

*Historic Review Commission of Pittsburgh*  
200 Ross Street, Fourth Floor, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

## NOMINATION FORM FOR HISTORIC STRUCTURES, SITES, OBJECTS, AND DISTRICTS

1. **HISTORICAL NAME OF PROPERTY**      Pythian Temple  
*(If applicable)*
2. **CURRENT NAME OF PROPERTY**      New Granada Theater  
*(If applicable)*

3. **LOCATION**
- |             |                          |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| Street      | 2009 – 13 Centre Avenue  |
| City, State | Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania |
| Zip Code    | 15219-6301               |

4. **OWNERSHIP**
- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| Name:       | Hill Community Development Corporation |
| Street      | 2015 Centre Avenue                     |
| City, State | Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania               |
| Zip Code    | 15219-6301                             |

5. **CLASSIFICATION**

<u>Category</u>	<u>Accessibility</u>	<u>Ownership</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private
<input type="checkbox"/> District	<input type="checkbox"/> Private, Open to the public	<input type="checkbox"/> Public
<input type="checkbox"/> Site		
<input type="checkbox"/> Object		

6. **NOMINATED BY**

Name                                      Chloe Velasquez<sup>1</sup>

Street  
City, State, Zip Code

418 North Taylor Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15212

## 7. DESCRIPTION

Provide a narrative description of the structure, district, site, or object. If it has been altered over time, indicate the date(s) and nature of the alteration(s). (Attach extra pages if necessary.)

The Centre Avenue front is the principal facade. There is a four-story brick and terra cotta structure decorated in the late English Gothic style known as Tudor. Below the crenellations at the top are coats-of-arms and projecting bands of molding with foliated tips, laid in vertical strips across the facade and bent into flat-topped frames around the store windows on either side of the main entrance. The store windows and the grand arched entrance adorned with Tudor flowers had transoms inset with textured glass panes or prisms, popular in display windows since the 1890s.

The Wylie Avenue side, at the top of the hillside and across the street from Ebenezer Baptist Church, is narrower, three-stories high, and constructed of patterned brick. Over the arched center doorway is the inscription, "Pythian Temple A.D. 1927." Originally there were shops on the first floor and offices above.

In 1937, Pittsburgh architect Alfred M. Marks prepared plans to convert the building into a commercial theater. In 1938, now sporting a polychromatic Art Moderne first floor front, the Pythian Temple became the New Granada Theatre.

## 8. HISTORY

Provide a history of the structure, district, site, or object. Include a bibliography of sources consulted. (Attach extra pages if necessary.) Include copies of relevant source materials with the nomination form (see Number 11).

Pittsburgh's New Granada Theater was built in 1927 as a lodge for a local chapter of a national African-American fraternal organization of construction workers called the Knights of Pythias. The Knights of Pythias were devoted to "toleration in religion, obedience to law, and loyalty to government." Its inspiration and name came from the story of the Greek friends, Damon and Pythias; its appellation as a knighthood was based on the medieval concept of chivalry. 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.

The Knights of Pythias presented public exhibitions of quasi-military drill team exercises. Hence the need for a 5,000-square-foot drill hall (that could be converted into a banquet hall). The second-floor auditorium, with its innovative seating arrangement that allowed the space to be used as a basketball court, was, according to the local African American newspaper *The Courier*, "a long-felt want." It immediately became the community showplace, attracting nationally known black entertainers to Pittsburgh.

In the 1930s, the Knights were forced to sell the building. In 1937, Pittsburgh architect Alfred M. Marks created plans to convert the building into a commercial theater and the new owner, Harry Hendel, closed the original Granada Theatre on Centre Avenue and moved two blocks to the Pythian structure. Because it was a different location for the Granada, the word "new" was added to its name. The New Granada's theater was built like an indoor amphitheater, with a sloping grade and carpeted center aisle. On the second floor was the lavish ballroom—first called the Hill City Auditorium and later the Savoy Ballroom—where the jazz greats played. First opened in 1941, the ballroom had indirect lighting, beautiful venetian blinds, colorful drapes, wall murals and a revolving crystal ball.

Despite the changes in ownership, the second-floor ballroom quickly became a hot spot for blacks from all over the city, who weren't allowed to dance at other venues. Rising jazz stars began to play there; 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), Louis Armstrong (who performed a relief concert after a 1936 flood), 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.

### Sources:

Brown, Eliza Smith, Dan Holland, et al, *African American Historic Sites Survey of Allegheny County*.

Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1994, p. 147.

*Pythian Temple/New Granada Theater Historic Nomination*

Fuoco, Michael, “‘New Granada’ isn't so new anymore, but plans will help restore luster,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Monday, April 12, 1999.

Kidney, Walter, *Pittsburgh's Landmark Architecture: The Historic Buildings of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County*. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation, 1997, p. 324.

Palm, Kristin, “A boarded-up theater in Pittsburgh’s Hill District holds the key to community; collective memory,” *Metropolis Magazine Online* ([http://www.metropolismag.com/html/content\\_0201/per.htm](http://www.metropolismag.com/html/content_0201/per.htm)), February 2001.

Tannler, Albert M., “Louis Bellinger: Pittsburgh’s African-American Architect,” *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, Sunday, February 9, 2003.

Toker, Franklin, *Pittsburgh: An Urban Portrait*. University Park: The Penn State University Press, 1986, p. 240.

## 9. SIGNIFICANCE

The *Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances, Title 11, Historic Preservation, Chapter 1: Historic Structures, Districts, Sites and Objects* lists ten criteria, at least one of which must be met for Historic Designation. Describe how the structure, district, site, or object meets one or more of these criteria. (Attach extra pages if necessary.)

The Pythian Temple (later named the New Granada Theater) at 2000-13 Centre Avenue in Pittsburgh's Hill District meets the following criteria for designation as a "historic structure" in accordance to section 1.4 of the Pittsburgh Historic Preservation Ordinance.

*4. Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States.*

Louis A. S. Bellinger, was one of only 60 African American architects practicing in the United States in 1930 (compared to 22,000 white architects). Mr. Bellinger was Pittsburgh's most significant African American architect during his lifetime. The most important building he designed during his career was the Pythian Temple, completed in March 1928. There are very few of Bellinger's buildings standing today, and none as prominent as the Temple. The loss of this significant structure would be a detriment to the African American community of the Hill District, the City of Pittsburgh, and to the United States for losing a historic architectural landmark for the city and for African Americans nationwide.

*1. Its location as a site of a significant historic or prehistoric event or activity.*

*2. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related aspect of the development of the City of Pittsburgh, State of Pennsylvania, Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States.*

*7. Its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States.*

*And*

*10. Its unique location and distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh.*

During the Hill District's prime, jazz music was everywhere and the Pythian Temple was where many of the most legendary performers played when they came to Pittsburgh. Famous musical entertainers such as Lena Horne, Earl Hines, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Stanley Turrentine, Billy Eckstine, the O'Jays, Peaches & Herb, James Brown, Dizzy Gillespie, and Ella Fitzgerald, performed for the local African-American community and the nation (via national broadcast performances). Today, it is one of the only remaining signs of the events that used to occur daily.

The Pythian Temple rests on a very prominent location at the heart of the Hill District on Centre Avenue, and could easily become the cornerstone of the community once again. As one of the largest structures on Centre Avenue it has been a noted landmark within the community since it was Completed in 1927. The main façade (facing Centre Avenue) construction features brick and terra cotta, with highly detailed

decorative foliage and coats-of-arms. The Tudor-styled street-front building is an asset to Pittsburgh's historic Hill District and to the city as a whole.

**10. NOTIFICATION/CONSENT OF PROPERTY OWNER(S)**

Please see attached letter to the Hill CDC.

**11. NUMBER AND SUBJECTS OF PHOTOGRAPHS INCLUDED WITH THE NOMINATION FORM**

- Photo 1: The New Granada Theater in 1935.
- Photo 2: New Granada Theater in 2002.
- Photo 3: Rear of the New Granada showing datestone.
- Photo 4: Rear of the New Granada Theater in 2002.
- Photo 5: New Granada Theater in 1992.

**12. LIST OF SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED WITH THE NOMINATION FORM**

**NOMINATION FORM PREPARED BY:**

Name            Kemo Crawford, Dan Holland, and Sean Simmons, YPA Board Members

Address        PO Box 2669



Pittsburgh, PA 15230-2669

Telephone 412/261-2747



Photo 1.

The New Granada Theater in 1935.

Photo from "Louis Bellinger: Pittsburgh's African-American Architect," *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, Sunday, February 9, 2003.



Photo 2.

New Granada Theater in 2002.

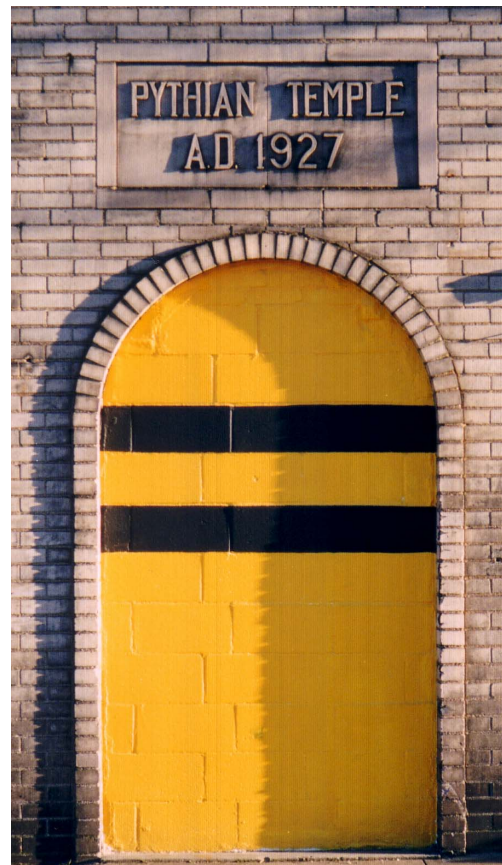


Photo 3.

Rear of the New Granada showing datestone.

Photo by Dan Holland.

Photo by Dan Holland



Photo 4.

Rear of the New Granada Theater in 2002.  
Photo by Dan Holland.



Photo 5.

New Granada Theater in 1992.  
Photo from *African American Historic Sites Survey of Allegheny County*, p. 147