

RALEIGH HISTORIC PROPERTY DESIGNATION APPLICATION AND REPORT

1. **NAME OF THE PROPERTY:** (If historic name is unknown, give current name or give street address)

Historic Name Raleigh Little Theatre/Amphitheatre/Rose Garden

Current Name, or Address _____

2. **LOCATION:** Pogue and Gardner Streets Raleigh Wake
street city and/or county

3. **LEGAL OWNER: Name** City of Raleigh 890-3125
day phone

Address Mr. Dempsey E. Benton, Jr., City Manager
PO Box 590 Raleigh NC 27602
street city state zip

4. **APPLICANT/CONTACT PERSON: Name** N/A day phone

Address _____
street city state zip

5. **REASON FOR REQUEST:** Architectural and historical significance
of the buildings, structures, and site.

6. **GENERAL DATA:**

a. Date of **construction** and alterations: 1938-40, 1966, 1988-89

b. Outbuildings: **Yes** N/A **No** _____ **If yes, number** _____

c. Approximate **acreage** or dimensions: 6.66 acres

d. Architect, builder, carpenter **and/or** mason: William Henley Deitrick, Thad Hurd,
R. J. Pearse

e. Use: Original Amphitheatre, Theatre Gardens Present Same

f. Is the property income producing? **Yes** _____ **No** X

7. **CLASSIFICATION:**

a. Category: **building(s)** X **structure** X **object** _____ **site** X

b. Ownership: private _____ public: local X state _____ federal _____

c. Number of resources within property:

	Contributing	Non-contributing
buildings	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>
structures	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
objects	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
sites	<u>1</u>	<u>-</u>

d. **National Register of Historic Places status (check one):** Entered (date) _____
nominated: eligible _____ not eligible _____ not requested X removed (date) _____

e. Has the property ever been recorded during a historic building survey by the City of Raleigh or by the NC State Historic Preservation Office? If so, by whom and when Raleigh Inv.: Linda Harris & M. A. Lee
1-2-76

8. **SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT:** Raleigh Historic Properties Commission, Inc. date March 13,
Post Office Box 829 1990
Century Station
Raleigh, North Carolina 27602

Raleigh Little Theatre/Amphitheatre/Rose Garden

9.(c.) Justification for Land to be Designated

The 6.66 acres of land included in this application represent all of the area of the original Little Theatre/Amphitheatre/Rose Garden complex, as it was developed in the late 1930s. It has remained continuously in City ownership, serving the same functions, since that period. Designed as a multi-part, single entity, it should be preserved entire.

9.(d.) Architectural Description and Significance

The Raleigh Little Theatre, Amphitheatre and Rose Garden occupy a 6.66 acre tract of land in a horseshoe formed by Pogue and Gardner Streets in west Raleigh. Landscaping during construction reinforced a natural depression, creating an oval bowl about two hundred yards long. At the south end of the tract is an arc-shaped amphitheatre with stage, while the north end is landscaped with mature trees. The Raleigh Little Theatre is perched on the rim of the bowl at its east side. On the floor of the bowl is the Rose Garden.

The amphitheatre at the south end, which seats approximately 3,000, consists of a series of semi-circular terraces formed by low, random ashlar stone walls with concrete copings that serve as seats. Between the arcs of seating are grass strip aisles. At the bottom of the amphitheatre is a raised, grassed stage formed by arched walls of random ashlar stonework, in front of which is a depressed orchestra pit. At either end, the pit contains circular stone and concrete fountains, no longer working. Flanking the stage on either side are screening walls, and at both sides of stage are small, hipped-roofed stone dressing room buildings. A backdrop for the stage is provided by large evergreen shrubs and evergreen trees. Encircling the entire amphitheatre are random ashlar masonry walls with concrete copings.

On the floor of the complex, the Rose Garden forms a large oval, the north end of which is a semi-circular pergola of random ashlar stone columns and wooden crosspieces, covered with a white climbing rose. At the south end is a gable-roofed, ashlar stone and frame shelter open on the sides. Between these two structures are a series of rose beds grouped around a central lawn. At the north end of the lawn is a small, circular concrete fountain.

Adjoining the rose garden on three sides are lawn areas interspersed with trees of a considerable variety of species. Large trees, a mix of hard and softwoods, cover the steep slopes of the bowl.

The original portion of the Raleigh Little Theatre building is composed of two crisp, painted brick rectangles: the lower, front one containing the lobby and auditorium, the taller rectangle containing the stage and fly gallery. Both portions of the theatre are set on high, random ashlar foundations on the downhill side, and the plaza in front of the theatre is framed with low, random ashlar stone walls. At the south end, the building's symmetrically-arranged facade contains a recessed, two-story entrance porch with two square brick piers. The only applied ornament on the facade is an inset concrete plaque, centered over the entrance, which depicts masks of comedy and tragedy. The side elevations of the original **auditorium** have recessed, two-story panels of brickwork.

As originally constructed, the theatre seated 299 in a very **spartan** interior. During 1966 a brick addition was made to the rear of the original theatre to accommodate a scene shop and dressing rooms, while the auditorium and lobby, as well as the basement area of the existing building, were also **remodelled**.(1)

The Gaddy-Goodwin Teaching Theatre constructed at the rear of the existing theatre in 1988-89 echoes the design of the original building, while more than doubling it in size. The new building, also of painted brick, but with textured split block foundation walls, consists of a **rectangular** auditorium section with recessed panels on the side walls, and a **lobby/office** space composed of a series of receding cubes. projecting from the northwest corner of the lobby is a large, concrete deck supported on split block pillars.

As part of the 1988-89 work, an addition was also made to the exit on the northeast corner of the main theatre.

The Raleigh Little Theatre/Amphitheatre/Rose Garden design concept was the work of the capital's most accomplished architect of the period, William **Henley** Deitrick. A native of **Danville**, Virginia, Deitrick (1895-1974) moved to Raleigh in 1924 after studying at Wake Forest and Columbia University. In the course of a career of over fifty years, he designed more than 125 public school buildings, 24 state and federal government buildings, as well as numerous churches, residences, commercial and other buildings. His best known Raleigh works include Broughton High School (1929), the conversion of the Raleigh Water Tower to architectural offices (1938), and the completion of the design of Dorton Arena in 1951 following the death of Matthew **Nowicki**. The latter building received the **American** Institute of Architects First Honor Award, and the Engineering Gold Medal of the Architectural League of New York. The AIA also elected Deitrick a Fellow in 1955.(2)

While from surviving sketches it appears that Deitrick was responsible for the overall design of the entire site, including placement of the amphitheatre, pergola and theatre, construction drawings for the theatre building were prepared by **Raleigh** architect Thad Hurd when Deitrick became unavailable to complete

his preliminary designs. Deitrick's initial sketch for the theatre itself shows an art **deco/art moderne** style facade, much like conventional movie theatres of the **period.**(3) The clean, classical lines of the theatre as built are the work of **Hurd**, and represent one of the earliest local examples of the stripped-down modern classical style used for public buildings in the late 1930s through the early 1950s.

The Little Theatre/Amphitheatre/Rose Garden complex is arguably the **city's** best planned, **best integrated** and best preserved park space. While the city has older park areas, most notably the squares of the original city plan, and **Pullen Park**, these spaces either had no original landscape plan, or have been subjected to a series of redevelopments. Of the pre-World War **II** parks, only the Little Theatre/Amphitheatre/Rose Garden combines a workable plan with consistent citizen involvement in its preservation.

9.(e.) Historical Significance

The Little Theatre/Amphitheatre/Rose Garden complex is historically significant for its association with the Works Progress Administration in North Carolina, a program which provided employment for large numbers of workers during the Depression, while producing many important public facilities. The theatre itself is associated with the more than fifty year history of **Raleigh's**, and one of the **state's**, foremost amateur drama groups.

Historical Background

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the state fair grounds were located on a large tract east of Hillsborough Street across from what is now North Carolina State University. When a new fair site was established in the early **1920s**, the North Carolina Agricultural Society laid out a subdivision on the old site, calling it **Fairmont.**(4) A 6.66 acre portion of the tract, amounting to more than fifty lots, was purchased by the City of Raleigh in **1927.**(5) These lots were located in and adjacent to a natural amphitheatre used as a racetrack by the fair. In 1939 the area was described as "an unsightly clay pit that was a tangle of red mud and weeds..."(6)

The Raleigh Little Theatre was organized in 1936 as an outgrowth of the Works Progress **Administration's** Federal Theatre Project. By the late 1930s it was in need of a permanent home. Mrs. Louis V. (**Cantey Venable**) Sutton pushed a plan to construct a new theatre building with adjacent amphitheatre and gardens on the old racetrack site. Mrs. Sutton was able to, secure assurances from the mayor that the city-owned land could be used for this purpose, as well as preliminary approval from WPA officials for the project. An initial design for the theatre and garden complex was donated by Raleigh architect William **Henly Dietrick.**(7) Landscape architect R. J. Pearse designed the amphitheatre and adjacent landscaping, and when Deitrick proved too busy to prepare working drawings for the theatre, architect

Thad Hurd of the building committee carried out the necessary design **work.**(8)

The initial **stages** of the **project** moved fairly rapidly. Formal approval was granted by WPA officials in Washington on August 20, 1938, with a budget of \$97,120.10 (later increased to \$129, 056). Work was begun by the WPA under City Engineer C. L. Barnhardt on October 13, 1938 and during that winter the ground was cleared and landscaping begun. Construction of the dressing rooms, stage and seats of the amphitheatre, and of the sunken gardens behind them began in the spring of 1939, and were partly complete when used for the first time on June 20, **1939.**(9)

Groundbreaking for the **Little** Theatre was held in January of 1939, the foundations finished in the summer of 1939, and work started on the walls in **December.**(10) A lack of enthusiasm on the part of Durham WPA officials for the theatre building slowed its construction, but constant pressure from Mrs. Sutton and local officials pushed completion through in early fall, **1940.**(11)

A newspaper article in January, 1939 quoted Mrs. Grover Dill, chairman of the planting committee, as saying that State College foresters were combing Wake County woodlands for native trees to fill in the biggest spots in an arboretum designed by R. J. Pearse for the north end of the bowl. Local nurseries and garden clubs were solicited for donations of azaleas, roses and **bulbs.**(12) Raleigh merchants also donated lumber, brick, stone and other equipment for the **complex.**(13) Chapel Hill Playwright Paul Green provided the cast concrete plaque of comedy and tragedy sculpted by **local** artist James **McLean** that was placed over the front **entrance.**(14)

Dedication ceremonies for the Raleigh Little Theatre, then referred to as the "**Drama** Center," were held on September **13**, 1940, and included addresses by Governor Clyde Hooey and Raleigh Mayor Graham **Andrews.**(15)

From its initial production of "Outward Bound" in 1940, the Raleigh Little Theatre has mounted an uninterrupted series of plays and musicals in the Pogue Street facility. One of the **state's** oldest and most successful amateur theatre **organizations**, it has developed special programs for children; classes in acting, creative dramatics and oral interpretation; as well as technical **internships.**(16)

In 1988-89, a new teaching theatre complex, called the Gaddy **Goodwin** Teaching Theatre, was constructed at the north end of the original building.

The Rose Garden was developed from the sunken garden area in 1948 with an original planting of 3,000 **bushes.**(17)

Notes

- ¹Guy Munger, Curtain Up!: Raleigh Little Theatre's First Fifty Years (Raleigh: Raleigh Little Theatre, 1985), p. 120.
- ²"Deitrick Paralleled--and Made--Architecture History," The (Raleigh) News and Observer, 21 July 1974 and "Architect Deitrick Dies at 79," The (Raleigh) News and Observer, 15 July 1974.
- ³Munger, Curtain Up!, pp. 36, 37, 40.
- ⁴Wake County Maps, Book 1926, p. 8.
- ⁵Wake County Deeds, Book 621, p. 48.
- ⁶"Little Theatre Arises from Old Eye-sore," The (Raleigh) News and Observer, 11 June 1939.
- ⁷"Raleigh Dedicates Drama Center," The (Raleigh) News and Observer, 13 September 1940, p. 14.
- ⁸Munger, Curtains Up!, p. 40.
- ⁹"Local Funds in Little Theatre," The (Raleigh) News and Observer, 11 September 1940, p. 3.
- ¹⁰Ibid.
- ¹¹Munger, curtains Up!, pp. 38-40.
- ¹²"Theatre Builders Lead Off with Two Spades," The (Raleigh) News and Observer, 19 January 1939, p. 16.
- ¹³"Little Theatre Plans Progress," The (Raleigh) News and Observer, 1 April 1938, p. 2.
- ¹⁴Munger, Curtain Up!, p. 48.
- ¹⁵"Raleigh Dedicates Drama Center," The (Raleigh) News and Observer, 13 September 1940, p. 14.
- ¹⁶Munger, Curtain Up!, p. 177.
- ¹⁷Elizabeth Waugh, North Carolina's Capital, Raleigh (Raleigh: Junior League of Raleigh, 1967), p. 181.

Bibliography

Munger, Guy. Curtain Up!: Raleigh Little Theatre's First Fifty Years. Raleigh: Raleigh Little Theatre, 1985.

Raleigh (NC) News and Observer

March 27, 1938, p. 12. "Little Theatre May Build Home."

April 1, 1938, p. 2. "Little Theatre Plans Progress."

May 12, 1938, p. 18. "Fairmont Residents Don't Want Theatre."

January 19, 1939, p. 16. "Theatre Builders Lead Off With Two Spades."

June 11, 1939, p. 6. "Little Theatre Arises from Old Eyesore."

September 8, 1940, p. 12. "Development on Old Fair Grounds Race Track to be Dedicated Thursday."

September 11, 1940, p. 3. "Local Funds in Little Theatre."

September 13, 1940, p. 14. "Raleigh Dedicates Drama Center."

Raleigh (NC) Times:

September 13, 1940, p. 16. "Many Attend Art Center Dedication."

University of North Carolina Library, North Carolina Collection Clipping File:

The (Raleigh) News and Observer, 21 July 1974, "Deitrick Paralleled--and Made--Architecture History."

The (Raleigh) News and Observer, 15 July 1974, "Architect Deitrick Dies at 79."

The (Raleigh) News and Observer, 27 December 1959, "Hallmarks."

Wake County Deeds, Book 621, p. 48.

Wake County Maps, Book 1926, p. 8. "Fairmont, Raleigh, N. C."

Waugh, Elizabeth Culbertson. North Carolina's Capital, Raleigh. Raleigh: Junior League of Raleigh, 1967.

Who's Who in the South and Southwest. Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co., 1950. Entry for Deitrick, William Henley, p. 249.



RALEIGH LITTLE THEATRE/AMPHITHEATRE/ROSE GARDEN

D-35







