

SUMMARY OF NOMINATION INFORMATION IN ONJH FILES

NAME Stanley Theatre  
 COUNTY Essex  
 MUNICIPALITY Newark City

TYPE:  
 Individual X  
 Historic District \_\_\_\_\_  
 Multiple Property \_\_\_\_\_  
 Documentation Form \_\_\_\_\_

NOMINATION FORM

ONJH FILES

- Nomination form (If there are continuation sheets, please indicate number) ✓
- First page (#1-6) ✓ CS: \_\_\_\_\_
- Description (#7) ✓ CS: 2
- Significance (#8) ✓ CS: 1
- Last page (#9-11) ✓ CS: 1
- SHPO Signatures ✓
- USGS Map ✓
- Site plan \_\_\_\_\_
- Tax map ✓
- Floorplan \_\_\_\_\_
- Photo index map \_\_\_\_\_
- Other maps \_\_\_\_\_
- Photographs (Indicate number) ✓
- Exterior 4 (pages 3)
- Interior 12 (pages 17)
- Streetscapes \_\_\_\_\_
- Outbuildings \_\_\_\_\_
- Historical \_\_\_\_\_
- Negatives \_\_\_\_\_
- Contact Sheet ✓

DATE OF LISTING

State Register 7/17/86  
 National Register 8/28/86

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

N.J.H.S.I. # \_\_\_\_\_ Draft Nomination \_\_\_\_\_  
 Newspaper/Magazine Articles ✓ Correspondence \_\_\_\_\_  
 HABS \_\_\_\_\_ Contextual Data \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

STAFF MEMBER Prof. G. ... DATE 7/1/86  
 UPDATES: STAFF \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
 STAFF \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NATIONAL REGISTER SUBMISSION SUMMARY SHEET/CROSS INDEX TO OTHER FILES

NAME Stanley Theater ("Casa Italiana")  
MUNICIPALITY Newark COUNTY Essex

DATE SENT TO WASHINGTON 07/22/86

\*\*\*photo copy noted as PC

	Sent to Washington	NJ File
NOMINATION FORM:		
- Signed nomination form	✓	PC
- U.S.G.S. Map	✓	PC
- Site plan		
- Tax map	✓	PC
- Floorplan		
- Photo index map		
- Other maps (indicate type)		
PUBLIC NOTIFICATION:		
- Intent to nominate letters		4/22/86
- General Public Notice		
- Owner list		
- Certification of owners		
PUBLIC COMMENTS:		
- Notarized owner objection letters (Indicate #)		0
- Other comments (Indicate #)		1
PHOTOGRAPHS: (Indicate #. Indicate if OCES photos differ from photos sent to Washington)		
- Exterior	4	4
- Interior	12	12
- Streetscapes		
- Outbuildings		
- Historical		
- Negatives		
- Contact Sheet		

Staff Member Lue Prengle Date 7/15/86



STATE OF NEW JERSEY  
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION  
*HELEN C. FENSKE, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER*  
CN 402  
TRENTON, N.J. 08625  
609-292-3541

ONJH-G86-55

July 22, 1986

Ms. Carol Shull  
Chief of Registration  
National Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service  
Department of Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Ms. Shull:

I am pleased to nominate the Stanley Theater, Newark, Essex County, New Jersey to the National Register.

This application has received majority approval from the New Jersey State Review Board. All procedures were followed in accord with regulations published in the Federal Register.

Should you want any further information concerning this application, please feel free to contact Mr. Terry Karschner, Principal Historic Preservation Specialist, Office of New Jersey Heritage, CN 404, Trenton, New Jersey 08625 or call (609) 292-2028.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Helen C. Fenske".

Helen C. Fenske  
Deputy State Historic  
Preservation Officer

HCF:SP:lr

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Stanley Theater

and or common "Casa Italiana"

Father Vincent Monella Center of Italian Culture at Seton Hall University

2. Location

street & number 985 South Orange Avenue

~~NA~~ not for publication

city, town Newark

vicinity of

state New Jersey

code 034

county Essex

code 013

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	NA	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Theater

4. Owner of Property

name Father Vincent Monella Center of Italian Culture

street & number 985 South Orange Avenue

city, town Newark

vicinity of

state New Jersey

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Essex County Hall of Records

street & number Martin Luther King Boulevard ( High Street )

city, town Newark

state New Jersey

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town

state

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved date

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Father Vincent Monella Center of Italian Culture at Seton Hall University, "Casa Italiana", located at 985 South Orange Avenue in the Vailsburg section of Newark, is an "atmospheric" style theater building, originally constructed for the Newark-based Stanley-Fabian chain of movie theatres. Designed by local architect Frank Grad in 1927, the neighborhood movie house was advertised as "The Wonder Theater" with a mammoth organ, 2,000 luxurious seats, and marvelous lighting effects (Sunday Call, May 22, 1927). The south-facing two story, three bay stucco-covered, Spanish influenced facade is sandwiched between two 1920s-era commercial buildings, with the brick auditorium rising to the rear in the middle of the block.

The tri-partite symmetrical facade is composed of a central bay containing the entrance vestibule, marquee and broken bonnet parapet, flanked by the fenestrated side bays surmounted by wide overhanging eaves covered with red ("S"-type) Spanish tile. On either side of the terra cotta framed entrance vestibule are carved oak doors set in white terra cotta surrounds of spiral columns and stylized capitals. Above each is a wrought iron sconce with colored glass lights. The green and yellow metal marquee above the vestibule, which contains the names of the Center, is hung from two garlanded oculi flanking the central pedimented surround of the middle bay. This elaborate white glazed terra cotta surround consists of a Composite trabeated arch with a round arched multi-paned window within and a segmentally arched pediment with a cherub's head above the entablature. The entire bay is surmounted by a stepped parapet culminating in a broken bonnet. The coping, decorative brackets, and bonnet ornamentation are composed of white glazed terra cotta.

The flanking bays, which originally contained storefronts on the ground floor, have since been closed up, re-fenestrated and stuccoed. The new windows have been sympathetically covered with wrought iron grilles to match the other ironwork on the facade, and do not detract from the overall composition of the facade. The four second floor windows of each bay are set in an arcuated gallery of spiral terra cotta colonettes supporting round arches and unified by a continuous plinth and a wrought iron visual balcony. The wide overhanging eaves are supported by plain wood brackets and trimmed with a narrow copper cornice. The brick side walls rise three steps to form a fire wall. The remainder of the building is three stories in height, laid in common bond, and completely unornamented.

The exterior entrance vestibule, which is locked by a massive wrought iron gate when the theater is not in use, contains blind terra cotta surrounds for movie posters and a set back row of glass replacement doors leading into the ticket lobby. The rectangular ticket lobby has a slightly ramped floor covered with quarry tiles. The plaster walls are ornamented with round arched blind surrounds separated by polychromed plaster pilaster reliefs depicting urns, garlands, and figurines. A bronze candelabra sconce is attached to each pilaster below its capital. An ornamental plaster entablature surmounts the Composite capitals. The surrounds contain elaborately framed mirrors and a portrait of

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Continuation sheet Stanley Theater, Newark, Item number 7 Page 1  
Essex County, New Jersey

Father Vincent Monella, founder of the Center of Italian Culture. Three sets of double wooden doors with glass panes lead into the main lobby of the theater.

The main lobby is two stories in height and features a mezzanine around its circumference. This is the first room a patron would see which features the three-dimensional architectural features of the Spanish style atmospheric house. The interior walls are stuccoed and ornamented with wide overhanging Spanish tile covered roofs, window openings covered with wrought iron grilles and arcuated galleries with statuary. This room is quite subdued in comparison with the main theater, but it immediately captures one's attention. A staircase on either side leads to the mezzanine from which one can look down onto entering patrons. The plaster and terra cotta railing contains plaster plaques and masks. Behind the mezzanine overlooking South Orange Avenue are offices and restrooms. Another set of triple doors leads from this lobby into the orchestra foyer, a narrow passage which opens into the auditorium.

The auditorium was originally designed to be a stadium type of theater with the rear group of seats rising to a mezzanine level but not quite forming a balcony. This area has since been altered to house a dance floor. However, the stairs and sloped side aisles leading to the main block of auditorium seats are still intact as are the walls and railings of this upper level. The entire auditorium is designed to resemble a Spanish village square open to the sky at night. The walls are covered with three-dimensional, two and three story buildings with balconies and many different types of windows framed with colorful awnings, trellises, and grilles. The buildings are realistically depicted with Spanish tile overhanging roofs, arcuated and trabeated loggias, classical orders and towers. The three story high, deep-blue painted coved ceiling is unobstructed and originally functioned as the screen for the sky effect of passing clouds and twinkling stars. A review of the theater the day after its opening states that:

The Stanley is the essence of Spain. It is a gem of architectural beauty, bringing in its exquisite conception the brilliant and haunting magic of Seville and Barcelona. All the glamour, all the color, all the gaiety of the romance-loving people of the southland of Europe is reflected in its architecture and this reflection has been admirably caught by those skilled in the crafts that built the theater. Beauty of comfort and decoration are its main features. One views a program at the Stanley as if in Spain itself. There is an expansive cyclorama above the spectators upon which float fleecy clouds. The cloud-decked

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Continuation sheet Stanley Theater, Newark, Essex County, New Jersey Item number 7 Page 2

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heavens are fretted with twinkling stars and the performance takes place as if in a Spanish garden directly beneath Spanish stars (Star-Eagle, May 26, 1927; 23).

The focal point of the auditorium is the proscenium arch, which serves as the frame for the stage and movie settings. Flanked by three story towers, the proscenium is composed of a segmentally arched balustrade resembling a bridge. The trabeated loggia to the east of the arch holds the original pipes for the organ, which is located in the console pit in front of the stage. Before the debut of "talkies", the organist would play the three tiered giant Wurlitzer for background music, frantically, keeping up with the action on the movie screen. Between movies, the organist played popular songs or accompanied interval acts which kept the public amused. Together with the Wurlitzer organ, the ornate wood, iron, and velvet seats are also original to the theater.

The theater is in relatively good condition and has retained a high level of integrity, although some of the plaster work is deteriorating and in some cases, the painted canvas covering the plaster is curling at the corners. The removal of the theater seats in the upper portion of the theater has not damaged the "facades" of the buildings or compromised the appearance of the auditorium.

The site of the building is located on the north side of South Orange Avenue, on the westerly corner of Halsted Street, Block 4204, Lot 36. The property dimensions are 81.75' x 253.67' x 100.0' x 191.67'. The total area occupied by the building is approximately 20,746 square feet.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
prehistoric	archeology-prehistoric	community planning	landscape architecture	religion
1400-1499	archeology-historic	conservation	law	science
1500-1599	agriculture	economics	literature	sculpture
1600-1699	X architecture	education	military	social
1700-1799	art	engineering	music	humanitarian
1800-1899	commerce	exploration settlement	philosophy	X theater
X 1900-	communications	industry	politics government	transportation
		invention		other (specify)

Specific dates 1927

Builder Architect Frank Grad/Warren MacEvoy

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Casa Italiana is significant architecturally as an excellent example of an "atmospheric" style movie theater, an unusual type of theater built only between 1923 and 1929 (Sharp, 1969: 74-77). As such, the building is also representative of the changing trends in theater design which characterized the golden age of movie palaces.

The Stanley Theater opened on May 26, 1927, as the latest suburban addition to the progressive chain of Stanley-Fabian Theaters, a local branch of the Stanley Company of America. The idea of a Spanish influenced theater was conceived by Louis R. Golding, an executive of Stanley-Fabian. Golding hired local architect Frank Grad, builder Warren MacEvoy, and supervised the construction himself. The choice of the Spanish influence for theater design was a reflection of the tastes of the times, when luxury and elegance in movie palace architecture were necessities. The Spanish influence had been disseminated as a result of the 1915 Panama-California Exposition in San Diego. Inspired by the wide publicity given the exposition, architects around the country began to look directly at Spain for source material and used many of its elements through the 1920s and 1930s (McAlester 1984: 418).

The use of the atmospheric theater was considered innovative, as it had been invented only four years earlier, in 1923, by John Ebersson, a movie palace architect trained in Vienna and Dresden. Prior to his invention, movie theaters were more conventionally designed with elaborately moulded, painted or frescoed ceilings; these were referred to as "standard" or "hard-top" theaters. The "atmospheric" interior, first used on the Majestic Theater in Houston, Texas, used a "stars and clouds" interior which relied on the use of "manufactured weather", ingenious lighting effects and stage set decoration. The "atmospheric" was firmly rooted in the conviction that visual gimcrackery is the primary domain of the paying public and the more splendour and glitter that can be brought together to inspire an audience the better they will respond" (Sharp 1969: 74). When the lighting effects were not in use, the deep blue-painted coved ceiling was barely visible to the eye creating the effect of an upward abyss or void.

The Stanley Theater contained all the ingredients of an "atmospheric" theater: a magnificent amphitheater canopied by a glorious moonlit and star-studded sky in a Spanish patio. To produce the elaborate settings and atmosphere, lighting and weather equipment such as the cloud machines, was located on platforms behind the elaborate three-dimensional facades, concealed from public observation. Satisfactory lighting for the great span of sky was created by a combination of reflectors, lighting units, and small openings in the ceiling for producing star effects (Sexton, 1927: 35).



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The building of atmospheric theaters, along with other "de luxe" motion picture theaters, dwindled to a minimum after the Stock Market Crash of 1929, limiting the number of these very elaborate theaters. The march of time, the physical division of old theaters into multi-screen movie houses with its accompanying destructive changes, and the need for ever more stimulation by an increasingly bored public has even further reduced the number of existing undivided theaters. Current research shows that none of the remaining Newark theaters were built in the "atmospheric" style. Except for the Little Theater (562 Broad Street, built 1930), the other theaters were built exclusively for vaudeville and other live performances and were later adapted for the showing of motion pictures. These "hard-tops" include the Branford Theater (11-23 Branford Place, built 1913), the Adams Theater (26-30 Branford Place, built 1919), the RKO Proctor's Theater (112 Market Street, built c. 1925) and the Newark Paramount Theater (193-195 Market Street), formerly Henry Clay Miner's Theater, Newark's oldest legitimate theater building, built in 1886 (Renaissance Newark 1985: Volume II, 007, 009, 017, 157, 172). Although a study of Newark's remaining suburban theaters has yet to be done, it appears that the Stanley Theater, Casa Italiana, may be one of the only remaining examples of the "atmospheric" type of theater in Newark.

The building is currently owned by and used as the headquarters for the Father Vincent Monella Center of Italian Culture, a non-profit educational, cultural and social organization founded to promote Italian culture through education. The Center was organized in 1960 by Father Vincent Monella (deceased) and is affiliated with Seton Hall University. The Stanley Theater was purchased by the organization in 1968 and was subsequently renovated to include the "ballroom" in the rear elevated portion of the auditorium (Essex County Deed Book 4305: 753). The Center of Italian Culture uses the auditorium to show movies, stage shows, and operas.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

See attached.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 1/2 acre

Quadrangle name Orange

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 

1	8	5	6	5	0	6	0	4	5	1	0	7	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

The site is located on the north side of So. Orange Ave., on the westerly corner of Halsted St., Block 4204, Lot 36. Dimesions: 81.75' x 253.67' x 100.0' x 191.67'

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

NA

state code county code

state code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ulana D. Zakalak, Consultant

organization Newark Preservation & Landmarks Committee date April 18, 1986

street & number 868 Broad Street, 2nd Floor

telephone (201) 622-4910

city or town Newark

state New Jersey

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Deputy  
State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*William C. ...*

title Assistant Commissioner for Natural Resources

date 07/17/86

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
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Continuation sheet Stanley Theater, Newark, Essex County, New Jersey Item number 9 Page 1

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

McAlester, Lee and Virginia. A Field Guide to American Houses. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.

Sexton, R.W. and B.F. Betts. American Theaters of Today. New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1969.

Sharp, Dennis, The Picture Palace. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1969.

Deed Books

Essex County Deed Books, V-78, 4115, 4305.

Directories

Newark City Directory, 1927.

Newspapers

Ring, Robert C. "The Stanley in Valisburg". Sunday Call, May 29, 1927. Part IV, 7.

"The Stanley, New Fabian Theater to Open Tonight". Star-Eagle, May 26, 1927, 23.

Also various ads in:

Newark News, May 27, 1927.

Star-Eagle, May 26, 1927.

Sunday Call, February 26, 1928.