Landmarks Preservation Commission
September 14, 2010, Designation List 433
LP-2368

LOEW'S CANAL STREET THEATRE, 31 Canal Street, Manhattan
Built 1926-27; Thomas W. Lamb, Inc., architect

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 297 Lot 1 in part, consisting of the primary facade and southern portion of the building facing Canal Street, bounded by a line beginning at the intersection of the eastern and southern property lines, continuing westerly along the southern property line along Canal Street, northerly along a portion of the western property line to a point 57.29' distant from the southern property line, easterly along a line parallel with Canal Street to the eastern property line, thence southerly along a portion of the eastern property line to the point of the beginning.

On June 22, 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Loew's Canal Street Theatre and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Public Hearing Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Seven people spoke in favor of designation, including the owner of the property, Councilmember Margaret Chin, and a representative of the Historic Districts Council. An additional statement in support of designation was also entered into the record at the hearing. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

Summary

The Loew's Canal Street Theatre at 31 Canal Street on Manahattan's Lower East Side was constructed as a neighborhood movie house in 1926-27 at the beginning of what is generally regarded as the Golden Age of Cinema. It was commissioned by Loew's Inc., which was one of the so-called Big Five within the Hollywood Studio System, and was designed by the nationally-known firm of Thomas W. Lamb, Inc.

The emergence of the motion picture industry coincided closely with the growth of the Lower East Side as the city's most prominent immigrant district. The earliest experiments in the medium began in the 1870s and the first commercial exhibitions took place in the 1890s, right as hundreds of thousands of newcomers—many of Jewish faith—were settling in the area. By the early 20th century the neighborhood could claim the nation's densest concentration of both human population and movie houses.

Marcus Loew, the founder of the theater chain, was born to immigrant parents on the Lower East Side and became involved in film exhibition during its earliest days as a peep-show novelty. He started as an operator of penny arcades and soon moved on to larger nickelodeons and then to small-time vaudeville theaters. In the 1920s he acquired several film production companies and created the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, or MGM, studio. The parent company Loew's Inc. remained one of the largest and most important film monopolies into the 1950s, when it was broken up following a federal anti-trust case against the Hollywood studios.

From the earliest days of cinema the Lower East Side contained one of the highest concentrations of motion picture theaters in the country. The Loew's Canal Street Theatre was one of several large movie houses constructed in the neighborhood during the 1920s as the national chain competed against the smaller M. & S. Circuit for control of the local market. Of these theaters, the Loew's Canal Street was one of the largest and most architecturally distinguished, with an exuberant terra-cotta facade facing bustling Canal Street. It is also certainly the best preserved.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Manhattan's Lower East Side[1]

The Lower East Side of Manhattan is one of New York's, and the country's, most storied neighborhoods. Historically defined as the area east of Broadway, extending from the vicinity of the Brooklyn Bridge north to 14th Street, its name is synonymous with the American immigrant experience. Although immigrants from around the world, from East Asia to Western Europe, have settled on the Lower East Side since the mid-nineteenth century, the neighborhood is most strongly associated with Jewish history and culture; from the 1880s to the 1920s, it was the country's center of Jewish life and "the single largest Jewish community in the world, unrivaled…in terms of the sheer number of Jews who lived in close proximity to each other."[2] The historic core of this community was present-day Straus Square, located at the intersection of Canal Street, Essex Street, and East Broadway, just steps away from the site of the Loew's Canal Street Theatre.

The city grew rapidly northward during the early 19th century and by the 1830s virtually the entire Lower East Side had been transformed into a bustling urban neighborhood of Federal-style residences and commercial buildings. A decade later, however, the same expansion had pushed the fashionable residential district above Houston Street into what is now the East Village and the older houses of the Lower East Side were being converted for multi-family use, largely by recently arrived immigrants. Many of these newcomers were Irish-Americans; Irish immigration to New York rapidly increased following the beginning of Ireland's Great Famine in 1845. Soon afterward, German immigrants, fleeing unemployment, religious oppression, famine, and the European Revolutions of 1848, also moved into the area. The city's German population grew from about 24,000 in the mid-1840s to over 400,000 by 1880; by then, almost the entire Lower East Side was known as *Kleindeutschland*, or "Little Germany."

Up to the 1870s, no distinctly Jewish neighborhood existed in New York; German Jews, who accounted for most of the city's Jewish population, generally settled within the larger *Kleindeutschland* community. That would change as hundreds of thousands of Jews, primarily from Russia and Poland, started fleeing pogroms and poverty in their homelands in the early 1880s. From 1881 to 1924—the year in which the so-called "Quota Law" drastically cut immigration to the United States from Eastern Europe—one-third of Eastern Europe's Jews left their homes, with most seeking refuge in America. Between 1880 and 1910, approximately 1.1 million Jews moved to New York City, and between 1880 and 1890, three-quarters of these newcomers settled on the "East Side," as the Lower East Side was commonly called at that time. Within the neighborhood, Jewish immigrants typically lived within defined ethnic quarters with others from their home regions; the Loew's Canal Street Theatre was erected within the largest of these enclaves, which housed Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Lithuanian Jews, and covered most of the area east of the Bowery and south of Grand Street. Although late-19th- and early-20th-century transportation improvements efficiently dispersed much of the Lower East Side's Jewish population to Yorkville, Harlem, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, more than 300,000 Jews continued to occupy the neighborhood's tenements at the dawn of World War I, with some living at densities of more than 1,000 persons per acre.

The Early History of the Motion Picture[3]

The emergence of the motion picture as the dominant form of popular entertainment in America coincided almost exactly with the growth of the Lower East Side as a Jewish immigrant

district. Many of the most important figures in the early history of the movies were in fact raised in the neighborhood, which for much of the early twentieth century was also home to the greatest concentration of movie houses in the nation.[4] The earliest experiments in capturing motion with a photographic device occurred in the late 1870s when Eadward Muybridge was contracted to make a series of images of a trotting race horse.[5] Muybridge's technical advancements were refined by other innovators, including Étienne-Jule Marey—who in 1882 introduced what is widely considered the first motion picture camera—and Thomas Edison—whose laboratory perfected the perforated strip film that was to become the basic medium of the motion picture industry.

In 1894, ten of Edison's new Kinetoscope machines debuted at the Holland Brother's entertainment parlor in New York City in what is generally considered the first commercial exploitation of motion pictures in the United States. The earliest movies that played in these machines—which were viewed by a single person at a time—lasted little more than a minute in length and often showed simple scenes from everyday life. In spite of these limitations the devices proved to be a great commercial success and were installed wherever they could make a profit, including the penny arcades that were popping up in urban immigrant neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side.[6]

The first commercial exhibition of a projected movie before a mass audience in America occurred in April 1896 at Koster & Bial's Music Hall on 34th Street in Manhattan using the Edison-branded Vitascope.[7] Other vaudeville venues soon picked up on the innovation and short motion pictures became a popular novelty accompaniment to the usual variety program. While vaudeville was largely patronized by a wealthy clientele, smaller venues in working-class neighborhoods also adopted the medium of projected motion pictures, often exhibiting films in partitioned-off sections at the rear of existing entertainment establishments and sometimes in newly-converted storefront theaters—which by 1905 had taken the popular name of nickelodeons and had become a national phenomenon.[8]

Marcus Loew and the Novelty Short Film from Penny Arcades to Small-Time Vaudeville[9]

One of the most successful operators of these venues was Marcus Loew (1870-1927), who was born and raised on the Lower East Side to an immigrant Jewish Austrian waiter and his German-born wife. He began work selling newspapers on the street, eventually published his own paper, and later became a relatively successful furrier. Around the turn of the century Loew met Adolph Zukor, 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 quickly 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.[10]

While opening another penny arcade in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1905, Loew had the chance to visit a small projection movie theater in a converted dwelling in Covington, Kentucky. He saw the commercial possibilities of the format and installed projection devices in his own establishments. A couple of years later in 1907 Loew purchased an actual theater building in Brooklyn and converted it for use as a movie house. The Royal Theatre opened in January 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.[11]

Loew's business began to expand rapidly in 1909 when he landed the financial backing of prominent legitimate theater owners the Shubert brothers.[12] Near the end of the year Loew had

taken control of several large theaters in Manhattan—including the Yorkville, Lincoln Square, 59th Street Plaza, and the Majestic—from both Morris and the Shuberts. That September Loew also secured a lease on the Grand Theatre on the Lower East Side, which may have been his first venture back into his childhood neighborhood.[13] He took his company public in 1910 under the name Loews Consolidated Enterprises, with Adolph Zukor as treasurer and Nicholas Schenck secretary. That same year the firm began construction on the flagship 2,800-seat National Theatre in the Bronx, the first theater building erected for specifically for Loew's company.[14] In 1911 he completed the acquisition of the Morris vaudeville circuit which gained him interest in 100 theaters nation-wide including the prominent American Theatre on 42nd Street in Times Square; the firm was subsequently reorganized as Loew's Theatrical Enterprises.[15]

Loew continued to aggressively grow his company in subsequent years, opening a number of large theaters throughout Manhattan and Greater New York City. On the Lower East Side he opened the 1,700-seat Delancey Theatre in 1912 and the following year erected the Loew's Avenue B on the site of the tenement in which he had been raised.[16] The latter building—which Loew claimed was "the most pretentious of the houses on our string, because my better judgment was over-balanced by my sentimentalism" for his childhood neighborhood—was designed by the firm of Thomas W. Lamb and featured an elaborate terra-cotta facade that perhaps established the architectural form for many of Loew's later theaters.

Loew's Inc. and the Hollywood Studio System during the Golden Age of Cinema[17]

Loew continued to show a mixed bill of short one- and two-reel motion pictures interspersed with variety acts, throughout the 1910s. By the middle of the decade, however, a number of motion picture firms had begun to produce feature-length films that were meant to be exhibited as complete entertainments in their own right rather than as an adjunct to a stage show. Loew's associate Adolph Zukor helped introduce the format to America through his Famous Players Film Company. In 1912 it financed the French production *Queen Elizabeth*, which starred noted stage actor Sarah Bernhardt; this was soon followed in 1913 by film versions of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Prisoner of Zenda*, widely considered the first feature films to be produced in America.[18] Others soon followed including David W. Griffith's thematically problematic but technically innovation *Birth of a Nation* in 1915.

By the end of the decade Loew had become convinced that feature films would play a pivotal role in the future of his business and he began another expansion that would turn his company into the largest producer of movies in the country.[19] The firm was reorganized as Loews Inc. in 1919 and the following year it acquired the Metro Pictures Corporation, an existing studio, in order to ensure a steady supply of feature films to the company's continually expanding circuit of theaters. In 1924 the firm purchased the Goldwyn Pictures Corporation and Louis B. Mayer Pictures, merging the three studios into the Metro-Goldwyn Pictures Corporation—later renamed Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM). The production company's first major success came in 1925 with the release of *Ben-Hur* and *The Big Parade*.

With the consolidation of MGM under Loew's corporate umbrella, the company controlled every aspect of film production, distribution, and exhibition.[20] Loew was eventually joined by Zukor's Paramount Pictures Corporation, the Fox Film Corporation (later 20th Century Fox), RKO Radio Pictures, and Warner Bros. in constituting what has been termed the "Big Five" of the Hollywood Studio System. While these firms never fully eliminated outside competition, they continued to dominate the film industry from the 1920s into the late 1940s.[21]

A significant consequence of the advent of the studio system was the establishment of the "run-zone-clearance" method of film distribution and exhibition. Under this scheme the studios divided the national market into a number of geographic zones; the theaters in each zone were in turn classified according to importance and profitability, with the most prominent having the privilege of showing films on their first run while smaller neighborhood venues were given subsequent runs after a certain period of time—known as the "clearance." In New York City, the large movie palaces around Times Square were undisputedly at the top of this hierarchy, with the 3,330-seat Loew's State Theatre and 5,000-seat Capitol Theatre serving as the twin flagships of the Loew's chain.[22]

The ultimate triumph of the Hollywood Studio System, however, was the final realization of feature films accompanied by synchronized sound—a goal that had eluded movie makers for decades as far back as Edison. The first of these "talkies" to be commercially exhibited was Al Jolson's 1927 *The Jazz Singer*, produced by the Warner Bros. studio. The other major studios soon began producing talking films of their own and by the early 1930s nearly all of the movies produced in the country had sound. Hollywood was soon realizing heretofore unknown success and the Golden Age of Cinema had begun.

Loew's Canal Street Theatre and the Movie Houses of the Lower East Side[23]

While Marcus Loew was born and raised on the Lower East Side, his earliest penny arcades and nickelodeons were all located farther uptown in established entertainment corridors such as 23rd, 116th, and 125th Streets. He did gain an important entrée into the neighborhood in 1909 when he took over the lease of the Grand Theatre, and further expanded his interests in the area in the early 1910s with the erection of the Delancey and Avenue B Theatres, but throughout the early 20th century the Lower East Side remained largely the domain of the independent film exhibitor. Prominent amongst these small-time operators was Charles Steiner, who first entered the movie business in 1908 when he turned his father's stable on Essex Street into a 250-seat nickelodeon showing a bill of several short films along with illustrated songs and Yiddish vaudeville acts.[24]

The limited size of Steiner's converted storefront theater was typical of the neighborhood's early movie houses and contrasted greatly with the palatial theaters that Marcus Loew was beginning to open. The humble nature of these venues was partially a matter of economics and partially due to the constraints of the area's existing building stock. It was also a result of the New York City building code that, prior to 1913, allowed movie theaters to operate either under an expensive theatrical license—which imposed rigid health and safety regulations but allowed much larger seating capacities—or under the much less costly common show license that had fewer requirements but restricted audience sizes to fewer than 300 people.[25]

These limitations were eased somewhat by the July 1913 passage of the so-called "Folks Ordinance," the city's first set of laws aimed specifically at regulating motion picture theaters.[26] Under the new ordinance, movie houses without stages or other provisions for live acts were allowed to accommodate up to 600 spectators. Theater operators on the Lower East Side were quick to take advantage; Steiner and his business partners opened five new theaters in the area between 1914 and 1917, each with a maximum seating capacity of slightly fewer than 600 patrons.[27] The Greater M. & S. Circuit, as Steiner's group eventually came to be known, quickly became the largest exhibitor of motion pictures on the Lower East Side.[28]

The conglomerate soon expanded into other immigrant neighborhoods throughout the city as well as into larger theater buildings designed perhaps to compete more directly with the

national chains that were beginning to emerge as part of the Hollywood Studio System.[29] The circuit instituted its most aggressive building campaign in 1925 when it started construction on seven theaters throughout the Lower East Side.[30] The undisputed crown jewel of the system was the 2,800-seat Commodore—located on Second Avenue in the heart of what has been termed the Jewish Rialto.[31]

By the start of 1926 it had become clear that Loew's Inc. was also looking to expand its presence on the Lower East Side.[32] In January of that year the company began to compile a large parcel on Canal and Ludlow Streets and soon hired the firm of Thomas W. Lamb to draw up plans for a 2,300-seat theater building to occupy the site. Construction was begun that fall by the contracting firm of M. Shapiro & Son and the following year the Loew's Canal Street Theatre opened its doors for business.[33]

Some accounts note that Loew's renewed interest in the Lower East Side was actually focused on the Commodore, due to its favorable location on the Lower East Side's legitimate theater district.[34] The firm apparently tried to lease the property from the Greater M. & S. Circuit even before its completion but was rebuffed by the local conglomerate. In response Loew's filed plans for a new movie house of their own three blocks south of the Commodore on Second Avenue, but for reasons unknown these were never carried out.[35] In this context it is possible that the Loew's Canal Street Theatre was, at least in part, built as a sort of bargaining chip to force or persuade the neighborhood chain into giving up its centerpiece. The exact mechanism of the transaction between the two companies is unclear, but by October 1928—just over a year after it had opened—Loew's had sold the Canal Street Theatre to the Greater M. & S. Circuit and gained control of the Commodore.

The Greater M. & S. Circuit in turn operated the Canal Street Theatre for just over a year. Towards the end of 1929 the chain apparently ran into financial difficulties and the building on Canal Street was sold back to Loew's at auction following foreclosure proceedings instituted by the national corporation.[36] Although weakened by the Great Depression, the Greater M. & S. Circuit—later renamed the Belle Theatre Circuit—continued to operate a number of venues on the Lower East Side and remained a viable local competitor throughout the early years of the Golden Age of Cinema.

From the time of its construction the Loew's Canal Street Theatre was the one of the largest movie theaters in the neighborhood, surpassed in seating capacity only by the Commodore. It was also one of the more lavishly decorated with a lively terra-cotta facade designed by a nationally-noted architecture firm. Yet the Canal Street Theatre appears to have been relegated to the lower echelons within the hierarchy of the run-zone-clearance system of movie exhibition. The theater was occasionally mentioned in the local press for minor incidents such as projector fires or neighborhood premieres, but it was rarely, if ever, featured in the *New York Times* listings of show times, which tended to focus on the chain's flagship theaters in Times Square and the more prominent local venues such as the Commodore.[37]

Thomas W. Lamb and the Design of the Canal Street Theatre[38]

Thomas White Lamb (1871-1942) was born in Dundee, Scotland, although 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 began a degree in general science at the Cooper Union in 1894, graduated in 1898, and worked for a time as a 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.[39]

Like Marcus Loew—who was born only a year earlier and who would eventually become a close business associate—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 existing Gotham Theatre at 165 East 125th Street. This led to a number of other alteration projects and eventually to commissions for entirely new theater buildings. In 1908, Lamb designed a storefront movie house in the Bronx for the Nicoland Amusement Company.[40] As the name suggests, this was a small nickelodeon of the type that had proliferated throughout the city since 1905.

Lamb quickly went from designing humble nickelodeons to large movie palaces. In 1909 he was hired by William Fox—who like Loew and Adolph Zukor would go on to found one of the Big Five Hollywood studios—to draw up plans for the opulent City Theatre located in the heart of the entertainment district on 14th Street.[41] Fox continued to employ Lamb's services on subsequent projects, including the Washington Theatre in 1910 and the Audubon Theatre and Ballroom in 1912.[42] Other theatrical chains soon took notice of the architect; Loew's first commission from Lamb may have been the Orpheum Theatre in 1911, which was followed in 1912 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.[43]

As business continued to grow, Lamb incorporated his architectural firm under the name Thomas W. Lamb, Inc. in 1914. That same year the firm's Strand Theatre near Times Square in Manhattan, widely considered one of the earliest and most influential of the "de-lux" Midtown theaters, was opened.[44] Lamb's firm also received commissions for the Rialto in 1916, the Rivoli and the Capitol—which was first American theater with more than 5,000 seats—in 1917, and the Loew's State Theatre Building in 1921, all of which were deluxe theaters situated at the top of the theater hierarchy under the run-zone-clearance system of film exhibition.[45]

While Lamb's firm won international renown for its Times Square movie palaces and legitimate theater buildings, the office was also responsible for a significant number of neighborhood theaters. Many of these had seating capacities nearly as large as their prominent first-run counterparts but were designed more for economy rather than national prestige. To minimize expenditures on real estate, it was not unusual for these local movie houses to be situated on irregularly shaped sites with a narrow lobby structure facing onto a busy commercial thoroughfare while the auditorium itself was located on less-expensive land fronting onto an adjacent side street. This plan had the added benefit of reducing the primary facade to the width of a single building lot, further lowering the building and maintenance costs, although the use of terra cotta allowed architects to achieve impressive results that recalled the grandeur of the Times Square movie palaces.

The general design of the Loew's Canal Street Theatre's primary facade is typical of the neighborhood theaters produced by Lamb's office. The ground floor consists almost entirely of a large rectangular opening that was once fitted with a series of doors flanking a central box office. The upper floors are completely clad in terra cotta with projecting piers running along the full height of the building's corners. The blind openings on the second story, which are fitted with rare black terra cotta designed to mimic window panes, hide the mechanical equipment of what was originally the theater's fan room. The most flamboyant ornamentation—which particularly distinguishes the Canal Street Theatre from earlier designs produced by Lamb's firm—is

reserved for the cornice line.[46] Griffons, eagles, and fanciful sea monsters are interspersed with garlands, festoons, and other foliate motifs in an exuberant explosion of terra-cotta decoration.

Later History of the Loew's Canal Street Theatre[47]

The opening of the Loew's Canal Street Theatre coincided with the beginning of the Golden Age of Cinema and also with the decline of the Lower East Side as the locus of the city's immigrant population. The influx of Eastern Europeans to the area slowed dramatically in 1924 following the passage of the so-called "Quota Law," which placed strict limits on the number of immigrants allowed to enter the country. Additionally, the expansion of the subway system, the construction of affordable and more spacious housing in the other boroughs and other areas of Manhattan, and the movement of the city's garment industry to the streets of the West 30s, led to the precipitous decline of the Jewish population of the Lower East Side—and the neighborhood's population in general—in the 1920s.[48]

In spite of the loss of local population, as well as the economic woes of the Great Depression, the movie theaters of the Lower East Side apparently thrived throughout the 1930s and 1940s as the talking films produced by the Hollywood studios continued to draw large crowds. That began to change in 1948 following a major federal anti-trust court case filed against the Big Five studios that determined, amongst other things, that the exhibition and production branches of the companies should be split up. Loew's was the last of the major studios to comply with these directives when it finally divorced MGM from its parent company in 1954. Within a few years nearly all of the Loew's theaters on the Lower East Side had been removed from operation.[49] The Loew's Canal Street Theatre permanently shut its doors in the late 1950s and the building was eventually sold off in October 1960. The following year alteration permits were filed with the Department of Buildings to convert the lobby facing Canal Street into retail space, while the auditorium was slated for light industrial use.[50]

Description

The Loew's Canal Street Theatre is approximately four stories in height and 22 feet in width, and is clad almost entirely in highly-ornamented terra cotta. The ground floor has two terra-cotta piers at the building's corners framing the primary entrance opening. A projecting terra-cotta beltcourse with egg-and-dart molding runs the width of the facade above the entrance opening and separates the ground floor from the upper stories. A pair of slightly projecting terra-cotta piers run the height of the upper stories along the building's corners, from the projecting beltcourse to the building's cornice. The piers are decorated with bas-relief urns, grotesques, festoons, rosettes, and cornucopia. The metal rings that once supported the building's marquee are still installed in the piers. Set just above the projecting beltcourse is a series of three double-height, round-arched blind window openings framed by turned pilasters and lintels decorated with garlands of acanthus leaves; the openings are fitted with panels of rare black terra cotta set within strips of narrow white terra cotta, meant to resemble multi-paned casement windows with transoms above. The intersection of the muntins in these blind windows are decorated with small rosettes. Rosettes are also located in the spandrels between the round-arched heads of the blind windows. The facade above the three blind windows consists of rusticated terra-cotta blocks. A large cartouche ornamented with a fleur-de-lis and a pair of garlands is centered on the facade above the middle window and just below a wide frieze set within the piers and under the building's cornice. The frieze is ornamented with series of bas-relief panels; the central panel depicts an urn, while the flanking panels contain a pair of stately griffons. Above the frieze a

cornice runs the width of the facade and is decorated with a dentil course, an egg-and-dart molding, and an acanthus-leaved molding. Above the cornice is a sculptural balustrade parapet featuring two substantial posts at the building's corners and two smaller posts set in line with the pilasters separating the blind windows below. The larger corner posts consist of a single square terra-cotta block ornamented with acanthus leaves with a festooned urn set above. The smaller middle posts consist of two square terra-cotta blocks ornamented with acanthus leaves, topped with a sphere wrapped in acanthus leaves. The balustrade consists of pairs of fanciful sea monsters interspersed with turned balusters. An original vent structure is located on the roof and is set back several feet from the building's facade. Significant alterations to the building have been limited to the removal of the original entrance doors and fames and their replacement with an infill storefront covered by metal roll-down security gates; the removal of the original marquee that ran along the fascia above the entrance opening and its replacement with a signboard; the removal of the vertical sign that ran the height of the upper floors perpendicular to the plane of the building's facade; the installation of a metal support structure for a projecting sign at the left of the facade at the height of the projecting beltcourse; and the installation of a through-wall utility box installed at the base of the central blind window opening.

Report prepared by
Christopher D. Brazee
Research Department

NOTES

[1] Portions of this section were adapted from LPC, *143 Allen Street House Designation Report* (LP-2350) (New York: City of New York, 2010), prepared by Christopher D. Brazee; LPC, *511 Grand Street House Designation Report* (LP-2269) (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Marianne S. Percival; LPC, *513 Grand Street House Designation Report* (LP-2270) (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Marianne S. Percival; LPC, *S. Jarmulowsky Bank Building Designation Report* (LP-2363) (New York: City of New York, 2009), prepared by Michael D. Caratzas. Information in this section is based on the following sources: Marc D. Angel and Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Jews," in Kenneth T. Jackson, Ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 620-23; Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Marion R. Casey, "Irish," in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, 598-602; Hasia Diner, "American Jewishness on the Lower East Side," in *The Lower East Side Historic District: A Request for Evaluation by the Lower East Side Preservation Coalition for the Landmarks Preservation Commission* (LPC files, August 2006); Andrew S. Dolkart, "A History of the Lower East Side," in *The Lower East Side Historic District: A Request for Evaluation by the Lower East Side Preservation Coalition for the Landmarks Preservation Commission*; Dolkart, *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City: An Architectural History of 97 Orchard Street* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Center for American Places, 2007); Leslie Harris, "African-Americans and the Lower East Side," in *The Lower East Side Historic District: A Request for Evaluation by the Lower East Side Preservation Coalition for the Landmarks Preservation Commission*; Graham Hodges, "Lower East Side," in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, 696-97; Joyce Mendelsohn, *The Lower East Side Remembered and Revisited* (New York: The Lower East Side Press, 2001); Henry Moscow, *The Street Book: An Encyclopedia of Manhattan's Street Names and Their Origins* (New York: Hagstrom, 1979); Ronald Saunders, *The Lower East Side: A Guide to Its Jewish Past in 99 New Photographs* (New York: Dover Publications, 1979).

[2] Diner.

[3] Information in this section is based on the following sources: Robert C. Allen, "Motion Picture Exhibition in Manhattan 1906-1912: Beyond the Nickelodeon," *Cinema Journal* 18 (Sprint 1979); Allen, "Manhattan Myopia; or, Oh! Iowa!, *Cinema Journal* 35 (Spring 1996); Charlotte Herzog, "The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of its Architectural Style," *Cinema Journal* 20 (Spring 1981); Ben Singer, "Manhattan Nickelodeons: New Data on Audiences and Exhibitors," *Cinema Journal* 34 (Spring 1995); Singer, "New York, Just Like I Pictured It…," *Cinema Journal* 35 (Spring 1996); Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Judith Thissen, "Oy, Myopia!," *Cinema Journal* 36 (Summer 1997); Thissen, "Charlie Steiner's Houston Hippodrome: Moviegoing on New York's Lower East Side, 1909-1913," *American Silent Film: Discovering Marginalized Voices*, ed. Gregg Bachman and Thomas J. Slater (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002); Thissen, "National and Local Movie Moguls: Two Patterns of Jewish Showmanship in Film Exhibition," *Jews and American Popular Culture*, ed. Paul Buhle (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2007); Thissen, "Film and Vaudeville on New York's Lower East Side," *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times*, ed. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Adolph Zukor with Dale Kramer, *The Public is Never Wrong: The Autobiography of Adolph Zukor* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1953.

[4] Thissen, "National and Local Movie Moguls," 49.

[5] "Photographing a Race-horse," *New York Times*, June 23, 1878, 5. Muybridge soon developed a method of exhibiting these images before a public audience in using a device known as the zoopraxiscope or zoogyroscope. "The Zoogyroscope," *New York Times*, May 19, 1880, 3.

[6] Adolph Zukor, a prominent Lower East Side penny arcade owner who would eventually became a major Hollywood magnate, remembered how the early arcades looked: "The long room was decorated with bright colors and flashing lights. A hundred or more peep machines were installed, about 60 per cent of them phonographs and the rest motion pictures…Other slot machines delivered peanuts, candy, and the like. Everything cost a penny, a penny to get in and a penny a look, a listen, or a handful of food." Zukor, 38, quoted in Thissen, "National and Local Movie Moguls," 14-15.

[7] "Edison's Latest Triumph," *New York Times*, April 14, 1896, 5; "Edison's Vitascope Cheered," *New York Times*, April 24, 1896, 5. The demonstration of the Vitascope that night was only a side act for a bill headlined by Chevalier, the "London monologue man," who sang such titles as "The Nipper's Lullaby," "My Old Dutch," and "The Old Kent Road."

[8] 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. Allen, "Motion Picture Exhibition," 2.

[9] Information in this section is based on the following sources: Allen, "Motion Picture Exhibition"; Allen, "Manhattan Myopia"; Bosley Crowther, *The Lion's Share: The Story of an Entertainment Empire* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1957); Singer, "Manhattan Nickelodeons"; Singer, "New York, Just Like I Pictured It"; Sklar; Thissen, "Oy, Myopia!"; Thissen, "Charlie Steiner's Houston Hippodrome"; Thissen, "National and Local Movie Moguls"; Thissen, "Film and Vaudeville."

[10] Additional locations were soon opened on 116th and 125th Streets in Manhattan, each outfitted with the standard assortment of coin-operated phonograph machines and peep-show movie devices. "How He Runs 127 Theatres." *New York Times*, September 4, 1921.

[11] The Royal Theatre had previously been operated as the Nassau Theatre and the burlesque venue known as Watson's Cozy Corner.

[12] The Shubert brothers first began investing in vaudeville during a feud between big-time producers B.F. Keith and William Morris. See Allen, "Manhattan Myopia," 88-89.

[13] The Grand Theatre was one of the most prominent Yiddish legitimate theaters of the time and its sale to a motion picture exhibitor scandalized local residents. See Thissen, "Film and Vaudeville," 51-52.

[14] The National Theatre (1910, Neville & Bagge with H. Craig Severance, demolished), was located at 570 Bergen Avenue in the Bronx.

[15] "Loew and Morris End Vaudeville War," *New York Times*, March 4, 1911.

[16] The Loew's Delancey Theatre (1911-12, S.S. Sugar, altered) is located at 140 Delancey Street; the Loew's Avenue B Theatre (1912-13, Thomas W. Lamb, demolished) was located at 72 Avenue B.

[17] Information in this section is based on: Allen, "Motion Picture Exhibition"; Allen, "Manhattan Myopia"; Crowther; Herzog; Singer, "Manhattan Nickelodeons"; Singer, "New York, Just Like I Pictured It"; Sklar; Thissen, "Oy, Myopia!"; Thissen, "Charlie Steiner's Houston Hippodrome"; Thissen, "National and Local Movie Moguls"; Thissen, "Film and Vaudeville."

[18] Sklar, 42-44.

[19] It may have been the Schenck brothers rather than Loew who pushed the company towards adopting feature films. Zukor, 71-72.

[20] In this regard Loew was again following in Adolph Zukor's footsteps, the latter already having merged his Famous Players production company with the Paramount Pictures Corporation, a film distribution firm. Zukor finally achieved full integration in 1925 when he acquired the prominent Chicago theater empire of Balaban & Katz, whose venues were rebranded as Paramount-Publix theaters.

[21] The "Little Three" studios—United Artists, Columbia Pictures, and Universal Studios—were nearly as important in film production as the Big Five but never fully achieved vertical integration, while the so-called Poverty Row studios were often relegated to making low-budget or genre movies. Independent neighborhood movie theaters continued to outnumber their nationally-branded competitors but never achieved the fame or notoriety or the larger first-run venues.

[22] The Loew's State Theatre (1919-21, Thomas W. Lamb, demolished) was located at 1540 Broadway; the Capitol Theatre (1917-19, Thomas W. Lamb, demolished) was located at 1645 Broadway and was acquired by Loew's in 1924.

[23] Information in this section is based on the following sources: Allen, "Motion Picture Exhibition"; Allen, "Manhattan Myopia"; Crowther; Raymond B. Fosdick, "Report on Motion Picture Theatres of Greater New York," (March 22, 1911), reproduced online: http://www.cinemaweb.com/silentfilm/bookshelf/17_fi_3.htm; Herzog; Singer, "Manhattan Nickelodeons"; Singer, "New York, Just Like I Pictured It"; Sklar; Thissen, "Oy, Myopia!"; Thissen, "Charlie Steiner's Houston Hippodrome"; Thissen, "National and Local Movie Moguls"; Thissen, "Film and Vaudeville."

[24] Thissen, "National and Local Movie Moguls," 19.

[25] Fosdick. See also Sklar, 30-31; Thissen, "Oy, Myopia," 106.

[26] "Aldermen Approve Film Theatre Bill," *New York Times*, July 2, 1913, 18.

[27] The New Law Theatre (1913-14, Louis A. Sheinart, altered) is located at 23-27 Second Avenue; the Majestic Theatre (1913-14, Louis A. Sheinart, altered) at 11-17 Second Avenue; the American Movies Theatre (1913-14, Louis A. Sheinart, altered) at 238-240 East 3rd Street; the Palace Theatre (1914-15, Lorenz F.J. Weiher, demolished) at 133-135 Essex Street; the New 14th Street Theatre (1915, Lorenz F.J. Weiher, demolished) at 235-237 East 14th Street; the Sunshine Theatre (alteration in 1917, Lorenz F.J. Weiher, altered) at 141-143 East Houston Street.

[28] The name of the Greater M. & S. Circuit derives from Elias Mayer and Louis Schneider, who—along with Harry Blinderman, Abraham Minsky, and others—were closely allied with Charles Steiner in the Lower East Side motion picture business.

[29] The Clinton Theatre (1917, Lorenz F.J. Weiher, altered) was located at 80-82 Clinton Street (the entrance was in an existing tenement building and the new auditorium building was erected facing Attorney Street); the New Delancey Street Theatre (1921, Harrison G. Wiseman, demolished) at 62 Delancey Street. Both were mere blocks away from the existing Loew's Delancey Theatre.

[30] Plans for an eighth theater at 155 Clinton Street were apparently never executed.

[31] The Commodore Theatre (1925-26, Harrison G. Wiseman, primary facade altered, auditorium demolished) was located at 105 Second Avenue. The circuit's other large theaters, each seating over 1,000 people, included the Hollywood Theatre (1925-26, Harrison G. Wiseman, altered) at 98 Avenue A; the New Apollo Theatre (1925-26,

Eugene DeRosa, demolished) at 126 Clinton Street; the Palestine Theatre (1925-26, Eugene DeRosa, demolished) at 11 Clinton Street; the Mecca Theatre (1925-26, Victor Mayper or Eugene DeRosa, demolished) at 441-443 East 14th Street. The smaller Ruby Theatre (1925-26, Eugene DeRosa, demolished) at 105-109 Rivington Street and the Bijou Theatre (1925-26, Eugene DeRosa, altered) at 193 Avenue B seated fewer than 600.

[32] An article from 1927 notes the opening of the Loew's Canal Street Theatre in addition to sixteen other new theaters across the country. "17 New Loew Theatres," *New York Times*, February 14, 1927, 15.

[33] The exact opening date of the Loew's Canal Street Theatre has not been determined, although a temporary Certificate of Occupancy was issued for the building on September 8, 1927.

[34] Thissen, "National and Local," 22.

[35] The planned theater was to be located at 74 Second Avenue with the auditorium stretching from 93-105 East 2nd Street. The new building permits filed with the Department of Buildings list the firm of Thomas. W. Lamb as the architect (NB 651-26).

[36] "Auction Results," *New York Times*, November 27, 1929, 49. Loew's eventually took over the Hollywood and New Apollo Theatres as well.

[37] Edie Cantor's *Forty Little Mothers*, for example, made its neighborhood debut at the Loew's Canal Street Theatre in April 1940 although the actor declined to make a personal appearance, choosing instead to go onstage at the chain's first-run Capitol Theatre in Times Square. "Of Local Origin," *New York Times* (April 8, 1940), 20.

[38] Portions of this section are adapted from: LPC, *Regent Theater (now First Corinthian Baptist Church) Designation Report (LP-1841)* (New York: City of New York, 1994), prepared by Jay Shockley; LPC, *Hamilton Theater Designation Report (LP-2052*) (New York: City of New York, 2000), prepared by Donald Presa. Information in this section is based on: Christopher Grey, "Streetscapes: Thomas W. Lamb's Theaters, an Architect for Stage and Screen," *New York Times*, October 10, 2008; Claudia C. Hart, "The New York Theaters of Thomas Lamb" (Columbia University Master's Thesis, 1983); Office of Metropolitan History, "The Building Permits Database, 1900-1986," online: http://www.MetroHistory.com/;Thomas W. Lamb Job Book and Index, Avery Library, Columbia University; Thomas W. Lamb obituary, *New York Times*, February 27, 1942; LPC, Thomas W. Lamb research file; Hillary Russell, "An Architect's Progress: Thomas White Lamb," *Marquee* 21 (1989).

[39] The hotel was designed in conjunction with John F. Kelly, with whom Lamb apparently shared an office for several years around the turn of the century. Office of Metropolitan History; Russell, footnote 2.

[40] Department of Buildings, New Building Permit 82-08. See also *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* 81 (February 22, 1908), 324. By 1909 the Nicoland Amusement Company operated at least five nickelodeons. Robert Grau, *Forty Years Observation of Music and Drama* (New York: Broadway Publishing Company, 1909), 188. Some sources claim the Nicoland was the first purpose-built movie theater in New York City, even though it was erected over a decade after the first commercial exhibition of a motion picture and several years into the nickelodeon boom that began around 1905.

[41] The City Theatre (1909-10, demolished) was located at 114 East 14th Street.

[42] The Washington Theatre (1910-11, altered) is located at 1801-1807 Amsterdam Avenue; the Audubon Theatre and Ballroom (1912, front facade partially extant) at 3940-3960 Broadway.

[43] 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; Loew's Boulevard Theatre (1912-13, extant) at 1032 Southern 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 commissioned from Loew as early as 1908, although there appears to be no direct evidence of this.

[44] The Strand Theatre (1913-14, demolished) was located at 1579 Broadway. The Regent (1912-13, a designated New York City Landmark) at 1906-1916 Seventh Avenue (Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard) preceded the Strand as a deluxe theater but was located further uptown.

[45] The Rialto (1916-17, demolished) was located at 1481 Broadway; the Rivoli (1917, demolished) at 1620 Broadway; the Capitol Theatre (1917-19, demolished) at 1645 Broadway; the Loew's State Theatre Building (1919-21, demolished) at 1540 Broadway.

[46] The primary facade of the Ridgewood Theater Building (1916, a designated New York City Landmark) at 55-27 Myrtle Avenue in Queens, for example, has a similar layout to the Loew's Canal Street Theatre but its ornamentation is much more restrained.

[47] Portions of this section are adapted from LPC, *Jarmulowsky*. Information in this section is based on the following sources: Dolkart, *Biography*; Sklar

[48] Between 1920 and 1930 the population of the Lower East Side fell from 414,909 to 248,696. Dolkart, 110.

[49] The Loew's Delancey apparently remained in operation until the 1970s.

[50] See Department of Buildings alteration permit ALT 1578-61 and Certificate of Occupancy 12974.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

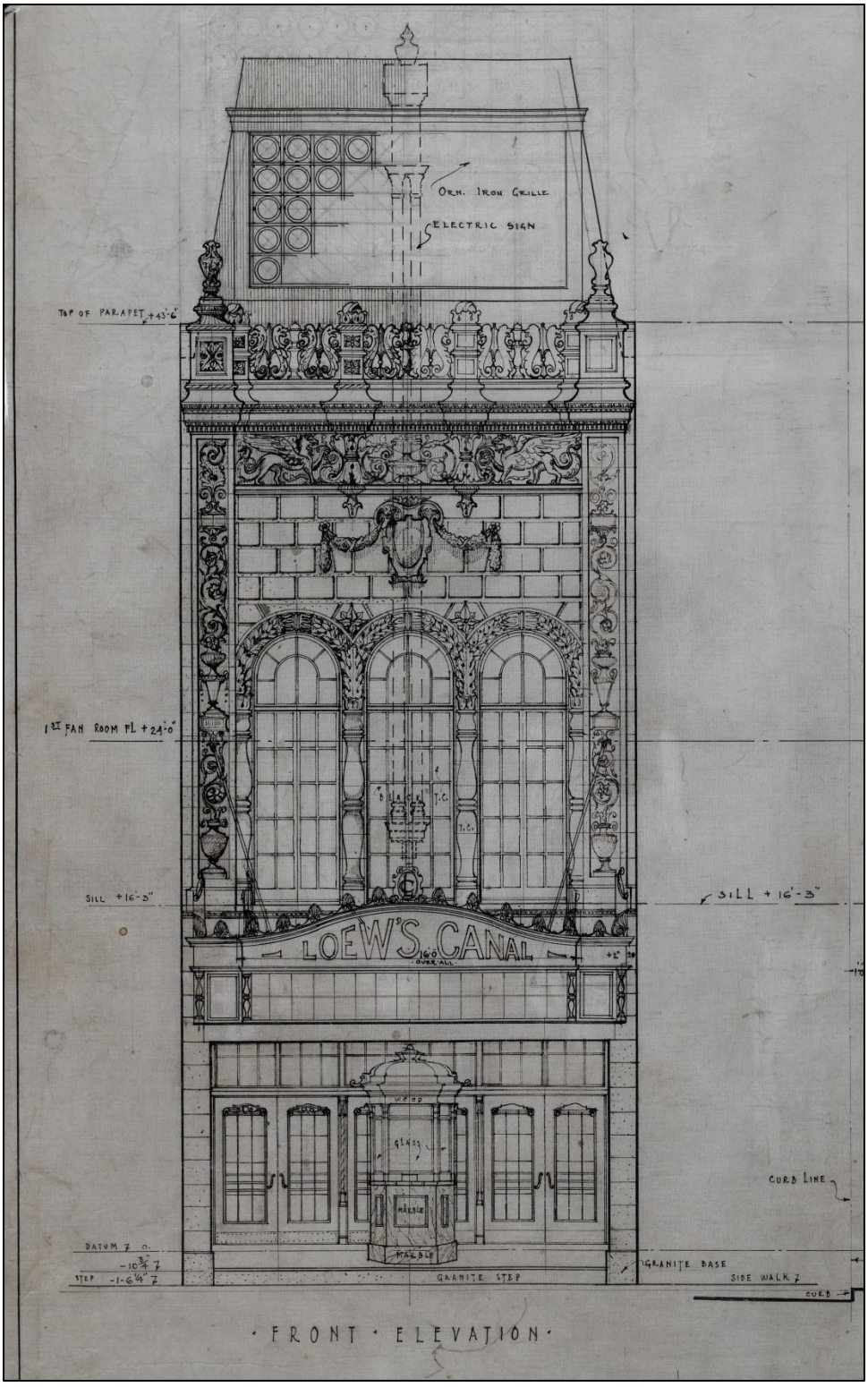
On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the buildings and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Loew's Canal Street Theatre has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest, and value as part of the development,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

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Loew's Canal Street Theatre was constructed as a neighborhood movie house in 1926-27 at the beginning of what is generally considered the Golden Age of Cinema; that it was commissioned by Loew's, Inc. which was one of the most important firms within the Hollywood Studio System; that it was designed by the nationally-known firm of Thomas W. Lamb, Inc.; that the emergence of the motion picture industry coincided closely with growth of the Lower East Side as the city's most prominent immigrant district, and that by the early 20th century the neighborhood could claim the nation's densest concentration of human population and movie houses; that Marcus Loew, the founder of the theater chain, was born to immigrant parents on the Lower East Side and became involved in film exhibition from its earliest days; that he worked his way up from penny arcade owner to movie studio mogul at the head of both the Loew's, Inc. chain of movie theaters and the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film production studio; that from the earliest days of cinema the Lower East Side contained one of the highest concentrations of motion picture theaters in the country and that the Loew's Canal Street Theatre was one of several constructed in the neighborhood during the 1920s as the national chain competed for control of the local market; that of the movie theaters on the Lower East Side, the Loew's Canal was one of the largest and most architecturally distinguished, as well as the best preserved.

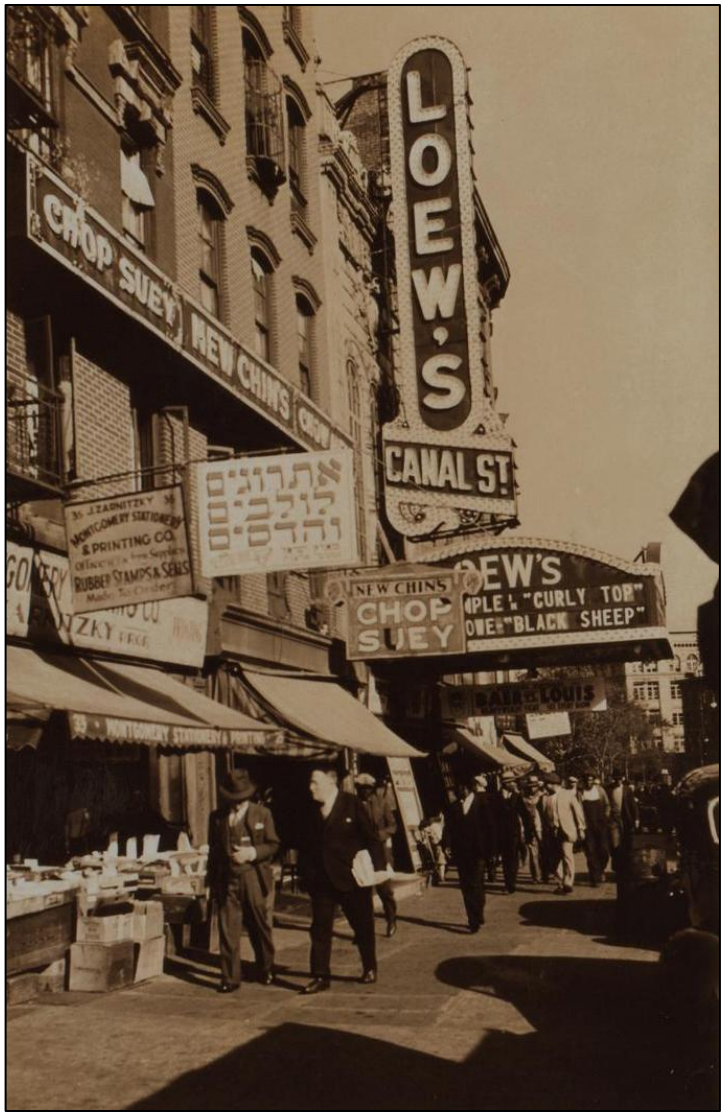
Accordingly, pursuant to provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Loew's Canal Street Theatre, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 297, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the primary facade and southern portion of the building facing Canal Street, bounded by a line beginning at the intersection of the eastern and southern property lines, continuing westerly along the southern property line along Canal Street, northerly along a portion of the western property line to a point 57.29' distant from the southern property line, easterly along a line parallel with Canal Street to the eastern property line, thence southerly along a portion of the eastern property line to the point of the beginning, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice Chair
Frederick Bland, Stephen F. Byrns, Joan Gerner,
Roberta Brandes Gratz, Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Commissioners

Loew's Canal Street Theatre
31 Canal Street, Manhattan
Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 297 Lot 1 in part
Built: 1926-27
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee (2010)



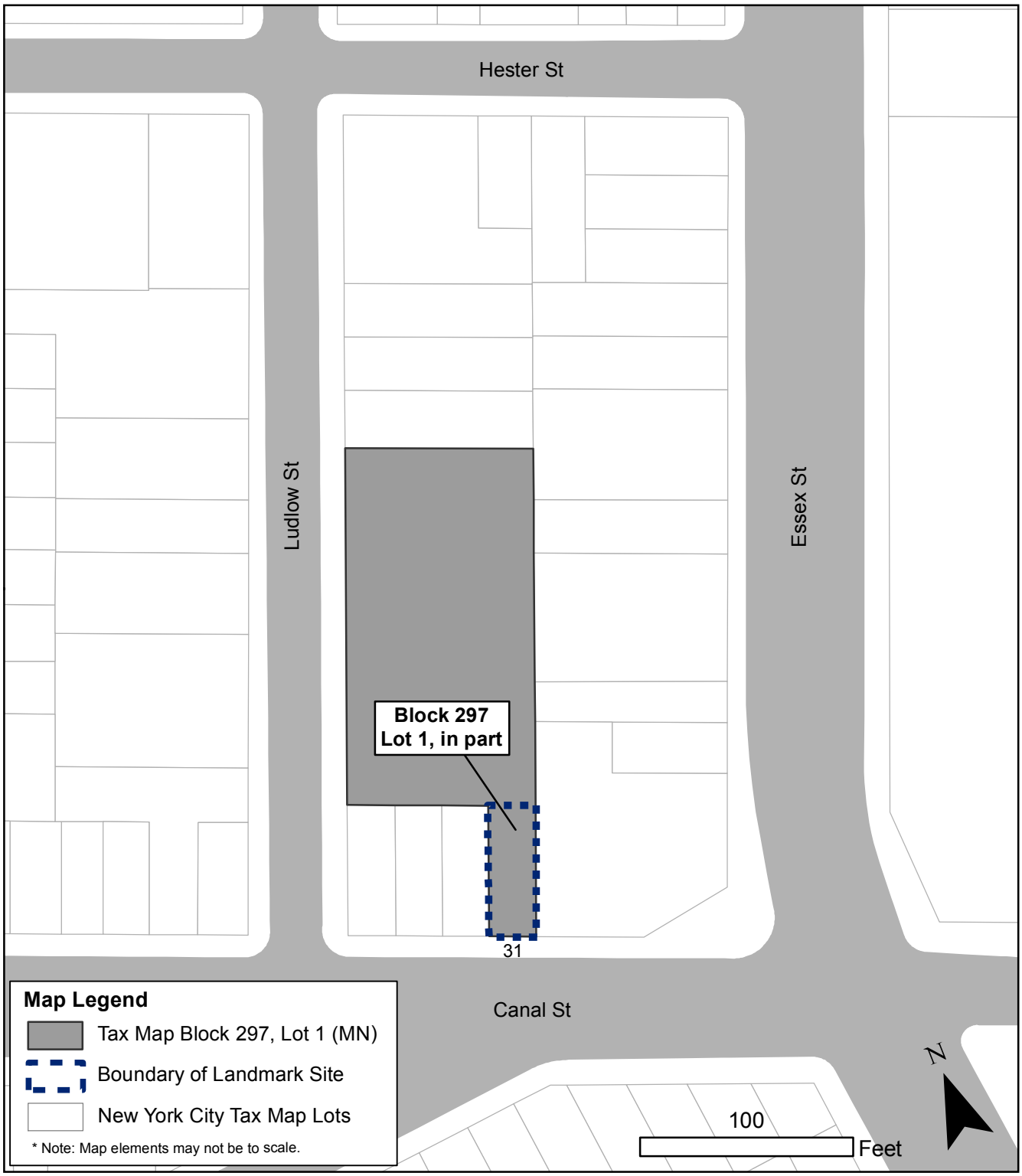
Loew's Canal Street Theatre
Drawing: Office of Thomas W. Lamb (1926)
Courtesy of Columbia University Libraries,
Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Drawings & Archives Department



Loew's Canal Street Theatre
Photo: Percy Loomis Speer (1935)
Courtesy the Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Loew's Canal Street Theatre
Photo: New York City Department of Taxes (c. 1939)
Courtesy New York City Municipal Archives

Loew's Canal Street Theatre
Details of terra-cotta ornament
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee (2009)



LOEW'S CANAL STREET THEATRE (LP-2368), 31 Canal Street. Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 297 Lot 1 in part, consisting of the primary facade and southern portion of the building facing Canal Street, bounded by a line beginning at the intersection of the eastern and southern property lines, continuing westerly along the southern property line along Canal Street, northerly along a portion of the western property line to a point 57.29' distant from the southern property line, easterly along a line parallel with Canal Street to the eastern property line, thence southerly along a portion of the eastern property line to the point of the beginning.

Designated: September 14, 2010

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 09v1, 2009. Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM. Date: September 14, 2010.