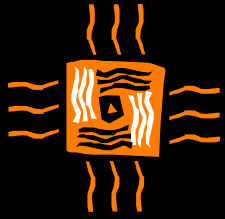


new granada theater



historic designation

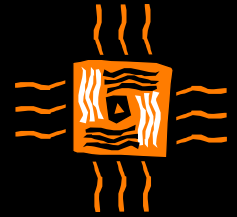


new granada theater historic designation



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pythian temple



Statement of Purpose

The Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh enthusiastically supports the nomination of the New Granada Theater (also known as the “Pythian Temple”) to be a City of Pittsburgh Historic Landmark. The Young Preservationists Association believes that the New Granada Theater is one of Pittsburgh’s most prized historic possessions. Its distinctive architecture, prominent location, and design by one of the few African American architects in the United States, Louis Bellinger, warrant historic designation. More importantly, this building tells a story of African American history in the Pittsburgh region. The Young Preservationists urge City Council to approve this historic nomination.

Formed in 2002, the YPA is a broad-based regional coalition of dynamic preservation leaders organized to ignite a new historic preservation movement in southwestern Pennsylvania. Everyone who supports the next generation is a young preservationist. The mission of Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh is the active participation of young people in the preservation of historic resources.

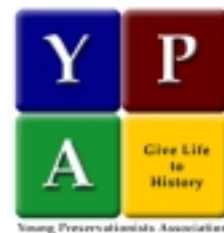
The YPA will accomplish its mission in three ways: it will conduct educational seminars and interactive workshops, host tours and field sessions, and publish high-impact research that supports the mission and organizational values. The YPA will emphasize several themes in its work: African American history, rural preservation, smart growth principles, Main Street revitalization, youth participation and leadership in civic affairs, and regional cooperation.

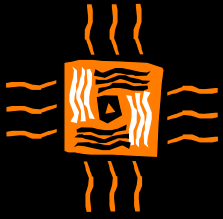
African American history occupies an important place in the work of the Young Preservationists. In 2003 and 2004, the YPA placed several

African American historic sites on its “Top Ten Best Historic Preservation Opportunities” as a way to attract investment to these important properties. In 2003, the New Granada Theater was listed as number 5. This year, the YPA was a co-sponsor of the Black History Essay Contest with National City Bank. The nomination of the New Granada Theater is another way that YPA recognizes and honors the tremendous African American heritage that exists in Western Pennsylvania.

This summer, the Historic Review Commission and City Planning Department voted to recommend to City Council that the New Granada Theater become a City Historic Landmark. Support for the nomination is provided by the Hill Community Development Corporation, the property owner, and the Urban League of Pittsburgh. The Young Preservationists believe that historic designation of this important structure is long overdue.

We urge the Pittsburgh City Council to vote “YES” on the historic designation of the New Granada Theater to be a City of Pittsburgh Historic Landmark.





new granada theater historic designation

History

Designed in 1927 by a prominent local African American architect, Louis Bellinger—at a time when there were no more than 60 African American architects in the country—the New Granada Theater was originally built as the “Pythian Temple,” a local chapter of a national African-American fraternal organization of construction workers called the Knights of Pythias.

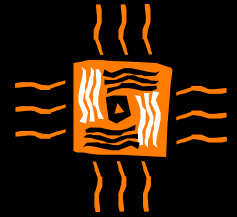
The Pythian Temple was the headquarters for the local chapter as well as provide office and commercial space and recreational and entertainment facilities for the community.

In 1937, Pittsburgh architect Alfred M. Marks converted the building into a commercial theater. The new owner, Harry Hendel, closed the original Granada Theatre on Centre Avenue and moved two blocks to the Pythian



The Pythian Temple in 1935.

pythian temple



structure. Because it was a different location for the Granada, the word “new” was added to its name and included an auditorium called the Savoy Ballroom, first opened in 1941.

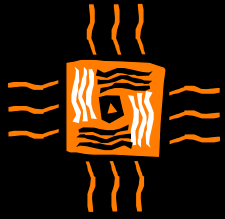
Rising jazz stars began to play at the New Granada. Out-of-town artists stopped in on their way from Chicago to New York or vice versa, and locals like Stanley Turrentine, Lena Horne, and Earl “Fatha” Hines made regular appearances along with such legendary names as Duke Ellington (who was named the “King of Jazz” at the New Granada and played his first Pittsburgh performance at the New Granada), Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, Ella Fitzgerald, Billy Eckstine, James Brown, the O’Jays, and Peaches & Herb.

At one time, the New Granada Theatre was one of four movie theaters in the Hill. By 1942, all that remained were the New Granada and the Roosevelt Theater, nearby on Centre where the AUBA Triangle Shops are now situated. The Roosevelt eventually closed, leaving only the New Granada.

The New Granada Theater fell into disuse and disrepair in the 1960s, and has sat vacant for nearly two decades becoming nearly as famous for its neglect as for its history. Continued neglect and prohibitive rehabilitation costs threaten the New Granada’s future.



The New Granada Theater in 1992 (left) and 2002.



new granada theater historic designation

African American History in the Balance

Few neighborhoods in Pittsburgh have undergone such a radical change as the Hill District. The historic heart of the region's African American community, there are far too few African American historic landmarks left in the Hill and throughout Pittsburgh.

Currently, there are only two City-designated historic landmarks in the entire City of Pittsburgh dedicated to African Americans, out of 74 total landmarks (a paltry 2.7%). The other two—the Centre Avenue YMCA and the John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church—are also located in the Hill. A fourth African American landmark, The Greater Faith Tabernacle Baptist Church in

Homewood, was a designated landmark, but it was demolished a few years ago due to grave structural problems.

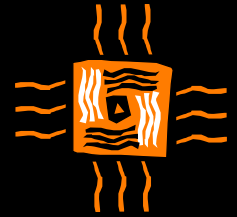
The YPA strongly believes that African Americans deserve a more prominent place in Pittsburgh's strong heritage of historic preservation.

In recent years, the New Granada's deteriorated condition has been a central concern of the historic preservation community. The New Granada Theater was first identified as a significant African American historic landmark by the "African American Historic Sites Survey of Allegheny County," completed in 1992 [the study was later published by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in



The once-famous Ellis Hotel became a pile of rubble in 2002.

pythian temple



1994). On August 10, 2000, the New Granada was determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places by the PHMC. In 2002, Preservation Pennsylvania listed the New Granada on their "At Risk" list.

Last year, the Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh listed the New Granada as number 5 on their "Top Ten Best Historic Preservation Opportunities for 2003."

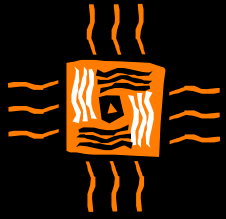
Yet, the structure continues to sit, unprotected and unimproved. The restoration of this important structure begins with its designation as a City of Pittsburgh historic landmark. The historic designation of the New Granada Theater would add more certainty to the structure's future, rather than to continue its legacy as an endangered property.

The Young Preservationists' goal is to ensure that Pittsburgh's rich tapestry of history is preserved and offer our support to the New Granada Theater's nomination. A restored New Granada Theater will signal new life and a new future for Pittsburgh's oldest and most historic neighborhood, the Hill District.

Thank you in advance for your support of the historic designation of the New Granada Theater.



The Greater Faith Tabernacle Church of God in Christ was a City Landmark, but it's gone now.



new granada theater historic designation



The Centre Avenue YMCA (above, left) and John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church (center) are Pittsburgh's only two African American Historic Landmarks.

Will the New Granada Theater be the third?



pythian temple

