Landmarks Preservation Commission
January 12, 2010, Designation List 425
LP-2325

RIDGEWOOD THEATER BUILDING, 55-27 Myrtle Avenue, Queens
Built: 1916; Thomas W. Lamb, architect

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map: Block 3451, Lot 7, in part, consisting of the front (southern) portion of the building facing on Myrtle Avenue, bounded by the southern and parts of the eastern and western lot lines, and a line parallel to and 55 feet north of the southern lot line

On March 24, 2009, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Ridgewood Theater Building and its related Landmark Site (Item No.6). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were sixteen speakers in favor of designation, including the owner of the theater, a representative of Councilmember Diana Reyna, representatives of the Queens Preservation Alliance, the Friends of Ridgewood Theater, the Ridgewood Property Owners Association, the Ridgewood Development Corporation, the Four Borough Preservation Alliance, the Municipal Art Society, the Historic Districts Council, the Society for the Architecture of the City, and the Landmarks Conservancy. There were no speakers opposed to designation. The Commission has also received several letters and emails in favor of designation, including one from the great grandson of the architect, Thomas Lamb.

<u>Summary</u>

The Ridgewood Theater, constructed in 1916 in the rapidly developing section of Ridgewood, was designed by prominent theater architect Thomas Lamb. The theater is located on Myrtle Avenue, the area's major commercial thoroughfare, contributing to the creation of a town center for the residents who were moving into the nearby rowhouse developments. This building was constructed during the earliest period of the development of the movie theater as a building type, and was part of the industry's efforts to bring this new and exciting form of entertainment to small towns and local communities throughout the country. This theater showed movies continuously for more than 90 years, retaining its original use through numerous changes in the presentation of movies and the interior environment of the theater, including the addition of sound for "talkies," and in spite of the competition provided by television and other forms of entertainment. It was one of the longest-running movie theaters in the country when it closed in March, 2008. The theater's façade displays the Beaux-Arts training and skills of architect Thomas Lamb in its straightforward design enhanced with classical and geometric elements such as pilasters and heavily encrusted shields, created in glazed terra cotta. The building retains a strong presence on the street as it rises above the neighboring structures, with its name carved onto the building and its large projecting marquee advertising the wonders within. The Ridgewood Theater's impressive white façade has helped it stand out from its neighbors, and makes it as attractive to local residents today as when it was constructed.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

History of Ridgewood, Queens[1]

Located in western Queens County, the town of Ridgewood[2] originally spanned the Brooklyn-Queens border. Part of the town was located in the eastern end of Bushwick, Brooklyn[3] while another section was part of the adjacent town of Newtown, one of the original three towns of Queens County. Inhabited by the Mespachtes Indians prior to being settled by Europeans, Bushwick was one of the original six towns that joined together to become the City of Brooklyn in 1854. The high, thickly wooded terrain running east from Ridgewood through the center of Long Island was the most noticeable aspect of the area's topology.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, farms in Bushwick and Ridgewood were farmed by Dutch and British families, who grew lettuce, corn, potatoes, cauliflower, and a variety of fruits for urban markets in Brooklyn and Manhattan. The only known Dutch farmhouse surviving in Ridgewood is the Adrian and Ann Wyckoff Onderdonk House (a designated New York City Landmark).[4] There were only five farms in Ridgewood at the start of the American Revolution, along with a small burial ground. During this period and for some years thereafter, some of the farmers owned slaves. After they were freed, some of these African-American people stayed in the area and became prominent in local affairs.[5]

The discovery of pure ground water in Bushwick in the mid-19th century spurred the construction of several breweries, most of which were owned by German immigrants and staffed by a German work force.[6] By 1880, at least eleven breweries, including Rheingold, were operating within a fourteen block area in western Bushwick, known as "brewer's row,"[7] and other industrious German immigrants opened factories and knitting mills in the area. Tenements and small row houses were built nearby to house the workers and their families.[8] A number of picnic grounds, beer gardens, amusement parks, and racetracks opened amidst Ridgewood's fields and farming villages towards the end of the nineteenth century, catering especially to the large German population of Bushwick. These areas provided open space for many people who otherwise spent their time in crowded tenements. German shooting clubs also provided a popular pastime.[9]

Transportation improvements to the area helped propel development. Myrtle and Metropolitan Avenues and Fresh Pond Road are among the oldest streets in Ridgewood, having originally been Native American trails and then used by Long Island farmers to take their products to market. Stagecoaches and horsecars ran along Myrtle Avenue (also called Jamaica Plank Road) which extended from the Brooklyn Bridge to Jamaica Avenue.[10] The first railroad to reach the area, in 1878, was the New York Connecting Railroad Extension (once the Manhattan Beach Railroad), running from Brooklyn through Ridgewood to the Brooklyn seashore.[11] The elevated rapid transit line ran to Wyckoff Avenue along the Brooklyn/Queens border beginning in 1888 and was extended to Fresh Pond Road beginning in 1915.[12]

Ridgewood remained largely rural however, until after the consolidation of the City of New York in 1898, just as the last vacant land in Bushwick was being developed. By the turn of the century, Bushwick's builders began purchasing Ridgewood's farms, parks, and racetracks. Over the next two decades they constructed tenements and small row houses similar to those they had built for the German immigrant workers and their

families further west in Bushwick.[13] An article in the *Real Estate Record and Guide*[14] published in late 1909 mentions that an area of over 150 blocks of former farmland and picnic parks in Ridgewood was then experiencing intense growth.

From the turn of the century to World War I, over 5,000 new structures were constructed in Ridgewood.[15] The Ridgewood Theater, located on the major commercial thoroughfare of Myrtle Avenue, was built during this period of concentrated residential construction in Ridgewood. Bringing a movie theater to the area was an integral part of the development of a complete neighborhood at that time.

Ridgewood remained a solid neighborhood of hard-working people throughout the rest of the twentieth century. *The WPA Guide* called the area "old-fashioned and respectable."[16] In the 1960s and 70s, as other parts of Bushwick deteriorated, the residents of Ridgewood voted to change their address to Queens.[17]

Emergence of the Movie Theater[18]

The earliest known use of a motion picture projection device before an American audience occurred in 1896.[19] Vaudeville immediately picked up on the new invention and short motion pictures were shown as a novelty at the end of programs, usually projected from the balcony of the theater. "Movies" could also be viewed in partitioned-off sections of popular gathering places such as arcades or circuses. By 1905 "nickelodeons" showing silent movies began to open in converted storefronts, and over the next decade they proliferated throughout the United States. Nickelodeons were a lucrative source of income for their owners, and the movies became a very popular and inexpensive form of entertainment for the masses. In conjunction with the short and relatively unsophisticated nature of the early movies, the interiors of nickelodeon theaters were generally unpretentious.

The fledgling motion picture industry found itself under attack around 1909-10 from various quarters: by moral guardians advocating censorship and age restrictions, by legitimate and vaudeville theater owners concerned about competition, and by municipal authorities worried about the health and safety standards of the numerous small movie theaters. A number of large cities, including New York, passed legislation to regulate the construction and operation of movie theaters, primarily for safety issues; New York's ordinance, enacted in 1913 after four years of discussion, prohibited (among its specifications) stages and galleries in smaller theaters. In order for movie theaters to remain profitable while meeting these special requirements, owners realized that their theaters would have to be larger in size and able to seat more people. Beginning around 1910-11, larger, more luxurious theaters, following the architectural model of legitimate and vaudeville theaters and concert halls but designed specifically to show movies, were built in several American cities. The Columbia Theater (1911) in Detroit and the Regent Theater in New York (1913, a designated New York City Landmark) were two early examples. The development at the same time of the first American feature-length narrative films, or "photoplays," further transformed the motion picture and theater business, and for the first time this popular entertainment was promoted as respectable enough for families and for the middle classes. A report published in 1916 indicated the extent of the early growth of the business:

> Houses devoted to the legitimate plays and for combination vaudeville and pictures, will continue to be in demand but the greatest demand at present

> is for the motion picture theatre. There are about 25,000 picture houses in this country alone, and representing an investment of about 175,000,000 of dollars, with an average daily attendance of about 6,000,000 of people… The growth has been phenomenal and unprecedented.[20]

Most "movie theaters" of the day were actually used for a combination of movies and vaudeville or variety entertainment, a fact which attests to their equal popularity during this era.[21] Throughout the late 1910s and 1920s, more theaters offered their patrons increasingly luxurious amenities, in areas such as décor, comfort, ushers and attendants, musical accompaniment (including pipe organs and orchestras), and the presentation of quality films.

Thomas W. Lamb, Architect[22]

Thomas W. Lamb (1871-1942), one of the best known of a small group of American theater specialists and one of the world's most prolific theater architects, designed over three hundred theater buildings in the United States and around the world, the majority of which were movie theaters. Born in Dundee, Scotland, Lamb moved with his family by 1883 to New York City, where his father worked as an engineer. Lamb opened an architectural office around 1892, prior to his having any particular architectural training. He enrolled 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 theater project was the 1904 alteration of the Gotham Theater at 165 East 125th Street (demolished). Theaters soon became his specialty, and he worked on a number of renovations as well as new theater projects. One of these was the 1908-09 conversion of the roof garden of the American Theater (at Eighth Avenue and 42nd Street, demolished) into a theater for William Morris. The Nicoland Theater (1908, demolished), 768 Westchester Avenue, the Bronx, is thought to have been one of the earliest movie theaters built in New York. Other notable early theater commissions by Lamb also included the 2267-seat City Theater (1909-10, 114 East 14th Street, demolished) for William Fox, which housed both vaudeville and motion pictures (and was one of the first large theaters to show movies in New York City), and the National Theater/National Winter Garden Theater (1911-12, East Houston and Chrystie streets, demolished), a Yiddish theater/vaudeville house.

Lamb became known throughout his career for his designs of both monumental movie theaters and smaller neighborhood houses for the leading theater chains of the day, such as Loew's, Proctor's, Keith's, RKO, and Trans-Lux. Lamb's extant early theaters include: the Washington, 1801-1807 Amsterdam Avenue (1910-11, with V. Hugo Koehler, now New Covenant Temple of the United Holy Church of America, building significantly altered); the Eltinge, 236-240 West 42nd Street (later Empire, 1911-12); the Audubon Theater and Ballroom, 3940-3960 Broadway (1912, front façade partially extant); Loew's Boulevard, 1032 Southern Boulevard, the Bronx (1912-13); the Regent, 1906-1916 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard (1912-13, a designated New York City Landmark); the Cort, 138-146 West 48th Street (1912-13, a designated New York City Landmark); the Hamilton, 3560-3568 Broadway (1912-13, a designated New York City Landmark); Loew's Bedford, 1362-1372 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn (1913, altered); and the 81st Street, 2248-2258 Broadway (1913-14, auditorium demolished).

Lamb received commissions for some of the most prominent and enormous movie theaters on Broadway in the vicinity of Times Square in the 1910s and 20s. These included the Strand (1914), the Rialto (1916), the Rivoli (1917), the Capitol (1918-19, the first American movie theater with over 5000 seats), and the Loew's State Theater Building (1921), now all demolished. Two surviving movie palaces are the Hollywood Theater, 217-239 West 51st Street (1929), which was later converted for use as a Broadway house called the Mark Hellinger (a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark) and Loew's 175th Street, 4140-4156 Broadway (1930).

Although best known for his theaters, Lamb accepted other commissions and his oeuvre includes a variety of building types. Among the more notable of these buildings are the Pythian Temple , 135-145 West 70th Street (1926-27, now a private club located in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District), the Paramount Hotel, 235-245 West 46th Street (1927-28), and the second Madison Square Garden, Eighth Avenue and West 49th Street (1925-29, demolished).

Movie Theaters as an Architectural Type

The American movie theater developed as an architectural type over the first four decades of twentieth century. From the nickelodeons of the turn of the century, theaters grew in size and lavishness during the 1910s, and emerged during the 1920s as movie palaces, a unique national institution. Thomas Lamb's elegant Regent Theatre (1913) at the corner of 116th Street and Seventh Avenue was designed to give its patrons a new and different kind of experience. More importantly, this elaborate building was not constructed in the main entertainment district but in a local neighborhood, to attract local patrons. (Only when "Roxy" Rothafel added his extravagant showman's touches did it actually succeed. Roxy's elaborate show combining live entertainment and movies was designed to work with the theatre's architectural setting to create a completely integrated event.) The Strand (1914) was Lamb's next project for Roxy and became a model for a more elaborate design that was emulated in movie theaters all over the country.[23] Thomas Lamb was "the first major architect to make his name in movie theatres" and became known as a master of theaters whose richly decorated interior designs were based on those of the old opera houses and vaudeville theaters.[24] He also set the standard for the exterior treatment of movie theaters in order to attract a middle-class audience, using elegant Classically-inspired ornamental motifs (especially in his early work) often executed in terra cotta,.

As small towns and suburbs around the country began to grow, their residents preferred access to their entertainment close to home and they began to demand local movie theaters. Theater architects continued the traditions that had started in New York City, "blending modernism with commercial accents, classic motifs and modernistic comforts."[25] The construction and degree of elaboration of a movie theater became a sign of a community's culture and importance and they became icons for each local main street.[26] "The experience of watching the film was equally matched by the surroundings of the theater."

Over time and with their growing success, movie theaters began to "increase their proximity to the retail district."[27] Office space was often included in the building, next to or above the theater itself, to help subsidize the cost of construction. (The rear facades of

these buildings were usually simple, undecorated boxes, with all of the embellishment added to the front.) The distinctive front facades attracted not only theater-going audiences but also business clientele. The movie theater also became a meeting place for neighborhood residents.

"From 1914 to 1922, more than 4,000 new theaters were built in the United States."[28] This changed the experience of downtowns across the country. The decorative facades, bright lights and colorful advertising signs of the theaters, evolving directly from the early fairground booths and biograph shows helped create a sense of excitement about what could be seen inside. As theater architect S. Charles Lee stated, "the show started on the sidewalk." Going to the movies became an event as well as a shared experience for the community and its "affordability, entertainment and spectacle created the community of the theater in the central business district."[29]

Ridgewood Theater

The 1910s were the period of heaviest development in Ridgewood, with large developers such as Bauer & Stier[30] purchasing farmland that was then divided into lots and sold for houses. This company, located at 677 Fresh Pond Road, was the original developer of the area where the Ridgewood Theater was constructed and had originally planned a multi-family tenement building for this lot.[31] Busy commercial streets such as Myrtle Avenue clearly needed a different kind of structure than the smaller streets nearby.

In April, 1916, Bauer & Stier sold the combined lots for the Ridgewood Theater to the Ridgewood Operating Company,[32] a corporate name established by the Levy Brothers Real Estate firm, that had been actively purchasing and developing real estate throughout the city since the early 1900s.[33] The Levy Brothers originally planned a vaudeville theater to seat 2500 people. By July, 1916, work had begun on the new neighborhood movie theater, designed by Thomas W. Lamb.[34] It was completed by December and a grand opening was held on December 23, 1916. The building cost $250,000, was fireproof, and was said to be modeled after Lamb's Strand Theater continued to operate for more than 90 years before it was closed in March, 2008.[35]

The theater continued to be owned by the Levy Brothers although it was operated by various groups through the years, including William Fox who made it part of his Fox chain around 1923. Fox "dominated the movie industry in the 1920s"[36] with his extensive empire of theaters. Fox began his career as a peddler on New York's Lower East Side and gradually created a chain of 500 theaters throughout the country by 1929. Fox also created his own film production company that eventually became Twentieth-Century Fox, and oversaw an effort to create movies that included sound. This led to the creation, in 1927, of the popular feature "Movietone News." This new phenomenon was shown at the Ridgewood Theater in December of that year. Fox invested heavily in his properties, converting his movie houses to accommodate the "talkies." Eventually lawsuits from competitors and the economic woes of the Great Depression led to Fox's bankruptcy in 1936. In 1939, the Ridgewood Theater was sold to the Nately Operating Company.[37]

Other changes occurred to keep the movie theater competitive. It became part of the United Artists chain in the 1980s and was converted to a multi-plex theater with five screens.

Description

The front façade of the Ridgewood Theater faces the busy commercial thoroughfare of Myrtle Avenue. Higher than the simple, masonry structures on either side, it clearly stands out on this bustling street. The side walls that project over the neighboring buildings are faced with plain brick. The front of the building is three bays wide and three stories tall.

At the base, there are non-historic glass display cases on the side pilasters. There is a modern ticket booth on the west side of the entrance, near the lot line. Recessed in the center are four sets of double glass and metal entrance doors, separated by plain metal pilasters. To the east, along the lot line is a smaller entrance, covered by a solid roll-down metal security door. The area above the entrance has been refaced with plain, non-historic material and a large, non-historic roll-down grate covers the entire area. A large, projecting marquee covers the sidewalk in front of the theater and is topped by standing metal letters with the word "Ridgewood" on each side. This part of the structure replaced the original marquee that was blown down in a storm. The marquee is supported by metal wires and bracing that is attached to the front façade at several points around the central window of the second story. The sides of the marquee have space for removable signage and the underside of this marquee is marked by black horizontal bands that extend beyond the security grate, to the front entrance doors.

The two stories above the marquee are largely intact. They are completely faced with the original terra-cotta tiles, many bearing geometric designs. The wide side pilasters are highlighted by linked diamond shapes and each one is topped by a large shield embellished with volutes, shells and garlands as it rises above the center section. The name of the theater is incised in the terra cotta across the front at the top of the façade and is set off by a band with a wave design. The central section holds six non-historic windows, three on each story, divided by terra-cotta pilasters and spandrels. This section is slightly recessed and surrounded by a spiral terra-cotta molding. The pilasters have flat columns crowned by ornate capitals and the spandrels express a great deal of movement with their diagonal lines leading to smaller shields with garlands in the center of each one.

Report researched and written by
Virginia Kurshan
Research Department

NOTES

[1] This section is based upon the following sources: Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Stockholm Street Historic District Designation Report (LP-2081)* (New York: City of New York, 2000), report prepared by Donald Presa; Eugene L. Armbruster, *The Eastern District of Brooklyn* (New York: Eugene L. Armbruster, 1912); Walter J. Hutter et al., *Our Community: Its History and People – Ridgewood, Glendale, Maspeth, Middle Village, Liberty Park* (New York: Greater Ridgewood Historical Society, Inc., 1976);); National Register of Historic Places, *Ridgewood Multiple Resource Area* (Washington, D.C., 1983), report prepared by Donald G. Presa; "Our Neighborhood the Way It Was," *Times Newsweekly*, August 23,1990, p. 31; *A Research Guide to the History of Queens Borough and its Neighborhoods*, Jon A. Peterson, ed. (Queens, N.Y.: Queens College, 1983), 5, 6, 22; George Schubel, *A History of Greater Ridgewood* (New York: Ridgewood Times Publishing Co., 1912); and Vincent Seyfried and Stephen Weinstein, "Ridgewood," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1005.

[2] Ridgewood was named for the reservoir, built in 1856-59 by the City of Brooklyn, located on the glacial ridge formed by the Long Island terminal moraine. The reservoir was located in the present-day Highland Park on the south side of Ridgewood.

[3] *Encyclopedia of New York*, 1005.

[4] Built in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the house was restored in 1980-82.

[5] Hutter, 200.

[6] Bushwick had developed a large German population, as did Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Steinway, Queens, and Yorkville in Manhattan. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Germans in large numbers had migrated to New York, settling at first in an area of the Lower East Side that came to be known as *Kleinedeutscheland*. Over time, as this area became too crowded and as people assimilated, they moved to other sections of the city. New York City's German population increased further in the 1890s, reaching a peak of 748,882 in 1900.

[7] In 1913, Ridgewood had 30 breweries. None of them remain in operation and all of the brewery buildings have been demolished. Hutter, 268.

[8] Bushwick was not a company town. Housing was constructed by speculative builders, most of whom were also of German descent.

[9] Hutter, 221.

[10] Ibid., 255-6.

[11] Ibid., 257.

[12] Ibid., 260.

[13] Three basic types of homes were constructed: two- and three-family row houses with one apartment per floor, two- and three-story tenements with two apartments per floor, and small multiple-dwellings with ground-floor stores.

[14] "Growth of Queens," *Real Estate Record and Guide*, December 25, 1909, p. 1200.

[15] In the early and middle twentieth century, factories and warehouses were erected in Ridgewood along Flushing and Metropolitan Avenues, north of Ridgewood's residential neighborhoods. This industrial area is located near the Newtown Creek and English Kills shipping channels, and adjoins similar commercial areas in Williamsburg, Bushwick, and Maspeth. In its heyday, the area had hundreds of knitting mills, oil refineries, and manufacturers of such products as glassware and pharmaceuticals.

[16] *WPA Guide*, 460.

[17] This occurred in 1979. *Encyclopedia of NY*, 1004.

[18] This section was compiled from the following sources: "Aldermen Approve Theatre Bill," *NYT* (July 2, 1913), 18; Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema 1907-1915* (New York: Bramhall House, 1961);

Eleanor Kerr, *The First Quarter Century of the Motion Picture Theatre* (New York: Potter & Co,, 1930); Craig Morrison, "From Nickelodeon to Picture Palace and Back," *Design Quarterly* 93 (1974), 6-15; David Naylor, *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1981) and *Great American Movie Theaters* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1987); and P.R. Pereira, "The Development of the Moving Picture Theatre," *The American Architect* 106 (Sept. 23, 1914), 177-185.

[19] On April 23, 1896, Koster & Bial's Music Hall in New York City included the short film "Thomas A. Edison's Latest Marvel, The Vitascope" on its bill.

[20] Arthur S. Meloy, *Theatres and Motion Picture Houses* (New York: Architects' Supply & Publishing Co., 1916), 1. Bosley Crowther, *The Lion's Share: The Story of an Entertainment Empire* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1957), 13.

[21] It was only after World War I that theaters began to be built exclusively for movies.

[22] This section was compiled from: LPC, *Regent Theater (now First Corinthian Baptist Church) Designation Report (LP-1841)* (New York: City of New York, 1994), prepared by Jay Shockley and LPC, *Hamilton Theater Designation Report (LP-2052*) (New York: City of New York, 2000), prepared by Donald Presa; Claudia C. Hart, "The New York Theaters of Thomas Lamb" (Columbia University Masters Thesis, 1983); Thomas W. Lamb Job Book and Index, Avery Library, Columbia University; Thomas W. Lamb obituary, *New York Times* (Feb. 27, 1942); LPC, Thomas W. Lamb research file; and Hillary Russell, "An Architect's Progress: Thomas White Lamb," *Marquee* 21 (1989).

[23] Dennis Sharp, *The Picture Palace*, 73. This inspiration has also been attributed to the Ridgewood Theater.

[24] Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats*, 95.

[25] James Forsher, *How The Community of Cinema, How Cinema and Spectacle Transformed the American Downtown* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2003), 35.

[26] Ibid., vii.

[27] Ibid.

[28]Quoted in Forsher, 38.

[29] Ibid.

[30] August Bauer was its president and architect Louis Berger was its secretary. They were responsible for many developed areas of Ridgewood, including the designated New York City Historic District, Stockholm Street Historic District.

[31] Bauer & Stier first applied for a building permit for this lot in 1914, to build a 5 story, multi-family tenement, NB-1504-14, and NB 384, 85, 86-14, Queens Department of Building files.

[32] Queens County Register, Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 2063, p. 80. The Ridgewood Operating Company was incorporated in January, 1916 by Jacob and Nathan Levy.

[33] "Brooklyn," *New York Times*, Feb. 19, 1916.

[34] Queens Department of Buildings, NB 571-1916.

[35] Nicholas Hirshon, "Will Old Theater Fade to Black?" Daily News (March 26, 2006). According to this article, the theater is "believed to be one of the oldest continuously operated theaters in the country."

[36] Information about William Fox was taken from: http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug00/3on1/movies/fox.html and Gene Farnett, *American Film Studios: An Historical Encyclopedia* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Co., 1988), 86-93.

[37] Queens County Register, Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 4024, p.119. The Nately Operating Corporation was incorporated in February, 1939, by heirs of Jacob Levy and two other business associates. This company was dissolved in 1971.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Ridgewood Theater has a special character and a 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 Ridgewood Theater was constructed in the newly developing community of Ridgewood (then Brooklyn, later Queens) in 1916; that it was designed by one of the country's premier theater architects, Thomas W. Lamb; that Lamb was instrumental in developing a type of architecture specifically for the then-new form of entertainment called motion pictures; that the Ridgewood Theater was one of his earlier buildings and typical of the industry's effort to distribute movie theaters widely on main streets of small towns and communities; that Lamb's decorative but restrained facade has classical revival motifs such as pilasters and heavily encrusted shields created in terra cotta to make the theater stand out on the busy commercial street; that although the theater had different operators through the years, and interior updates to make it compatible with technological changes, it continued to show movies from its opening in December, 1916 through its closing in March, 2008, making it one of the longest continuously running movie theater in the country; that this theater is a unique reminder of the early days of movies when large movie theaters became a focal point of the streetscape and community life of every small town and main street in the country.

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 Ridgewood Theater, 55-27 Myrtle Avenue, Ridgewood, Queens and designates Borough of Queens Tax Map Block, 3451, Lot 7 in part as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair
Stephen F. Byrns, Joan Gerner, Christopher Moore,
Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners

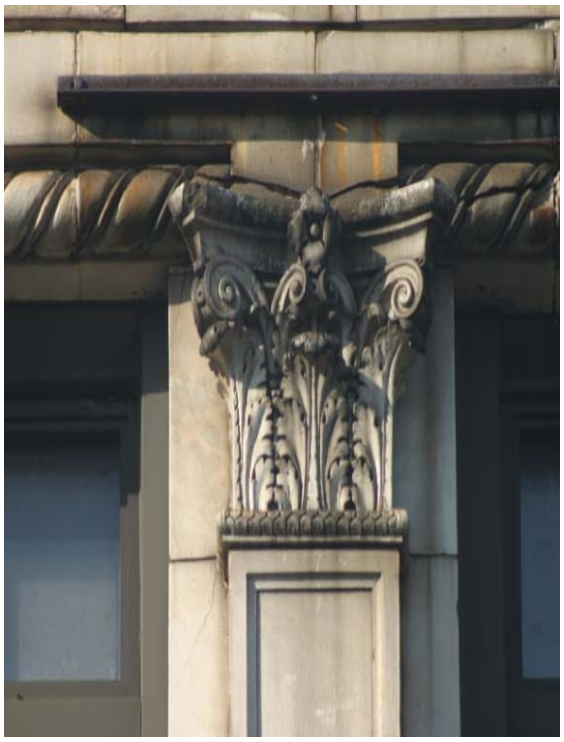
Ridgewood Theater Building
55-27 Myrtle Avenue
Ridgewood, Queens
Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 3451, Lot 7, in part
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009

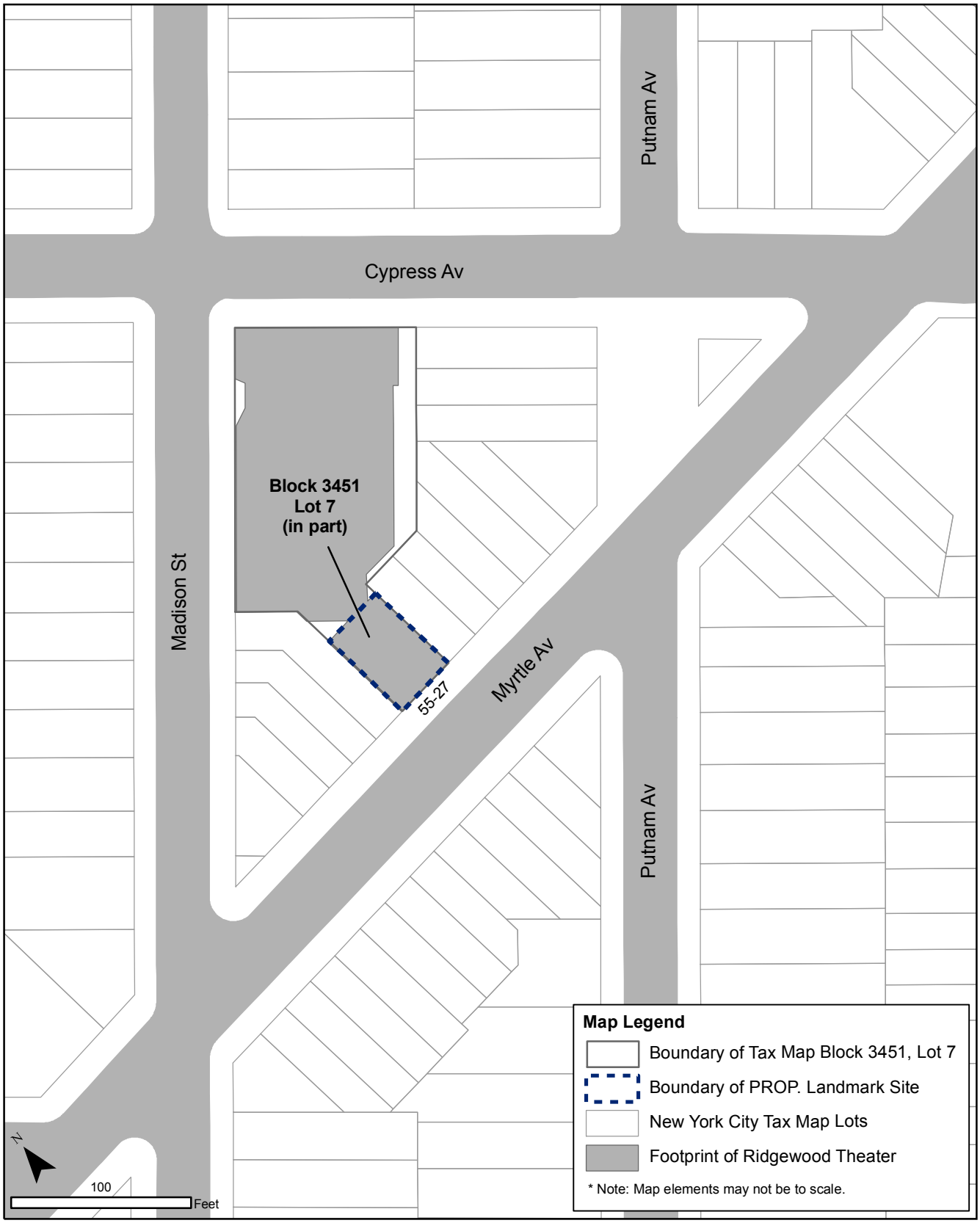
Ridgewood Theater Building
55-27 Myrtle Avenue
Ridgewood, Queens
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009

Ridgewood Theater Building
Façade details
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009

Ridgewood Theater
Ticket booth and entrance details
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009

Ridgewood Theater
Façade details
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009





RIDGEWOOD THEATER, 55-27 Myrtle Avenue. Borough of Queens, Tax Map Block 3451, Lot 7 in part, consisting of the front (southern) portion of the building facing on Myrtle Avenue, bounded by the southern and parts of the eastern and western lot lines, and a line parallel to and 55 feet north of the southern lot line.

Designated: January 12, 2010

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 09v1, 2009. Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM. Date: January 12, 2010.