

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received APR 25 1988
date entered

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

1. Name

historic King Block

and/or common King Block/Crossroads Theater

2. Location

street & number 316-324 Memorial Parkway (formerly Burnet Street) NA not for publication

city, town New Brunswick vicinity of

state New Jersey code 034 county Middlesex code 023

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	NA	<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 Lee Richardson

street & number 316 Memorial Parkway

city, town New Brunswick vicinity of state New Jersey 08903

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Record Office, Middlesex County Courthouse

street & number John F. Kennedy Square

city, town New Brunswick state New Jersey 08903

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Hiram Market Neighborhood & Architectural Survey 10/11/79 - Hiram Market Historic District
has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date August 1982 federal state county local

depository for survey records Office of New Jersey Heritage, CN 404,

city, town Trenton state New Jersey 08625

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 type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

A commercial building in the Italianate style, the King Block retains a high degree of exterior architectural integrity. It was constructed in the mid-19th century in the midst of a bustling commercial district as one of the most substantial buildings in the area. Its well-constructed features are virtually a catalog of typical elements and embellishments of commercial architecture of its day, and yet it is currently a rare survivor of its type in New Brunswick.

The three-story brick building is divided into two sections, one six bays wide, the other seven bays wide, and each section of the building originally contained two storefronts. The hard, dark red brick has very thin "butter" joints in a dark gray mortar. At the center of the facade is a stone tablet inscribed "KING BLOCK", the name by which the structure has been known since it was built. The sides of the building, originally party walls, are of a more common type of brick with a porous surface and wider joints. These walls have been stuccoed.

The flat roof, sloping slightly toward the rear of the structure, is accented on the facade by a large-scale cornice. It features a fascia of intertwining circles and paired wooden consoles at the bay divisions. This detailing remains in good condition, and comparison with late-19th century photographs reveals that little has changed on the exterior of the upper floors since that time. The second and third floors contain tall four-over-four sash windows under low-arch pediments and label moldings, apparently of painted cast iron. The projecting window sills on bracketed feet are also apparently cast iron.

The first floor storefronts have been altered from their original appearance by years of changing uses. The wide cornice and entablature over the storefronts remains, as do some diamond-pattern transoms above boarded-up plate glass windows. The central bays retain the appearance of shopfronts, even though the windows, frames, and bulkheads have been replaced in the 20th century. Storefronts on the ends of the building have been more drastically altered, one with the insertion of a metal garage-type door.

The rear of the building is brick and stucco; windows on this elevation are six over six sash with a fixed row of three panes across the bottom. Historic maps of the area show an irregular outline to the rear plan of the building, probably representing multiple one-and-a-half and two-story additions begun almost as soon as the main portion of the building was completed. These have recently been demolished, and the rear of the building has been painted, stuccoed, and sided with vertically laid wood to enclose the reduced-size structure.

The interior of the King Block has been modified over the years as the building itself declined from a first-class dry-goods store to a garage. Presently, much of the building is used by the Crossroads Theater Company, who have installed a small stage and tiered seating on the second floor. The upper

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floor of the building contains offices and workrooms for the theater; the first floor is used for prop storage and maintenance materials. The interior has no elements of historic architectural significance. Any ornamentation, such as the pressed metal ceilings, or built-in cabinets and shelves which one might expect to find in a surviving 19th century commercial building are entirely absent. It is uncertain that they ever existed at the King Block, for a murky photograph of the interior from a 1909 New Brunswick self-promotion piece indicates only the most utilitarian and moveable type of display cabinets and other fixtures. Currently the "historic" features of the interior consist of only exposed brick walls on the gable ends of the building and a common wooden floor.

The King Block is contemporary with cast iron commercial buildings in New York and other major cities, but a traditional masonry load-bearing structural system was used in its construction. Interior supports are heavy brick piers, finished with plaster, as well as the bearing walls which divide the building into four units.

Turn-of-the-century photographs show that the storefront incorporated cast iron piers to support the facade between display windows. These survive on the facade although their moldings and caps have been removed or covered by later additions.

All adjacent buildings have been demolished within the past decade, leaving the King Block alone, rather than as an integral part of the urban fabric in which it was built. The King Block now faces a one way street which serves as an access ramp to Route 18 southbound. However, it remains an impressive landmark for the automobile traveller speeding past New Brunswick, and a handsome survivor of mid-19th century commercial architecture.

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 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 type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input 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 ca. 1860 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The King Block is a mid-19th century commercial building, a vernacular version of the Italianate style. Commercial buildings of similar style and scale were a hallmark of mid-19th century urban America, and this well-preserved building is one of the few remaining examples from that era in New Brunswick. It is the largest standing 19th century business block in the area once known as Hiram Market, and one of the last evidences of the commercial vitality of that area.

The King Block was built about the time the of the Civil War in the heart of New Brunswick's bustling commercial district, at what was then known as 314-320 Burnet Street. When erected, the King Block looked across Burnet Street to Commerce Square, and the site of the old city market. The Delaware and Raritan Canal ran parallel to Burnet Street, and many of the travelers and merchants conducting their business there would pass by the King Block on their way to the City Wharf just west on Burnet Street.

The King Block seems to have been named for an early 19th century gentleman who owned a great deal of real estate in New Brunswick. In the 1820's George King acquired the lots where the King Block now stands; because of their central location in the business district, there were probably buildings on the lots at that time.

At King's death in 1853, his sister, Elizabeth Armstrong, and her nephew William Armstrong inherited the property. William Armstrong apparently had the new building constructed on his property, and named it to honor his generous uncle.

One source indicates that the King Block was built for Stoddard, Duncan and Van Pelt, "Dealers in Dry Goods, Carpeting, Floor Oil-Cloths, Matting, Lace Curtains, etc." according to the 1887 publication, Leading Manufacturers and Merchants. At that time, this was one of the oldest and largest retail businesses in the state. It was started in 1817, and for many years was known as Dayton, Stoddard and Co. When C.P. Dayton retired in 1864, William Stoddard became head of the firm, and went into partnership with Kenneth J. Duncan and Gilbert Van Pelt. The business may well have chosen this time of internal reorganization to construct a store. The same 1887 article states that "The premises now occupied were specially erected for business, and the firm utilizes the whole building, which is 28 x 150 feet in dimensions." This is the size of one of the four units within the King Block. It is inconsistent with the architecture of the unified facade to imagine that each unit of the King Block was erected separately. Stoddard, Duncan and Van Pelt may have contracted with

9. Major Bibliographical References

(See attached bibliography)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .308 acres

Quadrangle name New Brunswick

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

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

B

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

Block 4, Lots 25,26,27,28 of the City of New Brunswick;
bounded east by Memorial Parkway, at the intersection of the
former Peace Street and Burnet Street.

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

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Janet W. Foster

organization ACROTERION

date January 1987

street & number 45-A Macculloch Ave.

telephone 201-984-9660

city or town Morristown

state New Jersey 07960

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.

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer signature Allen A. Senneker

title Assistant Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources date 12/03/87

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

John A. Brown
Keeper of the National Register

date 5-26-88

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

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Armstrong to lease a portion of the building even before it was constructed; at any rate they remained in the King Block until 1906.

The American Journal of Commerce from about 1900 reported on K. J. Duncan and Co., the successor firm to Stoddard, Duncan and Van Pelt. The brief article notes that the firm "have occupied the present store for many years [and] the building was erected after the fire of 1864." The fire explains the fate of the buildings which are presumed to have been on the site when William Armstrong inherited the property in 1853, although it does not fully clarify whether the King Block was built, at least in part, specifically for the Stoddard Dry Goods firm.

When its occupants were first noted in a city directory in 1865, the block contained four separate business establishments: H. Towle and Co. Dry Goods and Carpets; Vliet and Snedeker, Merchant Tailors; Wm. H. Armstrong, Stoves, Tinware, and Sheet Iron; and Stoddard, Duncan and Van Pelt, Dry Goods, sharing the space with "David Clark's Celebrated Photographic Gallery". Armstrong the tinsmith is presumably also the William Armstrong who developed the property. He retained a shop here until about 1880. The building remained home to a number of dry goods stores through the end of the 19th century, and photographs from the turn-of-the-century show the King Block tightly nestled within a dense commercial area.

A great number of the neighboring buildings were wooden, as far as can be discerned from photographs, with covered sidewalks projecting from their facades like porches on so many country stores. The King Block was built using the same vernacular Italianate vocabulary of cornice brackets, window hoods, and broad-windowed storefronts that characterized adjacent commercial buildings, but the King Block was constructed better, on a larger scale, and in a more urban spirit than the small wooden buildings around it.

Beginning in the 20th century, as the commercial center of New Brunswick shifted away from the defunct canal and toward the railroad, the Hiram Market area changed from one of retail establishments to light manufacturing and warehouse facilities. The King Block reflected these changes as well. In 1916, for instance, one dry goods store remained in the building, but two of the units were occupied by the Bayuk Brothers Cigar Manufacturing Co., and one by the New Brunswick Cornice Works. Later in the 20th century the first floor was used for automobile served establishments while the upper lofts housed small clothing and hat manufacturing concerns. Finally, by the mid-1960's, the building was largely vacant, reflecting the morbidity of downtown New Brunswick, and of American

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cities in general. The adoption of the building by the Crossroads Theater Company gave a struggling performing arts company an inexpensive home, and provided the use and minimal maintenance necessary to keep the King Block standing while other structures around it were vandalized, condemned, and ultimately razed.

The King Block is one of the last, and the best preserved relics of Burnet Street's heyday as the commercial center of New Brunswick.

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