

Music Hall (Carnegie Hall)  
154 West Fifty-seventh Street  
New York  
New York County  
New York

HABS No. NY-5717

HABS  
NY,  
31-NEYO,  
108-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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ADDENDUM TO  
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(Carnegie Hall)  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office  
200 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

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ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

STATE New York		COUNTY New York	TOWN OR VICINITY New York
HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME) Music Hall			HABS NO. NY-5717
SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE Carnegie Hall (after Andrew Carnegie who provided funds)			
COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES) 154 West Fifty-seventh Street			
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE) 1889-1891		ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE) William Burnet Tuthill (Contract drawings)	
SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE) Carnegie Hall's name is synonymous world-wide with musical excellence. It is noted for its acoustics as well as its rich musical history. The hall, together with the artists' studios which surround it, create a unique treasure.			
STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE) Romanesque revival			
MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS) Steel and cast iron structure with masonry bearing walls. Tile arches. Cinder and concrete floor.			
SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE) Rectangular 200' x 150' 16 stories plus basement and cellar			
EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE Light yellow iron spot Roman face brick with terra cotta detailing			
INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED) See Attachment A			
MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES See Attachment B			
PRESENT CONDITION AND USE Fair condition; concert hall with artists' studios above			
OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE Renovation of the Recital Hall entrance and stair is to be funded by EDA. Mitigative documentation of the affected elements was carried out under the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.			
SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDING LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.) See Attachment C			
COMPILER, AFFILIATION Tyler H. Donaldson - James Stewart Polshek & Partners, Architects			DATE November 5, 1981

Attachment A

Interior features of note:

The following text was extracted from the premier program of Carnegie Hall. The text provides a picturesque description of the "Music Hall", as it was originally called, when it first opened in 1891.

MUSIC HALL

The name under which this great structure is known is the including title of a varied and large series of halls and apartments prepared for every form of public assemblage.

Its exterior design is stately, rich and dignified, in an architectural style easily and simply expressing the public purposes for which the structure is intended. The terra-cotta of the enrichments and architectural forms blend with the clear luminous color of the bricks - a sequence of graded browns - forming a whole of peculiar beauty. The entrances to the several portions are clearly indicated. The principal doorways - or those leading into the Main Hall - are approached by a series of steps eighty feet broad, and are enriched by splended groups of polished pilasters of Peterhead granite.

The chief feature, by the nature of the case, is the "Main Hall," a great and rich concert hall, with accommodation to seat about three thousand people, and ample standing room for one thousand more. Its entrance is on Fifty-Seventh Street, through the vestibule - a splendid apartment, seventy feet long, covered with a semi-circular vault twenty-five feet high, and richly elaborated in marble, mosaic and color. The Hall was designed purely as a concert hall, and is not equipped in any way with theatrical devices; it has neither drop curtain nor footlights.

The Parquet itself, seating over one thousand persons, has nine exits upon the corridors surrounding it, the corridors continuing entirely around the building, and giving egress both on Seventh Avenue and Fifty-Sixth Street, as well as into the main vestibule.

Above the Parquet are two tiers of boxes, the "Dress Circle" and the "Balcony." The arrangement of these several tiers is different from the usual method in that they do not extend entirely around the three sides of the house, stopping at the line of the proscenium, but are terminated on the side walls at points further and further back from the front of the auditorium, gradually expanding the hall, displaying its peculiar shape, and naturally leading to the magnificent ceiling which spans the great apartment.

The decoration of the Main Hall is rich in plastic form and refined in color, the general scheme being a soft ivory with gold, relieved by rich tones of old rose. The Boxes are finished in darker shades of old rose, in which color is also the covering of the chairs in the Parquet, and the carpets.

The treatment of the illumination by electric lights gives a most beautiful, decorative effect, the lights being essential features of the enrichments. The disposition has also been carefully studied so as to avoid, as far as possible, placing the lights immediately in front of the audience, where they must be continually in sight.

The form of the hall, both in plan and section, has been designed with the acoustic perfection of its every portion as a controlling idea. The surfaces surrounding the stage and that portion of the building immediately in front of it, have been so modeled that not only is no sound lost to the audience, but it is so directed that every portion of the house has relatively perfect acoustic value.

The stage is an integral part of the hall and its decoration and illumination governed by the same system as the greater auditorium. The floor of the stage is constructed in a modified form, as a resonator. At one side of the stage is the organ.

Each portion of "Main Hall" is equipped with its individual hat and cloak and toilet rooms, and is separately reached by broad and easy staircases. Back of the corridor of the second box-tier, is a large foyer. The arrangement of the general staircases is such that all portions of the building can be put into immediate communication.

When so required, the Parquet can be floored over, transforming the auditorium into an immense and magnificent ball-room, the entrances and exits from which are the same as those for the Parquet when used for concerts or other purposes, as none of them are interfered with by the temporary flooring. From the northerly ends of the east and west corridors, broad staircases give access to the hall below, transformed into a banquet hall, connected with which is a complete suite of kitchen and serving rooms. The adjacent building, in immediate communication with the Parquet corridors, furnishes, in addition to the local accommodation, all the essential meeting, hat, cloak and toilet rooms demanded for a great ball, convention, or similar gatherings.

To the ventilation of this hall the most minute and painstaking care has been given. Each division of the house has its separate supply of fresh air, and its separate exit for the vitiated air. The volume of fresh air delivered into the building is sufficient to entirely renew the contents three times per hour.

Personal ease and comfort, perfect illumination, acoustics, vision and ventilation, rich and elegant decorations, rank this hall without a superior for the purposes for which it was designed and to which it may duly be applied.

The second great room in the building, "Recital Hall," is located below "Main Hall" having its separate entrance on Fifty-Seventh Street, and being equipped in every particular for public functions. Its accommodation is twelve hundred. This hall has also many special features which take it out of the body of the usual concert halls. It has a balcony at the rear and a gallery on either side; the galleries, however, are very low - only three feet higher than the main floor of the room. The rails separating them from the main portion can be removed at will. The same is true of the chairs, so that with a minimum of effort the room can be turned into a ball-room, a grand dining-hall, or prepared for such other use as may be legitimate. The acoustic properties of the hall are most perfect. Its decorations are similar in style to those above described as being placed in "Main Hall," and its system of illumination and ventilation equally ample and elaborate. Connected with this hall is a large kitchen, fully furnished as the kitchen of a hotel; it is also in communication with all the floors of the Lateral Building by means of a swift-running double elevator, so that dinners or collations may be readily served in any one of its various apartments.

Above the kitchen - that is, on the first floor of the Lateral Building - is the small dining-room, capable of seating at the table one hundred and fifty persons. The room has immediate access from Fifty-Seventh Street and has attached to it serving-room, hat and cloak and toilet rooms. It can also, by means of a special stair, be connected with the parlors and "Chamber Music Hall" above.

The parlor is on the second floor of this building and is richly decorated and furnished. In connection with it are separate hat and cloak-rooms for ladies and gentlemen, and a ladies' private parlor and toilet-room. It is in immediate relation to the hall above - "Chamber Music Hall" - a beautiful room fitted either for the purpose named in its title, or for readings, small balls, dinners, etc. As a concert hall, its accommodations fit four hundred and fifty. A gallery is built at its northern end. Still above this hall is another, of almost equal size, called the "Chapter Room," because planned with the special requirements of such a room in view, but applicable for all the purposes for which the "Chamber Music Hall" could be used. Above this is still another hall, of equal size, appointment and application.

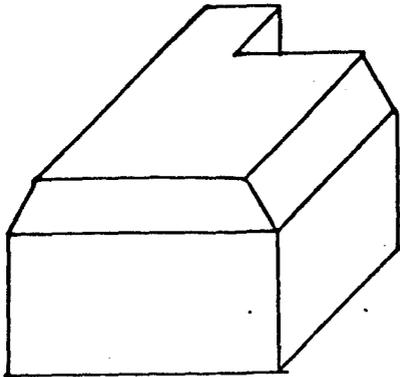
The entire roof of "Music Hall" is occupied with a series of rooms, planned to be used as lodge-rooms. They are reached by the elevators and corridors, and are fitted with every detail required for their intended purposes. The larger corridor is furnished with sofas. Opening from the corridor is a beautiful smoking-room, luxuriously fitted up, a committee-room, and a group of storage closets for the use of the lodges.

The other portions of the building are occupied by rooms of various sizes, and applicable to the purposes of studios, piano-rooms, etc.

Every portion of the building, which is literally fire-proof (being built of steel, iron and terra-cotta), is under the same general system of illumination and ventilation, and to properly accomplish it a most elaborate plant has been established. The fresh air is taken in above the roof, at the height of about one hundred and thirty feet above the curb line, and through a shaft to the fan-room, where its propelling power is four great fans, each with its engine (the inlet capacity being over eight millions of cubic feet of air per hour), and distributed through the house by a most intricate system of ducts, some of them almost as large as some of the corridors for the public. Supplementary to these are three fans and engines in the upper portion of the Lateral Building. Four great dynamos, with their engines, with a capacity of five thousand lights, a system of continuous wiring for the electric lights, and the three batteries of boilers, constitute the remaining important features of this portion of the equipment.

Attachment B

Major alterations and additions with dates:

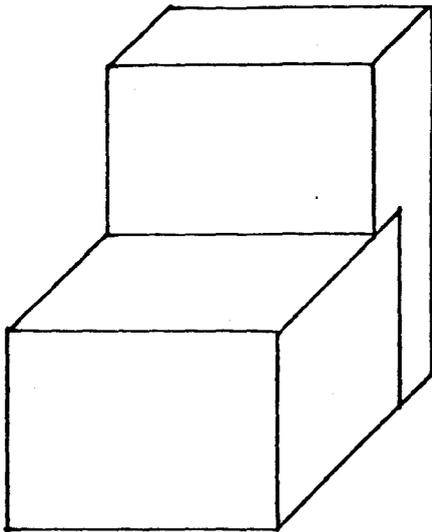


1

1887 - Carnegie Agrees to Funding

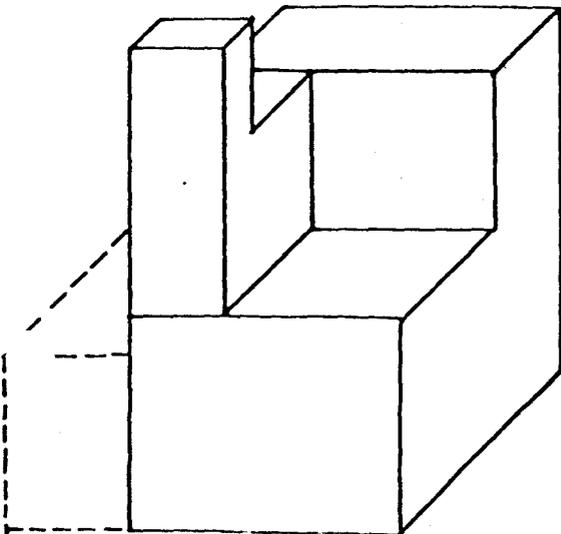
1889 - Excavation Begins

1891 - "Music Hall" Opens



2

1894 - Rear Building Added  
Mansard Removed, Roof  
Raised and Skylights  
Added.



3

1896 - Top Floors Added to  
Lateral Building

1898 - Officially Called  
"Carnegie Hall"

1903 - Adjacent Property Purchased  
"Rembrant Building"

1929 - Space Altered on Street  
For Rentable Property

Attachment C

Sources of information:

1. Carnegie Hall, New York  
Cherouny Printing and Publishing Co.  
189\_
2. The House That Music Built  
Ethel Peyser  
R.M. McBride and Co.  
1936
3. Portrait of Carnegie Hall  
Theo. Cyon and Burt Goldblatt  
Macmillan  
1966
4. Carnegie Hall, N.Y.  
Singing V. 3  
December 1928
5. Carnegie Hall, N.Y.  
Program No. 1  
Pusey & Troxel Press  
1891

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ADDENDUM TO  
MUSIC HALL  
(Carnegie Hall)  
HABS No. NY-5717  
(Page 8)

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MUSIC HALL  
(Carnegie Hall)

HABS No. NY-5717

This report is an addendum to a 7 page report previously transmitted to the Library of Congress on October 31, 1985.

Location: 154 West Fifty-Seventh Street, southeast corner of West Fifty-Seventh Street and Seventh Avenue, New York, New York County, New York.

Present Owner: Carnegie Hall Corporation  
881 Seventh Avenue, Seventh Floor  
New York, NY 10019

Present Occupant: Carnegie Hall.

Present Use: Concert hall with artists' studios above,

Significance: Carnegie Hall's name is synonymous world-wide with musical excellence. It is noted for its acoustics as well as its rich musical history. The hall, together with the artists' studios which surround it, constitutes a unique cultural resource of international significance.

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Carnegie Hall, built by Andrew Carnegie and opened by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky in 1891, by design and from its inception helped establish New York as the cultural capital of America and a gravitational force for great music worldwide. Though it has been used to highlight many types of performances, Carnegie Hall's primary mission since its founding has been to present the world's finest musicians - indeed, its original name, still found inscribed above its entrance, was simply "Music Hall." The finished building - designed by William Burnet Tuthill in a modified Italian Renaissance style - contained three performance spaces:

- the 2,804-seat Carnegie (Main) Hall (now Isaac Stern Auditorium)
- a 268-seat Chamber Music Hall (now Weill Recital Hall)
- a 1,200-seat lower-level Recital Hall

The lower-level Recital Hall was originally built as a 1,200-seat hall, mid-way in size between the other two. This space has undergone an almost constant series of changes in use and architectural character beginning only a few years after its opening in 1891 and continuing into the 1980s and 90s. While the other two original concert spaces have continued to be operated directly by Carnegie Hall as musical concert venues, the basement was by and large treated as a commercial space from the mid-1890s until the present. Throughout that period, it was altered - often and to a great degree - by various outside tenants to meet their changing needs.

The original Recital Hall was laid out in a cruciform plan with curved walls at the corners of each arm. The crossing of the plan was occupied by the main double-height seating area, with the stage located beyond the south arm and arcaded galleries located in the east and west arms. The north arm contained an upper-level balcony with additional seating below. Two vestibules were located at the north end of the galleries, flanking the north arm of the seating area.

The Recital Hall was, through economic necessity, forced to veer from its original purpose as early as 1895. Alterations to convert the space to a theater, renamed the Carnegie Lyceum, were largely complete by December of that year. Final completion came by 1896, when the space was leased to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts.

No architectural drawings of the alterations have been found. However, based on written accounts, physical evidence and historic photographs, it has been determined that the alterations were substantial.

Significant changes undertaken during this first alteration included the installation of a new raked floor structure added over the original floor, the reduction of the overall capacity from 1,200 to 820 seats, and the extension of the balcony to provide 137 seats, with a new decorative plaster balcony front installed. The removal of the original proscenium and the installation of a new proscenium several feet north resulted in the southernmost arches of the side arcades being cut in half. Original decorative plasterwork was removed at the stage and adjacent curved walls, and at east and west galleries, and new decorative plaster was installed.

As decades passed, the Lyceum slowly deteriorated through age and lack of repair. In 1925, the steel beams supporting the balcony were cut and the balcony itself made level. At some unknown point between 1896 and 1927 the seating capacity was reduced from 820 to 441, and in 1927 it was further reduced to 299. Between 1950 and 1954, Kahn and Jacobs proposed a number of alterations, including the removal of portions of the existing ceiling and portions of the balcony, and the infill of the side arches. It is not clear which of these last alterations, if any, were undertaken.

In 1952, the Lyceum was abandoned by the Academy, and became known as the Carnegie Playhouse. Considered a haven for off-Broadway dramatists, who were finding it difficult to lease a theater of such a substantial size in Manhattan, the Playhouse was nevertheless allowed to deteriorate further.

In the years following Carnegie Hall's last-minute rescue from demolition in 1960, the Playhouse was converted again, this time to a 300-seat first-run art film house, and renamed the Carnegie Hall Cinema. In 1974, the Cinema was leased by Comico Inc.; in the late 1980s Cineplex Odeon became the lessee. Substantial changes occurred during these tenancies, including construction of a projection booth in the balcony, conversion of the stage and backstage areas to a smaller cinema space, and installation of extensive new finishes in the lobby and circulation areas.

Major changes also occurred during this period in connection with Carnegie Hall's work on the main hall, circulation and mechanical systems. Mainly, these

changed ceilings, spaces and structure in the balcony, inner lobby and east gallery areas.

#### DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

As noted above, alterations have resulted in the loss of much of the original fabric. The original cruciform plan of the 1891 Recital Hall has been largely lost to these changes. The east arcade is presently occupied by offices, while the west arcade contains a café and lobby for the Cinema. Partitions have been installed within all of the arches, and the original plaster capitals have been removed from the back side of all of the columns in the east arcade. A new proscenium has been installed in front of the 1896 proscenium, with the stage and backstage area of the Lyceum now occupied by a Cinema screening room. All of the plasterwork associated with the 1896 proscenium has been removed from the southern arches. The balcony area is now occupied by a projection room; most of the decorative finishes in this space have been removed. Suspended ceilings have been installed throughout much of the historic auditorium space, with much of the original ceiling removed in the process.

Surviving historic finishes include decorative plaster on portions of the 1896 proscenium and on the east and west arcades, as well at the balcony front and on portions of the ceiling in the main space and in the west gallery. Fragmentary plaster finishes remain in other areas of the Recital Hall, such as the interior walls of the arcades, the ceiling of the east gallery, and the Library. In addition, the curved plaster fronts on the east and west galleries, installed in 1896, remain largely intact.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary-source materials consulted include drawings, photographs and documents from the Carnegie Hall Archives, the New York City Department of Buildings, the New York Public Library, and the Museum of the City of New York. The documents include:

- A.     ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS
- Kahn & Jacobs. Drawings circa 1948, 1950 and 1954 showing proposed changes (some executed) to balcony and other areas. Carnegie Hall Archives.
- Lawless, Robert E. 1981 cinema alteration drawings. Carnegie Hall Archives.
- Polshek Partnership. Photographs and drawings showing work related to 1984-6 Main Hall restoration and mechanical/circulation renovations.
- Tuthill, William Burnet. Original floor plan drawing, section rendering and perspective rendering, looking south toward stage. Carnegie Hall Archives.
- B.     HISTORIC VIEWS
- Undated photographs. ca. 1920s. In the collection of the Museum of the City of New York.
- C.     BIBLIOGRAPHY
- Alteration permits. New York City Department of Buildings, City of New York, Municipal Archives. 1927 permits relating to balcony, fire stairs and seating.
- Certificate of Occupancy. New York City Department of Buildings. 1952.
- Certificate of Occupancy. New York City Department of Buildings. 1986.
- “The New Carnegie Lyceum: A Fire-proof theatre for the Sargent School of Acting.” New York Times. December 13, 1895.
- West, Percy. Letter to John C. Travis. October 1, 1895. Carnegie Hall Archives.

## PROJECT INFORMATION

Carnegie Hall has restored the two most intact and important of its three original performance spaces. As an integral part of this overall effort, it plans to transform the Recital Hall into a completely new, multipurpose performance, teaching and event space. The changes relating to the restoration and modernization of the Isaac Stern Auditorium (above the Recital Hall) make it impossible to restore the lower level recital hall to its original form. However, what is possible is creating a venue that will reflect its original purpose: a mid-size venue, dedicated to the presentation of musical performances that are not best served by a large, grand space (such as the Isaac Stern Auditorium) or a small, intimate one (such as Weill Recital Hall).

The New Music Hall will provide approximately 600 seats of highly flexible space for a wide variety of musical performances, educational and cultural programs for both adults and children. In addition to the main auditorium, the facility will include circulation and service spaces, and a new exterior entry on Seventh Avenue. The hall will be designed to accommodate frequent reconfiguration of spaces, seating and floor levels, and to include state-of-the-art audio and communication technology. Interior finishes will be contemporary rather than historically referential. On the exterior, the project will remove inappropriate later alterations and restore portions of the facade in sympathy with the original 1891 design.

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Title: Research Associate  
Affiliation: Higgins & Quasebarth, Historic Preservation Consultants  
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