

**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 Strand Theater
other names Strand Theater (Deanwood)

2. Location

street & number 5129-5131 Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue, NE not for publication
city or town Washington vicinity
state District of Columbia code DC county _____ code 001 zip code 20019

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 of certifying official/Title Date

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:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain): _____	_____	_____

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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)

number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Theater

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/Classical

Revival

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

roof Rubber membrane

other _____

Narrative Description

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

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Description Summary:

The Strand Theater is a two-story brick theater building (painted white) with an integrated storefront at the corner of Division and Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenues, NE in the Deanwood neighborhood of Washington, D.C. Erected in 1928, the Strand is designed in a vernacular, stripped Classical style of architecture. The principal facade of the building facing Burroughs Avenue lacks its original marquee, but retains its massive steel, rooftop sign and overall massing identifying it as a theater building. The building is characterized by balance and symmetry, as well as by a restrained use of classical elements. A canted corner tower marks the intersection of the primary and secondary facades and historically provided entry into the building's storefront.

A two-story commercial building, contemporaneous to the theater and architecturally similar, abuts the north end of the Strand Theater, while a group of three one-story commercial buildings and a freestanding church building are located just beyond. The whole forms a cohesive and noteworthy collection of historic buildings, though only the theater is included in this nomination.

General Description:

Exterior

The Strand Theater is a two-story, wedge-shaped brick building that historically housed a theater and corner store. The principal elevation faces Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue, N.E., offering a symmetrical three-part elevation of center block and end pavilions with the now bricked-in theater entrance on-center of the facade. The building extends south along Division Avenue, which runs at a slight angle to Burroughs Avenue, thus creating the building's wedge-shaped footprint. A corner projecting bay/tower at the intersection of the two streets historically provided entry to the corner store, at one point known as the Strand Pharmacy. The Division Avenue elevation—a secondary, but still visually prominent public façade—presents a symmetrical arrangement of openings, now bricked in or boarded up, while the rear elevation is purely utilitarian in nature. The building is covered with a flat asphalt roof, hidden on the Burroughs Avenue elevation by a parapet wall decorated with the building's name on-center and *bas relief* panels at either end. The walls are laid in all-stretcher bond of brick painted white along most of the wall surfaces.

The Burroughs Avenue façade is the formal "front" of the building. The now filled-in openings on the first story included the theater entrance on-center of the façade, the box office to the left and display windows to either side. The second story includes a range of six, single window openings, all of which are currently boarded up. A simple shelf-type marquee above the entry

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has been removed, as have flanking niches, used for inset display cases. All of the first and second story openings are either boarded up or filled in with brick or concrete block.

A projecting stringcourse, between the first and second floors, and a projecting cornice between the second floor and parapet wall, extend the full width of the front elevation, wrapping around the corner store entry bay on the east elevation. At the first floor level, fluted pilasters at the east end of the Burroughs Avenue façade support the first story stringcourse. A three-part parapet wall caps the elevation at the roofline, with a central stepped section over the original theater entrance and two end pavilions. A metal sign bearing the theater name “STRAND” is located in the center panel of the central pavilion, while the end piers of the parapet are ornamented with concrete *bas-reliefs* of a winged human face. At present, all of the window and door apertures are boarded up by either plywood sheets or filled in with brick or concrete block.

The eastern end pavilion of the Burroughs Avenue façade turns the corner with Division Avenue, forming a canted corner bay and implied tower. This corner bay provides a transition between the primary Burroughs Avenue façade and the secondary Division Avenue façade, and historically provided access to the corner store accommodated in the building. This corner tower, topped by an extension of the parapet extending along Burroughs Avenue, also features a concrete *bas relief* panel, depicting a winged human face like those found on the Burroughs Avenue parapet wall.

The Division Avenue elevation extends seven bays long and originally included, on the first story, exit doors for the theater auditorium, poster display cases, a projecting display window, and service entrances for the storefront. The bays are separated by brick pilasters, which rise above the cornice line almost like minor buttresses, with a cap on-line with the cornice on Burroughs Avenue and another one above the roofline. The northernmost bay closest to the corner of Burroughs Avenue has a former projecting display window now filled with concrete block on the first story and a long and narrow window above it. The center bay has an inset area that once accommodated large poster display cases, now covered with a mural painted on plywood sheets. Other bays on the ground floor accommodated doors to the theater auditorium, as well as a single door leading to a backroom of the storefront. These entrances are now filled in with cinderblock.

At the second-story level of the Division Avenue elevation, each of the seven bays features decorative blind brick panels framed by brick borders. Originally unbroken, several of these panels are now penetrated by metal ventilation duct grills. The Division Avenue façade is capped by a low parapet with a metal coping that extends around the corner to the eastern end of the Burroughs Avenue facade.

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The generally flat roof slopes toward the alley and is covered with a recently applied rubber membrane surface. A large metal sign supported by metal framework and bearing the name STRAND stands upon the roof at the western corner of the building. This sign, visible from a distance, clearly identifies the theater from afar.

Interior:

The interior of the theater includes a below-grade basement level, a first-floor entry vestibule and a double-height theater space, and a second floor office/projection/rest room level above the first floor vestibule area. The theater proper is reached via the entry vestibule from the exterior. This vestibule includes a corner winder stair leading to the second floor and a large opening into the theater proper. The theater floor has been entirely gutted; all interior structure and finishes, including ceilings have been removed. The walls have been stripped to the brick structure and are in structurally sound condition. In certain areas, there are ghosts of prior elements, such as the stage. The floors are concrete, with ghosts of a square tile finish in places. The original store, although also gutted, is clearly separated from the theater by intact walls. The balcony level of the theater has been removed.

The second floor of the theater is reached via the winder stair from the front entry area and includes the projection area and several offices. All of the interior finishes and fixtures have been removed, though original room partitions remain intact.

The basement of the building has long-standing water and is in deteriorating condition. The existing mechanical equipment and electrical system have been completely decommissioned and either removed or abandoned in place. The plumbing is similarly defunct.

INTEGRITY

The Strand Theater suffers from deterioration and has lost important exterior elements, namely original windows and doors, and more significantly the marquee. On the interior, the Strand has lost all significant theater features. Despite this loss of fabric, the Strand Theater retains its overall massing with no additions or alterations to it, and retains its distinctive large-scale sign that clearly identifies the building as an historic theater.

The Strand retains its historic integrity in terms of location, setting, materials, feeling, and most importantly association. The theater was an important neighborhood institution east of the Anacostia River in an underserved section of the city. Though no longer operating as a theater, its physical presence is a significant community landmark and a reminder of the area's past. The now vacant theater will soon be part of a redevelopment project aimed at revitalizing this neglected part of the city.

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)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

ETHNIC HERITAGE/Black

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1928

Significant Dates

1928

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Abe E. Lichtman

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

James Dowrick

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:

District of Columbia Public Library, Washingtoniana
Division. D.C. Preservation League

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Summary Statement of Significance:

The Strand Theater is highly significant under Criterion A for its role in the development of the Deanwood neighborhood, a historically African-American community in Washington, DC with Entertainment/Recreation, Ethnic Heritage: Black, and Social History as the Areas of Significance. The theater is representative of a trend in the motion picture industry to provide affordable neighborhood-based entertainment for blacks and whites in the early to mid-20th century. When the Strand Theater was constructed in 1928 in the northeast neighborhood of Deanwood, it was Washington’s first true purpose-built “east of the River” theater. The Strand became a center of secular community life for over 40 years and contributed to the perception of Deanwood as a self-sufficient neighborhood that endures strongly to this day.

The Strand is also significant under Criterion B for its association with the career of its builder Abe E. Lichtman. The Strand was one of a number of African American movie/vaudeville houses along the East Coast owned by Lichtman, including eight in Washington, D.C. Lichtman was nationally famous as a white advocate for equal economic opportunities for African Americans in the entertainment industry. He was also an important business and political leader in the District of Columbia through his ties with Franklin D. Roosevelt and other figures.

The Period of Significance for the Strand extends from 1928, when the theater was constructed until 1960 when it ceased to operate as a theater.

Resource History and Historic Context:

The Development of Movie Theaters in Washington, DC’s African-American Community:

Motion pictures came to Washington in 1894, when the Columbia Phonograph Company showroom at 919 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW began offering short films on hand-cranked Edison “Kinetoscopes.”¹ Over the next decade dozens of entrepreneurs opened storefronts with rows of individual viewers. After projected images came to the city in 1897, exhibitors often presented filmed travelogues, lectures, and such sporting events as prize-fights in rented auditoriums, church halls, and “live” theaters.²

Washington’s earliest motion picture theaters were remodeled spaces in existing buildings. Likely the first purpose-built motion picture theater building was the Pickwick, designed by Frances Koenig at 911 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW in 1907. A wave of theater building followed, lasting into the early 1910s.

¹ Bloch, Don. “Pioneer Days of the Flickers,” *The Washington Post*, December 24, 1933. p. SM3.

² Headley, Robert K. *Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington, DC*, McFarland Company: Jefferson, North Carolina, 1999, p. 5-8.

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From the days of the Kinetoscope, motion pictures had found a wide audience in Washington's African-American community despite the segregationist policies of the city's theaters. Other than in storefronts with Kinetoscopes, African-Americans first saw motion pictures in church halls. For example, the Metzertott brothers exhibited religious films at African-American churches in the first years of the twentieth century. Similarly, an African-American exhibitor, Doctor Richardson, "the religious show king," showed films in church halls all over the city.³

The development of motion picture exhibition in the African-American community paralleled that of the white community, with the first purpose-built theaters in African-American neighborhoods opening in 1909. The Hiawatha at 2008 11th Street, NW is often noted as the oldest African-American theater in the United States.⁴ As was customary with white theaters of the time, these early African-American theaters offered both live entertainment and motion pictures. By later day standards, theaters from this first wave of theater development were small structures. The Hiawatha, the Foraker (1120-1122 20th Street NW), and the Gem (1000 block of 7th Street, NW) each seated fewer than 350 patrons. Still, these were larger than the Pickwick which seated just 150.

Segregationist policies were carried out in the city in a variety of ways. Most downtown theaters did not sell tickets to African Americans; however, a few, such as the Gayety at 513 9th Street, NW did allow them to be seated in a segregated balcony. The movie-and-vaudeville Lyceum Theater on Pennsylvania Avenue, NW won praise in the local African-American press for selling tickets to African Americans when it booked an African-American act. Some other theaters, such as the Gem and the Happyland on 7th Street NW had separate entrances and divided their seats into "white" and "colored" sections with a low wall.⁵

In 1910, Washington was said to have nine African-American theaters, five of which were white-owned.⁶ Whites owned the "Jim Crow" theaters such as the Gem and the Happyland. The Maceo, which was owned by prominent African-American businessman James F. Child, had an exterior sign that advertised open seating without discrimination.⁷

In 1910, the Howard Theater opened at 7th and T Streets NW to both black and white audiences. A magnificent theater building that originally seated 1,250 patrons, the Howard was comparable in size and architectural style to the large white theaters in downtown. Originally it presented vaudeville and

³ Ibid. p. 33.

⁴ Ibid. p. 35.

⁵ Ibid. p. 35.

⁶ Ibid. p. 35.

⁷ Ibid. p. 290.

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musical acts, but showed its first motion pictures in 1916, when it played the “first engagement for a colored audience” of an anti-war drama called “The Law of Peace.”

By 1914, the city had approximately 70 working motion picture theaters.⁸ At the time, seven theaters were classified as “colored” and five as “white and colored”. Of the twelve theaters not restricted to whites, ten were in the northwest quadrant and two in the southeast. These theaters were estimated to provide about 11% of the city’s average daily motion attendees from about 8% of its available seating.⁹

The early 1920s were marked by the construction of the great movie palaces on F Street NW and larger theaters like the Lincoln and the Dunbar along the U Street corridor. As the 1920s progressed, additional theaters for white audiences appeared along streetcar lines in more outlying areas in northwest Washington. However, neighborhoods in other quadrants remained under-served, with just five theaters in northeast and southeast. There was only one “east of the river theater” the Logan in the Anacostia Masonic Lodge building, in segregated Anacostia.¹⁰ In 1927, the Strand opened as the first purpose-built theater “east of the river” serving the far northeast neighborhood of Deanwood. In 1930, the Fairlawn Theater opened on Good Hope Road, SE as the first true purpose-built theater in the Anacostia neighborhood of southeast, D.C.

Business and Entertainment Development in Deanwood:

At the end of the 19th century, much of the area east of the Anacostia River was open land with small, scattered settlements. Deanwood originally centered about a Baltimore and Ohio Railroad station near the Maryland border and remained sparsely settled through the 1890s. An 1895 police census numerated 153 white and 117 “colored” residents in Deanwood proper, although the adjacent hamlets of Burrville and Lincolnville were entirely African American.¹¹

Deanwood began to develop more rapidly after 1899, when a railroad was built through the neighborhood’s open fields to connect the waterfront resort of Chesapeake Beach to Chesapeake Junction, a terminal near the intersection of Deane and Minnesota Avenues, NE.¹² A few years later, the Washington Railway and Electric Company’s “Seat Pleasant Line” was built parallel with the Chesapeake Beach Railway tracks, connecting downtown Washington to Deanwood. During the next two decades, as residential subdivisions replaced open fields, the community became predominantly African American. A major event in the development of the neighborhood occurred in 1909, when Nannie Helen Burroughs founded the internationally famous National Training School for Women and

⁸ Ibid. p. 56.

⁹ Ibid. p. 68.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 288-289. The Anacostia Lodge building was built on 14th Street, SE in 1890. The Logan became a full-time theater in 1923.

¹¹ “Population By Color,” *The Washington Post*, February 5, 1895. p.8.

¹² “Progress of Work on Street Railway Extension,” *The Washington Post*, March 19, 1899. p. 14.

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Girls on 50th Street just off Grant Road, NE. By the late 1920s, there was considerable residential development on the numbered streets branching off Deane Avenue, NE, a major arterial street in the community. However, there was relatively little commercial development east of the point where Deane Avenue merged into Grant Road near the intersection of 49th Street, NE.

By the 1890s, when many church groups and fraternal societies picnicked in its fields, Deanwood was an important recreational area. The Benning Racetrack, located close to the B&O station, was the major horse track in the city until racing became illegal in 1908. In the World War I era, noted engineer H.D. Woodson and Lewis Giles formed the Universal Development and Loan Company and in 1921 founded the Suburban Gardens amusement park with fellow Deanwood resident and civic activist John Paynter.¹³ Long the only amusement park for African Americans in the Washington area, Suburban Gardens had its main gate at 50th and Hayes Streets, NE on the trolley and rail right-of-way. It quickly became the site of various lodge, church, and social club functions. African-American patrons came by trolley from all over the city to picnic and dance, ride the carousel, “King Tut’s Chariots,” “The Caterpillar,” “Tilt-A-Whirl” and miniature railroad, swim, or enjoy vaudeville performances.¹⁴

The earliest attempt to build a movie theater in Deanwood came around the time that Suburban Gardens opened. In addition to all manner of apartment buildings, small stores and row houses, architect Julius Wenig had designed several of the city’s earliest theaters, including The Hippodrome at Mount Vernon Square. In 1921, an entrepreneur retained the prolific Wenig to design a theater and business block near 61st and Dix Streets, NE. Wenig’s rendering of an attractive two-story theater named “The Classic” appeared in the *Washington Post* in December 1922. However, the theater was never completed. It would be six more years before a theater opened in the “east of the river” section of Northeast.

Abe E. Lichtman (1889-1965), Builder of the Strand Theater:

Abe Lichtman, builder of the Strand, was a nationally known white advocate for equal economic opportunities for African Americans. Born in 1889 in Kansas, Lichtman moved as a young man to West Hoboken, New Jersey and entered the theater business in Brooklyn, New York. He came to Washington in 1926, where he entered the local theater industry by projecting films in rental halls.¹⁵ He soon began leasing and operating theaters for African-American audiences, achieving rapid success and quickly

¹³ Deanwood History Project. “Deanwood: A Model of Self-sufficiency in Far Northeast Washington”. (Pamphlet) Washington, DC. Advertisements and news mentions of Suburban Gardens first appeared in the Washington tribune during 1921. A “grand opening” announcement appears in the June 25, 1921 edition.

¹⁴ See Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, (1927-1928) Volume 7, Map Sheet 917 for a map of Suburban Gardens with labeled structures.

¹⁵ These first theaters in African-American neighborhoods were the Foraker (address not known), the Welcome (920 4 ½ Street, SW), the Fairyland (1838 L Street, NW), and the Hiawatha (2008 11th Street, NW), all of which opened in 1909, and the Ford Dabney at 2001 9th Street NW and the Minnehaha at 1215 U Street, NW, both of which opened in 1910. Other early theaters with African-American audiences included the Happyland and the Gem in the 1000 block of 7th Street, NW, the Georgia at 3324 Georgia Avenue, NW, and the Maceo at 1939 11th Street NW.

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building a chain of theaters that eventually stretched from Baltimore to Norfolk. By the late 1920s, Lichtman Theaters, with Abe Lichtman as managing partner, controlled both the Lincoln and Howard theaters, the major venues on the U Street corridor, known as “Black Broadway.” In addition to movies, Lichtman presented a mix of vaudeville acts and performances by top African-American stars at the Howard and Lincoln, as well as operating the Lincoln Colonnade, a ballroom adjacent to the Lincoln Theater. He enjoyed a national reputation for hiring African Americans at all levels within his company¹⁶ and for paying them fair wages.¹⁷ He also founded Camp Lichtman for economically disadvantaged youths and conducted fundraising benefits for Howard University and the NAACP, among other organizations. These efforts attracted national attention in African-American newspapers.¹⁸

Lichtman arranged for the production of newsreels featuring subjects of interest to the African-American community, such as the 1929 African-American Elks convention in Atlantic City.¹⁹ He was also an early advocate for what remains a contemporary cause: greater opportunities for African-Americans in the film industry. In 1934, the Chicago Defender reported that Lichtman had gone to Hollywood to lobby film executives to give more numerous and prominent parts to African-American performers, promising in turn to book the performers for personal appearances at his theaters to promote the film.²⁰

In the late 1920s, Lichtman began sponsoring an all-African American basketball team to promote his theater chain. Originally based at the Pythian Temple at 12th and U Streets, NW, the Lichtman Theater Carlises²¹ were renamed the Lichtman Players in 1928 and eventually metamorphosed into the red-and-white uniformed Lichtman Bears, a powerhouse who won an incredible 40 straight games and became the “world professional champions” by winning the national professional basketball tournament in

¹⁶ African American Rufus G. Byars served as Lichtman’s theater manager, having been employed in various managerial and administrative capacities in the African-American community amusement enterprises since the World War I era. See *Washington Post*, “Byars Takes Leases”. August 14, 1921. p. 2.

¹⁷ In 1936, when layoffs shortened work weeks, wage cuts and outright unemployment were especially common in the African-American community. The country’s most prominent African-American newspaper, the Chicago Defender, wrote a highly favorable article on the 1% pay raise received by Lichtman Theater employees. The annual Lichtman Theaters’ managers’ banquet was mentioned frequently in the newspaper’s columns. For example, see Chicago Defender. “In Washington”. September 30, 1933. p. 6.

¹⁸ On June 16, 1934, the Chicago Defender noted on the opening of Lichtman’s Booker T. Theater in Richmond, Virginia, “A race operator, Roger Pryor, runs the motion picture machines. Not even in the second run theaters, which have been run for the Colored here, was there ever before a Colored operator. It was not believed that a license as an operator would be given to the Race”. (as originally printed on page 9.)

¹⁹ Chicago Defender. “To Make Movietone of Elks Convention”. August 24, 1929. p. 6.

²⁰ In an era when the few African-American performers in mainstream films were not typically included in promotional tours, Lichtman had presented Etta Moten, who performed the song “Carioca”, to publicize his showing of the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers film “Flying Down to Rio”. See Chicago Defender. “Washington Theater to Feature Movie Players”. April 21, 1934. p. 8.

²¹ The *Washington Tribune* sports page covered the Lichtman team games in each weekly issue. See, for example, “Grand Opening 1928-1929 Basketball Season,” December 7, 1928. p 7. or “Lichtman Five is Drubbed 28-16 in Opener.” November 23, 1928. p. 7.

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Chicago in 1943.²² It was during the 1940s that Lichtman’s chain reached its peak, with 31 theaters, including eight in the District.²³ He was recognized as a civic leader and became an associate of the Roosevelts.²⁴ An historic image shows a Chicago Defender photograph of Abe Lichtman in the company of Eleanor Roosevelt and Mary McLeod Bethune.

After World War II, Lichtman reorganized Lichtman Theaters into a publicly owned company called District Theaters.²⁵ At the time he sold his theater business, Lichtman owned 29 theaters and had 425 employees, of whom 400 were African American. For the remainder of his working life, he focused on the Westory Real Estate Company and the Turner-Barbee Construction Company, which he co-founded in 1946.²⁶

The Building of the Strand Theater

Within a few years of entering the theater business, Lichtman was ready to move beyond U Street. Within a short time, he would operate the Rosalia near 2nd and F Streets, SW as well as the former Blue Mouse Theater (which he renamed the Mott) at 26th and M Streets, NW in the West End. However, in the late 1920s the time seemed ripe to expand to the other side of the Anacostia River. In 1928, Lichtman formed the Deanwood Amusement Company, which built the Strand, the first purpose-built theater as well as the only theater for African-American patrons east of the river. Up to that time, Lichtman had limited himself to taking over the operation of existing District theaters.²⁷ At around the same time, he also acquired a large interest in Suburban Gardens.

The Washington Post first announced the Deanwood Amusement Company’s plans on June 17, 1928. Lichtman called his theater the Strand, likely after a venerable theater of the same name that had long presented burlesque, vaudeville, and movies to white audiences in downtown Washington. The Deanwood Strand was located at the confluence of Grant Street (present-day Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue) and Division Avenue, NE, about three blocks from Suburban Gardens and one block from the trolley line. Because the original building permit has been lost, many details about its construction are unknown. Its design is attributed to James Dowrick (1860-1934).²⁸ Dowrick, a designer/builder about

²² Costello, Al. “Basketball Bug Bites Lichtman Via Bears and Lichtman Bites Back”. Washington Post. March 21, 1943. p. R4.

²³ Washington Post. “Theater Chain Registers Issue”. February 27, 1946. p. 40.

²⁴ See, for example, Chicago Defender. “Dedicate Women’s Council Building” October 28, 1944. p. 13, a photograph which shows Lichtman posing with Eleanor Roosevelt, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Agnes Meyer (wife of the owner of the Washington Post) at the dedication of the National Council of Negro Women Headquarters Building. Lichtman’s obituary in the August 25, 1965 Washington Post describes his relationship with Franklin D. Roosevelt.

²⁵ “Theater Chain Registers Issue,” *The Washington Post*, February 27, 1946. p. 40.

²⁶ “A.E. Lichtman Dies Here at 76, *The Washington Post*,” August 25, 1965.

²⁷ Lichtman also built the Langston Theater in Northeast Washington in 1945. See Chicago Defender. “First Night in DC”. October 13, 1945. p.14.

²⁸ Headley states that although Dowrick is generally credited as architect, a contracting magazine suggests that a J.A. Melby may have

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whom little is known, was a native of Whitehaven, England. He had immigrated to the United States in 1885 and came to Washington about ten years later. Based upon his obituary, Howrick Dowrick specialized in constructing churches and theaters during his 45-year career.²⁹

The Strand included the 650-seat theater and a storefront with a separate entrance at present-day 5131 Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue.³⁰ The Strand's opening on November 3, 1928 was not reported in either *The Washington Post* or *The Evening Star*, although the weekly *Washington Tribune*, the city's leading African-American community newspaper, did mention the opening in a brief article. The new theater's staff included manager John T.O. Carpenter, former assistant manager of the Broadway Theater on U Street, projectionist James F. Lee, and cashier Pauline Drake. The article noted that "Non-synchronous accompaniment" was provided by Evelyn Grant, indicating that the Strand showed silent films to piano music.³¹ The storefront was originally occupied by the George Gray Grocery; however, by 1933 it housed the Strand pharmacy, a business that continued for many years.

In 1927, almost exactly one year before the Strand's opening, Al Jolson had appeared in "The Jazz Singer," "the first all-talking, all-singing picture." By the summer of 1929, less than one year after the Strand's opening, the U Street theaters were installing sound and Lichtman's other theaters included "two talking picture houses."³² The advent of sound must have made the Strand and its non-synchronous accompanist seem outdated within a short time after its opening. In an April 1929 interview, Lichtman referred to "my three theaters—the Lincoln, the Howard, and the Rosalia,"³³ suggesting that the Strand was not regularly showing movies.

In addition to lacking current equipment, the Strand was battered by the onset of the Depression. Within a year of its opening came the Crash of 1929, which triggered a downward economic spiral that saw weekly cinema attendance fall by one-third nationally from 1930 to 1932 and more than one third of the theaters in the country close in 1933.³⁴ The Depression affected the African-American community's economy even more severely than that of the white community.

At the same time that Lichtman built the Strand Theater, he was also expanding his U Street operations, taking over operation of the Broadway Theater and extensively remodeling the Olympic Theater before

actually been the architect. See *Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington, DC*, p. 325.

²⁹ "J.A. Dowrick, Builder Here 40 Years, Dies," *The Washington Post*, January 12, 1934. p. 4.

³⁰ In the late 1970s, Deane Avenue was renamed in honor of educator Nannie Helen Burroughs and the eastern blocks of Grant Street NE became part of the avenue. The current addresses of the theater and storefront are respectively 5129 and 5131 Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue, NE.

³¹ "Deanwood Theater Opens," *The Washington Tribune*, November 9, 1928, p. 9.

³² "Lichtman Theaters to Operate Broadway-To Have Talkies," *The Washington Tribune*, June 14, 1929, p. 9.

³³ "To The Colored Citizens of Washington" (advertisement), *The Washington Tribune*.. April 12, 1929. p. 8.

³⁴ Preddy, Jane. *Glitz, Glamour, and Sparkle. The Deco Theaters of John Ebersson*, Theater Historical Society of America, 1989, p. 25.

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reopening it as the Booker T.³⁵ In an attempt to counteract the effects of the on-set of the Depression, Lichtman undertook an aggressive promotion campaign. In January 1930, a Ms. Evelyn Peyton was awarded a sporty 1930 Plymouth roadster on the stage of the Lincoln Theater for being elected “Lichtman Theaters’ Miss Popularity.”³⁶ Later that week, Lichtman presented Louis Armstrong at the Howard in direct competition with Duke Ellington’s performances at the rival Republic Theater.³⁷

Despite his efforts, Lichtman’s downtown theaters struggled. His unproductive investment in the Strand clearly placed an intolerable strain on his cash flow, and by October 30, 1930 Lichtman had sold the theater building. According to a D.C. permit application to install a generator motor for a “photophone” sound system, the new owner was Robert S. Nash.³⁸ Ownership of the theater appears to have remained in the Nash family, as the 1932-1933 tax rolls listed the owner as Wilbur F. Nash. Wilbur Nash (1858-1951), a native of New York who had first lived in the District during the Civil War, was a veteran entrepreneur who had already had several successful careers. At one time, Nash’s firm at the Center Market was the city’s largest purveyor of smoked and cooked meats. He later became a building and demolition contractor who cleared the sites of such notable buildings as the Old City Post Office and the Washington Arsenal, as well as a developer and owner of warehouses.³⁹ Nash’s obituary does not mention the Strand, and there is no record that he and his son ever operated the theater. Rather, it is likely that the property was a real estate investment that they leased to an operator.

In early 1932 the *Washington Tribune* began to carry advertisements for the Strand beneath a banner which contained the legends “Now Showing Talking Pictures” and “C.J. Clarke, Mgr.”. Clarke held this position for about a year before being replaced by Albert Scott, former manager of Lichtman’s Broadway,⁴⁰ who in turn was supplanted by Carter Locke in June 1933.⁴¹

During the 1930s, first-run big budget movies opened at downtown flagship theaters, which often packaged them with stage entertainment. After a week’s run, these movies circulated among neighborhood theaters which were frequently owned by the studio which had made the movie. Unable to compete with well-financed chain theaters, many small, independent theaters became “action houses” which concentrated on adventure, crime, and western “B pictures”. The Strand’s weekly bills in 1932-1933 feature many such films, interspersed with occasional “A” pictures like Greta Garbo’s “Susan Lennox” which had been in release for months. The Strand’s *Washington Tribune* advertisement on

³⁵ Chicago Defender. “Booker T. in Washington Opens September 1”. August 3, 1929. p. 6. *Washington Tribune*. “Lichtman May Buy Olympic Theater”. July 19, 1929. p. 7, “Booker T. Grand Opening”. August 30, 1929, p. 9.

³⁶ *Washington Tribune*. “A Christmas Gift That’s Worthwhile”. January 3, 1930. p. 6.

³⁷ *Washington Tribune*. January 6, 1930. p.8.

³⁸ District of Columbia Building Permit 137438.

³⁹ *Washington Post*. “Wilbur Nash, DC Builder, Dies at 92”. February 18, 1951. p. M14.

⁴⁰ “Lichtman Chain Adds Two New Managers,” *Washington Tribune*, February 19, 1932. p.15.

⁴¹ *Washington Tribune*, June 30, 1933. p.14.

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March 25, 1932 showed a typical week's fare. Friday night presented Ruth Chatterton in "Once a Lady", a "weeper" about an upper-class woman essentially reduced to prostitution, which had been in release for six months.⁴² Saturday, the traditional cowboy matinee day, brought Leo Carrillo in "Lasca of the Rio Grande". Easter Sunday's feature was "Charlie Chan's Chance" starring Warner Oland, followed by an Easter Monday holiday special double feature matinee of Bill Cody westerns. Tuesday was another double feature, with an adventure film called "Vbangi" and "Local Bad Man", a Hoot Gibson western. Wednesday bought "Honeymoon Lane", the obscure film version of a Broadway comedy with Eddie Dowling and Ray Dooley. The Thursday presentation was "The Mad Parade", which starred Evelyn Brent as the tough sergeant of an all-female platoon in World War I.⁴³ While 1930s Hollywood turned out a few movies which featured African-American performers, these seem to have played the U Street theaters rather than the Strand.

This week's billings played while the Strand was adding a neighborhood landmark. On March 16, 1932, a permit was granted to the Mid-City Theater Corporation to erect the twenty by five foot rooftop sign which announced "STRAND" to eastbound traffic on Burroughs Avenue.⁴⁴ This steel and metal sign, illuminated by electric lights, was fabricated by D.L. Borgers of 230 Rhode Island Avenue NE, with electrical components by the National Neon Sign Company of Fourth and Channing Streets NE. It was completely installed by the night "Honeymoon Lane" played the theater.

Providing entertainment at prices its working class audience could afford, the Strand successfully presented its programs of "B pictures" and serials for decades. By the beginning of the 1940s, Deanwood no longer had trolley service and Suburban Gardens had been replaced by an apartment complex⁴⁵. By 1948, the Strand had changed ownership from Nash to Frank J. Storty, a longtime motion picture projectionist turned entrepreneur. Storty and his son Francis J. Storty were associates in both the Mid-City and Alamo Theater Corporations, whose offices were at 1223 Seventh Street N.W. James Jefferson of 3780 Hayes Street, N.E managed the Strand in 1948. By 1954, he had been replaced by John H. Henderson of 5092 Jay Street N.E.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the Strand, which was still the only theater within walking distance, served as a center of the Deanwood community's secular social life. It was not just a place to watch movies, but a place to gather and socialize with neighbors. Its presence was felt to reinforce the sense of self-sufficiency which was a hallmark of the Deanwood community, located in the far northeast corner of a

⁴² Indeed, many of the "A pictures" the Strand could afford to show had been first run box office disappointments despite popular starts. "Susan Lennox" was one of Garbo's few flops and Time Magazine noted of "Once A Lady", "this one, though Ruth Chatterton acts well and ably affects a Russian accent, seems as long as two ordinary cinemas and twice as ordinary." ("The New Pictures", November 16, 1931). The only movie to be held over more than one day was James Whale's classic version of "Frankenstein".

⁴³ Washington Tribune, Advertisement, March 25, 1932, p. 7.

⁴⁴ District of Columbia Building Permit # 151806.

⁴⁵ "Suburban Gardens Plan \$302,000 Project," *The Washington Post*, August 18, 1940. p. R1.

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city that was highly-segregated into the 1950s. Neighborhood residents recall Saturday matinees whose staple program was a cowboy movie and installment of a western-themed serial like “Zorro” as a community-wide childhood ritual. Children whose parents could not afford the price of admission or who could not attend for religious reasons eagerly sought to be briefed on the latest installment after Sunday School on the following day. The theater would be crowded on Saturday, with latecomers relegated to sitting in the small balcony with the projectionist. The ticket booth was located inside the Grant Street entrance of the theater, with admission priced at a quarter in the early 1950s. “Concessions” consisted of a table set up in the lobby at which a female attendant scooped pre-popped corn from a large sack into individual brown paper bags for 10 cents. Flavored sugar candies in the shape of orange slices were another favorite. The staff is remembered as being identical from year-to-year.

Dating teenagers tended to eschew the rather plain décor of the Strand in favor of Lichtman’s Langston Theater across the Anacostia River, which had opulent red décor and a full concession counter with air-tossed popcorn.⁴⁶ Because the Strand served a local clientele, it generally did not advertise in the citywide press. However, in 1955 the Strand’s programs appeared in a *Washington Post* advertisement for the Best Theater chain. The Best chain also included the Sylvan, Academy, Senator, Atlas, and York Theaters, all of which were older theaters in inner-city neighborhoods.⁴⁷

The Stortys and Henderson were associated with the Strand into the 1960s. By 1965, however, the theater had fallen vacant and Bullock’s Barber Shop occupied the storefront. By the early 1970s, the building was owned by Sam Gilder and housed first a DC Government Legal Services Office, and then a DC Manpower Administration Office. Later, a convenience store occupied the building. Since the 1980s, the Strand has stood vacant and in deteriorating condition.

⁴⁶ Interviews with long-time Deanwood resident Elaine Bowman, August, 2007.

⁴⁷ “Neighborhood Theaters,” *The Washington Post*, February 22, 1955. p.15.

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The Washington Post. Published daily at Washington, DC. 1877-present.

The Washington Tribune. Published weekly at Washington, DC.

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 5,936 square feet

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	1 8 Zone	3 3 2 9 7 8 Easting	4 3 0 7 2 1 3 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 Rebecca Miller, Peter Sefton and Sally Berk, Architectural Historian. Kim Williams, editor

Organization D.C. Preservation League date June 2008

street & number 401 F Street, NW, Room 324 telephone 202.783.5144

city or town Washington state DC zip code 20001

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 District of Columbia; Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development

street & number 1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW telephone _____

city or town Washington state DC zip code 20004

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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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Verbal Boundary Description:

The Strand occupies lot 801 in Square 5196. Lot 801 is a concatenation of original lots 20 and 21.

Boundary Justification:

The building has occupied this site since its construction in 1927.

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HISTORIC PHOTOS



1948 photograph of the Strand Theater with the Strand Pharmacy in the corner store
(Wymer Collection, Historical Society of Washington, D.C.)

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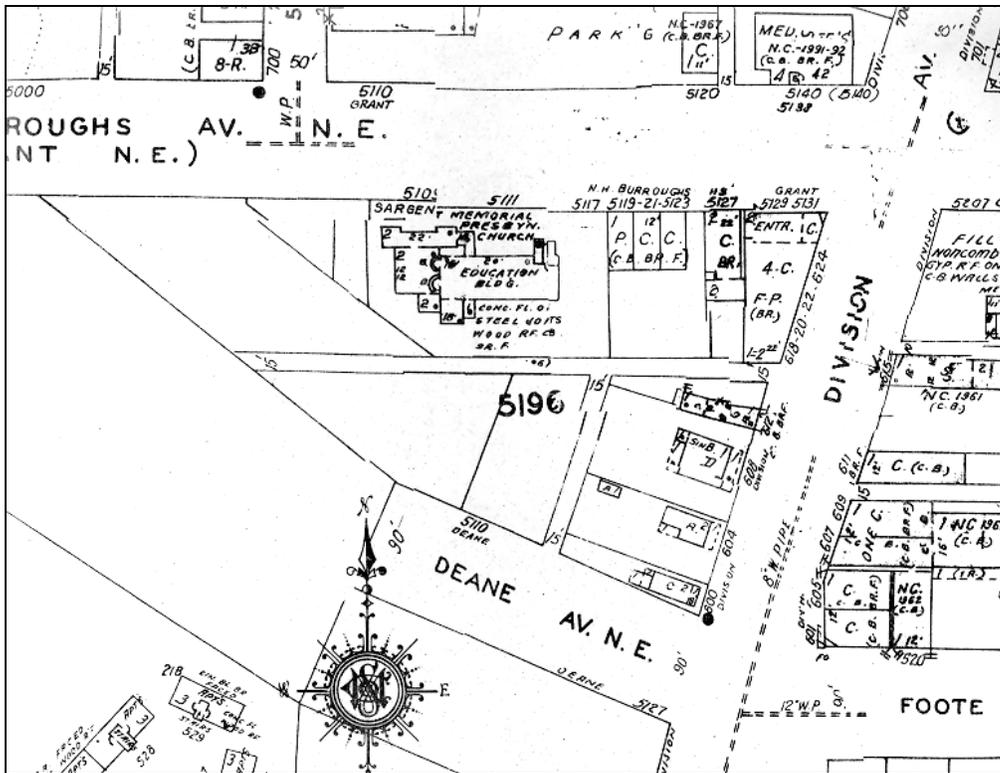
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SITE MAP



Strand Theater
5129-5131 Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue, NE
(corner of Burroughs and Division)
Washington, D.C.
(Sanborn Map, 1991)

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PHOTOGRAPHS

The following information is common to all photographs:

Strand Theater
5129-31 Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue, NE
Washington, D.C.
Kim Williams, photographer
August 2008
DC Historic Preservation Office (DC HPO)

- 1) View looking east along Burroughs Avenue with the Strand at the corner
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- 2) View looking south showing north (front) elevation
2 of 8
- 3) View looking west showing east side elevation and corner store entry
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- 4) East elevation; view looking southeast
4 of 8
- 5) West side and north rear elevations; view looking northeast
5 of 8
- 6) Interior view of first floor showing original box office entry vestibule with opening into theater area
6 of 8
- 7) Interior view of stair leading to 2nd floor from entry vestibule
7 of 8
- 8) Interior showing 2nd floor with projectionist opening in wall to right
8 of 8
