

Regent Theater

Individual Landmark

1906–1916 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard

Designation Date: March 8, 1994



Regent Theater. Photo by Lorraine Colbert

The Regent Theater is one of New York City's most significant surviving early motion picture theater buildings. Constructed in 1912–1913, during the period when the motion picture business made the transition from showing short silent movies in nickelodeons to offering "photoplays" in larger, specially built theaters with numerous amenities for their patrons, the Regent was designed by the noted and prolific theater specialist Thomas W. Lamb.

It is one of only a few theaters of Lamb's early career remaining in New York City. An elegant architectural design, the Regent was built to elevate the presentation of movies, and was one of the first luxurious movie theaters in New York City. The theater was controlled by the real estate interests of the Little family, prominent printers, for nearly 40 years. Located in Harlem at the corner of two thoroughfares which were popular for entertainment venues, the Regent was operated as a movie and vaudeville house for some 50 years. It was an innovative setting for movie presentations, for a short time under the management of Samuel L. Rothapfel, later "Roxy" Rothapfel, as the B.S. Moss Regent Theater from 1915 to 1928, and finally as the RKO Regent Theater.

Its distinctive, eclectic design, executed in polychrome terra cotta on the front portion of the building, incorporates Italian and northern European Renaissance and Mannerist motifs, particularly the diaper-patterned wall surfaces, ground-story arcade, upper loggias, and prominent central stepped frontispiece. The terra cotta, manufactured by the South Amboy Terra Cotta Company, is notable in its detailing and subtle shades. For 30 years the Regent Theater building, still a striking and very visible presence, has served as the home of the First Corinthian Baptist Church, an African American congregation formed in Harlem in 1939.

[Read the full NYC LPC designation report here.](#)