

PYTHIAN TEMPLE  
(New Granada Theater)  
2007-2013 Centre Avenue  
Pittsburgh  
Allegheny County  
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6728  
PA-6728

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### NEW GRANADA THEATER (Pythian Temple)

HABS No. PA-6728

- Location:** 2007-2013 Centre Avenue, Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.
- Significance:** The New Granada Theater was designed in 1927 by Louis A. Bellinger, Pittsburgh's first prominent African-American architect, for a local African-American Knights of Pythias lodge. Conversion into the New Granada Theater in the 1930s inspired the addition of a striking polychromatic Art Deco ground floor. The theater and its Savoy Ballroom functioned as a major entertainment institution for The Hill neighborhood until the riots in the 1960s.
- Description:** This three-story theater structure has yellow brick on its two street facades and red brick on the sides. The primary street façade has a crenellated parapet at the flat roofline with decorative terra cotta panels. The fenestration on this elevation is divided into three large vertical bays with groups of four window openings in each. A belt course of smaller decorative terra cotta panels is located between the second floor ballroom and its mezzanine level. The Art Deco ground floor features rounded corners at the openings, a streamlined marquee at each corner, and red, blue, and yellow glazed enamel panels. The secondary street façade is plain yellow brick with a simple arched opening at the ground floor of the center bay. The primary elevation appears a story higher due a change in street level on the other side of the block.
- History:** This structure was built as a Knights of Pythias lodge hall in 1927. A group of African-American construction workers belonging to Union Local 111 commissioned architect Louis A. Bellinger for the design. Bellinger graduated from Howard University in Washington, D.C. in 1914 and was Pittsburgh's first prominent African-American architect. In its original use as a lodge hall the building housed a dining hall on the first floor, ballroom on the second, and offices on the third.
- During the 1930s difficult economic conditions forced the Knights of Pythias to sell the building to local theater impresario Harry Hendel. He called the building the New Granada after one of his previous theaters. Hendel converted the dining hall into a theater showing Yiddish movies and opened the Savoy Ballroom on the second floor. The polychrome Art Deco ground floor façade was added by architect Alfred M. Marks in 1937. The refurbished New Granada Theater played an important role in The Hill neighborhood and local entertainment, hosting nationally prominent jazz artists such as Count Basie, Cab Calloway, Ella Fitzgerald,

Lionel Hampton, and Lena Horne. The theater closed after the local 1960s. Now the Hill Community Development Corporation plans to rehabilitate it as part of Granada Square, a project intended to be a hub of educational, social, and artistic activities for the neighborhood.

Source: Franklin Toker. *Buildings of Pittsburgh*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007.

Historian: Lisa Pfueller Davidson, HABS Historian, 2006.

Project

Information: This short form history was prepared to supplement photographic documentation of western Pennsylvania for the *Buildings of Western Pennsylvania* publication, part of the *Buildings of the United States* series published by the Society of Architectural Historians and the University of Virginia Press. Large-format photography was sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey through a cooperative agreement with the Society of Architectural Historians. Historical information was provided to the HABS office prior to publication of the book.