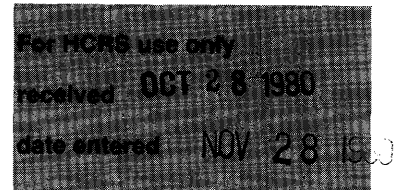


**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**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 Kearse Theater

and/or common same

2. Location

street & number 161, 165, and 167 Summers Street not for publication

city, town Charleston vicinity of congressional district

state West Virginia code county Kanawha code

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Betty Kearse Bobbitt, et. al.

street & number P.O. Box 6128

city, town Charlottesville vicinity of Virginia 22906
state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Kanawha County Court House

street & number Virginia Street

city, town Charleston state West Virginia 25301

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

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 Kearsse Theater building, composed of a single-floor auditorium with balcony behind a three-story front section which includes 2 store fronts, is located in a dense downtown area of Charleston, West Virginia. The theater is structurally detached from the buildings which adjoin it on either side. The building extends the full width of the block it occupies, forming a slightly irregular rectangle. Its dimensions are 221'-6 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 93'10 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (front) x 216'7 $\frac{5}{8}$ " x 95'-7 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". The front section contains the main entry and 2 stores on the ground floor, with a large room on the second floor and a ballroom on the third. The two sections are joined by support facilities which include stairways, offices, projection booth and rest rooms. There is a basement under the front section and under the stage.

Structurally, the foundations are continuous concrete with internal concrete piers and lally columns supporting the stage and front section. The exterior walls are load bearing masonry with bricks laid in a common bond with a header course every 6 rows. All floors are of concrete slab construction. The front section of the building is divided into five structural bays, while the auditorium is completely spanned by a series of warren trusses 17'-3 $\frac{1}{2}$ " on center. (A maze of plate girders supports the balcony). The entire building is covered with flat roofs which step up in sections to the fly area which is 62'-0" from ground level. The material used was 3-ply built-up tar and felt.

Entrance to the building is made through a square structural bay which is part of the building, yet open to the outside. A ticket booth now stands in the center of this space. Glass doors leading the foyer are set at the back of this portal-like opening.

The central bay containing the entry is articulated visually by thickened piers, each surmounted by a pointed dome covered in soft copper with standing seams (now painted silver). The central bay is flanked by two wider bays, each of which is composed of two structural bays. The corner piers of these bays are topped by small ornamental turrets. The central bay contains a large, tall opening below a segmental arch. The opening contains six double-hung windows in three vertical rows, each with a transom window forming part of the arch. Each of the flanking bays has six vertical rows of two double-hung windows.

The facade is faced with ornamental terra cotta in "a cream white with ornaments picked out in greens, blues, reds and yellows, finished with a malt glaze" (Specifications, p. 28). The decorative details are Gothic in origin, including trefoil arches, pointed arches, and rows of quatrefoils in diamonds. Terra cotta masks representing Comedy and Tragedy are set at the cornice line at the top of the two piers of the central bay. A row of small drop trefoil arches are set away from the facade at the cornice to conceal indirect lighting. A marquee (not original) is cantilevered out over the sidewalk above the entrance with a vertical section displaying the theater's name.

Actual entry doors to the theater are set at the back of the square structural bay forming the entrance. Through these doors is an interior foyer. Though separated by glass doors, the details of the entry and the foyer are identical. The floor is surfaced with marble of white and brown in a diagonal checker board pattern. There is wainscot of Napolean grey Tennessee marble, 7'8" thick, green veined Vermont white cloud. The original ticket window is also framed in this marble. The walls are plaster and each square bay of the ceiling is decorated with ornamental plaster work. The offices, storefronts and large rooms above this area have plaster walls

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Continuation sheet Kearse Theater, Charleston Item number 7

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and the ceilings with maple floors, with the exception of the bathrooms which have tile floors and the projection room which has a concrete floor.

The main floor of the theater slopes down to the stage and originally had 31 rows of radial seating (3 front rows have been removed). There are four aisles, two on the far outside and two between the center section of seating and the side seating. Each aisle seat is made of cast iron and embossed with a "K" (see photograph). The mezzanine seating is of a lesser quality and there are only 10 rows. This balcony level also includes 2 rows of boxes, of which 8 are higher and 17 are lower and extend down the sides of the theater. Box railings have plaster ornaments of panels and encircled quatrefoils on them. Both the main floor and the balcony have four sets of exit doors on each side of the theater, for a total of 16 sets. At the very back of the auditorium is a projection booth entered from a small metal stair at the top of the seating area.

The theater ceiling is plaster suspended from trusses. It is elliptical in cross section and at the front of the theater it curves in to the proscenium opening. This ceiling configuration is designed to direct sound to the back of the auditorium. In the very back of the room over the balcony seating, the ceiling is flat.

The ceiling is decorated with plasterwork in a variety of designs including interlocking arches and moulding dotted with bosses. Large gratings of cast plaster can be seen in the ceiling above and on either side of the proscenium opening. These cover openings through which the pipe organ's sound entered the room. Where the ceiling meets the wall there is a leaf moulding above a row of dropped trefoil arches with concealed lighting similar to that on the facade.

There is an orchestra pit in front of the stage. The proscenium has a 38'-0" opening and the stage is an average of 35'-0" deep. The back of the stage is at an angle conforming to the angle of the street at the rear. Beyond the wings are the organ wind chambers and two levels of six dressing rooms, each with a window. There is also a large kinnear door through which large equipment could be brought in. Above the stage there is a large sky light in the roof. The stage is supported by a 20" deep plate girder on lally columns and 10"x14" wood rafters 4'-0" on center.

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 checked="" 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 1921

Builder/Architect Mills & Millspaugh Co., Columbus Ohio

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

When the Kearsse Theater in Charleston, Kanawha County, West Virginia, opened in 1922, it was considered the finest facility of its kind in the Kanawha Valley. The work of Mills and Millspaugh Company of Columbus, Ohio, the theater was designed for stage shows as well as for movies. The facility brought Charlestonians not only the best silent films, but vaudeville acts, road shows, concerts, operas, stage plays and, in 1928, the first talking pictures. It was equipped with the latest in projection equipment, a feature which was continually updated through the installation of a Cinemascope screen in the 1950s. A pit for the orchestra which accompanied the silent films was a prominent feature, and the Kearsse orchestra, directed by Mr. Shallabarger, was widely renowned in the state. A magnificent Austin concert pipe organ featuring huge wind chambers integrated into the building's structure, was the largest individual item of expenditure in the construction of the lavish Kearsse Theater. Still in place and able to be restored to working order, the organ is currently the largest concert pipe organ remaining in a theater in West Virginia. It is a most important feature of the Kearsse Theater, which stands, largely unaltered, as a significant example of the theater and moving picture house architecture of the early 1920s. The Kearsse is one of only a handful of old commercial buildings in this condition yet standing in Charleston.

West Virginia governors E. F. Morgan, William A. MacCorkle and Wesley A. Atkinson, and Mayor Grant P. Hall of Charleston participated in the gala opening of the Kearsse November 26, 1922. Moving pictures of the occasion were made and shown throughout the country. The Charleston Gazette/Daily Mail stated that "never before, in the history of the theatrical business, has a theater opening been attended by such a gathering of statesmen." Newspaper accounts indicate that the opening of the theater was expected to provoke a rejuvenation of Summers Street, a goal which is reiterated today in recommending the nomination of the building to the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to the theater proper, the building housed two floors of clubrooms and ballroom space. Many civic clubs, including the B'nai B'rith and the Knight of Columbus had headquarters in the Kearsse Building, and a number of dance clubs, including the Charleston Cotillion, regularly scheduled dances and balls there. The Kearsse Theater stage was used by the armed forces to put on demonstrations during the Second World War. Regular Opportunity Night events during the decades following the war saw amateur performances by countless talented Charlestonians who were, or went on to become, prominent citizens of the community.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Architectural plans, "The Kearsse Theatre Building by Mills & Millspaugh Company, Columbus, Ohio, June 1, 1921".

Specifications, Set #30, P.S. Phillips, Revised. "The Kearsse Theatre Building/for/The Kanawha Investment Company, Charleston, W.V./June 1, 1921"

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1 city lot (20,300 sq. ft.)

Quadrangle name Charleston West, WV

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Scale 1:24,000

UMT References

UTM NOT VERIFIED

A

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

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 Located on Quarrier St., lot #26

The Kearsse Theater is located on a city lot (approx. 215' x 94') and is bounded by Summers and Laidley streets, and adjacent lots on the east and west.

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 Susan Cumins, Executive Director & Carter Giltinan, Vice President

organization Kanawha Arts Alliance date August 11, 1980

street & number City Hall, 4th & D streets telephone 304 744-5301

city or town South Charleston state West Virginia 25303

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 M. Moran*

title State Historic Preservation Officer date October 3, 1980

For HCRS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<u><i>Forster W. Ray</i></u> Keeper of the National Register	date <u>11/28/80</u>
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	

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Continuation sheet Kearsse Theater, Charleston Item number 9

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Charleston Gazette (Charleston, W.V.) Nov.5, 1922. Article on opening of Kearsse Theater.

Coleman, Ronald. Personal interview, June 8, 1980. (Mr. Coleman was manager of the Kearsse Theater for over 25 years).

Wells, Sandy, "The Kearsse," Charleston Gazette, April 29, 1980, p. 1B.