

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only
received **SEP 26 1979**
date entered **OCT 11 1979**

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

1. Name

historic Apollo Theatre

and/or common Martinsburg/Berkeley County Civic Center

2. Location

street & number 128 East Martin Street

not for publication

city, town Martinsburg

vicinity of

congressional district Second

state West Virginia

code 54

county Berkeley

code 003

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 | Public Acquisition | Accessible | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object | <input type="checkbox"/> in process | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> no | <input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other: |

4. Owner of Property

name Berkeley County Civic Theatre, Inc.

street & number 128 East Martin Street

city, town Martinsburg

vicinity of

state West Virginia 25401

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Berkeley County Courthouse

street & number King and Queen Streets

city, town Martinsburg

state West Virginia 25401

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Martinsburg Architectural Survey

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date Summer 1978

federal state county local

depository for survey records Berkeley County Historical Landmarks Commission

city, town Berkeley Co. Courthouse, Martinsburg,

state West Virginia 25401

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Apollo Theatre at Martinsburg, Berkeley County, West Virginia, is a significant early movie theatre building designed by architect Reginald Geare and built in 1913. Minor alterations have little impaired the sensitive detailing of the exterior and have left the basic plan of large interior open spaces intact, revealing original seating arrangements, proscenium dimensions, and stage height. Of special importance is the well-preserved pressed tin ceiling of the movie auditorium. These amenities in accordance with present restoration activities will be preserved as the building undergoes rehabilitation to become a civic and performing arts center.

The rectangular, three-story brick building measures 50 feet across the front and 150 feet from front to rear. The north (front) and east (side) elevations are distinguished at the second and third stories by continuous vertical recessed panels filled with flat-headed or segmental arch-headed windows.

A margquee of later addition obscures the twin, round-arched transoms of the two double door entrances. These major doors are flanked by secondary, arched doorways with fanlights. A cast metal, dentiled cornice across the front at the first-story level is overpowered by a cast metal bracketed cornice at the top of the building set upon a corbeled brick base. The brick parapet of the Apollo Theatre was originally crowned at the front and side elevations with a wide pyramidal cap containing the date "1913" and the name "Thorn" (Mr. H. P. Thorn was the entrepreneur who built the Apollo Theatre).

Interior spaces of the theatre building are divided by seating, balcony, and stage areas of the first level, and by two upper floors with unobstructed halls or "lofts." The Martinsburg World of January 16, 1914, described the new facility as having indirect lighting; a seating capacity of 1,000; 10 fire exits on the first floor; 5 fire exits from the balcony; steam heating and excellent ventilation; and a 4 1/2 foot incline "giving an unobstructed view from every section."

In 1920 a small addition at the southwest side of the building was constructed. Also at this time expansion of the stage and orchestra pit was ordered.¹

The Apollo Theatre has served the movie, vaudeville, and concert going public during its distinguished existence. Restoration of the theatre at the present time (1979) harkens well for its continued use and preservation.

¹ Alterations and expansion of the Apollo Theater in 1920 apparently occurred under direction of Reginald Geare; see Deed Book 139, p.441.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> art | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> music | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900– | <input type="checkbox"/> communications | <input type="checkbox"/> industry | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> invention | | |

Specific dates 1912–14; 1920 **Builder/Architect** Reginald Geare and Chapman E. Kent

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Apollo Theatre, located in Martinsburg, Berkeley County, West Virginia is historically significant as one of the first theatres built in West Virginia primarily for the then-new media of motion pictures.¹ It is also significant as an architectural work by an architect who was later to become nationally notorious.²

Explanatory Notes

¹•Construction was begun on the Apollo Theatre in Martinsburg, West Virginia in April of 1913 (after the plans were drawn up the previous year), at a time when the real era of motion pictures was barely a decade old. Charlie Chaplin, Tom Mix, William S. Hart and Mary Pickford were beginning to become "household words" in a nation gripped in the thralls of this revolutionary new form of entertainment. The Apollo Theatre was designed to accommodate the ever growing ranks of the movie going public, and was one of the first theatres built in West Virginia with the primary purpose in mind of the showing of motion pictures. The Apollo Theatre is a very early example of the plush "movie palaces" that sprang up throughout the United States, particularly in the 1920's, and briefly dominated the social and cultural life of the United States. A stage was provided, however, for the performance of vaudeville acts, acting troupes, and other forms of live entertainment prevalent in that day. The Apollo Theatre, an imposing three-story structure that typified the larger-than-life aspects of the new entertainment media, was opened with a gala ceremony on January 19, 1914.

Since 1914, the Apollo Theatre has continued to serve as a focal point for community entertainment, and as a reflection of the changing social history of the Martinsburg community. The transition from silent pictures to "talkies" was made in 1927 and the theatre wired for sound.

The stage of the Apollo Theatre has seen the heyday of vaudeville, the "Crooners" of the 1930's, and hosted rock and roll concerts of today's era. Contemporary drama, as well as classical works, have been performed since the opening of the theatre in 1914, and the theatre has been the focal point of community dance and theatre activity. The history of the Apollo Theatre is therefore truly representative of the social history of one of West Virginia's oldest communities.

²•The Apollo Theatre is an important work by noted Washington, D.C. architect Reginald Geare, an architect whose promising career was marred and probably cut short by tragedy. Geare designed the Apollo Theatre, in company with local Martinsburg architect Chapman E. Kent, in 1912–13, and this imposing three-story building became

9. Major Bibliographical References

King, Donald C., "Theatre Disasters," Marquee, Vol. 8, No.3, 3rd Quarter 1976.
Naylor, David, "Ticket to the World of Movies" Historic Preservation, Vol. 31, No.2,
May-June 1979.
Martinsburg Herald, January 4, 1890--December 24, 1913.

UTM NOT VERIFIED

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2 City Lots

Quadrangle name Martinsburg, West Virginia

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A

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| Zone | | | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | |

Verbal boundary description and justification Located on Lot #48, S.W. corner of Martin and Spring Streets; 51 1/2' on Martins Street x 102' on Spring Street. 48.1' on Spring Street x 104.9' at back, adjoins above. (Deed Book 286, p.440).

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

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Michael J. Pauley, Historian and Rodney S. Collins, Architectual Historian

organization Historic Preservation Unit W.Va. Department of Culture & History date September 12, 1979

street & number Capitol Complex telephone (304) 348-0244

city or town Charleston state West Virginia

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Clarence Moran

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 9-14-79

For HCRS use only

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

Carol Shull date 10-11-79

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: Emma Jane Saxe date 10-10-79

Chief of Registration

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|-------------------|-------------|
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| RECEIVED | SEP 26 1979 |
| DATE ENTERED | 11 1 1979 |

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Apollo Theatre, Martinsburg, Berkeley County, West Virginia

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a very important part of his growing portfolio. Undoubtedly the successful completion of the Apollo Theatre contributed to Geares being asked to design the great Knickerbocker Theatre in Washington, D.C. It was hailed as "beautiful" by newspapers of the day (1921). But on January 28, 1922, in one of theatre history's greatest disasters, the roof of the Knickerbocker Theatre collapsed under the weight of 30" of new snow, killing 98 and injuring 150. Although the indictment against architect Geare was dropped (as being "toovague and general") his business certainly collapsed under the resulting notoriety and, five years after the Knickerbocker Theatre Disaster, Reginald Geare took his own life. In such a tragic manner did the career end of one whose early work, namely the Apollo Theatre in Martinsburg, had shown such promise.

The Apollo Theatre represents a significant contribution to early movie theatre design in West Virginia. Its largely intact spaces are dominated on the first of its three levels by a large seating and balcony area and by an ornate proscenium-stage arrangement. The survival of original ornamentation in the form of elaborate pressed tin ceilings in the movie auditorium greatly contributes to the structure's integrity. The plan of the Apollo Theatre to accommodate upwards of 1,000 people in a small town at such an early date (1913-14) for the then infant and not fully accepted entertainment medium of moving pictures, is a measure of this building's significance.

Inviting twin, double doorways surmounted by arched transom lights form graceful accents at the ground level. Tripartite front elevation windows, flat-arched and segmental-headed at the second and third levels, are outlined between projecting cast metal cornices. The suggestion of such a facade was to create a dignified yet inviting impression upon the new movie-going public.

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Martinsburg Journal, May 1, 1912--October 31, 1912

Pioneer Press, January 7, 1911 -- September 22, 1917

Martinsburg World, January 2, 1912 -- December 31, 1920

Wrenn, Tony P.. Martinsburg Architectural Survey. Summer 1978. Berkeley County Historical Landmarks Commission. (Xerox copy, West Virginia Department of Culture and History, Historic Preservation Unit).