

**LOEW'S 175TH STREET THEATRE (NOW UNITED PALACE)**, 4140 Broadway (aka 4140-4156 Broadway, 40-54 Wadsworth Avenue, 651-661 West 175th Street, 650-662 West 176th Street), Manhattan

Built 1929-30; Thomas W. Lamb, architect

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2145, Lot 1

On February 3, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Loew's 175th Street Theatre and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 19). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A representative of the building's owner spoke in opposition to the proposed designation. There were no speakers in favor of the proposed designation. The Commission also received 22 letters in favor of designation, including letters from theater historian Ben M. Hall; Professor James Marston Fitch of Columbia University, writing on behalf of the Municipal Art Society; two representatives of the British Music Hall Society; architect Richard Dattner; architect and planner Barry Benepe; a representative of the Historic Buildings Committee of the American Institute of Architects; the curator of the Theater Collection of the New York Public Library's Performing Arts Library; and the general manager of the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

On November 12, 2015, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a special public hearing on Backlog Initiative Items in the Borough of Manhattan, including the Loew's 175th Street Theatre and the related Landmark Site (Item F—Borough of Manhattan B, Group 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three representatives of the owner, including Reverend Barbara Tilley of the United Palace House of Inspiration, testified in opposition to the proposed designation. Eight speakers testified in favor of the proposed designation, including representatives of Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and Community Board 12, former Council Member Robert Jackson, and representatives of Explore New York, the Historic Districts Council, New York Landmarks Conservancy, and Save Harlem Now!. The Commission also received letters in opposition to the proposed designation from United States Representative Charles B. Rangel; Council Member for the adjacent 9th District Inez E. Dickens; and Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez, who stated that he was opposed to designating the Loew's 175th Street Theatre without a comprehensive plan for considering other potential Landmarks within this Council District. The Commission received seven written submissions in favor of the proposed designation, including one from the Municipal Art Society; and 1,086 letters, on United Palace letterhead, in opposition to designation (this number may include duplicates).

Statements about support for the Loew's 175th Street Theatre during the backlog process reflect specific testimony given or submitted during the hearing or while the record was open. In addition, the Commission received numerous more general communications about the backlog that were directed at all items on the backlog. These items were not specifically submitted while the record was open. Due to the volume and variety of these more general emails they are not tallied for individual buildings.

## Summary

Commanding an entire block in Manhattan's Washington Heights neighborhood and featuring exuberant terra-cotta ornament, the Loew's 175th Street Theatre exemplifies the American movie palace at its most monumental and spectacular. It was one of a select handful of venues billed by Loew's as its "Wonder Theatres," enormous neighborhood movie palaces opened in 1929 and 1930 that were among the most lavish ever constructed in New York City. Bounded by West 175th and 176th Streets, Broadway, and Wadsworth Avenue and reaching 60 feet in height, it is a massive building, unusual among Manhattan movie palaces for its construction as "a freestanding structure, built to be viewed—and admired—from all sides." It was the first theater in Washington Heights designed specifically for talking pictures, and upon its opening, in 1930, it was hailed by the press as "mammoth" and "magnificent" and as "one of the most costly and elaborate" theaters in the Loew's chain.



The architect of the Loew's 175th Street Theatre, Thomas W. Lamb, was Loew's "most favored architect," the renowned designer of more than 300 theaters across the country and around the world. Rare in New York City for its use of historic Indian architectural elements, it was one of a small group of "Indo-Persian" movie theaters designed by Lamb between 1928 and 1932 that are considered to be his "last great palaces." Its intricate and unconventional terra-cotta ornament, which covers the entire 175th Street facade and includes elaborate tiered pilasters, ziggurats, lancet arches, hexagonal motifs, and muqarnas, was in keeping with Lamb's goal of providing moviegoers with a "thoroughly foreign" experience "in which the mind is free to frolic and becomes receptive to entertainment." Remarkably well-preserved, the building possesses its original entrance doors, box office, vertical blade sign, and imposing corner marquee, the only one of Loew's Wonder Theatres to retain all of these features from the day of its opening.

Over nearly four decades, the Loew's 175th Street Theatre introduced Washington Heights moviegoers to dozens of classic films and hosted appearances by movie stars such as Eleanor Powell, Judy Garland, Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, and Joan Crawford. By the 1960s, the economics of operating large urban movie theaters had become increasingly difficult, and in 1969, Loew's sold the building to the United Christian Evangelistic Association, led by Reverend Frederick Joseph Eikerenkoetter II, known as Reverend Ike, who renamed it the United Palace. At the United Palace, Reverend Ike's ministry reached its peak, welcoming thousands of worshippers each week and becoming one of the country's largest congregations. Reverend Ike's television program, which was the first hosted by an African-American religious leader when it debuted in 1973, often featured him on the United Palace stage. Maintained in an excellent state of preservation, the United Palace continues to function as a house of worship while hosting community performing-arts groups, film screenings, and other cultural events, acting as a valuable neighborhood resource while still representing "the apogee of movie palace glamour in those long-gone days when Hollywood ruled the world."

## DESCRIPTION

Designed by Thomas W. Lamb and constructed in 1929-30, the Loew's 175th Street features four primary facades and fills the entire block bounded by West 175th and 176th Streets, Broadway, and Wadsworth Avenue. The building consists of two basic blocks, one containing the theater—entered under the marquee at the building's southwest corner—and the other consisting of a two-story portion extending along Broadway, constructed to house retail and office space. Although technically one story in height, the theater block includes the auditorium, which towers above the retail and office block. At the time of designation, the retail and office block did not contain any retail tenants.

### **West (Broadway) Facade, Theater Block**

*Historic:* Projecting pavilion at south end of facade containing main entrance; recessed bronze-and-glass doors and transoms within foliated frames; ticket booth with marble base, ticket windows crowned by cusped arches, and metal window surrounds with engaged columns and cusped pediments; terra-cotta soffit with light fixtures; sign board over main entrance; display cases with metal frames flanking main entrance; chamfered marquee wrapping southwest corner of building; rusticated blocks with incised terra-cotta ornament, including vermiculation, flanking main entrance; upper portions of pavilion feature multi-story ziggurat-shaped panel with rosettes, pointed-arch, hexagon motifs, and muqarnas; panel flanked by tiered, fluted pilasters with complex cushion capitals; capitals crowned by blind openings with pointed arches and intricate surrounds; complex moldings capped by angled, outwardly projecting cornice; high parapet with intricate ornament including pedestals, capitals, and scrolls; copper molding with pointed projections crowning parapet; projecting multi-story blade sign; north face of pavilion similar to west face; lower, two-story pavilion between main theater entrance and main entrance to retail and office block, featuring display cases with metal frames, foliate relief, and classical cornice at ground story and pointed-arch niche, recessed panels, and elaborate cornice with cusped cresting at second story; paneled brick west wall of auditorium rising above second story of retail-and-office building; metal fire escape with decorative railing and arched roof; terra-cotta parapets; brick chimney with terra-cotta cap at north end of facade.

*Alterations:* Plaque next to main entrance; through-wall air conditioner in base of ticket booth; roll-down security gate with gate box and conduit; underside of marquee covered with sign; sign board of marquee covered and/or replaced; "LOEW'S 175TH ST." lettering and finial removed from blade sign; fallout shelter sign north of main entrance; downspouts on fire escape.

### **West (Broadway) Facade, Retail and Office Block**

*Historic:* Entrance to building's second story at south end; recessed pair of bronze entrance doors and round-arch-headed transom; display cases with metal frames, foliate relief, and foliated cornice at ground story south of entrance; pointed-arch niche and ziggurat at second story; elaborate second-story pavilion cornice with cusped cresting; storefront openings with sign bands and cornices; foliated sill course below second-story windows; ornate pilasters between square-headed second-story window openings; window openings crowned by continuous bands and deep cornice decorated with rosettes, geometric ornament, and other foliated ornament; pitched roof.

*Alterations:* Roll-down security gate, gate box, and light fixtures at main entrance; standpipe; replacement storefront infill below sign bands; replacement second-story windows (originally Chicago windows with transoms); replacement roofing material (originally copper).

### **North (176th Street) Facade, Retail and Office Block**

*Historic:* Chamfered corner; entrance opening set asymmetrically within large patterned gray-brick field; storefront sign band and cornice; second story similar to that of Broadway facade; two elaborate finials at corner of rooftop.

*Alterations:* Replacement entrance door, light fixture, and other infill; entrance awning; replacement storefront infill below sign band; sign, conduit, light fixtures, and cameras at storefront; replacement second-story windows (originally Chicago windows with transoms); replacement roofing material (originally copper).

### **North (176th Street) Facade, Theater Block**

*Historic:* Rusticated brick ground story; four entrances, including freight entrance at western end of facade; second-through-seventh-story window openings with three-over-three double-hung windows above freight entrance; terra-cotta parapets; display cases flanking entrance east of freight entrance; recessed ground-story panels with terra-cotta frames; terra-cotta ornament at upper stories east of freight entrance similar to that on Broadway and 175th Street facades; chimney with terra-cotta cap; copper molding with pointed projections crowning eastern portion of parapet; rooftop tower, octagonal in plan, with two openings on each face, and with dome.

*Alterations:* Roll-down security gate with gate box at freight entrance; gate, awning, and “stage door” sign at adjacent entrance; replacement doors; louver, light fixtures, conduit, and cameras at ground story; storm sash at small second-story window; tower mostly covered in siding, resulting in removal or covering of original ornament, including decorative piers, cusped arches, cornice and diamond-patterned panels below dome; copper grilles replaced with decorative panels within tower openings; corner finials removed from tower; rooftop light fixtures on poles; dome painted; metal rooftop star on cylindrical base.<sup>1</sup>

### **East (Wadsworth Avenue) Facade**

*Historic:* Rusticated terra-cotta ground floor with incised terra-cotta ornament including vermiculation; door openings; blind terra-cotta openings at ground floor; metal fire escape with decorative railing and arched roof; upper portions of facade similar to Broadway and West 176th Street facades of theater block; tower at north end of facade (see above).

*Alterations:* Ground-story light fixtures, replacement doors, standpipe, conduit, and cameras; large metal HVAC duct on roof; see above for tower alterations.

### **South (West 175th Street) Facade**

*Historic:* Similar to other primary facades; door openings at each end of facade; ground floor display cases; marquee continued from Broadway facade.

*Alterations:* Replacement doors; cameras; conduit; soffit of marquee covered; sign board of marquee covered and/or replaced.

## SITE HISTORY

### Washington Heights<sup>2</sup>

The Washington Heights neighborhood of northern Manhattan extends from around 155th Street to Dyckman Street between the Hudson and East Rivers. It acquired its present name—a reference to its many Revolutionary-era forts, including Forts Washington, Tryon, and George—by the 1880s. By that time, Washington Heights had become a favored location for the summer estates of wealthy New Yorkers, who were attracted by its breathtaking views and country air. Several large institutions had also opened there, including the Deaf and Dumb Asylum near Fort Washington Avenue and 165th Street, and the New York Juvenile Asylum between 176th and 178th Streets near Eleventh (now St. Nicholas) Avenue, both of which have been demolished. The area remained primarily rural until the arrival of the I.R.T. Subway Line (today's #1 Line), which reached 157th Street in 1904 and as far north as 181st Street by 1906. This opened the area to intensive development and attracted additional institutions, including those at the Audubon Terrace cultural complex (1904-23, a designated New York City Historic District), as well as Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center and Yeshiva University, both of which opened in the late 1920s. New apartment houses catered to tenants of varying incomes and backgrounds, with Broadway generally serving as a dividing line between the working-class eastern and southern sections of the neighborhood and its more upscale areas to the north and west, which were situated on and around the high ground overlooking the Hudson River.

Planned in the late 1920s and opened along St. Nicholas and Fort Washington Avenues in 1932, the Eighth Avenue IND Subway, or A Train, vastly improved the neighborhood's access to Midtown and Lower Manhattan. It included a stop at 175th Street, one block west of the new Loew's Theatre. The neighborhood's abundant open space and recreational facilities, including Highbridge, Fort Tryon, and Fort Washington Parks, added to its appeal, and by the 1930s, sizeable Jewish, Greek, and Irish communities had developed there. Washington Heights' African-American, Cuban, and Puerto Rican communities grew considerably starting in the 1960s, and by the middle of that decade, the neighborhood had begun attracting large numbers of immigrants from the Dominican Republic. During the 1980s, Washington Heights attracted the largest number of immigrants of any New York City neighborhood; by 1990, the Dominican community there and in neighboring Inwood was the biggest in the country. As in many of the city's majority African-American and Latino neighborhoods, substantial gentrification and increases in the white population have occurred in recent years.

### The American Movie Industry and Movie Palaces<sup>3</sup>

The first exhibition of a projected movie to a paying audience took place in April of 1896 at Koster & Bial's Music Hall on 34<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan, where Thomas Edison's "latest marvel," the Vitascope, was used to show short films depicting boxing matches, dancing, and "Kaiser Wilhelm reviewing his troops," among other subjects.<sup>4</sup> Such films soon became a regular part of vaudeville programs. Exhibitors also began showing silent movies to small but enthusiastic crowds in partitioned-off sections of existing entertainment venues and in newly-converted storefront theaters, which by 1905 had taken the popular name of nickelodeons because of the customary five-cent charge for admission.<sup>5</sup>

Soon theaters began to be built specifically for movies. Several major film-making companies were established, including the Universal Film Manufacturing Company (1912), Famous Players Film Company (1912), and the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company (1913), all

producing feature-length films that lasted an hour or more. In the 1910s, film producers began moving their production studios to Hollywood to avoid winter shutdowns, although the filmmakers' executive offices remained in New York City. In the post-World War I period, the Hollywood studios produced extravaganzas such as Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1923); James Cruze's *The Covered Wagon* (1923), the first Western epic; and *Ben Hur* (1925), a worldwide hit. A major breakthrough came in 1927 with *The Jazz Singer*, the first feature with synchronized dialogue and musical numbers, which ushered in the end of the silent film era.

As the popularity of movies increased, movie theaters grew in size and lavishness, drawing from a variety of exotic building types and locales, including Baroque palaces, Mediterranean villas, Gothic cathedrals, and Indian and Chinese temples. Among the earliest examples of what came to be known as the movie palace were the Audubon Theatre and Ballroom at Broadway and 165<sup>th</sup> Street (Thomas W. Lamb, 1912, portions of façade incorporated in later building); the Venetian-palazzo-inspired Regent Theater at West 116th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard (Thomas W. Lamb, 1912-13, a designated New York City Landmark); and the Strand Theater at 47<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway (Thomas W. Lamb, 1914, demolished). Movie palaces seated several thousand people and offered vaudeville, organ recitals, orchestras, comedians, magicians, and a full-length feature film—all for as little as 25 cents. As theater operators started expanding their operations to meet demand, they aligned themselves with specific Hollywood studios to eliminate competition over the same films. This enabled a small group of exhibitors, among them Marcus Loew, Benjamin Franklin Keith, Edward Albee, William Fox, and Balaban & Katz to create national chains controlling hundreds of theaters. The majority of the movie palaces were designed by a few architects who specialized in theater design, including John Ebersson, Rapp & Rapp, C. Howard Crane, Thomas W. Lamb, Walter Ahlschlager, B. Marcus Priteca, and G. Albert Lansburgh; their ornate exteriors and interiors made the “buildings attractions unto themselves.”<sup>6</sup> Typically, movie palaces had cavernous lobbies and lounges, sweeping staircases, walls enriched with columns, elaborate moldings, polychrome and gilded surfaces, decorative ironwork, sculpture and fountains, opulent drapery and furniture, oil paintings, and grand chandeliers.

The grand eclectic designs of the 1920s gradually gave way in the 1930s to the modernistic motifs of Art Deco and Art Moderne. Some movie theaters were as large as the earlier palaces, including the world's largest at the time of its construction, Radio City Music Hall (exterior and interiors by Donald Deskey, 1931-32; within the Rockefeller Center Historic District and a designated New York City Interior Landmark). During the Depression of the 1930s, however, smaller theaters became the norm and the great age of movie palace construction came to an end.

#### Marcus Loew and Loew's, Inc.<sup>7</sup>

One of the titans of the early movie industry, Marcus Loew was born in New York City in 1870 and raised on the Lower East Side. Both of his parents were Jewish immigrants; his father, a waiter, had immigrated from Austria, and his mother was born in Germany. Loew began selling newspapers on the street, eventually published his own paper, and later became a furrier. Around the turn of the century he met Adolph Zukor, who was also in the fur business, and the two soon became friends and neighbors on the Upper West Side. In the early 1900s, Zukor established the Automatic Vaudeville Company and opened a lavish penny arcade on East 14th Street. Loew briefly invested in his friend's business in 1904 but soon struck out on his own, creating the People's Vaudeville Company in partnership with actor David Warfield and opening

a penny arcade on West 23rd Street. While opening another arcade in Cincinnati in 1905, Loew had the chance to visit a small projection movie theater in a converted dwelling in Covington, Kentucky. Witnessing the commercial possibilities of the format, he soon installed projectors in his own establishments. Two years later, Loew purchased a theater building in Brooklyn and converted it into a movie house. The Royal Theater opened in January of 1908 showing a mixed bill of short motion pictures and vaudeville acts at a ticket price of ten cents, a format that came to be known as small-time vaudeville.<sup>8</sup>

Loew's business began to expand rapidly in 1909, when he obtained the backing of the prominent theater owners the Shubert Brothers and took control of several large Manhattan theaters. He took his company public in 1910 under the name Loew's Consolidated Enterprises, with Adolph Zukor as treasurer and Nicholas Schenck as secretary. In that year, the firm also began construction on its flagship 2,800-seat National Theater in the Bronx, the first theater building erected specifically for the Loew's Company.<sup>9</sup> In 1911, Loew acquired the Morris vaudeville circuit, which gained him interest in 100 theaters nationwide including the prominent American Theatre on 42nd Street in Times Square; the firm was subsequently reorganized as Loew's Theatrical Enterprises.<sup>10</sup>

Loew's continued to show a mixed bill of short one- and two-reel motion pictures interspersed with variety acts through the 1910s. By the middle of the decade, however, several studios were releasing feature-length films that were meant to be exhibited as complete entertainments in their own right rather than as adjuncts to a stage show. Adolph Zukor helped introduce the format to America through his Famous Players Film Company, producing, in 1913, the pioneering features *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Prisoner of Zenda*. By the end of the decade, Loew was convinced that feature films would play a key role in his business' future and he began another expansion that would turn his company into the country's largest producer of movies. Reorganized as Loew's, Inc. in 1919, the firm acquired Metro Pictures Corporation in 1920 to ensure a steady supply of feature films for its theaters. In 1924, Loew's purchased the Goldwyn Pictures Corporation and Louis B. Mayer Pictures, merging the three studios into Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. With the consolidation of M-G-M under Loew's corporate umbrella, the company controlled every aspect of film production, distribution, and exhibition. Loew's, along with Paramount Pictures, Fox Film Corporation (later 20th Century Fox), RKO Radio Pictures, and Warner Bros., constituted the "Big Five" of the Hollywood studio system.

In the meantime, Loew had continued expanding his theater empire, adding movie houses across the country and internationally. In 1921, Loew's built a 16-story office building on Broadway between 45th and 46th Streets housing the Loew's State Theatre, a 3,200-seat movie palace designed by Thomas W. Lamb.<sup>11</sup> Marcus Loew died in 1927 at the height of his success, having grown the company into a 144-theater chain and major movie studio.

Nicholas Schenck took the helm of Loew's, and he quickly brokered a deal ensuring that Loew's would remain New York's premier exhibitor of motion pictures. In 1925, Adolph Zukor had helped arrange the merger of his Famous Players-Lasky Company with the Chicago movie-palace empire of Balaban & Katz, which controlled 500 theaters. The new company, named Paramount-Publix, constructed the Paramount Building (Rapp & Rapp, 1926-27, a designated New York City Landmark) in Times Square and announced plans for nine additional New York theaters, including the Brooklyn Paramount (Rapp & Rapp, 1928, altered), alarming Schenck, who was already concerned about the mounting cost of stage shows and the expansion plans of smaller theater chains in New York City. In December of 1927, Schenck and Zukor came to an agreement in which Paramount-Publix would continue to operate its Times Square and

Downtown Brooklyn theaters and would build a movie house in Stapleton, Staten Island, where Loew's had no competing theaters. Loew's, in turn, would build no new theaters in Chicago and took over Publix projects, including several so-called "Wonder Theatres" that were planned or underway in New York and Jersey City. Four months later, Thomas W. Lamb filed the plans for the company's new 175th Street Theatre.

### Architect Thomas W. Lamb<sup>12</sup>

Thomas White Lamb (1871-1942) was one of the world's most prolific theater architects. During his career, Lamb designed more than 300 theaters throughout the world, many of which served, and continue to serve, as prominent landmarks of their communities. Not only was Lamb responsible for an enormous number of theaters, but his designs exemplify the adaptation of revival styles popular with the wealthy to buildings designed for use by the masses. The vast majority of Lamb's commissions were for movie theaters, many built with a scale and richness reminiscent of the great palaces of Europe.

Lamb was born in Dundee, Scotland. By 1883, his family had moved to New York City where his father worked as an engineer. Lamb opened an architectural office around 1892 before he had undertaken any particular architectural training. He enrolled at the Cooper Union in 1894, graduated in 1898, and worked for a time as a city building inspector and plan examiner. Lamb's earliest-known commissions as an architect were for a three-story hotel on 125th Street in Harlem and for the clubhouse of the Pastime Athletic Club on 79th Street in 1903.

Lamb soon aligned himself with the entertainment industry and in particular the emerging motion-picture business. His first-known theater-related job was a minor alteration in 1904 to the Gotham Theatre at 165 East 125th Street.<sup>13</sup> This led to a number of additional alteration projects and eventually to commissions for entirely new theater buildings. In 1908, he designed a storefront movie house in the Bronx for the Nicoland Amusement Company.<sup>14</sup> Lamb quickly went from designing humble nickelodeons to lavish movie theaters. In 1909, he was hired by William Fox—later the founder of the Fox Film Corporation—to draw up plans for the opulent City Theatre located in the heart of the 14th Street entertainment district.<sup>15</sup> Fox employed Lamb for subsequent projects, including the Washington Theatre in 1910 and the Audubon Theatre and Ballroom in 1912.<sup>16</sup> Other theater chains soon took notice of his work; Loew's first commission from Lamb may have been for the Orpheum Theatre in 1911, which was followed by the Loew's Avenue B on the Lower East Side, the Loew's Boulevard in the Bronx, and the Loew's Bedford in Brooklyn.<sup>17</sup>

After designing Harlem's Regent Theatre—one of the first buildings designed exclusively for movies, opened in 1913—Lamb incorporated his firm, in 1914, under the name Thomas W. Lamb, Inc. That same year, his Strand Theatre near Times Square, widely considered one of the earliest and most influential "deluxe" Midtown theaters, opened.<sup>18</sup> Lamb's firm also designed the Rialto in 1916, the Rivoli and the Capitol—Loew's flagship and the first American theater with more than 5,000 seats—in 1917, as well as the Loew's State Theatre Building in 1921.<sup>19</sup> Lamb's association with Loew's would continue until his death; he designed most of Loew's major American theaters as well as theaters for the firm in Canada, England, Australia, Belgium, the Netherlands, Mexico, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad, Honduras, Sweden, South Africa, Japan, India, and China. Lamb also designed movie palaces and neighborhood theaters for other major chains of the day, including Proctor's, Keith's, RKO, and Trans-Lux, along with many legitimate playhouses, including the Cort Theater (1912-13, a designated New York City Landmark) in the Times Square theater district.



Although best known for his theaters, Lamb's office produced, under his close supervision, a variety of building types, including loft buildings, factories, stables, and houses of worship. Some of his more notable New York buildings include several banks; the Pythian Temple at 135-145 West 70th Street (1926-27, within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District); and the third Madison Square Garden at Eighth Avenue and West 49th Street.<sup>20</sup> Lamb also designed a series of Greyhound bus terminals in New York, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Detroit, and casinos in Miami and New York. He is known to have designed three hotels, including the Paramount Hotel at 235-245 West 46th Street (1927-28, a designated New York City Landmark) and the Pickwick Arms at 230 East 51st Street (1929-31). At the time of his death in 1942, Lamb was still actively involved in the design of theaters. Lamb's death coincided with the end of an era in theater design, as along with widespread suburbanization and the adoption of television in the 1940s and 1950s, the need for large, opulent movie theaters would soon decline.

### Construction and Early Years of the Loew's 175th Street Theatre<sup>21</sup>

The Loew's 175th Street Theatre is one of a select handful of venues, billed by the chain as its "Wonder Theatres," that rank among the most lavish and exotic movie palaces ever built in the New York Metropolitan Area. As a theater construction project, Loew's Wonder Theatre initiative was "unparalleled anywhere," according to the Theatre Historical Society of America.<sup>22</sup> Opened over a period of just 13 months between January 1929 and February 1930, these six theaters in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Washington Heights, and Jersey City, New Jersey, were Loew's neighborhood flagships representing the height of movie-palace design and splendor, with each seating more than 3,000 patrons in air-conditioned comfort and presenting live stage shows from the Capitol Theatre in Times Square. Planned during the boom years of the mid-to-late 1920s, they opened just as talking pictures were supplanting silent film, vastly expanding cinema's appeal and influence as a popular art form and generating enormous revenues for the major studios. All six were designed by leading theater architects of the day, with John Eberson receiving the commissions for the Valencia (1928-29, a designated New York City Landmark) in Jamaica, Queens, and the Paradise (1928-29, a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark) in the Bronx; Rapp & Rapp for the Kings (1928-29) in Flatbush, Brooklyn, and the Jersey (1929) in Jersey City; and Thomas W. Lamb for the Pitkin (1929, altered) in Brownsville, Brooklyn, as well as for the 175th Street Theatre. All of these theaters, except for the Pitkin, featured unique four-manual, 23-rank organs constructed by the Robert Morton Company, which were "the most elaborate [Morton] ever turned out," and have since come to be known as the "Wonder Mortons."<sup>23</sup>

Most of these theaters were originally planned by Paramount-Publix in 1927 as part of its strategy to shake up the New York City market by constructing nine opulent new neighborhood theaters that would directly compete with those of Loew's and other established chains. The "Wonder Theatre" term appears to have originated with Balaban & Katz, one of Paramount-Publix' two predecessor firms, which used it to promote its extravagant Chicago Theatre in 1918 and advertised its four "Wonder Theatres of the World" in Chicago in 1922.<sup>24</sup> Following the December 1927 deal between Paramount and Loew's, in which Loew's agreed to abandon its Chicago expansion if Paramount would scale back its plans for New York City, Loew's took over several of Publix' neighborhood theaters planned for New York. Of the nine theaters announced by Paramount-Publix in March of 1927, four would open as the Loew's Kings, Paradise, Pitkin, and Valencia; two, in Flushing and Hunts Point in the Bronx, seem to have been

abandoned; another, planned for the vicinity of Flatbush Avenue and Nevins Street, opened as the Paramount Brooklyn, while the last theater, at a location then undisclosed, may have been constructed as the Loew's Jersey or as the Paramount on Staten Island.

Although Paramount-Publix also proposed, at that time, a theater for Washington Heights—the journal *Variety* named Broadway and 182nd Street as a possible location—that project did not become the Loew's 175th Street. Separately from Paramount, in 1924, an officer of Loew's, Inc., Len Cohen, had begun acquiring properties in Washington Heights on the block bounded by Broadway, Wadsworth Avenue, and West 175th and 176th Streets, one of the few large unbuilt parcels remaining along Broadway in that area.<sup>25</sup> Over the next three years, Cohen assembled the entire block from more than a dozen separate owners at a cost of several hundred thousand dollars, which he conveyed to the Highbridge Realty Corporation—headed by Nicholas Schenck, the president of Loew's—in February of 1928.<sup>26</sup> One month later, Thomas Lamb filed plans for the new theater with the Department of Buildings, estimating its cost at \$1.25 million, and construction began in May of 1928.<sup>27</sup>

The locations of New York's Wonder Theatres, including the Loew's 175th Street, followed Balaban & Katz's strategy of siting its movie palaces in rapidly developing outlying neighborhoods with good mass-transit access and growing middle-class populations. Middle- and upper-middle-class patrons were especially desirable customers, as they attended the movies more often than the less-affluent customers of smaller neighborhood theaters and were more willing to spend extra money on the stage shows, lavish appointments, and other distinctive amenities of the top-of-the-line movie palaces. With its gleaming new apartment houses attracting upwardly mobile residents, including many second- and third-generation Americans with increasing disposable income and leisure time, Washington Heights was an ideal neighborhood for a Wonder Theatre. At the time of its opening, the Loew's 175th Street was accessible via the I.R.T. Subway and was one block away from a new A-Train Station, then under construction at 175th Street and Fort Washington Avenue, that would open in 1932. Also nearing completion was the George Washington Bridge, which was expected to “greatly increase traffic and retail business, extending the Washington Heights business heart from 181st to 175th Street” upon its completion in October of 1931.<sup>28</sup>

As the Loew's 175th Street Theatre neared completion, final preparations were being made. Nine days before the theater's debut, opera singer Tito Schipa tested its acoustics, pronouncing them “perfect,” and “a large American silk flag presented by a squadron of Boy Scouts was raised over the theater.”<sup>29</sup> After nearly two years of construction, the new building, described in the press as “mammoth” and “magnificent,” opened to the public on Washington's Birthday, February 22, 1930.<sup>30</sup> Advertisements promoted the new Loew's as “the world's most modern theatre” with “fantastic carvings” and “a rajah's ransom in furnishings” that would leave theatergoers “speechless with wonderment!”<sup>31</sup> More than 5,000 people from across New York City attended the patriotic opening-day festivities, which included a parade up Broadway recalling “the march of Washington's army to defend New York against the Hessians.”<sup>32</sup> More than 1,000 Boy Scouts drawn from Manhattan neighborhoods north of 59th Street marched in the parade, including three portraying “The Spirit of '76,” along with the Boy Scout Brass Band, 250 veterans of the World War, and two caissons of the New York National Guard. Loew's president Nicholas Schenck dedicated the theater, which was described as the first in Washington Heights designed specifically for talking pictures and “one of the most costly and elaborate” in the Loew's chain.<sup>33</sup> Press accounts also noted that the Loew's 175th Street was the first New York film theater with two stages, one of which was combined with the theater's disappearing

orchestra pit and consisted of three sections that could be raised or lowered individually. The opening-day program included an appearance by film star Sigrid Holmquist; the talkie *Their Own Desire*, starring Norma Shearer; *Pearls*, a stage show featuring the Chester Hale Girls, the Capitol Theatre's resident dance troupe; as well as a symphonic orchestra performance, organ recital, and comedy show. Initial admission prices varied from a low of 25 cents on weekdays up to 75 cents during prime Saturday and Sunday hours.<sup>34</sup>

From the time of its opening through World War II, the Loew's 175th Street Theatre introduced Washington Heights moviegoers to dozens of films now recognized as classics.<sup>35</sup> During World War II, the theater frequently featured patriotic morale-boosting films such as the Soviet film *The City That Stopped Hitler: Heroic Stalingrad* (1943), *Stage Door Canteen* (1943), and *Rosie the Riveter* (1944), and in 1945, it hosted a jitterbug dance contest and Victory Bond rally.<sup>36</sup> Several film stars made appearances in the 1930s and 1940s, including Eleanor Powell promoting the film *Rosalie*, in 1938; Judy Garland, whose frenzied fans "got beyond even police control" and stole her hat during a 1939 appearance; and Roy Rogers and Dale Evans in 1945.<sup>37</sup>

### Design of the Loew's 175th Street Theatre

The exuberant, eye-catching exterior of the Loew's 175th Street Theatre reflects Marcus Loew's belief that "We sell tickets to theaters, not movies."<sup>38</sup> Unusual for its intricately designed ornament drawing upon historic Indian architecture, it is also remarkable for its commanding street presence. Filling the entire block bounded by West 175th and 176th Streets, Broadway, and Wadsworth Avenue and reaching 60 feet in height, it is the only extant Manhattan theater, according to movie-palace historian Ben M. Hall, constructed as "a freestanding structure, built to be viewed—and admired—from all sides."<sup>39</sup> With Loew's commissions across the country and around the world, Lamb was the firm's "most favored architect," and today, the Loew's 175th Street Theatre is the only intact Wonder Theatre designed by him.<sup>40</sup> Hall considered it to be Lamb's finest remaining work in New York City.<sup>41</sup>

The building consists of two basic blocks, one containing the theater—entered under the marquee at the building's southwest corner—and the other, extending along Broadway, housing retail and office space. The auditorium, running perpendicular to 175th Street and parallel with Wadsworth Avenue, towers above the two-story retail and office block, which follows Broadway's diagonal path. As theater historian Charlotte Herzog has pointed out, movie palace exteriors were meant to function as "show windows" that would entice patrons inside, and Lamb concentrated the theater's ornament around its entrance, surrounding the marquee and covering the entire 175th Street facade with alluring terra-cotta ornament.<sup>42</sup>

The exoticism of the decoration is representative of Lamb's work during this period. Although most of his theaters into the 1920s drew upon classical styles—frequently, the Adamesque—in the late 1920s Lamb began to incorporate influences from increasingly distant times and places, including pre-Columbian, Moorish, Indian, and East Asian architecture.<sup>43</sup> This shift reflected prevailing architectural trends, especially that of Art Deco, which incorporated similar influences, as well as the burgeoning wealth of the movie business and intensifying competition among theater chains, which sought to top each other with increasingly novel, extravagant, and attention-grabbing theaters. But it also resulted from Lamb's belief that theaters should deliver a transcendent experience providing an escape, if only temporary, from the burdens of modern life. In 1928, he told *Motion Picture News* that

To make our audience receptive and interested, we must cut them off from the rest of city life and take them into a rich and self-contained auditorium, where their minds are freed from their usual occupations and freed from their customary thoughts. In order to do this, it is necessary to present to their eyes a general scheme quite different from their daily environment ... and a great deal more elaborate. The theater can afford this, and must afford it for our public is large and in the average not wealthy. The theater is the palace of the average man. As long as he is there, it is his, and it helps him to lift himself out of his daily drudgery.<sup>44</sup>

The 175th Street Theatre was the second of a small group of Asian-inspired theaters designed for the Loew's chain between 1928 and 1932 that were "Lamb's last great palaces," according to historian David Naylor.<sup>45</sup> Speaking of the first of these, the Loew's State Theatre (1928) in Syracuse, Lamb stated that the theater's "Indo-Persian" style, as he termed it, created "an effect thoroughly foreign to our Western minds" and was "particularly effective in creating an atmosphere in which the mind is free to frolic and becomes receptive to entertainment."<sup>46</sup> Most of the 175th Street Theatre's exterior ornament, including its elaborate tiered pilasters, niches, and high panels filled with pointed arches, hexagons, and ziggurats, were also used at Lamb's Pitkin Theatre, which had opened in 1929 and was described as being "reminiscent of Persian or Indian architecture."<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Lamb's chief inspiration appears to have been the architecture of India's 16th-to-18th-century Mughal Empire, which incorporated Indian, Islamic, and Persian influences and includes many of India's greatest landmarks, including the Taj Mahal. The exterior's cusped and lancet arches, elaborate pilasters, and cresting over the large pointed arch on the Broadway facade are consistent with Mughal architecture, as are its hexagonal motifs and honeycomb-like forms known as muqarnas, which are traditional Islamic features incorporated into Mughal-era structures. Its vertical blade sign may have been intended to resemble a minaret attached to the building's side.<sup>48</sup> Lamb appears to have drawn upon historic Indian structures outside the Mughal era as well; David Dunlap, who describes the Loew's 175th Street Theatre as a "delirious masterpiece" and its exterior as "a feast," notes similarities to traditional Hindu temple architecture, as did Ben M. Hall, who saw Dravidian influences, a possible inspiration for the ziggurat-like forms executed on a grand scale on all four facades and crowning the entrance to the Broadway retail and office block.<sup>49</sup> As with movie-palace architecture in general, the ornament was chosen for its evocative qualities—its ability to transport moviegoers to a far-off fantasyland—rather than historical accuracy, and the Loew's 175th Street Theatre remains an outstanding example of the "freewheeling eclecticism that marked so much of the movie-palace style."<sup>50</sup>

### Later History<sup>51</sup>

In 1948, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the major studios' control of the production, distribution, and exhibition of motion pictures constituted a restraint of trade and ordered the studios to "divorce" their production and exhibition operations. Loew's was the last of the major studios to comply with these directives when it finally split into Loew's Theaters Inc. (for exhibition) and Loew's Inc. (later MGM Inc., for production and distribution) in 1954. The companies' assets and debts were so intricately intertwined that they were not completely separated until 1959. By that time, the audience for movies was declining due to the advent of television and mass-suburbanization. Conditions were particularly challenging for Loew's Theaters, Inc. and the other chains that had been formed following divestiture because they were

barred from opening theaters in the suburbs. As the economics of the theater business became more problematic, Loew's began closing theaters, especially its larger houses, which had become increasingly difficult to fill and expensive to run. Even so, from the end of World War II through the 1960s, the Loew's 175th Street Theatre remained a film-lovers' paradise.<sup>52</sup> Tito Puente played the Loew's 175 Street Theatre in 1952, and in 1964, Joan Crawford appeared there to promote her horror film *Strait-Jacket*.<sup>53</sup>

Loew's made various efforts to keep the theater afloat during this period, including the installation of "Vendaticket," billed as "the world's first automated movie theater box office," in 1960, and the closed-circuit presentation of a professional football game in 1964, but the economics of maintaining such a large, elaborate theater without the support of a major studio were becoming prohibitive.<sup>54</sup> In early April of 1969, Reverend Frederick Joseph Eikerenkoetter II—better known as Reverend Ike—and his wife Eula Mae attended a showing of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* there, and "the building made such an impression that they actually arranged with the management ... so that they could move into the building the next day," according to their son Xavier.<sup>55</sup> The purchase price was \$600,000, and the building was conveyed from Loew's to Reverend Ike's United Christian Evangelistic Association on April 4, 1969.<sup>56</sup>

At the peak of his ministry, Reverend Ike was a national phenomenon with more than a million followers from coast to coast.<sup>57</sup> Born in South Carolina in 1935, he was the son of architect, builder, and Baptist minister Frederick Joseph Eikerenkoetter and the former Rema Estelle Matthews, a schoolteacher. Young Frederick became an assistant minister in his father's church at 14 before completing high school and attending, on scholarship, the American Bible College in New York. Following his graduation with a Bachelor's in Theology in 1956, he became an Air Force chaplain, then returned to South Carolina where he founded the United Church of Jesus Christ and, in 1962, the United Christian Evangelistic Association. He and Eula married in 1964 and the following year they moved to Boston, where he established the Miracle Temple and began giving radio sermons. By 1966, when he moved his congregation to a former movie theater on 125th Street in Harlem, he was already known as Reverend Ike, often shortened to "Rev. Ike."<sup>58</sup> Influenced by the New Thought movement, he urged his followers to seek the "Infinite Good" within themselves as a means of achieving a "positive, dynamic, healthy, happy, successful, and prosperous life."<sup>59</sup>

Reverend Ike described the theater, which he renamed the United Palace, as "a famous architectural showplace that takes up an entire city block. It is truly a 'palace.'"<sup>60</sup> Thousands of followers came to see him in the church's new home. "Every week was a big production with music and often telecasts from here," according to Xavier Eikerenkoetter. "It was a kind of pageantry that this building really calls for."<sup>61</sup> By the 1970s, his congregation was one of the largest in the United States. Reverend Ike filled Madison Square Garden in 1971, and in 1973 he became the first African-American religious leader with his own television program, the *Joy of Living*. By 1975, his radio message was being carried by more than 1,700 radio stations and his videotaped sermons were being broadcast in ten major television markets, including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, and San Francisco. Reverend Ike was dedicated to maintaining the theater's original splendor, and over the years, the church has spent millions of dollars on repairing and restoring it.<sup>62</sup>

Ordained at the age of 18, Xavier Eikerenkoetter became the organization's spiritual director following his father's 2009 death. Under his leadership, it has continued to provide childcare and other vital neighborhood services. Eikerenkoetter has broadened its mission, and

although the building continues to serve as a house of worship—holding services every Sunday as well as throughout the week—it also houses the United Palace of Cultural Arts, which hosts a variety of community art programs and performing-arts events. As a result of a recent crowdfunding campaign that paid for a new screen and projection equipment, film presentations returned to the United Palace in 2013. A major supporter of this effort has been the Washington Heights native and Broadway star Lin-Manuel Miranda, who donated \$100,000 towards the campaign, stating that

There is no other theater like the United Palace in New York City, or around the world, really. This theater is special. It’s breathtaking. You don’t just come to sit and watch a movie here; you are transported. The full moviegoing experience always leaves me mesmerized. As a Northern Manhattan native, local resident, and film lover, I am proud to continue to help revitalize this timeless movie palace.”<sup>63</sup>

Classic films presented at the United Palace in recent years have included *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) and *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928), both shown with live organ accompaniment. In 2016, the United Palace began a full restoration of its original “Wonder Morton” organ. The executive director of the United Palace of Cultural Arts, Mike Fitelson, sees the venue providing “a monumental space to see movies in Manhattan,” filling a void created by 2016 closing of the Ziegfeld Theater (Emery Roth & Sons, 1969) in Midtown Manhattan and its conversion into an event space.<sup>64</sup>

Today, the Loew’s 175th Street Theatre remains remarkably intact, possessing its original entrance doors, box office, marquee, and vertical blade sign, the only one of the Loew’s Wonder Theatres to retain all of these original features. The only major exterior change occurred under Reverend Ike’s leadership, when most of the domed tower crowning the building’s northeast corner was covered with siding and a star was installed on its roof.<sup>65</sup> Dating from the brief period in the late 1920s and early 1930s in which movie-palace design reached its most extravagant and exotic peak, the Loew’s 175th Street Theatre continues to represent “the apogee of movie-palace glamour in those long-gone days when Hollywood ruled the world” and remains one of Washington Heights’ most prominent and spectacular landmarks.<sup>66</sup>

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The roof of the dome was originally stenciled and gilded by Aladdin Studios, Inc., according to “Loew’s 175th Street Theatre, New York City,” *Architecture and Building* 62 (1930), 164.

<sup>2</sup> Portions of this section are adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Fort Washington Presbyterian Church Designation Report* (LP-2337) (New York: City of New York), prepared by Gale Harris, 3-4. Other sources include Robert W. Snyder, “Washington Heights,” in Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Encyclopedia of New York City, Second Edition* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2010), 1380.

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- <sup>3</sup> This section was primarily written by Gale Harris of the Landmarks Preservation Commission and was adapted from LPC, *(Former) Loew's Valencia Theater (now Tabernacle of Prayer for All People) Designation Report* (LP-2193) (New York: City of New York, 1999), prepared by Anthony W. Robins, 2. Other sources include Ben M. Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats: the Golden Age of the Movie Palace* (New York: Bramhall House, 1961); Charlotte Herzog, "The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of its Architectural Style," *Cinema Journal* 20 (Spring 1981); Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Russell Merritt, "The Nickelodeon Theater, 1905-1914," in Ina Rae Hark, Ed., *Exhibition, the Film Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); and Adolph Zukor with Dale Kramer, *The Public is Never Wrong: The Autobiography of Adolph Zukor* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1953).
- <sup>4</sup> Hall, 12.
- <sup>5</sup> Sources often cite the June 19, 1905 opening of the Nickelodeon on Smithfield Street in Pittsburgh by Harry David and John P. Harris as the beginning of the storefront movie house phenomenon, although such theaters had already existed for a number of years. See Robert C. Allen, "Motion Picture Exhibition in Manhattan 1906-1912: Beyond the Nickelodeon," *Cinema Journal* 18 (Spring 1979), 2.
- <sup>6</sup> Gomery, 96.
- <sup>7</sup> This section is adapted from LPC, *(Former) Loew's Valencia Theater Designation Report*, 2-3; and LPC, *Loew's Canal Street Theatre Designation Report* (LP-2368) (New York: City of New York, 2010), prepared by Christopher D. Brazee, 3-5. Other sources include LPC Research Department Movie Theater files.
- <sup>8</sup> Loew's Royal Theatre was located at Willoughby and Pearl Streets in Downtown Brooklyn. It was demolished in 1922. See Cezar Del Valle, *The Brooklyn Theater Index, Volume II: Manhattan Avenue to York Street* (Theater Talks, 2010), 237.
- <sup>9</sup> The theater, which has been demolished, was located on East 149th Street near Bergen Avenue. It was designed by Neville & Bagge in association with H. Craig Severance. See "Theatres and Their Decorations," *Architecture and Building* (May 1911), 342.
- <sup>10</sup> The American Theater was located at 644 Eighth Avenue, between 41st and 42nd Streets. Designed by Charles Coolidge Haight and completed in 1895, it has been demolished. See Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and John Massengale, *New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism, 1890-1915* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1983), 220.
- <sup>11</sup> This building has been demolished.
- <sup>12</sup> Portions of this section are adapted from LPC, *(Former) Hamilton Theater Designation Report* (LP-2052) (New York: City of New York, 2000), prepared by Donald G. Presa, 4-5; LPC, *Loew's Canal Street Theatre Designation Report*, 6-8; Andrew Scott Dolkart, "Thomas Lamb," in LPC, *Mark Hellinger Theater (Originally Hollywood Theater) Designation Report* (LP-1338) (New York: City of New York, 1988), 10-13; and LPC, *Paramount Hotel Designation Report* (LP-2342) (New York: City of New York, 2009), 4-5. Other sources include "An Interview with Thomas W. Lamb," *Motion Picture News Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide* (June 30, 1928); Hilary Russell, "An Architect's Progress: Thomas White Lamb," *Marquee: The Journal of the Theatre Historical Society* (First Quarter 1989), 3-40; Annon Adams and Steve Levin, "Loew's Wonder Theatres," *Theatre Historical Society Annual No. 29* (2002), 2; and Christopher Gray, "An Architect for Stage and Screen," *New York Times*, October 10, 2008, RE8.
- <sup>13</sup> This building has been demolished.
- <sup>14</sup> This building has been demolished.
- <sup>15</sup> The City Theatre was located at 114 East 14th Street. It has been demolished.
- <sup>16</sup> The Washington Theatre (1910-11, altered) is located at 1801-1807 Amsterdam Avenue; the Audubon Theatre and Ballroom (1912, front facade partially extant) is at 3940-3960 Broadway.
- <sup>17</sup> Loew's Orpheum Theatre (1911-13, demolished) was located at 168 East 86th Street; Loew's Avenue B Theatre (1912-13, demolished) at 72 Avenue B; and Loew's Boulevard Theatre (1912-13, extant) at 1032 Southern

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Boulevard in the Bronx; Loew's Bedford Theatre (1912-13, altered) at 1362-1372 Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn. Some sources, citing a 1942 obituary notice, claim that Lamb received a commission from Loew as early as 1908, although there appears to be no direct evidence of this.

<sup>18</sup> The Strand Theatre (1913-14, demolished) was located at 1579 Broadway.

<sup>19</sup> The Rialto (1916-17) was located at 1481 Broadway; the Rivoli (1917) at 1620 Broadway; the Capitol Theatre (1917-19) at 1645 Broadway; and the Loew's State Theatre Building (1919-21) at 1540 Broadway. All four have been demolished.

<sup>20</sup> Constructed in 1925-29, the third Madison Square Garden has been demolished.

<sup>21</sup> Portions of this section are adapted from LPC, (*Former*) *Loew's Valencia Theater Designation Report*, 5. Other sources include Gomery, 91-105; *Theatre Historical Society of America Annual No. 29*, 2, 32-39; "Publix's N.Y. Neighborhood Policy: 9 New Theatres; \$20,000,000," *Variety* (March 16, 1927); "Store Leasing Reflects Value of New Bridge," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 2, 1930, E2; "New Theater Has Two Stages," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 2, 1930, G6; "Loew's 175th Street To Open," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 7, 1930, 13; "Loew's 175th Street Will Open Feb. 22," *Yonkers Statesman*, February 10, 1930, 11; "Music Notes," *New York Times*, February 12, 1930, 30; "Schipa Tests Theater's Acoustics," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 13, 1930, 14; "Loew's 175th Street Opening Set for Saturday Afternoon," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 19, 1930, 19; "Loew's 175th St." (Advertisement), *New York Sun*, February 21, 1930, 21; "Loew's 175th Street Opens Today," *New York Evening Post*, February 22, 1930, M5; "Another Loew's House Opens," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 23, 1930, G3; "Loew's 175th St. Opens With Boy Scout Parade," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 23, 1930, 18; "New Loew Theatre Opens," *New York Times*, February 23, 1930, 29; "Loew's 175th St.," *Variety* (February 26, 1930), 49; and LPC Research Department Movie Theater files.

<sup>22</sup> Adams and Levin, 2.

<sup>23</sup> For this reason, the Pitkin is generally excluded from accounts of the Wonder Theatres, with the Valencia, Paradise, Kings, Jersey, and 175th Street considered by many theater historians to be the "true" Wonder Theatres. In other respects, however, the Pitkin was the equal of the other five theaters. It was frequently billed as a Wonder Theatre in Loew's advertisements and featured stage shows from Loew's flagship Capitol Theatre in Times Square. It was also equally large, with 3,727 seats, according to Thomas Lamb's original architectural drawings within the Avery Library archival collections at Columbia University. Moreover, it was a product of the original Paramount-Publix plan that brought the Wonder Theatre concept to the New York area. The Pitkin is the least intact of these theaters. Although it still stands, window openings have been added to its exterior and the interior has been converted into a charter school and retail space.

<sup>24</sup> "Gus Bartram and Vertner Saxton" (Advertisement), *Variety* (March 10, 1922), 29.

<sup>25</sup> Len Cohen was identified as one of Loew's assistant treasurers in the company's 1924 consolidated balance sheet. See *Variety* (November 12, 1924), 7.

<sup>26</sup> New York County, Office of the Register, Conveyance Liber 3624, 146 (November 24, 1924); Liber 3542, 236 (May 20, 1926); Liber 3555, 154 (May 20, 1926); Liber 3564, 246 (May 20, 1926); Liber 3559, 34 (June 17, 1926); Liber 3562, 90 (June 24, 1926); Liber 3624, 144 (June 28, 1926); Liber 3591, 145 (July 6, 1926); Liber 3569, 137 (October 5, 1926); Liber 3624, 139 (October 26, 1926); Liber 3624, 141 (February 8, 1927); Liber 3624, 140 (February 17, 1927); Liber 3624, 143 (February 25, 1927); Liber 3624, 142 (March 7, 1927); Liber 3624, 144 (June 28, 1926); Liber 3624, 145 (September 23, 1926); Liber 3624, 147 (October 22, 1926); Liber 3624, 143 (October 23, 1926); Liber 3624, 146 (December 15, 1926); Liber 3582, 225 (January 6, 1927); Liber 3624, 141 (February 18, 1927); Liber 3624, 142 (March 7, 1927); and Liber 3637, 47 (February 27, 1928).

<sup>27</sup> City of New York Bureau of Buildings, Borough of Manhattan, New Building Application 171-1928 (March 13, 1928).

<sup>28</sup> "Store Leasing Reflects Value of New Bridge."

<sup>29</sup> "Schipa Tests Theater's Acoustics," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 13, 1930, 14.

<sup>30</sup> "Washington Heights Civic Leaders Take Part in New Theatre Dedication" (publication unknown; Capitol Theatre Scrapbooks Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library).



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- <sup>31</sup> “Loew’s 175th St.” (Advertisement).
- <sup>32</sup> “New Loew Theatre Opens.”
- <sup>33</sup> “Washington Heights Civic Leaders Take Part in New Theatre Dedication.”
- <sup>34</sup> Chester Hale was a choreographer of Broadway musicals. In *The Best Remaining Seats: The Story of the Golden Age of the Movie Palace* (New York: Bramball, 1961), 229, Ben M. Hall describes the Chester Hale Girls as, “until the Roxyettes [later the Rockettes] pranced on the scene in 1927, the best beloved group of young ladies in New York, a city famous for its appreciation of nifty hoofers.”
- <sup>35</sup> These included *Anna Christie* (1930) with Greta Garbo, famously marketed with the line “Garbo Talks!”; *Grand Hotel* (1932), in which Garbo uttered the line “I want to be alone”; *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932); Cecil B. DeMille’s Biblical epic *Sign of the Cross* (1932); the Marx Brothers comedy *Duck Soup* (1933); Charlie Chaplin’s *City Lights* (1931), *Modern Times* (1936), and *The Great Dictator* (1941); *42nd Street* (1933); *Gone With the Wind* (1939); Preston Sturges’ *Sullivan’s Travels* (1941); *Holiday Inn* (1942); *Lassie Come Home* (1943); *Cabin in the Sky* (1943), one of the first movies with an all-African-American cast; and *Going My Way* (1944).<sup>35</sup> Dates listed are those in which the pictures were released; in some cases, they did not play at the Loew’s 175th Street until slightly later. Sources are the movie clocks and advertisements from the following newspapers: *New York Times*, April 11, 1930, 22; *New York Herald Tribune*, October 11, 1932, 14; *New York Herald Tribune*, December 29, 1932, 13; *New York Herald Tribune*, April 2, 1933, E5; *New York Herald Tribune*, December 31, 1933, D5; *New York Sun*, May 8, 1931, 23; *New York Herald Tribune*, April 5, 1936, E5; *New York Times*, April 11, 1941, 25; *New York Herald Tribune*, May 21, 1933, E5; *New York Times*, March 7, 1940, 27; *New York Times*, March 29, 1942, X4; *New York Times*, September 27, 1942, X4; *New York Times*, November 18, 1943, 29; and *New York Times*, July 29, 1943, 12; *New York Times*, August 3, 1944, 16.
- <sup>36</sup> *New York Herald Tribune*, November 9, 1943, 19; *New York Herald Tribune*, July 18, 1944, 12A; *New York Times*, May 16, 1944, 18; and “Victory Bond Rally,” *New York Post*, November 16, 1945, 40.
- <sup>37</sup> “Mystery of Black Doll” Solved at Globe Theatre, *New York Post*, February 8, 1938; “Judy Garland Clicks at Loews,” *New York Post*, April 18, 1939, 9; and *New York Post*, October 13, 1945, 16.
- <sup>38</sup> Scott Eyman, *Lion of Hollywood: The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 76.
- <sup>39</sup> Letter from Ben M. Hall to Harmon H. Goldstone, Landmarks Preservation Commission, January 15, 1970. Hall’s book *The Best Remaining Seats*, published in 1961, is considered a seminal work in the study of movie palaces.
- <sup>40</sup> Adams and Levin, 2.
- <sup>41</sup> Letter from Hall to Goldstone.
- <sup>42</sup> The terra-cotta’s manufacturer has not been identified; as Christopher Gray notes in “An Architect for Stage and Screen,” in a search for low bids, Lamb and his clients “worked with every major supplier” of terra cotta. Charlotte Herzog explains that around 1910, terra cotta began to be used for the fronts of vaudeville theaters. “Terra cotta,” she writes, “was durable, inexpensive, easy to clean, easy to model and particularly suitable for the movie theater facade. It could be colored to make the theater gayer and more cheerful than surrounding buildings, appropriately expressing the entertainment function and attracting the attention of potential customers. It was also good for decorating large plain surfaces with no or few windows characteristic of the movie theater, which had to be dark inside. It was adaptable to all styles of architectural complexity and could be modeled to imitate any motif. Last, but perhaps most important, terra cotta ... [was] indigenous and therefore made a great deal of experimentation possible.” These factors often led to “bizarre combinations of historic modes” (60).
- <sup>43</sup> Among Lamb’s works from this period was the Pythian Temple, completed in 1927 at 135-145 West 70th Street (within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District) in the neo-Babylonian style.
- <sup>44</sup> “An Interview With Thomas W. Lamb.”
- <sup>45</sup> David Naylor, *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1991), 125. Naylor names these theaters as the Loew’s State in Syracuse, the 175th Street Theatre, and Loew’s 72nd Street Theatre (1932, demolished) in Manhattan. Although the exterior of the Loew’s Pitkin was similar to that of the

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175th Street, its interior, described as “Hispanic-Moresque,” was different from the interiors of these three. See Del Valle, 71.

<sup>46</sup> Hall, 113.

<sup>47</sup> “Loew’s Pitkin Theatre, Brooklyn, N. Y.,” *Architecture and Building* (vol. 62, 1930).

<sup>48</sup> It appears as such in a rendering on page 255 of Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987).

<sup>49</sup> David W. Dunlap, “Xanadus Rise to a Higher Calling,” *New York Times*, April 13, 2011.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from Hall to Goldstone.

<sup>51</sup> Sources for this section include LPC Research Department Movie Theater files.

<sup>52</sup> Movies screened there during this period included the celebrated musicals *On the Town* (1949), *An American in Paris* (1951), *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952), *Pal Joey* (1958), and *Mary Poppins* (1964); dramas such as *The African Queen* (1951), *High Noon* (1952), *The Caine Mutiny* (1954), *On the Waterfront* (1954), *Twelve Angry Men* (1957), *Fail Safe* (1964), *In Cold Blood* (1967), *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), and *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967); epics including *Quo Vadis* (1951), *Exodus* (1960), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *How the West Was Won* (1962), and *Doctor Zhivago* (1965); the James Bond classic *Goldfinger* and the black comedy *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (both 1964); and lighter fare, including *The Pink Panther* (1963), *Viva Las Vegas* (1964), *Cat Ballou* (1965), and *Barbarella* (1968). Dates listed are those in which the pictures were released; in some cases, they did not play at the Loew’s 175th Street until slightly later. Sources are the movie clocks and advertisements from the following newspapers: *New York Times*, February 9, 1950, 43; *New York Times*, December 20, 1951, 44; *New York Times*, May 29, 1952, 14; *New York Times*, January 22, 1958, 22; *New York Times*, April 16, 1965, 32; *New York Times*, April 26, 1952, 19; *New York Times*, October 17, 1952, 32; *New York Times*, November 2, 1954, 24; *New York Times*, January 13, 1955, 30; *New York Times*, May 23, 1957, 52; *New York Times*, November 3, 1964, 27; *New York Times*, May 3, 1968, 38; *New York Times*, April 12, 1968, 48; *New York Times*, March 9, 1969, D12; *New York Times*, April 17, 1952, 33; *New York Times*, October 27, 1961, 25; *New York Times*, January 14, 1964, 24; *New York Times*, September 2, 1964, 32; *New York Times*, May 22, 1968, 57; *New York Times*, March 19, 1965, 27; *New York Times*, April 7, 1965, 38; *New York Times*, February 11, 1965, 44; *New York Times*, July 15, 1964, 26; *New York Times*, August 10, 1965, 18; and *New York Times*, November 17, 1968, D14.

<sup>53</sup> “Tito Puente’s Band Heads Revue Booked for Loew’s Pitkin,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 11, 1952, 4; “Strait-Jacket” (Advertisement), *New York Times*, January 22, 1964, 30.

<sup>54</sup> “Film Notes,” *New York Herald Tribune*, December 7, 1960, 23; “Five Theaters to Show Giants, Cowboys on TV,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1964, S2.

<sup>55</sup> “Wonder Theatres,” *Blueprint New York City* (Season 5, Episode 1, 2015), accessed on September 28, 2016 at [www1.nyc.gov/site/media/shows/blueprint.page?id=2809&pg=6](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/media/shows/blueprint.page?id=2809&pg=6).

<sup>56</sup> New York County, Office of the Register, Conveyance Reels 136, 261 and 136, 265 (both April 4, 1969). These indenture and mortgage records indicate that the United Christian Evangelistic Association paid \$300,000 and obtained a mortgage of the same amount from Loew’s Theatre and Realty Corporation.

<sup>57</sup> The main source for this section on Reverend Ike’s life and career is Shlomo B. Levy, “Reverend Ike,” in Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Eds., *African American Lives* (New York: Oxford University press, 2004), 711-12. Other sources on Reverend Ike and the building’s later history include “New 125th St. Church Holds First Services,” *New York Amsterdam News*, September 24, 1966, 31; “Harlem Preacher Stresses Power of Money and Prayer,” *New York Times*, July 26, 1972, 39; James Cazalas, “Reverend Ike Is Biggest Crowd Pleaser Since Father Divine,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 12, 1973, 19; Clayton Riley, “The Golden Gospel of Reverend Ike,” *New York Times*, March 9, 1975, SM4; Reverend Ike, “Evangelism in the Church,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 26, 1976, B2A; “Loews Paradise (and Others) Regained,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1976, 52; Charles L. Sanders, “The Gospel According to Rev. Ike,” *Ebony* (December 1976), 148-154; David W. Dunlap, “Xanadus Rise to a Higher Calling,” *New York Times*, April 13, 2001, E29; and Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, “Reverend Ike, Who Preached Riches, Dies at 74,” *New York Times*, July 29, 2009, A28. Other

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information regarding the building's recent history are from the United Palace website, accessed on November 18, 2016 at [unitedpalace.org](http://unitedpalace.org).

<sup>58</sup> Although accounts of Reverend Ike's life often state that he shortened his name because the theater marquee on 125th Street was too small to fit the name Eikerenkoetter, he was billed as "Rev. Ike" in a 1966 advertisement predating his move to Harlem. "Coming to New York" (Advertisement), *New York Amsterdam News*, July 30, 1966, 6. According to the United Christian Evangelistic Association, "Rev. Eikerenkoetter did not shorten his name in order to fit on the theater marquee, but rather because he found that his radio audience and his many mail correspondents had trouble with his full name." Letter from Evan K. Farber, Reed Smith LLP, to Sarah Carroll, LPC, December 12, 2016.

<sup>59</sup> "Healing and Blessing Meetings with Rev. Ike" (Advertisement), *New York Amsterdam News*, May 22, 1971, 40.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> "Wonder Theatres," *Blueprint New York City*.

<sup>62</sup> According to the United Christian Evangelistic Association, it has spent "significantly more than ten million dollars on repairing and restoring the property ... since Reverend Eikerenkoetter initially purchased the property" (Farber letter to Carroll).

<sup>63</sup> Robert Viagas, "Watch Lin-Manuel Miranda Sing *Mary Poppins* Song in the Heights," *Playbill Online* (October 17, 2016), accessed on October 24, 2016 at <http://www.playbill.com/article/lin-manuel-miranda-will-appear-at-mary-poppins-screening-in-the-heights>.

<sup>64</sup> Pia Catton, "'Hamilton' Creator Boosts Uptown Films," *Wall Street Journal Online*, accessed on November 18, 2016 at [www.wsj.com/articles/director-freezes-out-the-competition-1474948802](http://www.wsj.com/articles/director-freezes-out-the-competition-1474948802).

<sup>65</sup> "Eikerenkoetter, Frederick J., II," in Larry G. Murphy, Gordon Melton, and Gary L. Ward, *Encyclopedia of African American Religions* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>66</sup> Norval White, Elliot Willensky, and Fran Leadon, *AIA Guide to New York City, Fifth Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 568.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Loew's 175th Street Theatre (now United Palace) has a special character and special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds, that among its important qualities, the Loew's 175th Street Theatre (now United Palace), which commands an entire block in Manhattan's Washington Heights neighborhood and features exuberant terra-cotta ornament, exemplifies the American movie palace at its most monumental and spectacular; that it was one of a select handful of venues billed by Loew's as its "Wonder Theatres," enormous neighborhood movie palaces opened in 1929 and 1930 that were among the most lavish ever constructed in New York City; that it is a massive building, unusual among Manhattan movie palaces for its construction as a freestanding structure with four elaborately decorated facades; that it was the first theater in Washington Heights designed specifically for talking pictures, and upon its opening in 1930 was hailed by the press as "mammoth" and "magnificent" and as "one of the most costly and elaborate" theaters in the Loew's chain; that the architect of the Loew's 175th Street Theatre, Thomas W. Lamb, was Loew's favorite architect and the renowned designer of more than 300 theaters across the country and around the world; that the building is rare in New York City for its use of historic Indian architectural elements and was one of a small group of "Indo-Persian" movie theaters designed by Lamb between 1928 and 1932 that were considered, by historian David Naylor, to be Lamb's "last great palaces"; that its intricate and unconventional terra-cotta ornament, which covers the entire 175th Street facade, includes elaborate tiered pilasters, ziggurats, lancet arches, hexagonal motifs, and muqarnas; that the building is remarkably well-preserved, possessing its original entrance doors, box office, vertical blade sign, and imposing corner marquee, the only one of Loew's Wonder Theatres to retain all of these features from the day of its opening; that over nearly four decades, the Loew's 175th Street Theatre introduced Washington Heights moviegoers to dozens of classic films and hosted appearances by movie stars such as Eleanor Powell, Judy Garland, Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, and Joan Crawford; that in 1969, the building was sold to the United Christian Evangelistic Association, led by Reverend Frederick Joseph Eikerenkoetter II, known as Reverend Ike, who renamed it the United Palace; that at the United Palace, Reverend Ike's ministry reached its peak, welcoming thousands of worshippers each week and becoming one of the country's largest congregations; that Reverend Ike's television program, which was the first hosted by an African-American religious leader when it debuted in 1973, often featured him on the United Palace stage; and that the building represents, according to the *A.I.A. Guide to New York City*, "the apogee of movie palace glamour in those long-gone days when Hollywood ruled the world."

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Loew's 175th Street Theatre (now United Palace) and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2145, Lot 1 as its Landmark Site.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

Frederick Bland, Diana Chapin, Wellington Chen, Michael Devonshire, Michael Goldblum, John Gustafsson, Jeanne Lutfy, Adi Shamir-Baron, Kim Vauss, Commissioners



Loew's 175th Street Theatre (now United Palace)  
4140 Broadway (aka 4140-4156 Broadway, 40-54 Wadsworth Avenue, 651-661 West 175th Street, 650-662 West 176th Street),  
Manhattan  
Block 2145, Lot 1  
Broadway (left) and West 175th Street (right) facades  
*Photo: Sarah Moses, 2016*



Loew's 175th Street Theatre (now United Palace)

Broadway entrance

*Photo: Michael Caratzas, 2016*



Loew's 175th Street Theatre (now United Palace)  
Broadway entrance, including entrance doors, box office, and sign board  
*Photo: Sarah Moses, 2016*



Loew's 175th Street Theatre (now United Palace)  
West 176th Street facade, showing Theater Block (left) and Retail and Office Block (right)  
*Photo: Sarah Moses, 2016*





Loew's 175th Street Theatre (now United Palace)  
Wadsworth Avenue (left) and West 176th Street (right) facades  
*Photo: Sarah Moses, 2016*



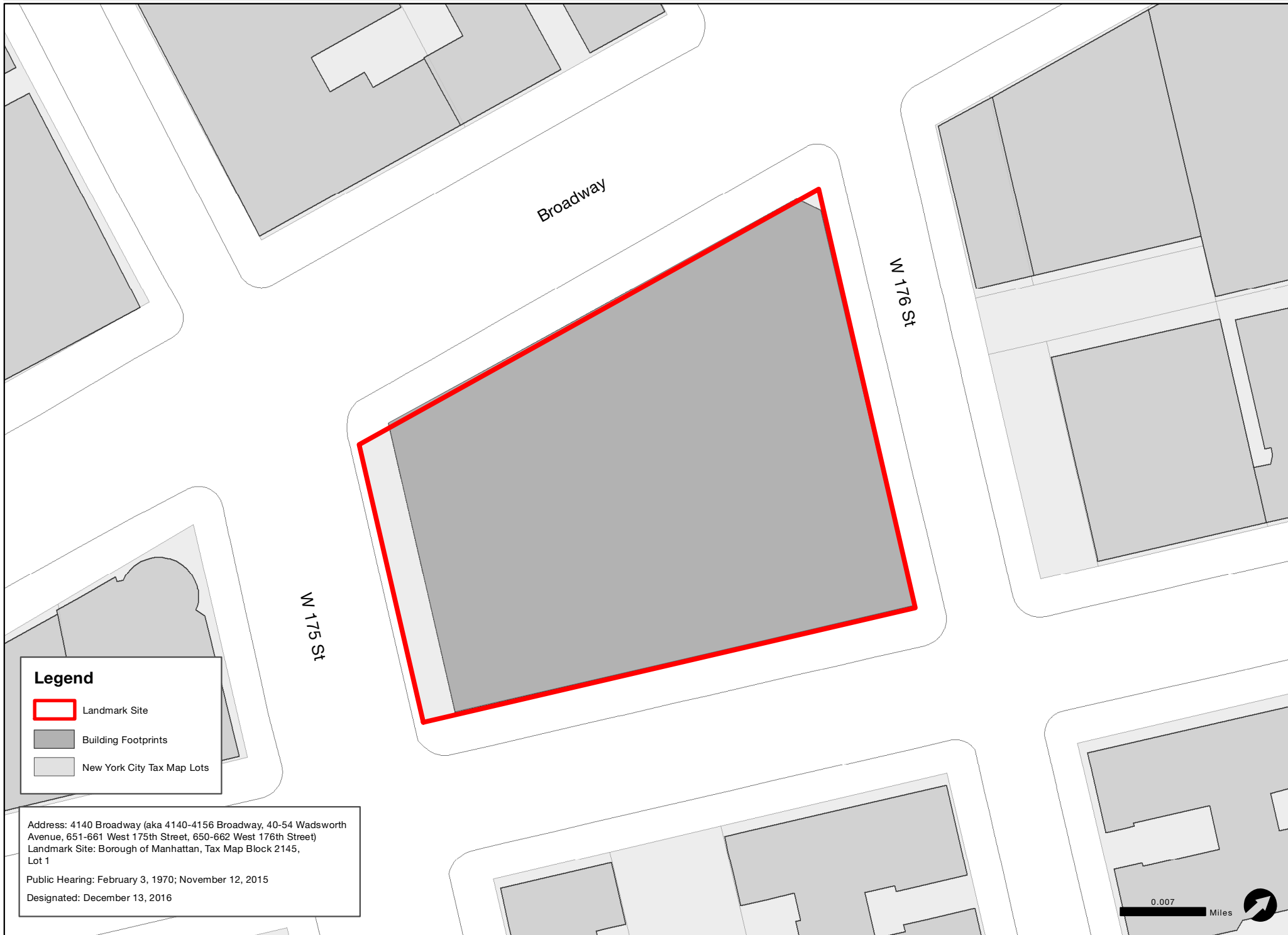
Loew's 175th Street Theatre (now United Palace)

Wadsworth Avenue facade




*Photo: Sarah Moses, 2016*



Loew's 175th Street Theatre (now United Palace)  
West 175th Street facade  
*Photo: Sarah Moses, 2016*



**Legend**

-  Landmark Site
-  Building Footprints
-  New York City Tax Map Lots

Address: 4140 Broadway (aka 4140-4156 Broadway, 40-54 Wadsworth Avenue, 651-661 West 175th Street, 650-662 West 176th Street)  
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 2145, Lot 1  
Public Hearing: February 3, 1970; November 12, 2015  
Designated: December 13, 2016

0.007 Miles 