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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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NATIONAL REGISTER

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Masonic Temple Building/Temple Theater

other names/site number Heilig's Theater; John Hamrick's Temple Theater

2. Location

street & number 47 St. Helens Ave.  not for publication

city or town Tacoma  vicinity

state Washington code WA county Pierce code 053 zip code 98402

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Mary Chapman 3/1/93  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation  
State of Federal agency and bureau

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

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper Delores Byrum **entered in the National Register** Date of Action 4/29/93

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

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

Movie Theaters of WA State

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Social: clubhouse  
Recreation/Culture: theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation/Culture: theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th/Early 20th Century Revivals:  
other: Second Renaissance Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete  
walls brick  
sandstone  
roof composition  
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation 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.

**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**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/Recreation

Architecture

Social History

**Period of Significance**

1927-1943

**Significant Dates**

1927, 1932

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Russell, Ambrose J. (architect)

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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

**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:

\_\_\_\_\_

Masonic Building/Temple Theater  
Name of Property

Pierce Co., WA  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property less than one

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

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

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Kevin Phelps (owner) and Valerie Sivinski, Tacoma Historic Preservation Officer

organization St. Helens Plaza date November 13, 1991

street & number 47 St. Helens Avenue telephone (206) 272-2042

city or town Tacoma state WA zip code 98402

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

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

name Kevin Phelps and Richard Mirau

street & number 47 St. Helens Avenue telephone (206) 272-2042

city or town Tacoma state WA zip code 98402

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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## National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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Masonic Temple/Theater, Tacoma, Pierce Co., WA

### Description:

The Masonic Temple is a Renaissance Revival Style structure constructed in 1927 as a headquarters for sixteen of the city's fraternal organizations. Located in the heart of the city's commercial district, the building houses meeting rooms, ballrooms and offices, as well as the city's largest theater.

Exterior: The building is sited facing St. Helens Avenue between South 2nd and South 3rd Streets, and measures roughly 124 feet by 170 feet. Rising four stories above St. Helens Avenue, the interior of the building steps up gradually through the intermediate levels between each floor. As the site slopes away from St. Helens, there is a full story beneath the street level facing onto Broadway at the rear, which contains a grand ballroom. The main entrance faces on to St. Helens, which contains only the stair entry for the Temple rooms above. Six storefronts are accessible from the street. There are secondary entrances for the theater and ballroom on the south facade and a small plaza/loading dock at the rear of the ballroom. At the rear of the building is a brick loading dock enclosure which allowed trucks to enter from St. Helens directly on to the stage of the theater for the unloading of stage equipment. There is a partial penthouse above the roof level which originally contained the meeting rooms and offices of the Shriners, as well as a small parade ground for marching band and drill team practice. The building remains relatively intact, having had few modifications to the exterior over the years.

Designed by A. J. Russell of Tacoma, the building was constructed of steel beams and concrete walls with a facing of red brick and sandstone trim. The structure had a simple rectangular form with low relief decorations typical of the Second Renaissance Revival Style (a combination of classical details and form with the flat and restrained decoration popular in institutional buildings of the time). The central portion of the building projects slightly from the brick flanking wings, and is marked by a full height stone surround topped with a modified temple front that rises above the lower roofs of the wings. The central block contains a two-story stone arched doorway centered in the central stone pavilion. Two stories of windows are contained in the stone surround above the arched door. A pair of engaged Corinthian columns resting on a rusticated pedestal on the first story rise beside the spring point of the entrance arch and continue to the cornice line of the flanking wing roofs. The simplified entablature typical of this style has low flat stepped progressions and a ring of dentils. Two large rectangular tablets with

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Masonic Temple/Theater, Tacoma, Pierce Co., WA

guttae hang from the cornice and are carved with the words "Masonic Temple." The central block continues another story above the cornice as a temple front in stone with four free standing columns and four pilasters flanking.

The two wings of the building are faced with red brick. The stone surrounds on the paired windows have a lightly ornamented head and the second and third floor windows are linked by plain stone spandrels. The window sash consist of a pair of casement windows with a single horizontal muntin down approximately one third of the height of the window. This is one of the few departures from Russell's design as he had intended a fixed single pane transom above the casements. Stone pilasters mark the bays and are topped with anthemion leaves for capitals. There is a flat stone cornice above and below the capitals with a brick parapet wall at the top edge of the wall. Modified triglyphs with guttae hang below the anthemion capitals and there are decorative attic vents in the metopes. The storefronts originally had recessed doorways and small panes of glass across the transoms of the display windows, but these appear to have been replaced numerous times. Presently they are standard flat aluminum storefronts.

Interior: The entrance hall occupies the front of the central block and rises continuously through all the floors. It contains a grand central stair finished in black and white terrazzo with grey borders. The railings have wood caps on top of wrought iron. The pattern of the wrought iron is a series of linked circles over twisted and straight balusters. The elevators have been modernized. The lobbies at each floor feed offices in either wing. The meeting rooms and banquet halls, mainly at the rear of the building to respond to the views, are up the stairs a half-level.

On the second floor are meeting rooms and offices. The arched windows over the entry doors let light into the lobby. The front offices are double-height and contain mezzanines.

The third floor contains four large meeting rooms finished in different architectural styles including Doric, Ionic, Gothic, and Corinthian. The Gothic and Corinthian rooms are the larger corner rooms, with the smaller Doric and Ionic rooms in the center. Each room has pilasters with various capitals and lighting arrangements to give them each a different aspect. Each room has double lobbies to ensure privacy for secret Masonic ceremonies. None of the rooms contain windows.

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Masonic Temple/Theater, Tacoma, Pierce Co., WA

There is a small bathroom on the fourth floor with arched French doors facing out over the bay. The room is decorated with simple Doric pilasters and schoolhouse light fixtures. There is a kitchen attached with original wood cabinetry. Along the corridor to the ballroom are storage rooms for the regalia of the Masonic ceremonies and mechanical rooms. The original HVAC is still functioning.

On the roof is the penthouse constructed for the Shriners. These rooms have been modified over the years. Many windows have been replaced with aluminum sliders and there is a sliding glass door from the large meeting room to a raised exterior deck. The roof had originally been paved so that the Shriners band and drill team could practice there.

Below St. Helens Avenue is the Temple's grand ballroom. With room for a thousand coats and six hundred hats, it is open to the rear through a series of French door. The room, which is two stories high, has a stage at one end. Two story columns engage the balcony/mezzanine. It is entered from a recessed plaza at the southeast corner of the building.

Theater Exterior: The theater was integrally constructed when the Temple was designed. Originally intended to be entered under a suspended marquee at the south, a new entrance was immediately added to bring patrons in directly from St. Helens. Underneath an open square pavilion with stained glass Baroque dome roof was a new entrance to the theater. A small ramped addition was built next to the Temple with a scored concrete pedestal and columns. It was predominately glass with stained glass transoms. The cornice appears to have been ornamental sheet metal with small oblong finials above each column. The enclosure contained ticket windows with stained glass transoms. The domed marquee lost its stained glass early on and was replaced by a new triangular marquee in the 1940s possibly during Will Connor's renovations in 1948. The connecting structure remains intact as well as the suspended marquee on the south.

Theater interior: The walls of the lobby were heavily textured with plaster with simple cornices, stenciled with Egyptian motifs. There was a hood airlock entrance alcove on the south wall that did not go to the full height of the lobby. The lid on this airlock was a wrought iron railing and it was filled with potted palms. Ramps led from either side of the lobby to the balcony. These had wrought iron railings of the same design as the Temple. There was a coat check room directly opposite the airlock entrance. Above it was an open balcony reception area filled with upholstered chairs. The corners of this balcony area were marked by lamp posts with spherical globe lights, stenciled with patterns.

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Masonic Temple/Theater, Tacoma, Pierce Co., WA

The auditorium originally sat 2,000 patrons --1,200 on the main floor and 800 in the cantilevered balcony. The balcony was supported by a huge steel post running the entire width of the theater and measuring six feet in height. Lining the outer aisles were lamp posts with velvet drapes in between. The plaster front of the balcony was stenciled with an open metal railing above. Six large stenciled octagonal chandeliers hung from the ceiling. The deep cornice was also stencilled between regular brackets of lotus flowers. All of the stenciling had an Egyptian motif.

The proscenium arch is flat, flanked by four heavy Egyptian columns. The beams over the stage were heavily stenciled. The orchestra pit was large enough to contain a full orchestra and was entered through a passageway at the west of the auditorium. There were 14 dressing rooms and other storage rooms beyond and below the stage. The fly loft extended the full height of the building.

The interior was described at the time of construction as being decorated in "restrained and restful tones of soft blue, rose and golden brown." An asbestos curtain spans the proscenium, painted with a scene of the Nile, complete with ruined temples and sailing boats. The velvet curtain is a rich amber brown with touches of flame and black, ornamented with rhinestones. The ceiling had a marble effect. The chairs were covered with leather and in the loges and boxes were arm chairs of bronze reed decoration and tapestry upholstery.

In 1948, Will Connor modernized the interior to meet contemporary needs. Improvements in the acoustic control had been the reason for remodelling but other improvements were also made. The coat check room was removed, a blank wall below the balcony was broken out to create a lounge, and a new refreshment center was incorporated into the lobby. The loge sections on the main floor of the auditorium were removed as were all the original seats, replaced with new ones with semi-reclining backs and automatic lifts. The color scheme was revised to be a "restful, warm color scheme of coral, lime, and forest green." Two new revolving lamps were installed on the ceiling to create special effects on the gold auditorium ornamentation. In addition, an experimental movie screen, Pana-A-Vue, was installed. The curved screen, invented by a Tacoma professor, was intended to eliminate the distortion when viewed from any angle.



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Masonic Temple/Theater, Tacoma, Pierce Co., WA

Statement of Significance:

Distinguished by its dramatic Renaissance Revival Style architecture and its lavish interior spaces, the Masonic Temple Building is significantly associated with both the growth of Tacoma fraternal organizations and the history of entertainment in the early 20th century. The building was the largest of the city's fraternal structures, providing ceremonial and meeting spaces for 16 Masonic organizations. But the structure served more than Masons; the integral Temple Theater boasted the largest stage in the city and an ornate Egyptian style auditorium that seated 2,000 patrons. In use for over 50 years, the Masonic Building and its Temple Theater were centerpieces of the city's cultural life. As a leading motion picture theater during the heyday of film, the Temple Theater meets the registration requirements for palace-era theaters as established in the Movie Theaters of Washington Multiple Property Documentation Form.

**Historic Background:** The Masonic fraternal order, which has roots dating to the earliest period of American history, had numerous lodges in Tacoma by the early 20th century, reflecting the strong growth in fraternal associations during the period. Sixteen Masonic organizations were united in a Masonic Temple at 747 St. Helens (now the site of the historic Rhodes Medical Arts Building). But by 1920, the building was found inadequate for the groups' needs: it had too few rooms, no space of sufficient size to accommodate large gatherings, and was simply not lavish enough for the Grand Lodge. (Moreover, it was overshadowed by the new Scottish Rite Temple erected in 1918.) The Masons also realized that a major new facility, with an auditorium adequate to "fill all the present and future needs of the city," would provide an important outside revenue source for the organizations.

The site for the new headquarters was located in downtown Tacoma on the former A. C. Brokaw property. The land was purchased in 1922 by the Masonic Corporation, which was formed for the purposes of erecting the new building. Masonic bodies funded construction of the building by offering a special bond to Masons and their families. The bonds, offered in denominations of \$100, were sold to fund the entire project, whose total construction cost exceeded \$586,000. Among those on the committee to sell bonds included such prominent Tacoma residents as E. B. King, S. R. Balkwill, S. A. Perkins, W. R. Rust, and J. F. Bonnell.

Three Tacoma architectural firms (Heath and Gove, Bullard and Mason, and A. J. Russell) submitted plans for the facility, with the designs of

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Russell chosen after an extensive review process. Ambrose J. Russell was among the most prominent and experienced architects in the region at the time. He came to Tacoma in 1892 after receiving classical training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He worked for one year in the offices of H. H. Richardson, America's preeminent architect of the period, and later worked for Van Brunt and Howe of Kansas City and Evans and Young of St. Louis. One year after his arrival in Tacoma he formed a partnership with Everett Babcock. Russell's other work includes many residences in the Stadium-Seminary district as well as the imposing Neoclassical Rust Mansion (National Register, 1985). The building was constructed by local "operative" Masons (that is, Masons who actually practiced a building craft or trade), with materials supplied by local firms—including structural steel from the Star Iron and Steel Company, millwork from the Tacoma Millwork Supply Company, and furnishings from Schoenfelds.

On October 18, 1927, the building—reputedly one of the largest Masonic halls west of the Mississippi—was officially dedicated by Governor Roland Hartley among much pomp and ceremony. The new building was distinguished by many large meeting and lodge rooms, including a hall located beneath the main theater which could seat 1,500. The theater itself could hold 2,000, and combined with the other spaces the structure boasted room for more than 5,000 people. In addition to meeting halls and lodges, however, the building boasted a library, club rooms, billiard and smoking rooms, a banquet hall, rooms for the state grand secretary, dining rooms, and a rooftop garden with additional space for drilling.

But the jewel of the complex was the central theater, an Egyptian-styled facility that featured the largest stage between Portland and Seattle; a five story fly-loft allowing as many as 42 different sets of up to three stories in height; a cantilevered balcony which eliminated posts; a Kimball organ costing \$20,000; a fire curtain painted with an Egyptian mural by noted Northwest painter Edward Misener (with assistance by Bert Straight); eleven dressing rooms; a set design studio; and its own warehouse space.

Because the Masons hoped to raise money through leasing spaces in the building, the large theater was immediately rented to Calvin Heilig, who managed the facility as a stage and motion picture theater from its opening in 1927 until 1932. A noted theater operator, Heilig (who named the theater after himself) opened the facility with "The Madcap with Mitzi and Her Company," in which Arthur Treacher played the part of Sir Bertram

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Masonic Temple/Theater, Tacoma, Pierce Co., WA

Hawley. Artistic merit notwithstanding, the opening night performance was celebrated as an important entertainment and cultural milestone for the city.

In 1932, veteran Northwest showman John Hamrick assumed the lease of the theater and promptly renamed it "John Hamrick's Temple Theatre." Hamrick was joined by Tacoma resident Will Connor (a veteran of the defunct Fox Theater chain) who became a full partner in 1948 and assumed most of the daily management of the house. During Connor's tenure at the theater, a professor at Tacoma's Pacific Lutheran University invented a curved screen that stayed in focus even on the edges. Connor agreed to implement the full-sized version of this experimental screen at the Temple Theater, thus earning the honor of having the first Pana-A-Vue screen in the nation.

Connor continued to operate the theater until 1974 when he retired, after which he leased the theater to Maurice Mullendore of Auburn. While dormant during most of the 1980s, the theater recently went through a major rehabilitation and has reopened as a major theatrical venue for the region.

**Bibliography:**

Barbara Smith, The Masonic Temple Building/Temple Theater: A Brief History (unpublished manuscript submitted for TLSUS 437, University of WA/Tacoma, 1992).

"New Theater to Open in October," Tacoma News Tribune, July 29, 1927.

"Splendid Theater Ready," "Temple Theater Conceived in Love for the Arts," Tacoma News Tribune, October 17, 1927.

"New Temple Greet Patrons Friday Evening," Tacoma News Tribune, August 26, 1948.

**Verbal Boundary Description:** Lots 18-26, Block 7, Plat of New Tacoma.

**Boundary Justification:** The nominated property includes the entire parcel associated with the Masonic Temple Building and Temple Theater.

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Verbal Boundary Description: Lots 18 to 26, inclusive Block 7, Map of New Tacoma, W.T.

Boundary Justification: The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Masonic Temple Building.

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Continuation Sheet**

Section number Photos Page 1

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Masonic Temple Building  
Tacoma, Pierce County, Washington

Contemporary photographs by Valerie Sivinski, October, 1992  
Negatives at OAHP

Historic photograph negatives at Tacoma Public Library

Description:

1. Exterior facade, facing northeast (contemporary photo)
2. Exterior facade, facing northeast, detail (contemporary photo)
3. Interior lodge room (contemporary photo)
4. Exterior facade, facing northeast (historic photo c. 1927)
5. Interior theater (historic photo c. 1927)
6. Interior theater (historic photo c. 1927)