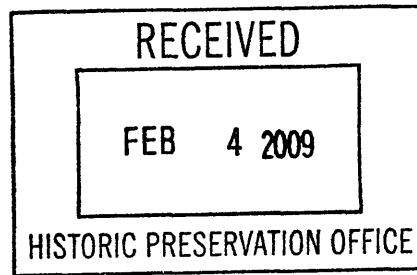


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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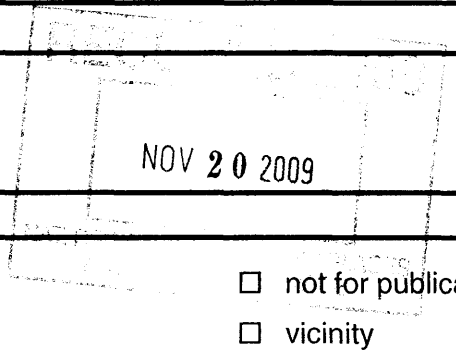


**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Summit Playhouse
other names/site number Summit Library



2. Location

street & number 10 New England Avenue
city or town City of Summit
state New Jersey code NJ county Union code 039 zip code 07901

- not for publication
- vicinity

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official [Signature] Date 9/29/09

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper [Signature: Eason H. Beall] Date of Action 12.30.09

- entered in the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register

other (explain): _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

1

buildings

sites

structures

objects

Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/Library

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Richardsonian Romanesque

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls stone, stucco

roof asphalt shingle

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheets.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

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

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Education _____
- Performing Arts _____
- Architecture _____
- _____
- _____

Period of Significance

1891 - 1961

Significant Dates

1891, 1918, 1938, 1961

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Arthur B. Jennings (1849-1927), architect

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - x Other
- Name of Repository:
Summit Playhouse Archives, Summit, NJ

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 18 553629.184 4507315.757
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____ _____

3 _____ _____ _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____ _____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Meredith Arms Bzdak and Kerensa Wood, Architectural Historians

organization Farewell Mills Gatsch Architects, LLC

date July 2008

street & number 200 Forrestal Road

telephone 609/452-1777

city or town Princeton state NJ

zip code 08540

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

 A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

organization

street & number

telephone

city or town

state

zip code

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to Keeper, National Register of Historic Places, 1849 "C" Street NW, Washington, DC 20240.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Description**

Section 7 Page 1

A small, one-story, brick and stone building, the Summit Playhouse (originally the Summit Library) in Summit, NJ, was completed in 1891 in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The Playhouse is located on a small triangular parcel of land bound by New England Avenue and Tulip Street in the City of Summit, NJ, and set within a largely residential neighborhood comprising many small two-story structures (Photos 1 and 2). The building's use and style distinguishes it from other structures in the area. A one-story, stuccoed, flat-roofed addition was appended to the building's south (rear) elevation in the early 1960s (Photo 3). In 2000, minor alterations were completed at the east façade of the 1960s wing to provide greater accessibility to the structure. Alterations to the original structure have been minor. The Playhouse is in excellent condition, and retains a high degree of architectural integrity.

The original one-story masonry portion of the Playhouse is roughly ovoid in plan (although shown as rectangular on historic maps), with long elevations at the north and south, a curved elevation at the east, and an angled elevation at the west. The building rests on a masonry foundation and is capped by an asphalt, hipped roof, the ridge of which terminates in a conical turret at the east end (Photo 2). Both the turret and the western end of the ridge are ornamented with a metal finial. A brick chimney rises between the original structure and the 1960s addition (Photo 3).

The principal addition to the building, completed in 1961, was appended at the south elevation and resulted in the removal of the building's back wall (Photo 3). This wing houses the Playhouse auditorium and entrance lobby. The addition, like the original building, is one story in height, but is windowless. Its flat roof (raised over the auditorium but lower over the lobby) is embellished by a denticulated wood cornice on all three elevations. Because the addition is somewhat smaller than the original building in terms of height, and is set back slightly at the west elevation and flush with the east elevation, this addition is not visible when approaching the Playhouse from the main street (Springfield Avenue; Photo 1). In this way, the impression that a visitor to the building would have has remained unchanged over time.

The primary, or north, elevation of the Playhouse (Photo 2) originally served as the main entrance to the building when it was a Library (the main entrance has been relocated to the 1961 addition). The north elevation is dominated by a projecting gabled bay of brick and stone with an arched, brick entry, and the entry is accessed by a flight of wood steps with an iron railing (Photo 4). The sides of this bay, as well as the gable, are decorated with slate shingles. Narrow, paired 1/1 wood windows, set between the rows of slate shingles on the bay's side elevations, provide light into this vestibule space. An entrance to the building's basement is located beneath the entrance bay, in an areaway that incorporates a short flight of stairs at either side (Photo 5). The main entrance doors are paired (modern) wood doors. They are capped by a narrow denticulated wood cornice and wood transom ornamented with a wood mask designed by illustrator and Playhouse volunteer Jack Manley Rosé (Photo 6).

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Description**

Section 7 Page 2

The eastern end of the north elevation features a single segmental arched opening, which has been filled with brick (Photo 2). The western end of the north elevation is defined by three narrow window openings, each with an original 1/1 wood sash window. These windows have segmental arched, brick openings and are framed by brick quoining. Directly beneath each of the windows is a basement level window opening, each with a segmental arched, stone lintel and 1/1 sash. Each of these windows at the west end of the north elevation has a bluestone sill.

The west elevation of the original building is angled, and its façade dominated by a divided thermal window with brick arched opening. At the basement level, these openings have segmental arched lintels. At the main level, narrow 1/1 wood sash windows with segmental arched lintels are distributed across the elevation at regular intervals, with two small, narrow, round arched windows between each of the longer windows.

The east elevation of the addition is now the main entrance to the Playhouse (Photo 3). This entrance is accessed by a set of wide stone steps with iron railings. A brick walkway leads to the entrance. Brick quoining at the corners of this east elevation serve to link this later wing visually with the original building. Panelled double entry doors, which open into the Playhouse lobby, are flanked by sidelights and sheltered by a shallow shed-roofed overdoor. Two wood masks, similar to the mask at the former main entrance and designed by Jack Manley Rosé, are located just beneath the overdoor.

A side entrance into the lobby, added in 2003, is located at the shallow north elevation of the 1961 addition, between the original building and the later wing (Photo 3). This side entrance was designed to provide exterior access to an elevator. A curving brick walkway leads to this entrance, and the doorway itself is sheltered by a small shed roofed overdoor.

In 1918, when the Library was turned over to the Playhouse, the original main reading room area became the Playhouse lobby, stage, and seating area (Photo 7). With the 1961 addition, the Playhouse was expanded and greater distinction drawn between the spaces of the actor and audience. Today, the interior of the original building serves as the Playhouse stage and storage / back of house space. The ceiling in this space is wood, and walls are masonry. Windows in this space have been blocked from the inside with foam to prevent unwanted light from entering the stage and for storage purposes (each window is inset about one foot into the wall, creating one foot of optimal prop or storage space). The stage itself is approximately 30 feet wide and 30 feet deep (Photo 7).

The new auditorium space, completed in 1961, is rectangular in plan, with hardwood floors, white stucco walls with wood molding, and a high ceiling (Photo 8). A combination of moveable, fold-down chairs and benches maintains a seating capacity of 121 (the first five rows of seats date to the 1930s; the last two rows were added more recently, but all chairs have been reupholstered). The auditorium is separated from the stage by a rectangular proscenium, and the

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Description**

Section 7 Page 3

stage apron is faced with wood paneling (Photo 7). A catwalk for technical equipment, accessed by a steel ladder, extends across the back of the auditorium space (Photo 8). Beneath it is located a mural, depicting a scene from *Henry V*. The mural was painted by Joan Rosé Thomas, the daughter of Jack Manley Rosé, in memory of William Livingston Faust, a playwright and actor who performed at the Playhouse (Photo 8).

The auditorium is entered from the lobby (Photo 9) at the southeast corner of the building through a set of double wood doors along the west wall of the lobby. The lobby is relatively small, more an entry bay than a gathering space. An accessible bathroom and elevator are located along the north wall of the space, and access to the basement via stairs is at the southern end of the lobby. The lobby contains several important decorative elements. On the south wall, above the staircase to the basement, is a mural painted by Jack Manley Rosé (Photo 9). The mural, which was moved from its original location, was painted in memory of the Playhouse's First Director, Norman Lee Swartout. On the west wall, to the right of the entrance to the auditorium, is a fountain from the Metropolitan Opera, which was donated by Floyd & Marjorie Cranstoun Jefferson in memory of member Campbell Howard (Photo 10).

The basement of the Playhouse can be accessed two ways: via a wood staircase from what is now the Playhouse stage, or from the lobby. The original basement, as well as the basement of the 1960s addition, is defined by a series of small rooms, accommodating theatre support spaces that include the prop room, makeup room, dressing rooms, sitting areas, and storage. The basement area was partitioned into these small rooms beginning in 1925, and their finishes have been modified over time as the needs of the Playhouse have grown and changed.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Statement of Significance**

Section 8 Page 1

SUMMARY

The Summit Playhouse was constructed in 1891 as the Summit Library, and was the first library to be located within the municipality. In 1918, seven years after a new Carnegie Library had necessitated the relocation of the collection, the building was leased to the newly formed Summit Dramatic Club (now the Summit Playhouse Association). The first performance took place on October 31, 1918, and the building has supported the dramatic arts continually since that time. In 1938, after 20 years of leasing the building from the Library, the Playhouse Association essentially merged with the Summit Library Association and secured a new lease for the building. At the same time, the Playhouse Association also incorporated themselves as a non-profit corporation. The building was expanded to the rear in 1961, and was purchased by the Playhouse Association in 1968, a reflection of the organization's continued health and commitment to its mission.

The adaptive use of the building from library to theatre in 1918 coincided with the early growth of the Little Theatre Movement, which supported the formation of community theatres across the country. The Summit Playhouse is the oldest community theatre in New Jersey, and one of the oldest consistently operating community theatres in the United States. Unlike many early community theatres, its location has remained consistent. Locally, the building's long history as a center for the literary and dramatic arts reflects the community's desire for intellectual growth and cultural expression. The Summit Playhouse is eligible under Criterion A, for its association with the Little Theatre, or Community Theatre, movement in New Jersey, and Criterion C, as a well preserved example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style.

EARLY BUILDING HISTORY - SUMMIT LIBRARY

Summit became a cultural center during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when it witnessed an influx of wealthy, educated residents following the Civil War. The first effort to organize a library was made by the Ladies' Book Club in 1873. After discussions between the Book Club and a select group of citizens, a Library Association was organized in 1873.¹ At the time, there was no available public space to house their growing collection, and the Association opted instead to store their books at members' houses and commercial enterprises.²

¹ N.E. Rauscher, "Summit's Libraries, Past and Present," *The Historian: A Publication of The Summit Historical Society* (April 1997): 1-3. See also "Ladies' Book Club of 1874 Was Forerunner of Library," *The Summit Herald*, 15 November 1951.

² Some of the books were stored in Mrs. Rapelyea's dry goods store at 408 Springfield Avenue, while others were kept at Dr. William Risk's house and Public School No. 1. The Summit Historical Society, *Glimpses into Summit's Past: A Selection of Photographs and Texts Tracing the City's Growth*, Summit, NJ: The Summit Historical Society, November 1978.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Statement of Significance**

Section 8 Page 2

For the first few years, the collections were maintained by the small group of members, without considerable involvement or interest on the part of other local citizens. In time, however, the Association began to plan community events, including small local events for less affluent children and their families. Soon the focus of the Association broadened, and planning for a library that could serve the entire Summit population was underway.

The first step in realizing their goal was achieved in 1889. George M. Manley, an early Summit resident and extensive landowner, offered to donate the land needed to build a library if the Library Association was able to raise funds to pay for its construction.³ After two years of fundraising, led by Summit resident Augustus F. Libby, enough money (\$3,720)⁴ was raised from stock subscriptions and donations. With that money, the Library Association accepted Mr. Manley's offer, and hired an architect, Arthur B. Jennings. The triangular piece of land that Mr. Manley donated was located at the corner of Tulip Street, Locust Drive, and New England Avenue, immediately adjacent to the main road, Springfield Avenue.

Architect Arthur B. Jennings received an architectural degree from the College of the City of New York in 1870. He subsequently trained with John Correja, George B. Post, and Russell Sturgis in New York. While he lived and worked in New York, some of his earliest works were residences in Summit and neighboring Short Hills. Although it is not known who hired Jennings to design the Library, it can be assumed that local residents, including Association members, would have been familiar with his work in Summit, several examples of which were only blocks away from the new site for the Library.

Early in his career, Jennings worked predominantly in the Stick Style. In the late 1870s, he began to incorporate Richardsonian elements into his work. His 1882 apartment for Dr. Lucien Warner in Harlem featured heavily rusticated stonework, a turret, and a small arcade of Roman arches. In 1884, Jennings built his first public building in a Richardsonian Romanesque style for Oberlin College in Ohio. He continued to work in the Richardsonian Romanesque style for the rest of his career, designing many apartments and houses in New York, religious buildings along the East Coast, and a range of buildings for colleges and municipalities.

His work at the Summit Playhouse is both typical of his career and unusual. It was the only small public building in his oeuvre. It was also his only library. Accustomed to creating large-scale Richardsonian buildings, he found a way to adapt the style to a smaller structure. Instead of utilizing heavy stone, for example, he used red brick with stone as a decorative element. Instead of a tower or full turret, he designed a small, turreted bay. At the main entrance, a brick and stone arch frame the doorway. Other details characteristic of Jennings' work include conical roofs (which, as historic photos reveal, were originally capped with crosses, a detail Jennings typically utilized in his religious architecture) and polychrome materials. An excellent example of Jennings' work from the same date remains in Bloomfield, NJ; the building, now part of Bloomfield College, was originally constructed as

³ R.A. Hageman, "Summit Playhouse: A Cultural Heritage," *The Historian: The Newsletter of The Summit Historical Society* (December, 2002): 1-2, 5.

⁴ The Summit Historical Society, November 1978.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Statement of Significance**

Section 8 Page 3

Westminster Presbyterian Church in 1891-92. Like his work in Summit, this building was designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, with a rough stone exterior, multiple conical roofs, and a dramatic entrance tower capped by three bands of open stone latticework.

The new Summit Library opened on June 10, 1891. It was described years later as “A charming building....that first real library. The...wide door opened into a pleasant reading room, where a generous fire-place faced the entrance. Tables with current magazines surrounded by high backed wooden arm chairs tempted the visitor to leisured reading. Where the stage now stands were the several rows of book cases.”⁵ Historic photographs of the building taken shortly after it was constructed reveal that the area in which it was located was still relatively rural, despite the fact that there were residences on adjoining parcels; in one photo, a cow stands in the front yard of the newly completed building. A somewhat later photograph shows that ivy quickly began to cover the façade of the library, and that a wood fire escape was located on the building’s south elevation.

The 19th century saw an increase in the construction of libraries. Public libraries were designed and built in almost every major city in the late 1800s. Well known examples constructed within several years of the new Summit Library include the Boston Public Library, designed by McKim, Mead, and White in 1888, and the New York Public Library, designed by Carrere and Hastings, beginning in 1897. Among the new libraries, the Richardsonian Romanesque style proved to be quite popular; Richardson himself designed the Winn Memorial Library in Woburn, MA (1876-1879); the Crane Library in Quincy, MA (1881); and the Converse Memorial Library in Malden, MA (1885).

After two years of private operation, the stockholders and trustees of the Summit Library explored the idea of opening the new library to the entire community (which had initially been the Association’s goal), and in 1893 the building became Summit’s first “Free Library, open to all the residents in Summit and its vicinity without charge.”⁶ For the next decade, the library provided services to any who desired, but its maintenance cost was still largely paid by stockholders with very little public support (the Town Committee agreed to pay an annual \$150 fee).⁷ The Association approached the local government about acquiring more public revenue, and in November, 1901, a referendum was put forth to the Summit community that proposed that the Free Public Library become tax supported. The public agreed and the library became entirely publicly funded.⁸

Though the new library was successful, it soon became too small to contain the growing number of books and periodicals and an increasing number of patrons. The community’s interest in keeping Summit intellectually and culturally current was evident once again when the Summit Home Land Company offered the Library Association land valued at \$10,000 at the intersection of Morris Avenue and Maple Street. The Company, owned by two of Summit’s most affluent families (the Bonnell and

⁵ “Ladies’ Book Club of 1874 Was Forerunner of Library,” *The Summit Herald*, 15 November 1951.

⁶ E.B. Rattis, *Summit, New Jersey: From Poverty Hill to the City Hill*. Seattle: Great Swamp Press, 1996.

⁷ The Summit Historical Society, November 1978.

⁸ N.E. Rauscher, 1-3.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Statement of Significance**

Section 8 Page 4

Littell Families), requested that the Association build a larger, more modern building to accommodate a larger number of Summit citizens.⁹

To obtain funds for the actual construction of a new library, Summit citizen William Lyall applied for, and received, a \$21,000 grant from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation. During this time, many grants from the Carnegie Foundation were made to small communities nationwide (29 in New Jersey alone) for the construction of new libraries. Earl Harvey Lyall, William Lyall's son, was selected to design the new, Neoclassical building, which opened on May 13, 1911.¹⁰

Once the new Carnegie Library was constructed and the collection moved, the original library building stood vacant for seven years, in part because a restriction in the original deed limited use of the building to a library or open public place.¹¹ Finally, in 1918, the building was leased to the newly formed Summit Dramatic Club (now known as the Summit Playhouse Association) for \$1 annually and their agreement to insure the building, maintain the grounds, donate proceeds to charity, and return (as appropriate) the building in its original condition.¹²

SUMMIT PLAYHOUSE

The Summit Dramatic Club was formed in 1918 by 23 Summit citizens. Their original goal was to produce shows as a form of fundraising for various World War I relief organizations. Charter Club member Norman Lee Swartout was named the first stage director, and Jack Manley Rosé the first stage manager. Grace Norton Rosé, wife of Jack Rosé, later reflected on the Club's early impressions of the building, "The building itself was not lovely...but its possibilities were immediately recognized."¹³ Among the qualities that Mrs. Rosé found appealing were the simplicity of the space and the consequent sense of intimacy that could be developed between audience and actors.

Upon moving into the old Summit Library, the Dramatic Club was immediately faced with the problem of converting the interior of the old library into a space where they could successfully perform full productions. The space was divided into two rooms, one large and one small, separated by an arched opening. The larger of the two rooms contained a fireplace as well as the building's exit.¹⁴ Physical obstacles they faced included lack of a sewage and water system in the building, rooms with dirt floors, no heat sources, and a floor made of wood planks and cinderblocks. Workmen, assisted by members of

⁹ N.E. Rauscher, 1-3.

¹⁰ In January 1964, a larger and more modern library was completed directly adjacent to Summit's Carnegie Library. For one week in January, Summit had two functioning libraries. However, on January 24, Lyall's library was completely razed. The Summit Historical Society, November 1978.

¹¹ Russell Himman to James Bertram, New York City, 23 January 1909, Summit Playhouse archives.

¹² Jack Manley Rose to The President and Members of the Board of Governors of The Playhouse Association, Summit, NJ, 10 October 1953, Summit Playhouse archives.

¹³ Grace N. Rosé, "Mrs. Rosé writes of Our Little Theatre," Summit Playhouse archives.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Statement of Significance**

Section 8 Page 5

the Dramatic Club, spent the summer remodeling the building to incorporate a modern stage, lighting, and new scenery. Additionally, new wood steps were constructed and the entrance doors rehung to swing outward. The first performance took place on October 31, 1918, and included three one-act plays and one or two musical numbers. Proceeds were donated to the local chapter of the Red Cross.¹⁵

In 1921, improvements were made to the area near the stage entrance, with the creation of what seems to have been a concrete landing.¹⁶ Additional alterations to the building were made circa 1925, including the addition of dressing rooms in the basement, a new furnace (and the consequent relocation of registers from the floor to the walls), and a new curtain.¹⁷

Norman Swartout remained the director of the Playhouse until his death in 1928. Under the directorship of Swartout, the Club produced many one-act plays and often brought their troupe to perform for other local towns. A mural dedicated to his efforts was painted backstage by Jack Manley Rosé in 1937. Rosé, a grandson of George Manley (the original donor of the property) was very active within the community and dedicated to both the library and the playhouse, serving at various times as the President of the Library Association, actor, stage manager, technical director, and scene designer. Rosé also designed the masks at the building's entrance, as well as many of the tickets and programs for the Playhouse. He was nationally known for his work in illustration, publishing *Williamsburg Today and Yesterday* (G.P. Putnam's Sons) in 1940 with his wife, Grace Norton Rosé. In 1928, after Mr. Swartout's death, Marjorie Cranstoun (later Marjorie Cranstoun Jefferson), another original charter member, took over his role as director, remaining in that position until 1979.¹⁸ Cranstoun Jefferson was regularly credited with maintaining the theatre's high artistic standards and commitment to charitable giving during her long tenure with the Playhouse.¹⁹

The late 1930s brought a number of changes to the organization and to the building. In 1937, a staircase was constructed from the stage to the basement, and the chairs that continue to be used today were introduced.²⁰ Significantly, in 1938, after 20 years of leasing the building from the Summit Free Library, the Playhouse Association essentially merged with the Summit Library Association (which by this point no longer functioned but was technically still a corporation). In doing so, which required gathering signed proxies from the estates of the original stockholders (all of which were then deceased),

¹⁵ "Little Playhouse for Summit," Scrapbook, Norman L. Swartout, Summit Playhouse archives. Other early recipients of charitable donations included the Conkling Fund for relief work among the destitute of Paris; the Serbian Relief Committee; and the Murray Hill Children's Home. Over the course of the twentieth century, donations would range from a number of local Summit causes to area interests such as Overlook Hospital and Visiting Nurse Association.

¹⁶ "Planning New Cast at the Playhouse," c. 1921, Scrapbook, Norman L. Swartout, Summit Playhouse archives.

¹⁷ "Playhouse Notes," c. 1925, Summit Playhouse Archives.

¹⁸ R.A. Hageman, 1-2, 5.

¹⁹ For instance, see B. Spero, "Summit Playhouse Continuing 60-Year Tradition of Excellence," *The Star-Ledger*, 3 January 1979. Cranstoun Jefferson's association with the Playhouse earned it a listing on the NJ Women's Heritage Trail.

²⁰ The Playhouse Association, Inc. Sixtieth Anniversary pamphlet, 1978, Summit Playhouse Archives. The architect for the 1937 alterations was Phillip Burnham ("Playhouse Has Brought Comedy and Drama to Summit for 32 Years," c. 1950, Summit Playhouse Archives.)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Statement of Significance**

Section 8 Page 6

the Playhouse Association managed to elect new officers of the Library Association (all of whom were also Playhouse Association members) and to secure a new lease for the building. At the same time, the Playhouse Association also incorporated themselves as a non-profit corporation.

Fundraising for an addition to the building began with the formation of a committee in 1958. In 1961, a new auditorium, which became known as the Marjorie Jefferson Auditorium, was completed at the back of the building, and opened to the public on January 29, 1961 at a total cost of \$50,000. The architect for the addition was local, a Short Hills architect named Bernard M. Cowperthwait.²¹ What had previously been the entire theatre and seating sections became the stage and faced the back toward the new auditorium, which seated 121 people in both permanent and temporary seating. Just after the auditorium was finished, Joan Rosé Thomas, daughter of Jack Manley Rosé, painted a mural on the back wall of the auditorium in honor of William Livingston Faust, Playhouse president from 1933-1935. Faust also wrote and directed many plays.²² A new lobby was also created as part of the addition, at the southeast corner. A section of the mural dedicated to Norman Swartout that had originally been located on the back wall of the theatre was moved to the lobby wall during these renovations. Also added to the new lobby was a water fountain from New York City's old Metropolitan Opera House, donated by Floyd Jefferson and his wife, charter member Marjorie Cranstoun Jefferson, in memory of former vice president and board member, J. Campbell Howard.

On March 29, 1968, the Playhouse Association officially became owners of the building that they had occupied for fifty years with the purchase of the building from the Library Association for \$1.²³

Significant technological advancements were made to the Playhouse at the end of the 20th century. In 1996, air conditioning was installed in the new theatre, replacing two antiquated ceiling fans. The issue of accessibility had been a problem since the opening of the Library, and in 2001, Nancy Boucher, a longtime member of the Playhouse, began raising funds to make the Playhouse fully accessible. This was accomplished in a variety of ways: through the sale of bricks and plaques on seats; through grants from the Summit Area Public Foundation; a Union County Development Block Grant; monies from the Manley Winser and Hyde & Watson Foundations; and a special benefit event featuring playwright Christopher Durang.²⁴ An elevator and accessible bathroom were designed by The Rosen Group and Nancy Dougherty, and work was completed in May, 2004. The elevator is located at the intersection of the new auditorium and the original building, and opens at the right hand wall of the lobby. The accessible bathroom was constructed adjacent to the elevator. Since Jack Manley Rosé's mural had been

²¹ P. Sumerwell, *Newark Sunday News*, 29 January 1961. Cowperthwait had earlier been involved with the Playhouse as a set and lighting designer. While some sources identify Cowperthwait as a Summit-based architect, his stationery from 1960 lists an address of 525 Millburn Avenue, Short Hills, NJ.

²² R.A. Hageman, 1-2, 5.

²³ State of New Jersey, County of Union, Deed, The Summit Library Association to The Playhouse Association, 29 March 1968.

²⁴ M. Roig, "Playhouse Puts Accessibility First," *Cultural Access News*. Morristown, NJ (Winter 2005): 6-7.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Statement of Significance

Section 8 Page 7

relocated there in the 1960s, it was moved once again, from the right wall of the lobby to the left. Small restoration projects, including repointing of the brick façade, are ongoing.

THE LITTLE THEATRE MOVEMENT

The formation of the Summit Dramatic Club was concurrent with the Little Theatre Movement, the roots of community theatre, and as a dramatic club it perfectly typified the ideals of the movement in its early years.²⁵ Typically, plays associated with this movement were performed in small spaces, but more important, they represented a shift away from the grandiose professional theatrical productions that had been prevalent at the turn of the century. As theatre historian Dorothy Chansky notes, “Little Theatre reformers...thought theatre could offer its participants and audiences a chance to explore social issues and to resist the numbing lure of predictably scripted spectacle shows.”²⁶

The Little Theatre Movement is said to have originated in Europe (often referred to as the European Art Theatre Movement), but spread to the United States prior to the first World War. The performances were not given by professionals on tour, but rather by local, amateur actors who considered their work to be more artistic and creative. The American Association of Community Theatre notes that amateur theatre existed during the 18th century in America, and that at least three 19th century theatre groups (the Aurora Drama Guild in Illinois, the Concord Players in Massachusetts, both dating to 1874; and the Footlight Club in Jamaica Plain, MA, dating to 1877) served as early forerunners of the movement.

The publication of a book by poet and playwright Percy MacKaye entitled *The Civic Theatre* in 1912 is considered to have provided support and encouragement for the development of community theatres around the country. In his book, he promoted the idea of a “civic theatre” that was characterized by “‘participation by the people’...not merely as spectators but as active elements in the production...he felt that such communal activity represented ‘a new expression of democracy’...”²⁷ The founding of the Drama League of America in 1910, a national organization that sought to promote quality (i.e. non-commercial) dramatic literature, and its publication, “The Drama,” beginning in 1911, lent further support to the Little Theatre Movement.²⁸ Another publication, “Theatre Arts,” began to be produced in 1916; “Theatre Arts,” like “The Drama,” championed this new form of intellectual theatre.²⁹

²⁵ For information on the Little Theatre Movement, see T. Lynch, “Let There Be Art,” American Association of Community Theatre Website, http://www.aact.org/documents/ct_history.html, accessed 9 October 2007; “Little Theatre Movement,” Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Theatre_Movement, accessed 9 October 2007; “Little Theatre Movement,” The Canadian Encyclopedia, <http://thecanadianencyclopedia.com/>, accessed 9 October 2007.

²⁶ D. Chansky, *Composing Ourselves; The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004, 4.

²⁷ G. Hughes, *A History of the American Theatre, 1700 – 1950*, New York, 1951, 365.

²⁸ Hughes, 367.

²⁹ Hughes, 374.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Statement of Significance

Section 8 Page 8

The term “community theatre” is credited to Louise Burleigh in 1917, although several such groups were founded as early as 1912: the Toy Theatre (Boston), the Chicago Little Theatre (Chicago), and the Little Theatre (New York City). These venues were followed by the creation of several others, including The Neighborhood Playhouse (New York City) and the Provincetown Players (Provincetown, MA) in 1915.³⁰ Thus, the formation of the Summit Dramatic Club in 1918 was very early within the history of this movement in the United States, and was notable for its location outside of a major metropolitan area.³¹

Historians see the first decade of the Little Theatre Movement (the 1910s) – the decade during which the Summit Dramatic Club was formed - as relatively pure, and they observe a clear shift from the 1910s to the 1920s. Sayler states, “In a decade its original impulses have been greatly altered; its direction has swerved from the esoteric to the popular. And from this more readily comprehensible direction, the movement has gained an impetus which has carried it from coast to coast.... Today it is a perverse municipality, a listless Main Street, which hasn’t at least one Little Theatre.”³² Dorothy Chansky, observing slightly later concurs “Many theatre histories locate the ‘innovative’ Little Theatre movement in the years between 1912 and 1918, with a devolution into ‘community’ theatre occurring in the 1920s.”³³

The Summit Playhouse was typical of the early Little Theatres in a number of ways, including its choice of productions; involvement of the larger community, particularly youth; location; and small scale that allowed for a new, more direct relationship between audience and performer.

Much of the work presented in the earliest Little Theatres was either European in origin or the work of emerging American playwrights. In some instances, the new work was the product of a member of the theatre itself; at the Summit Playhouse, members Grace and Jack Rosé, Marjorie Cranstoun, and Norman Swartout all contributed to the plays produced during the first several seasons.³⁴ The productions of the Summit Playhouse during their first ten seasons were remarkably consistent with those of Little Theatres around the country, incorporating works by George Bernard Shaw, Lord Dunsany, Zona Gale, Susan Glaspell, Alice Brown, and A.A. Milne.³⁵

³⁰ Hughes, 370.

³¹ Many of New Jersey’s professional theatres were not constructed until the 1920s; they included the Stanley Theatre in Newark (1928); Loew’s Theatre in Jersey City (1927); Paramount Theatre in Asbury Park (1923); The Brook Theatre in Bound Brook (1927); the John Harms Theatre in Englewood (1926); the Fabian Theatre in Paterson (1925); the Westmont Theatre in Westmont (1927); the Union County Arts Center in Rahway (1928); the State Theatre in New Brunswick (1921); the Ritz Theatre in Oaklyn (1927); the Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank (1926); and the Strand Theatre in Lakewood (1922).

³² O.M. Sayler, *Our American Theatre*, New York, 1923, 115.

³³ Chansky, 6.

³⁴ *The Playhouse Association, Sixtieth Anniversary*, 1978, 9. Grace and Jack Rosé authored “The Eastern Gate,” produced during the first season, 1918-19 and Norman L. Swartout dramatized “Fiber,” also produced during the Playhouse’s first season. Marjorie Cranstoun dramatized “The Changeling” for the Playhouse’s fifth season, 1922-23. Jack Rosé also contributed work to the eighth season (1925-26) and the eleventh season (1928-29).

³⁵ Chansky, 6-7. A list of the Summit Playhouse’s productions through 1978 is found in *The Playhouse Association, Sixtieth Anniversary*, 1978, 9-12.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Statement of Significance

Section 8 Page 9

The Little Theatre offered everyone within a community who was interested in directing, acting, or working behind the scenes an opportunity to become involved.³⁶ The world of theatre was no longer closed, or limited to professionals. The study of the theatre as an intellectual, avocational pursuit broadened simultaneously, engaging high schools as well as colleges and universities. The Summit Playhouse always saw the involvement of youth as one of their primary goals, providing awards to high school seniors, presenting performances at the local high school, and making the Playhouse itself available for student productions.³⁷

Another feature of the Little Theatres was their scale, which was, as the name implied, small. Little Theatres were typically located outside of established entertainment districts; as Dorothy Chansky notes, “typical choices were renovated storefronts or churches, studios or school auditoriums, grange halls, settlement houses, and occasionally, private homes or overhauled saloons.”³⁸ Typically, they were small operations, not only because they had little money, but also because they attracted a limited audience. Audiences were local, tended to know each other, and were often racially and socially segregated.³⁹ The small scale of the Little Theatre also resulted in an intimate environment, one where the audience could feel engaged with the production and a part of the event.⁴⁰

The Summit “Players Association” is listed in Oliver M. Saylor’s 1923 publication, *Our American Theatre*, as one of twelve “little, experimental, and community theatres” in New Jersey. This may be one of the most accurate lists of the early Little Theatres located within the state that exists. Also included in the list are the Players (Hightstown); Little Theatre League Thespians (Jersey City); Players’ Playhouse (Montclair); Catholic Young Women’s Club, Little Theatre Guild, Neighborhood Players, The Thaliens (Newark); Drama Guild of the Oranges, The Masquers (Orange); Triangle Club of Princeton University (Princeton); and the Guild Players (Trenton).⁴¹ Other than the Summit Playhouse, only Triangle Club survives today, although it differs from most community theatres in the fact that it focuses on the college community within which it is situated, and attempts through its productions to place Princeton events within a larger national (and international) context. Additionally, Triangle’s performances have traditionally been musicals written and produced by students, rather than dramas or comedies drawn from a larger literary tradition.⁴²

³⁶ Dorothy Chansky views the Little Theatre movement as one among a number of national reform projects that typified the era, circa 1890-1920s. (Chansky, 3.)

³⁷“The Playhouse Association, Inc. Sixtieth Anniversary,” 1978, 8. Summit Playhouse Archives.

³⁸ Chansky, 13-14.

³⁹ Chansky, 14.

⁴⁰The Summit Playhouse has always maintained such an intimate environment, reaching its maximum seating capacity of just over 100 in 1961 through the construction of a small addition.

⁴¹ Saylor, 355.

⁴² Princeton’s Triangle Club traces its development to 1883, when it was known as the Princeton College Dramatic Association. It became the Triangle Club of Princeton in 1893.

http://www.princeton.edu/~triangle/content_page/history.html, accessed 14 July 2008.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Statement of Significance**

Section 8 Page 10

A search of the New Jersey Association of Community Theatres members yields a small list of Little or Community Theatre groups that were founded within the same time frame (although slightly later) as the Summit Dramatic Club: the Players Guild of Leonia, founded in 1919, and the Cranford Dramatic Club (also founded in 1919).⁴³ These groups are still active and producing community theatre. Other early community theatre groups in the state that remain in existence today include the Chatham Community Players (1922); the Radburn Players in Fairlawn (1929); the Bergen County Players (1933); Dover Little Theatre (1933); Westfield Community Players (1934); and Studio Players in Montclair (1937).

The Summit Playhouse has – physically, strategically, and artistically – changed little since its founding in 1918. The Playhouse currently produces three shows a season, comedies and dramas drawn from contemporary and historical sources. The organization has 250 subscribers and 90 members. Members are invited to join by the Playhouse Board and must dedicate at least 10 hours a year to Playhouse activities. Each member pays \$40 annually. Subscribers pay \$50 annually and receive discounted tickets to the three shows. The Playhouse Association also sponsors Kaleidoscope Theatre, a summer program by and for youth ages 8 to 18. The Playhouse continues a tradition of community service that includes a benefit performance of each of their regular plays, scholarships for Dramatic Arts students, and donations of books on theater to the Summit Free Public Library. The Playhouse itself, enlarged only once in 1961, still offers an intimate theatre experience to the local community and beyond.

⁴³New Jersey Association of Community Theatres website, www.njtheater.com/NJACT/default.asp, accessed 14 July 2008.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

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Union County, New Jersey
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Section 9 Page 1

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Section 9 Page 2

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Summit Playhouse
Union County, New Jersey
Verbal Boundary Description**

Section 10 Page 1

Boundary Description

The Summit Playhouse is located in the Township of Summit, Union County, New Jersey, at 10 New England Avenue, Block 1808, Lot 1, within the triangle formed by the intersection of New England Avenue and Tulip Street. The boundary lines of the nominated property follow the property lines as indicated on the 1990 Tax Map, City of Summit.

Boundary Justification

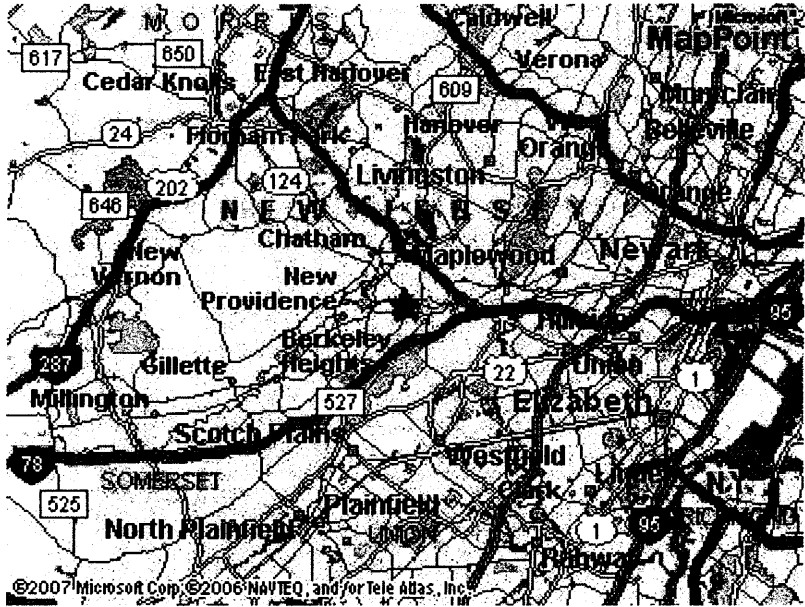
Boundary lines follow legally recorded property lines.

Photographs

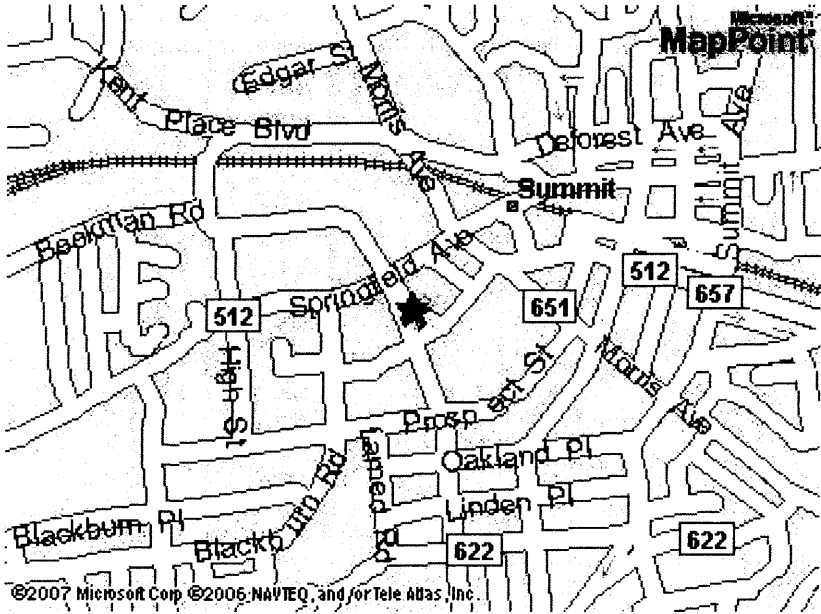
The following information applies to all photographs:

5. Location of Digital Files: New Jersey Historic Preservation Office

<u>Photo</u>	<u>Subject/Location</u>	<u>Photographer</u>	<u>Date</u>
Photo 1	North elevation, view looking south	Meredith Bzdak	October 8, 2007
Photo 2	North elevation, looking southwest	Kerensa Wood	July 11, 2007
Photo 3	East elevation, looking northwest	Kerensa Wood	July 11, 2007
Photo 4	Detail, north elevation, original main entrance	Kerensa Wood	July 11, 2007
Photo 5	Detail, north elevation, entrance beneath main staircase	Kerensa Wood	July 11, 2007
Photo 6	Detail, arched tympanum at original main entrance (north elevation), showing mask designed by J.M. Rose	Kerensa Wood	July 11, 2007
Photo 7	Playhouse interior, looking north toward stage	Kerensa Wood	July 11, 2007
Photo 8	Playhouse interior, looking southwest toward seating and mural by Joan Rose Thomas	Kerensa Wood	July 11, 2007
Photo 9	Playhouse lobby, looking southwest at mural by Jack Manley Rose	Kerensa Wood	July 11, 2007
Photo 10	Water fountain in Playhouse lobby	Kerensa Wood	July 11, 2007

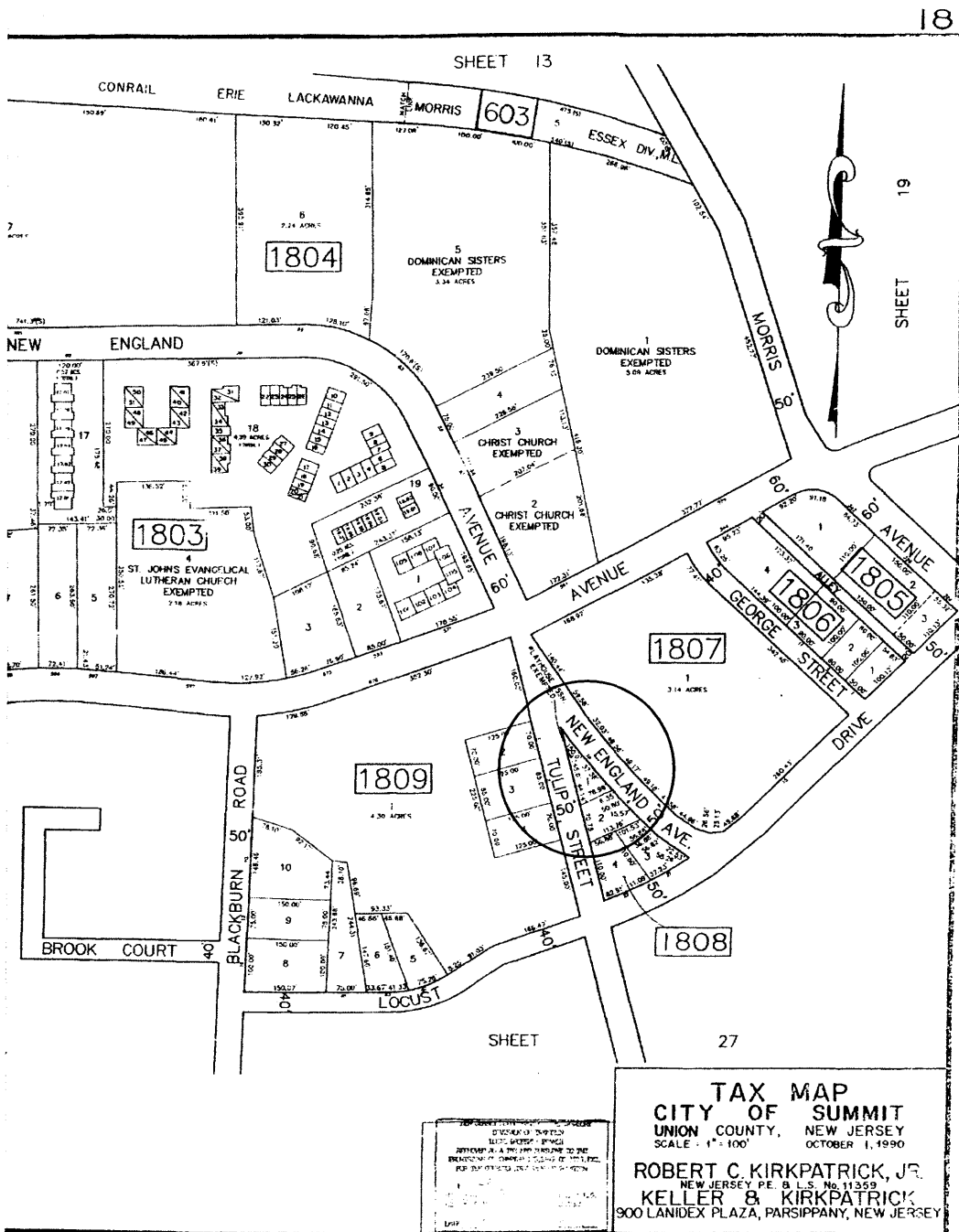


Location of Summit Playhouse within northern New Jersey.

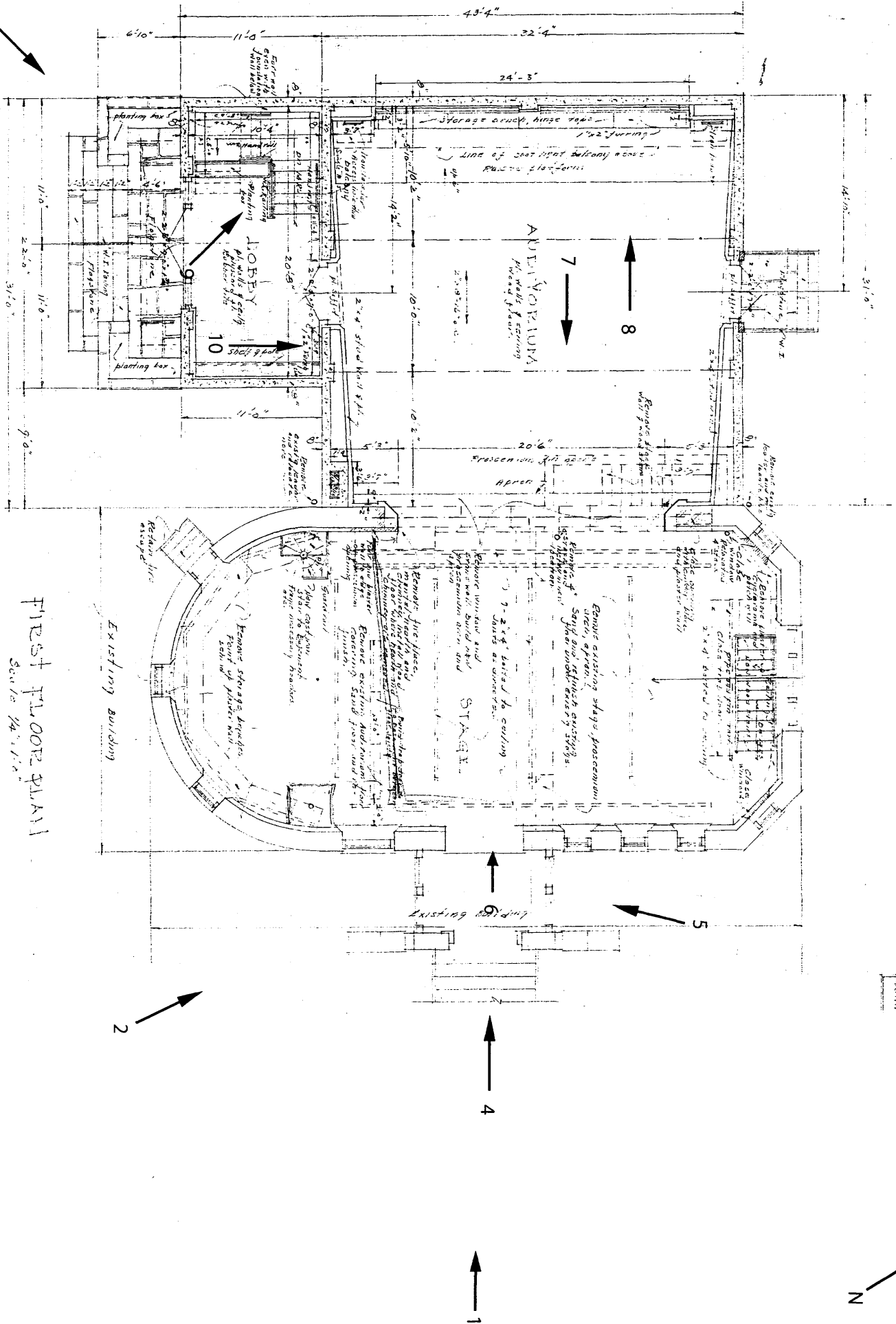


Location of Summit Playhouse within Township of Summit.

Summit Playhouse
 Union County, New Jersey
 Accompanying Documentation



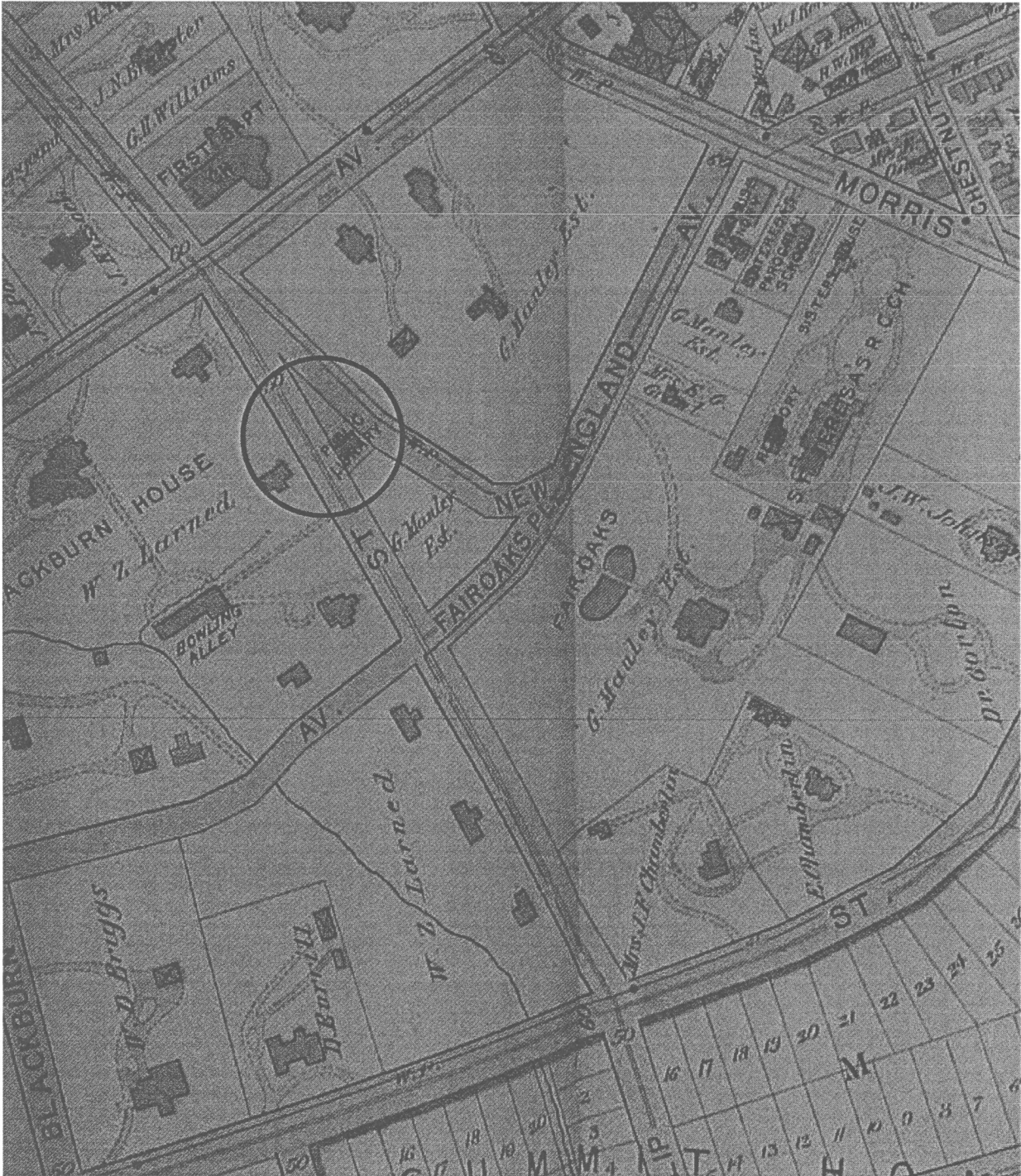
City of Summit Tax Map; Summit Playhouse is located at Block 1808, Lot 1.



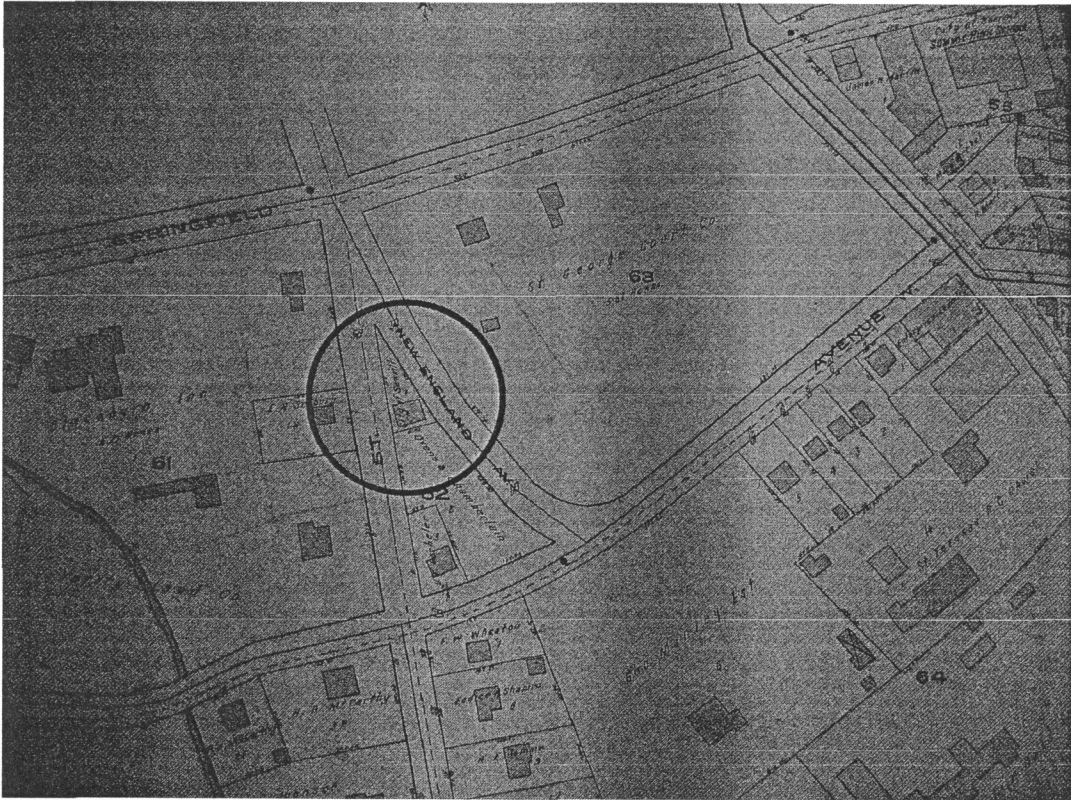
FIRST FLOOR PLAN
Scale 1/4" = 1'-0"



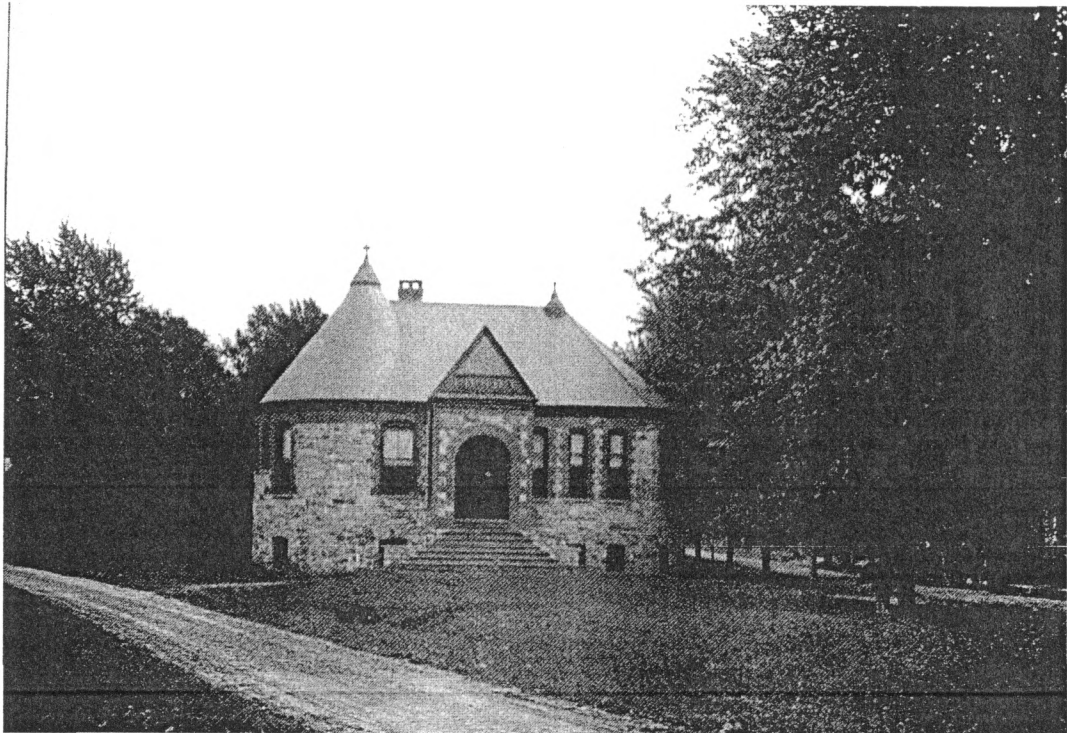
Tulip Street, prior to creation of New England Avenue and construction of Summit Library. (E. Robinson, *Atlas of Union County, New Jersey*, 1882, plate 120. Courtesy Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries.)



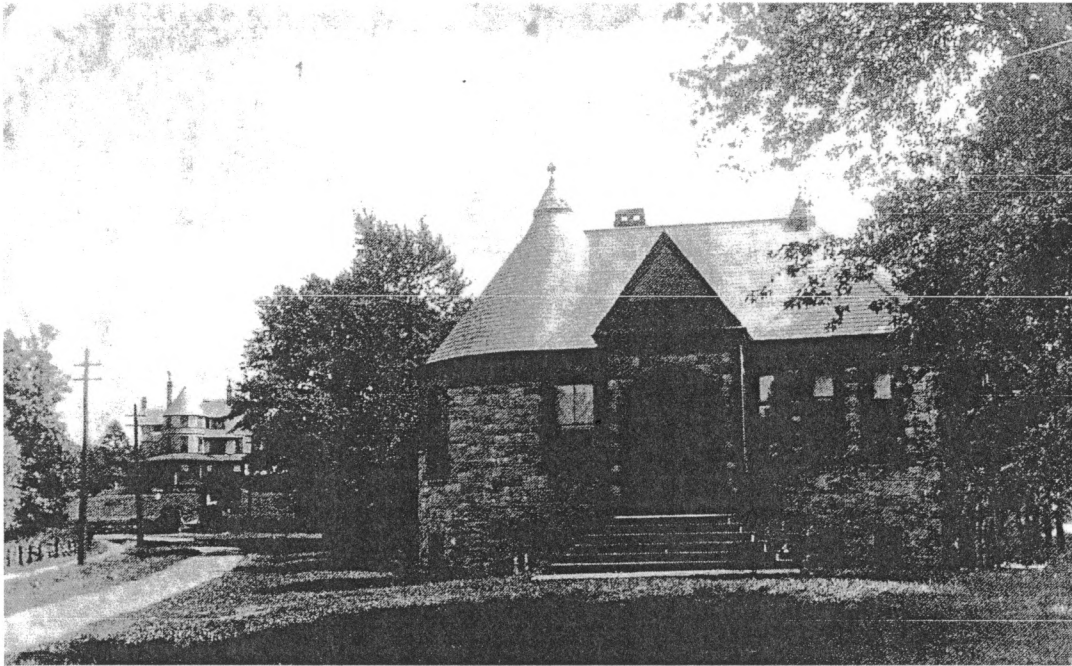
New England Avenue and the Library, in 1906, are located adjacent to the estates of George Manley. (J.L. Bauer, *Atlas of Union County, New Jersey*, 1906, plate 28. Courtesy Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries.)



The Sanborn Map of 1922 shows the Summit Playhouse as “City of Summit,” shortly after the Summit Dramatic Club took over the building. Sanborn Map Company, 1922. (Courtesy Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries.)



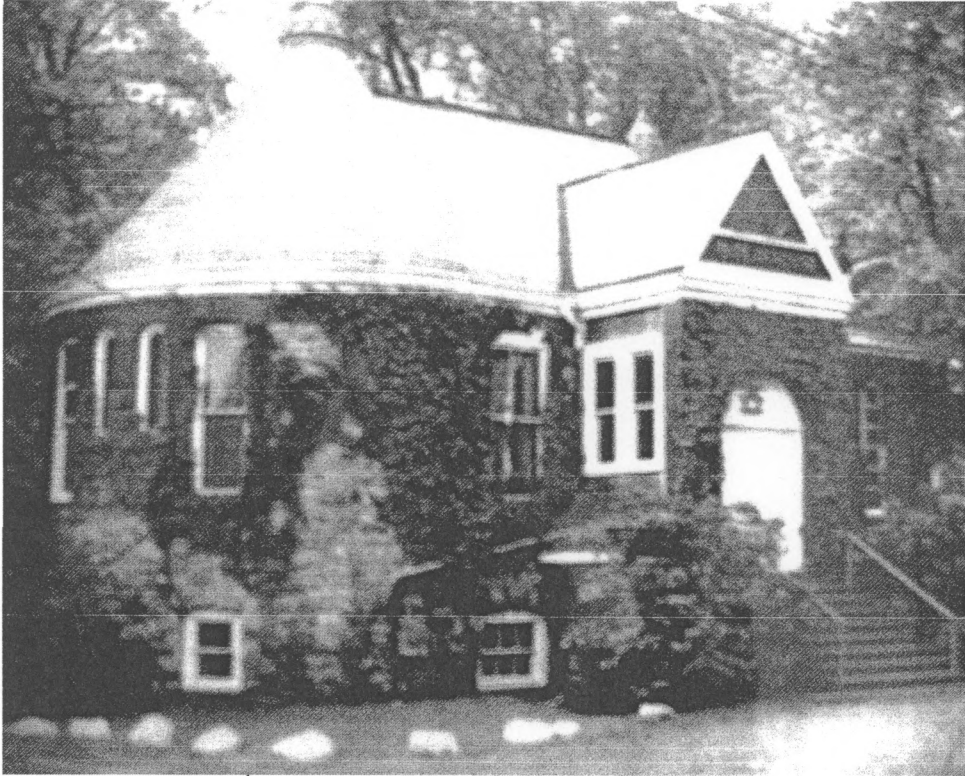
Summit Playhouse, shortly after construction. (Courtesy Summit Playhouse Archives.)



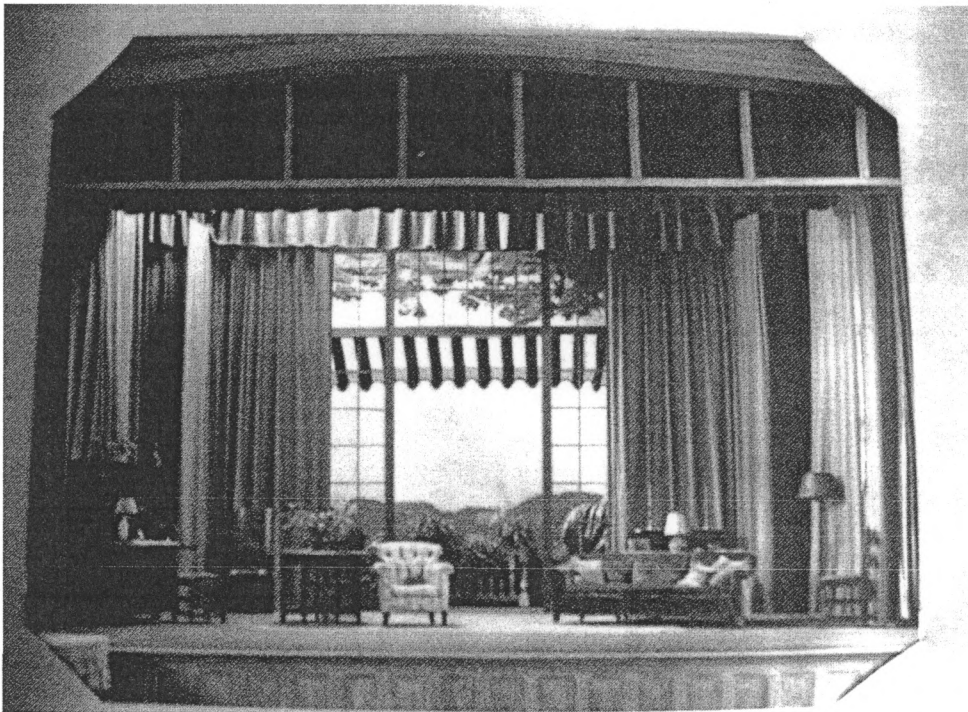
Summit Playhouse, shortly after construction. Note George Manley Estate in the background of the photograph. (Courtesy Summit Playhouse Archives.)



Summit Playhouse, showing east elevation and wood fire escape. Photograph is undated, but likely circa 1918. Note ivy at main elevation. (Courtesy Summit Playhouse Archives.)



Summit Playhouse, early 20th century. Note ivy now covers the elevations, the drive across the front of the building appears to have been more formalized with the addition of rocks that mark the edges, and the front stairs have been changed. (Courtesy Summit Playhouse Archives.)



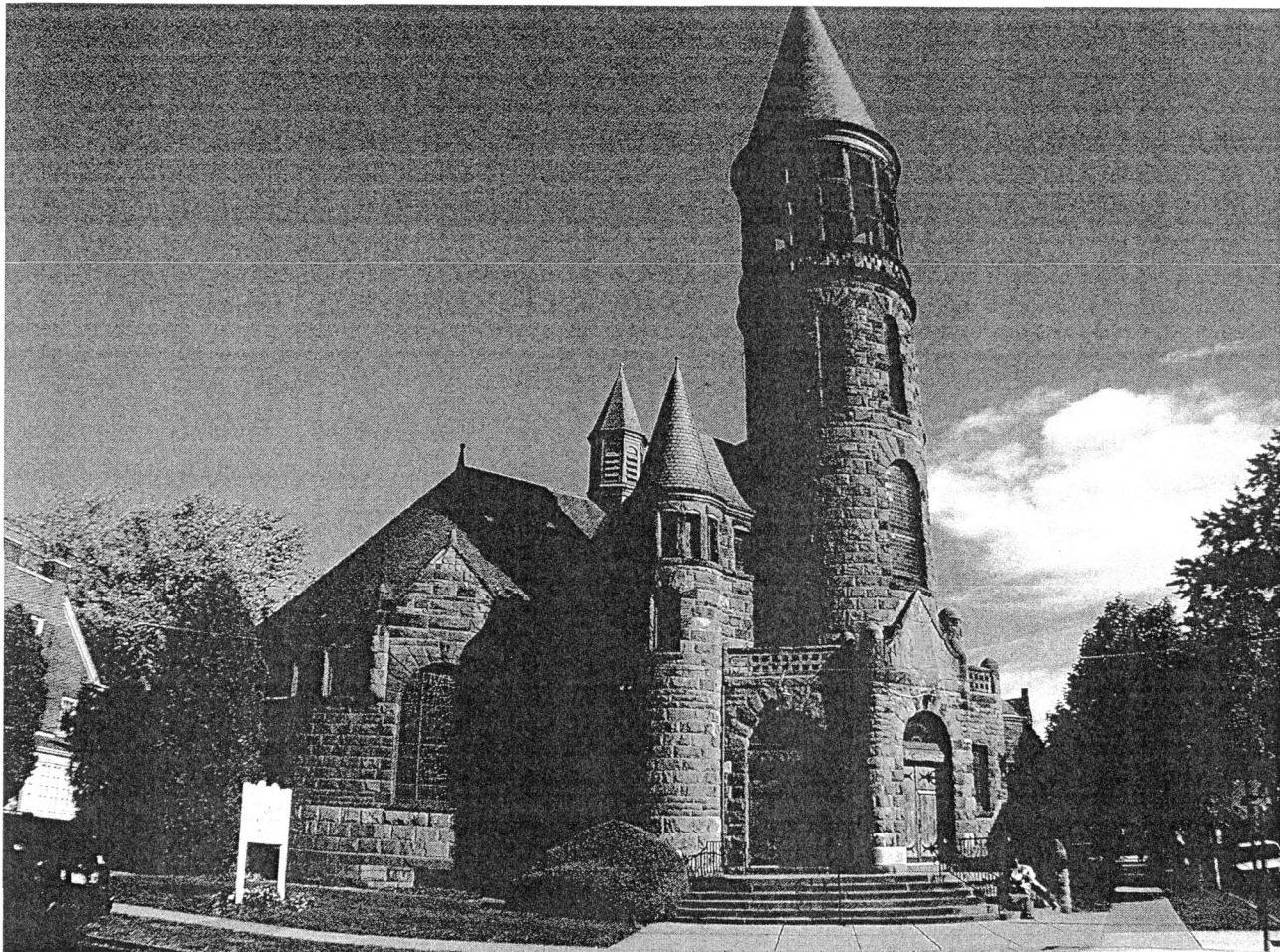
Summit Playhouse interior, circa 1923, showing proscenium opening and wood paneling at the stage. (Courtesy Summit Playhouse Archives.)



Marjorie and Floyd Jefferson at their villa in Rome, undated. (Courtesy Summit Playhouse Archives.)



Two Summit residences (no longer extant) designed by A.B. Jennings. Left: Simmons House, 67 New England Avenue, c. 1870s; Right: Allen House, 66 New England Avenue, c. 1870s. (Jennings Photograph Collection, The New-York Historical Society.)



A.B. Jennings, former Westminster Presbyterian Church (now Westminster Hall, Bloomfield College), Bloomfield, NJ, constructed 1891-92.