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# LYRIC THEATER

819 N.W. 2 AVENUE

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## Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI PLANNING DEPARTMENT  
TO THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION BOARD  
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF  
LYRIC THEATER  
819 N.W. 2ND AVENUE  
AS A HERITAGE CONSERVATION ZONING DISTRICT

Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton 1-16-74  
Historic Preservation Consultant Date

Accepted by [Signature]  
Chairman, Heritage Conservation Board Date

Designated by the Miami City Commission

Ordinance No. \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Lyric Theater

Current Name:

United House of Prayer for All People

Location:

819 N.W. 2nd Avenue  
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

United House of Prayer  
Bishop W. McCullough  
1665 N. Portal Drive, N.W.  
Washington, D. C. 20012

Present Occupant:

Vacant

Present Use:

Vacant

Present Zoning District:

CR-3/7

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

Tax Folio Number:

01-0103-60-1190

Boundary Description of HC Zoning District:

Lot 29 and the northerly 15 feet of Lot 36 of the plat of P. W. WHITE'S RESUB OF BLOCK 36 NORTH, as recorded in Plat Book B at Page 34, of the Public Records of Dade County, Florida.

HC Zoning Classification:

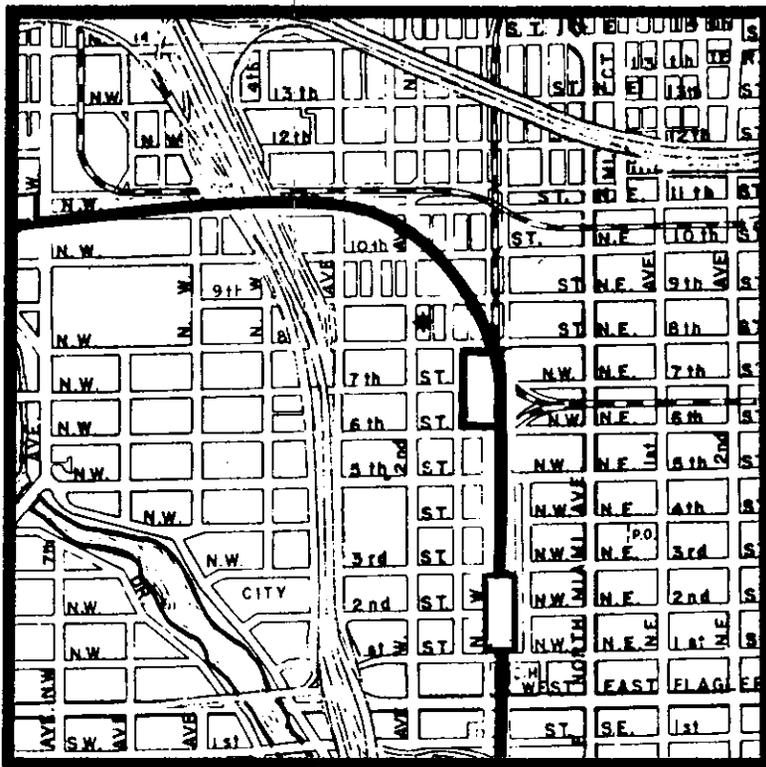
Historic Site

Dade County Historic Survey Rating:

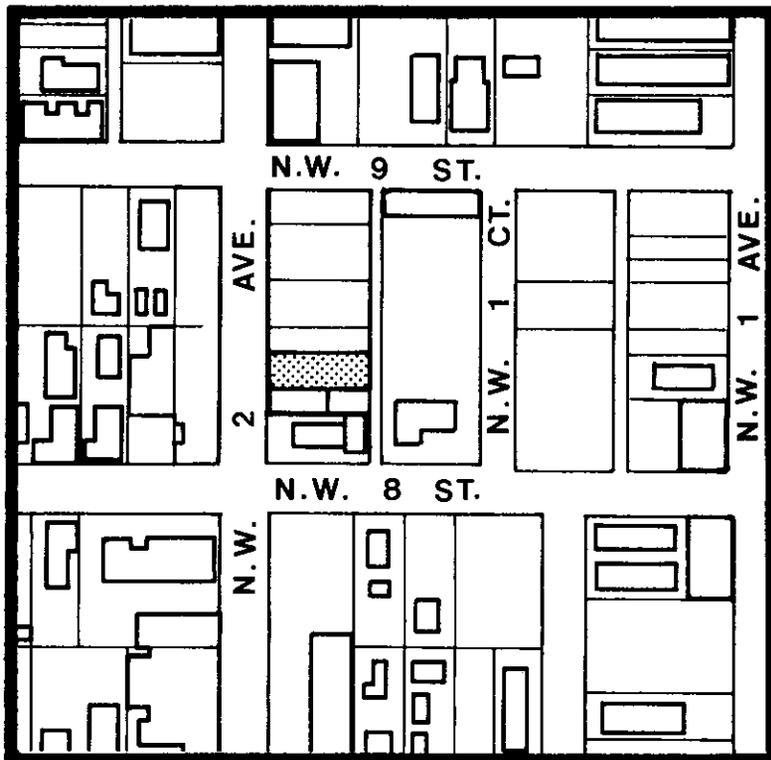
Architectural Significance - 2  
Historical Significance - 1  
Contextural Significance - 2

# LYRIC THEATER

819 N.W. 2 AVENUE



location



site plan

## II. SIGNIFICANCE

### Statement of Significance:

The Lyric Theater is significant as a reflection of social life in Overtown during the early twentieth century and as an excellent example of masonry vernacular architecture.

The Lyric Theater exemplifies an era in the history of Overtown which was characterized by a flourishing night life. Northwest Second Avenue, on which the Lyric Theater is located, was known as "Little Broadway" during the 1930's and 1940's because of the high quality of the entertainment it offered. Performers such as Billie Holiday, Marion Anderson, Nat King Cole, and Bessie Smith frequented the theaters and clubs here, adding to the area's reputation. Most of the buildings which hosted these entertainers no longer remain, however, and the Lyric Theater is a surviving testament to this important period in Overtown's history.

Built around 1913, the Lyric Theater was described in 1915 as "possibly the most beautiful and costly playhouse owned by colored people in all the Southland." The theater was built by Gedar Walker, a wealthy black businessman, and featured a comfortable, well-appointed interior which allowed for legitimate theater, moving pictures, and meetings.

The Lyric Theater is an excellent example of masonry vernacular architecture in Dade County before 1925 and is one of the more elaborate buildings remaining in Overtown. The building is particularly noteworthy for its application of classical detailing, including the massive Corinthian columns flanking the end bays and its decorative parapet.

### Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

The Lyric Theater is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

3. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community.

The Lyric Theater reflects an era in the history of Overtown when night life flourished and Northwest Second Avenue became known as "Little Broadway."

5. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

The Lyric Theater is an excellent example of masonry vernacular architecture and is noted for its applied classical details.

### III. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of Erection:

c. 1913

Architect:

Unknown

Builder/Contractor:

Unknown

Historical Context:

The Lyric Theater was built around 1913 by Gedar Walker, a successful black businessman. Considered one of the most beautiful buildings in town by residents of the area, the Lyric served as a movie house as well as a social center for the community. It was perhaps the first legitimate theater in Overtown.

The Lyric was a popular spot for movies and vaudeville, but also featured concerts, dramas, political meets, boxing, rallies, beauty pageants, and club activities. Schools also used the stage for plays and cantatas. Later, the building housed popular entertainers from around the country.

The building stood vacant for a number of years, but was converted for use as a church around 1960. Today, the Lyric is again vacant.

#### IV. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

##### Description of Building:

The Lyric Theater is a two story rectangular structure with five bays across the west (front) facade. Constructed of concrete, the building is finished with smooth stucco and is topped with a flat roof with parapet.

The building displays a symmetrical, three part composition and is embellished with applied classical details. The most outstanding components of the building are its elaborate end bays and arched parapet. Each end bay features a two story, round arched recess containing a window on each story. The upper windows rest on a decorative masonry console and are topped with a fanlight. Each recess is further highlighted by large, flanking Corinthian pilasters which rest on a low wall.

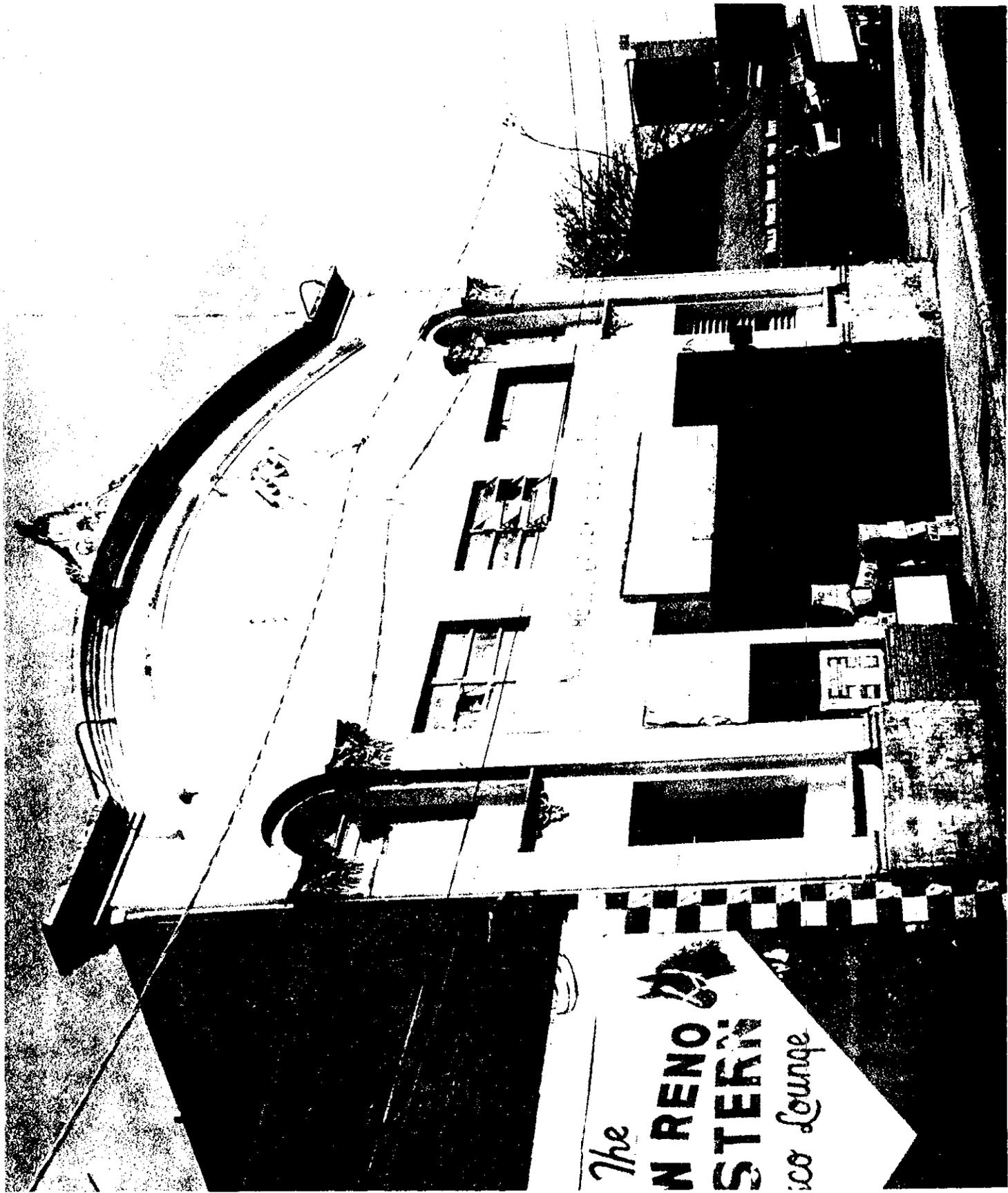
The building's parapet is arched over the center three bays and is topped with an elaborately molded cornice-type coping. A large, projecting cartouche decorates the center of the arch.

The first story has been greatly altered but still contains the original configuration of a recessed entry or foyer in the center three bays. All original doors have since been replaced. Likewise, no original windows remain, and existing windows are aluminum awning and jalousie types.

Despite the deterioration of the building and the alterations that have been made, the theater still retains its architectural integrity. The most significant architectural features have been preserved.

##### Description of Site:

The Lyric Theater faces west and is located in the middle of the block between N.W. 8th Street and N.W. 9th Street. It fronts directly on the street and occupies the entire lot.



Lyric Theater  
819 N.W. 2nd Avenue  
West (front) facade  
1984

## V. PLANNING CONTEXT

### Present Trends and Conditions:

The Lyric Theater, which is currently vacant, is located adjacent to the approved Phase I of the Southeast Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Plan. Public acquisition is currently underway on four blocks which are south of the building (UMTA area). In addition, the building lies directly west of a two acre site purchased by the City of Miami and Dade County and proposed for residential development.

At the present time, public acquisition is proposed for the building, as well as adjacent frontage along N.W. 2nd Avenue. A feasibility study, sponsored by Black Archives, will also be undertaken to determine whether the building can be rehabilitated.

### Conservation Objectives:

The intention of the Southeast Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Plan to preserve structures for which rehabilitation is feasible should be carefully considered in the case of the Lyric Theater. The feasibility study is necessary to determine the structural soundness of the building and the extent of deterioration.

If the Lyric Theater is found to be a candidate for rehabilitation, Southeast Overtown/Park West should work with Black Archives to identify a new use for the property.

These conservation objectives can best be achieved by maintaining the present zoning of the property. An HC-1 zoning overlay district will maintain the existing zoning, requiring only the review of physical changes to the property.

VI. HC ZONING ELEMENTS

Boundaries:

The boundaries of the HC zoning district have been drawn to include the entire tract of land owned by the United House of Prayer.

Major Exterior Surfaces Subject to Review:

The west, north, and south facades shall be considered major exterior surfaces subject to review.

Major Landscape Features Subject to Review:

The major landscape features subject to review shall include all features which are subject to requirements for tree removal permits, as set forth in Chapter 17 of the City Code.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dade County, Florida. Community and Economic Development, Historic Preservation Division. Dade County Historic Survey, Site Inventory File for 819 N.W. 2nd Avenue, Miami, Florida.

Fields, Dorothy. "Black Entertainment 1908-1919." Update. Volume II, December 1974.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Black Miami: The Way It Was: The Lyric Theater." The Miami Times, March 31, 1983, p. 17.

Pharr, Kelsey Leroy, ed. "Colored Town Section of the City of Miami Is a Thriving Community." The Miami Metropolis, October 16, 1915, p. 46.

Sweeting, Stanley. "Looking Back on Black Miami: Night Life Flourished in '30s and '40s." The Miami Times, May 15, 1975.