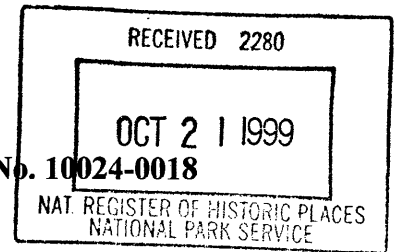


NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

1398

OMB No. 10024-0018



**United States Department of the Interior National Park Service
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM**

1. Name of Property

historic name: Charleston Municipal Auditorium
 other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number: 224-232 Virginia Street, East not for publication: N/A
 city/town: Charleston vicinity: N/A
 state: WV county: Kanawha code: 039 zip code: 25301

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide X locally.

Susan M. Pierce 10/8/99
 Signature of Certifying Official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau Date

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

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau Date

Name of Property:
Charleston Municipal Auditorium

County/State:
Kanawha/West Virginia

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet. <input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet. <input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> 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
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	TOTAL

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of Property:
Charleston Municipal Auditorium

County/State:
Kanawha/West Virginia

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

RECREATION AND CULTURE
Auditorium

Current Functions

RECREATION AND CULTURE
Auditorium

7. Description

Architectural Classification

MODERN MOVEMENT
Art Deco

Materials

Foundation Concrete and Steel
Walls Concrete-front facade
Brick-back and sides
Roof Concrete
Other

Narrative Description
(See continuation on 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.

Name of Property:

Charleston Municipal Auditorium

County/State:

Kanawha, West Virginia

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 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.

Areas of Significance

Architecture

Entertainment/Recreation

Performing Arts

Period of Significance

1939

Significant Dates

1939

Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Alphonso F. Wysong

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Name of Property :

County and State:

Charleston Municipal Auditorium

Kanawha, West Virginia

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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of Repository: Kanawha Valley Historical & Preservation Society has a small collection of newspaper articles, photographs, construction drawings and other historical information on the auditorium at its office: 817 People's Building (179 Summers Street), P.O. Box 2283, Charleston, WV, 25301, (304)342-7676.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References Charleston West Quad Map

17 444080 4244950

Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe property boundaries on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

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

Name of Property:

Charleston Municipal Auditorium

County/State:

Kanawha, West Virginia

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Dr. Billy Joe Peyton

Organization: Paul D. Marshall & Associates, Inc. Date: July 1999

Street & Number: 209 Washington Street, West Telephone: (304)343-5310

City or Town: Charleston State: WV ZIP: 25302

Property Owner

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

Name: City of Charleston
Civic Center Board
John Robertson, Facility Manager

Street & Number: 200 Civic Center Drive Telephone: (304)345-1500

City or Town: Charleston State: WV Zip: 25326

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Name of Property:

Charleston Municipal Auditorium

County/State:

Kanawha, West Virginia

Section number 7

Page 1

Description of Property:

The Charleston Municipal Auditorium is a monolithic concrete and steel structure of massive proportions situated in the southwestern section of Charleston, West Virginia's central business district. It is an excellent representation of the Art Deco architectural style in a public building, and one of the finest extant examples in the greater Charleston area. The major decorated facade is curvilinear and oriented towards the intersection of Virginia and Truslow Streets. This great curve is representative of Art Deco innovation which broke with, yet reflected in part, the revivalist tradition in architectural style. Revivalist designs (Neo-Gothic, Neo-Classicism, etc.) had been introduced to counter the eclecticism spawned in the Victorian era.

Professor JoEllen Kerr of the Carleton Varney Department of Interior Decoration at the University of Charleston (West Virginia) notes that Art Deco was a prominent art style of the early twentieth century that reached its peak in the United States in the 1920s-30s. Art Deco, variously called Moderne or Modernistic, was a style of decoration applied to jewelry, clothing, furniture, crafts, and buildings. Based on modern materials, repetitive geometric patterns, low relief surface decoration, and highly stylized and classical motifs, it often contained faceted panels, elongated shapes, bold lines, and geometric patterns of Machine Age imagery.

The Art Deco style incorporated bold materials and designs that impressed the eye and represented speed in motion, embodied fantasy, and responded to the modernization of society. It was simple in design, utilitarian in function, and typically represented as a decorative veneer or skin that lent itself nicely to architecture through modern building materials like concrete and steel. Some well-known national examples of Art Deco buildings include the Chrysler Building, Rockefeller Center, and Radio City Music Hall in New York City, and a number of hotels and other commercial properties in Miami Beach, Florida. Art Deco became a popular revival style in the 1960s and again in the 1980s. With one of the nation's largest Art Deco historic districts, Miami Beach celebrates its outstanding heritage with an Art Deco weekend each January.

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Name of Property: Charleston Municipal Auditorium County/State: Kanawha, West Virginia

Section number 7 Page 2

Description of Property:

True to its characteristic Art Deco design, the Charleston Municipal Auditorium consists of modern steel joist construction and a steel frame resting on concrete piles. It is surrounded by a watertight subterranean retaining wall, concrete floors and roof, metal lath and plaster ceilings, concrete and cinder block brick-faced curtain walls, and a stylistic concrete facade. Project architect Alphonso F. Wysong of Charleston described the building style as "Conservative Modern," an appropriate term since its classical architectural elements are treated in a modern, shorthand manner that substitutes simple piers for elaborate columns and incorporates simple geometric shapes.

The curved facade is interrupted by three stair tower blocks. A center block dominates the front and incorporates the grand central stair. It rises to nearly the full height of the auditorium and is the building's most prominent physical feature. Two smaller blocks at the southeast and southwest corners are about half the height and bulk of the central unit, giving enhanced importance to the verticality of the main block and the symmetry of the whole. Representative architectural elements prominently displayed on the front facade include many classic angular and rounded geometric design elements of the Art Deco form. At ground level, the facade is pierced by six entrances--four on the front (south) elevation and one at each of the side (east and west) elevations, and two box offices with exterior ticket windows.

Enveloping the front and wrapping around the east and west sides, the molded concrete facade encompasses approximately one-third of the exterior space. In keeping with the building's symmetry and consonance, many of the exterior elements echo the verticality of its Art Deco design. These include a series of eight (four on each side of the center tower) vertical, angular buttressed steel members covered in concrete and extending from ground level to just below the cornice line. They replace columns found in more classic designs and tie into concrete piles to provide structural stability for the massive face wall.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Name of Property: Charleston Municipal Auditorium **County/State:** Kanawha, West Virginia

Section number 7 **Page** 3

Description of Property:

The buttresses are a bold and significant design element second only in prominence to the center stair tower. An additional noteworthy vertical element appears on the facade as a type of fluting that borders either side of the center projection and is reminiscent of fluted columns.

Another distinctive feature of the front facade is the name "Municipal Auditorium" which is cast in concrete and prominently emblazoned across the front of the building just above ground level in large letters with an Avant Garde typestyle painted a deep red. Below the lettering is a series of horizontal recessed striations that are consistent with those beneath the front cornice line. These smaller edge projections feature the same horizontal recesses found along the border around the windows in the side stair towers. Additionally, two additional sets of geometric designs above them consist of a series of recessed squares with smaller squares inside. This pattern is repeated on both sides of the buttresses and also crowns a series of vertical fluting details. A prominent horizontal string of recessed squares runs along the entire width of the facade below the cornice and at the angled top of the buttresses. These horizontal recessed squares seem to recall the horizontal rustication in stone masonry of an earlier period. A larger single square-within-a-square crowns the center of the main stair block, which also incorporates a stepped reveal, decorative bead, and flutes at its corners. A row of hollow reversed fluting (or beads) appears in a recurring pattern along the entire front facade below the cornice. Secondary stair blocks have truncated corners with a beveled cornice.

The cantilevered roofs with square patterns overhanging the front entrances and ticket windows attach to the center projection and smaller side projections to shelter event-goers from the elements. Square recessed panels are used to decorate the overhanging ceilings.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Name of Property: Charleston Municipal Auditorium County/State: Kanawha, West Virginia

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Description of Property:

Arching outward to form a semicircular motif that echoes the arched, open fan-shaped design of the building, they create a horizontal delineation between the small-scale pedestrian level entrances and the massive and dominant facade that towers three stories above. Four original stainless steel Art Deco light fixtures remain in place over the front entrances.

Both box offices are offset from the main facade and covered with charcoal gray granite panels with large (6' high) waffle-pattern plate glass surrounds on either side. These glass panels displayed playbills, posters, and other information about events held at the facility. A water table encircling the base of the facade accentuates the primary building entrances. Public access is gained through any one of four double doorways aligned in a symmetrical pattern across the front (south) elevation or by two individual double doorways located on the east and west sides of the building, respectively. Rustication is found at the two end entrances. Each of the six primary entrances originally had two solid panel doors with a single octagonal porthole-style window in each, but these were replaced in the 1960s by the current glass and aluminum doors with push bar openers.

Originally, the distinctive molded concrete facade was a monochromatic gray that lacked any contrasting color except for the letters spelling out the building's name, but in recent years the main surface has been painted a light cream shade with some of the geometric elements highlighted in red. Aside from this bolder paint scheme that accentuates the most prominent architectural features, the most noticeable alteration to the facade since 1939 has been the replacement of the original entrance doors. Despite a few areas where the paint is peeling and routine maintenance is needed, the exterior surface shows little outward signs of deterioration and is relatively sound.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Description of Property:

Contrasting with the sleek, ornate, and finished Art Deco styling of the main facade, the three remaining sides of the building are covered with yellow facebrick laid in a Flemish bond (one header at each seven courses). The form of the massed walls on the east and west sides follow the design of the interior auditorium floor plan and epitomize the symmetrical nature of the building. There are stone-capped structural buttresses on the facades of the main auditorium high walls, and the stage fly area is a major high block. On each side of the fly block is a stepped facade that originally featured symmetrical arrangements of window and door openings which have subsequently been filled with brick. On Truslow Street, the auditorium facade is decorated with a pattern of recessed and projected square panels above a recessed and projected water table. Located high on the rear elevation of the fly block is a large cast concrete panel bearing the name "Municipal Auditorium" in an Avant Garde typestyle painted in red.

On the east and west sides of the brick portion of the building are four sets of steel fire doors providing outside egress from the auditorium floor. Two doors open below ground level on each side and incorporate a ramp and stairs with pipe rail to reach the surrounding parking lots. These are typically not used as public entrances, but are exit routes most commonly used after performances. Two additional door openings at the rear of the building permit direct access to the backstage area. Specifically, the easternmost opening has a single steel door with stairs and a landing for pedestrian use, while the westernmost opening accesses a loading dock via a roller-mounted, vertical-opening steel door.

Upon entering the Municipal Auditorium at any of the public front or side entrances, the first interior space encountered is the main foyer or lobby area. In keeping with the curvilinear design of the building's exterior, the 16' wide foyer follows an arcing pattern its

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Description of Property:

entire 46' length. Interior lobby walls are painted plaster over lath and trimmed at the base with 20" black baseboard molding. Two black metal air vents with a star pattern design are located on the north interior partition wall separating the lobby and main auditorium.

Although some modern improvements have been made in the main foyer, the space retains most of its original Art Deco character. Along the front (south) interior wall are three sets of stairs that extend into the corresponding stair towers to the second floor mezzanine and continue down to the lower level. Each stairway has handsome stainless steel railings its entire length and aluminum Art Deco wall sconces on each landing (four per stairway, a total of twelve in all) to light the area between floors. A large metal-framed casement window pierces the front facade in the main center landing between the main foyer and mezzanine.

The main foyer area is covered with a highly decorative and polished light gray-brown Terrazzo floor that extends its entire length from east to west. It is inlaid with a series of 21 square geometric inserts that are framed in a darker charcoal gray Terrazzo and set off from the rest of the floor with stainless steel strips outlining a black border. On the floor in front of each of the six passages to the main hall are stylistic Art Deco aisle numbers highlighted with white cement and white marble enclosed in a circle design (starting on the east end, the aisles are numbered one through six). Entrances are covered with an identical set of double wooden doors, each of which has a distinctive round porthole window centered near its top. These six sets of doors, which are original to the 1939 construction period, are covered in a green-blue laminated plastic and reflect the style of original exterior entrance doors removed in the 1960s.

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Description of Property:

Flanking the center stairs along the front wall of the foyer are two other double wooden doors without porthole windows. These allow interior access to the box offices along the front of the building. An interior ticket counter installed in the easternmost box office in the 1960s allows patrons to purchase tickets from the main foyer. The interior ticket office doors are covered in the same blue-green laminated plastic as the ones leading to the auditorium. In addition, they retain decorative beehive-shaped Art Deco style metal hinges and are thought to be original. The curving lobby ceiling is covered in a white textured acoustical spray (possibly asbestos) and is punctuated by eleven modern square overhead lights, each of which is mounted in the middle of two concentric squares. Located in the center of the foyer is a single overhead ceiling light of a chrome circular dish design with round globe. Also on the ceiling are four chrome bowl-shaped air vents with wire strap connectors between each one. Extant circular light and air vents appear to be original.

According to auditorium maintenance staff, the original partition wall separating the foyer and main hall reputedly incorporated rows of inlaid glass blocks for nearly its entire length. No physical investigations have been undertaken to verify this assertion or determine if any glass blocks remain in place behind the acoustical tile which was installed later. Several years ago the city installed two handicapped accessible toilet rooms just off the east and west ends of the foyer, respectively.

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Description of Property:

Hanging in the main foyer of the auditorium is a large (24" wide x 30" high) commemorative brass plaque honoring many of the key officials who participated in the Municipal Auditorium project. Mounted in the center of the inside wall, the plaque reads as follows:

MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM
FEDERAL
EMERGENCY ADMINISTRATION
OF PUBLIC WORKS
PROJECT NUMBER W.VA. 1072-DS

1	CITY OF	1
9	CHARLESTON	9
3	D. BOONE DAWSON - MAYOR	3
8		9

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

CARL L. DAVIS	R. S. SPILMAN, JR.
ALEXANDER P. GATES	DR. H. H. SMALLRIDGE
HARRY L. MATHEWS	GEORGE E. SUTHERLAND, CHAIRMAN

CITIZEN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HARRY R. HOWELL	JOHN C. MORRISON, JR.
HARRY SILVERSTEIN, CHAIRMAN	

A. F. WYSONG, ARCHITECT C. P. FORTNEY, CONSULTING ENGINEER

BUILT WITH FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH A BOND ISSUE BY THE
CITY OF CHARLESTON AND A GRANT FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

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Description of Property:

The main floor of the Municipal Auditorium originally held 2,411 persons and the balcony accommodated 1,158, bringing total seating capacity to 3,569 (this number has been reduced to 3,450 due to the removal of seats for handicapped access at the rear of the main hall). In the rare occasions where additional seating is required, 1,500 more temporary seats can be placed on the stage and still leave room for speakers to appear. Manufactured by the American Seating Company, the permanently-installed metal folding seats feature decorative end details and cushions and backs upholstered in red cloth. All permanent seats received an overhaul during the major renovations undertaken in the mid-1960s.

Seating on the main floor is divided into seven sections separated by eight aisles running the length of the floor from the entrance doors at the rear to the base of the stage at the front of the hall. Located directly below the front of the stage and footlights is a shallow (approximately 2' deep) orchestra pit which remains concealed under a hard cover that supports foot traffic when not in use. Access to the orchestra pit is obtained through a door in the basement located directly beneath the stage area.

The auditorium ceiling employs the familiar semicircular configuration that is a prominent detail throughout the building. It contains a succession of seven cantilevered sections which are lit from the recesses between each section. This type of recessed lighting casts a low reflective luminescence on the auditorium and bathes the space in a soft, warm glow. Also on the ceiling are seven large disk-shaped air intakes, while mounted in the main floor beneath one seat per row in each aisle from the balcony to the fourth row are 10" mushroom ventilators that exhaust into concrete ducts beneath the floor to circulate air throughout the hall.

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Name of Property:

Charleston Municipal Auditorium

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Description of Property:

A massive proscenium arch frames the elevated stage in the main hall. Measuring 64' across by 25' high and "comparable to any in the nation," it provides an unobstructed view of the performing area from virtually all seats on the main floor and balcony. Plaster walls in the main auditorium are painted to match the buff/tan color scheme in the foyer, while the proscenium arch sports a decorative linear border in an alternating red and white paint pattern. The spacious 8,400-square-foot stage area is the center point of the auditorium proper. As originally designed, a fireproof asbestos stage curtain could be lowered with the touch of a button and the stage area isolated from the main auditorium for meetings, conferences, and other smaller gatherings. In these cases, the stage could accommodate up to 1,000 persons and be heated separately from the rest of the cavernous building. Exhibit space could be made available on the ground floor and lower level foyer, as well.

The main stage area measures 52' high to the grid, with 29 lines of drops originally providing ample apparatus for scene shifting. Behind the heavy red curtains that frame the performing area is a utilitarian space that displays none of the interesting design details that adorn the public areas. Walls are concrete block painted white, and the floor is tongue and groove pine boards. Mechanical controls for the stage, curtains, and drop lines are located along the west side wall (stage right) next to the main electrical breaker panel for the stage and house lights. Two prefabricated dressing rooms, installed in the 1960s, are located behind the stage along the east wall. Also in this area is a large acoustical shell, grand piano, and portable orchestra seating that the West Virginia Symphony uses during performance.

Access to the second level of public space is gained by the three interior stairways located off the main foyer. This area contains a narrow curving outer mezzanine and balcony

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Description of Property:

with a concrete floor. A combination light and projection room is located behind the back wall of the balcony and is used by technical crews during performances. In this room, which is located within the top portion of the central stair tower, is a windowless opening that affords a sweeping view of the stage. Its back wall fronts on Virginia Street and is pierced by a two-over-three light casement window centered on the main stair tower and visible from the front facade.

From the second floor mezzanine, the balcony is reached by passing under four open stadium-style concrete portals. Arching in a semicircular pattern around the main hall, the balcony extends the entire width of the auditorium. It features a curving concrete balustrade with the familiar square-in-square geometric motif cast in its front border. The balustrade is covered with acoustical spray and painted a deep red to match other interior features. Two levels of upholstered balcony seats are identical to those on the main floor. A walkway separates the two balcony seating levels, with decorative copper handrails adorning the upper seating area and plain steel rails along the lower seating area. The back wall of the balcony is lined with acoustical tiles installed in the 1960s or later.

Public access to the lower level is through one of the three interior stairways located off the Virginia Street (front) entrance to the main foyer. On this subterranean level also are the primary public toilet facilities for non-handicapped individuals (men on the west end and women on the east). Both lower level restrooms were remodeled and updated for handicapped accessibility (sinks and lavatories, toilets, urinals, etc.) in the 1990s. Since the building has no elevator, physically impaired patrons use the toilet facilities in the main foyer. Between the restrooms located at either end of the lower level are two modern concession areas with service counters for use by auditorium patrons. Originally,

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Description of Property:

sliding partitions could be used to divide the lower level into three smaller rooms known as the men's committee room, central exhibit room, and women's committee room. These spaces could be individually used for small meetings or as lounge rooms, and by sliding back the accordion-style partitions they offered a larger area for art exhibitions (picture moldings were provided), sales meetings, displays, etc. Except for the Art Deco stair railings that terminate on the lower level, no historic fabric or original detailing remains in this area.

An expansive basement with unadorned concrete and block walls is located beneath the stage and backstage areas. It is reached by descending one of two sets of metal stairs located on either side of the main stage. This space is not open to the public, but is used primarily as a staging and preparation area by performers, stagehands, and technical crews who work the various events held in the auditorium. Directly beneath the stage in the basement is a large central room with steel I-beam column supports, concrete block walls, and open ribbed concrete ceiling. Immediately adjacent to the west are toilet facilities for men and women. Other basement spaces include the furnace room housing six vertical tube heaters, gas burners, and main breaker, the boiler room containing the main 6' floor-mounted blower fan, and the fire control room that houses a modern alarm system. Nearby is the recently installed sump pump apparatus that pumps raw sewage from the auditorium up to the level of city sewer lines.

Two sets of stairs located on either side (east and west) of the backstage area provide direct access to the basement and upper floors. These spaces, which are utilized by performers and others involved in staging performances at the facility, are not accessible to the public. On the second and third levels are a series of ten backstage dressing rooms and several storage closets. Dressing rooms on the west side are slightly larger than those on the east. From the top (fourth floor) stair level, a door opens to an extensive array of ductwork that circulates heating, ventilation, and air conditioning throughout the

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Description of Property:

building. Also from this vantage point, maintenance staff access the attic crawl space leading out over the ceiling of the auditorium in order to replace burned out bulbs and otherwise service the recessed lighting and other systems located directly above the main seating area.

One of the grandest and most monumental examples of the Art Deco architectural style to grace the skyline of Charleston, West Virginia, for six decades the Municipal Auditorium has been the venue for musical and theatrical shows, concerts, and other performances by local, state, national, and international artists. The monolithic building has undergone relatively few alterations or changes in that time, and continues to operate in its original function as a public performing hall. Overall, it remains in a good state of preservation.

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Name of Property:

Charleston Municipal Auditorium

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Kanawha, West Virginia

Section number 8

Page 1

Statement of Significance:

The Municipal Auditorium is significant under Criteria A for its important contribution to entertainment/recreation and the performing arts in Charleston, West Virginia, and under Criteria C because of its architecture which is of the Art Deco building style. The period of significance has been determined to be 1939, which corresponds to its date of completion and opening as the city's premier playhouse.

Initial discussions on the viability of building a civic auditorium in downtown Charleston began with a public debate in the early 1930s that rapidly became a source of local controversy. Supporters of the proposed hall felt that the area needed such a facility to attract quality performers and enhance the cultural life of the expanding capital city. Conversely, opponents regarded it as an unnecessary and frivolous waste of public funds. Despite outspoken opposition, the city forged ahead and in 1936 applied for a \$412,000 grant-in-aid through the Public Works Administration (PWA), a New Deal agency established by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933.

Establishment of the Public Works Administration began with Roosevelt's inauguration in March of 1933 at a time when demand was great for a strong public works agency to lead the nation out of the Great Depression. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes became the primary advocates of a nationwide public works program intended to help alleviate unemployment, prime the pump for

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economic revitalization, and provide the instrument for building necessary and useful public works that might not otherwise find the necessary funding sources. The proposal to establish the PWA passed through Congress as Title II of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 with a budget of \$3.3 billion. During its existence in the 1930s, the Public Works Administration distributed nearly \$6 billion for the construction of roads, tunnels, bridges, dams, hydroelectric power projects, public buildings, municipal water and sewage systems, and railroad equipment and facilities nationwide. With the primary purpose of creating jobs and stimulating economic recovery, it became a major source of construction money during the Great Depression--in 1933 alone it accounted for an incredible thirty percent of all construction nationwide.

Because PWA projects were generally large, complex, and relatively slow to develop, the agency disappointed those who hoped it would provide a quick and easy remedy for the nation's high unemployment rate. Ultimately, the PWA spent only \$2.8 billion of its initial \$3.3 billion appropriation--with much of that sum being used to fund construction projects undertaken by other agencies. Growing disillusionment with the PWA finally led Congress to shift the primary relief burden to the Works Progress Administration by 1935. As a result, President Roosevelt took \$400 million from the PWA and gave it to the Civil Works Administration because he felt the newly-created agency could achieve the desired results more expeditiously. Consequently, PWA funds totaled only \$313 million through the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, and it was not until 1938 that Congress allocated another \$1.6 billion for the agency to spend on its own projects. Passage of the Reorganization Act of 1939 precipitated the transfer of PWA's 2,000 employees to the Federal Works Agency.

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Nationwide, the PWA contributed funding to more than 34,000 projects during the depression era. It averaged nearly 140,000 workers each year that it existed, indirectly created more than 600,000 other jobs, and allocated approximately \$1.8 billion to fund numerous federal agencies. Despite the agency's failure to become the juggernaut for an anticipated economic recovery, the PWA did accomplish three significant objectives during its short existence: it pioneered the pattern of direct federal appropriations to municipal governments, initiated the federal housing program, and many of its projects--including Grand Coulee Dam, Queens Midtown Tunnel, All-American Canal, and Charleston's Municipal Auditorium--were extremely high caliber constructions that remain functional at the close of the twentieth century.

In 1936, the Public Works Administration turned down Charleston's initial request for financial assistance due to insufficient federal funds. Not to be deterred, the city reapplied the following year. After considerable deliberations, voters helped to decide the outcome of the project by approving a \$250,000 municipal bond issue for auditorium construction. Charleston city council sanctioned the bond issue at the same time it authorized one for building the South Side Bridge, another large public works project financed in part by the federal Works Progress Administration. This success spurred other WPA projects in the city, including a new bridge over Elk River and improvements to the nearby Columbia Boulevard.

Consulting engineer C. P. Fortney and project architect A. F. Wysong worked diligently to prepare plans and estimates for the proposed auditorium. Fortney was Charleston's city engineer, while Wysong was a prominent local architect hired to design the facility. Born in 1880 in Newport (Giles County), Virginia, Alphonso F. Wysong relocated to Mercer County, West Virginia, in the second decade of the twentieth century and established offices in Princeton and Bluefield. From 1916 to 1921 he served in the West Virginia House of Delegates from Mercer County before moving to Charleston in 1924. Wysong

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died in Charleston of a heart attack on February 12, 1944 at the age of 64. He is buried at Ashland, Kentucky.

Professionally, Alphonso F. Wysong was a respected and influential architect who collaborated with others to define the practice of architecture in West Virginia and provide for the examination and registration of architects. Among his most noteworthy commissions was the Wyoming County Courthouse (1916) located in Pineville and built in a Neo-Classical Revival style, and the Gilmer County Courthouse (c. 1924) in Glenville. After World War I, Wysong affiliated with Thomas P. Jones in the firm of Wysong and Jones, maintaining offices in Princeton and Charleston. One known construction of this partnership was the Princeton residence of Lower G. Bowling. Wysong also established a brief association with W. H. Eason in 1920.

An important achievement in Wysong's career was his election to the West Virginia House of Delegates from Mercer County in 1916. There he introduced House Bill No. 176 that provided for a state board of examiners of architects who were responsible for the establishment of rules for examination and registration of architects in order for potential recipients to develop proficiency in technical and professional subjects. Wysong's bill passed legislative scrutiny on April 27, 1921 and Governor Ephraim F. Morgan approved it on May 3, 1921. Throughout the 1920s Wysong was a member of the Board of Examiners, serving as its secretary for most of this period. In the late 1920s he resumed his practice in Charleston with the firm of Wysong, (Ludwig T.) Bengston, and Jones.

Thanks in large part to the joint efforts of Wysong and Fortney, optimism for PWA funding of the auditorium proposal ran high. In fact, in the fall of 1937 the local press confidently reported on the positive prospects for passage of a \$2 billion federal relief

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appropriations bill being debated in Congress. Its imminent approval meant that "Charleston is virtually assured of receiving a \$400,000 federal grant for the erection of a public auditorium." Since the request was the only one submitted by the city to the PWA, "the proposed auditorium is looked upon favorably by both state and federal officials." As anticipated, the massive federal relief bill made it through Congress and benefited Charleston immensely. Although the municipality did not get the full amount requested, it received \$212,000 in funding from the Public Works Administration. The federal grant-in-aid provided the city with forty-five percent of necessary construction funds, and the \$250,000 in municipal bond money covered the remaining balance.

It became apparent at the outset that the city wanted its civic auditorium built close to the central business district. One of the prime sites being considered was a parcel of land owned by the Wehrle family estate. Situated just east of the Kanawha County Courthouse and one block from Kanawha River, the property extended from an alley adjoining the old City Hall on the east, Alderson Street (now known as Laidley Street) on the west, and Kanawha Street (Kanawha Boulevard) on the south. It incorporated the former site of the landmark St. Albert Hotel that had burned several years earlier.

Despite its apparent favored status, city officials decided against acquiring the Wehrle tract in favor of a 2.04 acre lot situated about two blocks west of there and bordered by Virginia and Truslow Streets on the south and east, respectively. Disparagingly referred to as "the hole in the ground" because it lay in a swale several feet below street level, the local press dubbed the low-lying tract a "debris-littered, weed-clogged catch basin for stagnant rainwater" which city officials considered a public eyesore. Starting in 1874, the Kanawha Woolen Mills Company had a factory on the site which engaged in the manufacture of yarns, flannels, jeans, and blankets. However, the plant disappeared long before plans materialized for the auditorium. According to Sanborn Map and Publishing Company insurance maps and local newspaper reports, in the mid-1930s the block of

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Virginia Street between Truslow and Clendenin Streets contained an auto sales and service center dating from 1924, a used car lot, cinder block office building, and cinder block service station. To make room for the auditorium, workers demolished a frame garage and service station and relocated another frame structure elsewhere.

Official groundbreaking for the new performing hall took place on the morning of Thursday, January 20, 1938. With a throng of about 500 bystanders looking on approvingly from the sidewalk above, the mayor, city manager, project architect, two city councilmen, and several other dignitaries descended into the chasm for a brief dedication ceremony. As the appointed chairman of a special citizen's advisory committee in charge of the project, Harry L. Silverstein had the honor of turning over the first spadeful of earth. Under guidelines established by the Public Works Administration, all work had to be completed within 208 days.

Alphonso F. Wysong worked in conjunction with consulting architects C. W. and George L. Rapp of Rapp and Rapp, Inc. of Chicago to complete the construction specifications by December of 1937. Site clearing began in January of 1938 and construction got underway shortly thereafter. The city awarded the construction contract to Ward and Ward, a general contracting firm from Charleston. It took slightly over a year to erect the steel framework and concrete edifice, and another half a year for crews to finish the interior and landscaping work. Charlestonians got their first glimpse of the building's sleek Art Deco facade after workers removed the exterior scaffolding on Saturday, April 22, 1939.

Although construction did not meet the PWA's mandated 208-day time frame, completion of the impressive concrete and steel monolith occurred before the end of 1939. When finished, it garnered effusive praise and was reputed to be one of the largest performing halls of its type in the eastern United States. Local newspaper reports called it "beautiful in coloring, and complete in detail," while hailing it as the "crown-jewel in Charleston's

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cultural crown." Amenities in the state-of-the-art facility included a public address system and arrangements for setting up outside speakers as needed, a system of chimes on all three levels to call audiences back to the hall between acts before the curtain rose, an intercommunicating (intercom) telephone unit to connect different locations throughout the building, a backstage sound control room, and a combination light and projection room behind the upstairs balcony.

Project supporters were generally pleased to see their quest for a first-class civic auditorium in West Virginia's capital city reach a successful conclusion, and at least one stakeholder in particular was ecstatic with the final result. Founded in 1932, the local Community Music Association sponsored a series of annual concerts first at the Shrine Mosque and then at the Charleston High School auditorium, which held 2,004 patrons. This created obvious problems for the association, which had over 3,000 members in 1935 and rejected many more applications due to space limitations. Association president Harry L. Silverstein publicly apologized to those who could not be accommodated before announcing potential plans for a new concert hall: "Maybe in two years, or five or ten...we'll have an auditorium that's a credit to the city, and where music lovers can hear without distortion and without crowding."

Silverstein was vice president of Midwest Steel, a city councilman, respected civic leader, and a charter member of the Community Music Association. He acted as the primary protagonist whose activism provided a tremendous driving force behind the organization which was (and still is) dedicated to enhancing the cultural life of the Charleston area. Working with Simon Galperin and other key members of the group, Silverstein put his considerable talents behind the effort to build a first-rate performing space.

According to Silverstein, three possibilities existed for a new hall. The city could either build a combination auditorium and farmer's market--a proposal that garnered little support from either the city or federal government, enlarge the existing Shrine Mosque

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in five to ten years, or utilize a proposed building on the campus of nearby Morris Harvey College that called for a 3,500-seat auditorium. A separate auditorium became the preferred alternative, but without the accompanying market. As one local drama critic wrote: "fish and music won't mix very well." Construction of the new space was carried out under the joint auspices of the City Planning Commission and the Citizen's Advisory Committee. Members Harry Howell, John C. Morrison, Jr., and chairman Harry L. Silverstein worked diligently with city officials to make the project a reality.

The City of Charleston christened its new Art Deco performing palace on Sunday, November 5, 1939, with a special four-hour dedication that drew an estimated 5,000 persons--3,000 to hear the speeches and music program and an additional 2,000 who came to tour the facility. Activities kicked off with a free concert by the auditorium orchestra under the direction of Harry Beckenstein. Predictably, the day featured a host of dignitaries. Speakers included Governor Homer A. Holt, Mayor D. Boone Dawson, PWA Regional Director D. R. Kennicott, and the Charleston Chamber of Commerce's managing director Charles E. Hodges, who shared the stage with consulting designer D. H. Brush, Jr. of C. W. and George L. Rapp, Inc., of Chicago, A. F. Wysong, C. P. Fortney, and various members of Charleston city government. In referring to the large numbers in attendance, Governor Holt pointed out that it "indicates the need of this beautiful auditorium." Kennicott defended PWA's financial commitment to the building as being fully justified, and then favorably compared the auditorium with some of the finest of its kind in the nation. A post-dedication music program featured the Kessinger Brothers' fiddle and guitar act, operatic singing by Viennese soprano Gertrude Glesinger, the Honolulu Serenaders, and pianist Walter Bricht.

On the evening of November 7, 1939, the Municipal Auditorium hosted an auspicious inaugural performance. Held only two days after the hugely successful dedication

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ceremony that attracted 5,000 to the hall, the Community Music Association brought in French violinist Zino Francescatti to play before 4,000 satisfied patrons. Since this inaugural effort, the auditorium has hosted an endless variety of musical performances by some of the world's most accomplished and popular artists. Those who have appeared on the Charleston stage reads like a veritable who's who of American theater, music, and dance and includes well-known personages such as George Szell and the world-renowned Cleveland Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Eugene Ormandy, Ray Charles, Nelson Eddy, Jerome Hines, Marilyn Horne, Jeanette MacDonald, Robert Merrill, Luciano Pavarotti, Arthur Rubenstein, the Vienna Boys Choir, to name but a few.

Well-known Broadway shows and operas staged there over the years include *La Boheme*, *Hello Dolly* (featuring Betty Grable), *La Traviata* (with Beverly Sills), *Hair*, and *Grease*. Despite the fact that Mayor John T. Copenhaver issued an edict banning all rock-n-roll shows after an especially boisterous crowd of youngsters got out of hand at a 1957 performance, the auditorium has hosted Alice Cooper and numerous other rockers, as well as country and western, folk, pop and comedic icons such as Lorrie Morgan, Bob Dylan, Billy Joel, Crosby, Stills, and Nash, and the legendary Bob Hope. A lesser known, albeit equally important, aspect of the auditorium's rich history are groups like the Carbide and Carbon Chemical Corporation (presently Union Carbide Corporation) Band, Beni Kedem Shrine Band, school choruses, and many other local and regional acts that also play there.

In addition to being the venue for famous and not-so-famous stage performers alike, in the earliest days the Municipal Auditorium hosted an interesting array of other entertainment options. These events included Morris Harvey College basketball games in the 1950s (with the court and bleachers placed on the stage), the Ice Capades from 1946

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to 1960, and Shrine Circus from 1947 to 1959. Interestingly, the large basement room located directly beneath the stage at one time held a police department pistol range. The decision to remove it created quite a flap many years ago and led to considerable grumbling by the local law enforcement community. (According to maintenance staff, the city removed the last physical remnants of the shooting range in the 1990s.)

During the era of segregation, blacks and whites could not attend the same activities at the Municipal Auditorium. Theoretically, the city afforded both groups the same opportunity to rent the space, but in reality the black community often found itself shut out of many featured offerings due to the restrictive policy. This fact created considerable tension after blacks claimed discrimination by the Community Music Association, which only allowed its members and their guests to attend its programs. Harry Silverstein said the association's board of directors would consider admitting blacks to the concerts, but only in certain sections of the balcony. This unsatisfactory response led to the adoption of an ordinance by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Charleston Business and Professional Men's Club calling for an end to discriminatory practices. After years of forced segregation, integrated audiences began to attend performances as a single group in the 1950s.

The lack of air conditioning originally precluded use of the Municipal Auditorium for several months each year, but the hall now operates a full schedule of year-round activities. It remains home to the Community Music Association, Charleston Ballet, and West Virginia Symphony, and regularly hosts concerts, touring Broadway shows, and a variety of other forms of cultural programming. Annual highlights include a series of children's' concerts by the West Virginia Symphony, opera productions, and Christmas presentations of "The Nutcracker" ballet. Every third year the West Virginia Music Educators brings all-state band, choir, and orchestra concerts to town. According to

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auditorium management, one group or another rented the hall for 139 days in 1996. With rental revenues bringing in about \$75,000, the city absorbed a \$58,000 loss. By comparison, the Charleston Civic Center took in \$1.7 million, leaving the city to cover a \$380,000 loss.

To celebrate the golden anniversary of the venerable performing hall in 1989, the *Charleston Daily Mail* ran a retrospective article which dubbed it the "Art Deco Grande Dame" and referred to it as an icon that "stands as a monument of 50 years of curtain calls, acclaimed orchestras and legendary theatrical figures." Despite the fact that the Municipal Auditorium has brought an inestimable measure of cultural enrichment to the citizens of West Virginia's capital city, it has also had some problems, too. One charge leveled against it relates to the acoustics, which patrons lamented as being inferior from the start. Admitting that a problem did indeed exist, Harry Silverstein took quick and decisive action to remedy the situation by traveling to New York City and tracking down the specifications for the acoustical shell at Carnegie Hall. Upon his return to Charleston, he managed to successfully duplicate the technology for the orchestra shell at the Municipal Auditorium.

Despite Silverstein's best efforts, rumors of poor acoustics persisted for years. Community Music Association members feel the acoustics question is nothing more than a lingering myth that refuses to die. Harry Silverstein's daughter, Lois Silverstein Kaufman, summed up the situation for a local newspaper with the simple but logical pronouncement that the Community Music Association "would not be able to book the best talent if the auditorium is as bad as people are saying."

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Inadequate heating in the building was also problematic, despite the original installation of seven gas furnaces capable of each furnishing one million B.T.U. of heat, a massive six-foot blower fan, and several auxiliary fans to circulate the warm air. As reported in the *Charleston Daily Mail*, during a 1940 performance the ushers wore overcoats and "patrons shivered in building at Golden Boy production, but basement furnace ate up \$52 in gas." Building managers acknowledged the heating problem early on, but it still persisted for years. As late as November 1975, "an absence of heat in the auditorium forced many orchestra members to perform wearing overcoats." Warm weather offered little respite from the climatic inadequacies because the auditorium had no air conditioning. Consequently, the windowless concrete building turned into an oven during the hottest summer months, which effectively limited its availability to nine months of the year. In the 1980s the city hired Silling & Associates to design and install a new central heating, ventilation, and air conditioning plan for the building.

Following a decade of heavy use, the city in 1950 conducted an inspection of the auditorium. Officials pronounced the building basically sound but in need of maintenance. However, no funds were made available for repairs at the time. By 1957 the "big, old dusty auditorium" (as one touring Broadway actress called it) required substantial renovations and repairs. Initial estimates valued the necessary work at \$85,000, but that figure was reduced to \$74,352 and then scaled back further to \$52,445. Despite the effort to set aside dollars for upgrading Charleston's largest dedicated concert hall, the city undertook no work on it and detractors increasingly commented on the deplorable condition of Charleston's tarnished crown jewel. On March 2, 1959, City Councilman Simon Bailey termed the playhouse "a big pile of mottled, discolored concrete."

Meanwhile, the city completed construction of the Charleston Civic Center, a state-of-the-art sports arena located less than four blocks away on the banks of the Elk River

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between Lee and Washington Streets. Planning for the new facility in 1953 during the administration of Mayor John T. Copenhaver (1951-59), when he and city council appointed a committee to examine the possibilities of building a large multipurpose arena to meet the sports and convention needs of the community. Passage of a bond issue to fund the ambitious project soon followed, and the \$2.5 million facility opened with a performance of Holiday on Ice on November 11, 1958.

Suddenly relegated to secondary status in what many perceived as being a one theater town, city officials had serious doubts as to whether Charleston could continue to support the Municipal Auditorium. As councilman James Ireland succinctly reported, "we'll have to decide whether we can afford to have two places." A debate ensued over the potential sale of the older hall, even though it was barely two decades old at the time.

There can be no doubt that the 8,000-seat Civic Center immediately took business away from the Municipal Auditorium, but the latter's fortunes actually began to improve after the new arena opened. In late 1959 facility manager Bill Bolden announced that the City of Charleston intended to spend \$100,000 for repairs before turning operation of it over to the Civic Center Board. Then, Mayor John A. Shanklin on February 1, 1960 appointed a citizen's committee to study and make recommendations on its future status. Its members included well-known citizens Lyell Clay, Henry Elden, V. B. Harris, John T. Morgan, and Edwin W. Tabor, and it seemed that each one had a differing opinion on what to do with the facility. Architect Henry Elden led the advocates who favored selling the building,

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which he and others termed an "ugly duckling" and "white elephant" while arguing that it was still unpaid for and costing the city \$15,000 a year.

After considerable deliberations, the citizen's committee issued a comprehensive report on the state of the auditorium on April 21, 1960. They reiterated the obvious fact that the facility was neglected and run down, but noted that it was definitely worthy of being repaired and operated as an asset to the city. Their report detailed specific priority items that would require remediation within three years, along with other considerations that offered definite advantages but were not absolutely essential to the auditorium's successful short term operation. In order to reduce the projected outlay of funds spent on repairs in any single year, the citizen's committee recommended spreading the essential jobs over a three-year period. An administrative recommendation also called for Civic Center administrators to assume official responsibility for managing and promoting the facility.

Despite the city's plan to commit a substantial amount of funds for the long-awaited program of repairs, local officials still discussed selling the building to the Beni Kedem Shrine for use as a mosque. That proposal did not come to pass, and eventually the last of the diehards who advocated selling it relented by symbolically waving the white flag of surrender at a city council meeting. Meanwhile, the chairman of the citizen's committee, Vincent Reishman, got the approval to start renovations and transfer management responsibility for the auditorium to the Charleston Civic Center Board.

After nearly a decade of planning, the much-needed repair program finally got underway in 1966. When work concluded in 1967 the city had spent over \$100,000 on renovations, beginning with a general clean-up that yielded eight truck loads of accumulated dirt and debris from the air ducts. The project continued with roof repairs, painting inside and out with sealers and acoustical materials, installation of additional sets of lines on stage, a

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new exterior front for the box offices and installation of an inside ticket window (a welcome addition--especially during inclement weather), and total replacement of all original exterior Art Deco doors with modern glass and aluminum equivalents to meet current life safety codes. Workers applied a water seal to the subterranean floors and walls of the old basement shooting range, painted the concrete floor, reupholstered and refinished the woodwork and metal ends of all auditorium seats, installed new rugs, and remodeled and redecorated restrooms. Other work involved a major overhaul of the heating and ventilation system, installation of a new lighting control system for the stage, and placement of new acoustical tile in the lobby and auditorium proper.

A number of aesthetic upgrades also occurred at the same time. These involved the installation of new flameproof (probably asbestos) stage curtains and drapes in the balcony entrances, box offices and stair landing windows, new showers, lavatories, and dressing tables in the backstage dressing rooms, new light fixtures in the lobby and restrooms, plastering, painting, and reflooring of the dressing rooms, and refinishing of the Terrazzo lobby floor. Finally, workers landscaped the building's front entrance facing Virginia Street according to a plan submitted to the Municipal Beautification Commission.

Another proposal called for two prefabricated dressing rooms to be built behind the stage to accommodate star performers and alleviate the need for actors to climb stairs to reach the original dressing rooms. The Charleston *Sunday Gazette-Mail* reported that this was "to conserve the energies of such stars as Betty Grable, who was on stage 85 per cent of the time when she appeared here in 'Hello Dolly' and found that a return to the nearest dressing room two short flights of steps up took more energy than the few minutes of rest she had between appearances." Auditorium manager Denzil Skinner further explained the logic behind the new dressing rooms: "When these outstanding stars are willing to bring their talents to Charleston to entertain us, I think we owe it to them to make them as comfortable as possible."

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As the local press reported at the time, the public embraced the improvements and "the result is gratifying." To be sure, the work gave the venerable playhouse a new lease on life and made it "sparkle like Cinderella" in the process. Within a short period of time the city's \$100,000 investment began to pay large dividends, as the auditorium made more money on bookings during the first seven months of 1967 than any comparable period since the nearby Civic Center first opened its doors in 1959.

Charleston City Council budgeted an additional \$14,500 for improvements to the auditorium, and discussed setting aside around \$10,000 for future annual maintenance projects in 1968. Outspoken critics who opposed the city's decision to expend public funds on the building harshly criticized the choice, and their derisive comments elicited an astute response from facility manager Denzil Skinner: "I don't know that the auditorium ever will be a money-making proposition. Auditoriums are not built to make money. They are a part of the service the city gives its people, just like the parks, police and fire departments. They attract visitors and business to the city. They provide relaxation for the community."

To most city residents the commitment to keep and maintain a municipal auditorium was an important part of the civic mission shared by the city government and its voting constituents. Charleston voters made the decision to accept responsibility for the facility by approving a bond issue for partial funding in 1937, and local officials reaffirmed that choice by accepting a matching federal grant from the Public Works Administration to pay the balance of project costs. As stewards of the public trust, later city administrations contributed to the partnership by providing maintenance funds and keeping the facility open for the public's benefit.

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This debate was not unique in the history of Charleston's Art Deco playhouse, as recurring discussions on its status have taken place over the years. One especially interesting, albeit grandiose, proposal was contained in a "Civic Center Master Plan" prepared for the city in 1949 by Ladislas, Segoe, and Associates of Cincinnati, Ohio. It called for the auditorium to be part of a proposed cultural complex featuring a small theater, gallery, library, and safety building. Although the complex never materialized, a few years later the city did succeed in building a civic center and adjoining theater on the site of the old city dump at Clendenin Street.

A half-century after the city formulated its proposed civic center master plan, the Municipal Auditorium is once more the topic of discussion as a result of a new center for the arts and sciences that is scheduled to open in downtown Charleston in 2002. The proposed center will house an 1,880-seat auditorium that is expected to become the new home to the West Virginia Symphony--a long-time tenant of the Municipal Auditorium. While some community members feel the existing hall has outlived its usefulness and the smaller theater is an adequate replacement, others consider this claim to be folly and insist that Charleston still needs its 3,450-seat auditorium. Survival of the Municipal Auditorium is not assured, and only time will tell if this significant landmark can compete with the state-of-the-art facility being built a few blocks to the east.

In 1999, the Municipal Auditorium commemorates its sixtieth year of continuous operation as the Kanawha Valley's premier performance hall. This auspicious anniversary gives sufficient cause to reflect on its significant contributions to the cultural life of the region. Despite weathering a stream of criticism over the years from detractors who have repeatedly denounced it as being inadequate and outdated, the facility remains an important architectural and cultural icon and one of the largest auditoriums of its type in the State of West Virginia.

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Name of Property:

Charleston Municipal Auditorium

County/State:

Kanawha, West Virginia

Section number 8

Page 18

Statement of Significance:

Since it first opened in 1939 the Municipal Auditorium has hosted hundreds of famous and not-so-famous artists in performances that have enriched the lives of thousands of West Virginians. As a venue for a diverse array of live entertainment, it has made a substantial and lasting contribution to the area's cultural heritage. Moreover, the classic styling of this "Art Deco Grande Dame," its high level of architectural integrity, enduring functionality, and affiliation with the New Deal-era Public Works Administration all add to the building's historical significance and help set it apart from other area playhouses. Considered collectively, these factors make the Charleston Municipal Auditorium a prime candidate for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

(NPS Form 10-900)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Name of Property: Charleston Municipal Auditorium County/State: Kanawha, West Virginia

Section number 9 Page 1

Bibliography:

Bayer, Patricia. Art Deco Architecture: Design, Decoration, and Detail from the Twenties and Thirties, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999.

Charleston (West Virginia) *Daily Mail*, 29 December 1935, 14 June 1936, 30 December 1936, 19 January 1938, 20 January 1938, 23 April 1939, 5 November 1939, 8 November 1939, 9 November 1989.

Charleston (West Virginia) *Gazette*, 1 September 1937, 26 November 1937, 20 January 1938, 23 April 1939, 26 October 1939, 3 November 1939, 5 November 1939, 6 November 1939, 4 August 1997.

Charleston Municipal Planning Commission, Biennial Report, 1948-49, at the West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, W.Va.

Cohen, Stan with Richard Andre. Kanawha County Images: A Bicentennial History, 1788-1988. Charleston, W.Va.: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1987.

Harris, V. B. Great Kanawha: An Historical Outline. Charleston, W.Va.: Jarrett Printing Company, 1976.

Olson, James S., ed. Historical Dictionary of the New Deal: From Inauguration to Preparation for War. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985.

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Stringer, Gary M. Draft National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Municipal Auditorium, 10 December 1996.

(NPS Form 10-900)

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Name of Property: Charleston Municipal Auditorium **County/State:** Kanawha, West Virginia

Section number 9 **Page** 2

Bibliography:

Sunday Charleston (West Virginia) Gazette-Mail, (no date) 1967, 3 August 1997.

Written Statement of JoEllen Kerr, Chair, Carleton Varney Department of Interior Decoration at the University of Charleston (West Virginia), 1 April 1999, located at the Kanawha Valley Historical and Preservation Society, Charleston, W.Va.

(NPS Form 10-900)

**United States Department of the Interior
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Name of Property:

Charleston Municipal Auditorium

County/State:

Kanawha, West Virginia

Section number 10

Page 1

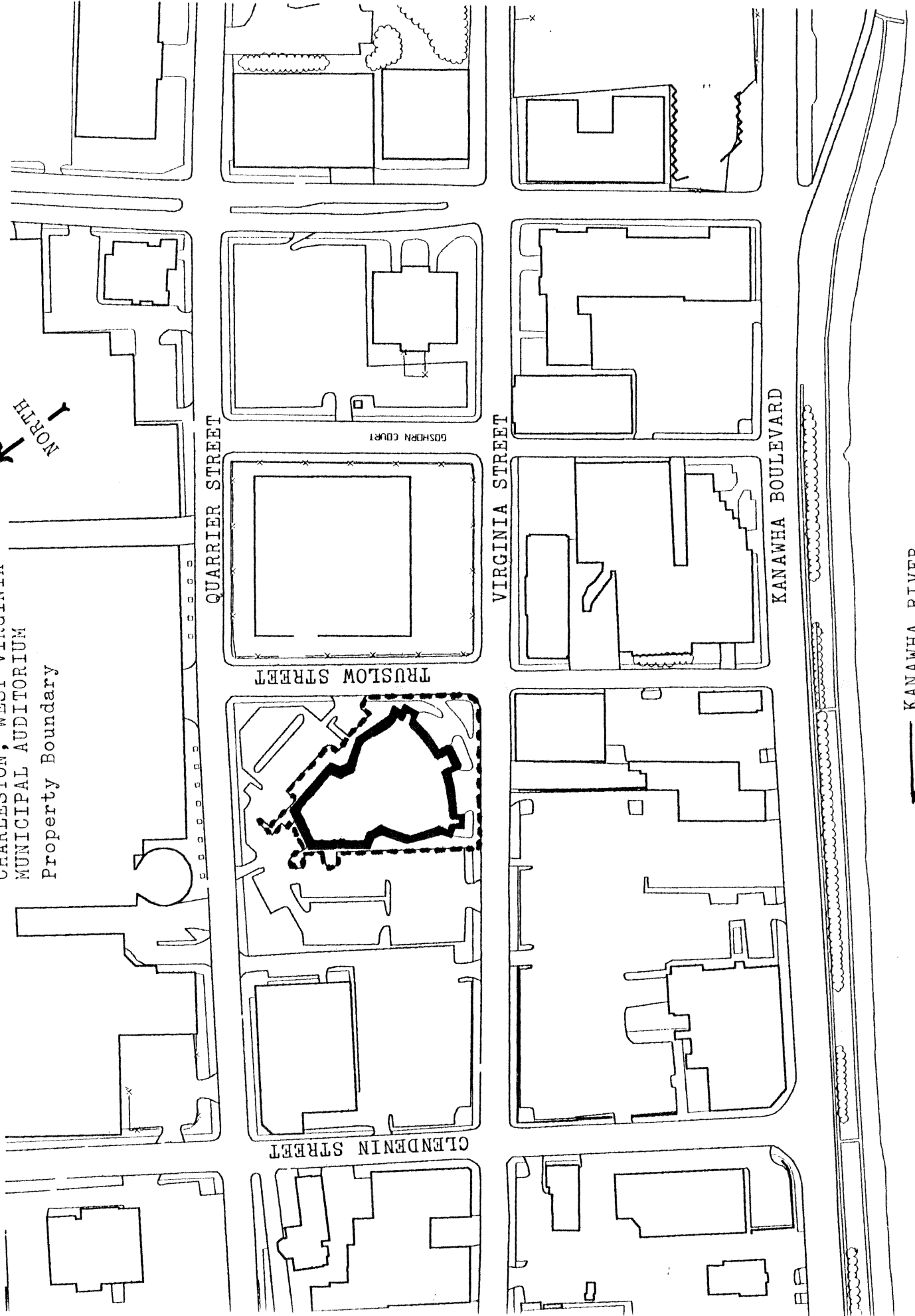
Verbal Boundary Description:

The property, which is located in the southwestern section of Charleston's central business district, is bordered on the south by Virginia Street, on the north and west by public metered parking lots, and on the east by Truslow Street.

Boundary Justification:

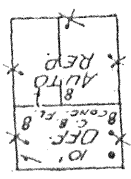
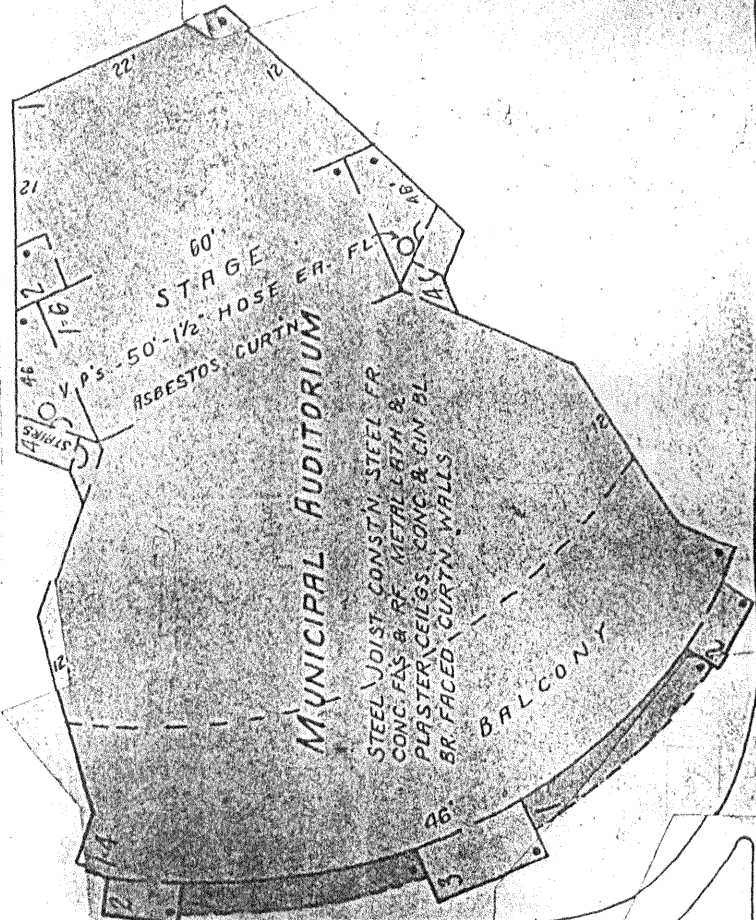
The boundary as selected encompasses the Municipal Auditorium building and the landscaped front (south) approach bounded by Virginia and Truslow Streets on the south and east, respectively. Excluded from this boundary are the public metered parking lots that surround the building on the rear (north) and west sides.

CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA
MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM
Property Boundary



← KANAWHA RIVER

Source: Sanborn Map & Publishing Co., Ltd.
1956 insurance maps for Charleston, W.Va.



USED CAR SALES

VIRGINIA 220 9 VIRGINIA

2198 VIRGINIA 219A

227 VIRGINIA 223

233 VIRGINIA 231

36

TRUSLOW

DH TRUSLOW VIRGINIA

10 W P

P AUTO SALES

I N O

ONES

35

P A R K G

60'

33

47

47

65'

35

36

36

47

47

33

47

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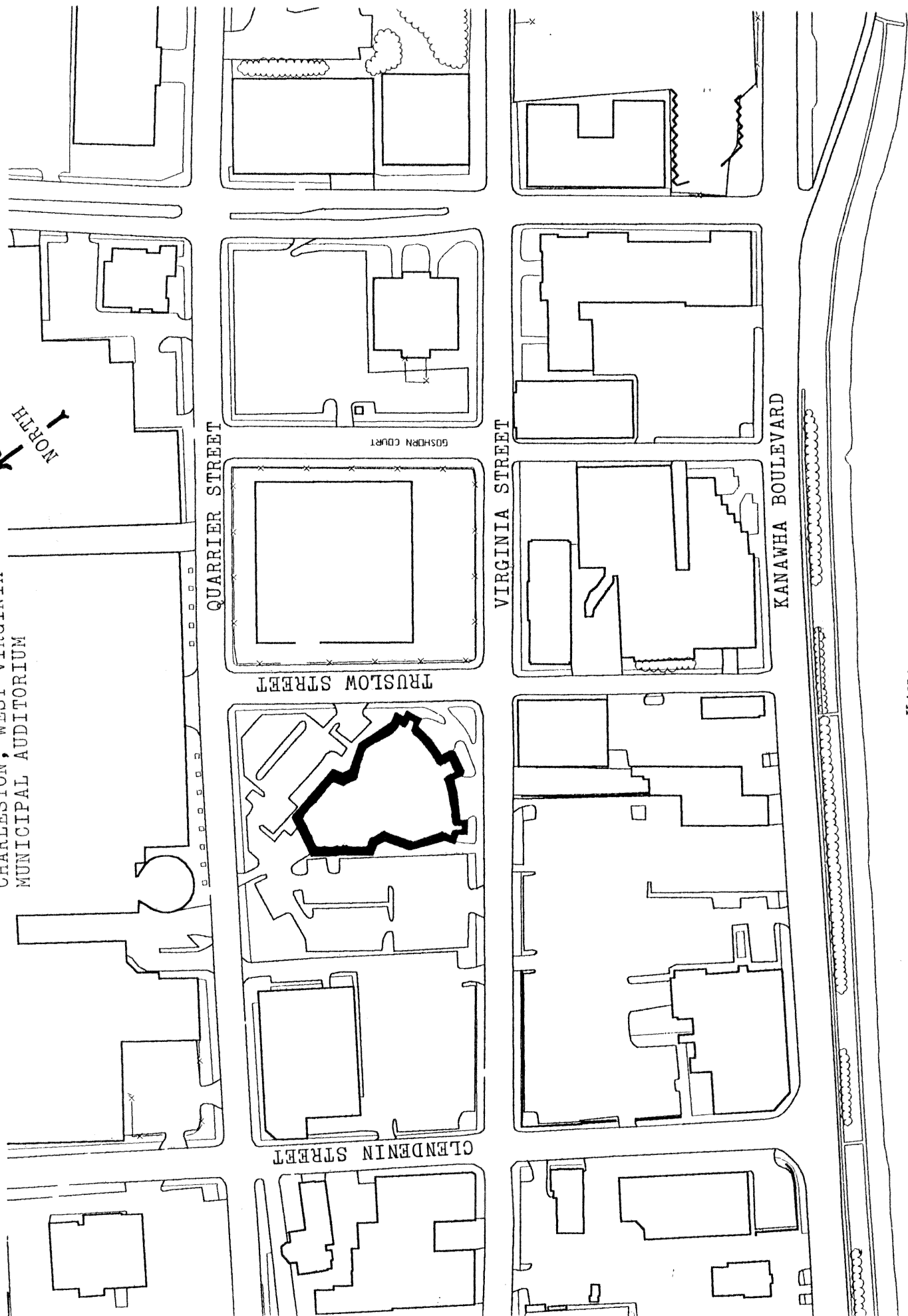
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CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA
MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM



← KANAWHA RIVER

(NPS Form 10-900)

United States Department of the Interior
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Name of Property: Charleston Municipal Auditorium County/State: Kanawha/West Virginia

Section number Photo Page 1

Name of Property: Charleston Municipal Auditorium
Address 224-232 Virginia Street, East
Town Charleston
County Kanawha

Photographer: Dr. Billy Joe Peyton

Date: July 1999

Negatives: Paul D. Marshall & Associates, Charleston, West Virginia

Photo 1 of 9: Front facade or south elevation.
Camera facing northeast (7/99).

Photo 2 of 9: East elevation.
Camera facing southwest (7/99).

Photo 3 of 9: West elevation.
Camera facing southeast (7/99).

Photo 4 of 9: Southeast oblique view.
Camera facing east (7/99).

Photo 5 of 9: Exterior view of central stair tower showing Art Deco detail.
Camera facing north (7/99).

Photo 6 of 9: Exterior view of box office, entrance, and overhanging roof.
Camera facing north (7/99).

(NPS Form 10-900)

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Name of Property: Charleston Municipal Auditorium County/State: Kanawha/West Virginia

Section number Photo Page 2

Photo 7 of 9: Interior view of first floor foyer looking east and showing Art Deco stair, Terrazzo floor, and curvilinear shape of foyer. Camera facing east from west entrance of foyer (7/99).

Photo 8 of 9: View of original interior doors to main auditorium. Camera facing north from main foyer (7/99).

Photo 9 of 9: Interior view of main stage, proscenium arch, and auditorium seating. Camera facing north from back of auditorium (7/99).