

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

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

For NPS use only

received FEB 2 1984

date entered

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

1. Name

historic The Little Theatre on Lincoln Street

and/or common Lincoln Theatre

2. Location

street & number 1 Lincoln Street

n/a not for publication

city, town New Haven

n/a vicinity of

state Connecticut

code 09

county New Haven

code 009

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<u>n/a</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

4. Owner of Property

name City of New Haven -- Redevelopment Agency

street & number 157 Church Street

city, town New Haven

n/a vicinity of

state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. City Clerk's Office

street & number 200 Orange Street

city, town New Haven

state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1983 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Comm., 59 South Prospect Street

city, town Hartford

state Connecticut

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 <u>n/a</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Little Theatre on Lincoln Street (constructed 1924, second floor addition 1928) is a one-and-a-half story stuccoed concrete-block structure consisting of a gable front auditorium, a rectangular-block fly space, and a set-back ell segment serving as a lounge and dressing room area. It is situated facing north at the south end of Lincoln Street, a fine residential street which was developed during the nineteenth century. The site is slightly less than four blocks from the New Haven Green.

The Little Theatre forms a remarkable focal point to one of the most notable residential streets in New Haven. Its shape, scale and placement offer a fitting, subtle, yet substantial closure to Lincoln Street (photograph #1). The Theatre itself relates well both to the residential buildings on either side of Lincoln Street to the north, as well as to the larger brick carriage houses converted to architectural offices and a residence on its immediate block. As part of the Audubon arts area, the Theatre's mass is an important reinforcement to the circular form of the Arts Complex to the south. 1

The one-and-a-half story masonry structure has a two-story rear section creating fly space for the stage (photograph #2). The main body of the theatre, facing Lincoln Street, has a gable-front roof (photograph #3). A wood-paneled aluminum-porch overhang partially covers a classically shaped stuccoed facade which includes an inset semicircular arch, and two symmetrically placed rectangular display cases for theatre bills. The facade is neatly pointed by three symmetrically placed rectangular insets. Centered within the arch is a three-foot circular cross-paned window. Alcoves on both side elevations cover paired exit doors from the auditorium, one exiting on to a small private road that runs the length of the theatre on the west side, the other exiting into the small courtyard formed by the east side of the body of the auditorium, the lounge area and dressing room segment on the south, and the back wall of an adjacent carriage house on the east.

The sloped, poured-concrete floor carries two hundred and ninety-four seats, fourteen to a row. These face a stage whose original dimensions were twenty-six feet deep, thirty-six feet wide with eight feet of wing space on either side of the stage, a twenty-foot proscenium arch, and a height to the grid of twenty-six feet (photograph #4). The stage has been cut back to allow for the addition of approximately twenty-eight seats. The two-inch thick flush-boarded roof is supported by four triangulated-iron tie rods (photograph #5). Two small rectangular diagonally cross-paned windows of frosted glass symmetrically placed on each side wall admitted light to the auditorium. These were covered over when the theatre became a movie theatre during the 1930s. Each end-of-row seat is embellished with a red-and-gold stylized Art Deco sunburst (photograph #6). The stage area includes the original pulley system for scenery, original, plain asbestos fire curtain, and row of belaying pins for tying down set lines (photograph #7).

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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

New Haven Historic Resources Inventory. New Haven Preservation Trust. 1981, Local. Survey deposited at New Haven Colony Historical Society, 114 Whitney Avenue, New Haven.

Survey of Connecticut Historic Theaters. Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. January 1983. Survey deposited at Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 South Prospect Street, Hartford.

7. DESCRIPTION

Alteration on the facade consist of a front porch of aluminum and brick planters which receive support poles, a wood-plank facade ten feet high below the porch roof, and a plywood board painted white above the lintel. The board (which could easily be removed) covers the original inset semicircular arch and circular window, both of which remain intact. All alterations to the facade are reversible.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

Jack Crawford of 14 Lincoln Street. Phelps was professor of English at Yale for almost forty years and a well-known literary figure in his own right. He served as President of The Little Theatre Guild of New Haven for its entire life. Jack Crawford taught English at Yale and organized the Yale Playcraftsmen there (an undergraduate group formed in 1922 which wrote and produced their own one-act plays and supplied the Yale Dramat with new material), at a time when the Drama School had not yet been established. Both Phelps and Crawford were active in the Drama League of America which was founded in 1909 and was based in Chicago. Phelps served as Director and then Vice President of the League from 1925 on, and Crawford was both Director in 1925-26 and Associate Editor of The Drama magazine, a League publication, for a number of years. 4

The list of Charter Members and Founders of The Little Theatre Guild of New Haven is filled with the cultural, educational, social and business leaders of New Haven during the 1920s and '30s. In addition to the Phelps and the Crawfords, there were eleven other couples one of whose members was on the Yale faculty. Yale was also represented by Mr. and Mrs. George Parmly Day, Yale treasurer, and Miss Laura Hadley, daughter of Yale President Arthur T. Hadley. Other Charter Members included: Mr. and Mrs. John Day Jackson, publisher of the New Haven Register; Mrs. E.G. Stoddard, wife of the President of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad; Mr. and Mrs. Victor Tyler, President of the Southern New England Telephone Company; Mr. and Mrs. Henry H. Townshend and Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Hemingway, both bankers; and a number of prominent lawyers: George D. Seymour, Charles Morris, Harry G. Day, and Leonard Daggett. In all, the list of Charter Members includes over ninety names of New Haven leaders.

The Little Theatre Guild was part of the national little

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input 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		

Criteria A, B, C

Specific dates 1924/1928 **Addition** **Builder/Architect** Samuel G. Russell/ George H. Gray

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Built by The Little Theatre Guild of New Haven in 1924, The Little Theatre on Lincoln Street is the only known extant little theatre in Connecticut built by a little theatre movement company. ² That movement (1911-1933) was one of the most significant and widespread in American theatre history. It introduced thousands of citizens to the joys of producing, acting in and viewing non-professional community productions which emphasized simplicity, experimentation and participation. It is credited with producing such noted American playwrights and producers as Eugene O'Neill, George S. Kaufman, Elmer Rice, Maxwell Anderson and Robert E. Sherwood. The Little Theatre on Lincoln Street was New Haven's flagship in this movement from 1924 until 1935. It was the home of a company of the pioneering Federal Theatre Project, a program of the Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.), for one year during the Depression, and for thirty-seven years (1945-1982), an extraordinary length of time, it introduced generations of Yale students and other New Haveners to foreign films and classic American films. In these roles The Little Theatre has been part of and witness to some of the most important theatrical movements and significant motion picture developments in American entertainment history (Criterion A). Its founders from The Little Theatre Guild of New Haven included two figures--William Lyon Phelps and Jack Crawford--who were leaders in New Haven culture of their day, and were both officers of a national dramatic arts association as well (Criterion B). The Little Theatre's simple yet sophisticated high-style architecture is an excellent American example of the Modern (or English) Free-Style movement of architecture, whose paring down of ornate embellishments neatly parallels the pared-down style of dramatics that the little theatre movement represented (Criterion C).

Historical Background

The Little Theatre Guild was one of the most popular and largest volunteer organizations in New Haven, having almost 1000 adult and 130 child members in 1930. Its organizers were primarily associated with Yale University and lived on the residential streets adjacent to the site of the new Little Theatre. The building represented a permanent home for the Guild, which had been producing plays in various New Haven church and other halls since its organization in 1922. The Little Theatre was built in 1924 for \$34,000 (\$25,000 of which was raised by sale of stock and subscriptions to the public.) Its second floor addition over the original dressing room (now a lounge area) was added in 1928 after The Little Theatre Guild raised an additional \$3,600. ³

The founders of the Guild included Professor and Mrs. William Lyon Phelps, who lived nearby on Whitney Avenue, and Dorothy and Professor

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Flanagan, Hallie. Arena. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940.

Galdston, Kenneth A. Interview with Robert Spodick and Leonard Sampson, Lincoln Theatre operators, 1945-1982. (continued p.5)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name New Haven

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	8	6	7	4	1	1	0	4	5	7	5	2	6	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

As described in Deed Book 2390, page 328.

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

state n/a code n/a county n/a code n/a

state n/a code n/a county n/a code n/a

11. Form Prepared By

- edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator
name/title Jack A. Gold - Architectural Historian; Kenneth A. Galdston - Researcher;
Nancy W. Brown - Researcher

organization Committee to Save the Lincoln date May 5, 1983

street & number 73 Pearl Street telephone (203) 777-0929

city or town New Haven state Connecticut

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

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date January 27, 1984

For NPS use only

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

for Albert Byer
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date

3/1/84

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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theatre movement which began in Europe in the early 1900s and spread to the United States by the 1920s. It rejected ornate commercial theatre and spawned non-professional theatre groups in cities and towns across the country, and small theatres they built to house their work: The Toy Theatre in Boston (1912), The Little Theatre in Chicago (1912); and three New York playhouses--the Little Theatre (1912), the Washington Square Theatre (1915), and the Theatre Guild (1918). According to one survey published in 1931, by that year notices of 1,020 little theatre groups from communities as small as Tougaloo, Mississippi and Dillon, Montana, had appeared in The Drama's "On the Billboard" section. The Little Theatre Guild's notices appeared there frequently during the twenties and early thirties, along with articles and reviews by Jack Crawford. 5

The movement was not only one of popular appeal and participation, it also produced talented American playwrights and producers such as Eugene O'Neill, George S. Kaufman, Elmer Rice, Maxwell Anderson and Robert E. Sherwood. It got thousands of everyday citizens involved in putting on plays, and its emphasis on experimentation and simplicity affected American drama for years to come. A student of the movement described it in 1917 as "the newest, freest, most potent and democratic force in the art of the American stage." 6

Of the fifteen little theatre groups producing plays in twelve Connecticut towns during the period October 1925 through June 1931, it appears that only The Little Theatre Guild of New Haven actually built its own theatre from the ground up. This is some indication of the seriousness of the New Haven Guild (as well as of the relative resources it had to draw on). It is also probable, therefore, that The Little Theatre on Lincoln Street is among the few little theatre movement theatres extant and surviving as a theatre in some form in the nation. 7

As a community activity, little theatres drew not only those who wanted to act, but artists to design and create scenery and costumes and volunteers to secure funds, program advertising and props for often elaborate stage productions. It is clear from the memorabilia and records of The Little Theatre Guild of New Haven that their activities drew the support of many volunteers devoting hours of work, substantial financial gifts, season subscriptions, as well as fine audiences. Even annual meetings were well attended. In 1933 in its twelfth season over two hundred members attended the annual meeting and heard Allardyce Nicoll, the new Dean of the Yale Drama School, discuss the history of the little theatre movement.

The plays staged by The Little Theatre Guild at The Little Theatre ranged from Shakespeare to Ibsen to "Ten Nights in a Barroom." (In keeping with its opposition to commercialization, a prerequisite of a little theatre's repertory was that it include only plays that could be produced without a royalty charge.) But the Theatre also hosted children's plays (staged by junior members), and community meetings. These last ranged from the 1926 New Haven Republican caucus to a conven-

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tion of area Chevrolet dealers.

The opening of the Yale Drama School and its presentation of free plays, as well as the Depression, took a huge toll on the activities of The Little Theatre Guild. Though its members worked hard to raise additional funds, and reorganized to do this, they were forced to discontinue play production.

The Little Theatre Guild, however, had introduced the little theatre movement to New Haven through its play production, and through its design and construction of its own home, The Little Theatre on Lincoln Street.

And while The Little Theatre Guild disbanded, The Little Theatre had been well established during its first eleven years of life as a site for entertainment in a residential neighborhood on the edge of downtown New Haven. The Federal Theatre Project was the next and last live performing group to use The Little Theatre for production. The Project was part of the W.P.A. It was designed to put out-of-work theatre people back on stage, performing for a public paying nominal admission prices. Though the Project was short-lived (1935-1939) it was as pioneering and influential in American theatre history in its own way as the little theatre movement had been. It produced plays focused on social issues, as well as modern drama and revivals. Its organizers hoped it would form the base of an American national theatre. It was considered "the liveliest, most innovative and most original theatre of its era." Such actors as Orson Welles, Joseph Cotten, John Houseman, Will Geer, E.G. Marshall and John Huston received early training and recognition in the Federal Theatre. ⁸

While The Little Theatre of New Haven did not produce any actors or actresses of their fame, it did house a very active Federal Theatre Project company during the 1935-1936 season. That group was responsible for staging the national openings of ten Federal Theatre productions during that period. They included adaptations of works by Moliere and Lewis Carroll, as well as modern drama such as James Warwick's "Blind Alley." ⁹

With the end of the 1935-1936 season The Little Theatre on Lincoln Street ended an era of live performance. It was purchased in 1939 by Gilber Josephson, the owner of the World Theater in New York and a foreign film distributor. It was then owned, as his first theatre, by Joseph E. Levine, the movie producer. Morris Nunes and Maurice Bailey, owners of the Shubert Theatre in New Haven and a number of theatres elsewhere bought it prior to World War II.

In 1945 the building became known as the Lincoln Theatre. Under the management of Robert Spodick and Leonard Sampson it began an uninterrupted period as the home of first-run foreign films, and later as a repertory theatre showing classic foreign and American films, until its closing in the fall of 1982.

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During this era The Little Theatre was significant for three roles: as the off-campus college cinema for Yale students, attending movies at the Lincoln became very much a Yale tradition (just as students at Harvard attend the Brattle Street Theatre; those at Brown go to the Avon on College Hill; Smith students attend the Academy in Northampton; and Columbia students go to the Thalia or Olympia). This relatively modern Yale tradition reinforced the original extremely close tie between members of that community and the founding and building of the theatre itself.

In a second role the theatre was the scene of presentations by an impressive group of film producers who screened their current films for Yale film classes there. These included Robert Altman ("M.A.S.H."), William Wyler ("Sister Carrie"), Terrence Malek ("Badlands") and Costa-Gravas ("State of Siege"). While this was not an extensive use of the Lincoln it did continue the role of the theatre established by the undergraduate Yale Playcraftsmen in the 1920s, as a place for a type of instruction in the arts. 10

Finally, The Little Theatre's (now the Lincoln's) role as a neighborhood place for entertainment continued during this period after 1945 as it had before. And while the theatre continued to draw patrons from all parts of the city, and suburban areas as well, part of its enduring significance remained that it related wonderfully to its surrounding neighborhood architecturally, socially and historically as a neighborhood institution serving the broader community.

Architecture

As originally constructed, The Little Theatre's architectural significance is derived from the careful application of the English or Modern Free-Style movement of architecture. 11 This style incorporated Colonial Revival elements in form and massing, but eliminated use of conventional Colonial Revival decoration such as dentils, modillioned cornices, trabeated fenestrations, etc. The style, more popular in Europe than in America, was patronized here by avant garde art circles. It was viewed as an attempt to create modern expressions out of traditional building forms. 12

The sophisticated round-arched entry below the gabled facade is characteristic of high-style theatres designed by architects in Europe in the early years of this century. The most notable of these is La Scala Movie Theatre, designed by Le Corbusier in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland (1912-1916). 13

Architect George Gray (F.A.I.A., 1874-1945) incorporated a barn-lie facade with a classically-inspired inset arch in designing The Little Theatre. The three-part placement of rectangular display cases flanking the arch is evocative of a church exterior. On the interior, the simple, flat wall surfaces and flush-boarded ceiling constitute a paring down of ornate embellishments which typified theatres constructed

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during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The relationship of the theatre to traditional forms of architecture minus ornate elements, neatly parallels the relationship of the little theatre movement to heavier and more elaborate forms of traditional theatre. 14

In addition to heading an active architectural firm in New Haven, Gray was largely responsible for the formation of the Zoning Commission in the City. As an early advocate of public housing, he was an organizer and participant on the New Haven Housing Authority. Before moving to New Haven after World War I, Gray practiced architecture in Louisville, Kentucky. From 1901 to 1905 he studied at L'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris.

The Little Theatre's simplicity creates a fine focal point for Lincoln Street. In addition, its scale is perfectly suited for the overall character of the neighborhood. Neighborhood and performing arts groups have taken an interest in the preservation and reuse of the building and are raising funds for its rehabilitation, redevelopment and operation as a performing arts theatre. Although the original facade is sheathed by later alterations, the overall integrity of the exterior and interior of the structure remain intact.

NOTES

1. The Audubon Arts Complex is a group of buildings developed by the City of New Haven and the Arts Council of New Haven arranged around a traffic circle immediately south of The Little Theatre. They include the Educational Center for the Arts, formerly Temple Mishkin Israel, 1896, Brunner and Tryon; the Creative Arts Workshop, 1972, Orr, deCossy, Winder and Associates; and the Neighborhood Music School, 1968, Charles Brewer.
2. We have arrived at this conclusion as a result of successfully contacting the directors of historical societies, preservation trust offices and town clerks in all twelve of the cities and towns listed in Clarence Perry's very thorough study of the breadth of the little theatre movement as being located in Connecticut and having had some sort of little theatre movement group between the years 1925 to 1931. In each of these places (Bridgeport, Bristol, Hartford, Litchfield, Madison, Middletown, Milford, New Haven, Redding Ridge, Stamford, Stony Creek and Washington) we were able to confirm that the groups listed in Perry's book did exist, and that they had not built their own little theatre in which to perform. In addition, the Survey of Historic Theaters prepared by the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, January 1983 found no evidence of the existence of theatres built in these towns by little theatre movement groups.
3. New Haven City Building Permit #23783, Department of Building Inspection, City of New Haven, Connecticut.

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4. The Little Theatre Monthly, Volume 1, #1. November 1924. p. 1.
5. Clarence A. Perry. The Work of the Little Theatres. New York: The Russell Sage Foundation. 1933. pp. 27-30.
6. Constance D'Arcy Mackay. The Little Theatre in the United States. New York: Henry Holt and Company. 1917. p. iii.
7. Our efforts to locate standing theatres still used as theatres or at least unaltered in form, built by little theatre groups in other states in the nation have not been successful to date. We have contacted the League of Historic American Theatres (after finding that the Northeast Regional Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation did not have a survey readily available which would disclose this information), and found that their survey of theatres does not go beyond 1910. In addition, we have contacted the State Historic Preservation Officers in ten states where our research would indicate the greatest likelihood of finding such a theatre still standing, and have found, so far, only the Pasadena Playhouse in California which seems to have these qualities. It is based on this research that we make our concluding statement on the relative rarity of The Little Theatre on Lincoln Street.
8. John O'Connor and Lorraine Brown, editors. Free, Adult, Uncensored, the Living History of the Federal Theatre Project. Washington, D.C.: New Republic Books. 1978. pp. 4-5.
9. Hallie Flanagan. Arena. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce. 1940. pp. 381-435.
10. Kenneth A. Galdston. Interview with Spodick and Sampson. April 25, 1983.
11. Nicholas Pevsner. Pioneers of Modern Design. New York: Museum of Modern Art. 1949. p. 85.
12. Pevsner. p. 85, p. 123.
13. Vincent Scully. The Shingle Style Today, or The Historian's Revenge. New York: George Braziller. 1974. p. 132.
14. Anstress Paine, Department of the History of Art, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, March 1983.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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New Haven, CT.

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April 1925. p. 128.
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