

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Lynn Memorial City Hall and Auditorium
Lynn (Essex), MA

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7. DESCRIPTION

Constructed in 1948-1949, Lynn Memorial City Hall and Auditorium is a late example of an Art Deco-style civic building that also reflects the influence of the contemporaneous Modern Movement in architecture. Monumental in scale, the building is the focal point of City Hall Square, which is formed by the intersection of Essex Street, Central Avenue, Market Street, South Common Street, North Common Street, and Franklin Street. Comprising an area of 13.5 square miles, Lynn is located approximately 10 miles north of Boston, along Route 1A. It is bordered by Peabody and Salem on the north, Swampscott and the Atlantic Ocean (Lynn Harbor) on the east, Nahant and Revere on the south, and Saugus and Lynnfield on the west. Locally referred to as the gateway to the North Shore, Lynn is the southernmost municipality and largest city in Essex County.

Situated at the north end of the dense civic and commercial downtown area, Lynn Memorial City Hall and Auditorium faces south on a 57,578 square foot trapezoidal, three-corner lot formed by City Hall Square, Essex, and Johnson Streets. The bulk of the building is set back about twelve feet from the sidewalk, but the broad span of gently rising front steps projects to meet the sidewalk. On either side of the steps, the property is landscaped with grass, a few trees, and a hedge that separates the grassy area from the sidewalk. The lawn area to the east of the entry contains three trees and a polished granite marker (N/C) indicating that the trees were planted in memory of Arthur C. Snow (1929-1987). A flagpole that dates to construction of the building is located in the lawn area to the west of the front entry. A flat granite slab marks a time capsule (N/C) that was buried to the left of the flagpole in 1976. The slab is inscribed: "City of Lynn Time Capsule 1976-2029." Small parking areas are located along the east and west elevations of the building.

Buildings in the immediate area generally date to the early 20th century including the classical revival-style Goodman Building opposite City Hall (MHC#10) and the Art Deco-style New England Telephone Building one door to the west. Like City Hall, the Telephone Building is faced with limestone. Because of their similar style and material, the two buildings create an imposing complex at this important intersection. Extending west from City Hall Square is the Lynn Common Historic District (NR – 1992), a collection of mid-to-late 19th century residential, commercial, and institutional buildings lining both sides of the linear Lynn Common. Significant public buildings that stand nearby include the Lynn District Courthouse and the Lynn Public Library, another impressive limestone building. (The latter is in the Lynn Common Historic District). A late 19th to early 20th century residential area abuts City Hall on the east along Johnson Street. A wooden and brick church (Mt. Olive Church), which stands directly behind City Hall, dates to the last quarter of the 19th century.

EXTERIOR

Generally conforming to the shape of its lot, Lynn Memorial City Hall and Auditorium has a unique six-sided, symmetrical footprint that is approximately 262 feet wide at the three-part façade, 184 feet deep, and 95 feet across the rear elevation. The steel-framed structure has a reinforced, poured-concrete foundation that rests on concrete footings. The frame is covered with large buff-colored Indiana limestone slabs laid up with narrow mortar joints that are only visible on close inspection so that the building appears to have a smooth limestone skin. A course of large granite slabs that match the limestone in color runs along the foundation. The building rises three full stories above a ground floor

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(now known as the first floor) and a subterranean basement so that there are five interior floors. Two small penthouses, one for the elevator, and a limestone chimney rise through the flat roof, which was originally covered with five-ply tar and gravel, but is now rubber membrane. The symmetrical, three-faceted façade (south elevation) is arranged in a wide V with its point flattened by a canted colossal entrance bay flanked by nine-bay “wings.” The cornerstone of the building, located at the southeast corner of the façade, is a limestone slab incised with the date 1948.

Spanning the 60-foot-wide central section of the façade are two sets of five broad granite steps with spacious landings. The granite matches that of the foundation, and wide, flat-topped granite buttresses flank the stairway. The monolithic entry bay is the focal point of the building. Its smooth blocky form projects slightly from the mass of the building, rising the equivalent of two stories above it. Featuring a flush, stepped cornice, its central section is set off by vertical bands of fluting, a simple detail that is repeated many times inside the building. Centered on the massive frontispiece is the entryway, which rises to a spandrel that rests beneath a bank of three windows at the fourth story. At the entry are three sets of glazed doors in bronze frames, above which is a soaring tripartite transom that lights the two-story Memorial Lobby. Framed in bronze, each section of the three-part window has 32 panes. A double, fluted architrave encloses the entry composition and is topped by *bas-relief* eagles that flank an incised sign block. The heroic-scale lettering reads: “MEMORIAL CITY HALL AND AUDITORIUM.” Above this are three vertical windows that light the City Council Chamber on the top floor. Sash, which are not operable, contain 28 lights each. At the base of the main entry composition, two additional sets of deeply recessed, paired, glazed doors, which also lead into the Memorial Lobby, flank the central grouping of doors.

The second, third, and fourth stories of the façade wings as well as the east and west elevations are composed of slightly projecting broad vertical piers and horizontal spandrels that frame the windows. Each opening contains a 16-light bronze-colored sash with a 4-light operable awning-style section in the center. The first story forms the base for the vertical piers and is lit by 9-light sash, the top and bottom rows of which open awning style. The present metal sash replaced the original casement windows in the 1990s.

The east and west elevations are 16 bays long, including 15 windows and a wide blind bay at the north end. The two elevations are identical at the upper three floors, but they differ in the organization and number of openings at the first level. From south to north, the west elevation displays six windows, a pair of doors (probably replacements) leading into the municipal sections of the building, seven windows, and three sets of paired doors (probably original) leading to the dressing rooms below the auditorium, the backstage area, and to the main stairwell that serves all floors. The east elevation, south to north, has five windows, two sets of paired doors, seven windows, and three more sets of paired doors. The latter doors lead to dressing rooms and backstage areas. One of the two doors closest to the south end of the east elevation is handicap accessible and it is approached by a long but relatively inconspicuous concrete ramp that originates at the southeast corner of the building. All doors are glazed and have bronze frames and bracing.

The north (rear) elevation, which steps up at the cornice level like the façade, has one row of nine boarded windows along the first story. The only other opening in the rear elevation is a pair of large Kalamein doors and a hoist centered on the second story. These doors lead to the auditorium’s stage, which spans the rear of the building, and are used to load props and equipment.

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INTERIOR

The vast interior, reportedly 2,000,000 cubic feet of space, is composed of a large wedge-shaped auditorium surrounded on three sides (south, east, and west) by four floors of municipal offices. The stage area of the auditorium spans the north (rear) end of the building and the Memorial Lobby occupies three floors at the south (front) end of the building. Original furniture remains in meeting rooms and offices throughout the building. Public spaces have upholstered seating, but most of the furniture in the municipal offices is metal. While utilitarian finishes generally characterize interior spaces, there are six types of marble (Laredo Chiaro, Bottino, and Travertine from Italy; Black Belgium from Belgium; Renfrew from England; and Tennessee from the U.S.) and five hardwoods (teak, mahogany, maple, birch, and oak) in the most important offices and public spaces. Bronze is used for most of the hardware throughout the building.

Arranged around the perimeter of the building, the municipal offices are separated from the auditorium by a 9 or 10 foot-wide U-shaped circulation corridor covered with terrazzo floor tiles. Non-glazed, 2-inch square, beige tiles line the corridor walls and rise to the height of the doorways. This spare decoration meets unadorned plaster, which covers the upper section of the walls and the ceilings of the corridors. Interior doors are metal with a hollow core, a gypsum coat, and a wood-grained finish that is peeling on most of the doors. The original lighted brass and glass signs indicating the names of the offices remain in working order above most of the primary interior doorways. Two-foot square florescent ceiling fixtures light the corridors. Six main stair halls lined with rectangular buff-colored tiles are spread throughout the building. Staircases feature terrazzo treads, brass handrails, rectangular metal newel posts with brass caps, and slender iron balusters. A pair of elevators, located just west of the entrance to the auditorium, has wood grained metal doors with vertical brass strips set into them. Above the doors are the original brass plates that light up to show which floor the elevator is on. Near the elevator bank is the original brass-framed, glass mail tube with a slot on each floor for the insertion of letters. Men's and women's rooms are located throughout the building and are finished with marble stalls, tile walls, and concrete floors.

Memorial Lobby

The decorative and emotional centerpiece of the building is the monumental Memorial Lobby. Intended to serve a dual purpose, it was designed as the main entry to the municipal offices as well as the auditorium. In contrast to the utilitarian finishes of the office corridors, the lobby is lavishly finished with floor to ceiling, highly veined, buff-colored, Italian marble. Five pairs of recessed entry doors, three centered on the façade plus one on each side of the central grouping, lead into the ceremonial space. (The central pair of doors is now boarded and labeled exit only.) Rising above the three central doorways is a twenty-foot tall window that lights the interior. A grand stairway opposite the entry leads up to a second level of the lobby, which is officially known as the foyer. The Italian marble continues along the walls of the stairs and foyer.

The main section of the lobby (56 feet wide by 26 feet deep) is three-stories tall and classically detailed with wide fluted pilasters rising to a compound, foliated cornice and a coved ceiling painted blue (original color was light green). Tall black marble baseboards rim the large rectangular space, and terrazzo tiles separated by narrow brass borders and set in a geometric pattern cover the floor. Engaged marble pedestals on the east and west walls support lettered panels,

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the text for which was selected by school superintendent Ernest Stephens. The east panel reads: "Since war began in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed. The great and terrible war, which has now ended was a war made possible by the denial of democratic principles of the dignity, equality, and mutual respect of men. The wide diffusion of culture and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man. Peace must be founded upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind. – From the preamble to the constitution of UNESCO." The panel on the opposite wall reads: "I believe in the United States of America as a government of the people, a perfect union, one and inseparable, established upon those principles of freedom, equality, and humanity for which American patriots sacrificed their lives and fortunes. I therefore believe it is my duty of my country to love it, to support its constitution, to obey its laws, to respect its flag, and to defend it against all enemies. – From the American Creed." [Quotation marks and punctuation added. The American Creed was written by William Tyler Page in 1917 during WWI, and accepted by the US House of Representatives in 1918.]

The grand stairway opposite the entrance is composed of a central set of two runs of five steps each with a generous landing. Flanked by marble buttresses or knee walls that double as handrails, the organization of the stairway is similar to that of the exterior stairs. Two pairs of symmetrically positioned brass handrails divide the travertine marble stairs into three parts. Flanking the central "up" staircase are stairs leading down to the first (ground) floor. The east and west walls of the stairwell contain classical arched niches. The frieze over the staircase is engraved with heroic lettering as follows: "THIS BUILDING IS DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO SERVED IN ALL WARS OF OUR COUNTRY."

The foyer (34' by 22') at the top of the stairs (third story) contains an information desk centered in front of three sets of doors to the auditorium. The desk is a later addition that modifies the intent of the foyer to lead into the auditorium. An original clock is mounted on the wall over the central door. Of modern design, the clock face has no numerals, but rather double and single hatch marks. Floors are similar to those in the lobby, but are not as intricately patterned. Marble-clad alcoves that lead to the building's main corridors flank the foyer. The west alcove contains the elevator bank and a ticket office. The east alcove contains three memorial plaques, the largest of which commemorates Lynn citizens who lost their lives in World War II. The individual names are listed under the branch of the military in which they served including the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Merchant Marines, Coast Guard and the Women's' Auxiliary Army Corps (WAACs). Three hundred Lynn citizens died in WWII, including one woman, Mary E. Dibble, a WAAC. Two other plaques list the names of those who lost their lives in Korea and Vietnam. A set of double doors at each side (east and west) of the foyer can be closed to separate the city hall spaces from those of the auditorium at the end of the business day.

Mayor's Suite

Located in the southwest corner of the building, the Mayor's suite consists of a waiting room open to a clerks' space and three private offices -- two small rooms for the Mayor's deputies and a large room for the Mayor. The clerks' space, which has three west-facing windows, is typical of offices throughout the building. It has an acoustic tile (12" squares) ceiling, plaster walls with a chair rail molding, and a metal wood-grained counter separating the clerks from

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the waiting room. The counter has a leather-like top with brass trim. Entry to the waiting room from the corridor is via a single glazed door flanked by sidelights and enclosed in a metal wood-grained frame. Floors are carpeted, but it appears that the original flooring in the offices was a square linoleum tile with black border. The main floor color matched the corridor tiles (beige) in color. This pattern still exists in some of the office.

The Mayor's office, the largest office in the building (32' long by 24' wide), overlooks City Hall Square through four deeply recessed windows with pink granite sills. Walls are covered floor to ceiling with teak paneling, fluted pilasters without capitals, narrower fluted vertical detailing placed at regular intervals around the room, and a chair rail. Ceilings are plaster, painted pink with a double boarder. Maroon-colored carpeting covers the floors, and a simple black baseboard covers the floor-wall junction. The principal entry is located at the west end of the room and the mayor's desk is at the opposite end. Some of the finishes in the mayor's suite—reportedly the paneling, carpeting and counters—were replaced or refurbished in 1988.

City Council Chamber

Located on the top floor above the Memorial Lobby, the council chamber is 56 feet long by 44 feet wide. Entry doors are on the long north side of the room opposite the bank of three large façade windows, which rise above built in window seats supported by corbels. Councilors' seating is located at the west end of the room, which is carpeted and divided from the public seating space by a semi-circular bronze rail with gates on each side. The dais with oak rostrum is centered under a square arch and oval coved ceiling painted blue. While the rostrum, which seats the council president and assistants, faces the audience, the councilors sit at two curved oak desks forming a semi-circle. Each desk seats five councilors, who face the dais. Desktops are brass and each councilor's place is defined by a maroon leather desk pad and matching armchair.

The rest of the room is fitted with rows of built-in, upholstered auditorium chairs (approximately 200). Covered with salmon colored wide-wale corduroy, the seating is original, but a few chairs have been removed to create a wider isle for accessibility. Floors are covered with cork tiles and the walls are covered, floor to ceiling, with 1¼" oak paneling detailed with vertical fluting and a wide chair rail. Other features of the room include a deep crown molding and a plaster ceiling. The three doors leading into the chamber from the north side of the room are grained to match the walls have and wide flat architraves. The rear (east) wall of the room is a gallery lined with portraits of Lynn mayors.

Veterans' Auditorium

Occupying the core of the building on all four floors, the auditorium is composed of orchestra and balcony seating, the stage, an orchestra pit, a projection room, and dressing rooms. The latter are located beneath the stage on the first (ground) floor. Total seating capacity is 2072, with 1245 seats in the orchestra section and 827 in the balcony. The dimensions of the auditorium are 120 feet wide across the entry off the foyer, 40 feet wide across the proscenium arch, and 93 feet deep from the entry to the orchestra pit.

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