Landmarks Preservation Commission May 25, 1999, Designation List 305 LP-2036

(Former) **LOEW'S VALENCIA THEATER** (now Tabernacle of Prayer for All People), 165-11 Jamaica Avenue, Borough of Queens. Built 1928; John Eberson, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 9795, Lot 3.

On February 23, 1999, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the (former) Loew's Valencia Theater (now Tabernacle of Prayer for All People), and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two speakers, representing the Queens Historical Society and the Historic Districts Council, testified in favor of the proposed designation; there were no speakers opposed to designation. Letters in favor of designation have been received from the building's owner, and from the Queens Borough President and the Friends of Terra Cotta.

Summary

Located on Jamaica Avenue at Merrick Boulevard in Jamaica, the major commercial center of the borough of Queens and once a major theater center for Queens and Long Island, the Loew's Valencia is the borough's largest and most famous remaining movie palace. Designed by theater architect John Eberson and opened in 1929, the 3554-seat Valencia was the first of five so-called "Wonder Theaters" built for the New York-based Loew's chain of movie theaters to serve the major metropolitan population centers outside midtown Manhattan. Eberson, who created the "atmospheric theater" type, was one of America's most prolific and influential theater designers, and the Valencia was among his most important commissions. Its romantic, brick and glazed terra-cotta facade was inspired by Spanish and Mexican architecture of the Baroque or "Churrigueresque" period, with detail including elaborate ornamental terra-cotta pilasters, cherubs' heads, half-shells, volutes, floral swags, curvilinear gables and decorative finials. The Valencia entertained the people of Queens for half a century. Since 1977, it has housed the Tabernacle of Prayer for All People, which has maintained the building's exterior almost completely intact.



The American Movie Industry¹

The first showing of a film of moving images to a paying theater audience took place in April of 1896, when Koster & Bial's vaudeville theater in New York City included the short film "Thomas A. Edison's Latest Marvel, The Vitascope" among its productions.² Such films soon became a regular part of vaudeville programs. By 1905 "nickelodeons" (so-called because of the five-cent admission charges) showing silent movies began to open in converted storefronts, and over the next decade the movies became a popular and inexpensive form of entertainment.

During World War I, America emerged as the dominant force in the motion picture industry. witnessing the formation of the Hollywood studios which became MGM, RKO, Warner Brothers, Universal and Twentieth Century Fox, and the production of such film extravaganzas as Cecil B. deMille's Ten Commandments, James Cruze's Covered Wagon (the first epic western), and in 1925, Ben Hur, the greatest worldwide success that the industry had ever produced. A major breakthrough came in 1927 with The Jazz Singer, starring Al Jolson in the first sound track movie. The subsequent introduction of Technicolor in 1935 catapulted motion pictures into their golden age. With more than 500 films produced annually in America, the number of movie theaters boomed, both through the construction of new buildings and the conversion of legitimate theaters. Flourishing throughout the Depression and war years, the motion picture industry faltered only in the early 1950s when it was undermined by the increasingly popular medium of television.

The American Movie Palace

The American movie theater developed as an architectural type over the first four decades of this century.³ From the nickelodeons of the turn of the century, the theaters grew in size and lavishness during the 1910s, and emerged during the 1920s as movie palaces, a unique national institution. Designed to look like Parisian boudoirs, old Spanish towns, or Indian, Chinese, or Egyptian temples, the theaters often seated several thousand people, and each show offered vaudeville, organ recitals, orchestras, comedians, magicians, and a full-length feature film -- all for as little as twenty-five cents. Almost every town in the country had at least one movie theater; larger cities had large theaters downtown and smaller neighborhood houses

scattered around the city. In New York, all the boroughs had major theaters as well as smaller neighborhood houses.

The movie palaces were built by a small group of people. Loew, Keith, Albee, Fox, Balaban & Katz, all started as small-time exhibitors, and gradually emerged as entrepreneurs controlling hundreds of theaters each, in national circuits.⁴ Most movie palaces were designed by architects who specialized in the type including John Eberson, Rapp & Rapp, C. Howard Crane, Thomas Lamb, Walter Ahlschlager, B. Marcus Priteca, and G. Albert Lansburgh. Theaters called "The Rialto," "The Tivoli," "The Granada," "The Oriental," "The Paradise," and similarly suggestive names, were designed in styles reminiscent of Baroque Spain, ancient Egypt, Hindu India, the Far East, southern Italy, and occasionally Colonial New England.

The grand eclectic designs of the 1920s movie theaters and palaces gradually gave way in the 1930s to the modernistic motifs of the Art Deco and Art Moderne. Some were as large as the earlier palaces, including the grandest of them all, New York's Radio City Music Hall of 1932, designed by the Associated Architects with Donald Deskey. During the 1930s, however, smaller theaters became the norm. The great age of movie palace building came to an end.

Loew's Inc.⁵

Loew's Inc., founded by Marcus Loew early in the century, became the premiere movie theater chain in New York City and the Northeast, and one of the country's largest, with theaters all across the country and, eventually, around the world.

Marcus Loew (1870-1927), like many of the pioneers of the cinema and movie theater world, was born on New York's Lower East Side, the son of an immigrant Austrian Jewish restaurant waiter and his wife. Working from the age of six selling newspapers on the street, he became a furrier at age twelve. With his friend Adolf Zukor and the rising young actor David Warfield, Loew moved into the business of penny arcades in 1904, and opened his own arcade in 1905 on West 23rd Street, which he converted into a nickelodeon, following the success of a similar venture in Cincinnati.

In 1908, Loew converted a Brooklyn burlesque house into the Royal Theater, whose programs of vaudeville combined with a film commanded ticket prices of 10 cents. Moving quickly into the movie theater business, in 1909 he took over the management of two Shubert theaters, the Yorkville and the Lincoln Square, and ran them with a similar policy of showing vaudeville and film. In 1910, with Zukor and the brothers Nicholas and Joseph Schenck as partners, and with the Shubert brothers as investors, he formed Loew's Consolidated Enterprises, and opened the National Theater in the Bronx as the company "flagship." In 1911, he purchased the William Morris circuit of vaudeville theaters, including the very prominent American Music Hall on 42nd Street, and reorganized his company as Loew's Theatrical Enterprises.

By 1919, Loew controlled one of the country's major chains, with film and vaudeville theaters in Atlanta, Boston, Memphis, Baltimore, New Orleans, Birmingham, Montreal, and Hamilton (Ont.), Canada. Expanding his holdings with new acquisitions in Cleveland and along the West Coast, he formed Loew's Inc. In 1921, he built the Loew's State (demolished) in Times Square, a 3200-seat movie palace in a sixteen-story office building.

In 1920, Loew had acquired his own film studio, "Metro," which had been formed by Louis B. Mayer. In 1924, Loew's Inc. took over the Goldwyn studio, forming Metro-Goldwyn Pictures Corporation, while Louis B. Mayer directed production operations, hence the name Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, or M-G-M. By 1925, with the release of *Ben Hur*, M-G-M had become one of the nation's premier movie production companies. Loew's Inc. remained its parent company. Loew, however, continued to concentrate on expanding his movie theater chain. In 1924 he had just 100 houses under his control; by 1927 the number had grown to 144.⁶

In 1925 Loew's former partner Zukor had helped arrange the merger of his Famous Players-Lasky Company (owner of Paramount) with the giant Chicago movie palace empire of Balaban & Katz, with 500 theaters under its control. The new company, renamed Paramount-Publix, constructed the Paramount Building on Times Square. The competition apparently worried Loew, because he reached an accord with Zukor stating that any future theaters built in the outlying areas of New York would be jointly owned by the two companies.⁷ Paramount built no theaters in New York besides the Times Square Paramount and the Brooklyn Paramount, and Loew built no theaters in Chicago, home base of the Paramount-Publix chain.

Loew's Inc. remained the premier power in New York. According to a contemporary account in *Motion Picture World*, "The supply of movies is assured and standardized. The vaudeville acts are routed uniformly, the strength of each is known and the proper balance of a bill is fixed. The public knows what it will get for its money, week after week. Thus the Loew line is held."⁸

At the height of his success Marcus Loew became ill and died in 1927. He was succeeded as president of Loew's Inc. by his partner Nicholas Schenck, who remained with the company until his retirement in 1957. It was Schenck who oversaw the Loew corporation's move into sound pictures, and Schenck was in command when Loew's built, among others, the Valencia on Jamaica Avenue, designed by theater architect John Eberson.

John Eberson

John Eberson (1875-1954) was one of the most prominent theater designers in the country. From the turn of the century until the 1980s, Eberson and his son Drew designed over 1200 theaters across the country.

Born in Austria, and trained as an electrical engineer, Eberson left Vienna in 1901 and settled in St. Louis, where he joined the Johnston architecture firm building opera houses in the Midwest.⁹ In 1904 he started his own practice, and in 1910 he moved to Chicago. During his first twenty years in practice he designed theaters and opera houses throughout the Midwest and Southwest, all in classically inspired styles. Many of these were for the Hoblitzelle chain in Texas, including the Austin Majestic (1915) and the Dallas Majestic (1921).

Eberson made his great contribution to the American theater when he designed his first "atmospheric" theater, the Hoblitzelle Majestic in Houston (1923, demolished). In place of a domed classical ceiling surmounting the auditorium, he created a blue plaster "sky," with electric light-bulbs simulating stars, and arranged for a hidden machine to project "clouds" moving across the ceiling in an effect similar to that of a planetarium. The walls of the auditorium were designed to simulate a stage set suggesting an Italian garden, and the total effect was of being outside, in the evening, in a garden, watching a show.¹⁰ As recalled by Eberson's son, Drew, who joined his father's practice in 1926, Eberson felt "that the ornate [movie] palaces were gradually being overdone and had become static in design, as they were copies of European opera houses and were repetitious in the ornamental treatment." He then "had the idea of atmospheric theatres in which he could use the colors of the Mediterranean and the excitement of the inner courtyards of the romantic periods of architecture."¹¹

Eberson designed his last atmospheric theaters in 1929. His design for the Loew's Paradise was based on an extraordinary array of Italian Renaissance and Baroque motifs. His Valencia Theater in Queens was another Spanish-inspired design. In Texas, Eberson produced one final Spanish/Moorish fantasy for the San Antonio Majestic, whose interiors were specially adorned with "Alamo bells" in honor of that city's history.

Although the Depression brought with it the demise of the great movie palace, Eberson continued to be active in theater design throughout the 1930s. During those years he turned to designs in the new modernistic styles, and produced a body of work less well known than his atmospherics, but of much interest, including the Warner Beverly Theater in Washington, D.C., the Nostrand and the College (both on the Century Circuit) in Brooklyn (both demolished), the Warner State Theater in Chester, Pa., the Newsreel Theater at Rockefeller Center (today operated as the Guild Theater), and the Lane in Staten Island.¹²

John Eberson continued designing theaters through the World War II period, during which time his commissions included theaters on military bases, and also the Lewisohn Bandshell (demolished) in New York. After the War he designed theaters in shopping centers and drive-in theaters, continuing this work until his death in 1954.¹³ His son Drew continued the practice until his retirement in the mid-1980s. The Eberson legacy, however, is most notable in the grand era of pre-World War II theater design.

Development of Jamaica¹⁴

Jamaica, one of the oldest settlements within the boundaries of New York City, developed into the leading commercial and entertainment center of Queens County. The Dutch purchased land in Jamaica from the Jameco (also spelled Jemeco) Indians in 1655. The following year, Governor Peter Stuyvesant granted a charter to the town, originally known as Rusdorp.

Following the transfer of power from the Dutch to the English in 1664, Rusdorp was renamed Jamaica, after the original Indian inhabitants of the region. Queens County (incorporating present-day Queens and Nassau Counties) was chartered in 1683. The English established Jamaica as the governmental center of Queens County, with a court, county clerk's office, and parish church (Grace Church; the present structure, dating from 1861-62, is a designated New York Landmark). Outside the town center, Jamaica was largely an area of farm fields and grazing land for cattle. The rural village was officially incorporated by New York State in 1814.

Jamaica's central location in Queens County, and the extensive transportation network that developed in the town during the nineteenth century, resulted in the transformation of the community into the major commercial center for Queens County and much of eastern Long Island. It was the arrival of the railroads that began this transformation.¹⁵ The roads and rail lines -- connecting Jamaica with other sections of Queens County, with Brooklyn to the west, eastern Long Island, and ferries to New York City -- had a tremendous impact. Jamaica's farmland was soon being subdivided into streets and building lots, and new homes were erected.

By the turn of the century, Jamaica's importance as a commercial area became evident in the impressive buildings appearing on Jamaica Avenue, most notably the Beaux-Arts Jamaica Savings Bank Building (Hough & Deuell, 1897-98), 161-02 Jamaica Avenue, and the neo-Italian Renaissance Queens County Register Office (A.S. Macgregor, 1898), 161-04 Jamaica Avenue.¹⁶ After Jamaica was incorporated into the borough of Queens and became a part of New York City on January 1, 1898, additional transportation improvements brought increasing numbers of people.¹⁷ As a result, the population of Jamaica quadrupled between 1900 and 1920.

It was during the 1920s, when the major mass transit links were in place, and during a period when private automobile ownership was growing at an extraordinary rate, that Jamaica experienced its major expansion as a commercial and entertainment center.¹⁸ By 1925, Jamaica Avenue between 160th Street and 168th Street had the highest assessed valuation in Queens County.¹⁹

During the 1920s and early 1930s, many smallscale commercial buildings were erected in Jamaica, as well as several major office and commercial structures, including the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce Building (George W. Conable, 1928-29) on 161st Street; the Title Guarantee Building (Dennison & Hirons, 1929), 90-04 161st Street; and the J. Kurtz & Sons Store (Allmendinger & Schlendorf, 1931; a designated New York City Landmark) on Jamaica Avenue. In addition. Jamaica developed into a significant entertainment center. By the mid-1930s, there were over sixty restaurants, bars, and clubs, ranging from small ethnic taverns to elegant restaurants. And there were at least eight movie theaters on or just off Jamaica Avenue, including the Carlton, Hillside,

Alden, Merrick, Jamaica, and Savoy, and, largest of all, the Valencia Theater, which opened in 1929.²⁰

Loew's Valencia Theater

The Valencia was one of four theaters originally planned by the Paramount-Publix chain for four major residential centers outside Midtown Manhattan. These included the Kings on Flatbush Avenue in the geographic center of Brooklyn, the Paradise in the Bronx at the commercial hub of the Grand Concourse near Fordham Road, and the Jersey in the heart of Jersey City. When Paramount-Publix looked for a central location for its Queens theater, the logical choice was the commercial center of Jamaica.

According to Paramount-Publix's initial plans, the architectural firm of Rapp & Rapp was to design the Kings and the Jersey, while John Eberson was to design the Valencia and the Paradise. Both firms had designed many theaters for Paramount-Publix, and for its predecessor, Balaban & Katz, in Chicago and the Midwest.

As a result of the 1925 agreement that kept Paramount from building more theaters in New York and Loew's from entering the Chicago market, the four Paramount theater projects passed to Paramount, however, appears to have Loew's. maintained an interest in the theaters, using them as New York outlets for Paramount pictures. Loew's also added a fifth theater, the 175th Street, designed by the company's preferred theater architect, Thomas Lamb. Each of the theaters included a Morton "Wonder" organ, apparently the origin of the name "Wonder Theaters" that has since been applied collectively to the five houses. The five theaters, all of which survive in varying states of repair, were among the most lavish movie palaces ever built in the greater New York City area.²¹ The Valencia was the first of the five to open.

In 1926-27 builder R. Riccardo acquired a site at the intersection of Jamaica Avenue and Merrick Road and subdivided it, keeping the corner plot on which he built the six-story Riccardo Building, and selling the other half to the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation (Paramount). Riccardo's agreement with that company apparently included certain restrictions "to assure Jamaica of a beautiful theater." When Famous-Players-Lasky sold the property to Loew's, the property remained subject to those restrictions.²² Loew's filed plans for the Valencia Theater in 1927; construction, by the Thompson-Starrett Company, commenced in June 1928, and was completed in December.²³ The Valencia opened for business on Saturday, January 12, 1929.

Erected at a cost exceeding two million dollars, seating approximately 3500,²⁴ and one of the first theaters built with sound equipment for the new "talkies," the Valencia was meant to serve not just Jamaica, but all of Queens and the greater Long Island area, offering first-run sound pictures along with stage shows imported from the Capitol Theater on Broadway.²⁵ It was described as "the first 'de luxe' theatre on Long Island."26 Its anticipated opening provoked enormous amounts of coverage in the Long Island Daily Press, a regional paper headquartered in Jamaica. Multiple-page coverage in that paper the day before opening included biographies of Marcus Loew and his successor Nicholas Schenck, and stories and photos of the stage show's stars.²⁷ Once the theater opened, in keeping with its role as a theater drawing from a wide regional market, movies playing at the Valencia were not shown anywhere else in the vicinity, as far east as Bay Shore, Long Island.²⁸

The Valencia was designed as a large movie palace, with a narrow mid-block facade containing the entrance lobby on Jamaica Avenue, and the bulk of the theater with the auditorium, stage, and stagehouse behind, along Merrick Boulevard, not quite half the block towards 89th Avenue. For the 40-foot-wide Jamaica Avenue facade, Eberson created an elaborate architectural fantasy in brick and terra cotta, using elements from Spanish and Mexican churches of the Baroque, or "Churrigueresque," period. The Churrigueresque style, named after the Spanish architect J.M. de Churriguera, was an eighteenth-century modification of the Italian Baroque, incorporating Moorish and Gothic decorative elements. The Spanish-influenced design fit the exotic-sounding name of the theater (Valencia), a combination found in other movie palaces of the period (e.g., the Granada Theater, Chicago; Levy & Klein, 1926). The Indiana Theater, in Indianapolis (Rubush & Hunter, 1927), has a facade similar to the Valencia's. Eberson used the style in his 1928 Majestic Theater in San Antonio, while elsewhere in Queens Thomas Lamb made use of the style at the RKO Keith's (1928).

The Spanish Baroque character of the Valencia's facade is created by the use of elaborate curving and twisted forms, spiral volutes, double columns adorned with florid patterns, and elaborate ornament including shells, wreaths, cherubim and foliate capitals. A series of curves and pinnacles is repeated three times: on the (original) marquee, at the surround of the main window opening, and again at the roofline. The Spanish motif is continued inside in the spectacular, atmospheric design of the lobby and auditorium.²⁹

The Valencia opened to much acclaim. Queensborough Magazine, published by the Chamber of Commerce of the Borough of Queens, considered the Valencia to be one of the "outstanding improvements" in the borough in 1928.³⁰ William F. Hofmann, publisher of the Long Island Daily Press, wrote that the Valencia, "properly called the most beautiful theatre in the country," marked the climax of a "new era in the history of Jamaica," and "another milestone in the steady, healthy progress this community is making towards leadership in all fields of commercial endeavour."31 The architectural magazine Architecture and Building wrote of the Valencia:

Having a seating capacity of 4,000, it compares favorably with the largest New York City houses and offers both motion picture and stage performances of the most elaborate character. The architectural treatment is a most elaborate development of Mexican Spanish ornament.³²

The Valencia as a Major Movie Palace

As part of the enormous chain of Loew's theaters, the Valencia was able to run a full program of vaudeville acts and a first-run feature sound film. The opening day's program on Saturday, January 12, 1929, which ran continuously from 11 a.m. until midnight, attracted an estimated 17,000 customers.³³ Queens Borough President George U. Harvey gave an inaugural address.

The inaugural program featured MGM's sound film *White Shadows in the South Seas*. According to the *Long Island Daily Press*:

the most up-to-date electrical effects for singing, talking and sound pictures which have been installed in the new theatre will be used in giving 'White Shadows' the sound effects that were to a great extent responsible for the extensive run on Broadway.

The stage show featured the revue "My Mantilla," brought in from the Capitol Theater on Broadway; a stage band directed by Walt Roesner; a symphony orchestra directed by Don Albert; and the following performers as described in the *Long Island Daily Press*:

Bob Nelson, well known musical comedy star, White & Manning, world famed comedy dancers, King & King, late features of 'Artists and Models,' and Gertrude Lang, soprano and late prima donna at 'Blossom Time,' Forrest Yarnell, baritone, and Livie Marracci, the fairest of all Italy and winner of the International beauty contest held at Galveston, Texas, last summer, who will appear in the grand finale supported by the 24 Chester Hale Girls.³⁴

The Valencia continued the movie and stage show formula for several decades. In the theater's first years, ticket prices ranged from 25 cents for orchestra and balcony seats on weekday mornings to 65 cents on Saturday, Sunday, and holiday evenings.³⁵ Broadway and other stars regularly graced its stage, including such famous performers as Ginger Rogers and Kate Smith.³⁶ In the 1930s, the theater included as a regular Monday night feature, the winners of the Major Bowes' Amateur Hour.³⁷

After its stage show policy was discontinued, the Valencia stayed in use as a movie theater. In the 1950s, a new, larger "panoramic" screen was installed in the theater, along with "stereophonic" sound, making the Valencia the first theater in Queens to offer these effects.³⁸ Gerald F. Twohig, writing in the *Long Island Press* in 1974, called the Valencia "the Taj Mahal of Long Island movie houses." In his recollection,

The Valencia wasn't just another movie house. It was the greatest of them all in those times when Queens in general and Jamaica in particular were big on movies. If you had a heavy date on Saturday night, you went to the Valencia. You proved you had class.³⁹

Later History

Following the end of World War II, with changing theater economics and the rise of television, a wave of theater alterations and demolitions began to claim large numbers of movie palaces across the country. In the 1960s, the management of many of the largest theaters, no longer able to attract audiences of several thousand, closed off whole seating sections. Eventually, many were either subdivided into smaller theaters with accompanying loss of interior ornament, or demolished for reuse of their valuable large sites. In New York, most of the large Manhattan movie palaces disappeared, while those surviving in the other boroughs were either subdivided or abandoned and subsequently vandalized. In 1976, rumors circulated that Loew's wasconsidering closing the Valencia Theater. That threat brought an outcry from residents of Jamaica and Queens. Various plans for the theater's reuse were proposed -- among others, the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation suggested its conversion into a cultural center, and a "permanent home for the Queens Symphony Orchestra."⁴⁰

In 1977 Loew's closed the Valencia Theater and donated it to the Tabernacle of Prayer for All People, a church congregation formerly located in Brooklyn. In an interview that year its pastor, Rev. Johnnie Washington, described the gift as "a miracle, a gift from God. A miracle at a time when miracles are not supposed to happen."⁴¹ Rev. Washington admired the building's design:

It's like entering a fantasy world, isn't it? We decided to keep the atmosphere of the movie house. It's such a beautiful place.... How could we ever replace what is already here? It has a beauty, an atmosphere that makes you feel you are at some place sacred.⁴²

The church undertook a major interior restoration, overseen by George Exarchou.⁴³

Today, the Tabernacle of Prayer for All People continues to use and care for the former Valencia, which remains very much a visible presence in the heart of downtown Jamaica.

Description

The former Loew's Valencia Theater building, located on the north side of Jamaica Avenue and the west side of Merrick Boulevard, extends along Jamaica for 39.4 feet and along Merrick for 210 feet. The building occupies an irregularly shaped lot, wrapping around a smaller building at the corner of the two streets. The steel-framed structure has three elevations: a Jamaica Avenue entrance facade with an elaborate terra-cotta faced frontispiece; a long side wall on Merrick Boulevard with exit doors and a fire stairs; and a rear wall visible from the adjoining parking lot. These last two sections are faced in brick set in panels.

Jamaica Avenue facade:

<u>Base</u>: The first story contains a wide entrance to the lobby of the theater, with a centrally placed ticket booth projecting from the entrance doors to the property line. The booth is defined by eight slender but elaborately designed cast-metal columns rising to finials, with foliate screens at the top; a fret pattern adorns its base. The glass doors to either

side have decorative metal framing over them, with rectangular single glass panes above. Framing the entrance at the property line, at either side, are twin metal volutes (the area below them is now enclosed by large announcement boards). The volutes support an overhead metal panel whose underside has foliate infill; its face is currently covered by a large sign. A large marquee projects above the base; it has been covered with protective materials. The original marquee included stamped zinc ornamental designs,⁴⁴ and a central sign spelling out "Loew's Valencia."45 There is decorative polychromatic tilework in the pavement in front of the doors.

<u>Upper stories:</u> The upper stories are designed in an extravagant Spanish Baroque style, with elaborate terra-cotta forms projecting from a yellow brick background. The brick background is composed of a slightly projecting diaper-pattern of brick headers, their crossing accented by colored tiles, superimposed over horizontal rows of stretchers.

The large central window opening has an elaborate terra-cotta surround and is flanked by heavily ornamented paired pilasters. The window has multi-light sash in three sections: a wide central section five-panes in width, flanked by narrower sections two panes in width. Beneath the foliate capitals of the pilasters are small cherubs' heads, while the pilasters themselves are adorned with larger cherubs' heads, half-shells, volutes, and floral swags. Directly above the window opening are spiral volutes supporting a curving gable form, surrounding a multi-pane sash, above which rises an elaborate terra-cotta infill including sphinxes and floral patterns. The infill is framed by another elaborate gable form, which mimics the massive curvilinear gable of the roofline above, accented by three crowning decorative finials. To either side of the central window and its surround, at the lower level of the facade, is a single narrow lancet window; the brick section above rises to a lower roofline with a large decorative finial. A large, modern sign in the form of a cross, lettered with the name of the church, has been added to the facade; it projects out from the facade on metal supports.

Merrick Boulevard elevation:

The elevation on Merrick Boulevard is faced in red and black brick accented with multi-colored header courses, with alternately projecting headers, that create a panel effect. There is a stone water table at the base. A long projecting fire stairs rises along the wall towards Jamaica Avenue. There are six metal exit doors towards the Jamaica Avenue end, recessed within a paneled terra-cotta surround, and approached by two steps; a recessed rectangular brick area surrounding a sidewalk vault opening; and blind rectangular recesses, three rectangular double metal doors, and two round-arched openings towards the rear. A service area with grated windows and a recessed garage with a garage door is situated at the rear. The walls rise to a narrow coping. A small sign in the shape of a cross, lettered with the name of the church, projects from the rear corner.

Rear elevation:

The rear elevation is also faced in red and black brick accented with multi-colored header courses that create a panel effect. Projecting at the bottom is a two-story area serviced by the garage door on Merrick Boulevard; its upper sections are punctuated by a series of four windowed recesses. A water tower rises from the roof.

> Report prepared by Anthony W. Robins Consultant

Notes

- 1. This section and the sections on the American Movie Palace, Loew's Inc., and John Eberson, are taken almost in their entirety from: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Loew's Paradise Theater Designation Report* (LP-1891), report prepared by Anthony W. Robins (New York: City of New York, 1967). The two basic works on the history of the American movie palace, on which this account is largely based, are Ben M. Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats* (New York: Bramhall House, 1961), and David Naylor, *American Picture Palaces* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981). Charlotte Herzog, "The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of its Architectural Style," *Cinema Journal* 20 (Spring 1981), 15-37, discusses the influence of architectural antecedents such as vaudeville theaters and penny arcades on movie palace design. The quarterly issues of *Marquee*, the publication of the Theatre Historical Society since 1969, are another invaluable source.
- 2. Bosley Crowther, The Lion's Share: The Story of an Entertainment Empire (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1957), 13.
- 3. Douglas Gomery defines the movie palace as "a large theater built to screen films and to accommodate live shows, seating over 1,500 people, constructed with a fan-shaped auditorium and much non-functional decoration." Douglas Gomery, "The Picture Palace: Economic Sense or Hollywood Nonsense?" *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, Winter 1978, p.221.
- 4. For a typical history of such an entrepreneur, see Carrie Balaban, *Continuous Performance* (New York, 1964), the biography of A.J. Balaban, founder of Balaban & Katz. The only major figure in the industry who never built an enormous chain was Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel; however, his Roxy Theater (demolished), the 6000-seat "Cathedral of the Motion Picture" at 50th Street and Seventh Avenue, was the epitome of the type, and his greatest creation, Radio City Music Hall (a designated New York City Interior landmark), was the most famous movie theater in the country.
- 5. This account of Loew's Inc. is based on Crowther.
- 6. These included new theaters in New York City, and newly acquired ones in Cleveland, New Orleans, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Toronto, Syracuse, Buffalo, New Haven, New London, Chicago, Kalamazoo, Akron, Flint, Saginaw, Evansville (Ind.), and London, Ontario.
- 7. The precise nature of this joint ownership is unclear,
- 8. Cited in Crowther, 130. The date is identified only as the mid-1920s.
- 9. This and much of the information on Eberson that follows was provided by the late Jane Preddy, curator of the Eberson collection, who at the time of her death in 1994 was at work on a monograph about the architect. See

also Palaces of Dreams: The Movie Theatres of John Eberson, Architect, catalog of an exhibition sponsored by Robert L.B. Tobin and the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas, 1989-1990, curated by Jane Preddy. The Eberson Archive is part of the Mitchell Wolfson Jr. Collection, The Wolfsonian - Florida International University, Miami Beach. The archive includes drawings, albums and blueprints of the Valencia.

- 10. Naylor, 67-68.
- 11. Drew Eberson, foreword to the Theatre Historical Society's 1975 Annual devoted to the Loew's Paradise (unpaginated). Atmospheric theaters soon became extremely popular, and as a type were easily recognizable: each included the simulation of an open, lit evening sky with stars and clouds; each had walls designed like a stage set suggesting a foreign setting; and each was asymmetrically designed. In John Eberson's words, "We visualize and dream a magnificent amphitheater, an Italian garden, a Persian Court, a Spanish patio, or a mystic Egyptian templeyard, all canopied by a soft moon-lit sky." (Naylor, 68.) Over the next six years Eberson designed some of the country's most extraordinary atmospheric theaters. Many had Spanish or Moorish themes, including the Tampa (1926) in Tampa; the Olympia (1926, now Gusman Center) in Miami; the State Theater (1927) in Kalamazoo; the Loew's United Artists (1928) in Louisville; the Palace (1928) in Marion, Ohio; and the Loew's Akron (1929) in Akron. Eberson variants on the atmospheric theme included the Greek and "Pompeiian" ornament of the Capitol (1925), the "Persian" of the Avalon (1927), and the extraordinary French Second Empire fantasy of the Balaban & Katz Paradise (1928), all in Chicago. Creating atmospheric theaters required skilled artisans. According to Drew Eberson: "Inasmuch as the atmospheric theatre was a specialty, [John Eberson] found it difficult to find in each town the skills required to polychrome the plaster and to get the exact sky effect that he wished. He, therefore, assembled a crew of skilled decorators and specialists under the banner of his company, known as Michael Angelo Studios, who accomplished the complete decorating job as to the trees, birds, furniture, etc. William Hartman headed the 'colorists.'" (Eberson.)
- 12. The Lane is a designated New York City Interior Landmark. For more on this period of Eberson's work, see Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Lane Theater, First Floor Interior, Designation Report* (LP-1696), report by Anthony W. Robins (New York: City of New York, 1988).

13. Preddy.

- 14. This section is taken almost in its entirety from: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, La Casina Designation Report (LP-1940), report prepared by Andrew Dolkart (New York: City of New York, 1996). It is based on H.W. Munsell, The History of Queens County, New York (New York: H.W. Munsell & Co., 1882); Jamaica, Hempstead, Richmond Hill, Morris Park, and Woodhaven: Their Representative Men and Points of Interest (New York: Mercantile Illustration Co., 1894); Henry Isham Hazelton, The Boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens Counties of Nassau and Suffolk Long Island, New York 1609-1924, vol. 2 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1925); Theodore H.M. Prudon, ed., "Jamaica, Queens County, New York: Aspects of its History," unpublished typescript prepared for Columbia University Graduate Program for Restoration and Preservation of Historic Architecture (1975); New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, Former J. Kurtz & Sons Store Building Designation Report, (LP-1132), report prepared by Virginia Kurshan (New York: City of New York, 1981); John A. Peterson, ed., A Research Guide to the History of the Borough of Queens, N.Y. in Early Photographs (New York: Dover, 1991); New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, (Former) Jamaica Savings Bank Designation Report (LP-1800), report prepared by Elisa Urbanelli (New York: City of New York, 1992).
- 15. In the early nineteenth century, the King's Highway, which led from Brooklyn to Queens along the route of an Indian trail, had become a toll road, known as the Brooklyn, Jamaica & Flatbush Turnpike. In 1832, the Brooklyn and Jamaica Railroad Company was established. It purchased the turnpike and began construction on a rail line. Two years later the Long Island Railroad (LIRR) was founded. It leased the Brooklyn and Jamaica's right of way, inaugurating service between Jamaica and a ferry at the foot of Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn in 1836; the line was extended eastward to Hicksville a year later. The opening of the initial Long Island Railroad line through Jamaica established the village as a transportation hub, but other developments

increased Jamaica's importance. In 1850, Jamaica Avenue was converted into a plank road by the Jamaica & Brooklyn Plank Road Company, thus improving road transportation between the Fulton Ferry and Queens County. Horsecar lines began operation on the avenue in 1866 when the East New York & Jamaica Railroad Company inaugurated service; the horsecars were replaced by electric trollies in the mid-1880s. In 1860, the Long Island Railroad began service from a ferry landing at Hunter's Point to Jamaica, and in 1869 a rival railroad company, the South Side Railroad, began service between Jamaica and Patchogue. For a schematic history of the Long Island Railroad see "Chronology of the Long Island Rail Road" in Peterson, 27-28. For more detailed information see, Carl W. Condit, *Port of New York*, 2 vol. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) and Vincent F. Seyfried, *The Long Island Rail Road: A Comprehensive History*, 7 vol. (Garden City, Long Island: 1961-1975).

- 16. The Jamaica Savings Bank Building was designated as a New York City Landmark in 1974, but the designation was subsequently denied by the Board of Estimate. The building was again designated a Landmark in 1992, but this designation was denied by the City Council. The Register was designated a New York City Landmark in 1974, and the designation was affirmed by the Board of Estimate.
- 17. These improvements included the widening and repaving of Jamaica Avenue (known as Fulton Street until about 1918) in 1898; the electrification of the Long Island Railroad in 1905-08; the opening of the Queensborough Bridge in 1909; the completion of the LIRR's tunnel beneath the East River in 1910 (the bridge and tunnel obviated the need for ferries, thus cutting commuting time to and from Long Island and Manhattan); and the completion of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company's elevated railroad on Jamaica Avenue in 1918.
- 18. There were more than eight million cars in America by 1920; see Chester Liebs, Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1985), 17.
- 19. Seyfried and Asadorian, 26. The importance of Jamaica's geographic location and the development of the area as a transportation and commercial hub was recognized in the WPA Guide to New York City: "Jamaica, the community around Jamaica Avenue and Parsons Boulevard, is the geographical center of Queens. Most of the important Brooklyn and Queens highways that lead to Nassau County and eastern Long Island pass through Jamaica. It is the terminus of the BMT and Independent subways and the principal transfer station of the Long Island Railroad. Along the main thoroughfare, Jamaica Avenue, there has evolved a comprehensive suburban shopping center." The WPA Guide to New York City (NY: Random House, 1939; reprinted NY: Pantheon, 1982), 583.
- 20. The only theater to survive relatively intact is the Loew's Valencia. Information on theaters and restaurants from *Queens Classified Telephone Directory* (1933-1936).
- 21. The Paradise is a New York City Landmark.
- 22. "New Office and Theater Building in Queens," *Queensborough Magazine* [published by Chamber of Commerce of the Borough of Queens] 14 (September 1928), 468.
- 23. New York City Buildings Department, Borough of Queens, New Building Permit 10957-1927.
- 24. All newspaper articles of 1929 refer to the number of seats as approximately 4,000. A list compiled by Brother Andrew C. Fowler for the Theatre Historical Society, however, gives the number as 3,554.
- 25. The Capitol Theater was built in 1919, to designs by architect Thomas Lamb, for showman Major Bowes. It was famous for stage shows emceed by "Roxy" Rothafel, who began live radio broadcasts from the theater in 1922. Naylor, 44. By the time the Valencia opened, the Capitol had been acquired by Loew's, and the Capitol stage shows played a number of new Loew's movie palaces around the country. Hall, 226.
- 26. Long Island Daily Press, January 12, 1929, p.3.
- 27. Long Island Daily Press, Friday January 11, 1929, Front page, Section Two.

- 28. Interview with Ted Arnow, an employee of the Loew's Corporation from 1933 until his retirement: "In those times, no one could play a picture while the Valencia was playing it, out to Bay Shore, Long Island. There was a complete mileage protection plan." Phone interview, 1997.
- 29. None of the Interior spaces is included in this designation.
- 30. "Queens 1928 Building Permits Total....," Queensborough Magazine 15 (January 1929), 46.
- 31. Long Island Daily Press, January 12, 1929, p. 1.
- 32. Architecture and Building (February 1929), 68.
- 33. Long Island Daily Press, Monday, January 14, 1929, p.1.
- 34. Long Island Daily Press, Thursday January 10, 1929, in an advance description of the program.
- 35. Long Island Daily Press, Thursday January 10, 1929, p. 6. Twenty-five cents and up was a standard movie palace ticket price in those years.
- 36. "Theatrical Reveries," Long Island Daily Press, November 7, 1937. Clipping in the "Jamaica Theatres" clippings file, Long Island Division, Queens Borough Public Library.
- 37. Loew's Corporation press release, 1934; in the "Jamaica Theatres" clippings file, Long Island Division, Queens Borough Public Library.
- 38. Unidentified 1950s clipping in the "Jamaica Theatres" clippings file, Long Island Division, Queens Borough Public Library.
- 39. Gerald F. Twohig, "The greatest movie house," Long Island Press, September 24, 1976.
- 40. Gerald Weingarten, chairman of Community Planning Board 14, as quoted in Bernard Rabin, "Commission Will Screen Film House as Landmark," *Daily News*, Sept 8, 1976.
- 41. Richard F. Shepard, "Loew's Valencia in Queens Goes From Movie House to House of God," clipping, Long Island Division, Queens Borough Public Library, Jamaica. See also Bernard Rabin, "Switch Valencia Seats to Pews," *Daily News*, July 11, 1977.
- 42. Shepard.
- 43. Shepard. The church was said to have spent a quarter of a million dollars on the restoration. See also Peter Engelbrecht and Charlotte Ames, "Downtown Livability: Preservation and the Battle for Public Awareness," *Environmental Comment* (May 1979), 13 ff, and "Queens' Own 'Radio City Music Hall' Saved, Restored," *Woodside Herald*, February 24, 1978, p. 8.
- 44. Architecture and Building.
- 45. The original marquee is shown in a drawing in a full-page ad placed by Thompson-Starrett in the Long Island Daily Press, January 11, 1929, Section A page 5.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

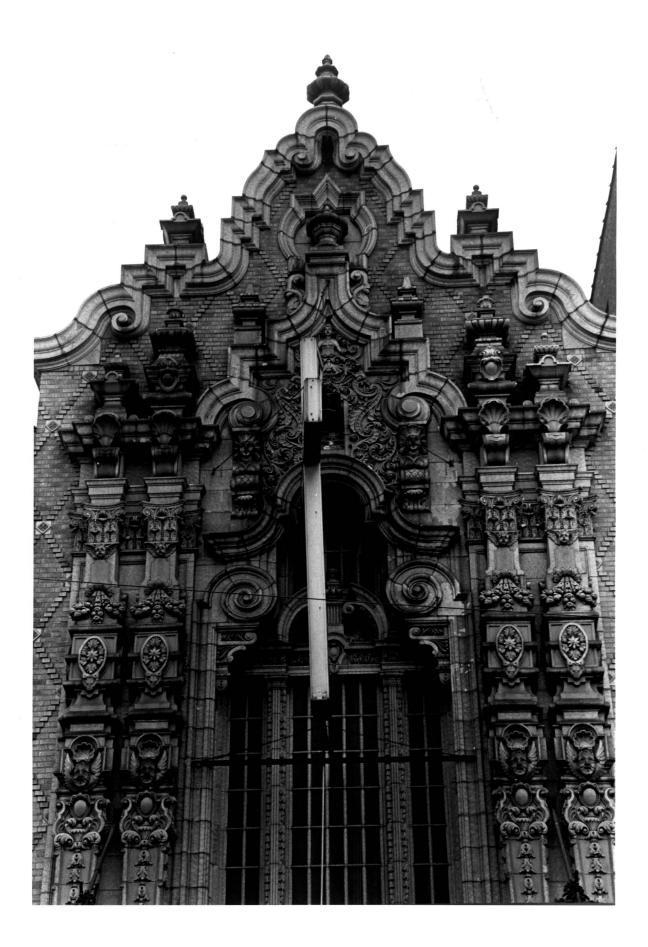
On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the (former) Loew's Valencia Theater (now Tabernacle of Prayer for All People) has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic 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 former Loew's Valencia Theater survives as one of the few grand movie palaces in Queens and New York City; that it was one of five major New York metropolitan area regional theaters built by the Loew's corporation in 1928-30, meant to serve a large population outside the Times Square-Midtown Manhattan theater district; that, located on Jamaica Avenue near Merrick Boulevard in the commercial center of Jamaica, it has long been a prominent building in the borough of Queens; that it is one of the most important commissions by John Eberson, one of America's most prolific and influential theater designers; that its ornate glazed terra-cotta facade was inspired by Spanish and Mexican architecture of the Baroque or "Churrigueresque" period; that its detail includes elaborate ornamental terra-cotta pilasters, cherubs' heads, half-shells, volutes, floral swags, curvilinear gables and decorative finials, all of which make its facade a highly visible and distinct element of the streetscape of Jamaica Avenue; that it has been sensitively adapted by its current owners for use as a church; and that, though no longer in use as a movie palace, the former Valencia Theater remains a major landmark of Queens.

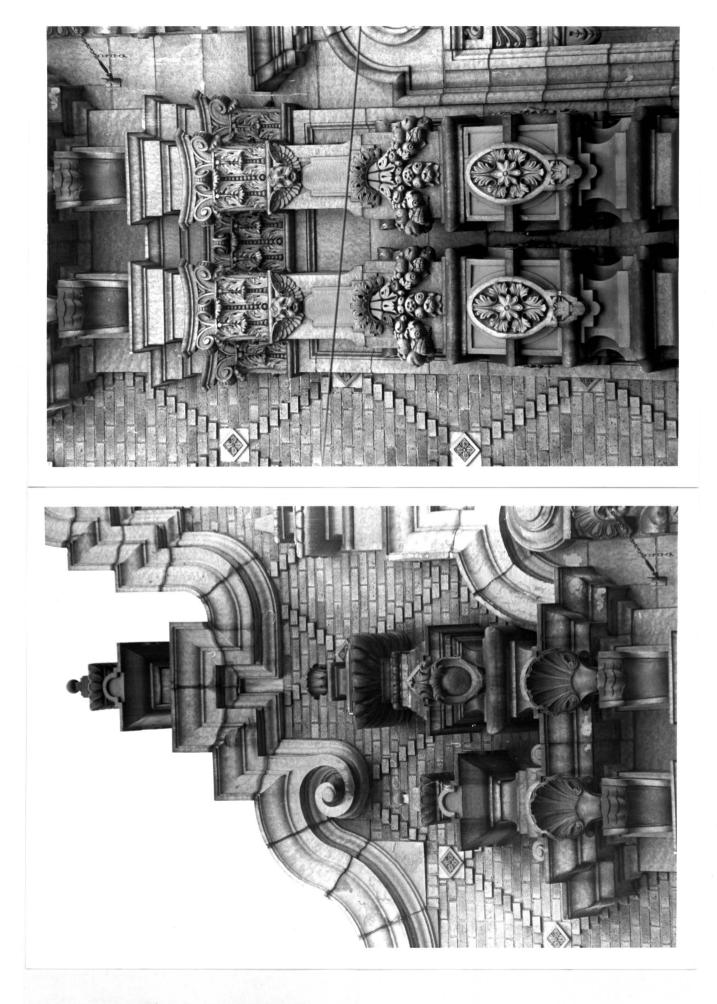
Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the (former) Loew's Valencia Theater (now Tabernacle of Prayer for All People), 165-11 Jamaica Avenue, Borough of Queens, and designates Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 9795, Lot 3, as its Landmark Site.



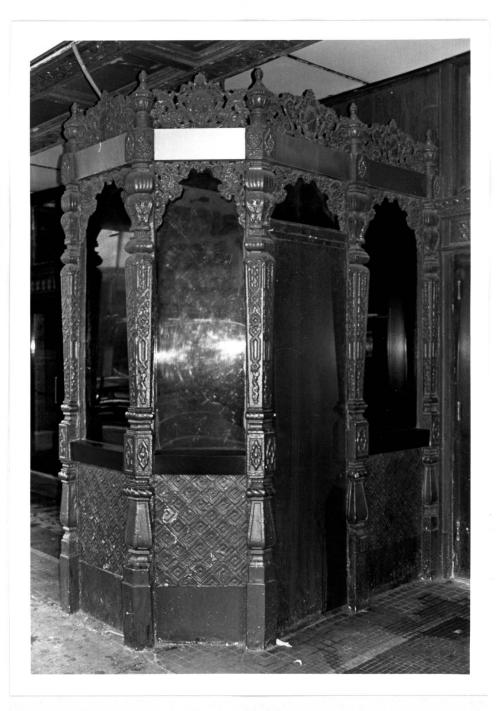
Loew's Valencia Theater, 165-11 Jamaica Avenue, Queens Photo: Carl Forster



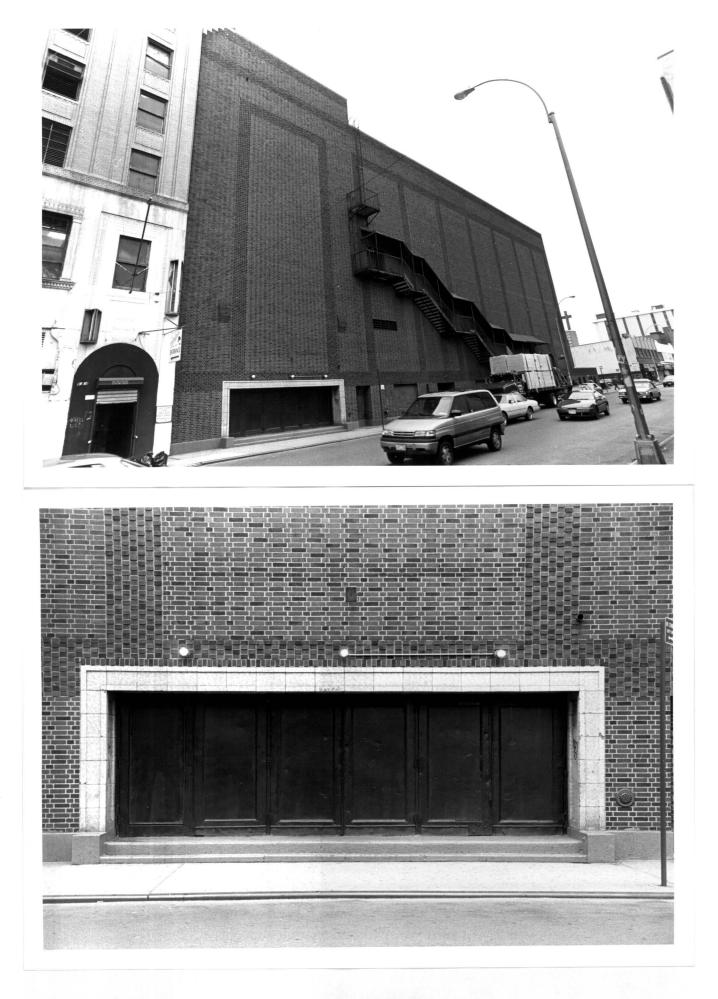
Loew's Valencia Theater, facade detail Photo: Carl Forster



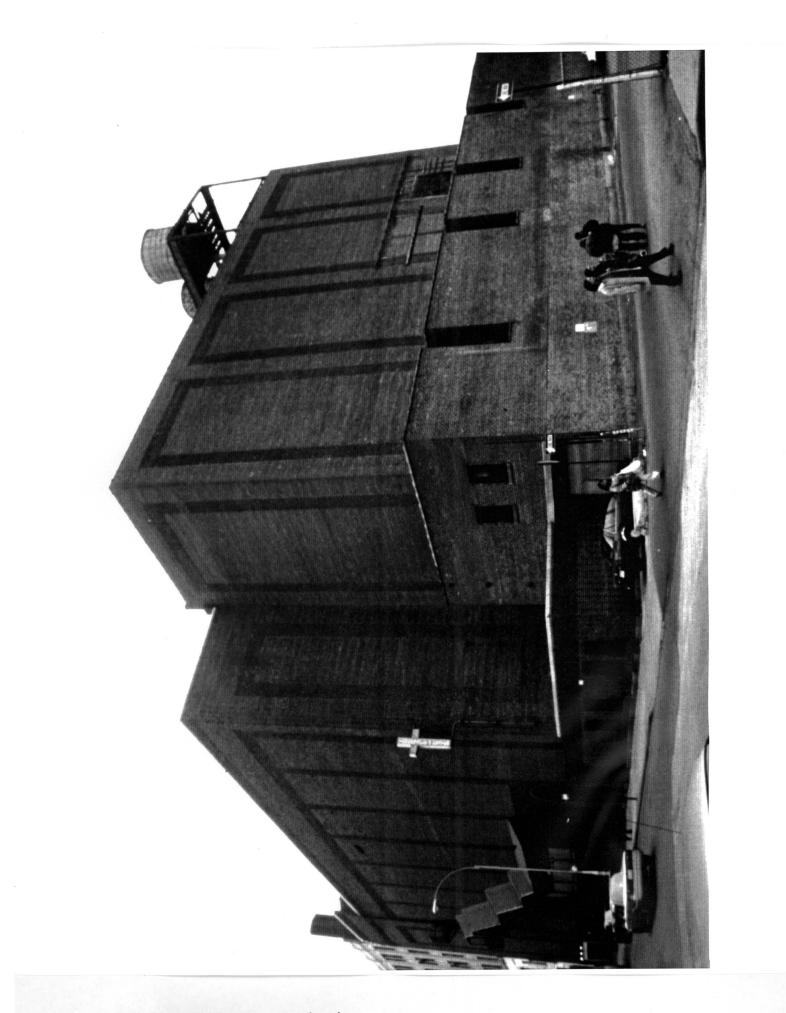
Loew's Valencia Theater, terra cotta details Photos: Carl Forster

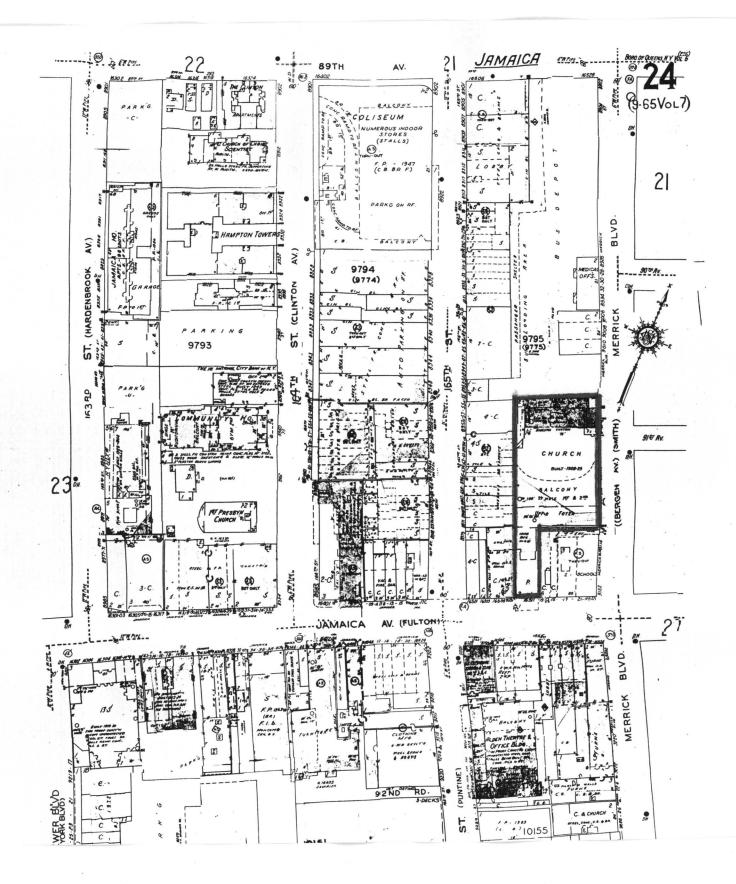


Loew's Valencia Theater, ticket booth Photo: Carl Forster

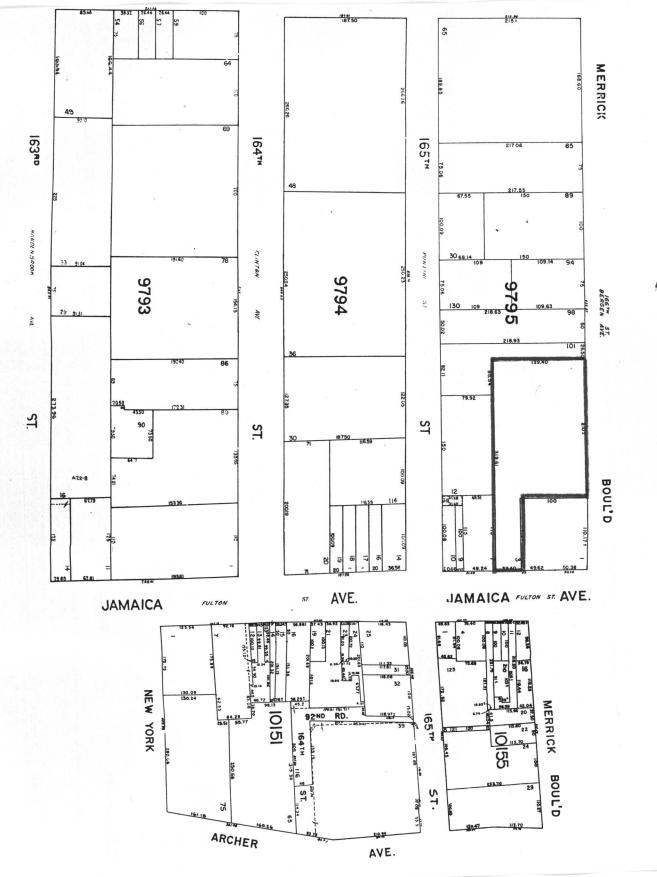


Loew's Valencia Theater, Merrick Blvd. elevation and entrance Photos: Carl Forster





Loew's Valencia Theater, 165-11 Jamaica Avenue, Queens Source: Sanborn Building and Property Atlas of Queens, N.Y. (1997), vol. 6, pl. 24



Loew's Valencia Theater, 165-11 Jamaica Avenue, Queens Landmark Site: Queens Tax Map Block 9795, Lot 3 Source: Dept. of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map