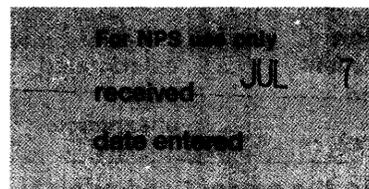


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



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

### 1. Name

historic *Orpheum Theatre*

and/or common *same*

### 2. Location

street & number *125-129 University Place* *N/A* not for publication

city, town *New Orleans* *N/A* vicinity of ~~congressional district~~

state *LA* code *22* county *Orleans Parish* code *071*

### 3. Classification

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

### 4. Owner of Property

name *New Orleans Philharmonic Symphony Society, Inc.*

street & number *203 Carondelet, Suite 903*

city, town *New Orleans* *N/A* vicinity of state *LA* *70130*

### 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. *Orleans Parish Conveyance Office*

street & number *421 Loyola Avenue*

city, town *New Orleans* state *LA* *70112*

### 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title *LA Historic Sites Survey* has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date *1980*  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records *Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office*

city, town *Baton Rouge* state *LA*

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## 7. Description

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

---

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

The Orpheum Theatre (1918-21) is a massive four-story Beaux Arts style building located in the central business district of New Orleans. It is of solid reinforced concrete construction. The theatre has suffered a few losses of integrity, but none of these have significantly impaired its overall architectural and theatrical significance.

One source on New Orleans architecture describes the Orpheum as follows:

The theatre facade is typical of a national trend in the first quarter of the twentieth century toward terra cotta buildings. The front elevation has applied forms and decorations emanating from various periods. The lower level features paired segmental arched openings and a wide string course with three pedimented windows. The central tier here has large panels with decorative relief carving and paired pilasters with ornamental composite capitals between panels for vertical emphasis. The entablature terminates the top section of the tripartite facade and has a cornice carved with floral motifs and a paneled parapet.<sup>1</sup>

This highly detailed, color glazed terra cotta facade of nymphs, fauns and fabled creatures is basically intact although the addition of a modern marquee and signs has obscured some of the lower sculptured details.

During the 1940's the front entrances and the lobby were remodeled. The lobby is now entered through doors of unframed 3/4 inch thick glass which are part of a floor-to-ceiling glass wall.

Entrance to the auditorium from the lobby is gained through three sets of double doors. Entrance to the balcony from the lobby is via original white marble stairs located at either end of the lobby. An elevator is also provided for access to the two balconies. There is a ladies lounge at the second level above the lobby. This lounge is decorated in the Renaissance Revival style with panels, fluted composite pilasters, and a frieze inset with oeil-de-boeuf motifs.

The auditorium is comprised of three major seating sections. The lower floor contains approximately 850 seats arranged in three sections, The first balcony contains approximately 750 seats. There are eight sets of box seats located along the left and right walls of the theatre emanating from the first balcony. There are 104 seats in the loge. The second balcony contains approximately 400 seats, yielding a total seating capacity of over 2,000.

CONTINUED . . .

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Continuation sheet

Orpheum Theatre

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7. Description (Continued)

Because the theatre was originally designed as a vaudeville house rather than a movie house, the auditorium is high rather than deep. The auditorium walls are of highly decorative plaster. The proscenium arch design is a continuous fluted shaft wrapped in acanthus leaf garlands. It is repeated in the arched motif of all the auditorium walls. The ceiling is a beautifully decorated dome which is illuminated by recessed cove lighting at the perimeter and a spectacular mushroom shaped chandelier with a sunburst motif suspended at the center of the dome. Each of the nine plaster panels surrounding the dome has a smaller chandelier of similar design. The interior is otherwise adorned with cartouches and brincade.

The stage measures approximately 45' X 35' with a 50' high proscenium arch. The offstage wings measure approximately 18' X 35'. The stage is equipped with bridges and a fly gallery with removable pin rail with pegs for tying off stage battens. A stationary orchestra pit is located immediately in front of the stage. The pit, however, is currently unaccessible since it was covered over by a wooden floor installed to increase the seating capacity of the lower floor. Restoration of the pit is very feasible.

Offstage there are dressing rooms with lavatories, toilets and showers; property rooms; shops and other storage or service facilities. At stage left there is a freight entrance which is accessible to South Rampart Street via a common alley. The stage floor is equipped with traps at the freight entrance to permit the raising and lowering of scenery, equipment and materials to and from the basement. There are also dressing rooms at the basement level as well as on two levels above the stage.

A Style D Special Wurlitzer pipe organ was installed in the theatre. The organ console has been disconnected and removed. The organ, however, could be restored to use since the console could be replaced.

Mitigation of the Losses of Integrity:

The described alterations have not significantly affected the Orpheum's historical significance as a theatre or its architectural standing in New Orleans. This is because the theatre is mainly significant for its front facade and its auditorium space, both of which are more or less intact. In any case, the marquee and the orchestra pit cover can be easily removed. The original lobby entrance and decor has been lost, but the lobby is a relatively small space which was never highly ornamented. If it survived it would add only modestly to the Orpheum's present historical and architectural value.

CONTINUED . . .

**United States Department of the Interior  
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Continuation sheet *Orpheum Theatre*

Item number 7

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7. *Description (Continued)*

<sup>1</sup>New Orleans Architecture: The American Sector, Mary Louise Christovich, Roulhac Toledano, Betsy Swanson and Pat Holden, Pelican Publishing Company, 1972, page 221.

# 8. Significance

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

**Specific dates** *constructed 1918-21*  
*opened 2/7/1921* **Builder/Architect** *Architect: G. Albert Lansburgh*

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)** *Criteria A and C*

*The Orpheum Theatre is locally significant in the area of architecture and of statewide significance in the area of theatre as follows:*

- (1) It is architecturally significant on the local level because it is one of New Orleans' most outstanding examples of the Beaux Arts style and as such is one of the grandest structures in the city.*
- (2) It is significant on the state level in the area of theatre as one of Louisiana's three extant early-twentieth century "movie palaces." 2*

*"State" is checked in Item 12 because in cases where two levels of significance are involved, the standard procedure is to check the higher of the two.*

Architecture on the Local Level:

*The Orpheum is architecturally significant within the context of New Orleans in the following respects:*

- (1) The Orpheum facade is articulated with a tremendously enriched double pilaster colonnade, and the auditorium space has a spectacular oval dome resting upon stylized pendentives. Both of these features qualify the Orpheum as an outstanding example of Beaux Arts architecture in New Orleans, where there are many surviving buildings of this period. The Orpheum embodies, as few local buildings do, the Beaux Arts tendency towards a facade or an interior designed as a single grand gesture rather than as an assemblage of classical elements.*
- (2) Excluding churches, there are relatively few historic large public spaces in New Orleans. Of these the interior of the Orpheum is one of the most palatial. For example, its floating Baroque oval dome is unsurpassed in the city.*
- (3) The facade features terra cotta work which is among the most elaborate in the New Orleans central business district. It is a local landmark with a stately and impressive presence along University Place.*

CONTINUED . . .

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

# 10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property @ .3 acre

Quadrangle name New Orleans East, LA

Quadrangle scale 1: 24,000

### UMT References

A 

1	5	7	8	2	5	4	0	3	3	1	7	1	7	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

### Verbal boundary description and justification

See attached plat map.

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

state N/A code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Albert Barry Henry, M.D., Lee Lanier, James C. Maumus, Jack W. Stewart, Randall Tolivar--members and officers

organization City Lights, Incorporated date December 1980

street & number 7319 Heather Court telephone 504-587-5251 or 504-241-6145

city or town New Orleans state LA 70127

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Robert B. DeBlieux

Robert B. DeBlieux

title State Historic Preservation Officer date June 25, 1982

For NPS use only

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

William H. Brauman date 8.11.82

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
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Continuation sheet *Orpheum Theatre*

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8. *Statement of Significance (Continued)*Theatre on the State Level:

The Orpheum Theatre is one of three early-twentieth century palace-type theatres in Louisiana.<sup>3</sup> It is part of a well-recognized era in the history of American theatre commonly known as the age of the "movie palace." Many regard this age and its legacy as the zenith of American theatre building. It is certainly universally admitted that American theatres have declined in grandeur, appointments, and prestige since that time. Hence the Orpheum is significant not so much for the theatrical performances which took place there or for the films which were shown there, but rather for what it was as a theatre and for the type of palatial theatre going experience it represented in its heyday. Of a host of over a dozen old theatres remaining in Louisiana, the Orpheum is one of three which can be classified as "movie palaces." It is therefore significant on the state level.

History:

Construction of the Orpheum began in 1918 and was completed in 1921, at a cost in excess of \$600,000, including \$35,000 for site acquisition. It was designed by G. Albert Lansburgh of New York, a prominent theatre architect of the early-twentieth century who also designed the Orpheum Theatre of Los Angeles, the Martin Beck Theatre of New York, and the Warner and El Capitan Theatres, both of Hollywood.

At its opening on February 7, 1921, Orpheum Circuit owners Meyer Feld, Jr. and Martin Beck and local manager Col. C. E. Bray heralded the new theatre as the perfect modern showplace for the high class vaudeville repertoire that they had introduced to the city several years before at the Saint Charles Theatre. The Orpheum Circuit Company, before it merged with the B. F. Keife Company and Radio Pictures to become R.K.O., was the leading vaudeville organization in the United States.

<sup>2</sup>"Movie palace" is, of course, a descriptive, evocative term and does not necessarily mean that the structure in question was designed to be strictly a movie house or that it was used exclusively for motion pictures during its entire existence.

<sup>3</sup>The other two, the New Orleans Saenger and the Strand in Shreveport, are already listed on the National Register.

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## 9. Bibliography

Christovich, Mary Louise, Toledano, Roulhac, Swanson, Betsy and Holden, Pat. New Orleans Architecture: The American Sector. Pelican Publishing Company, Gretna, 1972.

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Bookhardt, Eric. "All the City's a Stage." New Orleans Magazine. November, 1975.

The Times-Picayune. January 1, 1921, part 2, page 11, col. 1-2 and February 8, 1921, part 1, page 4, col. 2.

Sexton, R. W. and Betts, B. F. American Theatres of Today. Vols. 1 and 2. Architectural Book Publishing Company, Inc., New York, 1927, Vestal Press reprint edition, 1977.

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*Orpheum Theatre*

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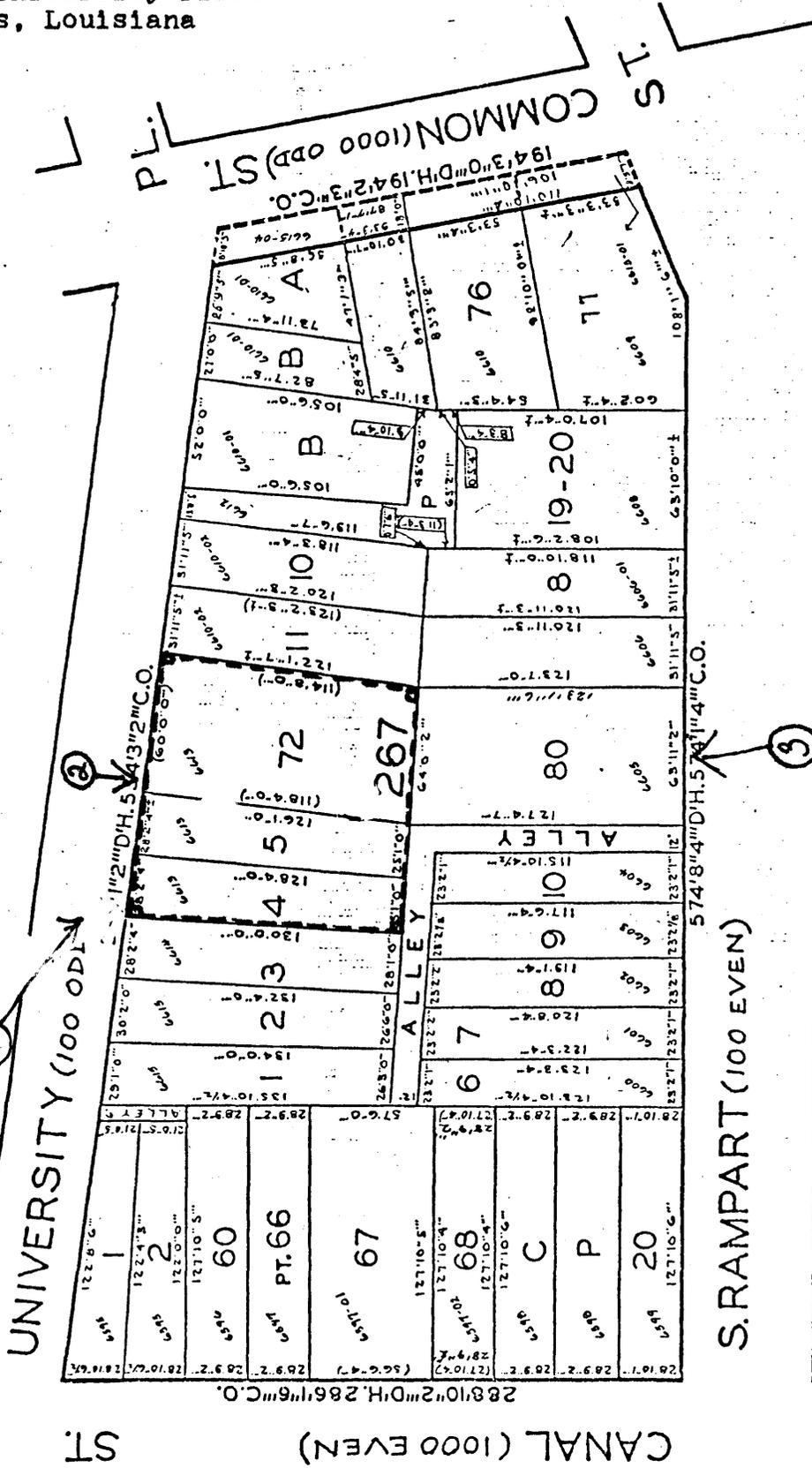
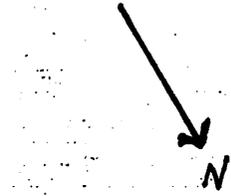
11. Form Prepared By (Continued)

*John Wright  
New Orleans Philharmonic Symphony Society, Inc.,  
203 Carondelet, Suite 903  
New Orleans, LA 70130 504-524-0404*

The Orpheum Theatre  
 125 - 129 University Place  
 New Orleans, Louisiana

IM-5A SCALE 1" = 80'

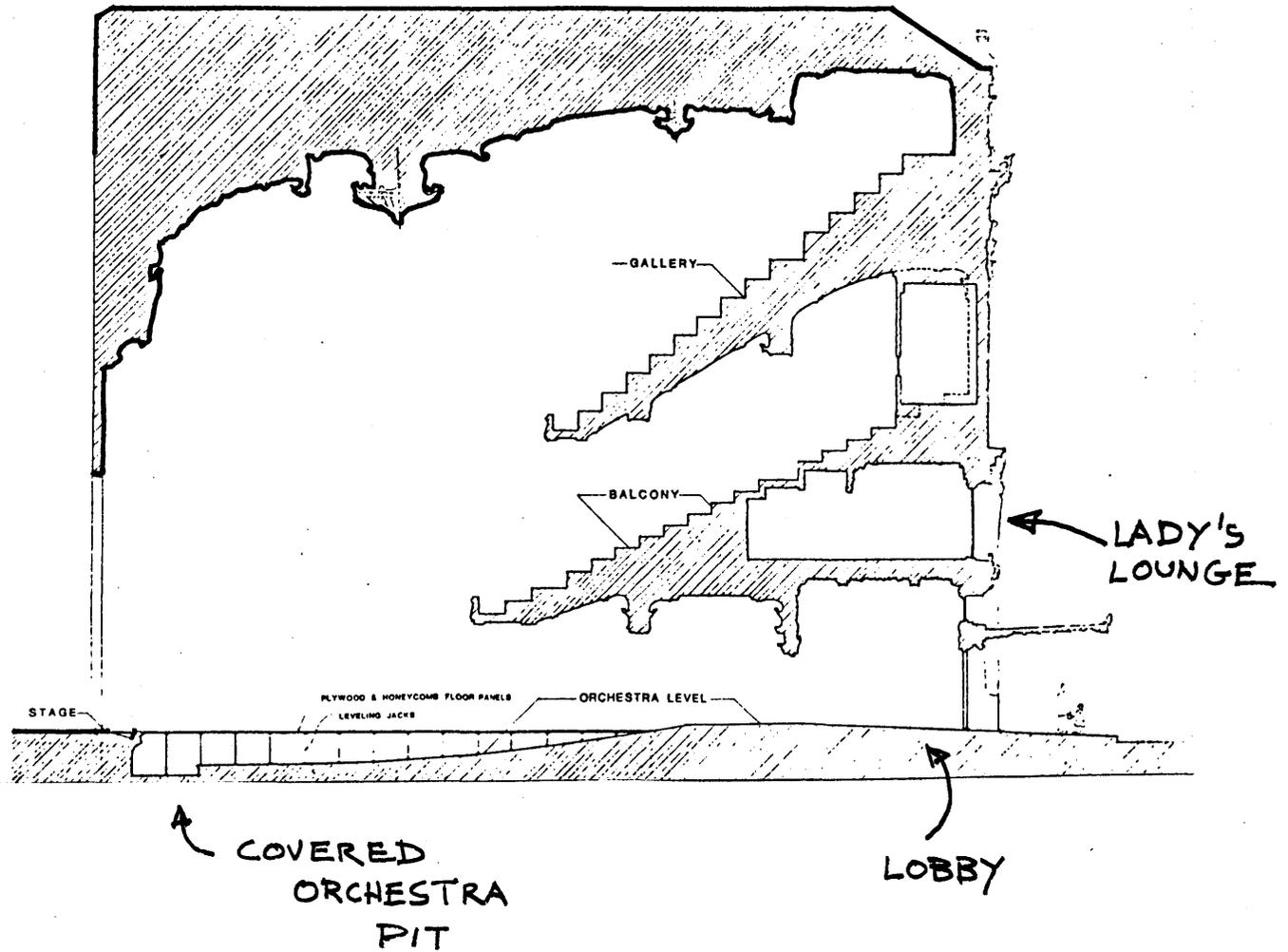
Boundaries follow property lines.



Location of the Theatre site

# ORPHEUM THEATRE

## AUDITORIUM SECTION



(DRAWING  
DOES NOT INCLUDE STAGE AREA,  
OR BACKSTAGE AREAS)