

Prince Hall Masonic Temple
Name of Property

East Baton Rouge Parish, LA
County and State

RECEIVED

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- 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.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theatre & music facility

SOCIAL/meeting hall

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/meeting hall

RECREATION AND CULTURE/music facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls brick

roof other: tar and gravel

other concrete

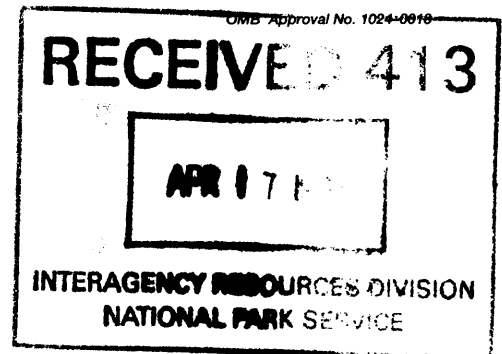
Narrative Description

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

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Prince Hall Masonic Temple, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA
Section number 7 Page 1



The Prince Hall Masonic Temple (1924) is a four story brick Neo-Classical building with cast concrete accents. The building is located on a major thoroughfare in what was historically the central business district for black Baton Rougeans. Although there have been alterations to both the exterior and interior over the years, the Prince Hall Masonic Temple easily retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic role as an entertainment focal point.

The temple's restrained Neo-Classical facade is distinguished by pilasters and an entablature in cast concrete defining the three bays of the second and third floor. Above this composition are pilasters and a smaller cast concrete entablature accenting the fourth floor. The principal entablature features pronounced swags while the one above is ornamented with roundels and lions' heads.

Windows vary. Those on the second and third floor of the facade feature a large one-over-one flanked by narrow one-over-ones. Facade windows on the fourth floor are multi-paned. Remaining windows on the side elevations are two-over-two.

The multi-use nature of the building during the historic period is reflected on the interior. The first and second floors are largely taken up with a theatre space. Offices occupy the front of the second story and most of the third floor. (During the historic period, space was leased to a variety of entities, including insurance companies and a secretarial school.) At the rear of the third floor is a large meeting room. Most of the fourth floor is taken up by a large ballroom known at the time as the Temple Roof Garden.

Interior alterations have been largely confined to the theatre and ballroom. Hallways and almost all of the offices retain their historic appearance as does the unadorned third floor meeting room.

The Temple, as it was and is known, has been renovated various times over the years. Principal alterations are as follows:

(1) The shopfront level has been modernized. Historically it consisted of a fairly wide entrance hall to the theatre with a business and stair hall on the west side and a business to the

CONTINUED

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Prince Hall Masonic Temple, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA
Section number 7 Page 2

east. This spatial arrangement survives, although grillwork doors have been placed at the opening of the theatre entrance hall.

(2) The theatre has been remodeled, including the removal of the theatre seats and leveling the previously sloping floor. The overall space survives as does the stage, the acoustical tile walls and wall sconces that appear to date from the 1930s.

(3) Originally the sides of the ballroom were almost completely taken up with large windows. Plywood paneling was added to the interior which covers the windows and the pilasters between them. The windows were bricked over on the exterior. Fortunately, however, the space survives, including a mezzanine gallery with its original stairs and balustrade. Also surviving is the ballroom's handsomely decorated ceiling. Encircling the room is a partial entablature featuring egg and dart molding, bead and reel molding, and the same pronounced swags that appear on the exterior. Beams with the same decorative features span the width of the room from pilaster to pilaster. Although the pilasters have been covered, as noted before, their capitals survive.

Assessment of Integrity:

Despite the above alterations, the Temple would be easily recognizable to anyone from the historic period, including interior spaces. While the remodeling of the theatre and ballroom is unfortunate, the overall spaces survive--i.e., have not been subdivided. Also, much of their original character survives, as noted above.

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 N/A
(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.

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): N/A

- 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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

entertainment/recreation

Period of Significance

1924-44

Significant Dates

none

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Wogan and Bernard, Architects

Conner, Bryant and Bell, Contractors

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Prince Hall Masonic Temple, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA
Section number 8 Page 1

The Prince Hall Masonic Temple is locally significant in the area of entertainment/recreation because it housed two facilities, the Temple Theatre and the Temple Roof Garden, which were entertainment focal points for black Baton Rougeans. The period of significance spans from 1924, the date of construction, to 1944, the fifty year cutoff. The theatre and ballroom continued to play important roles into the post-World War II era.

At one time or another during the historic period there were three theatres in Baton Rouge for the city's large black population: the Grand, which according to city directories closed c.1936; McKinley Theatre, which first appears in the 1936 city directory; and the Temple Theatre, which operated from the building's construction into the post-war era. Of these, only the Temple survives. Of course, in the pre-television era movie theatres were major sources of entertainment. The Temple attracted patrons from not only Baton Rouge, but nearby Scotlandville, where Southern University, a black institution, is located. According to individuals interviewed for this nomination, there was no theatre in Scotlandville during the historic period. In addition to movies, the Temple also hosted vaudeville acts.

The Temple's legendary claim to fame in Baton Rouge's black community is the Temple Roof Garden. Stories about dances held in the ballroom are legion. Apparently its heyday as the place to go was in the late 1930s and 1940s. It was particularly popular among youth clubs for dances. Interviewees recall hiring a band when they were flush, or when times were tight, paying someone to "spin" records. However, it was the "big name" bands brought to the Temple Roof Garden by the management that fill the memories of black Baton Rougeans, who reminisce about hundreds of people dancing the night away to the sounds of such well-known bands and entertainers as Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, Louie Armstrong, Cab Calloway, and the like. An ad appearing in January 1938 proclaimed the Temple Roof Garden the "finest dancing hall South." A headline in the same issue of The Baton Rouge Post read "Harlem Play Girls Swing Before a Record Crowd." "It was a gay night for all on the beautiful Temple Roof Garden," wrote the reporter. Like the theatre, the ballroom drew its patrons from Baton Rouge and nearby Southern University. According to interviewees, there were no other comparable facilities in the city available to blacks during the historic period.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Prince Hall Masonic Temple, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA

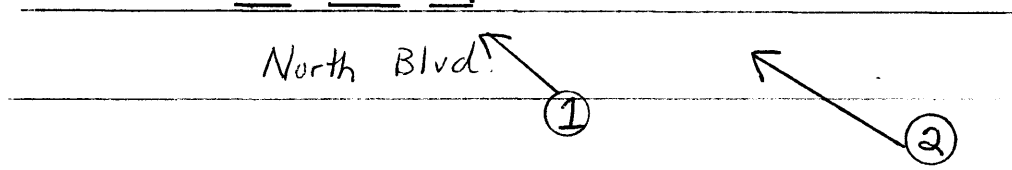
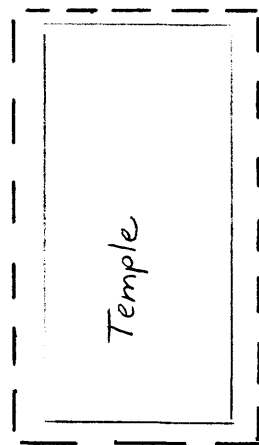
Section number 9 Page 1

Bibliography

Baton Rouge City Directories.

Baton Rouge Post, December 25, 1937, January 8, 15, and 22, 1938.

Recorded interviews with Robert Buffington, Albert Charles O'Dell, Isadore Tansil and Thelma Parnham. These individuals were of high school and college age or older during the historic period. Mr. Buffington's older brother was the manager of the building.



1" = 60'

Prince Hall
Masonic Temple
Baton Rouge
East Baton Rouge Parish
LA

--- BOUNDARY

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 94000498

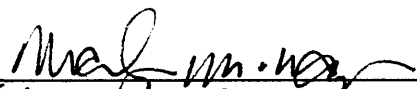
Date Listed: 6/2/94

Prince Hall Masonic Temple
Property Name

E. Baton Rouge LOUISIANA
County State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.


for **Signature of the Keeper**

6/8/94
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section No. 8

This nomination is amended to include Ethnic Heritage--Black as an area of significance.

This change was confirmed by phone with the Louisiana SHPO (6/7/94)

DISTRIBUTION:
National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)