

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received FEB 9 1984  
date entered

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

1. Name

historic Olympia Theater and Office Building

and/or common Maurice Gusman Cultural Center

2. Location

street & number 174 East Flager Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Miami

N/A vicinity of

state Florida

code 12

county Dade

code 025

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name City of Miami

street & number 3500 Pan American Drive

city, town Miami

N/A vicinity of

state Florida

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Dade County Courthouse

street & number 73 West Flagler Street

city, town Miami

state Florida

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Dade County Historic Survey

title City of Miami Heritage Conservation  
1978

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1983

federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Metro-Dade Community and Economic Development  
City of Miami Planning Department

city, town Miami

state Florida

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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

The Olympia Theater and Office Building is a ten story commercial building located in the heart of downtown Miami. Of steel frame construction, the building is faced with brick and is embellished with a variety of terra cotta and wrought iron detailing characteristic of the Mediterranean Revival style. The theater itself is contained in an elaborate four story wing which extends to the south of the building. Designed in the atmospheric mode, the theater creates the illusion of an amphitheater set in the courtyard of a Spanish villa. Overhead, the dark blue ceiling duplicates the evening sky with twinkling stars and rolling clouds. Both the exterior of the building and the interior theater spaces remain essentially intact, and alterations during the Olympia's 58 year history have not compromised the building's integrity.

Sitting on the southwest corner of one of downtown Miami's busiest intersections, the Olympia Theater and Office Building occupies a prominent location. The building is a rectangular structure with nine bays across the north (front) facade and five bays across the east facade. The theater wing is also rectangular in plan and features seven bays across the east facade. The building is faced with pressed brick in running or stretcher bond and is topped with a flat roof with parapet. The theater wing also features a parapet wall, behind which is a gable roof.

The north (front) facade is symmetrical in composition and is vertically separated into three main divisions containing three bays each. Original windows are wooden double hung sash with one-over-one lights; however, approximately one-third have been replaced with fixed sheet glass. Large, molded terra cotta beltcourses divide both the first and second stories and the ninth and tenth stories, while a smaller beltcourse separates the second and third stories. Decorative terra cotta detailing on the tenth story supplies the office building's major ornamentation. Elaborate terra cotta window heads are enriched with shaped pediments and feature a shield-shaped cartouche in the center. Brick pilasters topped with terra cotta urns separate windows on the end bays and also mark each corner. A small terra cotta beltcourse forms the capitals. The building's entablature, with its decorated arabesque frieze, is broken in the center three bays by a recessed curvilinear gable. Two twisted columns separate the center windows and extend to the top of the gable where they are topped by urns. Large brick pilasters, each topped by two urns, flank the center bays. Located within the gable end is one large shield-shaped cartouche, with a smaller one over each window.

The east facade of the office building is virtually identical to the north facade in its detailing. Here, however, the bays are evenly spaced, and the entablature is unbroken. An additional design element on this facade is the presence of a decorated window in the center bay of the second story. This window is embellished with terra cotta surrounds containing pilasters, scrolls, and an enriched cornice window head. It is fronted with an ornamental iron grille. A similar facade treatment extends only as far as the first bay on the south facade. The rest of the south facade and the west facade are finished in stucco and are void of decoration.

In contrast to the office building, the theater wing is highly ornamental and features a symmetrical composition with slightly projecting end bays. The center five bays on the second story contain large, shaped arched windows. These windows feature multi-light wooden casement sash with transoms and ornamental iron balconets. Similar windows are located

(See Continuation Sheet)

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1925 **Builder/Architect** George A. Fuller Co./John Ebersson

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Olympia Theater and Office Building is significant as an outstanding example of atmospheric theater design and is noted for the quality of its details, materials, and craftsmanship. Designed by John Ebersson, one of America's foremost theater architects, the Olympia is regularly cited as one of the finer examples of his works.<sup>1</sup> The Olympia is Miami's largest and most outstanding theater, and, together with the Tampa Theater in Tampa, is said to be one of only two atmospheric theaters which survive in Florida.<sup>2</sup> The Olympia Theater and Office Building is also significant as a unique example of the application of Mediterranean Revival style detailing to a ten story commercial building and, as such, is a landmark on the Miami skyline.

Construction on the Olympia Theater and Office Building began in May 1925 during the height of Miami's boom period, and the grand opening took place on February 18, 1926. Built for Paramount Enterprises, Inc. at a cost of approximately \$1,500,000, the Olympia Theater replaced the Airdome, an open-air theater which had occupied the same site.<sup>3</sup> Paramount sought to build one of the most elaborate theaters in the South and, accordingly, selected as its architect John Ebersson, who had designed his first atmospheric theater, the Majestic Theater in Houston, just two years before. In his almost startling departure from the accepted style in theater decoration, Ebersson created in Miami one of the region's most beautiful and elaborately equipped theaters. Unlike the Majestic, the Olympia was designed with air conditioning and is said to have been the first air conditioned theater in the South.<sup>4</sup>

John Ebersson originated the concept of the atmospheric theater in 1923. His intention was to create for the audience the illusion of sitting in "a magnificent amphitheater under a glorious moonlit sky...an Italian garden, a Persian court, a Spanish patio, or a mystic Egyptian temple-yard...where friendly stars twinkled and wisps of clouds drifted."<sup>5</sup> In the Olympia, patrons were treated to a large Spanish garden which was closed in on three sides by the walls of an imposing castle or villa. A duplication of the Florida sky appeared overhead.

Although it is a one-of-a-kind theater in Miami, the Olympia bears a striking resemblance to the Tampa Theater, which was also designed by Ebersson a short time later. Of the two, the Olympia is much larger in size, but both theaters exhibit many of the same interior themes and details. The Olympia, however, is much more elaborate of the exterior, due in part to its prominent corner location.

The Olympia Theater and Office Building is an outstanding and unique example of commercial architecture in downtown Miami. Despite the popularity of Mediterranean Revival architecture in South Florida, the style was not generally utilized on tall buildings. The Olympia Theater, however, makes wide use of Mediterranean elements, particularly in its elaborate window treatments and application of terra cotta and wrought iron detailing. Also unusual is the building's use of brick, an uncommon building material in the Miami area.

The Olympia Theater and Office Building is generally recognized as a landmark in Miami, and the theater continues to be utilized for performances. The building has remained relatively unaltered, both on the exterior and in the theater spaces, during its history. The City of Miami, which currently owns the property will soon seek a developer to rehabilitate the office building, and it is hoped that the selected developer will be able to utilize the 25 per cent Investment Tax Credit

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

(See Continuation Sheet)

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property Less than 1

Quadrangle name Miami

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A	<u>17</u>	<u>58111510</u>	<u>21851071010</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

D			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

E			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

F			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

G			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

H			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 1 and 2, and the southerly 55 feet of Lot 3, and the northerly 45 feet of Lots 18, 19, and 20, less the westerly 2 inches of the northerly 65 feet of Lot 2, of Block 121, of the plat of Miami North, as recorded in Plat Book B at page 41, of the Public Records of Dade County, Florida. This property includes all significant historic resources associated with the Olympia Theater and Office Building.

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sarah Eaton/Michael F. Zimny, Historic Sites Specialist

organization Division of Archives, History & Rec. Mgmt. date January 26, 1984

street & number The Capitol telephone (904) 487-2333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature George W. Percy

title George W. Percy, State Historic Preservation Officer date Feb. 3, 1984

### For NPS use only

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

**Entered In the National Register**

date 2/8/84

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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in each end bay, although these are embellished with elaborate terra cotta window surrounds. Located directly above on the third story are quatrefoil windows with multi-light fixed sash.

The upper level of the theater wing is separated from the lower stories by a beltcourse and features a large entablature broken by a curvilinear gable at each end bay and by a broken curvilinear gable with a finial in the center bays. Each end bay contains a multi-light, round arched window with keystone and iron balconet, flanked by ornamental terra cotta pilasters. The center bay, which projects outward, is supported by four brackets and contains a rectangular window. In between are three round arched windows with keystones and iron grilles.

Except for the replacement of some windows in the office building, the Olympia Theater and Office Building has remained virtually unaltered above the first story. At the street level, however, all storefronts have been completely modernized, and the theater entrance somewhat modified. The vestibule to the theater, located in the center three bays of the north facade, has been enclosed with modern glass doors, and the original ticket booth has been removed. The original entrance to the office building, located in the center bay of the east facade, has now been placed on the north facade directly east of the theater entrance. The original vertical marquee, located on the northwest corner of the building, has been replaced with a projecting marquee over the theater entrance. These alterations, however, are typical for commercial buildings and do not compromise the integrity of the building.

The interior of the theater features several public spaces, including a vestibule, lobby, foyer, and mezzanine, in addition to the auditorium, and all are designed with Spanish motif. The vestibule and lobby, which are no longer separated by doors, feature rough textured stucco walls with a highly polychromed coffered ceiling. Although the floors were originally tile, they have since been carpeted. A small balcony, with an ornamental wrought iron and wood railed balustrade, overlooks the lobby and is approached by a marble staircase. The Spanish motif is further carried out with lanterns, ceiling fixtures, and grille work.

The foyer is a two story vaulted space with the mezzanine balcony, supported by brackets, located above. The foyer, which was originally separated from the auditorium only by a railing, was modified in 1972. Now, the auditorium is permanently enclosed by a wall with doors at each aisle. Several rows of seats were removed during the renovation.

The mezzanine can be reached by stairs at either end of the foyer and is highlighted by a balcony with an ornamental iron balustrade identical to the one in the lobby. The mezzanine consists of seven bays, with barrel vaults supported on twisted and decorated Corinthian columns and pilasters. On the west (auditorium) side, niches have been created behind supporting columns to form seating areas. On the east side, the center three bays have been extended to form a side aisle which is now used as a refreshment area. The formerly elaborately decorated restrooms have been modernized. Like the lobby and the foyer, the mezzanine is embellished with a variety of polychromed ornamentation. All decorative details throughout the theater are made of cast-plaster. The foyer and mezzanine are carpeted, as was originally intended.

(See Continuation Sheet)

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The auditorium itself was designed to create the illusion of an amphitheater set in a Spanish garden and enclosed on three sides by the walls of an imposing villa. The ceiling, painted dark blue, duplicates the Florida sky with rolling clouds and twinkling lights to suggest stars. The theater originally seated approximately 2110 people.

The proscenium arch is highly decorated with ornamental plaster and is topped with a bracketed gable roof supported by engaged Corinthian columns. The roof is covered with plaster tiles and also features a balustrade topped by urns. Located in the center of the balustrade is a round arched niche containing a plaster statue. The north wall of the auditorium is comprised of three graduated arches surmounted by an arcade which is supported by twisted columns with a balustrade above. This side wall also features a tiled gable roof and an arcaded tower. The south wall of the auditorium is more elaborate and features a shaped gable with towers on either side. The lower level contains a round arched opening flanked by two smaller arches. Above is a large shaped arch which screens the organ. A balcony projects from the base of the arch, and grilled openings are located on either side. The balance of the south elevation reflects the opposite wall. Other decorative features throughout the auditorium include a series of decorative niches with plaster statues under the balcony and a wooden pergola above.

The auditorium was renovated in 1972, and, at this time, all new seating was installed and the stage was reconstructed. The basic form of the auditorium, however, was not altered, and the ornamental plaster detailing remains undisturbed. In contrast to the theater, the interior of the office building, including the lobby, has been completely modernized and does not retain its original architectural features.

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as a long-term lessee. It is anticipated that any revenue generated from the lease of the office building will be applied toward the future renovation of the theater.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Ben Hall, The Best Remaining Seats, 1961, p. 102; and Dennis Sharp, The Picture Palace, 1969, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>"Tampa Theater and Office Building," National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1978.

<sup>3</sup>"Theater to Be Opened," The Miami Herald, February 14, 1926.

<sup>4</sup>"Twenty-five-Year Old Theater Can Claim Firsts," The Miami Herald, February 24, 1951.

<sup>5</sup>Hall, p. 96.

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Page 1

Dade County, Florida. Community and Economic Development. Historic Preservation Division. Dade County Historic Survey, Site Inventory File for 174 E. Flagler Street, Miami, Florida.

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Eberson, John. "Miami Theater and Office Building, Miami, Florida, for Paramount Enterprises, Inc." Plans on file in City of Miami Off-Street Parking Authority, Miami, Florida, December 30, 1924.

Hall, Ben. The Best Remaining Seats. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1961.

Metropolitan Dade County. From Wilderness to Metropolis. Miami: Franklin Press, Inc., 1982.

"Nation's Finest Theater Opens to Public Here." The Miami Herald, February 19, 1926.

"New Theater Named." The Miami Herald, September 9, 1925.

"New Theater to Open." The Miami Herald, February 1, 1926.

"Olympia Opens Today." The Miami Herald, February 18, 1926.

Sharp, Dennis. The Picture Palace. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1969.

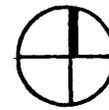
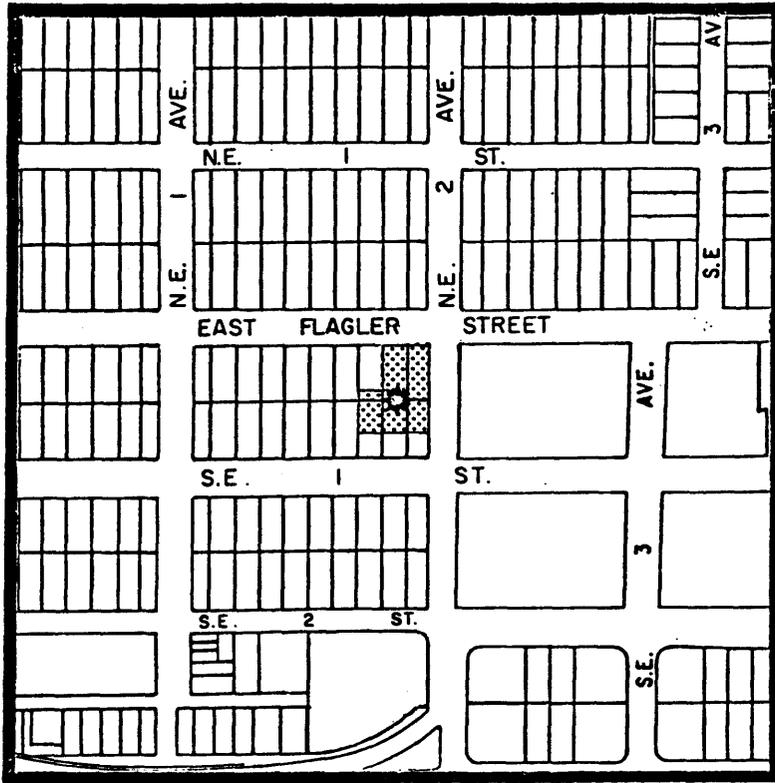
"Theater to Be Opened." The Miami Herald, February 14, 1926.

"Twenty-five-Year Old Olympia Theater Can Claim Firsts." The Miami Herald, February 19, 1951.

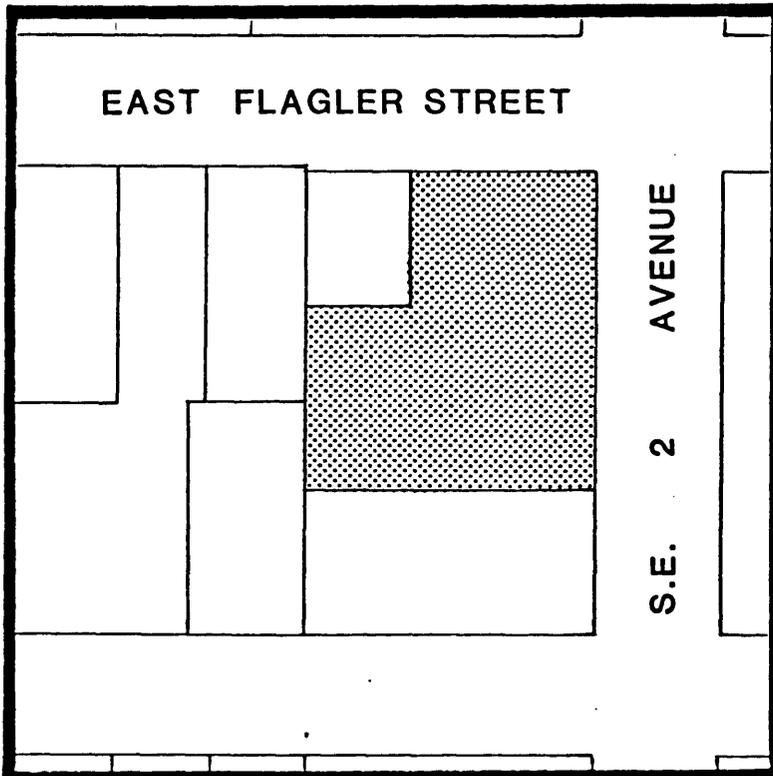
U.S. Department of the Interior. National Park Service. National Register of Historic Places, "Tampa Theater and Office Building," 1978.

# OLYMPIA THEATER & OFFICE BUILDING

174 EAST FLAGLER STREET



location



site plan