

FORM B – BUILDING

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

49/38	Boston North		
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MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
 MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
 220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
 BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Town: Lexington

Place: (*neighborhood or village*)
Central Business District

Address: 1792-1804 Massachusetts Avenue

Historic Name: Viano (Theater) Block

Uses: Present: commercial/theater
Original: commercial/theater

Date of Construction: 1916

Source: *Minute-man*, October 21, 1916

Style/Form: Classical Revival

Architect/Builder: Walter Trowbridge Littlefield

Exterior Material:

Foundation:

Wall/Trim: brick

Roof: tar and gravel

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

date? – storefront alterations, new windows

Condition: good

Moved: no | x | yes | | **Date** _____

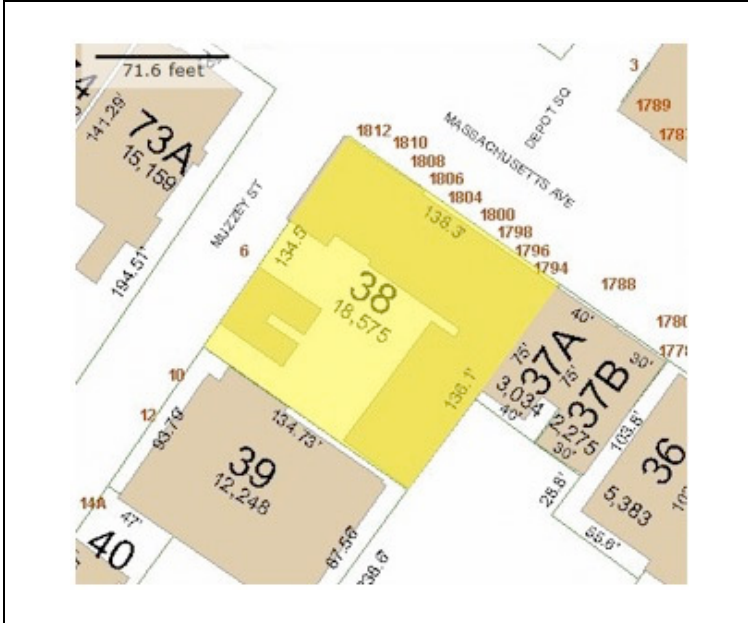
Acreage: 0.43 acre

Setting: mixed downtown area

Photograph



Topographic or Assessor's Map



Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization: Lexington Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): January 2010

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

LEXINGTON

1792 Mass. Ave.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

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___ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

The Viano or Theater Block is a two-story commercial block with a yellow brick veneer facing Massachusetts Avenue. Originally there were spaces for four stores on the first floor – today there are three storefronts of varying sizes, set between the original recessed panel (painted) brick piers set on granite bases. The c.1960 storefronts have plate glass display windows resting on low, red brick walls. The entries are recessed behind the angled windows. Centered on the façade, the entrance to the upper story has a Colonial enframement with transom lights over the door. Above the movie marquee is an entablature lintel with dentil course.

The yellow brickwork on the second floor includes bands of header brick including above the signboard entablature with soldier brick courses below the second story windows and between the tops of the windows and the cornice. The twelve second story windows are unevenly spaced and contain double-hung 1/1 replacement sash with stone sills.

Behind the block is the nearly windowless brick block containing the theater with the stage originally located at the south end.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

The Viano or Theater Block was constructed in 1916 on the former site of the Captain Phelps' house which was moved back (no longer extant). The building was designed by Walter Trowbridge Littlefield, who also designed the Teele Square Theater in Somerville (SMV.683) in 1922 and was architect for the Masonic Temple (1 Hancock Street) renovations in Lexington in 1917. A brief mention appearing in the *Minute-man* on October 21, 1916 noted:

Work on the new Viano block is progressing rapidly, and on Tuesday the staging over the sidewalk was removed. There will be four stores on the ground floor, besides a large entrance to the moving picture theatre in the rear. The theatre will be a fine one, with a seating capacity of about six hundred.

In 1918 the other first floor tenants included a grocery store, the gas office, a dry goods store and a meats & grocery store. In the 1930s bowling alleys were located in the basement.

In 1929 the theater was closed for about a month in order to remodel it for "talkies". At the time William Viano was the theater manager. On June 28, 1929, the *Minute-man* reported:

This will be the first theatre of its size in New England to introduce the "talkies". The Western Electric reproducing system will be installed. This system, which combines the vitaphone and movietone, is used in the Boston theatres. It requires doubling the size of the booth in addition to new wiring and equipment. The theatre will also be redecorated throughout with new draperies on the stage. There will be an entirely new set of seats, with leather cushions and backs.

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HISTORICAL NARRATIVE (continued)

It would appear that this theater was part of the Viano family of theaters. The Viano family built and owned a number of other area theaters including the Teele Square Theater and the Broadway Theater in Somerville as well as the Regent Theater in Arlington. State building inspector records indicate that the building underwent some unspecified alterations in 1941 according to designs by John Edmund Kelley and was also altered in 1970.

For some time the Lexington Theater functioned as a triplex with separate screens upstairs and down in addition to the rear theater. The theater was operated by the Sack Theaters/USA Cinemas/Loews chain for some time and more recently was known as the Lexington Flick. Since January 2009 it has been called the Lexington Venue. Today, the theater has two screens.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Department of Public Safety records, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston.

Lexington Minute-man, October 21, 1916; June 28, 1929.

Massachusetts Historical Commission, MACRIS database.

Sanborn insurance maps

Town Directories

<http://cinematreasures.org/theater/9295/>

