

ADDRESS: 2117-23 GERMANTOWN AVE

Name of Resource: Diamond Theatre, Iglesia Ministerio Maranatha Pentecostal

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: Iglesia Ministerio Maranatha Pentecostal Inc.

Nominator: Keeping Society of Philadelphia

Staff Contact: Ted Maust, theodore.maust@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the property at 2117-23 Germantown Avenue and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. A two-story brick building with terracotta ornamentation, known during various periods as the Diamond Theatre, the Diamante, the Teatro Puerto Rico, and Iglesia Ministerio Maranatha Pentecostal stands on the property. The nomination contends that the former theater satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D, and J. The nomination argues that the building's Classical Revival style with Palladian influences embodies an architectural style and reflects the environment in an era characterized by that architectural style. The author further contends that the property exemplifies the cultural, economic, and social heritage of the community in its history as a Spanish-language theater from roughly 1950 to 1975.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the property at 2117-23 Germantown Avenue satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D, and J.



Figure 1: Photo of subject property from the nomination.

NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE

1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE *(must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)*

Street address: 2117-23 Germantown Ave

Postal code: 19122

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Diamond Theatre, Diamante, Teatro Puerto Rico

Current/Common Name: Iglesia Ministerio Maranatha Pentecostal

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Building

Structure

Site

Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: excellent good fair poor ruins

Occupancy: occupied vacant under construction unknown

Current use: _____

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1922 to 1975

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1922-23

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Neubauer & Supowitz, David Supowitz

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: _____

Original owner: The Diamond Amusement Company, Michael "Mike" Lessy

Other significant persons: _____

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach a bibliography.

9. NOMINATOR

Organization Keeping Society of Philadelphia Date August 26, 2024

Name with Title Oscar Beisert Email keeper@keepingphiladelphia.org

Street Address 1315 Walnut Street Telephone _____

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19107

Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: August 27, 2024

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: September 9, 2024

Date of Notice Issuance: September 9, 2024

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Iglesia Ministerio Maranatha Pentecostal, Inc.

Address: 2117-23 Germantown Ave

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19122

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: October 16, 2024

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: November 8, 2024

Date of Final Action: _____

Designated Rejected

NOMINATION
FOR THE
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

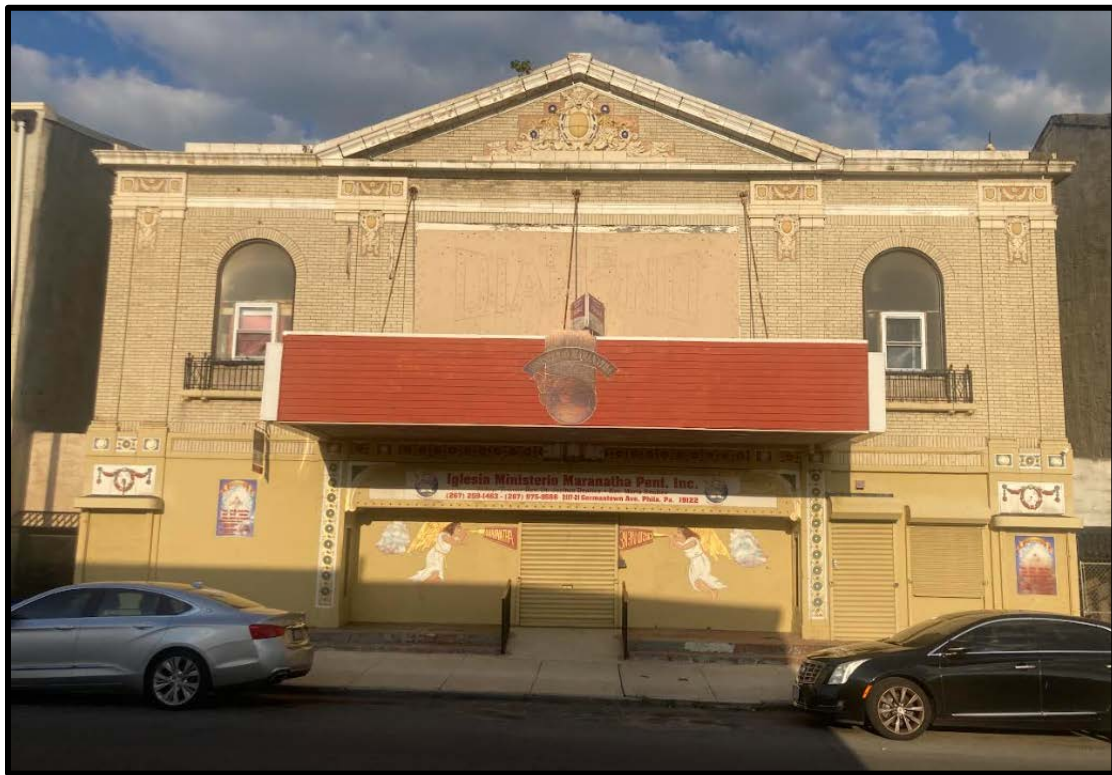


Figure 1. The primary (west) elevation. Source: Andy Molholt, 2024.

THE DIAMOND THEATRE
ERECTED 1922-23
AKA THE TEATRO PUERTO RICO
IGLESIA MINISTERIO MARANATHA PENTECOSTAL
21 17-23 GERMANTOWN AVENUE
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

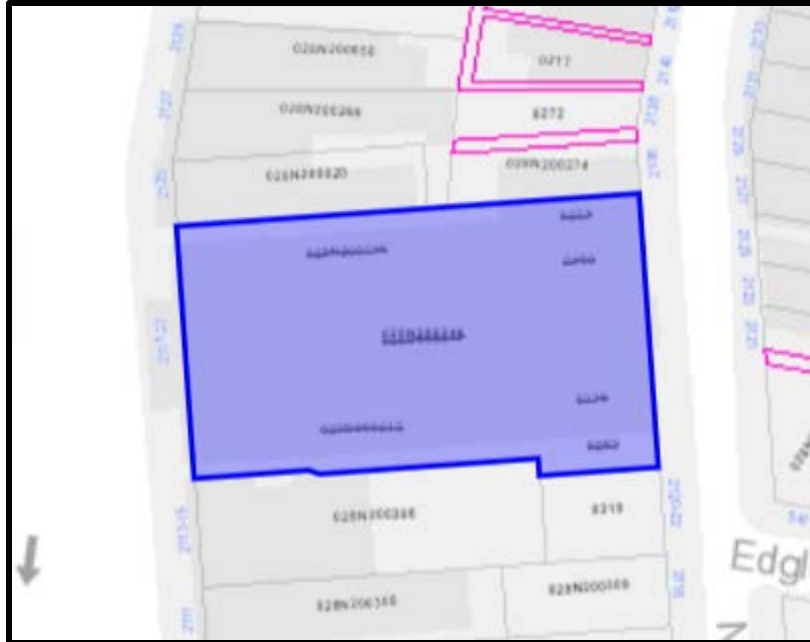


Figure 2. The boundary for the proposed designation is delineated in blue. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia.

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary for the proposed designation is as follows:

Beginning at a point on the Easterly side of Germantown Avenue at a distance of 148'-1" Northwardly from the Northerly side of Diamond Street, extending Eastwardly on a line at right angles to Germantown Avenue 32' to a point, thence South 70 degrees, 20 seconds East 3'-22" to a point thence East 61' to a point; thence Southwardly on a line parallel with Fairhill Street 4' to a point; thence Eastward on a line at right angles to Fairhill Street 33'-1"; thence to the North, on the Westerly side of Fairhill Street, 76' to a point; thence Westerly on a line at right angles to said Fairhill Street 129' to the Easterly side of Germantown Avenue; thence Southwardly 70' along Germantown Avenue to the place of beginning.



Figure 3. Looking east at the subject building. Source: Pictometry, Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2024.



Figure 4. The primary (west) elevation. Source: Andy Molholt, 2024.

6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Diamond Theatre is a two-story neighborhood “moving picture theatre” at 2117-23 Germantown Avenue at the center of what was historically known as the Cohocksink community. The building is constructed of “brick, terra cotta, and steel,” measuring 129 by 70 feet. It originally featured a “slag roof, cement floors,” and other amenities. The building stands immediately upon Germantown Avenue, being fully detached from the adjacent three-story row buildings.



Figure 5. Architectural details above the primary entrance within the primary (west) elevation. Source: Andy Molholt, 2024.



Figure 6. The upper level and pediment of the primary (west) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2024.

Designed in the Classical Revival style, the primary (west) elevation features a facade of tapestry brick that has been painted. Four pairs of brick pilasters create three distinct sections of the primary (west) elevation. The central bay is dominated by a Greek Ionic pediment delineated by molding comprised of architectural terracotta with a central acroterion. At the center of the triangular form is a decorative terracotta relief featuring an elaborate cartouche with a light-yellow convex surface that is celebrated within a scrolling frame. The cartouche is crowned by a grotesque with dramatic facial features and other attributes. Flanking the cartouche are small, circular floral pendants of a dark blue coloring, supported by strands and swags of ribbon and garland. The relief is flanked by slender cornucopia. The same tapestry brick serves as the backdrop for this sculptural decoration.

Beneath the pediment, the second floor of the central bay features a large old sign that reads “The Diamond” (Figure 6), which includes sockets where large lightbulbs once illuminated the theatre’s name. The sign is set off by tapestry brick in running bond and soldier coursing. The first and second floors are delineated in the central bay by a rectangular marquee reclad in signage and modern siding. The marquee is suspended from the building with three cable supports. The first floor of the central bay is the same width as the marquee. The large opening that once led to the theatre interior has been infilled with modern materials. A terracotta surround features a decorative guilloche motif based on two bands.



Figure 7. Architectural terra cotta at the southwest corner of the subject building. Source: Andy Molholt, 2024.

The outer bays are similar in design, though each first-floor bay has undergone different types of alterations and infill. These first-floor openings once housed small shops with storefront windows. The three sections of the facade are delineated by double pilasters on each side of the second floor. The pilasters are set upon a first floor clad in terracotta designed to look like limestone. The base material is interrupted at each corner of the building with an opening for a movie poster. Each opening is topped by a modernist hood with lighting to illuminate the advertisements (Figure 7). Rising above the light fixture is a rectangular terracotta relief with a wreath and garland motif articulated in blue and red colors. Each pilaster features a single terracotta medallion below the base in the form of a decorative pendant. There is also a third medallion between the pilasters. The pilasters feature Doric capitals wrought in a manner commonly associated with flat columns. Between the pilasters at the corners are terracotta cartouches with a convex circular form at center,

which is also of a yellow coloring. Rising above the pilasters is a reticular terracotta cartouche with garland at the center flanked by yellow shields with dark blue trim. A molded terracotta cornice projects from the roofline, connecting the north and south sections of the primary (west) elevation to the central bay and pediment.

The grandest parts of the façade are found on the second floor within the north and south sections, each of which features a large round arch opening at the center. These apertures are delineated by tapestry brick laid in a soldier coursing. The windows have been infilled with plywood or a similar material; however, the original size and shape of the opening remains. Small, vinyl one-over-one builder's grade windows have been cut into the infill of each opening. While the original window fabric appears to have been lost, both openings retain their decorative iron balustrades.



Figure 8. Architectural terracotta details and tapestry brick within the primary (west) elevation. Source: Andy Molholt, 2024.

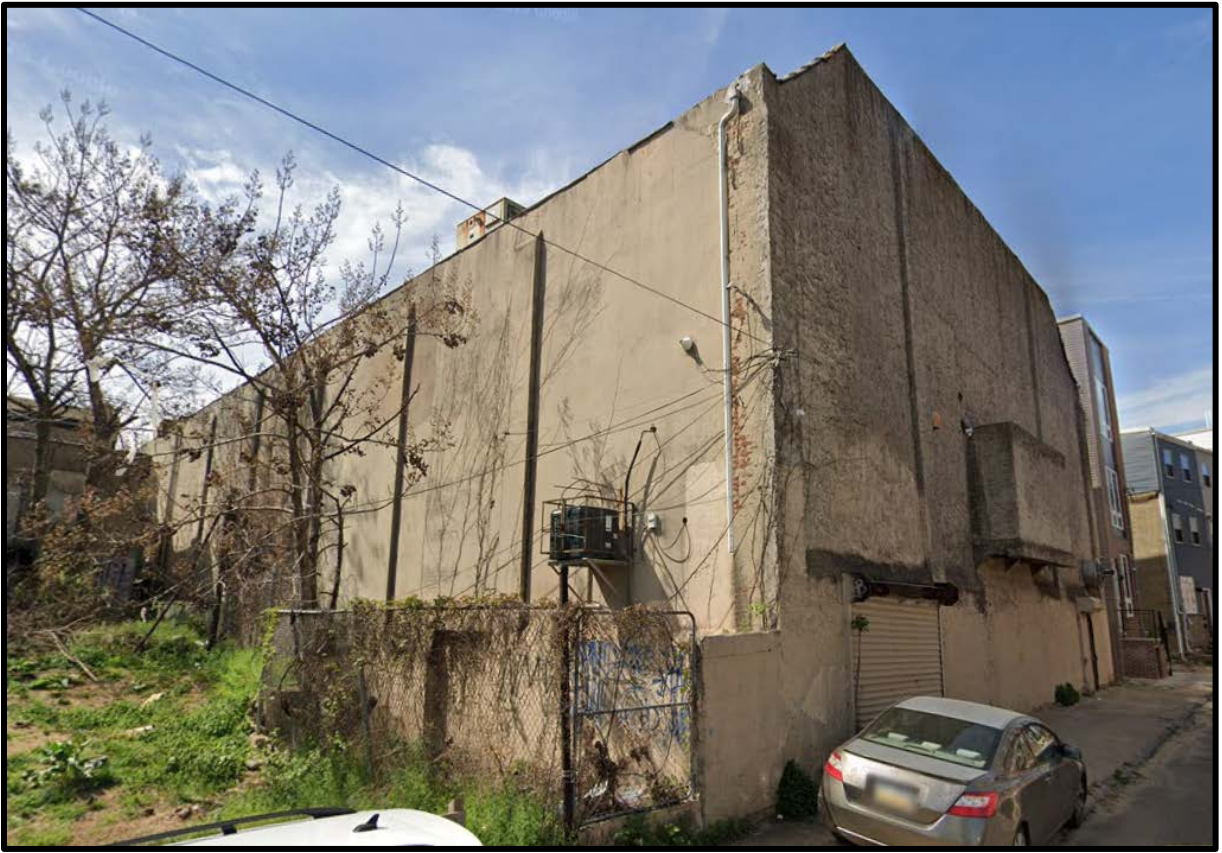


Figure 9. The side (south) and rear (east) elevations. Source: Google Earth.

The side (south) elevation is a blind brick wall finished in smooth-faced stucco (Figure 9). The rear (east) elevation faces onto a narrow alley known as North Fairhill Street. Its utilitarian brick façade has been refaced in pizza shop stucco. The side (north) elevation is concealed by the adjacent building.



Figure 10. The Diamond Theatre in 1945. Source: Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Diamond Theatre at 2117-23 Germantown Avenue in the Cohocksink neighborhood of Philadelphia is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The building satisfies the following Criteria for Designation as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code:

- (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; and
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social, or historical heritage of the community.

The period of significance for the subject property includes two phases: 1. The original period of design and construction in 1922-23; and 2. The period in which the subject building was known as the Diamante Theatre and the Teatro Puerto Rico, a Spanish language theatre, that served the Puerto Rican and larger Latino community from ca.1950 to ca.1975.

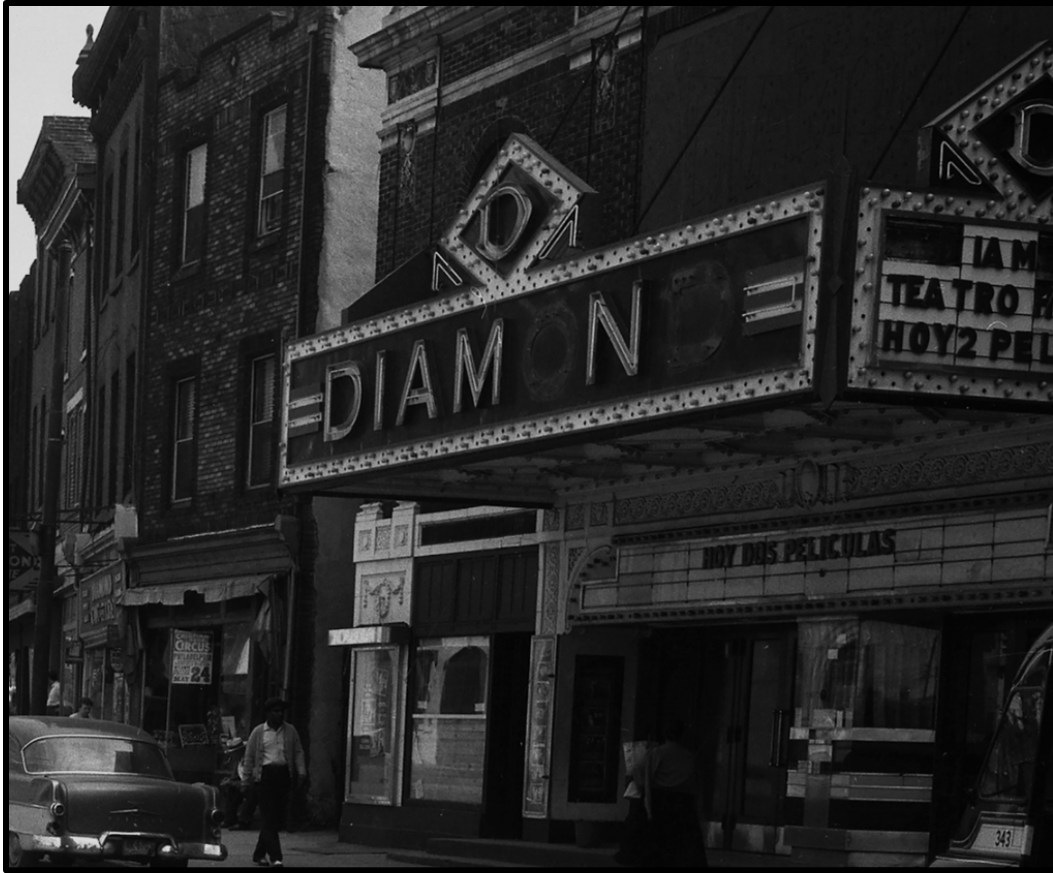


Figure 11. The Diamond Theatre in the ca.1940-50s. Source: Google.

CRITERIA C, D, AND J

The Diamond Theatre at 2117-23 Germantown Avenue is a century-old movie theatre building that served the community and city as a distinctive example of the Classical Revival style, as articulated in the interwar years, specifically in the 1920s, with the employment of tapestry brick and architectural terracotta, satisfying Criterion D. The subject building is representative of a neighborhood or small-town theatre building type that was designed in the Classical Revival style, satisfying Criterion C. In 1950, the Diamond became the Diamante, as the neighborhood had become home to a Puerto Rican community and population, which led to the subject building becoming a Spanish language theatre. By 1960, the Diamante was purchased by a Latin proprietor and the name was again changed to Teatro Puerto Rico, an established that endured until ca.1975. The subject building represents the cultural, social, and historical heritage of the Puerto Rican and larger Latino community as one of the important Spanish language theatres in Philadelphia, satisfying Criterion J.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

In April 1922, it was reported that the Cohocksink Amusement Company had purchased the subject property, and that a "Moving Picture Theatre" was slated for the site. Plans for the subject building were drawn in the Classical Revival style by Architects, Neubauer & Supowitz of 929 Chestnut Street. It likely that the building was designed by David Supowitz (1893-1964), a prolific Jewish

architect and designer of theatre buildings in the Philadelphia region.¹ The primary construction materials were brick, terracotta, and steel.² The project was flipped to the Diamond Amusement Company in July 1922, which included the removal of the dwellings at 2117 to 2123 Germantown Avenue, as well as 2126 North Fairhill Street.³ Construction appears to have taken place between July 1922 and January 1923.⁴ The Diamond Amusement Company was operated by Michael “Mike” Lessy (1876-1948), who also controlled the Collingswood Theatre in Collingswood, New Jersey, as well as the Standard Theatre in Camden, New Jersey. Lessy was a Russian-Jewish immigrant, who was a “pioneer in the motion picture business,” and said to have been associated with Universal Pictures as a producer about 1900.⁵ Around the time that the Diamond was opening in January 1923, Lessy purchased the Aurora Theatre, located just opposite the Diamond on Germantown Avenue.



Figure 12. Mike Lessy, owner of the Diamond Theatre stands at the center of this group of proprietors in 1924. Source: “*The Exhibitor*,” 15 February 1924, 19.

Naturally, the Diamond Theatre underwent improvements over time. In June 1926, Lessy engaged Gibelli & Co., theatre decorators, to “decorate” the Diamond Theatre, as well as his Collingswood Theatre. The interior renovations cost Lessy roughly \$3,000.⁶ The Diamond Theatre underwent

¹ The subject building may be eligible under Criterion E for its architect, David Supowitz; however, further research on the topic was beyond the scope of this nomination.

² *Philadelphia Real Estate Record & Builders' Guide (PRERBG)*, 19 April 1922, 255.

³ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 July 1922, 4.

⁴ “Lessy Gets Aurora Theatre,” “*The Exhibitor*,” 1 January 1923, 16.; and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 November 1923, 28.

⁵ “Movie Pioneer Dies,” *The Plain Speaker*, 9 December 1948, 1.

⁶ “Mike Lessy Renovates Collingwood and Diamond,” “*The Exhibitor*,” 15 July 1926, 10.

additional improvements in April 1927.⁷ In 1935, Lessy commissioned central air to be installed in the Diamond.⁸

By 1950, the local population was increasingly Latino, as Puerto Ricans were pouring into the neighborhood. This led to a major change in the Diamond Theatre, as it became one of the early Spanish language movie houses in Philadelphia. In 1958, the Estate of Mike Lessy sold the property. By 1960, Felix Rodriguez owned the theatre, and the name was changed to the Teatro Puerto Rico. This business endured until ca.1975. The Iglesia Ministerio Maranatha Pentecostal, Inc. purchased the property in 2011.



Figure 13. A view of Germantown Avenue with the subject building on right, when it was known as the Teatro Puerto Rico. Source: Cinema Treasures.

⁷ “Diamond to Be Renovated,” *The Exhibitor*, 15 April 1927, 12.

⁸ Zoning Archives, City of Philadelphia.



Figure 14. Top: The Diamond Theatre, taken by Stott. Source: Source: Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Figure 15. Bottom: The Diamond Theatre, taken by Hidden City Philadelphia.

CRITERIA C & D: THE CLASSICAL REVIVAL STYLE

The Diamond Theatre is a significant neighborhood movie house that embodies the Classical Revival style with Palladian overtones. The Classical Revival style enjoyed renewed popularity after the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, Illinois. In fact, almost three decades before the subject building was constructed, the Classical Revival began in approximately 1895, and it was such a popular style that it extended through 1950. Akin to the Colonial Revival style,

the Classical Revival was “more formal and monumental in its design.”⁹⁹ The Palladian component is one that traces its roots back to Venetian architect Andrea Palladio (1508-1580), whose concepts included perspectivism, symmetry, and the principles of classical architecture.



Figure 16. Bottom: The interior of the subject building. Source: Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Derived from classical architecture, the most prominent features of the Classical Revival include impressive columns of varying orders, as well as porticos and pediments. Urban designs, like the subject building, were done in the Classical Revival style with a decided Palladian influence; however, the columns were often articulated in the form of flat pilasters. The Diamond Theatre features four sets of brick pilasters set in pairs with simple Doric capitals. Above each set of pilasters is a rectangular terracotta cartouche or relief with classical details. There were rarely porticos in the commercial architecture of large cities, so pediments were often placed just above the cornice of the central bay at the same plain as the pilasters. This is certainly the case with the subject building. The triangular form, clad in brick, is dominated by a terracotta cartouche at the center, which is surrounded by small flowers, rosettes, and strands and swags of garland, along with cornucopia at each side. Symmetrical fenestrations were a requirement of the Classical Revival style, and the subject building is no different, featuring a formal but decidedly commercial set of apertures. In both the north and south sections, there are round arch openings that originally featured multi-light sash and fanlight. With the projecting iron balustrades these balconies gave the building a sense of importance, as though one of the actors might come out and wave to a crowd on Germantown Avenue. Figure 16 illustrates the early interior of the Diamond Theatre,

⁹⁹ PHMC Style Guide

which included a central screen that looked very much like an elaborate stage that was flanked by speakers set in frames that mimicked Palladian windows.

One important aspect of this Classical Revival design is that it culminates in a 1920s rendition of a Palladian building. Even the brick choice, a rough-faced “buff” tapestry brick, is reminiscent of large city houses in London that were influenced by the Adams brothers. This Classical and Palladian Revivalist façade is one formed by its brickwork; its pairs of pilasters; its round arch openings emulating formal balconies; its central pediment; and its proliferation of classical details as articulated in architectural terracotta.

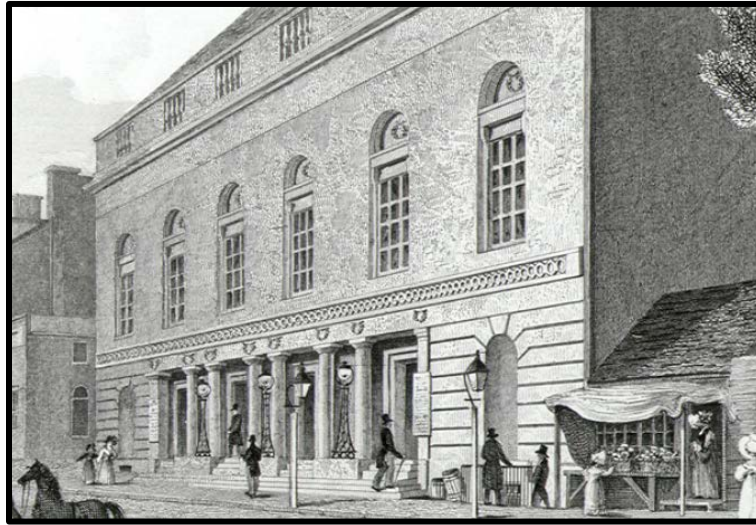


Figure 17. Etching of the Walnut Street Theatre in 1831. Source: Pennsylvania State Archives.

The Classical Revival appearance of the Diamond Theatre was hardly a new motif in 1922-23. In fact, Philadelphia’s most famous early theatres were of a similar scale with distinctive stylistic elements that were indicative of Georgian, Greek Revival, and Palladian facades. One version of the Chestnut Street Theatre, located on the north side of the 600 block of Chestnut Street near South Sixth Street, appears to have been rebuilt in 1805 on designs by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, the eminent architect. The fenestration featured round arch windows and a central pediment, which were antecedents to features of the subject building. In 1855, the Chestnut Street Theatre was replaced with a design by William Strickland, the eminent architect; this time with a Grecian front that was centered on a colonnade at the ground floor, supporting a gallery of six columns above.¹⁰ The central section was flanked by round arch niches that bring to mind the subject property with its round arch windows flanking the central section. Known as the oldest theatre in America, the Walnut Street Theatre (Figure 17) at the northeast corner of Ninth and Chestnut Streets opened in 1809. It has some features that are also antecedents to those employed on subject building, including its scale. The Greek Revival façade was added in 1828, which was when the rusticated first floor was completed, as well as the round arch windows.

¹⁰ Irving R. Glazer. *Philadelphia Theatres, A-Z*. (Philadelphia: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1986.)

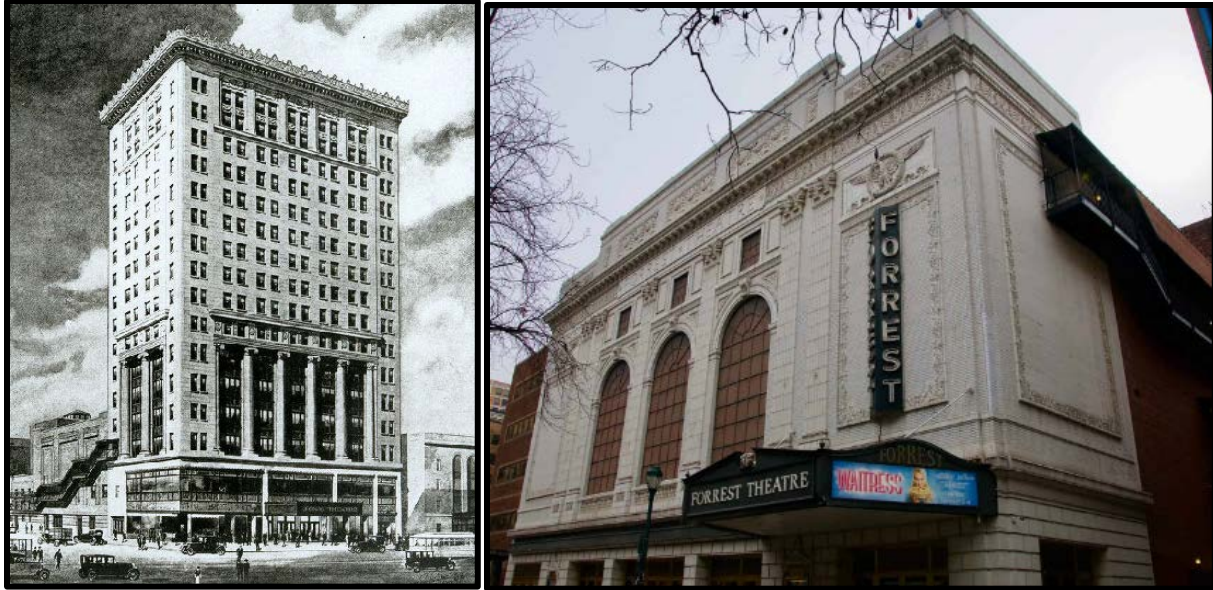


Figure 18. Left: The Fox Theatre at 16th Street near Market, Philadelphia, built in 1923, designed by Thomas W. Lamb, architect. Figure 19. Right: The Forrest Theatre, Walnut Street. Source: Google.

Naturally, in a city as large as Philadelphia, there were much grander theatres than the subject building by the interwar years. While there were still traditional theatres throughout the city, the “moving picture theatre” was becoming a feature of every community and neighborhood. Perhaps the grandest Classical Revival theatre in Philadelphia was the Fox Theatre (Demolished/Figure 18), built in 1923, at South Sixteenth and Market Streets, and designed by Thomas W. Lamb. It was essentially a theatre skyscraper with a four-story gallery of six columns that stood near the base of the sixteen-story building. Perhaps the greatest terracotta-clad Classical Revival style theatre is the Forrest (Figure 19) at 1106-14 Walnut Street, which is a grand building that outdoes the appearance of most neighborhood venues.



Figure 20. The Circle Theatre at Monument Circle in Indianapolis, Indiana, designed by Rubush & Hunter, architects. Source: Google.

Across the country, the Classical Revival style was applied to numerous neighborhood theatre buildings between 1895 and 1950. Though slightly grander, a particularly poignant example akin to the subject building is the Circle Theatre on Monument Circle in Indianapolis, Indiana (Figure 20), designed by Rubush & Hunter, architects. In addition to the Fox Theatre and the Forrest Theatre in Philadelphia, both the Metropolitan Opera House and the Mastbaum Theatre (Demolished) were impressive Neoclassical piles that occupied prominent locations. Movie palaces also included the Logan Theatre (Figure 22), built in 1923, on North Broad Street between Wyoming and Loudon Streets; and the Stanley Theatre (Demolished/Figure 21) on Market Street at Nineteenth, both of which were designed in the Classical Revival style like the subject building. Throughout the Quaker City, there were numerous neighborhood theatre buildings designed in the Classical Revival style, including the Jefferson Theatre at 2217 North 29th Street (Figure 23), featuring similar brickwork and a massive terracotta relief emulating a fanlight motif as a central feature; the Admiral Theatre at 2806 North Fifth Street (Figure 25), featuring pilasters and blind round arches; the Ambassador Theatre at 5542 Baltimore Avenue (Figure 24), featuring elaborate terracotta details, including pediments, fanlights, and an elaborate cornice; the Wayne-Palace Theatre at 4613 Wayne Avenue in Lower Germantown (Figure 26) with its pediment set atop four pilasters; and the Empress Theatre on Main Street in Manayunk (Figure 27), featuring terracotta reliefs replete with swags of garland. In the larger Philadelphia Region, additional examples include the Westmont Theatre in Haddon, Camden County, New Jersey (Figure 28); and the Colonial Theater in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania (Figure 29), both of which were designed by David Supowitz. The above-referenced examples illustrate the prevalence of the Classical Revival in the design of movie theatres in Philadelphia, even when executed on a neighborhood scale.

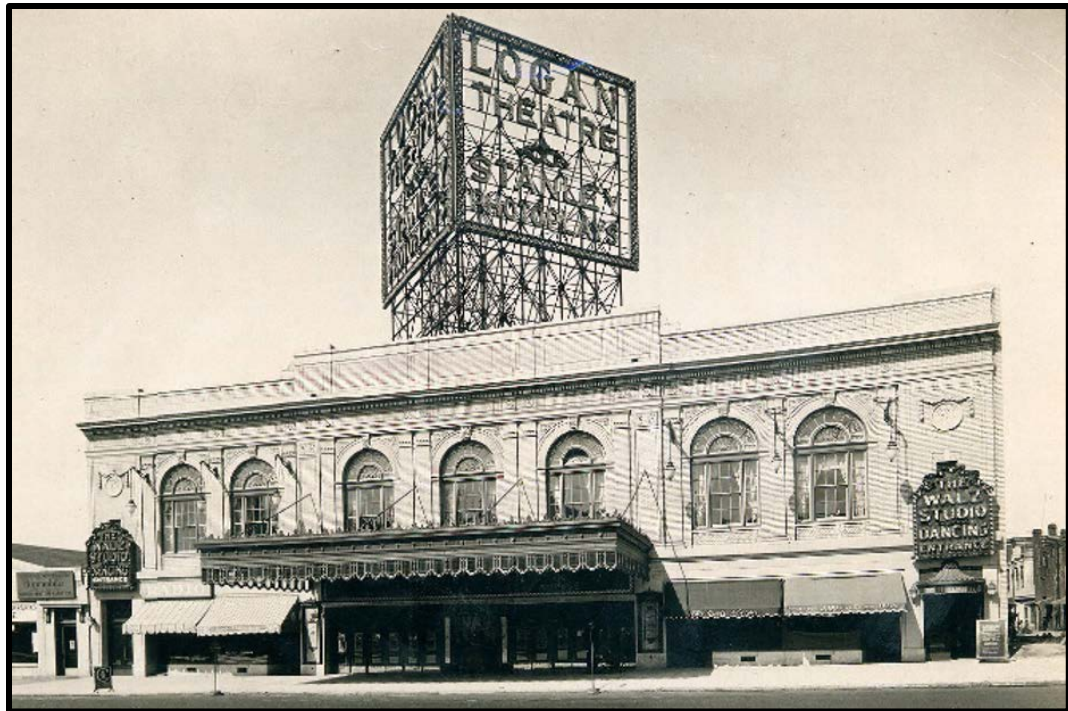


Figure 21. Top: The Stanley Theatre at 19th and Market Streets in 1921. Source: Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Figure 22. Bottom: Logan Theatre, Broad between Wyoming and Loudon Streets in 1923 by William R. Hellerman. Source: Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.



Figure 23. The Jefferson Theatre in Philadelphia. Source: Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.



Figure 24. Top: Admiral Theatre in Philadelphia. Source: Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Figure 25. Bottom: Ambassador Theatre in Philadelphia. Source: Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.



Figure 26. Top: The Wayne-Palace Theater at 4613 Wayne Avenue. Source: Google Earth. Figure 27. Bottom: The Empress Theater on Main Street in Manayunk. Source: Hidden City Philadelphia.



Figure 28. Top: The Westmont Theatre in Haddon, Camden County, New Jersey. Figure 29. Bottom: The Colonial Theater in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. Source: Google.



Figure 30. A close-up view of the subject building in 1964 after it was converted to the “Teatro Puerto Rico,” a theatre with exclusively Spanish-speaking films. Source: Thomas Werner. “Puerto Ricans List Police Among Their Problems,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 June 1964, 9.

CRITERION J

The Diamond Theatre, also known as the Diamante Theatre and the Teatro Puerto Rico, is an early Spanish language theatre in Philadelphia that served the Puerto Rican community in the vicinity of the subject property during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The building represents one of the few surviving community spaces that speaks to the first great period of Puerto Rican migration to Philadelphia, which largely occurred between 1950 and 1970.

In 1950, Josephine Trilla of 1852 North 7th Street applied for a permit to “Erect, Register or Maintain A Street Advertising Device” in the name of the Diamante Theatre, which is the Spanish translation of Diamond.¹¹ At the time, this change was clearly geared to serve a largely Hispanic and/or Puerto Rican clientele. The subject building was still owed by the Estate of Mike Lessy. In fact, the building would not be put on the market until 1958. It appears that Felix Rodriguez purchased the property from the Lessy Estate by October 1960, as is indicated on his “Permit To Erect Or Register Street Advertising Device.”¹² It was likely around this time that the Diamante Theatre became the Teatro Puerto Rico, which was its name under the ownership of Rodriguez. The subject building served the Puerto Rican community from ca.1950 through ca.1975 as a place of community and social engagement. This venue was especially important to the community due to it being one of the few Spanish language theatres in Philadelphia.

¹¹ Application For Permit To Erect, Register or Maintain A Street Advertising Device: 2117 Germantown Ave., May 1950. Source: Zoning Archives.

¹² Permit To Erect Or Register Street Advertising Device: 2117 Germantown Ave., 24 October 1960. Source: Zoning Archives.

While there were certainly a handful of Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this specific Latino community did not have a large population in the Quaker City until the mid-twentieth century.¹³ After the Second World War, the largely agrarian Puerto Rican economy was industrialized, ultimately leading some Puerto Ricans to migrate to Philadelphia. This began in the late 1940s so much so that in the 1950s, Puerto Ricans are said to have been the largest Latino population in Philadelphia. By 1954, roughly 65 percent of Puerto Ricans lived north of Center City.¹⁴ A large sector of the community resided in the area surrounding the subject property, which is why the Diamond became the Diamante in 1950. Between 1950 and 1970, the Puerto Rican community expanded in Philadelphia by more than 60,000.¹⁵

From ca.1950 to ca.1975, the Diamante Theatre, also known as the Teatro Puerto Rico, was an important Spanish language theatre in the context of the Puerto Rican community of Philadelphia, satisfying Criterion J.

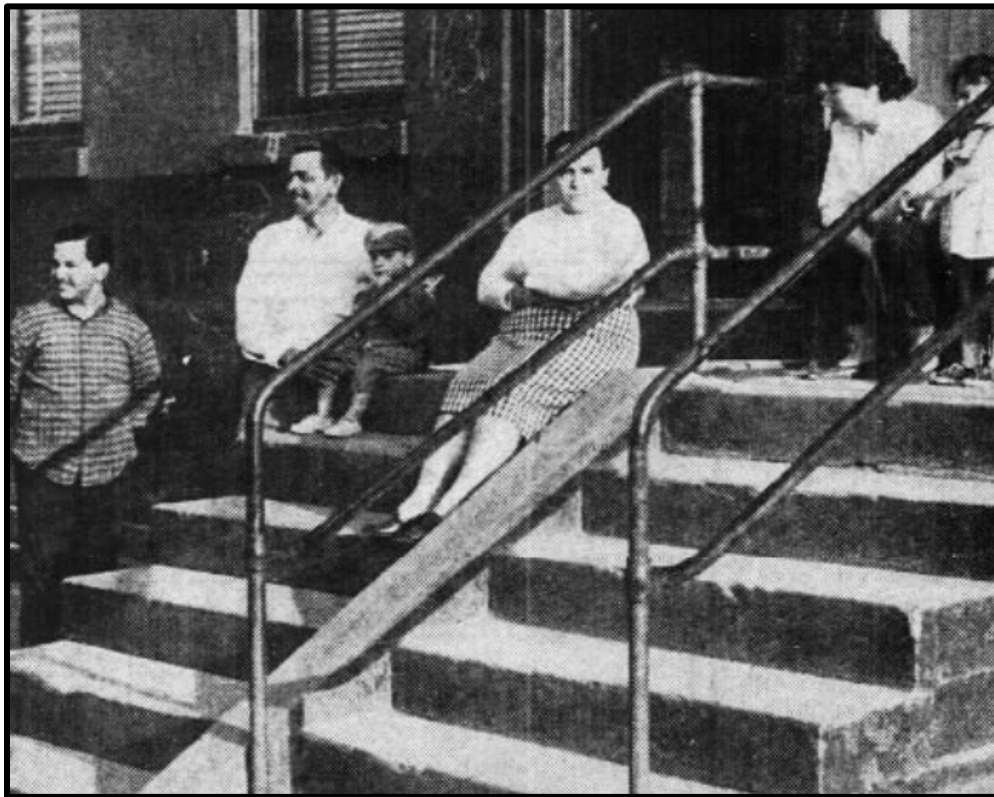


Figure 31. Puerto Rican families socializing on their stoops in the neighborhood near the subject property. Source: Thomas Werner. "Puerto Ricans List Police Among Their Problems," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 June 1964, 9.

¹³ Victor Vazquez-Hernandez. "From Pan-Latino Enclaves to a Community: Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia, 1910-2000," *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Carmen Teresa Whalen. *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

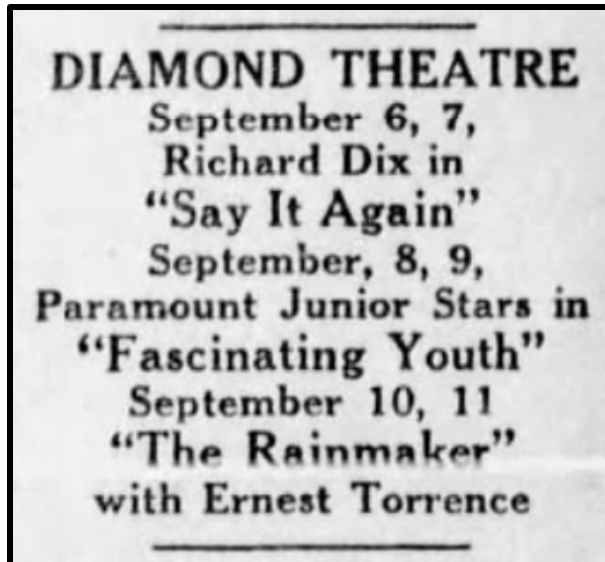


Figure 32. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 September 1926, 83.

8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

This nomination was made possible through the generosity of Andy Molholt, Musician and Cinema Palace Appreciator. The nomination is being completed by Keeping Society of Philadelphia with Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian and Historic Preservationist, as the primary author with assistance from J.M. Duffin, Archivist; and Nancy McBreen, Retired Teacher.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Application For Permit To Erect, Register or Maintain A Street Advertising Device: 2117 Germantown Ave., May 1950.

Carmen Teresa Whalen. *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

“Diamond to Be Renovated,” *The Exhibitor*, 15 April 1927, 12.

Irving R. Glazer. *Philadelphia Theatres, A-Z*. (Philadelphia: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1986.)

“Lessy Gets Aurora Theatre,” *The Exhibitor*, 1 January 1923, 16.

“Mike Lessy Renovates Collingwood and Diamond,” *The Exhibitor*, 15 July 1926, 10.

“Movie Pioneer Dies,” *The Plain Speaker*, 9 December 1948, 1.

Permit To Erect Or Register Street Advertising Device: 2117 Germantown Ave., 24 October 1960.
Source: Zoning Archives.

PRERBG, 19 April 1922, 255.

PHMC Style Guide

The Philadelphia Inquirer, 10 November 1923, 28.

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