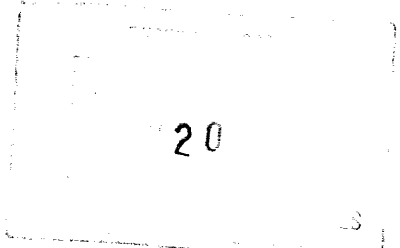


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Plymouth Theater  
other names Mott Motors (historic), H Street Playhouse (current)

2. Location

street & number 1365 H Street, NE  not for publication  
city or town Washington, D.C.  vicinity  
state District of Columbia Code DC county \_\_\_\_\_ code 001 zip code 20002

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments).

[Signature] 1/13/04  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

DC State Historic Preservation Office  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- Determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] 3/8/04  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

- Private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

**number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/Auto showroom

RECREATION/CULTURE/Theater

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION/CULTURE/Theater

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/20<sup>th</sup> century Neo-Romanesque

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Stone and brick walls, iron storefront

roof Terra cotta tiles

other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our History.
- B** Property associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

**Area of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE  
 TRANSPORTATION  
 ETHNIC HERITAGE  
 ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

**Period of Significance**

1928-1952

**Significant Dates**

1928; 1943; 1952

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

Upman and Adams

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

**Previous documentation on files (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

D.C. Historic Preservation Office

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 5,857 square feet

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	1 8 Zone	3 2 7 7 4 1 Easting	4 3 0 7 5 7 8 Northing	3			
2				4			

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title T. David Bell, AIA. Revised/edited by Kim Williams, Architectural Historian  
Organization D.C. Historic Preservation Office date December 2003  
street & number 801 North Capitol Street telephone 202 442-8840  
city or town Washington, D.C. state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code 20002

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

- X A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- X A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

- X Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

## Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name Phoenix Graphics, Inc  
street & number 120 11<sup>th</sup> Street, S.E. telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20003

**Paperwork Reduction Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et. seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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### Description Summary:

The Plymouth Theater building at 1365 H Street, N.E. is a one-story brick and stone structure designed in a 20<sup>th</sup>-century Romanesque Revival style characterized by round-arched openings, stone columns with carved capitals, and blind arcading. Originally constructed as an automobile showroom and repair facility, the building is rectangular in plan, measuring 45 feet wide by 100 feet deep, and is constructed of brick on the side and rear walls and of stone on the front elevation. The building is covered with a flat roof, clad on center with red terra cotta tiles, and constructed of a concrete deck and concrete beams supported by brick piers along the masonry party walls. The small, but architecturally notable building, is divided into three parts consisting of a central pavilion and flanking, tower-like end wings.

### General Description:

#### Site:

The Plymouth Theater is located on the south side of the 1300 block of H Street, N.E. in the near Northeast neighborhood of Washington, D.C. The building is attached to its neighbors on either side and is located towards the east end of the large city square. The square is comprised of commercial buildings fronting the main artery of H Street, N.E., and residential buildings, including single-family dwellings and apartment buildings, on the side streets.

#### Exterior:

The principal elevation of the Plymouth Theater building faces H Street and is divided into three principal parts—a central pavilion and flanking end wings—faced in stone and characterized by Romanesque-style detailing. The main block of the building is the central pavilion. It is slightly recessed from the single-bay-wide end wings, but features a storefront on center that projects in front of the end wings. The storefront, originally having an iron frame, but now black-painted aluminum, has narrow canted sidewalls and a wide front wall, all with plate glass show windows. An ornamented bronze frieze, original and intact, with embossed fleural patterning of alternating palmettes and lotus plants decorates the frieze above the top stile of the show window frame. Five single-light, wood transom windows, flush with the stone wall surface of the central pavilion, rise above and behind the projecting bay. This clerestory provides a transition between the iron storefront and an unadorned stone panel above. Above the stone panel is an ogee-shaped wood cornice with dentils. A red terra cotta tile roof rises above the wood cornice, spanning the end wings and obscuring the flat roof behind it. This tile roof gives the Romanesque-style building a Mediterranean flair.

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The flanking end wings, identically detailed with Romanesque-style features and detailing, project slightly from the center pavilion. The one-bay-wide wings are characterized by their arched entry surrounds, located on center of the stone walls. The opening itself is rectangular, cut into the smooth ashlar walls, and is flanked by slender limestone columns with spiral fluting and a geometric capital in a modern interpretation of the Composite order. The columns support a stone lintel decorated with three rosettes, which in turn, serves as an impost for a blind Syrian arch that rises over the recessed entry. The lintel is decorated with three carved roundels, perhaps recalling car wheels—a symbol of the building's original use as an automobile showroom and garage. The tympanum area of the blind arch is of undecorated polished marble with a metal bell on center. The entries are recessed from the entry surround, providing a small vestibule between the exterior and the interior of the building. The entry doors themselves, originally wood, have been removed, and replaced with recessed, dark bronze anodized aluminum ones.

Above the stone arch, a stone bas-relief in the form of a shield of armor projects from the wall. The shield is undecorated, but provides an ornamental element to the undecorated stone wall at this level. A row of five arches of blind arcading surmount the bas-relief, creating a transition between the wall and the simple square edged stone cornice molding that culminates the roofline of these end wings.

The attached building extends approximate 145 feet deep on its 45-foot wide lot. The rear elevation of the building is a flat, utilitarian surface of common brick with infilled openings and a new-cut opening for double fire doors. The rear elevation opens onto a blind alley with a small parking area immediately behind the building, including a ramp that historically led into the rear, repair/service area of the automobile showroom.

### Interior:

Historically, the interior of the building featured two distinct spaces: the automobile showroom and the service wing. The front showroom, facing H Street, extended the full 45-foot width of the building and featured smooth plaster walls between plaster wall pilasters. Single pilasters were located at the four corners of the room, while a pair of pilasters was located on center of the east and west side walls.

The service area, located behind the showroom, similarly spanned the full 45-foot width, with a small office space located in the southeast corner of the space. A vehicle door was originally located on center of the rear wall.

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### Summary Statement of Significance:

The Plymouth Theater building at 1365 H Street, N.E. is a one-story commercial building originally constructed in 1928 as a combination automobile showroom and automobile repair facility, and converted, in 1942, into a motion picture theater. The building was erected at a time when the historically commercial H Street corridor was becoming heavily concentrated with automobile-related businesses, second in the city to 14<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W., then dubbed "Automobile Row." In 1942-43, the automobile showroom underwent adaptive re-use, becoming a 400-seat neighborhood theater, open to African Americans. As the only integrated theater in this near northeast section of Washington upon its opening in January 1943, the Plymouth Theater reflects the local demographics and segregated level of society at that time.

Originally designed by the architectural firm of Frank Upman and Percy Adams, the building stands as a sophisticated example of a commercial adaptation of the Romanesque style of architecture. The building has been recently renovated into the H Street Playhouse and survives today as an important architectural and cultural landmark in the city.

The Plymouth Theater meets Criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places, with architecture, entertainment/recreation, ethnic heritage, and transportation as the areas of significance:

The Plymouth Theater building at 1365 H Street, N.E. stands as a premier example of an automobile showroom-cum-small neighborhood movie theater converted at a time when the competition from larger, consolidated automobile dealers led to the demise of small, independent dealerships, but at the same time that the "Golden Age of Hollywood" led to the proliferation of small, neighborhood theaters. The Plymouth Theater catered to a predominantly African-American audience at a time when segregation prevented blacks from patronizing "whites-only" enterprises.

The building is a rare survivor of an early in-town automobile showroom. The building—a Romanesque-inspired stone building—is executed in a unique, academic interpretation of the Romanesque style that stands out from the more common interpretation of the style, found predominantly in the many late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romanesque Revival-style row houses in the city. The attention paid to the building's design is reflective of that given to other automobile showrooms at the time and presents an air of dignity, importance and pretension indicative of the building type. The building's exterior retains a high degree of integrity, including a nearly intact façade, complete with its ornamental details.

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The building's period of significance extends from its date of construction as an automobile showroom in 1928 to its closing as a theater in 1952. The building was converted from an auto showroom to a theater in 1942-43, opening to the public in January 1943.

### Resource History and Historic Context:

#### Near Northeast Neighborhood:

The Plymouth Theater building at 1365 H Street, N.E. was built in 1928 on H Street, N.E. in the near Northeast neighborhood of Washington, D.C. At that time, H Street, N.E. was an important commercial corridor offering a variety of independent and chain businesses, along with light industrial and commercial warehouse concerns. Sparsely developed prior to the Civil War, this area of the city began to emerge as a residential/commercial neighborhood with the arrival of the Columbia Railway Company streetcar in 1872. The streetcar line ran from 15<sup>th</sup> and New York Avenue in downtown Washington, then southeast along Massachusetts Avenue to H Street, and through the "near Northeast" neighborhood to the streetcar line's terminus at 15<sup>th</sup> and H Streets, N.E. By 1883, the company was running 15 cars, each making 11 trips daily.

During the 1880s and 1890s as the streetcar encouraged residential speculative development, the area grew into a sizeable community of modest-sized, two and three-story brick row houses built primarily for members of the working class. Several nearby sources of employment, including the railroad, the Government Printing Office, the brickyard, the streetcar, and even the more remote Navy Yard, made this area particularly attractive to workers and their families. From the beginning, there was a mixture of white and African American residents; churches and schools for both races were built before the turn-of-the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

As the side streets became developed with residential row houses during this period, H Street itself became increasingly commercial. The number of businesses in the area jumped from 75 in 1880 to 154 in 1890 and 410 in 1910. Businesses that depended upon walk-in trade, such as dry goods stores, shoe stores, tobacco stores, confectioners, tailors, hardware stores, jewelry stores and others, tended to locate along this principal corridor, while businesses that catered to the local workers, such as saloons, restaurants and pool halls, clustered on side streets and around the car barn. In addition to these storefront businesses, the area was home to light industrial, or non-

<sup>1</sup> Capitol Hill North/Near Northeast Cultural and Social History Study, Context Statement, 2002, p. 22. (on file at the D.C. Historic Preservation Office).



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retail commercial uses, including coal yards, bread ovens, tinsmiths, blacksmiths, stone yards and beer bottlers.

During the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the near Northeast neighborhood was transformed by the construction of Union Station. Immigrant workers attracted by the construction jobs, added to the already diverse population of the area, and the number of businesses, especially along H Street, multiplied. By 1919, local businessmen had formed the Northeast Business Men's Association to promote improvements and raise business standards in the northeast section of the city. The business section continued to grow until H Street became one of Washington's most active commercial areas. The majority of businesses on H Street were small independently owned stores, along with professional offices (dentists, doctors), chain stores and large department stores were also present, including the Sanitary Grocery Company, People's Drug, Woolworth's 5 & 10, to name a few. By the mid-1920s, automobile-related enterprises had emerged as one of the dominant businesses on H Street.

In 1920, approximately ten auto-related businesses along H Street and in its alleys, offered auto repairs, auto accessories, auto garaging, and even auto livery, a forerunner of the taxi business. With the improvement of Bladensburg and Benning Roads, the H Street corridor became an increasingly important east-west automobile commuter route and an attractive location for automobile showrooms. Although H Street never had the concentration of automobile dealerships found on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W., there were several auto showrooms of city-wide, and even national significance.

Ourisman Chevrolet opened its first automobile showroom at 625 H Street in 1920. Ourisman Chevrolet was founded by Benjamin Ourisman, who began his automobile career as a sales clerk at the Chevrolet dealership on Connecticut Avenue, N.W. In 1925, the company had grown so successful that the firm built a new show room at 610 H Street, and in 1928 had moved into Anacostia with branch stores. By 1930, Ourisman Chevrolet was one of the largest auto dealers in the United States. In 1926, L.P. Steuart Motor Company, a large Ford dealership in Washington with its main salesroom at 6<sup>th</sup> and K Streets, N.W., opened a branch show room at 630 H Street. And in 1928, brothers William and Charles Oshinsky opened the combination automobile showroom/service facility at 1365 H Street. This sophisticated Romanesque-inspired building embodies the predominant character of the early automobile showroom, namely the traditional urban storefront, and survives as an excellent example of the work of the architectural firm of Upman and Adams.

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### The Architects:

The building at 1365 H Street was designed by the architectural firm of Upman and Adams, a partnership that lasted from 1924 until the death of Frank Upman in 1948. Frank Upman (1872-1948) received his architectural training at the Chicago School of Architecture and the Art Institute. Around 1897, he came to Washington to establish an office for Henry Ives Cobb, a renowned Chicago architect. He formed the partnership of Harding and Upman and practiced from 1904 until he served in France and England during World War I. After his 17-month service for the Construction Division of the U.S. Army's Air Service, he returned to form the partnership of Upman and Adams. Upman was president of the Allied Architects Association of Washington. In that capacity he supervised drawing the plans for the Longworth House Office Building at New Jersey Avenue and Independence Avenue, S.E. (1933), a cooperative project involving many Washington architects. In 1922, Frank Upman served as president of the Washington Chapter, AIA. Upman was responsible for designing the Avalon Theater in Chevy Chase; the Woodward Apartment building at 2311 Connecticut Avenue, N.W. (1909); the former Central YMCA building

Percy C. Adams (1869-1953) studied architecture at Cornell University and in 1893 began an architectural practice in Buffalo, New York. He moved to Washington and in 1897, worked in the office of the supervising architect of the U.S. Treasury Department. In 1909, he began private practice and became associated with Frank Upman in 1916.

### Automobile Showrooms: A Building Type:

The automobile showrooms in Washington, D.C. generally responded to programmatic requirements established for this building type worldwide. In fact, regardless of their location, the automobile showroom was a multi-functional building designed to meet the needs of both the automobile sales and service departments. While the sales department clearly required a space for the display of the automobiles, storage space was equally necessary for the housing of cars prior to delivery. In addition, workshops for the repair and adjustment of automobiles, and shops for the sale of motor parts and accessories were also needed. Typically, as the building type developed, all of these components of automobile commerce were housed in a single, fireproof building, called an automobile showroom.

As the production of automobiles and market area grew, retail firms sprang up with their own showrooms. Because the range of products was limited in the early years of the industry's growth, the showrooms generally shared the massing and scale of a typical urban commercial building. For instance, the building, with its central projecting display bay, does not differ

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significantly in form from any other commercial building of the period. Eventually, however, the automobile showroom as a building type became larger and more dominant, often replacing smaller-scale 19<sup>th</sup>-century structures. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the Washington, D.C. automobile showroom had emerged as a distinctive building type, often designed in a Classical Revival style of architecture, and defined by refined architectural detailing, and expansive plate glass show windows for the display of automobiles.

The building at 1365 H Street, N.E. was built during the first stages of the evolution of the building type and survives as a relatively rare and intact example of a modest-scaled automobile showroom.

### Building History

The building at 1365 H Street was a speculative venture financed and developed in 1927-28 by William and Charles Oshinsky. The Oshinskys, a local developer team credited with the construction of several other H Street properties, applied for a building permit to establish an auto showroom and service station and hired the well-established architectural firm of Upman and Adams to prepare plans for the building. The firm was already well established in the city (see above).

Upon the completion of the building in 1928, the Oshinskys leased it to a variety of different and relatively short-term automobile retailers. In 1928, Sam's Garage and Moller Motors occupied the building. Then, Mott Motors, Inc. moved in, remaining there until 1931. In 1928, the Mott Motors Company was the D.C. distributor of the Hupmobile, with its primary sales and service center on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, along the city's "Automobile Row." A 1928 article in the *Washington Herald* headlined "New Hupmobile is in Big Demand," quoted Thomas T. Mott as saying the "continued record-breaking demand for the new Hupmobile Century models is giving us one of the hardest jobs we have had in years in keeping our stock cars in shape to make deliveries."<sup>2</sup> The article continues to quote Mott, saying "Our business has been on a steady increase since the first of last fall. We have kept a steady stream of letters and telegrams between here and Detroit to try and impress on the factory officials the serious need for new cars in Washington and adjacent territory." Clearly, this demand for the Hupmobile led Thomas Mott to establish a branch showroom along H Street, N.E.—an important commercial corridor with the second-largest concentration of automobile-related businesses in the city. While the successful Mott Motors remained in the building for over two years, the building saw a range of different owners over the course of the next ten years. According to local city directories, the building was home to the Nash RJ Motor Company, later Nash Rohr Barsky, Inc. from 1931 to 1934. Then, in 1934,

<sup>2</sup> *The Washington Herald*, Sunday, July 15, 1928.

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Kingston-Otey Motors occupied the building, becoming Duke and Otey Motors, Inc. from 1934 to 1939. From 1940 to 1942, Duke & Cooksey were listed as occupants of the building.

The relatively high tenant turn-over rate in the building and the ultimate demise of the small, urban showroom is likely attributable to a combination of factors including the Depression, consolidation in the auto industry, and competition from newer, larger automobile dealers. On H Street, the competition came in the form of a new Ourisman Chevrolet building, constructed in 1941 as a large, multiple-level service building in the 600 block of H Street, N.E. At the same time, new showrooms were being constructed further out in the suburbs where larger buildings with expansive parking lots could accommodate increased quantities of merchandise. In 1942, during this period of change, the building at 1365 H Street, N.E. ceased to function as a showroom. However, as the building's unobstructed auto showroom proved suitable for adaptation, the building did not remain vacant for long. In 1942-1943, the building owner, William Oshinsky had the former automobile showroom converted into a 400-seat, neighborhood theater, the designs for which were prepared by architect Morris Hallett. The neighborhood theater celebrated its grand opening in January 1943.

### Motion Picture Theaters and H Street

The early 1940s were part of the so-called "Golden Age of Hollywood," with higher-than-ever demand for film entertainment. The H Street corridor was already home to a number of motion picture theaters, many of which opened in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Robert Headley's Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington, D.C., 19 theaters existed along the corridor between 1909 and 1940. The first of these were small structures, such as the 1910 Dixie Theater, at 800 H Street, N.E. that seated a few hundred people. However, as their popularity increased, movie houses rapidly became larger. The Apollo at 625 H Street was built in 1913 and seated 900 persons, while the Empire Theater at 911 H Street, built the same year, could accommodate 500 people. While the Apollo Theater continued to operate as a theater until 1955, many of the other smaller H Street theaters came and went quickly, as is typical of nickelodeons of the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

H Street ushered in the "Golden Age of Hollywood" in 1938 with the construction of the Atlas Theater. The impressive edifice, designed by well-known theater architect John Zink in an Art Moderne style of architecture, opened that year in the 1300 block of H Street. But the Atlas and the other H Street theaters were "whites-only" enterprises. H Street theaters available to African American patronage during segregation were rare. One nearby theater, The Florida, at 1438 Florida Avenue opened in 1913, and sometime during the 1920s came under African American ownership. However, the theater was closed in 1925, prompting William Henry Jones to note in his 1927 survey of recreational facilities for Negroes:

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“It was closed during the summer of 1925, and scheduled to re-open in September. However, it has been sold and has been converted into a garage. It had colored ownership. With the closing of this theater, the Northeast section, like the Southeast section of this city, is now without a [colored] theater.”<sup>3</sup>

So, when the former automobile showroom at 1365 H Street was converted into the Plymouth Theater in 1943, it was the only theater in this near Northeast section of Washington to accept African Americans. An article on the opening of the Plymouth in the *Washington Afro American* stated,

“Welcome news to Washington residents and newly arrived war workers living in Northeast and Southeast areas is the announcement of the opening of the Plymouth Theater, 1365 H Street, Northeast on January 30, at 12 noon. Not only does this house help meet the long felt need for motion picture entertainment, but will also help residents obtain recreation without violating the ban on pleasure driving, being within walking distance for many and on a street car line for others.”

During the War years, the H Street theaters, including the Plymouth, thrived. Immediately after the War, when war restrictions were lifted, Ike Weiner took over ownership of the Plymouth Theater building, adding restrooms, a heating and air conditioning system and a water fountain. These improvements helped the Plymouth draw in the crowds. However, as D.C. began to desegregate, the economic stability of the segregated facilities began to decline. Around 1951, the larger Atlas Theater desegregated, creating greater competition for the Plymouth. Already by 1952, the Plymouth Theater had bowed to its competition and closed its doors.

After the theater’s closure, the building, still owned by Williams Oshinsky, was leased to a roller rink and furniture store. In 1959, William Oshinsky sold the building to Clements Printing. During this period, the surrounding Near Northeast neighborhood was suffering a serious a socio-economic decline as residents left the city for the suburbs and the stable, working class neighborhood became plagued with poverty. In the 1960s, further decline in the area was

<sup>3</sup> Jones, William Henry. *Recreation and Amusement Among Negroes in Washington, D.C.* Reprinted by Negro University Press. Westport, Connecticut, 1970. Originally printed by Howard University Press, Washington, D.C., 1927, p. 117. As cited in “Capitol Hill North/Near Northeast Cultural and Social History Study, 2002.

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accelerated by transportation policies such as the interstate highway program. The 1968 riots that followed Martin Luther King's assassination were devastating. H Street businesses were looted, burned, and vandalized, though the blocks further east were spared the extreme devastation of those closer to the Capitol. Despite the widespread devastation and extended economic malaise that followed for decades after the riots, the building at 1365 H Street survived, along with its owner/occupant, Clements Printing.

In 1984, John French, former vice president of McDonald's Corporation purchased the property from Clements Printing and completed a renovation to open a southern soul food restaurant. For almost 20 years French's Fine Southern Cuisine catered to many celebrities as well as a local clientele. The restaurant operated until the end of 2001 upon sale of the building to Bruce and Adele Robey. The Robeys, publishers of the local newspaper, Voice of the Hill and proprietor's of Phoenix Graphics, purchased the building with the sole purpose of converting it into a live theater venue. In 2002, the H Street Playhouse, a legitimate theater, opened in the former automobile showroom-cum-theater at 1365 H Street.

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## Verbal Boundary Description:

The building at 1365 H Street, N.E. is located on the south side of the 1300 block of H Street, N.E. on Lot 829 in Square 1027 in Washington, D.C. +

## Boundary Justification:

The building at 1365 H Street has occupied this lot and square since the construction of the present building on the site in 1928.

+



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### PHOTOGRAPHS

- 1) Plymouth Theater  
1365 H Street, N.E.  
Washington, DC  
Kimberly Prothro Williams  
December 2003  
DCHPO  
South elevation, view looking south  
1/3
  
- 2) Plymouth Theater  
1365 H Street, N.E.  
Washington, DC  
Kimberly Prothro Williams  
December 2003  
DCHPO  
South elevation, view looking west  
2/3
  
- 3) Plymouth Theater  
1365 H Street, N.E.  
Washington, DC  
Kimberly Prothro Williams  
December 2003  
DCHPO  
South elevation, view looking east  
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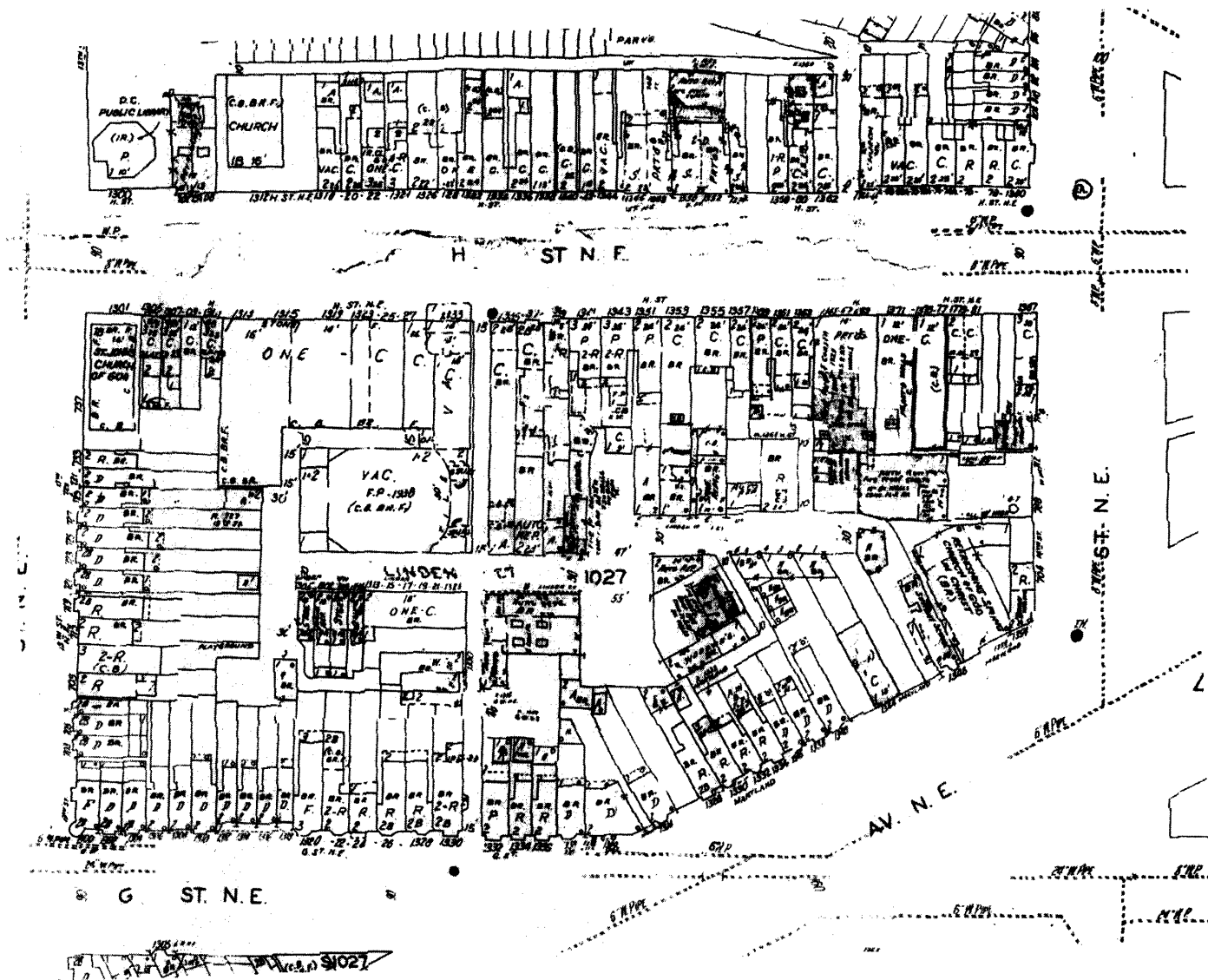
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SITE MAP

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Plymouth Theater  
1365 H Street, N.E.  
Washington, D.C.

Base Map from *Sanborn Building and Property Atlas, Washington, D.C., 1997*