

CONEY ISLAND THEATER (LATER SHORE THEATER) BUILDING, 1301 Surf Avenue (aka 2932-2952 Stillwell Avenue), Brooklyn. Built 1925; Reilly & Hall, architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 7064, Lot 16.

On March 23, 2010 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the (former) Coney Island Theater Building, later Shore Theater at 1301 Surf Avenue, Brooklyn, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 6). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were nine speakers in favor of designation including representatives of Councilmember Recchia, the Historic Districts Council, the Municipal Art Society, the Landmarks Conservancy, Coney Island USA, Save Coney Island, and the Coney Island History Project.

Summary

The seven-story theater and office building recently known as the Shore Theater and originally known as the Coney Island Theater is one of the largest, most substantial structures in Coney Island in Brooklyn and, when it was constructed in 1925, represented the optimistic attitude of that period for the successful year-round development of Coney Island as a premier entertainment district. Seeking to change the atmosphere of the resort from the somewhat seedy aura it had developed in the 19th century into an area of wholesome family amusement, the city constructed the Boardwalk and extended subway service to Stillwell Avenue while private developers built enclosed amusement parks, restaurants and hotels. The Coney Island Theater was part of this redevelopment effort and featured live performances as well as motion picture screenings.



The neo Renaissance Revival style building was constructed and owned by the Chanin Construction Company and leased to the prominent Loew's theater chain. This large building contained stores, a theater and offices, originally intended for businesses related to the theater industry. Faced with brick and terra-cotta and highlighted by stone and terra-cotta details this structure presents a grand and substantial counterpoint to Coney Island's more modest one- and two-story buildings. The architects, Reilly & Hall, were leading theater architects of the day. Their selection for the design of the building is indicative of the desire, on the part of Coney Island's civic and business leaders, to confer legitimacy, grandeur, and elegance on Coney Island. The building is organized in a tri-partite configuration, with a rusticated base, a buff brick shaft and a crown featuring a central arcade and balcony. The Shore Theater Building is a remarkably intact survivor of the early 20th century period when Coney Island was New York City's playground, and was striving to become a year-round entertainment district for the entire city.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Coney Island¹

Although the western end of Coney Island had achieved some popularity as a rustic seaside resort early in the 19th century, it also gained an unsavory reputation for its gambling, pick-pockets and prostitution. The real growth of Coney Island as a resort came about in the 1870s when five new railroads were constructed to connect the island with the rest of Brooklyn. These lines were built by businessmen and entrepreneurs who developed large hotels on the eastern end of the island and wanted to provide easy access to Brooklyn and Manhattan to attract a higher-end clientele than those who frequented the west side. The Manhattan Beach Hotel was opened in 1877 on the far eastern end of Coney Island, served by the New York and Manhattan Beach Railway with direct connections to lower Manhattan. Just to the west of this was the huge Brighton Beach Hotel opened in 1878, primarily drawing its clientele from Brooklyn's middle-class business community.

Between Brighton Beach and the less savory environs of the far western point lay West Brighton, an area that became the island's entertainment section and was served by the Prospect Park & Coney Island Railroad, commonly known as the Culver Line. Carrying numerous day-trippers away from their teeming tenements, this train terminated at a large depot near 17th Street across from Culver Plaza, a spacious open area filled with colorful flowers. West Brighton became the site of numerous bathing pavilions, restaurants, saloons, variety shows, small stores, games and unusual attractions such as "Lucy the Elephant" (destroyed by fire in 1896) and the Iron Tower (imported from the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876). West Brighton became "Coney's true entertainment district, attracting the lion's share of the island's visitors."²

By the end of the 19th century a series of devastating fires opened up vast tracts of land for redevelopment and the West Brighton section became home to a new type of diversion: the enclosed amusement park. In 1895 Paul Boyton's Sea Lion Park opened, quickly succeeded in 1897 by George C. Tilyou's legendary Steeplechase Park, and Coney Island took on a different mien. These parks, along with Luna Park (opened in 1903) and Dreamland (opened in 1904) offered thrilling, gravity-defying mechanical rides as well as exotic fantasy architecture shimmering with millions of electric lights, sideshows, live entertainment, theatrical reenactments, music and dance halls, bathing pavilions, and eateries.

It was during the first decades of the 20th century, with the advent of the great amusement parks, that the idea of the "New Coney Island" began to take shape. The "New Coney Island" was a notion promulgated by some Coney business leaders to turn Coney Island into a year-round resort, similar to Atlantic City. Chief among the goals of the "New Coney Island" was to slough off the seedy, somewhat dangerous reputation of the late 19th century, and replace it with a more wholesome image. The enclosed parks all banned alcohol, and required patrons to pay an admission fee. It was believed that this would help to keep out patrons perceived as undesirable.³ Several civic organizations began calling for the construction of a boardwalk, which would provide visitors with an important public amenity.⁴

The Boardwalk opened in 1920, the same year subway service was extended to Coney Island. Three years later, the Coney Island Chamber of Commerce was organized, with the goal of "developing Coney Island on a larger and broader scale."⁵ With the support and promotion of the Coney Island Chamber of Commerce, several new buildings and amusements were erected. These included the (second) Child's Restaurant on the Boardwalk, the Cyclone Roller Coaster, the Wonder Wheel, the Stillwell Avenue subway terminal, the Half Moon Hotel, Stauch's Baths, the RKO Tilyou Theater, and the Coney Island Theater.⁶ The Coney Island Theater Building is one of the few structures still extant from this period. Other surviving features include the

Wonder Wheel, the Cyclone and the Child's Restaurant (all designated New York City Landmarks) on the Boardwalk. By decade's end, Coney Island had been transformed once more.

The Coney Island Theater Building

This large, intact building rising on the Coney Island skyline is a prominent neo Renaissance Revival style structure that expresses, through its size and style, the aspirations of Coney Island's boosters in the 1920s. The Coney Island Theater Building, most recently known as the Shore Theater Building, was constructed as a fireproof structure on part of the site of the former Culver Railroad line depot (replaced by the newly extended subway).⁷ A comment by Irwin S. Chanin, president of the Chanin Construction Company who was the developer of this building indicated a concern for changing the atmosphere at Coney Island. "We realized the great need in Coney Island for an all-year amusement, and I believe we have satisfied this need. We spared no expense to provide adequate facilities that will attract the finest business and amusement ventures."⁸

By the booming 1920s, with the Jazz Age in full swing, the culture of Coney Island was fully formed. The construction of the Half Moon Hotel in 1927, the first major hotel to be built in Coney Island since the days of the great resorts of the late 1800s, along with the completion of the newly reconstructed and publicly accessible Boardwalk, was to be a harbinger of Coney's direction for the future. The construction of the Coney Island Theater was part and parcel of this movement. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reported in May, 1925 that "[the theater] will be the first of its kind at the resort and the forerunner of similar structures in the movement to make Coney Island an all-year amusement resort."⁹ Expanding upon this theme, Irwin S. Chanin continued,

The resort has the greatest population area in the country to draw from, and nothing has prevented it from being an all-year amusement place but the present type of structures, which for the most part are built only for summer use. With the subway terminating at Surf Avenue, the boardwalk extending the full length of the ocean front and the adequate police regulations, nothing can now stand in the way of its advancement.¹⁰

These bold intentions are also visible in the choice of the architectural firm for the theater building. Reilly & Hall were noted theater architects of the 1920s. Some of their most important commissions were New York's Sheridan Theater (now demolished) and the Newton Theater in Newton, New Jersey. Upon the opening of the New Jersey theater, a local newspaper, the *Sussex County Democrat* remarked that,

These young men have, in a short time, impressed theatre owners with their unusual ability, as operators of exquisite theatres and supervised the Tivoli Theatre in Newark, the Sheridan Theatre in New York, the Strand Theatre in Schenectady, and are engaged at present in directing the work on the Coney Island Theatre which, when completed, will rival the best picture palaces of the country.¹¹

The firm's choice of material also indicates the ambitious building campaign. Limestone, brick, and terra cotta were used, rather than wood, as had been the custom at Coney Island. Additionally, the building is not merely a movie theater, but a seven-story "Coney Island Theater Building," complete with offices intended to be occupied by organizations related to the entertainment industry. With buildings such as this theater and the Half Moon Hotel, the business community of Coney Island was announcing the area's legitimacy and its aspirations.

Indeed, a 1925 *Brooklyn Eagle* headline announced, “\$2,000,000 Theater and Office Building Reflects Transformation of Coney Island.”¹²

The theater was immediately leased to the prominent Loew’s movie theater chain, an organization that was expanding its holdings throughout the city and beyond.

Chanin Construction Company¹³

The Chanin Construction Company, developers of the Coney Island Theater Building, was founded in 1919 by Irwin S. Chanin (1892–1988) and his brother Henry (1893–1973), an accountant. Irwin was graduated from the Cooper Union School of Engineering in 1915. Beginning with modest residences in Bensonhurst, the firm quickly expanded and by the late 1920s, it was responsible for some of New York’s most significant buildings, including the Century and Majestic Apartments on Central Park West, and the Chanin Building (all designated New York City Landmarks). Indeed, a 1929 profile of the company in *The New Yorker* notes that “What is unusual about the Chanins’ story is that their achievements are visible; a whole city of scattered buildings, a hundred and forty-one of them in New York and Brooklyn.”¹⁴ Henry was responsible for the day-to-day management of the firm, while Irwin was the artistic visionary. Two other brothers, Samuel and Aron, also played a role in the Chanin Construction Company.

Among their numerous projects were many theaters. One of the earliest was the Roxy Theater, known as the “Cathedral of Motion Pictures” (demolished) followed by the Biltmore Theater; the Forty-Sixth Street Theater; the Mansfield Theater; the Theater Masque; The Royale Theater; and the Majestic Theater.¹⁵ Irwin Chanin had distinct ideas about theater design. The theme of fantasy and escape, of taking people away from their everyday lives was always uppermost in Chanin’s mind. The comfort of the theatergoer and performer was also paramount. The Chanin Construction Company built theaters with wide aisles, wide seats, roomy entry foyers, ample dressing rooms and good acoustics.¹⁶

The Loew’s Corporation¹⁷

From the beginning, this theater was leased and operated by the Loew’s theater chain. Marcus Loew (1870 – 1927), the company founder, was born on Manhattan’s Lower East Side and had an early career as a furrier. While working in this field Loew met Adolph Zukor, who was also in the fur business, and Morris Kohn and the three began investing in residential real estate. When Zukor and Kohn invested in a penny arcade on 14th Street, Loew watched the business thrive and was invited to join the partnership. Soon after, Loew began a competing establishment with an arcade on 23rd Street. By 1907 Loew’s company had a nationwide chain of 3,000 nickelodeons. Loew then purchased Watson’s Cozy Corner, a so-called low vaudeville theater in downtown Brooklyn, transformed it into a genuine movie palace and renamed it the Royal Theatre, charging 10 cents for admission, which was twice the standard. Loew began to expand his business rapidly, taking control of several large theaters in Manhattan and then constructing new ones, the first being the National Theatre in the Bronx in 1910. By 1911 a newly reorganized company - Loew’s Theatrical Enterprises – had purchased or taken over the management of dozens of theaters across the country.

During the second decade of the 20th century, studios and audiences had embraced full-length feature films. Zukor’s company had created the earliest essays of this new type and by 1919, Loew was convinced that this was the future of the industry. He changed his company’s name one again to Loew’s Incorporated and acquired Metro Pictures Corporation, a small existing movie production company.¹⁸ Loew’s Inc. then started producing its own movies in addition to owning or managing the theaters in which they would be shown. One of their first

productions, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* with Rudolph Valentino, which premiered in 1921, was a smash and with it Loew's Inc. became a force in the motion-picture industry.¹⁹ The firm embarked upon an extensive theater-building campaign of which the apogee was the construction of the Loew's State Theater in 1921. Designed by legendary theater architect Thomas W. Lamb, the construction of this theater was a "major event in Loew's progress [and] fulfilled his dream of possessing a big vaudeville-picture palace in the nation's theatrical center, Times Square."²⁰ If a location could vie with Times Square as a center of entertainment and amusement, it was Coney Island. Although Loew's Inc. leased rather than owned the new theater, when it opened in 1925 the new building was named the Loew's Coney Island Theater.

Reilly & Hall²¹

Paul C. Reilly, (1890 – 1984)

Douglas Pairman Hall (1880 – 1945)

Reilly, a native of New York City, was graduated from the Columbia University School of Architecture. In addition to the design of several theaters, Reilly was closely associated with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York, and served for a period as the architect of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Among his church commissions were the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Newark and the Church of Our Saviour on Park Avenue and East 38th Street in Manhattan. Other works include St. Ephrem's Church, Brooklyn²² and the Church of St. Peter Claver in Montclair, New Jersey.²³

Hall, a Scotsman (like Lamb), immigrated to America in 1912. He was graduated from the University of Edinburgh and received his architectural degree from the Royal Institute of Architecture in London. Hall developed a reputation as a theater architect, and was responsible for the design of more than 50 theaters in the New York area.

Early in their careers, both Reilly and Hall were employed by the firm of Thomas W. Lamb, theater architect, where Reilly held the position of chief designer. By 1920, the pair formed a partnership and the firm Reilly & Hall occupied an office at 749 Fifth Avenue. Though fruitful, the venture does not appear to have lasted long. By 1928, there is no longer a listing for Reilly & Hall, and Hall is a sole practitioner with an office on East 45th Street. Reilly opened his own office in 1930 on lower Fifth Avenue.

Neo Renaissance Revival Style and the Movies²⁴

The 1920s was an era of tremendous growth in the development of movie theater buildings. Often constructed by the studios to showcase their films, theaters were seen as crucial advertising. If the theater was elegant, if it served to enhance the escapism of the movie-going experience, if the eye could be continually delighted, the patron would return week after week. Some theaters were developed as grand "movie palaces" with fantastic interiors that added to the total experience of the invented world on the screen.

Others were dressed in historical revivalist styles, still popular in the 1920s. Of these, there were many variants, including Italianate and French. Based on European precedents of the Renaissance, Baroque, and classical, the style is characterized by rational planning, with classical elements like balustrades and prominent cornices, restrained facades, and a light palette. The neo Renaissance revival style (popular in the 20th century) was an outgrowth of the earlier Renaissance Revival style, which was in vogue beginning in the 1880s. Buildings constructed in these styles ranged from public buildings like theaters and municipal structures to private homes, such as row houses or town houses.²⁵ These historical revival styles suggested sophistication, wealth, and class. For a movie theater to be outfitted in such architectural clothing

communicated the serious side of the Loew's Coney Island Theater. Its builders intended the structure to evoke high-brow entertainment and edification, as part of Coney Island's more dignified aspirations at this time.

History of the Loew's Theater

The Loew's Coney Island Theater opened on June 17, 1925. Marcus Loew himself presided, and with typical show-business bravura promised an array of stage, screen, and radio stars in attendance. Those who were scheduled to attend included Johnny Hines, Barbara Lamarr, Mae Busch, Ben Lyon, John Irving Fisher, Texas Guinan, Dorothy Mackaill, Virginia Lee Corbin, and John Lowe.²⁶ Builder Irwin S. Chanin declared, "Here all of the island arrive, and here we hope to make the corner a sort of Coney Island 'Broadway and 42nd Street.'"²⁷ During the first week of operation, the stage was given over to Violet and Daisy Hilton, the famed Hilton Sisters.²⁸

Built primarily as a movie theater, the Loew's Coney Island also featured live vaudeville entertainment, as Loew's included live performances in many of its theaters to bolster the box office.²⁹

The Loew's Coney Island Theater remained under the control of Loew's Incorporated until 1964.³⁰ Spaces on the ground floor housed small shops or restaurants, and various offices were located in the upper floors. Some of these businesses included Nedick's, Garcia y Vega Cigars and Admiration Cigars. The office building housed such varied tenants as Angelo Paino & Co., Inc. (building contractors); Belpark Construction Corporation; and a local draft board.

By the end of 1964, Loew's Inc. lost control of the theater, and it became the Brandt Shore Theater.³¹ As the Shore Theater, movies were shown exclusively, although by the end of 1965, the management announced that the space would become a legitimate theater with musicals, revues, and plays.³² During this period, some of the offerings included "Let's Dance," "The Jewel Box Revue," and "Bagels and Yox." By April 1966, burlesque operator Leroy C. Griffith was staging shows at the Shore; thereafter, films resumed being shown along with live entertainment.³³

It appears that the era of live entertainment in the building was short-lived. Films returned exclusively and by the early 1970s, it had become an adult venue. In 1972 the orchestra level of the theater was converted to a bingo hall and during the 1970s, the Gay Way Bar was a tenant in the ground floor corner retail space. In the 1980s, a branch of Kansas Fried Chicken occupied the corner store. During the late 1960s and through the 1970s, tenants in the office space above included a dress manufacturer, a Medicaid office, and a Head Start nursery program.³⁴ The building is currently vacant.

Description

Surf Avenue Façade: The Shore Theater Building is located on the northwest corner of Stillwell and Surf Avenues. The building, including the ground floor storefronts, is vacant. Scaffolding projects at the first floor cornice line and covers the marquee which is located at the center of the seven-bay wide facade. The storefronts are non-historic and are covered by roll-down iron grilles. The westernmost opening on this facade is for vehicular access and is covered by a solid, roll-down gate. A pedestrian entrance is located in the bay just to the east of this. It has a stone surround, with a rope molding framing the doorway and a stone plaque carved with the name, "Coney Island Theatre Building" above. This opening is also covered by a solid metal gate. Another doorway under the marquee is also surrounded by dressed stone blocks, as are the end piers on both facades.

Above the base is a *piano nobile* faced with terra cotta molded to replicate rusticated limestone. This level has double-height, round-arched windows with one-over-one metal replacement sash. Within each arched opening the top part has non-historic metal infill, while the spandrels beneath the windows feature terra-cotta panels with foliate designs. This section of the building is capped by a narrow cornice formed by a terra-cotta dentil molding and a series of stone moldings.

Floors three through five are faced with buff-colored brick and have unadorned, rectangular window openings, set in pairs. The top of this level is marked by a dentil course of terra cotta. The sixth floor has the same window pattern as below, but the windows are framed by white terra cotta and the panels between the windows are faced with square white terra-cotta tiles set on the diagonal. The top of the sixth story has a broad, terra-cotta frieze ornamented with circles and classical foliate designs and topped by a terra-cotta cornice. All of the sash in the windows on this facade has been replaced.

The brick-faced seventh floor consists of a central pavilion, five-bays wide, with single-bay setbacks at the eastern and western ends of the facade. These setback bays are fronted by small terraces set behind terra-cotta balustrades and are topped by a brick dentil course and terra-cotta coping. The top of each round-arched window has been filled with a terra-cotta panel. The round-arched windows of the central pavilion have brick moldings and terra-cotta keystones, with round, flat terra-cotta panels inset into the brick in the spandrels between the arches. Two additional round-headed windows are located to the outside of this central area and these windows have terra-cotta moldings and keystones and sit above small panels of terra-cotta ornament. A broad balcony projects in front of the central five, round-arched windows of this level. Its underside is faced with terra cotta and it is supported on ornate terra-cotta brackets, and topped by a delicate, classically-inspired iron railing. All of the windows on the seventh story have replacement, one-over-one metal sash and the upper areas of the round-arched windows have been filled in. The central area of this level is capped by a projecting, overhanging terra-cotta cornice with modillions. A broad, bronze frieze ornamented by moresque fretwork sitting on a terra-cotta rope molding is also part of this capping element.

At the southeastern corner of the building a neon blade sign is affixed between the third and sixth floors. The sign reads "SHORE."

Stillwell Avenue façade: The east façade, along Stillwell Avenue, exhibits the narrow side of the seven-story office tower with the undecorated brick facade of the movie theater, about half its height, extending northward beyond it. The design of this facade of the office building is similar to that on Surf Avenue. The ground floor storefronts are vacant and covered by grilles. The double-height *piano nobile* is faced with terra cotta and pierced by three large, round-headed windows. Between the two northernmost windows are two smaller rectangular window openings, one above the other. The large, northernmost window has its original metal sash, while the other windows have replacement sash. The next four stories have rectangular window openings, with a few of the windows on the northern side of each level retaining their original two-over-two wood sash. The window pattern on these floors is 2-1-2-1-1. The moldings and decorative treatment are the same on this facade as on Surf Avenue. At the top floor level are three round-headed windows flanked by a single rectangular window on each side. The central windows have non-historic infill at the top of the windows, and all have non-historic one-over-one sash. The side windows are capped by inset round, terra-cotta circles and the northernmost window has small paned, double-hung sash.

The painted side wall of the theater extends to the north behind the office building. There is a small entrance door at the ground level and a variety of small window openings at the second

story level, either blocked closed or filled by non-historic sash. A covered metal emergency stairway steps down along this facade, toward the northern side of the building. A small non-historic storefront is located at this side of the facade along with a doorway near the top of the building, fronted by a metal balcony, with a ladder leading to the roof.

West façade: The western façade has two sections, the office building and the other side of the movie theater. Both are not designed. The side of the office building is faced with buff brick and features three vertical columns of rectangular, one-over-one double-hung replacement windows. The top of the building features three setbacks, and coping stones are evident at the top. The movie theater is faced in painted brick with a covered emergency stairway that steps down toward the rear.

North façade: The northern facade consists of two angled blank painted brick walls, projecting outward slightly and forming the end of the movie theater.

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NOTES

¹ The history of the Coney Island area is compiled from: "Coney Island," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, Kenneth Jackson, Ed. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 272-274; Federal Writers Project, *New York City Guide*, 471- 475; Landmarks Preservation Commission, *The Parachute Jump Designation Report (LP-1638)* (New York: City of New York, 1989), by David Breiner; "Coney Island" <http://naid.spsr.ucla.edu/coneyisland>, accessed on 10/30/2002; "Coney Island Historiography," <http://history.amusement-parks.com> accessed on 10/30/2002.

² Ellen M. Snyder-Grenier, *Brooklyn! An illustrated History* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1996), 182.

³ A 1904 booklet called *Seeing Coney Island* (New York: Cupples & Leon, 1904), proclaimed: "There was a Coney Island, not many yesterdays ago. There is a Coney Island of to-day, which differs as widely from the sandy and unsavory Coney of the past as the uptown avenues and palatial buildings differ from the Harlem goat pastures and shanties of recent memory. Brains, enterprise and capital and the purifying effects of a sweeping conflagration have contributed to make a new Coney, and the result is a marvelous transformation almost incredible and quite impossible fully to describe."

⁴ Prior to the construction of the Boardwalk, access to the beach was limited and controlled by the independent operators whose property lined the waterfront. Visitors to Coney Island could only get to the sand and the ocean by patronizing private bathing pavilions or restaurants.

⁵ Denson quotes the Chamber of Commerce literature on page 53 of his book.

⁶ The first three listed here are New York City Landmarks while the next four have been demolished.

⁷ “Plans for Coney Island Theater,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 27, 1923.

⁸ “Coney Island’s First All-Year Theater Completed Last Week; In Chanin Group,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 14, 1925.

⁹ “Start Foundation for Big Theater on Site of Old Coney Island Landmarks,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 25, 1924.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Sussex County (NJ) Democrat*, May 8, 1924.

¹² “Changes Under Way in Surf Ave. Show Progress of Coney,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 4, 1925.

¹³ Information for this section has been compiled from *The New York Times* obituaries (Henry Chanin, Feb. 27, 1973 and Irwin S. Chanin, Feb. 26, 1988); Diana Agrest, ed., *A Romance with the City*, Irwin S. Chanin (NY: Cooper Union Press, 1982); and Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Chanin Building Designation Report, LP-0993* (New York: City of New York, 1978).

¹⁴ “Skybinder,” *The New Yorker*, January 26, 1929.

¹⁵ The Biltmore Theater is a designated Interior Landmark; the Forty-Sixth Street Theater is a designated New York City Landmark; the Mansfield Theater is a designated Interior and Exterior Landmark); the Theater Masque is a designated New York City Interior and Exterior Landmark); the Royale Theater is a designated New York City Interior and Exterior Landmark; and the Majestic Theater is a designated New York City Interior and Exterior Landmark.

¹⁶ As quoted in *New York Times* obituary, Feb. 26, 1988.

¹⁷ The material for this section is from Bosley Crowther, *The Lion's Share; The Story of an Entertainment Empire*. (New York, Dutton, 1957), and the draft designation report for the Loew’s Canal Street Theater, LPC (LP- 2368), prepared by Christopher D. Brazee.

¹⁸ By this time the firm was reorganized as Loew’s Inc.

¹⁹ In 1924 the firm purchased the Goldwyn Pictures Corporation and Louis B. Mayer Pictures, merging the three studios into the Metro- Goldwyn Picture Corporation, later renamed Metro-Golden-Mayer (MGM).

²⁰ Crowther, p. 58.

²¹ While no building permit is apparent at the Brooklyn Department of Buildings, contemporary newspaper articles in the *New York Times* and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* have established the year and attribution. Additionally, the theater, its architects, and year of construction were featured in R. W. Sexton, *American Theaters of Today* (NY: Architectural Book Publishing Company, 1927). Information on the lives of work of these architects has been compiled from: James Ward, *Architects in Practice, New York City, 1900 – 1940* (Union, NJ: J&D Associates, 1989); Henry F. Withey, and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1956); *New York Times* obituaries, Douglas Pairman Hall (July 6, 1945) and Paul C. Reilly (September 13, 1984).

²² Published in the July-August 1954 edition of *Church Property Administration*.

²³ Published in the June 1940 issue of *Architectural Forum* and the December 1940 issue of *Architect and Building News*.

²⁴ This section was compiled with information from Alan Gowans, *Styles and Types of North American Architecture* (NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992); John C. Poppeliers, Allen Chambers, Jr., and Nancy B. Schwartz *What Style is it?* (Washington DC: Preservation Press, 1983); Andrew S. Dolkart, *Guide to NYC Landmarks, 2nd ed.* (NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1998); and Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins *New York 1930* (NY: Rizzoli Publications, 1994).

²⁵ In New York City, the largest concentration of Renaissance Revival and Neo Renaissance revival row houses lie within the Upper East Side Historic District. Other examples include the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (a

designated New York City Landmark) and the Tiffany & Company building at 397-409 Fifth Avenue (a designated New York City Landmark).

²⁶ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 14, 1925.

²⁷ Ibid. Of course, the onset of the Great Depression severely curtailed the anticipated and much-hoped-for growth; the goal of these bold building campaigns failed to materialize.

²⁸ Ibid. The Hiltons were Siamese twins, joined at the buttocks, who were among America's highest paid vaudeville and sideshow performers. Eventually, the pair's fame spread, with their appearance in the classic 1932 film *Freaks*.

²⁹ Some of the acts that graced the stage included Gallagher & Sheen, Peg Leg Bates, Pat Rooney, Sr., and the Boswell Sisters. Al Jolson performed there on August 11, 1949. International Al Jolson Society.

³⁰ The last time the "Loew's Coney Island" is identified in the movie ads as a functioning movie house is in *The New York Times* on April 29, 1964.

³¹ A small item in the *New York Times* of November 30, 1964 about Mrs. Lillian Haase, a murder victim, notes her occupation: she was the children's matron at the Shore Theater, Surf and Stillwell avenues, Brooklyn.

³² "Mt. Vernon Brandt's Opens With 'Bagels and Yox' Today," *The New York Times*, January 1, 1966 and "Two Theaters to Resume Stage Musical Programs," *The New York Times*, March 3, 1966.

³³ "2 More Theaters To Do Burlesque," *The New York Times*, April 27, 1966.

³⁴ Brooklyn Department of Buildings files.

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 Coney Island Theater (later Shore Theater) Building 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 Coney Island Theater (later Shore Theater) Building was constructed by the Chanin Construction Company in 1925 as part of the redevelopment of Coney Island into a year-round resort; that during the 1920s, New York City and the Coney Island Chamber of Commerce embarked on an effort to alter Coney Island's somewhat seedy reputation and, through the construction of the Boardwalk, better subway connections and more substantial buildings such as this, endeavored to create a large and popular resort area, replacing the fire-prone attractions of questionable repute, that were built in the late 19th century; that the theater was run for many years by the prominent Loew's movie chain; that the building's architects, Paul C. Reilly and Douglas Hall, were prominent theater designers and previously worked in the office of renowned theater architect Thomas Lamb; that they were also responsible for several well-known and well-regarded theaters of this period, including the Sheridan Theater on Seventh Avenue in Manhattan (demolished) and the Newton Theater in Newton, NJ; that they were hired for the Coney Island Theater project to create a dignified environment to show movies and live entertainment throughout the year; that the seven-story office block with its neo Renaissance Revival style design presented an impressive front in an area that had previously held only flimsy one- and two-story buildings; that the building's classically-inspired designs constructed in brick and terra cotta with stone trim add a substantial and distinguished presence to Coney Island's atmosphere.

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 Coney Island Theater (later Shore Theater) Building, 1301 Surf Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn, and designates Brooklyn Tax Map Block 7064, Lot 16 as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair

Frederick Bland, Diana Chapin, Michael Devonshire, Joan Gerner,

Michael Goldblum, Margery Perlmutter, Commissioners



Coney Island Theater (later Shore Theater) Building
1301 Surf Avenue (aka 2932-2952 Stillwell Avenue)
Brooklyn
Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 7064, Lot 16
Photo by: Christopher D. Brazee, 2010



Coney Island Theater (later Shore Theater) Building
East and north facades of theater box
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2010





Coney Island Theater (later Shore Theater) Building
Surf Avenue facade and details
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2010





Coney Island Theater (later Shore Theater) Building
Western facade of office building
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2010



Coney Island Theater (later Shore Theater) Building
Brick and terra-cotta facade details
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2010





Coney Island Theater (later Shore Theater) Building

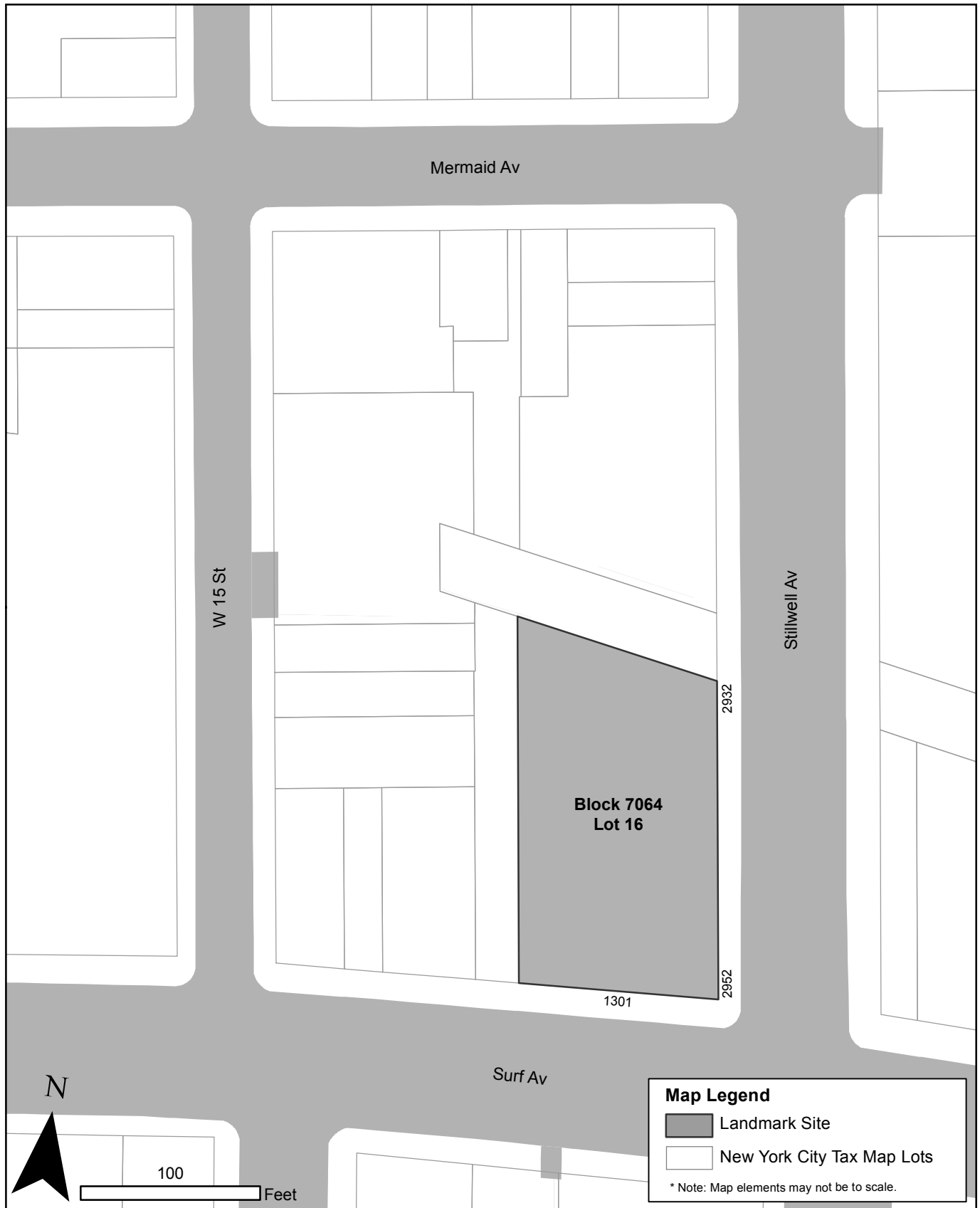
Terra-cotta details

Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2010





Coney Island Theater
(later Shore Theater) Building
Stone, and terra-cotta details
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2010



CONEY ISLAND THEATRE (LATER SHORE THEATER) BUILDING, 1301 Surf Avenue
(aka 2932-2952 Stillwell Avenue) Landmark Site: Borough of Queens, Tax Map Block 7064, Lot 16

Designated: December 14, 2010