

VLR-7/21/81 NRHP-9/16/82

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only  
received  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic ATTUCKS THEATRE AND OFFICE BUILDING

and/or common ATTUCKS THEATRE (Preferred)

2. Location

street & number 1008-1012 Church Street N/A not for publication  
city, town Norfolk N/A vicinity of congressional district Second (G. William White-  
hurst  
state Virginia code 51 county (in city) code 710

3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Stark and Legum, Clothiers, Inc., c/o Mr. Charles Legum

street & number 1010 Church Street

city, town Norfolk N/A vicinity of state Virginia 23510

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Norfolk City Hall

street & number N/A

city, town Norfolk state Virginia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

(1) Huntersville II Historic Survey  
title (2) (See Continuation Sheet # 1) has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date January 1978  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority

city, town Norfolk state Virginia

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>N/A</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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

The Attucks Theatre has been a prominent landmark in Norfolk's predominantly black Huntersville district since its erection in 1919. The brick and white terra-cotta, three-story theatre and commercial structure was built after the plans of the local black architect Harvey N. Johnson.

The main (west) facade fronts on Church Street. The original entrance was altered in the 1960s by the business presently occupying the building, Stark and Legum, which acquired the property ca. 1931 and converted it into a clothing store and pawn shop. The altered first floor has plate-glass display windows flanked by corrugated aluminum-covered piers. In the spirit of the original theatre, a three-sided marquee with the firm's name is suspended above the first story. The present entrance has glass-paned doors which are not original. The three bays of the facade's second and third stories are framed by terra-cotta Doric pilasters. The bays contain three-part, 1/1 hung-sash windows divided between the second and third stories by terra-cotta panels. A brick frieze runs above the third story and has a tablet with the name "Attucks Theatre." Above the frieze a terra-cotta cornice adds further embellishment. The facade is topped by a diaper-patterned brick parapet wall that has a terra-cotta tablet with the construction date, "1919."

The secondary walls are laid in six-course-American-bond brick. Fenestration in the commercial and office section consists of segmental-headed openings with 1/1 hung-sash windows. The exterior walls of the auditorium are defined by recessed brick panels that are, for the most part, unpierced. The auditorium does have plain openings for emergency exits.

The interior was originally composed of a lobby space with two floors of office space above and a theatre space to the east with a seating capacity of about six hundred. The plan was altered by the renovation of the first-story lobby into a pawn shop and clothing store; however, the interior lobby of the auditorium and the auditorium itself received minimal alterations. The auditorium lobby retains its original recessed plaster panels painted in imitation of folded drapery. The auditorium seating was removed in order to utilize the space for clothing storage. The stage area was not significantly altered and retains its ornamental plaster frame and original curtain which has a painting of the Boston Massacre by Lee Lash Studios of New York. The stage is flanked by pairs of boxes high on the wall and set in rounded arches flanked by ornamental plaster pilasters. The boxes retain their original drapery and hanging lights. The curved-front balcony is still accessible and, like the auditorium, has lost its original seating.

Current plans call for the restoration of the building to its original function as a theatre for Norfolk's black community. The Huntersville area, with the exception of the theatre and other key landmarks, is slated for redevelopment.

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The Attucks Theatre is located at 1008-1012 Church Street near the corner of Church Street and Virginia Beach Boulevard. The nominated property consists of one-half acre (approximate) and includes only the theatre building.

RCC

# 8. Significance

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

**Specific dates** 1919 **Builder/Architect** Harvey N. Johnson

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Attucks Theatre in Norfolk is a rare example of an early motion picture theatre in Virginia, financed, designed, and built exclusively by blacks. A prominent landmark on Church Street, the fashionable "Main Street" of Norfolk's black community in the years between the First World War and the Great Depression, the theatre was erected in 1919 after the designs of architect Harvey N. Johnson, who also supervised its construction. Of particular significance is the name of the theatre, which commemorates the black man, Crispus Attucks, traditionally regarded as the first colonial to be mortally wounded in the American Revolution. As a symbol of heroic sacrifice in the struggle for human equality, Attucks gave meaning to the experience of the generation that fought in behalf of democratic ideals abroad during World War I only to return to the reality of racial segregation in America. The original fire curtain, painted with a scene of Attuck's death by Lee Lash Studios of New York, survives in the building.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Attucks Theatre was erected by a group of black businessmen who founded the Twin Cities Amusement Corporation, which operated theatres in Norfolk and Portsmouth. It was financed by two black financial institutions in Tidewater, the Brown Savings Bank and Tidewater Trust Company. Situated in the center of a fairly concentrated area of black commercial activity and adjacent to a large black residential area, the Attucks Theatre building was designed to accommodate not only the motion picture theatre, but also various retail shops and offices for realtors, doctors, insurance agents, and dentists. Along with the emergence of a growing and more prosperous black population in Tidewater cities after World War I, there was also a marked tendency to segregate races in all public places. Although segregation in places of public entertainment was not written into the law of Virginia until 1926, society in the Old Dominion was moving in that direction much earlier, and the Attucks Theatre symbolizes the black community's attempt to deal with the reality.

The architect for the Attucks Theatre was Harvey N. Johnson (1892-1973). Born in Richmond's Jackson Ward, the son of a successful carpenter, Johnson was educated at Virginia Union University in Richmond and the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh. In 1919 at the age of 26, he moved to Norfolk to design and supervise the building of the Attucks Theatre.

The extant plans of the theatre are signed by Johnson and Charles T. Russell, another black architect who designed the renovation for the St. Luke Building in Richmond, as well as supervised the additions to the buildings of Virginia Union University. After several years as an architect in Norfolk, Mr. Johnson chose to leave that profession and in 1924 entered the ministry. He eventually became pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Portsmouth,

**United States Department of the Interior  
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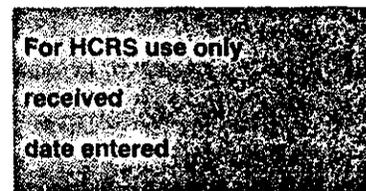
**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

ATTUCKS THEATRE, Norfolk, Virginia

Continuation sheet # 1

Item number 6, 8, 9

Page 1



6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

1981 State  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

8. SIGNIFICANCE (Continued)

where he served until his death in 1973.

By 1924, the Norfolk Directory shows that the Attucks Theatre was occupied by several lawyers, a dentist, realtors, and the National Benefit Life Insurance Company. The coming of the Great Depression seems to have halted the prosperity of the Attucks Theatre and the surrounding Church Street area. As early as 1931, there were a number of vacancies in the neighborhood, and the theatre building was ultimately purchased by Stark and Legum, the present owners. The theatre building itself, along with the surrounding businesses that flourished as a black commercial center in the 1920s, entered into a period of rapid decline.

Advocates of the redevelopment of the Church Street area today see the Attucks Theatre building as a catalytic agent for the improvement of the quality of life in the Huntersville area. The theatre and two neighboring churches are slated for renovation as part of the overall redevelopment of downtown Norfolk. It is expected that the Attucks Theatre will once again be put into service as a theatre for the newly rebuilt Huntersville II neighborhood.

MTP/RCC

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

The Attucks Theatre Project, A Community Development Proposal. Norfolk: Southeastern Tidewater Opportunity Project, Inc., 1978.

Herman, Frederick A. "Huntersville II Historic Survey," MS, 1978.

Hill Directory for Norfolk and Portsmouth. 1920-21, 1924, 1931. Norfolk: Hill Directory Co., Inc., 1921, 1924, 1931.

Norfolk Ledger-Star, December 7, 1973, page B-4, column 1. Obituary of Harvey N. Johnson.

Norfolk State College. "Church Street-Huntersville II-Wood Street Research Project." May 1978.

Richmond, Va. Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission. Attucks Theatre, Norfolk (File No. 122-74). Copies of Attucks Theatre plans drawn by H.N. Johnson, 1919.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

(See Continuation Sheet # 1)

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1/2 acre

Quadrangle name Norfolk South, Va.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 

1	8	3	8	5	9	7	0	4	0	7	9	4	9	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** Beginning at a point on E side of Church St., about 95' N.E. of the intersection with Va. Beach Blvd; thence extending about 75' SE, then about 41' NE, then about 83' SE; thence extending about 22' SW, jogging 10' NW, then about 83' SW; thence extending about 41' NW, jogging 5' NNW, then about 94' NW to point of origin. Comprising an L-shaped lot with

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries (see continuation sheet #2)

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date July 1981

street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3144

city or town Richmond state Virginia 23219

# 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature H. Bryan Mitchell

H. Bryan Mitchell, Executive Director  
title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date MAY 10 1982

For HCPRS use only  
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register  
Keeper of the National Register  
Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
Chief of Registration

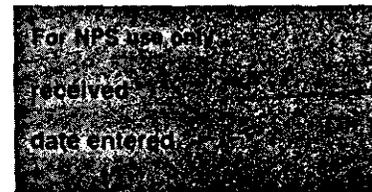
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
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ATTUCKS THEATRE, Norfolk, Va.  
Continuation sheet # 2

Item number 10

Page 1



10; GEOGRAPHIC DATA

Verbal Boundary Description, con.

an approximately 46' frontage on Church Street, Norfolk City Deed Book 693, p. 96.

STATE OF VIRGINIA  
NATURAL RESOURCES  
STATE GEOLOGIST

NORFOLK SOUTH QUADRANGLE  
VIRGINIA  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

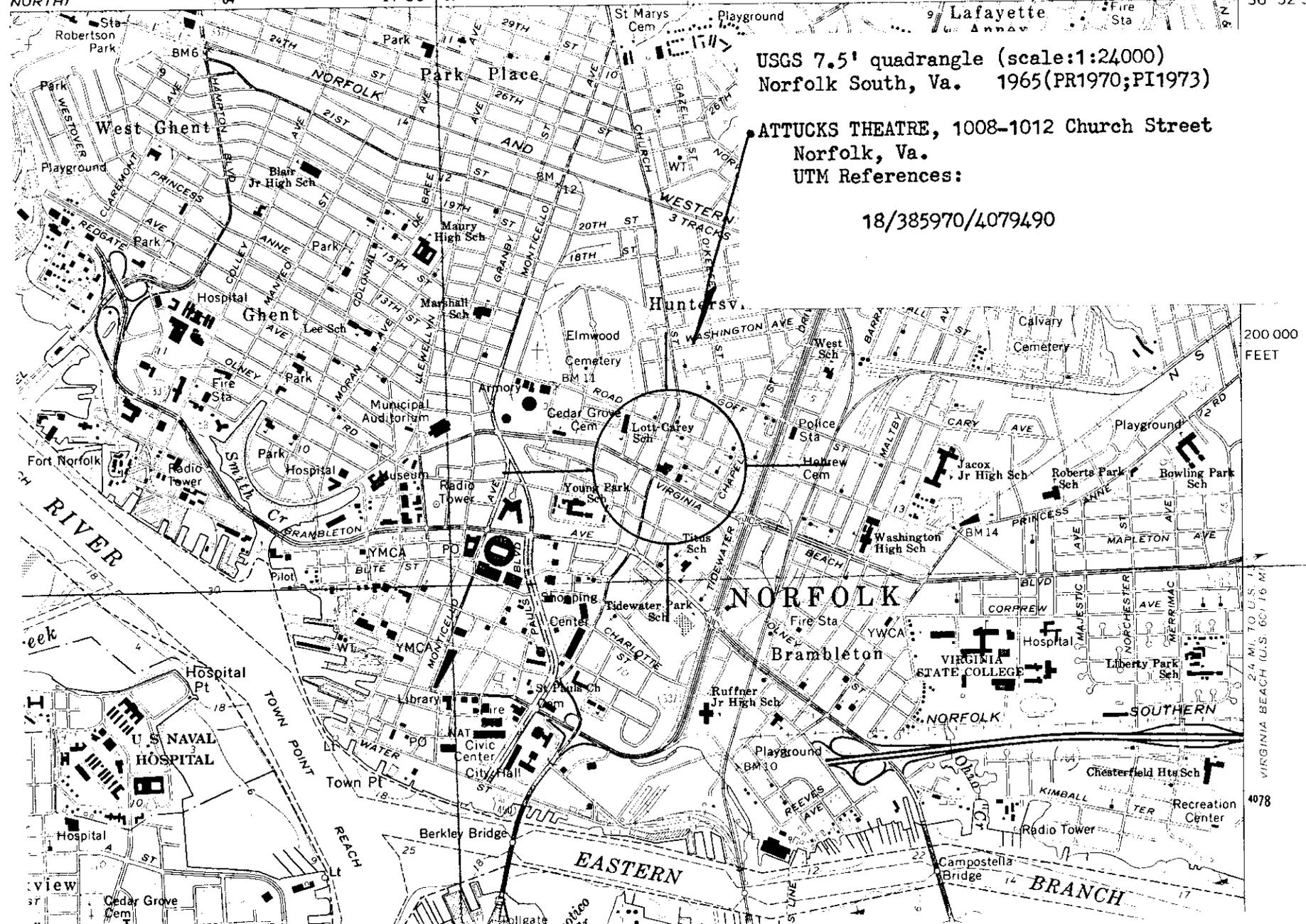
5757' NW  
(LITTLE CREEK)

384 17°30' 385 386 2 650 000 FEET 387 76°15' 36°52'30"

USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale:1:24000)  
Norfolk South, Va. 1965(PR1970;PI1973)

ATTUCKS THEATRE, 1008-1012 Church Street  
Norfolk, Va.  
UTM References:

18/385970/4079490



200 000  
FEET

24 MI. TO U.S. 1  
VIRGINIA BEACH (U.S. 60) 16 MI.

4078