Palaces on Main Street:
Thomas W. Lamb, Rapp & Rapp, John Eberson, and the Development of the American
Movie Palace

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Abstract

This dissertation is a thematic examination of the movie palace focusing on the three leading firms specializing in the type's design, those founded by Thomas W. Lamb, C.W. and George Rapp, and John Eberson. Movie palaces are commonly held as quintessentially American buildings, "democratic institutions" developed to attract the middle class by providing a respectable site for the interaction of audiences of differing social-economic classes. This study reaches beyond this well-recognized role; reevaluating the type's evolution and studying overlooked aspects. First, it provides a much-needed comprehensive survey of the Lamb, Rapp, and Eberson firms, examining aspects of their backgrounds that impacted movie palace development. Second, it reveals the movie palace's emergence and subsequent evolution as a continual process of oneupmanship among a handful of competing architectural firms. Lamb, the Rapps, and Eberson led this process, successively producing the major design innovations that fueled the type's development, which were adopted and further adapted by other movie palace architects. Third, it establishes the type's role as a tastemaker, exposing and educating moviegoers about historical and modernist varieties of art, architecture, and furnishings. This influence was most notable in relation to the domestic interior, where the type was marketed as a vehicle by domestic reformers to promote better taste and to Americanize its working-class, ethnic, and immigrant audiences. Finally, it examines the type's widespread transmission overseas as a notable episode within the narrative of the internationalization of American architecture. The Lamb, Rapp, and Eberson offices were at the center of this process, which encompassed both their own foreign commissions and

the influence that their work in the United States yielded over their counterparts abroad.

Throughout, the dissertation challenges a tendency to examine movie palaces in isolation by contextualizing them as products of the fast-evolving motion picture industry with its constantly evolving stylistic, functional, and technological requirements, and as a response to local conditions. This approach not only illuminates the contributions of the leading movie palace designers but also better integrates the type into the narrative of 20th century architectural history.

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Introduction

Hollywood's attention focused on the small Southern college town of Charlottesville, Virginia, on the morning of November 25, 1931; or so it appeared to local residents, as baskets of flowers with notes of "compliments and best wishes" streamed in from some of its biggest stars, including Maurice Chevalier, Joan Crawford, Marlene Dietrich, Clark Gable, and Norma Shearer.¹ The occasion was the grand opening of the Paramount Theater, the city's first movie palace, advertised as an "acre of entertainment for the entire community."² That evening, local dignitaries (including Mayor Fred L. Watson and University of Virginia President John Lloyd Newcomb) gathered to tour the theater and watch a screening of the football drama *Touchdown*, starring Charlottesville native Richard Arlen. The local newspaper, *The Daily Progress*, described how anxious crowds formed a line outside the theater's Main Street entrance with "people three and four abreast that extended down the block and around the square nearly to the post office."³ So great was the community's interest that "throngs had to be turned away from the doors when they were opened at 8 o'clock."⁴

The Paramount lived up to expectations. Newcomb found it to be "the last word in comfort and convenience," concluding "all of us should take pride in having such an attractive theater in this community."⁵ Opening night patrons pronounced it "a place of charming design, harmonious varicolored lights and luxurious seats," noting that they

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¹ "Paramount Opens with a Gala Show," *Daily Progress* [Charlottesville] (27 Nov. 1931): 1 and 6.

² "Paramount Opens New Playhouse on Nov. 25," *Daily Progress* [Charlottesville] (16 Nov. 1931): 1.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ "Paramount Opens with a Gala Show," 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*

were “simply amazed at the splendor.”⁶ *The Daily Progress* hailed the Paramount as modern in every way, as it constituted the first local theater specifically built for talking pictures.⁷ Charlottesville now had a movie palace comparable in appearance to those found in much larger cities throughout the country.

Charlottesville’s Paramount was among the nation’s last movie palaces, designed by C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, an architecture firm founded by the brothers Cornelius Ward Rapp (1861-1926) and George Leslie Rapp (1878-1941) and popularly known as Rapp & Rapp. The Rapp office and its principal competitors, the firms founded by Thomas W. Lamb (1871-1942) and John Eberson (1875-1954), largely shaped the development of the movie palace type from the creation of the first prototypical examples in the 1910s to the early years of the Great Depression. In 1925, George L. Rapp summarized the mass appeal of the movie palace:

Watch the eyes of a child as he enters the portals of our great theaters and treads the pathway into fairyland. Watch the bright light in the eyes of the tired shop girl who hurries noiselessly over carpets and sighs with satisfaction as she walks amid furnishings that once delighted the hearts of queens. See the toil-worn father whose dreams have never come true, and look inside his heart as he finds strength and rest within the theater. There you have the answer to why motion picture theaters are so palatial.

Here is a shrine to democracy where there are no privileged patrons. The wealthy rub elbows with the poor and are better for this contact. Do not wonder, then, at the touches of Italian Renaissance, executed in glazed polychrome terra-cotta, or at the lobbies and foyers adorned with replicas of precious masterpieces of another world, or at the imported marble wainscoting or the richly ornamented

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⁶ Ibid., 1 and 6.

⁷ “Acre of Entertainment for the Entire Community,” *Daily Progress* [Charlottesville] (19 Nov. 1931): 1.

ceilings with motifs copied from master touches of Germany, France and Italy, or at the carved niches, the cloistered arcades, the depthless mirrors, and the great sweeping staircases. These are not impractical attempts at showing off. These are part of a celestial city, a cavern of many-colored jewels, where iridescent lights and luxurious fittings heighten the expectation of pleasure. It is richness unabashed, but richness with a reason.⁸

By the early 1930s, most Americans were familiar with the luxuries of a movie palace, as the type had largely saturated the nation's larger cities during its building boom the previous decade. Publix, the Paramount's operator, and other Hollywood studio-exhibitors focused on expansion into small to mid-sized cities that had not kept pace with the type's development. The Paramount was representative of the skillful translation of the movie palace typology into a small city. This was accomplished by balancing a strict adherence to the type's functional and stylistic formulas with deliberate responses to local conditions. In keeping with its location, the Paramount was a modest example of a movie palace: its main entrance and lobby occupied a single long and narrow lot at 215 Main Street, in the heart of the city's theater and shopping district, which led back to the bulky auditorium that was positioned on the corner Market and Third streets (Figure In-1). While movie palaces across the nation were democratic in the sense that they broke down social-economic barriers, they could not erase contemporary racial divisions. Accordingly, the Paramount featured a separate entrance for African Americans on Third Street that led directly to the segregated balcony.

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⁸ Quoted in Ben Hall, *Best Remaining Seats: The Golden Age of the Movie Palace* (New York: Bramhall House, 1961), 136.

Rapp & Rapp's adaptation of the movie palace to Charlottesville was most evident in the Paramount's architectural influences. Movie palaces' conceptualization, initial development, and subsequent evolution were based upon the premise that theaters attracted audiences as much as the entertainment they presented. The firm's Publix movie palaces of the early 1930s occasionally conformed to local architectural tastes as a means to foster an immediate connection with the community.⁹ Charlottesville's built environment was shaped by the architectural legacy of its most prominent resident, Thomas Jefferson. Rapp & Rapp conformed to local preferences by eschewing the locally unpopular Art Deco motifs that were most characteristic of Publix's contemporary movie palaces in favor of the Colonial Revival. The narrow Main Street façade modestly recalled the Roman temple fronts Jefferson implemented at Monticello and the University of Virginia (Figure In-2), a design which harmonized with adjacent buildings while drawing attention through its 33-foot-high vertical sign and marquee, which, as the *Daily Progress* noted "dominates the electrical skyline of Main Street" sending "forth a light equaled only by the Monticello [Hotel] search light".¹⁰ Functional refinements set the Paramount apart from the city's earlier motion picture theaters. To insure that every patron had a feeling of intimacy with the screen, the auditorium was wider than it was deep, placing all seats closer to the stage, offering improved sight lines, better acoustics, and allowing for a wide proscenium.

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⁹ "Blends Theatre With Its Town," *Motion Picture News* (2 Aug. 1930): 38-39.

¹⁰ "Sign Installed," *Daily Progress* [Charlottesville] (10 Oct. 1931): 1.

Inside, the Paramount even more overtly referenced the primary local architectural tradition by blending Jefferson-inspired neoclassicism with French Renaissance motifs, Rapp & Rapp's trademark style. Its lobby (accessed from Main Street) was a modest interpretation of Versailles' Hall of Mirrors, the firm's favored source of inspiration for such spaces, which also obliquely referenced Jefferson's time as Ambassador to at the French court (Figure In-3). This escapist decor reflected the idea that movie palace lobbies should be spaces of interest for waiting patrons. The 1,300-seat auditorium was a variation of a distinctive decorative scheme employed in Publix movie palaces across the country. Publix's contemporary chain identity was most notably expressed in the large sidewall tapestries depicting *fête galante* scenes of Versailles-like gardens in the manner of Watteau, which also alluded to Jefferson's time in France (Figure In-4). The auditorium's elongated octagonal shape and domed ceiling were additional references to Jefferson's architecture, forms he used at his two homes, Monticello and Poplar Forest (Figure In-5).

Movie palaces such as the Charlottesville Paramount are mythologized as quintessentially American buildings, belonging to a type first developed in response to the unprecedented challenges of silent, feature-length motion picture exhibition. The advent of motion pictures had democratized the theater in the United States, making it accessible to segments of the public to whom it was previously an unobtainable luxury.¹¹ Specifically designed to attract the middle class by providing a respectable site for the

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¹¹ R.W. Sexton and B.F. Betts, ed., *American Theatres of Today* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1927), 14.

interaction of differing social-economic classes, movie palaces further broadened the appeal of movie going to all strata of society. Architects and observers boasted that the wealthy, middle class, poor, and recent immigrants all regularly visited movie palaces, frequently with each change of the bill. In a movie palace, they paid the same price, sat side by side, and were made equally comfortable while viewing the same entertainment program.¹² If this was only partially true in an era of segregation, movie palaces undoubtedly were a key agent in the emergence of film as a mass medium.

This dissertation focuses on lesser-studied aspects of the movie palace typology, beyond its widely-recognized role in broadening the appeal of movie going, utilizing the works of Lamb, the Rapps, and Eberson to examine four overlooked themes: the history of the leading three firms, the innovations they brought to the field, movie palaces as domestic tastemakers, and the type's influence outside the United States. It challenges the tendency to study movie palaces in isolation by framing them as products of the nascent motion picture industry and contextualizing each case study within its larger urban and architectural contexts. This approach not only illuminates the contributions of the leading movie palace designers but better integrates the type into the narrative of 20th century American architectural history as well.

A fundamental issue in studying movie palaces is establishing a concise definition of the building type, because the term “movie palace” carries a different connotation today than it did during the 1920s and early 1930s -- one that ignores important

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¹² Ibid.

contemporary distinctions. Today, the term is applied to almost any historic theater that at one time exhibited motion pictures, all of which are palatial in treatment compared to later multiplexes. Despite the increasing scholarly interest in early motion picture theaters in recent years, a standard definition of what precisely constitutes a movie palace remains elusive. The term was not unfamiliar during the interwar years (although it was probably first offered in jest), but it was just one of a number of designations for large motion picture theaters: “modern motion picture theater,” “modern playhouse,” “palatial motion picture theater,” “picture palace,” “deluxe theater,” and “American Theater Deluxe.”¹³ Period advertising leant additional names such as “Cathedral of the Motion Picture,” “Temple of the Motion Picture” and “Palace of Splendor.” “Movie palace” appears to have become the predominant term by the early 1960s, when it was codified in Ben Hall’s pioneering study, *The Best Remaining Seats: The Golden Age of the Movie Palace*.¹⁴

“Movie palace” also denotes a format of motion picture exhibition (of which the theater was one component) wherein audiences experienced a level of service, amenities, and entertainment that was distinct from what was offered in other movie venues. Theaters designed for this mode of movie going were distinguished by a number of factors, foremost being the type of entertainment for which they were designed. The period’s major divisions in theater type were between legitimate theaters, vaudeville

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¹³ For instance, the foremost studies of the type during its heyday -- Sexton and Betts, *American Theatres of Today* and R.W. Sexton, ed., *American Theatres of Today Volume 2* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1930) -- only sporadically use the term “movie palace,” instead referring to them as “modern motion picture theaters.”

¹⁴ Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats*, 93-161 passim.

houses, and motion picture theaters. Legitimate theaters of the interwar decades were of a dissimilar character to movie palaces: subdued exteriors, sedate décor, smaller lobbies, more intimate auditoriums, the frequent incorporation of multiple balconies, and the lack of orchestra pits and pipe organs, although projection booths were sometimes included (Figures In-6 and In-7). Vaudeville theaters between approximately 1880 and 1920 were modeled after legitimate theaters (of which they were an offshoot) in an attempt to associate the medium with high-class entertainments. They exhibited dignified exteriors with simple marquees but often with large roof signs advertising the theater; ticket lobbies rather than freestanding ticket booths; refined interiors with lavish appointments; and opera boxes flanking the proscenium and single balconies replaced galleries and double balconies. Later, provisions were made for motion picture exhibition (Figures In-8 and In-9).¹⁵ They were “palaces of the people,” offering a level of opulence and service to the middle class rivaled only by grand hotels. Movie palaces, in turn, appropriated vaudeville theaters’ democratic pretensions and many of their architectural features in their efforts to lure the middle classes. By the 1920s, there were only subtle differences between newly constructed examples of the two types: vaudeville theaters regularly exhibited motion pictures, were routinely designed by the same architects, and characteristically resembled smaller and less exuberant movie palaces.

Motion picture venues of the interwar decades belonged to a number of distinct types encompassing converted and purpose-built theaters. The former included renovated

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¹⁵ For a brief overview of vaudeville theaters, see Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre, Starring S. Charles Lee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 16-21.

legitimate theaters, older vaudeville theaters, and a wide assortment of other building types. Purpose-built venues included simple movie houses of varying size which were equipped solely for motion pictures and located in central business districts and neighborhoods; combination vaudeville and motion picture theaters; downtown and neighborhood movie palaces; and newsreel theaters. Movie palaces took in three-quarters of the total box office revenue by 1925, but they represented only a tiny fraction of the operating venues, being vastly outnumbered by smaller venues seating less than 1,000 patrons.¹⁶ *The 1932 Film Daily Yearbook* listed 18,715 motion picture theaters in the United States as of January 1st of that year (operating and recently closed), which marked the onset of the final year of significant movie palace construction.¹⁷ Approximately 2,689 (or about 14 percent) of these theaters seated at least 1,000. However, a substantial number of these larger motion picture venues were not purpose-built, let alone true movie palaces.

Movie palaces were distinguished from other motion picture theaters by a number of factors. First, they were purpose-built for motion picture exhibition rather than converted venues. Secondly, movie palace programs included stage shows that required the inclusion of stage facilities, which were uncommon in other types of purpose-built motion picture theaters. Thirdly, movie palaces were larger than most other purpose-built motion picture theaters of the time. Film trade publications the 1920s and early 1930s routinely deemed contemporary motion picture theaters above 1,000 seats as small movie

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¹⁶ Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 216.

¹⁷ Jack Alicoate, ed., *1932 Film Daily Yearbook* (New York: The Film Daily, 1932), 706-823.

palaces if they exhibited other associated features, while the largest examples neared 6,000 seats.¹⁸ Fourth, movie palaces appeared in both downtowns and neighborhoods, and the theaters in both locations were similar in terms of size and décor in the nation's largest cities, or even outclassed them as in the case of Chicago. Lastly, movie palaces exhibited a higher level of architectural design than other types of contemporary motion picture theaters, immersing audiences in escapist environments intended to remove moviegoers from the concerns of everyday life.

This dissertation defines the movie palace narrowly, in keeping with contemporary distinctions: it is a theater seating 1,000 or more patrons that was purpose-built between approximately 1921 and 1932 for motion picture exhibition and stage shows. Character defining features include conspicuous exteriors with flashy marquees and tall vertical signs; elaborate fanciful decoration in historicizing or modernist veins; a well-planned crowd circulation system of commodious lobbies, foyers, and lounges filled with art, furnishings, and other objects of patron interest; and the inclusion of stage facilities. Integral yet non-architectural amenities include theater organs, in-house orchestras, corps of ushers and other service personnel, and live entertainment in addition to motion pictures. This study also considers formative examples of the type (called proto-movie palaces or deluxe motion picture theaters) erected beginning in 1913 as well as selected contemporary vaudeville houses, however, a distinction is maintained

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¹⁸ In 1991, the Theatre Historical Society maintained that only the nation's largest motion picture theaters (the approximate 139 seating over 2,800 persons) fully qualify as movie palaces. However, confining the movie palace designation to motion picture theaters over 2,800 seats limits the type to only a handful of American cities, which was clearly not the case. Andrew C. Fowler, "The Big Theatre List," *Marquee: The Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 22, no. 3 (1991): 27-30.

between movie palaces and legitimate theaters and other venues converted for motion picture exhibition.

The Design Program

The movie palace's fundamental purpose was simple: attract moviegoers to the box office.¹⁹ In practice, they were recognized among the most complex building types of the interwar decades, responding to an almost unprecedented array of continually evolving functional, stylistic, and technological requirements. Movie palace architect John Eberson remarked:

A theatre architect must have the ability to present a feasible plan, showing maximum capacity, dependable sight lines and acoustics, proper facilities for quickly seating and dismissing audiences. He must be thoroughly familiar with the engineering problems of a dependable atmospheric conditioning apparatus, which must provide the proper air conditioning of an auditorium. All this with a thorough knowledge of the building market so as to achieve these accomplishments well within the financial appropriation, which must be commensurate with the possibilities of proper financial returns to the investor – the theater owner.²⁰

Movie palace architects had to consider fire protection, steel construction, circulation, lighting, sight lines, projection, acoustics, ventilation, and stage operation, among a myriad of other matters.²¹ Accordingly, while often cloaked in Old World imagery,

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¹⁹ Movie palace design was the subject of a number of contemporary publications. See, Arthur S. Meloy, *Theatres and Picture Houses* (New York: Architects' Supply & Publishing Company, 1916); Sexton and Betts, *American Theatres of Today*; Sexton, *American Theatres of Today Volume 2*; and Eugene Clute, *The Practical Requirements of Modern Buildings* (New York: Pencil Points Press, 1928), 136-166.

²⁰ John Eberson, "The Atmospheric Theatre," *Motion Picture News* (12 June 1926): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide.

²¹ Clute, *The Practical Requirements of Modern Buildings*, 147.

movie palaces were exceedingly modern buildings designed to meet the multifaceted needs of the burgeoning motion picture industry.

Movie palaces were attractions in their own right, often acting as the primary draw for audiences in the formative era of silent feature-length films. Marcus Loew, the founder of Loew's Theatres and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), famously remarked, "We sell tickets to theaters, not movies." To meet this demand, movie palace architects also carefully considered audience psychology in the design of each theater.²² Architect Thomas Lamb observed:

To make our audience receptive and interested, we must cut them off from the rest of the city life and take them into a rich and self-contained auditorium, where their minds are freed from their customary thoughts. In order to do this, it is necessary to present to their eyes a general scheme quite different from their daily environment, quite different in color scheme, and a great deal more elaborate. The theatre can afford this, and must afford it for our public is large, and in the average not wealthy. The theater is the palace of the average man. As long as he is there, it is his, and it helps him to lift himself out of his daily drudgery.²³

Randolph Williams Sexton, associate editor of *The American Architect*, similarly remarked:

The masses, reveling in luxury and costly beauty, go to the theatre, partly, at least, to be thrilled by the gorgeousness of their surroundings, which they cannot afford in their home life. Any they are disappointed if they do not find the thrill they have come for. Their favorite "movie house" is the one which gives them the biggest thrill.²⁴

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²² Sexton and Betts, *American Theatres of Today*, 12-18.

²³ Thomas W. Lamb, "Good Old Days to these Better New Days," *Motion Picture News* (30 June 1928): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyer's Guide.

²⁴ Sexton and Betts, *American Theatres of Today*, 14.

Indeed, movie palaces were aspirational for their upwardly mobile working-class and middle-class audience, allowing a broad segment of the American public to linger in luxurious environments once only accessible to the wealthy. The type was generally ornate in the extreme because that was what patrons expected. This demand made the field fiercely competitive, as each successive theater strove to offer something new: a more colossal structure, more exotic interiors, more ornate decorations, more sophisticated tastes, and with ever more lavish amenities. George Rapp noted:

The theater advances with the public in wants and expectations...the architect engaged in this type of work is ever ready to reach forward and grasp anything which may be of help in producing something in the way of decorative value for the wishes of the theater-going public.²⁵

This continual need to produce something new made the movie palace design field fiercely competitive.

In planning a movie palace, architects were required to accommodate a vast assortment of spaces under one roof on costly, and often irregular, urban sites.²⁶ The priority was fitting the maximum number of seats on a given lot practically and economically. Larger seating capacities offset the cost per seat, which is how theater construction expenses were typically calculated. Although there was a degree of standardization in movie palace design, each theater presented its own problems. The theater location, the population from which it would draw, and the project's budget were important considerations. Local building codes and safety ordinances dictated many

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²⁵ George L. Rapp, "History of Cinema Theater Architecture," in *Living Architecture*, ed. Arthur Woltersdorf (Chicago: A. Kroch, 1930), 63-64.

²⁶ On movie palace planning, see Sexton and Betts, *American Theatres of Today*, 2-6.

important factors affecting seating capacity, such as the width of aisles in the auditorium, the number of seats in a row, the space between rows, the slope of the orchestra floor, and the width of exit courts. The lot's size and shape was another major determinant of the theater's plan. In addition, the plan had to accommodate the organ console and chambers filled with pipes placed behind ornamental organ screens flanking the proscenium, an orchestra pit, the projection booth, a stage, backstage facilities, and a vast subterranean area containing the theater's electric plant and heating and cooling systems. There were five types of theater plans, in order of increasing seating capacity: the one-floor house, the bleacher type, the stadium, the single balcony, and the balcony-mezzanine (Figure In-10). The one-floor house was often found in less congested districts, where less costly, larger sites were available and less seats were required. At the other extreme, the single balcony and balcony-mezzanine types maximized seating capacity in theaters on smaller lots, in congested locations, or atop high-cost land. Movie palaces were most often balcony-mezzanine or single balcony houses.

Movie palace architects employed four basic typologies adapted from legitimate and vaudeville theaters to profitably fit into the urban fabric. The first was a movie palace designed as one component of a mid-to-large-scale commercial block, an arrangement most common in business districts where real estate values dictated the inclusion of revenue-producing offices, hotel, retail, or other uses (Figure In-11). The theater entrance was typically denoted by the requisite flashy signage and occasionally with an architectural feature such as a large window or niche. The second movie palace typology

was an attached commercial block, a more modest variation of the first, consisting of commercial wings of up to about four stories flanking one or both sides of the theater entrance (Figure In-12). Theater façades would often be designed to stand out as the most significant component of the block. A third configuration contained integrated stores or offices, but the building read primarily as a theater (Figure In-13). The fourth type was a stand-alone movie palace without income-producing commercial space, typically configured to occupy as little high-priced real estate as possible while still maintaining a presence on a principal thoroughfare (Figure In-14). The entrance and lobby often occupied a relatively narrow lot on a major street while the bulky auditorium block was placed behind on less costly real estate.

The exterior's purpose was to sell passersby a ticket, accomplishing this task, in part, by adapting elements originating in the nickelodeon. Rapp & Rapp designer Edwin "E.C.A." Bullock noted that, "The theater entrance must be compelling, it must be inviting, and it must overshadow everything in its immediate neighborhood. Literally it must actually be a magnet and pull pedestrians and vehicles towards it."²⁷ To design such a façade, movie palace architects again considered patron psychology, striving to imbue their exteriors with both a sense of theatricality reflecting the building's function and "a spirit of romance" to inspire the public to venture inside to "live for an hour or two in the land of make-believe."²⁸ The Rapp office recommended incorporating graceful curves to contrast with the "severe" straight commercial lines of the usual surrounding buildings

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²⁷ E.C.A. Bullock, "The Theatre of To-day," *Motion Picture News* (21 Nov. 1925): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide.

²⁸ Sexton and Betts, *American Theatres of Today*, 8.

(Figure In-15).²⁹ Large entrances and towering windows above the marquee provided enticing glimpses of the interior to those on the street. Other architects such as John Eberson rendered their movie palace exteriors in exotic motifs that reflected the overall theme of the theater to attract passersby's attention (Figure In-16). Drawing on nickelodeon design, movie palaces uniformly employed a nearly unprecedented amount of lighting to attract patronage from blocks away, which Lamb noted was carefully considered as part of the their overall architectural composition.³⁰ This customarily took the form of brightly lit marquees, which could stretch across the entire front the building, colossal vertical signs spelling out the theater's name in flashing letters, and often stud lights outlining its architectural features. A freestanding ticket-booth (also appropriated from the nickelodeon) performed the final act of capturing passersby. Accordingly was designed as an object of interest and placed in the middle of the entrance as near the street as possible, without any doors or other obstructions to pass through that could possibly deter potential patrons before they could purchase admission (Figure In-17).

Movie palace interiors were responses to functional considerations unprecedented in other types of theaters. The shows presented therein were longer than those in a legitimate or a vaudeville theater, encompassing short subjects, organ recitals, and stage shows in addition to a feature-length film. Furthermore, shows ran back-to-back throughout the day, which entailed the continual turnover of incoming and outgoing crowds numbering in the thousands. The development of sophisticated traffic circulation

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²⁹ Rapp, "History of Cinema Theater Architecture," 62.

³⁰ Thomas W. Lamb, "Construction and Equipment of Modern Theatres," *Motion Picture News* (21 Apr. 1923): 1938.

systems to efficiently and comfortably handle these extraordinary demands was of paramount importance to the type's economic success and its safety. This need determined the size and character of a movie palace's public spaces, which collectively formed a network of large, well ventilated, and attractive areas to facilitate crowd movement. These included grand lobbies, ambulatories, foyers, networks of stairs, exit lobbies, lounges, retiring rooms, and a variety of other spaces. Ideally these spaces would keep patrons awaiting a show separate from those exiting the auditorium. Highly trained corps of ushers ensured the smooth progression of patrons through this carefully planned sequence of public spaces.

Lobbies functioned as the heart of a movie palace's traffic circulation system, responding to the twin requirements of accommodating as large a crowd as possible in relation to the auditorium capacity and of keeping those patrons' minds of the fact they are waiting. According to Bullock, "the lobby must be a place of genuine interest, a place where the waiting throngs may be transformed from the usual pushing, complaining mob into one of a joyous mood."³¹ To meet these demands, architects employed a myriad of characteristic solutions through vastness of scale, elaborate ornamentation, escapist or exotic motifs, and expensive-looking but often faux materials (Figure In-18). Intriguing vistas in the lobby combated feelings of confinement and inspired a desire to explore other parts of the house. Grand staircases with commodious landings beckoned patrons to comfortably ascend to the upper levels of the auditorium. A variety of ancillary spaces

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³¹ Bullock, "The Theatre of To-day," Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide.

throughout the theater -- including foyers, lounges, women's retiring rooms, men's smoking rooms, music rooms, and children's playrooms -- supplemented the lobby as additional areas for waiting crowds' comfort and as further enticements for patrons to explore the theater's upper levels (Figure In-19). Patrons could occupy themselves admiring paintings, statuary, fountains, rugs, tapestries, and furnishings that filled all of these spaces.

Auditoriums responded to a particularly complex set of requirements. The principal concern was creating a feeling of intimacy with the screen in what was characteristically a cavernous space seating several thousands (Figure In-20). Bullock remarked that architects must "give the patrons, no matter in what section of the house they may be seated, a feeling of intimate contact with the stage and all parts of the auditorium."³² Ideally, the balcony would be gently sloped to give patrons the impression they were seated in the orchestra. The proscenium framing the stage and screen was the focal point of the auditorium's design, a hierarchy reinforced by the deference of all other architectural elements. To further increase the audience's feeling of intimacy, the architectural treatment of the sidewalls was often repeated in the organ screens flanking the proscenium and permanent stage settings framing the screen. Décor, like that of the remainder of the theater, was meant to put the audience in a frame of mind to be entertained, and provided a comfortable environment removed from everyday worries, stimulating imaginations, and redolent with a degree of romanticism. Architectural and

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³² Ibid.

decorative features also reinforced the auditorium's feeling of intimacy by being appropriately scaled so as not to overemphasize the space's size.

The advent of motion picture transformed the technological considerations inherent in auditorium design. Sightlines were previously considered satisfactory if every seat had a partial view of the stage, even if patrons were obliged to look around those in front of them or around a column supporting the balcony (Figure In-21).³³ In a motion picture theater, all patrons had to have an unobstructed view of the entire screen, which encouraged the use of a single large balcony, or later a balcony and mezzanine, rather than the two-balcony configuration of a legitimate theater or the galleries of an opera house. Movie palaces further complicated matters by requiring each seat also had unobstructed views of the entire stage and orchestra pit so patrons could experience the variety of entertainment they presented. These requirements necessitated the development of cantilevered balconies spanning vast distances to eliminate support posts from the seating areas (Figure In-22). Acoustical requirements, which impacted the shape, materials, and décor of the auditorium, evolved rapidly during the movie palace era from silent motion pictures and stage shows to talking pictures. Lighting had to be bright enough for patrons to locate their seats but otherwise subdued for atmosphere and film viewing.³⁴ Cove lighting, indirect lighting concealed by ornamental details, was a popular solution since it could be adjusted in color and intensity to alter the mood the auditorium. The requisite organ screens on each side of the proscenium anchored the sidewall

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³³ Sexton and Betts, *American Theatres of Today*, 21-22.

³⁴ David Naylor, *Great American Movie Theaters* (Washington D.C.: Preservation Press, 1987), 21.

composition. Projection booths had to be carefully positioned to avoid obstructions and to ensure a flat as possible angle to the center of the screen in order to avoid distortion and poor focus.

The Big Three

Movie palaces emerged gradually as a distinct type of motion picture theater during the 1910s and early 1920s, and evolved rapidly through the early 1930s due to the efforts of a relatively small group of specialist designers. The so-called “Big Three” firms founded by Thomas Lamb, the Rapp brothers, and John Eberson were the pacesetters, collectively producing the prototypes, developing key functional innovations, canonizing the movie palace itself, and experimenting with new decorative motifs. They led the process of competitive one-upmanship that shaped the field in which each innovation was quickly absorbed and adapted by other architects. In this manner, each of the three firms successively came to the fore as the single dominant influence in movie palace design at different points in the type’s development. Other notable specialist and non-specialist architects also made important contributions, but it was the Big Three who were generally recognized as the leaders of the field by virtue of both the innovations they produced and the vast breadth of their work.

Thomas Lamb, the Rapp brothers, and John Eberson were the foremost members of the first generation of movie palace architects and their offices produced many of the notable specialist firms that emerged afterward. Lamb was the industry’s pioneer, designing a series of highly influential proto-movie palaces in New York during the

1910s, redolent with functional innovations that pointed the way to the movie palace proper. He subsequently emerged as the dean of the classical-derived school of movie palace design, best known for his Adam-influenced work, and was by far the single most prolific specialist of the type, both in the United States and abroad. Rapp & Rapp was the field's chief purveyor of awe-inspiring, regal grandeur aimed at the middle class and rose to national importance by producing the archetypal movie palace. The firm's stock-and-trade was French Renaissance-inspired theaters that characteristically enveloped audiences in a level of luxury and cultured comfort its rivals rarely surpassed. Eberson was the industry's visionary, continually looking ahead to anticipate the next stage of movie palace development. He rose to fame by popularizing the atmospheric movie palace, which had a transformative impact on the field in the United States and in other countries.

The Big Three's dominance also stemmed from their enduring associations with leading theater chains, which brought a continual stream of prestigious commissions into their offices. Lamb was Loew's longtime favored architect; Rapp & Rapp served as Balaban & Katz's and later Paramount-Publix's de facto in-house architectural firm; and Eberson was closely associated with the Interstate Amusement Company and then with Loew's by the mid-1920s. Whereas a smaller specialist firm might be able to count one or two major exhibitors as steady clients, the Big Three had many. For instance, while the Rapps were most closely associated with Balaban & Katz and Paramount-Publix, their firm also received movie palace commissions from the Saxe Brothers of Milwaukee,

Loew's, and Warner Bros, among many others. Other movie palace architects equaled or eclipsed the Big Three in certain aspects of the field, notably in the design of a number of the very largest American movie palaces. The Big Three's work in the United States was confined, with a handful of notable exceptions, to the East, Midwest, and South, which reflected the building activity of their primary clients. Although movie palace design in the West was dominated by a number of regional specialists, the Big Three's work remained a strong influence in the region.

Methodology

This dissertation is a thematic examination of the movie palace utilizing the Big Three's output as a lens to reevaluate the type's evolution and to study lesser-known aspects of its architectural and cultural significance. While Thomas Lamb, the Rapps, and John Eberson are all worthy of (and indeed overdue for) individual study, a collective examination more fully illustrates the competitive process by which the movie palace was developed. A comparative approach also provides a greater variety of examples in terms of design and allows the scope of this study to encompass a wider geographic area.

Movie palaces responded to factors addressed by American studies, film studies, and architectural history. This dissertation frames the type within each of these contexts, focusing each chapter on a factor that shaped their character or an aspect of their architectural and cultural influence. In the final three chapters, these areas are examined through representative case studies drawing from the output of the Lamb, Rapp, and Eberson firms. An effort has been made to balance well-known movie palaces, pivotal

examples that advanced the type, and those that were particularly significant commissions for each firm with less familiar examples that provide an opportunity for original research.

Dissertation research centered upon primary sources and materials contemporary to the movie palace era, much of it overlooked in previous studies of the type or unavailable when those studies were prepared. This process began at archives housing the office material of the three firms that provide the examples for this study. In all three cases, office records have only partially survived, posing a particular challenge. This means, for instance, that client correspondence, job books, drawings, and photographs are variously unavailable. Thus, assembling a complete picture of the work of each firm required piecing together scattered and often contradictory information. Lamb's records have been consulted at the Architectural Archives at the Avery Library at Columbia University; Rapp & Rapp's at the Chicago History Museum; and Eberson's at the Wolfsonian Institute.

The American Theatre Architecture Archive at the Theatre Historical Society of America in Elmhurst, Illinois comprises the largest repository of movie palace-related material and thus supplemented the firms' individual office records. This included ephemera files on architectural firms, individual theaters, and theater exhibitors in addition to blueprints and photographs. Similar material relating to theaters overseas has been gathered through correspondence with the archives of the Theatre Historical

Society's international counterparts: the Australian Cinema and Theatre Society and the Cinema Theatre Association in the United Kingdom.

Film trade journals including *Motion Picture News*, *Moving Picture World*, and *Exhibitor's Herald-World* were major sources for this dissertation. These weekly periodicals covered all aspects of motion picture industry, including theater design. This includes numerous articles written by members of the Lamb, Rapp, and Eberson offices about their individual theaters and work as a whole throughout the movie palace era, giving each a voice while providing firsthand insight into the firms' ever shifting design priorities. Historical societies and local libraries provided material on the individual case studies, while site visits were made to surviving movie palaces, when possible. During the entire research process, an effort has been made to visit as many theaters by each firm as possible to gain a comprehensive understanding of the variety and evolution of their respective work.

The Historiography of the Movie Palace

Movie palaces have attracted a substantial and fast-growing body of related literature; however, very little of this material is scholarly, particularly in relation to architectural history. In many respects, study of the type is still in its infancy, as much basic information beyond broad, overarching themes remains to be laid out, let alone analyzed. Movie palaces and the films they exhibited are bound together within the collective memory of twentieth-century American popular culture, which has associated the type with a higher degree of nostalgia and antiquarianism than other commercial

building types. This has both driven the publication of a large amount of movie palace-related material and perhaps discouraged scholarly study. In relation to architectural history, biases remain concerning the type's merit as good architecture, a sentiment that has also hindered scholarly interest. Movie palaces unabashed commercialism has also discouraged serious study by architectural historians. All of this is beginning to change, but much remains to be done to gain a more complete understanding the building type.

Film historians have produced much of the scholarly material related to the movie palace, establishing the type as a key agent in the legitimization of middle class movie going.³⁵ Notable studies include Lewis Jacobs' *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History*, Tino Balio's *The American Film Industry*, Douglas Gomery's *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, Robert Sklar's *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, and *Film: An International History of the Medium*. Balio notes that nothing did more to gain motion pictures a larger audience than the movie palace's appeal.³⁶ Gomery builds upon this conclusion, detailing how movie palaces were integral to the mass-marketing of film through their location, architecture, the services they provided to audiences, the varied types of entertainment they presented, and the comfortable environment they offered to patrons through such technological innovations as air conditioning. Sklar asserts that movie palaces were never

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³⁵ Lewis Jacob, *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History* (New York: Teachers College Columbia University, 1968); Tino Balio, ed., *The American Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*; Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Robert Sklar, *Film: An International History of the Medium* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993).

³⁶ Balio, *The American Film Industry*, 209.

profitable, even during the boom years of the 1920s, because the studios did not produce a sufficient number of films with adequate drawing power to keep the seats in their vast auditoriums full throughout the year.³⁷ His unstated conclusion is that movie palaces, often exhibiting a mediocre product, were themselves responsible for attracting customers.

The movie palace's prominence during the interwar decades prompted architects, architectural historians, and other writers on architecture to regularly take note of the type's development. Architectural trade publications periodically covered new movie palaces, and the type was included in several contemporary histories of American architecture and building type surveys. Talbot Hamlin's *The American Spirit in Architecture* (1926) includes a section on the development of American theater architecture, including several movie palaces.³⁸ While generally cautious against excess and advocating simplicity in theater design, Hamlin acknowledged that movie palaces successfully fulfilled the public's expectation for festiveness and luxury. Furthermore, Hamlin noted that "the best" movie palaces did much to educate the American public to higher standards of architectural taste. A well-composed movie palace shamed "the slipshod formlessness of the average picture it is supposed to enshrine," in the process

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³⁷ Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 149.

³⁸ Talbot Faulkner Hamlin, *The American Spirit in Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), 297-308.

“some sense of what architecture is, and may be, will develop surely in thousands now ignorant of it.”³⁹

G.H. Edgell’s 1928 *The American Architecture of To-Day*, a history of American architecture and a survey of contemporary building types, also treated movie palaces.⁴⁰ Edgell discussed and illustrated several examples, including the Capitol theaters in New York and Chicago, the Fifth Avenue in Seattle, and the Metropolitan in Boston. Lamb’s New York Capitol is held as being a representative of movie palaces, which “are exuberant in design, a trifle ostentatious and imposing chiefly on account of their enormous scale, ingenuity of planning by which all of a thousand and more seats have an unobstructed view of the screen, and skill and cleverness of the lighting system.”⁴¹ Of the exotic strain of motion picture design, represented here by Eberson’s Capitol in Chicago with its “outdoor” auditorium, Edgell continued, “...one might expect that the building would be vulgar. Actually it is a fairy-land, inviting and compelling the visitor to accept its imaginative and exotic point of view.”⁴² Edgell’s reservation was that “there is something jarring in the sight of commonplace crowds in overshoes hurrying across a lobby which, despite its occasional use of spurious materials, is worthy of Mansart, while the elegantly dressed visitors to the Boston Opera-House stroll during the entr’actes along

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³⁹ Ibid., 298.

⁴⁰ G.H. Edgell, *The American Architecture of To-Day* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1928), 328-334.

⁴¹ Ibid., 329-34.

⁴² Ibid., 332.

a corridor scarcely more imposing than that of the city jail.” Edgell concluded, “none the less, this is typical of America and perhaps not an unhealthy phenomenon.”⁴³

Thomas Tallmadge took a contrasting view in the 1927 edition of *The Story of Architecture in America* that was indicative of the attitudes within a large segment of the architectural establishment.⁴⁴ He noted “An Englishman once viciously remarked that the mission of America was to vulgarize the world. One is prompted to pass the thought along with the observation that the mission of the moving-picture theater is to vulgarize America.”⁴⁵ Tallmadge praised the stark simplicity of early motion picture theaters, while opining that the introduction of other forms of live entertainment had halted the nascent type’s logical development and transformed it into a hybrid legitimate-type theater. In Tallmadge’s view, this led to motion picture theaters of “cavernous” size with the discovery that architecture “if sufficiently tortured, could be made to yell as loud as electric signs of the jazz band.” Indeed, “no more pitiful degradation of an art has ever been presented than the prostitution of architecture that goes on daily in the construction

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⁴³ Ibid., 332-334.

⁴⁴ Thomas E. Tallmadge, *The Story of Architecture in America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1927), 283-285. In the revised 1936 edition, Tallmadge looked back at the motion picture theaters of the 1920s and concluded, “Certainly we are justified in putting down a black mark against the eclectic period for its treatment of the moving picture theater.” He did allow for a few exceptions “when, on rare occasions, the work was placed in the hands of talented architects-such as the Eastman Theater in Rochester, New York, in which McKim, Mead and White were consultants.” However he noted that in theaters of the period, “the main work was done by self-styled picture house specialists and then turned over for completion to the other self-styled specialist of decoration and furnishings.” By the mid-thirties, however, the motion picture theater was said to have found its salvation following the end of palatial motion picture theater construction and the dominance of smaller venues in modern styles. Thomas E. Tallmadge, *The Story of Architecture in America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1936), 283-285.

⁴⁵ Quoted from Tallmadge, *The Story of Architecture in America* (1927), 283-85.

of these huge buildings.” This was detrimental to the public’s taste, as “what of the minds of the youngsters who see about them taste and beauty abashed to the lowest degree?”⁴⁶

Since the end of movie palace construction, architects and architectural historians largely have treated the type in passing, most prominently in studies of typologies, regional works on lost architecture, Art Deco surveys, and local histories.⁴⁷ Nikolaus Pevsner’s *A History of Building Types* treats movie theaters as a postscript to a chapter on theatrical architecture, listing but not illustrating five American examples by Eberson and Lamb. Richard Longstreth’s *Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* included movie palaces as examples to illustrate a larger classification system of commercial building typologies. Lost architecture studies have long been interested in movie palaces, with their customary focus on well-known local buildings eliciting strong nostalgic sentiment because so many prominent examples proved ephemeral.⁴⁸ Movie palace coverage is typically in the form of illustrated, brief historical overviews because detailed analysis is beyond the purview of their format. Movie palaces

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⁴⁶ Ibid., 284.

⁴⁷ Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 88; and Richard Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2000). Other notable building type studies include architect Ben Schlanger, “Motion Picture Theaters,” in *Forms and Functions of twentieth-century Architecture*, ed. Talbot Hamlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 445-477, which primarily addresses post-movie palace motion picture theaters, and Craig Morrison’s brief pictorial study, “Theaters and Movie Houses,” in *Built in the USA: American Buildings from Airports to Zoos*, ed. Dianne Maddex (Washington DC: The Preservation Press, 1985), 162-165.

⁴⁸ Representative examples include Nathan Silver, *Lost New York* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1967), 72-87; David Garrard Lowe, *Lost Chicago* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1975; reprint, New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 2000), 204-209; James M. Goode, *Capital Losses: A Cultural History of Washington’s Destroyed Buildings* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979), 372-382; Larry Millett, *Lost Twin Cities* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1992), 296-299; Steven B. Strom, *Houston Lost and Unbuilt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 25-39; Dan Austin, *Lost Detroit* (Charleston: History Press, 2010), 39-54 and 119-148; and Dan Austin, *Forgotten Landmarks of Detroit* (Charleston: History Press, 2012), 225-240.

are commonly included in studies of Art Deco architecture since they are particularly familiar examples to the general public, especially at the local level.⁴⁹ Art Deco exhibition catalogues and surveys of the 1980s and 1990s established the movie palace's importance in widely popularizing the style by making the ephemeral environments of the Paris Exposition and Hollywood movies permanent. In doing so, they provided a large segment of the American public with its initial firsthand exposure to the new style.

By the 1970s and increasingly thereafter, regional architectural histories have included movie palaces. This attention initially stemmed from a wider contemporary reappraisal of architecture of the nineteen-twenties, an increased interest in commercial architecture, and the type's renewed prominence resulting from early preservation efforts. Movie palace coverage is usually limited to brief descriptive passages on one or two locally prominent examples, but occasionally in-depth coverage of the type is offered. Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins' *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism between the Two World Wars* features a scholarly analysis of local movie palaces within the broader context of American motion picture theater's development, aided by the city boasting so many of the transformative examples of the

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⁴⁹Examples include Alastair Duncan, *American Art Deco* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1986), 146-206; Barbara Capitman, Michael D. Kinerk, and Dennis Wilhelm, *Rediscovering Art Deco USA: A Nationwide Tour of Architectural Delights* (New York: Viking Studio Books, 1994), 11-47 and coverage of specific cities; Bevis Hillier and Stephen Escritt, *Art Deco Style* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), 57-109. More recent studies such as *Art Deco, 1910-1939*, edited by Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood, (London: V&A Publications, 2003), 245-259, treat movie palaces in passing within their larger discussions of Art Deco architecture. .

type, and touches upon many of the issues that have occupied subsequent specialist studies.⁵⁰

The majority of movie palace-related literature is in the form of specialist studies. A good deal of this material is non-scholarly, driven by nostalgia and antiquarianism, and written by individuals with a sentimental attachment to the type, such as former ushers, projectionists, theater organists, and moviegoers. The resulting publications most often take the form of brief historical overviews, recollections, and pictorial histories. They characteristically divorce movie palaces from the larger contexts that shaped their design, such as their architects' work, other local theaters, the surrounding urban environment, contemporary architectural developments, and the motion picture exhibition industry as a whole.

Ben Hall's *The Best Remaining Seats: The Story of the Golden Age of the Movie Palace*, published in 1961, was the first major retrospective study of the type.⁵¹ Hall framed it as a tribute to the recently demolished Roxy (Walter W. Ahlschlager, 1927) in New York, his favorite movie palace. While nostalgic, this seminal study not only conveyed the experience of visiting a movie palace, but introduced several other important aspects: exhibitors, architects, evolving designs, stage shows, and theater

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⁵⁰ Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1987), 244-264. Other examples of this approach include Frank E. Sanchis, *American Architecture, Westchester County, New York: Colonial to Contemporary* (Croton-on-Hudson, NY: North River Press, 1977), 359-364; and Douglass Shand-Tucci, *Built in Boston: City and Suburb, 1800-1950* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), 206-220.

⁵¹ Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats*. Hall was the founder of the Theatre Historical Society of America in 1969.

organs. In retrospect, Hall's recognition of the movie palace's significance in the early 1960s was far ahead of its time as the demolition of many of the most significant examples occurred over the next twenty years.

A new wave of movie palace-related publications appeared in the early 1980s, driven by the type's transitional status during the decade: many of the most prominent examples continued to be demolished, a number faced closure and uncertain futures, while others were being revived as performing arts centers.⁵² David Naylor's *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy*, published in 1981, was the most ambitious and influential study to date, offering a general survey of movie palace architecture that remains a standard study of the type. Subsequent scholarship in the 1980s was narrower in focus, including Naylor's own *Great American Movie Theaters*, a guidebook to surviving examples, and Joseph M. Valerio's *Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse*, which focused on technical issues of adaptive use.

The current generation of specialist movie palace publications appeared in the early 2000s and largely has been regional in focus and pictorial in format.⁵³ Ross Melnick

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⁵² David Naylor, *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981); Naylor, *Great American Movie Theaters*; and Joseph M. Valerio, *Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse* (New York: Educational Facilities Laboratories, 1982).

⁵³ Ross Melnick and Andreas Fuchs, *Cinema Treasures: A New Look at Classic Movie Theaters* (St. Paul: MBI Publishing Company, 2004); Janna Jones, *The Southern Movie Palace: Rise, Fall, and Resurrection* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Robert K. Headley, *Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington D.C.: An Illustrated History of Parlors, Palaces and Multiplexes in the Metropolitan Area, 1894-1997* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1999); Robert K. Headley, *Motion Picture Exhibition in Baltimore: An Illustrated History and Directory of Theaters, 1895-2004* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006); Konrad Schiecke, *Historic Theatres in Illinois, 1883-1960* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006); and David Welling, *Cinema Houston: From Nickelodeon to Megaplex* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007). Nostalgic histories drawn from the recollections of former patrons and employees include John Margolies and Emily Gwathmey's *Ticket to Paradise*:

and Andreas Fuch's *Cinema Treasures: A New Look at Classic Movie Theaters* is a notable exception and something of a hybrid study, with one part a well-illustrated scholarly history of American film exhibition that contextualizes the development of movie palaces and other types of motion picture theaters as outgrowths of the evolving industry combined with a series of brief, nostalgic histories of surviving examples. Janna Jones' *The Southern Movie Palace: Rise, Fall, and Resurrection* examines movie palace segregation and the interpretation of this past in preserved theaters. Regional studies also include both encyclopedic compendiums and historic overviews of local motion picture exhibition such as Robert K. Headley's *Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington D.C.: An Illustrated History of Parlors, Palaces and Multiplexes in the Metropolitan Area, 1894-1997* and *Motion Picture Exhibition in Baltimore: An Illustrated History and Directory of Theaters, 1895-2004*; Konrad Schiecke's *Historic Movie Theatres in Illinois, 1883-1960*; and David Welling's *Cinema Houston: From Nickelodeon to Megaplex*.

Movie palaces exerted a wide influence over motion picture theater design outside the United States, but this has not yet been examined comprehensively. However, several

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American Movie Theaters and How We Had Fun (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1991). Pictorial histories are by far the fastest growing segment of specialist movie palace publications, varying widely in terms of their written content but typically offering brief introductory essays and descriptive or anecdotal captions. Representative works include Irvin R. Glazer's *Philadelphia Theaters: A Pictorial Architectural History* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1994); Gary Lacher and Steve Stone's *Theatres of Portland* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009); Arthur Singer and Ron Goodman's *Boston's Downtown Movie Palaces* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2011); and Jack Tillmany's three volume series on Bay Area theaters: Jack Tillmany, *Theatres of San Francisco* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), Jack Tillmany and Jennifer Dowling, *Theatres of Oakland* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), and Jack Tillmany and Gary Lee Parks, *Theatres of the San Francisco Peninsula* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2011).

studies have examined the type's influence in relation to specific countries.⁵⁴ Concerning Britain, works include Dennis Sharp's *The Picture Palace and Other Building for the Movies*, David Atwell's *Cathedrals of the Movies: A History of British Cinemas and their Audiences*, Richard Gray's *Cinemas in Britain: One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture*, and Allen Eyles' multi-volume series covering the major British cinema chains. Ross Thorne's *Picture Palace Architecture in Australia and Cinemas of Australia via USA* as well as Simon Brand's *Picture Palaces and Flea-Pits: Eighty Years of Australians at the Pictures* treat Australian movie palaces. Canadian movie palaces are examined in John C. Lindsey's *Turn Out the Stars Before Leaving: The Story of Canada's Theatres* and *Palaces of the Night: Canada's Grand Theatres*. French motion picture theaters are examined in Francis Lacloche's *Architectures de Cinemas* and India's in David Vinnels' and Brent Skelly's *Bollywood Showplaces: Cinema Theatres in India*.

The Theatre Historical Society is the largest source of current movie palace-related publications through its quarterly journal, *Marquee*, and an annual. *Marquee's*

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⁵⁴ Dennis Sharp, *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969); David Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies: A History of British Cinemas and their Audiences* (London: The Architectural Press, 1980); Richard Gray, *Cinemas in Britain: One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture* (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1996); Allen Eyles, *Gaumont British Cinemas* (Burgess Hill, West Sussex: Cinema Theatre Association, 1996); Allen Eyles, *The Granada Theatres* (London: Cinema Theatre Association, 1998); Allen Eyles, *Odeon Cinemas 1: Oscar Deutsch Entertains our Nation* (London: Cinema Theatre Association, 2002); Allen Eyles, *Odeon Cinemas 2: From J. Arthur Rank to the Multiplex* (London: Cinema Theatre Association, 2005); Ross Thorne, *Picture Palace Architecture in Australia* (Melbourne: Sun Book Pty Ltd, 1976); Ross Thorne, *Cinemas of Australia via USA* (Sydney: Architecture Department of Sydney University, 1981); and Simon Brand, *Picture Palaces and Flea-Pits: Eighty Years of Australians at the Pictures* (Sydney: Dreamweaver Books, 1983).

⁵⁴ John C. Lindsey, *Turn Out the Stars Before Leaving: The Story of Canada's Theatres* (Erin, Ontario: The Boston Mills Press, 1983); John C. Lindsey, *Palaces of the Night: Canada's Grand Theatres* (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 1999); Francis Lacloche, *Architectures de Cinemas* (Paris: Éditions du Moniteur, 1981); and David Vinnels and Brent Skelly, *Bollywood Showplaces: Cinema Theatres in India* (Cambridge: E&E Plumridge Ltd., 2002).

content is primarily made up of member research, which ranges from scholarly articles on various aspects of motion picture exhibition to the more frequent pictorial features on local theaters. Its annual examines a single topic, typically an in-depth pictorial history of a single movie palace. The Theatre Historical Society's international counterparts (the United Kingdom's Cinema Theatre Association and the Australian Cinema and Theatre Society) produce similar publications.

In movie palace scholarship there is a notable absence of published monographs on the type's leading architects, Lamb, the Rapps, and Eberson. Although scholars such as Gomery have traced the strategies used by movie palace architects on behalf of exhibitors in order to set themselves apart from their competition, there are no substantial studies of the differing ways the major architectural firms achieved these aims. There have been a handful of scholarly studies of movie palace architects with regional practices.⁵⁵ Maggie Valentine's *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre, Starring S. Charles Lee* uses Lee, a regional specialist based in Southern California, as a lens to trace the development of the motion picture theater. The effectiveness of this approach demonstrates the need for such studies focusing on the leading movie palace architects.

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⁵⁵ Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk*. Other monographs on regional architects who designed notable movie palaces include Therese Poletti's *Art Deco San Francisco: The Architecture of Timothy Pflueger* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008); Ruth Quinn's *Weaver of Dreams: The Life and Architecture of Robert C. Reamer* (Gardiner, MT: Leslie & Ruth Quinn Publishers, 2004); and Richard E. Polton's *The Life & Times of Fred Wesley Wentworth: The Architect Who Shaped Paterson, NJ and its People* (Rutgers: Pine Hill Architectural Press, 2012).

Lamb-related publications have focused on selected aspects of his career: his early work, Canadian theaters, and best-known movie palaces in the United States.⁵⁶ Hilary Russell's "An Architect's Progress: Thomas White Lamb" is the most detailed account of his career, although it primarily focuses on his New York work through the 1910s. There are also several published histories of individual Lamb theaters, particularly in Canada. These include Mary Bishop's *The Ohio Theatre, 1928-1978*, Constance Olsheski's *Pantages Theater: Rebirth of a Landmark*, and Hilary Russell's "All that Glitters: A Memorial to Ottawa's Capitol Theatre and its Predecessors" and *Double Take: The Story of the Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres*. Preston J. Kaufmann's *Fox: The Last Word, Story of the World's Finest Theatre* is especially notable as the most extensive study of a movie palace yet produced, documenting not only the Fox Theater in San Francisco's architecture but also its design evolution, the major events held there, all of the films shown there, and the ultimately unsuccessful struggle for its preservation. The Theatre Historical Society has also published a number of pictorial studies of Lamb movie palaces.

Rapp & Rapp-related publications primarily focus on the firm's early Balaban & Katz commissions and various movie palaces restored as performing arts centers.⁵⁷ In

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⁵⁶ Mary Bishop, *Ohio Theatre, 1928-1978* (Columbus: Columbus Association for the Performing Arts, 1978); Constance Olsheski, *Pantages Theatre: Rebirth of a Landmark* (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 1989); Hilary Russell, "All that Glitters: A Memorial to Ottawa's Capitol Theatre and its Predecessors," *Canadian Historic Sites* 13 (1975): 5-125; Hilary Russell, *Double Take: The Story of the Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres* (Toronto: Dundurn Press Limited, 1989); and Preston J. Kaufmann, *Fox: The Last Word, Story of the World's Finest Theatre* (Pasadena: Showcase Publications, 1979).

⁵⁷ Ann Rutherford Fair, "The American Movie Palace: Three Theatres by Rapp and Rapp" (MA thesis, University of Virginia, 1982); Jason Tippeconnic Fox, "An Acre of Seats in a Palace of Splendor: Three Paramount Theatres by Rapp & Rapp" (MA thesis, University of Virginia, 2004); Jason Tippeconnic Fox,

comparison to Lamb and Eberson, the firm's career has attracted less individual interest in architectural history and specialist literature. Scholarly work includes a pair of masters theses: Ann Rutherford Fair's "The American Movie Palace: Three Theatres by Rapp & Rapp" and Jason Tippeconnic Fox's "An Acre of Seats in a Palace of Splendor: Three Paramount Theatres by Rapp & Rapp." The former examines three early Balaban & Katz movie palaces within the context of larger narrative of theatrical architecture, while the latter builds upon it by examining later work in relation to stylistic evolution and urban context. Fox's "An Acre of Entertainment for the Entire Community: Rapp & Rapp's Paramount Theatre in Charlottesville, Virginia," examines the firm's movie palace designs of the early thirties. Two histories of Balaban & Katz have mentioned the Rapps and their work: Carrie Balaban's biography of her husband, *Continuous Performance: The Story of A.J. Balaban* and David Balaban's *The Chicago Movie Palaces of Balaban & Katz*, a pictorial history. Publications on individual Rapp theaters, which tend to be pictorial and nostalgic rather than scholarly, include Pat Halloran's *The Orpheum: Where Broadway Meets Beale*, Barbara J. Hauck's *A Picture Palace Transformed: How Erie's Warner Theatre Survived a Changing World*, the Will County Cultural Arts Association's

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"An Acre of Entertainment for the Entire Community: Rapp & Rapp's Paramount Theatre in Charlottesville, Virginia," *ARRIS: Journal of the Southeast Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians* 19 (2008): 38-55; Carrie Balaban, *Continuous Performance: The Story of A.J. Balaban* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1942); David Balaban, *The Chicago Movie Palaces of Balaban & Katz* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006); Pat Halloran, *The Orpheum: Where Broadway Meets Beale* (Memphis: Lithograph Publishing Company, 1997); Barbara J. Hauck, *A Picture Palace Transformed: How Erie's Warner Theatre Survived a Changing World* (Erie: Warner Theatre Preservation Trust, 2009); and Will County Cultural Arts Association, *Rialto: Jewel of Joliet* (Joliet: Will County Cultural Arts Association, 1977).

Rialto: Jewel of Joliet, and a number of pictorial studies by the Theatre Historical Society.

Eberson has garnered the most publications among movie palace architects, no doubt due to the distinctive nature of his atmospheric theaters. There has as yet been no comprehensive study of Eberson's work, but much has been published on specific aspects of his career and individual theaters.⁵⁸ Studies of Eberson's atmospheric designs include Jane Preddy's *Palaces of Dreams: The Movie Theatres of John Eberson*, an exhibition catalogue of architectural drawings and photographs; the Theatre Historical Society's *A John Eberson Scrapbook*, a pictorial survey of selected surviving theaters; and T.P. Luna's "Those Enterprising Ebersons," a brief overview of the firm's career. Eberson's Art Deco work is given a scholarly treatment in *Glitz, Glamour & Sparkle: The Deco Theatres of John Eberson*. Regional studies include Elroy Quenroe's "John Eberson in Richmond, Virginia: Architect for the Twenties" and Ann Kathryn Yoklavich's *John Eberson's Theaters in Texas*. Publications on individual Eberson theaters include Keith Wondra's *From the Land of Andalusia to the Wheat Fields of Kansas* and numerous Theatre Historical Society pictorial studies.

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⁵⁸ Jane Preddy, *Palaces of Dreams: The Movie Theatres of John Eberson* (San Antonio: McNay Art Museum, 1990); Steve Levin, ed., *A John Eberson Scrapbook* (Chicago: Theatre Historical Society, 2000); T.P. Luna, "Those Enterprising Ebersons," *Marquee* 23, no. 1(1991): 25-30; Jane Preddy, ed., *Glitz, Glamour & Sparkle: The Deco Theatres of John Eberson* (Chicago: Theatre Historical Society of America, 1989); Elroy E. Quenroe, "John Eberson in Richmond, Virginia: Architect for the Twenties" (MA thesis, University of Virginia, 1975); Ann Kathryn Yoklavich, *John Eberson's Theaters in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 1987); and Keith Wondra, *From the Land of Andalusia to the Wheat Fields of Kansas* (Lexington: Create Space, 2011).

This dissertation is structured as a response to the existing body of movie palace-related literature, making a number of new contributions to the study of the type by addressing deficiencies in existing scholarship. The first four chapters contextualize and reevaluate movie palace development, while the final two examine new areas of its significance within architectural history. First, it firmly situates the movie palace as a product of the motion picture exhibition industry. Second, it provides the first comprehensive comparative study of the Lamb, Rapp, and Eberson firms. Third, it traces their evolving theatrical designs, focusing on each firm's production of key innovations that shaped the type's development throughout its brief existence. Fourth, it examines the movie palace's role as an influential tastemaker. Finally, it builds upon existing studies by tracing the influence of the movie palace format in individual countries by undertaking a wider examination of its transmission overseas.

Dissertation Chapters

Chapter One, "The Rise of a Movie Palace Industry: Motion Picture Exhibition in the United States, 1893-1932," situates this dissertation alongside existing studies that examine the movie palace as a product of the motion picture business. Laying out this association is critical as it is what drove the rapid evolution of motion picture theaters from their inception to the rise of the movie palace. While scholars of film history have extensively documented this background, it has been largely overlooked in architectural histories of the type.

Chapter Two, “Movie Palace Architects: Thomas W. Lamb, Rapp & Rapp, and John Eberson,” establishes the three leading movie palace specialist firms which largely shaped the type’s design. It begins with an introduction to movie palace architects, tracing how specialists came to dominate the field, and continues with the first in-depth comparative overview of Lamb, the Rapps, and Eberson. The chapter illustrates their family backgrounds, education, early work, the leading figures within each firm, and the history of their practices, focusing on the commonalities that influenced the nature of movie palace design.

Chapters Three and Four, “The Big Three: Inventing the Movie Palace, 1913-1926” and “The Big Three: The Evolving Movie Palace, 1927-1932,” frame the movie palace’s emergence and subsequent evolution as a process of continual competitive one-upmanship among a small group of architects working for rival film exhibitors. Lamb, the Rapps, and Eberson were at the center of this process, successively producing the major design innovations that fueled the type’s development, which were adopted and further adapted by other movie palace architects. These two chapters examine this process through the first major comparative study of the three leading specialist firms’ work, focusing on six significant periods representing major advances in movie palace design. In each period, one or more of the three firms produced a theater that made it *the* most influential force in the type’s development. To provide a fuller picture of movie palace design in each period, the six sections examine not only the most innovative single example but also representative movie palaces produced by the other two leading firms.

Throughout both chapters, an emphasis is placed upon contextualizing each example as a product of constantly evolving stylistic, functional, and technological requirements as well as a response to local conditions.

Chapter Five, “Illuminating Main Street: Marketing the Movie Palace as a Tastemaker,” establishes the type’s role in exposing and educating moviegoers on historical and modernist modes of art, architecture, and furnishings. While motion pictures’ role as a tastemaker has been well documented, the movie palace’s interrelated influence on the American public has only been examined in passing. The latter was most significant in relation to the domestic interior, where the type was marketed as a vehicle to promote better taste and to Americanize its working-class, ethnic, and immigrant audiences. In the course of this examination, the chapter details movie palaces’ ancillary spaces, which were critical to the type’s efficient operation.

Chapter Six, “Exporting the Movie Palace: The Big Three’s International Commissions and Influence,” positions the spread of the movie palace outside the United States as a notable episode within the narrative of the internationalization of American architecture. The Lamb, Rapp, and Eberson offices were at the center of this process, which encompassed both their own foreign commissions and the influence that their work in the United States yielded over their counterparts abroad. This was among the most significant aspects of their careers, but has been largely neglected within both existing studies of the type and the wider realm of architectural history. This chapter redresses this oversight by providing an overview of their respective international commissions and by

examining the transmission of the movie palace abroad in detail through three case studies that demonstrate different means by which this process occurred.

An Afterward situates the movie palace within the context of the subsequent course of motion picture exhibition by briefly chronicling Lamb, Rapp, and Eberson's later careers. Each firm found varying levels of success responding to the vast changes wrought within the industry by the Depression. While all three firms were leaders in the movie palace years, only Eberson would clearly emerge as a major influence in shaping the dramatically different type of movie theater that emerged beginning in the mid-1930s.

Chapter 1

The Rise of a Movie Palace Industry: Motion Picture Exhibition in the United States, 1893-1932

Americans did not readily embrace motion pictures, and thus the ongoing challenge for film entrepreneurs during the medium's formative years was carving out a niche between entrenched high-class entertainments (such as opera, theater, and classical music concerts) and the multitude of popular entertainments, including vaudeville, popular music, and the circus.¹ Between the 1890s and the early 1910s, motion picture exhibitors experimented with a succession of venues in an effort to draw patronage away from established forms of entertainment. The movie palace of the 1920s was the culmination of these efforts, definitively positioning motion pictures as the leading form of American mass entertainment.

Finding an Audience: Kinetoscope to Nickelodeon, 1893-1909

The introduction of motion pictures in the United States in the last decade of the nineteenth century occurred in the immediate aftermath of the nation's emergence as a predominantly urban industrial society.² Many American cities had doubled in population as people flocked from the countryside to urban centers. At the same time, a wave of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe brought new languages, cultures, customs, and religious institutions to American shores. Streetcar lines pushed farther and farther

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¹ The earliest years of American motion picture exhibition are detailed in Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 3-17 and Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, rev. and updated ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 3-17.

²For American urbanization as it relates to the formative years of motion picture exhibition see Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 3-5.

outward from city centers to sprout new suburbs populated by the middle classes, while industry continued to move into the city center.

The character of American cities changed in the face of these developments. Previously, despite the variety of castes and classes, cities were places in which people of all income levels and occupations lived in close quarters and intermingled with one another to an extent. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, a new social structure eradicated such proximity and chance encounters. Cities in the United States became increasingly segregated: an individual's geospatial boundaries were defined by factors such as social class, earned income, occupation, and national origin. Instead of one community, the American city was composed of many parallel communities separated by social barriers.

This socioeconomic segregation extended to forms of entertainment. The upper classes patronized legitimate theaters, opera, country clubs, and athletic events. Middle class Americans spent much of their free time at relaxing or socializing at home.³ However, the middle class did have organized leisure activities such as concerts, lectures, libraries, churches, and church-affiliated associations like the YMCA. Limited leisure time and income meant that the working-class individuals had fewer forms of available entertainment. Their social activities included social clubs, church gatherings, and fraternal organizations. However, given their limited leisure time, the working class preferred more informal forms of recreation such as bowling, dancing, or socializing in neighborhood saloons, pool halls, and shooting galleries. Contemporaneously, during the

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³ On middle class entertainment in the late nineteenth century, see David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14-15.

1890s, built environments began to mirror these new forms of entertainment and amusement parks, major league baseball stadia, dime museums, and vaudeville theaters dotted the urban landscape. These venues were rarely affordable to the working class, and motion pictures filled this void, providing an affordable and readily accessible pastime.

Motion pictures initially were introduced to Americans as the phonograph had been: instead of being exhibited to large audiences, early films were shown to individual patrons in amusement parlors as a novelty. Between 1889 and 1892, Thomas Alva Edison and his assistant William Kennedy Laurie Dickson developed the Kinetoscope, a peepshow machine that produced moving images by rotating 50-foot reels of 35-mm. sequential black and white photographs on a cylinder, and the Kinetograph, a motion picture camera.⁴ The new machine's first official public demonstration was held on 9 May 1893, as part of a lecture given by George Hopkins at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, and the peep show era began on 14 April 1894 when the Holland brothers opened the first Kinetoscope parlor at 1155 Broadway in New York.⁵ Inside, a converted shoe store had been outfitted with ten machines arranged in two rows of five. Customers paid 25¢ access five machines, or bought two tickets to see all ten descriptively titled films lasting up to 90 seconds. Kinetoscopes spread across the country as they were installed in penny arcades and hotels, but the public's fascination began to wane by 1896, as they ultimately preferred seeing performers live on stage.

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⁴ On peep shows, see Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 9-13, Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 4-6, Barbara Stones, *America Goes to the Movies: 100 Years of Motion Picture Exhibition* (North Hollywood: National Association of Theatre Owners, 1993), 5-6, and David Robinson, *From Peep Show to Palace: The Birth of American Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 19-51.

⁵ Robinson, *From Peep Show to Palace*, 39 and 45-46.

The alternative to the peep show format arose through the efforts of Auguste and Louis Lumière in France, who modeled their approach after the theater.⁶ Their strategy involved filling a hall with customers and projecting films into a special surface. The Lumière brothers studied Edison's technology and developed a camera, printer, and projector, called the Cinématographe, which debuted on 28 December 1895 at a public exhibition in the basement of a Paris café. They quickly brought the Cinématographe to the United States and began producing films recording everyday life and important events. In response, Edison developed the Vitascope, which was modeled after the Cinématographe and first exhibited in 1896. Vitascope halls opened in both major cities and rural areas across the United States. A difficulty their operators encountered was the persistent public perception of film as a novelty rather than a lasting new form of entertainment. Vitascope halls routinely attracted large crowds curious to view the new medium during their first months of operation but public curiosity was soon satisfied and attendance ebbed, making the format a short-lived phenomenon.

Film projection systems were employed in a variety of venues. Amusement parks proliferated in the late nineteenth century at the end of streetcar lines in numerous American urban areas. Operating during the summer months, they often exhibited Vitascope movies in the open air, alongside an assortment of concerts, circus acts, rides, and vaudeville productions. While the format proved popular and persisted through the nickelodeon era, amusement parks operated only seasonally and were confined to the periphery of urban areas. Motion pictures made inroads outside the nation's large urban

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⁶Early motion picture exhibition, including the Lumière brothers and early venues, is discussed in Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 6-14.

areas through the efforts of traveling exhibitors, a well-established tradition in rural and small-town America. Itinerant exhibitors adopted three primary strategies: booking one-night shows in a myriad of pre-existing local spaces such as opera houses, town halls, courthouses, libraries, and YMCA halls; erecting their own temporary structures; or presenting movies in open-air.⁷ These exhibition formats proved successful until dedicated motion picture theaters were widely established in small-town America.

Vaudeville theaters were the most promising venues in which to establish motion pictures as a popular form of American mass entertainment. By the 1890s, they were well established in every major American city and firmly oriented toward the middle-class.⁸ Their programs typically consisted of eight, unrelated 10-to-20-minute acts that ran continuously throughout the day that included something for everyone: operatic singers, animal acts, acrobats and other circus-type performers, and condensed versions of popular plays. Initial American demonstrations of motion picture technology were often held in vaudeville theaters.⁹ The new medium appealed to vaudeville theater operators who were continually searching for something new to offer their audiences; films were incorporated as one 15-minute act among the eight in the program. The medium was initially very successful, and vaudeville managers noted both a doubling of weekly receipts and a more “select” class of patronage.¹⁰ Both Edison and the Lumières produced films geared directly to vaudeville audiences, with subject matters that ranged from

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⁷ An additional venue for rural Americans to see motion pictures was the circus.

⁸ The 1890s also saw the formation of the major vaudeville chains: the Keith’s in the east, Orpheum and Pantages west of the Mississippi, and numerous smaller regional chains throughout the country.

⁹ For instance, in 1896-97, both Vitascope and Cinématographe made their New York debuts in vaudeville theaters. Cinématographe made its American debut at Keith’s Union Square vaudeville theater in June of 1896. Two months later, the Vitascope was employed at Koster and Bial’s vaudeville theater.

¹⁰ Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 13.

recordings of vaudeville acts to local scenes to travelogues. Motion picture presentation in vaudeville theaters reached its pinnacle in 1898, during the Spanish-American War. The medium successfully capitalized on the public's patriotism, drawing large crowds to witness firsthand both the war's naval battles and celebratory scenes across the home front. However, vaudeville audiences' fascination with the new medium diminished by the end of the Spanish-American War. Motion pictures proved popular as a means to see major events, but they could not compete with the popularity of live vaudeville acts day-to-day to inspire lasting interest in the medium among a broad spectrum of the American public.

Nickelodeons, urban venues presenting motion pictures as their primary attraction, filled this void and transformed the nascent medium of film into a mass entertainment industry.¹¹ Although motion pictures had been exhibited in converted storefronts in the medium's formative years, it was not until 1905 that the nickelodeon format of offering films at low prices (often for nickel) in a repurposed commercial space gained widespread popularity and seemingly appeared everywhere at once. By 1908, nickelodeons assumed the status of the most ubiquitous venue for motion picture exhibition, a fixture in both large cities and small towns. In 1910, it was estimated that there were between 5,000 to 10,000 nickelodeons across the country. The same year, one estimate put their total weekly attendance at around 26 million patrons, or roughly one-fifth of all Americans.

The format's success was due to its working-class and immigrant patrons, as the venue fulfilled each group's need for accessible and inexpensive entertainment.

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¹¹ Regarding nickelodeons see Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 18-33 and Sklar, *Movie-Made*, 18-32.

Recognizing this need, entrepreneurs built nickelodeons in working-class neighborhoods, and this response to working-class need for cheap entertainment fostered a viable business and social phenomenon. As late as 1910, the ideal location for a nickelodeon was considered “a densely populated workingman’s residence section, with a frontage on a much traveled business street.”¹² Attendance thrived in areas where several nickelodeons crowded together in such business districts.

A nickelodeon’s architectural design was of paramount importance to its success. As nickelodeon operators seldom advertised in newspapers, it was the theater’s architecture (along with a little sidewalk ballyhoo in the form of a barker or a blaring phonograph) that drew passersby from the street. Accordingly, much of the expense in a nickelodeon’s conversion from a variety of storefront types into a theater was expended on the façade. The objective in nickelodeon design was to emulate, at as little cost as possible, a vaudeville theater. In practice, however, architectural similarities were limited. The nickelodeon’s most characteristic and novel exterior features were the profusion of lights outlining the façade, the prominence of the theater’s name, posters announcing the day’s films, and the inclusion of a ticket booth.¹³ Electric lights were a particularly novel symbol of modernity to potential customers at a time when very few had this amenity in their own homes.

In contrast to nickelodeons’ bombastic facades, their interiors were designed as an afterthought. They were characteristically simple in both layout and décor, the auditorium typically comprising the only interior space. Auditoriums were characteristically small,

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¹² Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 16.

¹³ It was the Nickelodeon that codified the ticket booth as an essential part of a motion picture theater. Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 19.

crowded, dark, stuffy, and uncomfortable.¹⁴ They typically contained from 50 to 300 unfixed wooden chairs or benches. There was no proper stage (a simple platform in the front of the room served this purpose), and the modestly sized screen was attached directly to the rear wall. Projection quality was poor and film deteriorated rapidly with each use.

While nickelodeons offered few amenities and little comfort, audiences rallied because their entertainment programs typically lasted only 15 to 20 minutes. This brevity was another way in which nickelodeons targeted the working-class (including housewives with babies, school children on their way home, factory workers getting off their shifts, and entire families on the weekend) because such classes were short on leisure time.¹⁵ The program usually began with a popular song but centered on motion pictures in the form of a variety of shorts including comedies, documentaries, dramas, and news.

The nickelodeon's success demonstrated the money-earning potential of motion picture exhibition. They proved very lucrative for theater owners, as weekly operating expenses were low, typically no more than a few hundred dollars. In contrast, a nickelodeon in a large city might take in as much as \$2,000 a week.¹⁶ Having solidified a loyal audience, nickelodeon operators began to look towards the middle-classes with their greater discretionary income and copious amounts of leisure time. Middle class patrons were loath to patronize nickelodeons, however, because all they knew of them stemmed from the reports of reformers or the police who ventured into the working class

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¹⁴ Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 16-17.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 29.

neighborhoods in which they were located.¹⁷ Progressive-era reformers were particularly alarmed about nickelodeons, presenting them to the middle class as yet another example of a corrupt institution prevalent in working-class districts, alongside brothels, gambling dens, and criminal hangouts. With such press, the nickelodeon became a liability to the motion picture industry's growth and future profits.

In an attempt to dispel negative associations, nickelodeon operators gradually instituted changes that carried the type farther from its original model, including raising the admission cost from a nickel to a dime (which was still less than the cost of vaudeville). Theater owners also attempted to elevate nickelodeons' respectability by marketing themselves directly to the "New American Woman" and her children through special "tea hour" screenings.¹⁸ Filmmakers made their own contributions to the effort to elevate the medium by creating popular short-films encapsulating works of literature. All of these changes heralded a transitional period in American motion picture exhibition. By 1909, commentators pronounced the end of the nickelodeon era, and accurately predicted a move towards larger motion picture theaters presenting both films and live entertainment.

Regional Exhibitors and the Development of the Movie Palace, 1910-1925

Between 1910 and 1925, motion picture exhibition underwent four major changes. First was the rise of regional motion picture exhibitors that monopolized the industry. Second was the emergence of higher-quality, feature length-films. Third was the gradual development of the movie palace exhibition format, an innovation spread by

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¹⁷ Ibid., 18-19.

¹⁸ Ibid., 31.

regional chains. Fourth was the establishment of motion pictures as the most popular form of mass entertainment for a broad spectrum of the American public, a process accomplished in no small part through the creation of the movie palace.

Regional motion picture exhibitors' ascendance can be viewed within the context of the ongoing growth of national retail chains in the United States, such as A & P grocery stores and F.W. Woolworth.¹⁹ Motion picture exhibitors adopted chain retail methods in contrast to the "mom and pop" operations that defined the industry during the nickelodeon era, and were operated from a central office wherein all areas were handled by specialized departments. Chain methods allowed motion picture exhibitors to keep costs low through the economies of scale, i.e., using fixed costs spread over an increasing number of theaters. A chain's monopsony buying power (when the economic power of a company is one in which only a limited number of buyers purchase a good or service) also kept costs down. These practices lowered operating costs while increasing sales volume, allowed for a speed of service delivery, standardized theaters, and ultimately increased profits.

Marcus Loew (1870-1927), William Fox (1879-1952), and Adolph Zukor (1873-1976) were among the motion picture industry's leaders during the nickelodeon to movie palace transition.²⁰ Loew, a former furrier, began his career in show business first operating penny arcades then nickelodeons. In 1906, he began to differentiate his growing chain from competing nickelodeons and vaudeville houses by taking over

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¹⁹ The connection between the establishment of national theater chains and the contemporary development of retail chains is detailed in *Ibid.*, 34-36. For an overview of chain store methods, see Godfrey M. Lebbhar, *Chain Stores in America, 1859-1959* (New York: Chain Store Publishing Corporation, 1959), 3-22 and 75-98.

²⁰ Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 41. Adolph Zukor lived to the age of 103.

unsuccessful New York-area theaters and instituting a new format. Called "small time vaudeville," Loew's program differed from "big time vaudeville," which featured two performances a day with top-name headliners, in that it played many shows throughout the day and featured less well-known performers. The latter also featured films between its vaudeville acts, all of which was offered at a much lower cost than big time vaudeville acts.²¹ Loew's large, 1,000 plus-seat small time vaudeville theaters offered audiences something new: motion pictures in an environment vastly superior to nickelodeons and vaudeville at a lower cost than rival big circuits. By 1910, Loew operated theaters in all five New York boroughs, and two years later his business was incorporated. As nickelodeons were superseded by more substantial motion picture theaters, Loew constantly fine-tuned his format and increasingly constructed his own purpose-built, palatial combination houses.

William Fox was also among the first motion picture exhibitors to make inroads with the middle class.²² Beginning in 1903, he took over established vaudeville houses and instituted a program evenly split with motion pictures. Fox's theaters were larger and more comfortable than those of many competitors, attracting middle-class vaudeville audiences to the movies. Despite this success, Fox was unable to compete evenly with Loew, who employed the same manner of program but routinely secured better New York-area theater locations. Fox laid the foundation for his greatest early contribution to the motion picture industry in 1904, when he entered film distribution and expanded into

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²¹ For Marcus Loew see Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 36-40, Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 11, 27-28 and Barry S. Goodkin, "Loew's Incorporated," *Marquee: The Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 44, no. 3 (2012): 5-28.

²² William Fox's pioneering motion picture practices are detailed in Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 41-42.

motion picture production six years later.²³ This made him a pioneer in the vertical integration of the motion picture industry: the combination of film production, distribution, and exhibition under single or affiliated ownership, a practice later employed by the five largest studio chains.

In 1908, Adolph Zukor was making a comfortable living as the operator of a series of nickelodeons, having already made a fortune as a furrier.²⁴ Two years later, he became affiliated with his friend Loew's growing empire of Small Time Vaudeville theaters. During this brief association, Zukor gained a broad knowledge of popular entertainment: its audience, the finances, various problems, and opportunities. Through this understanding, Zukor became convinced of the need to "kill the slum tradition" in motion picture attendance, setting his sights on attracting a middle-class audience.²⁵ Zukor felt this could be accomplished by producing longer and more expensive films, a strategy that had successfully built a middle-class audience from the medium's outset in Europe. With the new slogan "Famous Players in Famous Plays," Zukor focused on producing films starring well-known stage actors and actresses. Accordingly, his new Famous Players Film Company acquired the American rights to the French-produced *Queen Elizabeth* (1912) starring Sarah Bernhardt. Zukor's strategy proved a success: the Famous Players Film Company merged with the Lasky Feature Play Company in 1916 to form Famous Players-Lasky.²⁶

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²³ Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 37.

²⁴ Adolph Zukor's strategies to attract a middle class audience are further detailed in Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 42-47.

²⁵ Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 46.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

A handful of motion picture exhibitors recognized that a new environment was needed for feature-length films and to solidify the industry's fledgling inroads to the middle class. They maintained that these more cultivated, or at least aspirational, audiences required a more elegant atmosphere that could only be provided by a new type of theater expressly designed for motion picture exhibition. In February 1913, Biograph Company founder Henry Marvin (a rival of Edison's) opened the first purpose-built "deluxe" motion picture theater, the Regent (1913) in Harlem. Lamb, the Regent's architect, made a definitive break with nickelodeons by modeling the theater after a contemporary vaudeville house and incorporating functional innovations specifically for film. The theater opened with a program of "straight motion-picture performances" with "no vaudeville."²⁷ The only live entertainment offered was music from an organ, an eight-piece orchestra, and "some of the best operatic and concert singers." This programming, taken with the Regent's architectural design, made it the most distinctive motion picture venue in New York, even considering the increasing number of larger theaters operated by Loew's and Fox, which were purpose-built or converted combination houses.

Despite the Regent's innovations, it was not financially successful. In October 1913, its new operators, the Photoplay Theaters Company, hired Samuel L. Rothafel (known as "Roxy") (1882-1936) as the theater's new managing director. Roxy had already found success in programming motion picture theaters in the Midwest.²⁸ He immediately instituted an aggressive new exhibition strategy focused on providing a

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²⁷ For background on the Regent Theater see Ross Melnick, *American Showman: Samuel 'Roxy' Rothafel and the Birth of the Entertainment Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 82-86.

²⁸ On Rothafel's success prior to his tenure at the Regent, see Melnick, *American Showman*, 27-80.

superior movie-going experience: lowering admission costs to fill each show and to undercut neighborhood competition; fine-tuning projection to offer the best film presentation in the city; nearly doubling the size of the orchestra and using it as an accompaniment to films; and employing a team of uniformed ushers to oversee patron comfort.²⁹ It took less than one week for the trade press to hail the Regent the gold standard in New York motion picture exhibition, allowing Roxy's format to shape the methods of motion picture exhibitors nationwide. During the remainder of the 1910s, Roxy went on to employ his style of showmanship at a series of ever more elaborate and influential New York motion picture theaters: the Strand (1914), the Rialto (1916), the Rivoli (1917), and the Capitol (1919), which Roxy took over in 1920.

In addition to the growing Loew's and Fox chains in New York, there were numerous motion picture exhibitors based in America's other urban areas that dominated their regional markets. These included the Blank circuit in Des Moines, Sid Grauman in Los Angeles, John Kunsky in Detroit, the Saxe Brothers in Milwaukee, Finkelstein & Rubin in Minneapolis, the Skouras Brothers in St. Louis, the Stanley Company of America in Philadelphia, Harry Crandell in Washington, D.C., W.S. Butterfield of Michigan, and the Interstate Amusement Company of Texas.³⁰ Balaban & Katz of Chicago was the most influential of the regional exhibitors, codifying the movie palace and establishing an operating model adopted by the national theater chains.³¹ A comparative latecomer to the motion picture exhibition industry, the firm Balaban & Katz

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²⁹ Roxy's changes at the Regent are fully detailed in *Ibid.*, 86-91.

³⁰ For regional exhibitors see Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 38-40.

³¹ Balaban & Katz's significance and operating methods are laid out in *Ibid.*, 40-56.

was just beginning its ascendancy in 1920 when most of its counterparts were already well established. However, by 1924, it was making more money than any other American theater chain, and rivals adopted its methods across the country.

Balaban & Katz's genesis occurred in 1908, when brothers Barney (1887-1971) and Abraham Joseph "A.J." (1889-1962) Balaban, along with their parents, opened a nickelodeon on Chicago's West Side. This initial venture proved successful, and the family opened additional nickelodeons in 1909 and 1914. They also entered film distribution, selling inexpensive locally made features and shorts to other theater operators. The Balaban family also operated the Movie Inn, located in Chicago's film-sellers row, where the brothers met Samuel "Sam" Katz (1893-1961). Katz first entered the motion picture industry to support his education, working part-time in a South Side Chicago nickelodeon as a piano player. By 1915, he was in the motion picture business full time, operating three Chicago theaters. The following year, the Balaban brothers and Katz joined to form Balaban & Katz, aiming to emulate the model of Samuel Rothafel's well-known New York theaters. Balaban & Katz endeavored to dominate the Chicago market, erecting large theaters that could capitalize on the growing local interest in motion pictures.

Balaban & Katz's first movie palace, the Central Park Theater, opened on October 27, 1917 in the West Side North Lawndale neighborhood. The theater was an immediate success, followed a year later by the Riviera Theater (1918) in the Uptown district on the far North Side. Katz, who served as president and corporate planner, immediately set his sights on further expansion, initially targeting Chicago's South Side and the Loop. To

facilitate Balaban & Katz's expansion, Katz had assembled the backing of powerful local investors, including Julius Rosenwald of Sears-Roebuck, William Wrigley, Jr. of Wrigley Chewing Gum, and yellow cab operator John Hertz. The next two of Balaban & Katz's Chicago movie palaces definitively characterized the type: the Tivoli Theater (1921) on the South Side and the Chicago Theater (1921) in the Loop.

Balaban & Katz's successful inroads into the Chicago market occurred despite a major disadvantage in relation to its competitors' virtual monopoly on top Hollywood films. Unable to offer the most desirable motion pictures, Balaban & Katz sought to establish middle-class patronage by building "in the minds of our audience the feeling that we represent an institution taking vital part in the formation of the character of the community."³² This was accomplished by exploiting five factors: location, theater architecture, air conditioning, service, and stage shows.

Location was among the principal factors that distinguished Balaban & Katz's theaters from those of their competition. In contrast to the majority of early motion picture exhibitors who located their theaters in established, downtown entertainment districts, Balaban & Katz brought their product directly to their target audience. This meant erecting theaters in neighborhoods developing on the edge of Chicago, typically near the terminus of the new "el" line and streetcar transfer points that provided easy access from surrounding residential areas and the Loop. Balaban & Katz's new movie palaces became the focus of developing neighborhood business and entertainment districts. Only after the chain found great success in its first three neighborhood movie

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³² Ibid., 43.

palaces did it open a theater on State Street, in the city's core retail and entertainment district.³³

Architectural design was the most visible distinction between the early Balaban & Katz theaters and those of their competition. Balaban & Katz's theaters were the first fully-realized movie palaces, completely eclipsing anything Chicago audiences had seen in a motion picture venue. They were attractions in their own right, thereby establishing patronage by lending the act of movie-going the air of a special event. The classically-derived architecture of Balaban & Katz's first movie palaces gave the motion pictures a respectable image, further dispelling the lower-class stigma the medium had acquired during the nickelodeon era.

After location and architecture, air conditioning was the third factor that distinguished Balaban & Katz's new movie palaces from their peers.³⁴ In 1917, the Central Park Theater popularized the mechanically air-cooled venue. Theaters previously relied on mechanical ventilation systems, typically a fan-exhaust system, to comply with local health regulations and to provide a higher degree of patron comfort.³⁵ There were also rudimentary cooling systems that blew air over blocks of ice to lower the auditorium temperature, but these were generally unreliable. In the absence of effective and reliable

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³³ During the 1920s, it became customary for motion picture theater operators in larger American cities to follow Balaban & Katz's model by erecting the majority of their movie palaces outside the central business and entertainment district, depending on the shape of the respective urban area.

³⁴ On movie palace air conditioning see Ibid., 53-54 and 75-76 and Gail Cooper, *Air-Conditioning America: Engineers and the Controlled Environment, 1900-1960* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 80-109.

³⁵ In a fan-exhaust system, a fan, typically located on the roof, exhausted warm air through ducts in the ceiling and the soffit of the balcony. In the usual absence of a separate fresh air intake, fresh air entered the theater only through open doors and windows. Cooper, *Air-Conditioning America*, 84.

cooling systems, motion picture houses in the Midwest, South and West either closed entirely during the summer or remained open to largely empty seats.

Balaban & Katz had the advantage of being located in Chicago, which was then the nexus in the development of air-cooling technology by virtue of its status as the center of the American meat packing industry. Barney Balaban retained Frederick Wittenmeir of the Kroeschell Bros. Ice Machine Company, developer of a carbon dioxide system capable of cooling large spaces, to design a similar apparatus specifically for theaters. The Central Park's carbon dioxide system (also employed with improvements in the Riviera Theater) cooled air and forced it through vents in the auditorium floor before exhausting it through ducts in the ceiling. This system was capable of maintaining an interior temperature of 78 degrees on a 96-degree day. However, the system did not dehumidify in the manner of an air conditioner and the cooled air emanating from the auditorium floor bothered the audience. The system employed in Balaban & Katz's Tivoli and Chicago theaters resolved these drawbacks: air entered the auditorium from the sides and was not only cooled but dehumidified. Balaban & Katz's movie palaces became havens during Chicago's hot summers, routinely taking in more profits in this period than any other time of the year.

Movie palaces (and later motion picture theaters more generally) introduced a wide spectrum of the American public to the comfort of air conditioning. By the mid-1920s, Balaban & Katz's air conditioning system proved highly influential by virtue of its widespread coverage in film trade publications and the chain's own advertising. Until the

1930s, when new technology was introduced, the system's size and expense largely limited air conditioning to movie palaces to the detriment of smaller theaters.

Customer service was the fourth distinguishing feature of Balaban & Katz theaters. Not only did the chain surround patrons in an environment befitting royalty, its policy was to treat all customers as a king or queen through the efforts of doormen, nurses, attendants providing free childcare, and a corps of highly trained ushers. Ushers were at the forefront, undertaking a variety of tasks in an effort to maintain a level of decorum in the theater consistent with the refined atmosphere sought by its patrons. The result was a standardized "American" atmosphere that stood in sharp contrast to the city's smaller neighborhood theaters, which reflected the ethnic character of their neighborhoods³⁶.

Stage shows were the fifth distinctive feature. During Balaban & Katz's formative years, local competitors had exclusive booking contracts with Hollywood studios that gave them first choice of the top films; Balaban & Katz could only book the leftovers. Accordingly, the 150-minute entertainment programs in Balaban & Katz movie palaces supplemented these features with high-quality stage shows.³⁷ These were "pure presentations" -- self-contained, themed, short musicals with elaborate production value unrelated in content to the feature film.³⁸ The chain saw the development of popular but tasteful shows as another means to solidify its appeal to the middle class who

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³⁶ The distinctions between neighborhood theaters frequented by the working-class and middle class movie palaces is discussed in Liz Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 100-129.

³⁷ Combination live entertainment and motion picture programs were not new. Notable precedents included Samuel Rothafel in New York and Sid Grauman in Los Angeles. Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 51.

³⁸ This arrangement contrasted with that employed by Sid Grauman and Loew's. The former employed a "prologue," which was related to the film's content. At the latter, a "vaudeville show" in which several vaudeville acts, often with big name stars, were grouped together was employed.

traditionally patronized vaudeville. Balaban & Katz nurtured local talent, some of whom eventually emerged as stars who would perform exclusively in the chain's theaters.³⁹ This encompassed stage performers, bandleaders, orchestras, and organists, all of whom were better-known attractions in Balaban & Katz's theaters than the exhibited movies. A number of these performers, such as organists Jesse Crawford and Helen Anderson and bandleader Paul Ash, achieved fame outside of Chicago.

Balaban & Katz's five-point system was enormously successful from the start: its first four movie palaces were full and its operating costs were low. The chain did not find it necessary to pay its employees high wages, as many simply wanted to work in the motion picture industry and (other than for projectionists and some musicians) there were no unions. Although the movie palaces were expensive, they were a constant draw for patrons who filled them for most of the week. Ticket prices were higher than the customary nickel or dime, occasionally costing up to a dollar for the best seats on the busiest nights of the week.

The chain's initial four movie palaces were profitable enough to fund its subsequent expansion. Katz moved to solidify the chain's domination of the Chicago market by aggressively acquiring theaters from other exhibitors. By the mid-1920s, he employed excess profits from Balaban & Katz's first four theaters to plan for an additional three Chicago movie palaces.⁴⁰ Katz then established Balaban & Katz's dominance in areas outside Chicago by acquiring theater chains operating in portions of the Midwest.

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³⁹ Balaban & Katz also drew talent from bookers at the Western Vaudeville Association.

⁴⁰ These were the Uptown Theater (1925) in the Uptown District, the Norshore Theater (1926) in the city's North Side, and the Oriental Theater (1926) in the loop.

Balaban & Katz's five-point entertainment strategy changed the motion picture industry, proving that the films themselves were not the sole draw needed to attract middle class audiences. Motion picture exhibitors across the United States adopted the movie palace system, while the Balaban & Katz's success also attracted the attention of the major Hollywood studios seeking to affiliate themselves with the chain. In 1925, Balaban & Katz merged with Adolph Zukor's Famous Players-Lasky, the largest Hollywood motion picture company. This deal permitted Balaban & Katz movie palaces to exhibit top Hollywood films. In return, Famous Players-Lasky gained the talents of Katz, one of the nation's most successful theater managers, who promptly instituted the five-point strategy on a national scale.

The Movie Palace Industry, 1925-1932

From the late 1920s through the late 1940s, five Hollywood studio-theater chains -- Paramount (formerly Famous Players-Lasky), Loew's, Warner Bros., Fox, and Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO) -- controlled the American film industry.⁴¹ Each was vertically integrated, meaning that they produced, distributed, and exhibited their own motion pictures. Their power lay in the ownership of a specific type of motion picture theater: large movie palaces holding over 2,000-seats, well-situated in downtowns and outlying middle class shopping districts of the nation's largest cities. There were relatively few large movie palaces, but held more patrons than all the numerous smaller (500-seat or less) motion picture theaters combined. During the late 1920s, the five leading studio-

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⁴¹ Regarding the leading Hollywood chains, see *Ibid.*, 57-66 and 216. There were also prominent, partially vertically-integrated studios: Universal, Columbia, and United Artists. Each had production facilities and international distribution but were unable to establish significant theater chains. Accordingly, each had to negotiate with the Hollywood companies to exhibit their films. The spread of movie palaces in this period is noted in Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 86.

chains set about acquiring regional chains that built movie palaces and erecting their own similar houses. By the 1930s, every large American city (and most medium-sized ones) could boast at least one movie palace. The five studio chains then controlled the majority of all first-run movie palaces in the nation's 92 largest cities, taking in about three-quarters of all box office receipts and dictating the conditions of the motion picture exhibition market.⁴²

Paramount-Publix reigned as the most powerful of the studio-exhibitors. At its peak, the company was the largest motion picture operator in the world, with an estimated two million customers passing through its theaters each day.⁴³ The company operated as Famous Players-Lasky until 1925 and then as Paramount-Publix for the next decade. Zukor had overseen Famous Players-Lasky's rise as a dominant player in Hollywood production and film distribution. By the mid-1920s, his aggressive acquisition and construction campaigns provided the company with a controlling interest in nearly 400 theaters in the United States and Canada.⁴⁴ During the company's first five years as Paramount-Publix, the Publix theater chain grew to control more than 1,000 theaters, controlling the Midwest, New England, and the South. Although the company's offices were in New York, the theater chain's power center remained in Chicago, a vestige of Balaban & Katz's legacy.

Loew's became the second most powerful studio-exhibitor after it vertically integrated, following its 1920 purchase of Metro Pictures (which evolved into Metro-

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⁴² The 92 largest cities were defined as those having a population over 100,000. Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 59-60.

⁴³ Paramount-Publix is detailed in *Ibid.*, 57-61. Publix also dominated motion picture exhibition in Canada through Famous Players Canadian.

⁴⁴ Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 21.

Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) four years later).⁴⁵ However, it ranked only fifth in number of theaters (150) by the end of the decade, primarily because Marcus Loew ran the company in a rather conservative manner, limiting its expansion. The chain dominated the New York area market, a base established during its days as a vaudeville circuit. Outside New York, Loew's presence was largely confined to cities east of the Mississippi, most notably Boston, Cleveland, Jersey City, Toronto, and Washington, D.C. Loew's also established prominent, single-theater outposts in Houston, Kansas City, and Los Angeles. After Loew retired in 1923 due to health concerns,⁴⁶ his successor, Nicholas M. Schenck, began to run the company in a more aggressive manner.

Warner Bros. transformed itself from a little-known family business into a major force in motion picture exhibition with the vast profits it made from its pioneering use of talking pictures after 1925.⁴⁷ The company's peak occurred in the late 1920s, when it operated almost 700 theaters and controlled much of the mid-Atlantic region. While Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C. were the nexus of the circuit's operations, it also maintained a handful of important theaters in Los Angeles, Milwaukee, and other major cities outside the mid-Atlantic region. The four Warner brothers (Harry, Albert, Sam, and Jack) had opened their first theater in 1906 and incorporated the company as Warner Bros. in 1923.⁴⁸ Not fully vertically integrated until 1925, Warner Bros. remained the only family-run company among the leading chains. The eldest brother, Harry Warner, ran the company from New York, while Jack Warner

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⁴⁵ Ibid., 30. For further details on Loew's during the 1920s and 1930s see Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 61-62.

⁴⁶ Loew maintained a consulting role until his death in 1927.

⁴⁷ Warner Bros. is treated in Ibid., 62-63.

⁴⁸ Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 46-47.

operated the Hollywood studio. The company immediately set about building a theater chain with its talkie profits by acquiring a number of pre-existing regional circuits. Most significant was the 1928 acquisition of the Stanley Company of America, which operated over 300 theaters, which thereafter comprised the core of the chain.

Fox Theaters, at its peak, alongside Warner Bros., ranked just behind Paramount-Publix in terms of size.⁴⁹ The approximately 700-theater strong chain stretched from New York to San Francisco, dominating the western United States with houses in every major city west of the Rockies. It had grown slowly from William Fox's New York-area chain of small-time vaudeville theaters, unable to overtake its principal local rival, Marcus Loew. After 1925, however, Fox expanded his chain beyond the 25 theaters in the New York area and formed a national theater chain with profits made from investments in the development of sound technology. This expansion was accomplished through an ambitious building program coinciding with the acquisition of regional chains in New England, the Mid-Atlantic, the Midwest, the Pacific Northwest, and the West Coast. Especially significant was the purchase of West Coast Theaters, the leading chain in California and several western states. Fox also aimed to erect the grandest movie palace in every major American city, but although this vision remained unrealized, by the end of the decade, Fox opened gigantic movie palaces in Atlanta, Detroit, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia, San Francisco, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C.

Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO) was the least powerful of the Hollywood studio-exhibitors.⁵⁰ RKO was also the latecomer, formed in October of 1928. It was a merger of

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⁴⁹ Fox during the 1920s and 1930s is detailed in Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 63-65.

⁵⁰ For RKO see *Ibid.*, 65-66.

the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), a developer of sound technology; the Film Booking Office (FBO), a minor independent studio with international distribution that specialized in B-films; and theaters belonging to the recently merged Keith-Albee-Orpheum vaudeville circuit. In 1929, RKO further expanded by taking over theaters that defaulted RCA for the installation of sound equipment. At its peak during the late 1920s, RKO operated nearly 200 theaters: slightly more than Loew's, but fewer than Paramount-Publix, Twentieth Century Fox, and Warner Bros. RKO's origins in the Keith-Albee-Orpheum vaudeville circuit provided it with theaters in nearly every major American city, and although RKO did not dominate any one region of the United States, the majority of its theaters were located in the Loew's-dominated New York-area. These vaudeville palaces were immediately wired for sound with RCA's technology, converting them to movie palaces.

The five Hollywood studio-chains' control of motion picture exhibition had wide-ranging implications for the development of motion picture theaters, while simultaneously solidifying and further proliferating the movie palace as the highest standard of American film exhibition.⁵¹ Paramount-Publix pioneered many of the leading chains' practices. Foremost was Balaban & Katz's five-point motion picture exhibition system centered on the movie palace that Sam Katz instituted in Publix theaters across the country. Paramount-Publix also popularized a central management system, wherein Katz and his assistants dictated everything from the selection of theater draperies to film bookings from his office in the Paramount Building in Manhattan's Times Square. This

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⁵¹ Further details of the Hollywood companies' control of motion picture exhibition practices are detailed in *Ibid.*, 66-69.

system and the utilization of the economy of scale meant the motion picture industry was run in the same manner as contemporary national chain stores. The leading Hollywood studio-chains established a run-zone clearance system of film distribution and exhibition intended to maximize revenue. Each theater was within a particular zone and was assigned a run status: first-run, second-run, third-run, etc. Films premiered at a first-run theater, usually a downtown movie palace, then entered a clearance period of at least thirty days before being shown at a less-expensive, second-run theater, often a neighborhood movie palace. The film would then continue make its way down the theater hierarchy with intervening clearance periods, the entire process taking up to two years. Moviegoers knew if they wanted to see a new film at a lower price, there would be a lengthy wait. This system had architectural implications, although a theater's status could change over the course of its operational lifetime; houses initially planned as first- and second-run were typically designed as movie palaces.

Movie palaces were not without their drawbacks as exhibition spaces. Despite the type's status as the most prestigious motion picture venue and its success in establishing the medium's broad appeal, it became apparent in the 1920s (long before the Depression) that the type was, by in large, economically unsustainable.⁵² Most motion pictures simply did not have sufficient drawing power to fill first-run movie palaces. There were not enough above-average films to go around or consistently sell-out shows to meet heavy theater expenses.⁵³ The industry focused on the mass production of "program pictures,"

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⁵² The so-called "crisis of the movie palace" that faced the motion picture industry is put forth in Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 149-153.

⁵³ Typical theater expenses were dominated by rent and advertising costs. Maintenance was another notable expense. To offset the scarcity of high-drawing films, theater owners began to give more time on their

inexpensive genre and formula films (such as comedies, crime dramas, romances, and westerns), which amounted to nearly 700 films a year. These, largely, were produced to provide enough films to exhibit in the vast network of theaters, which changed their programs three to four times a week and thus required 150 to 200 pictures a year. Only a handful of these pictures ("specials" such as *Ben Hur* (1925)) were of sufficient quality to draw enough patrons throughout their runs to keep movie palaces in the black. The Hollywood companies could not solve this problem by simply abandoning movie palaces by virtue of the type's prestige, investor confidence, debt obligations, and the block-booking system. Conversely, established methods of motion picture production made it impossible to turn out a higher number of quality films.

The motion picture industry needed something new to offset the movie palace problem. During the second half of the 1920s, the "talkies" provided the solution.⁵⁴ Since movie palaces' inception, silent motion pictures had been accompanied by live music from an in-house orchestra; costs were cut with the invention of sound pictures. Despite the leading studio-exhibitors' challenges, the majority of them were reluctant embrace any changes to their exhibition format.⁵⁵ Each was already burdened with heavy real-estate investments and was leery of extensive theater and production facility remodeling costs. Accordingly, sound technology was only adopted when it proved more profitable than the silent film format and its installation was more cost effective.

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programs to popular live acts; orchestra numbers, vaudeville and variety acts. However the increased costs of these acts also eat into owners' bottom lines.

⁵⁴ The introduction of sound movies is fully detailed in Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 215-225.

⁵⁵ Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 152-153.

Warner Bros. and Fox led the motion picture industry in pioneering sound technology. The former envisioned talkies as substitutes for top vaudeville acts rather than as replacements for silent feature films, and aimed to market its sound recordings to theaters that could not afford to book performers in person. Accordingly, Warner Bros. employed its Vitaphone sound technology to record short films of stars such as Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor.⁵⁶ By April 1927, Warner Bros. had recorded all the major stars of the day and more than 100 movie houses were “Vitaphoned.” Looking to offer something new and to convince more theater owners to install sound equipment, the company added Vitaphoned segments into an otherwise silent feature film; the result was *The Jazz Singer* (1927) starring Al Jolson.⁵⁷ However, it was a follow-up film, *The Singing Fool* (1928) that convinced all doubters of sound technology.

Beginning about 1925-1926, Fox Film also began to investigate the possibilities for the development of sound technology. Like Warner Bros., Fox envisioned that this technology would supplement rather than replace silent movies.⁵⁸ Fox sought to differentiate itself from Warner Bros.' parallel efforts by focusing on applying sound technology to an untapped market: talking newsreels. In April 1927, five months before the opening of *The Jazz Singer*, Fox introduced Fox Movietone News, initially installing the equipment in its own theaters as an advantage over competitors.⁵⁹

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⁵⁶ Warner Bros.' Vitaphone system involved a series of recorded sound discs that were synchronized with the action on the screen.

⁵⁷ *The Jazz Singer's* main narrative was silent, but the songs were talking.

⁵⁸ Fox's development of sound is detailed in Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 41-44.

⁵⁹ Fox Movietone's system used an optical sound process recorded directly onto film, a format that later became the industry standard.

Talking pictures provided an immediate solution to the industry's movie palace crisis.⁶⁰ Moviegoers who avoided all but the best silent films indiscriminately rushed to talking movies, even when charged higher admission prices. Warner Bros. and Fox's success forced the other major chains to rapidly shift to talkies to remain profitable. From 1928 to 1930, the industry wired existing theaters for sound and converted and erected new production facilities for talkies. This process further solidified the Hollywood companies' dominance, as the leading chains secured agreements to have their theaters wired before independent houses could manage to do so. Additionally, the chains were able to lower their costs by increasingly cutting back on orchestras and live acts no longer considered essential in the sound era. The motion picture industry's profits soared with the introduction of talking pictures, movie palace construction boomed, and future prosperity appeared assured.

The Depression and the associated decline in public purchasing power resulted in a sharp decline in movie-going in the United States.⁶¹ This drop in revenue gradually prompted significant changes in the motion picture industry, not the least of which was the end of movie palace construction. During the first years of the economic crisis, the motion picture industry was buffered by the continued novelty of talking pictures, as attendance rose in 1930 over 1929, leading to assertions that it was "Depression-proof."⁶² The major chains initially continued their movie palace construction programs planned before the downturn. In 1931, earnings were dramatically lower than the year before,

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⁶⁰ Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 152-153.

⁶¹ The response of the motion picture exhibition industry to the Depression is fully detailed in Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 69-82.

⁶² Data on the movie industry's decline during the first years of the Depression is presented in Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 161-162.

although studio and theater operations remained profitable overall. However, in 1932, with a total industry deficit of more than \$85 million, there could be no further claims that the movie industry would escape the worst effects of the Depression. Between 1930 and 1932, box office revenues dropped by at least 25 percent. The movie industry bottomed out in 1933, when nearly a third of the nation's theaters closed. Faced with less disposable income, many Americans had abandoned motion pictures entirely in favor of cheaper forms of entertainment, such as radio, which required a substantial initial outlay but provided unlimited free programs thereafter.

In first years of the Depression, the movie industry's declining revenues threw the Hollywood studio-exhibitors into disarray.⁶³ Paramount-Publix was especially hard hit; its Balaban & Katz system was based on the principal of continuous growth and increasing attendance. To facilitate this, Sam Katz had borrowed heavily to construct additional theaters. Decreased Depression-era attendance made it impossible for the chain to make theater mortgage payments. By 1932, Paramount-Publix was \$30 million in debt before declaring bankruptcy the following year. Katz was ushered out, and the chain's erection of new movie palaces in the United States came to an end.⁶⁴ Warner Bros. failed to make a profit from April 1930 to 1935, leading the company to curtail expansion plans and sell or end the leases of numerous theaters.⁶⁵ By the mid-1930s, its circuit had been reduced from 700 to 400 theaters. Fox was the first of the leading companies to collapse following the stock market crash.⁶⁶ William Fox's heavy borrowing to finance a growing theater

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⁶³ Paramount-Publix's situation during the Depression is discussed in Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 59-61.

⁶⁴ Paramount emerged from bankruptcy in 1935 and was reorganized as Paramount Pictures, Inc.

⁶⁵ Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 133.

⁶⁶ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 64-65.

chain, sound technology and production facilities, and an unsuccessful merger with Loew's, overextended the company and left it unable to make debt payments.⁶⁷ Fox was pushed out and a series of reorganizations were undertaken to save the company, resulting in the emergence of Twentieth-Century Fox. RKO lacked a strong leader to guide it through the Depression, and entered bankruptcy in 1933 due to an inability to pay its theater mortgages.⁶⁸ Loew's was alone among the leading exhibitors in avoiding major Depression-era cutbacks, as it earned steady, if not spectacular, profits throughout the period.⁶⁹ This success was primarily due to Marcus Loew's prudent management during the 1920s.⁷⁰

The end of movie palace construction was perhaps the biggest Depression-era ramification upon the American motion picture industry. Prior to the Depression, the type was already undergoing major design changes in response to the advent of talking pictures, the introduction of Art Deco (which had the added incentive of reducing decorating costs), and the increased focus on expanding into small- and mid-sized cities following the saturation of many larger markets. However, after 1932, the industry found movie palace construction completely untenable in the United States due to declining revenues. By the time motion picture theater construction resumed to a significant degree in the mid-1930s, the movie palace typology was financially and functionally obsolete.

Conclusion

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⁶⁷ Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 116.

⁶⁸ RKO's peak years were 1929-1930. It emerged from receivership in 1935 and thereafter struggled along until 1957, when it ceased operations. Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 66 and Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 144.

⁶⁹ Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 99.

⁷⁰ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 61.

A major theme in the formative period of American motion picture exhibition between 1893 and 1910 is the effort to establish the medium as a popular form of middle-class entertainment. The movie palace's significance lies in being the exhibition format that achieved this goal following experimentation with a variety of other venues. In the 1920s, the American movie business transformed into an industry of movie palaces, as regional and Hollywood studio-exhibitors saturated the country with a network of theaters that would define movie going into the post-war years.

Chapter 2

Movie Palace Architects: Thomas W. Lamb, Rapp & Rapp, and John Eberson

The theater industry as it stands today is far different from that of years ago. One of the most important steps to be considered by the owner when contemplating the erection of a theater today is the selection of an architect who by knowledge and practical experience is fully qualified to furnish proper plans and specifications for the enterprise.

Theater construction has followed the trend of the times, having become a highly specialized art, requiring a thorough knowledge of not only the component parts which enter into all construction, but also a knowledge by experience of air conditioning, sound effects, acoustics, sight lines, comfort to patrons, economy in construction, and in general a slight knowledge of theater operation. Only an understanding of these several subjects would qualify an architect to successfully design a modern theater building.¹

--Leon Fleischmann, head of Loew's construction department, 1930.

Thomas Lamb, C.W. Rapp, George Rapp, and John Eberson were at the forefront of specialist architects in a prosperous industry, the design of movie palaces, during the 1920s and early 1930s. The three architectural firms they founded (the so-called "Big Three") were not only the most prominent in the field and the pacesetters, but they collectively had created the building type in the 1910s and early 1920s. Given this significance, examining selected aspects of their origins and family backgrounds, education and early careers, as well as firm histories assist in better understanding the type's character.

Movie Palace Architects

Movie palace design was almost exclusively the purview of national or regional specialist architects. Their dominance of the field is evident in an overview of American

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¹ Leon Fleischmann, "The Theatre Owner and the Architect," in *American Theatres of Today*, ed. R.W. Sexton (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1930), 50.

motion picture theaters constructed through 1932: among the 139 largest such theaters (those seating 2,800 or more) only one was designed by a leading architectural firm from the period, McKim, Mead and White.² Other major commercial firms of the era -- such as Carrère and Hastings; George B. Post & Sons; Graham, Anderson, Probst and White; Holabird and Roche; and Warren and Wetmore -- are absent from the survey. Although several of these offices designed an occasional movie palace, they were not responsible for the nation's most prominent examples of the type. Instead, the largest movie palaces were attributable to an assortment of less-familiar names in the history of American architecture, such as W.W. Ahlschlager, C. Howard Crane, Fridstein & Company, Graven & Mayger, Hoffman & Henon, Leon H. Lempert, Jr., Levy and Klein, and B. Marcus Priteca, all of whom specialized in the type. Of these, three firms -- those founded by Lamb, the Rapps, and Eberson -- collectively designed approximately half of the nation's largest motion picture theaters.³

The specialization of movie palace design was part of a larger trend during the interwar decades commensurate with other building types: department stores, factories, hotels, office buildings, and railroad stations, among others. Contemporary legitimate theater design was specialized to an extent as well, while it remained largely distinct from the motion picture theater field. In addition, earlier theater design was also somewhat

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² B. Andrew C. Fowler, "The Big Theater List," *Marquee: The Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 23, no. 3 (1991): 27-30. This was the Eastman Theater (1921) in Rochester, New York, which functioned more as an orchestra hall than a movie palace. In the Eastman's design, McKim, Mead and White collaborated with theater specialist R.E. Hall. Another large theater on the list not attributed to a movie palace specialist firm was Radio City Music Hall (1932), designed by the Associated Architects as part of the larger Rockefeller Center complex.

³ Of the 139 largest American motion picture theaters identified by the Theatre Historical Society, the three firms designed 70. This broke down as 35 by Thomas Lamb, 26 by C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp and 9 by John Eberson. Ibid.

specialized (particularly vaudeville theaters), and many of the leading figures in that era transitioned to designing motion picture theaters and movie palaces in the 1920s or earlier.

Architectural and film trade publications reinforced the specialization of movie palace design, and this emphasis began prior to the emergence of the movie palace. As early as 1916, motion picture theater design publications aimed at exhibitors and prospective designers stressed the type's complexity. A prominent early example noted "the skill of the architect is probably taxed more than in any other type of building."⁴ The architect "not only has to work out the best arrangement of the building regarding seating, sight lines, heating, ventilation, lighting, etc., but has to give special attention to the construction, foundations, safety of the public, and many other intricate problems."⁵ Film trade publications from the 1910s-1930s continually stressed the importance of selecting a skilled specialist architect. The *Film Daily Yearbook* and *Motion Picture News* (and its successors) included "Buyer's Guides" that listed specialist architects among a multitude of other resources for theater owners.⁶ *Motion Picture News*' monthly "New Theater Construction & Equipment Department" and "The Showman" sections, and *Motion Picture Herald* and *Exhibitors Herald-World's* monthly "Better Theaters Section," all contained coverage of new movie palaces and articles written by or about

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⁴ Arthur S. Meloy, *Theaters and Motion Picture Houses: A Practical Treatise on the Proper Planning and Construction of Such Buildings and Containing Useful Suggestions, Rules and Data for the Benefit of Architects, Prospective Owners, Etc.* (New York: Architects' Supply & Publishing Company, 1916), 2.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For instance see Jack Alicoate, ed., *The 1930 Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures* (New York: The Film Daily, 1930), 913-915.

the leading specialist firms. All of this attention amounted to free promotion for the specialist firms aimed directly to potential clients.

Movie palace specialists acquired an expertise in the field that enabled them to most ably produce theaters that met the type's central function, i.e. drawing patrons to the box office and away from competition.⁷ To accomplish this task, an architect had to be familiar with the type's myriad evolving technical requirements while staying ahead of the ever-changing preferences of film exhibitors and their audiences. The latter constantly craved something new in movie palace environments, and it was the task of architects to systematically deliver theaters that eclipsed everything audiences had seen theretofore. This knowledge favored specialist firms.

The Big Three's status at the top tier of specialist architects partially can be attributed to their well-publicized roles in pioneering the theatrical design innovations that gave birth to the movie palace, which was further underscored by subsequent prominent work. They were distinguished from other specialists by the number of enduring relationships with leading regional chains and, later, the Hollywood studio-exhibitors that drove the movie palace industry. The latter provided a steady stream of commissions during the second half of the 1920s that spread their work across the country beyond their former regional bases.

Lamb, Rapp & Rapp, and Eberson benefitted from establishing themselves in two major centers of motion picture exhibition and American commercial architecture during the 1910s and 1920s: New York and Chicago. Lamb was based in New York throughout his architectural career. The Rapp and Eberson offices were in Chicago until the mid-

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⁷ David Naylor, *Great American Movie Theaters* (Washington D.C.: Preservation Press, 1987), 19-20.

1920s. While New York had long been a center of theater architecture, Lamb drove its emergence as a center of motion picture theater design beginning in the 1910s. In the early 1920s, the Rapps and Eberson created a distinctive Chicago mode of movie palace design that positioned the city as a second center of the type's innovation. During the second half of the decade, the dominance of the New York-based national studio-chains' prompted the Rapps and Eberson to open offices in that city to be in closer proximity to their most important clients.

A second tier of specialist architects ranked just below the field's three leaders in prominence. C. Howard Crane of Detroit was perhaps the most significant in this group, closely following the Big Three with a number of significant commissions in the United States, Canada, and England. However, Crane did not contribute as many transformational theaters throughout the type's development. Other important specialists included Walter W. Ahlschlager in Chicago; Clifford A. Balch of Los Angeles; the Boller Brothers of Kansas City; Hoffman & Henon of Philadelphia; G. Albert Lansburgh of San Francisco; S. Charles Lee of Los Angeles; William H. Lee of Philadelphia; B. Marcus Priteca of Seattle; and Emile Weil of New Orleans. These practitioners were typically the foremost or among the foremost motion picture designers in their respective regions and occasionally obtained significant movie palace commissions in other major cities.

The distinction between the second tier of theater specialists and the Big Three lay in the greater breadth of the latter's output and influence on the type's development. Several of these firm's were second-generation movie palace specialists that emerged from the Big Three's offices (such as S. Charles Lee who worked in the Rapp office).

However, many of the second-tier firms also established business relationships with regional and national motion picture and vaudeville chains that brought in steady commissions. For example, C. Howard Crane designed important movie palaces for Fox and United Artists, Hoffman & Henon designed the Stanley Company of America's principal movie palaces, and Emile Weil was the principal architect for the Sanger chain.

A third tier of motion picture theater design specialists also produced significant theaters, but they were less prolific than other leaders in the field. They variously were based in mid-to-small-sized cities, worked in a region dominated by other firms, primarily worked for a small regional chain, or had shorter careers as theater designers. This group includes names such as the Fridstein Company, Graven and Mayger, Levy and Klein, United Studios in Chicago, and Maurice H. Finkel of Detroit. Similarly to the second-tier firms, several of these less prolific architects emerged from other specialist offices.

Regional architectural firms also designed significant movie palaces. These firms maintained a hand in motion picture theater design, but their reputations equally rested upon non-theatrical work via a variety of building types. Examples include Temple H. Buell in Denver; Albert C. Finn of Houston; Kirchhoff & Rose of Milwaukee; Meyer & Holler of Los Angeles; Miller & Pflueger of San Francisco; Morgan, Walls & Clements of Los Angeles; Robert C. Reamer of Seattle; the Reid Brothers of San Francisco; Rubush & Hunter in Indianapolis; and A.M. Strauss of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

A client's process of selecting a movie palace architect from the multiple tiers of specialists varied depending on the period and the particular circumstances of the

commission. Between the 1910s and the mid-1920s, the multitude of regional motion picture exhibitors typically became associated with one or two local firms specializing in theater design. The Big Three's innovations put them in demand from regional exhibitors across the country that wanted to introduce these features in their own, local theater chains. A regional chain might bring in a Big Three firm to design its flagship theater or the area's first movie palace, while a local firm might be retained to build subsequent houses or a project in a smaller urban area. This process remained much the same during the second half of the 1920s, when the Hollywood studio-chains and their offshoots employed the Big Three to design their most important theaters while awarding other commissions to regional architects. The most successful specialist firms, those that obtained the most prestigious commissions in their respective region, were those that quickly absorbed the type's latest innovations into their own work.

The multitude of movie palace specialist firms stemmed from the motion picture theater construction boom that began in the 1910s and lasted until the onset of the Depression. Scores of motion picture theaters of varying sizes were erected as the emerging film industry rushed to establish an extensive network of purpose-built venues and doggedly kept up with ever-evolving audience tastes and exhibition technology. By the early 1930s, movie palaces saturated both large cities and the Main Streets of towns across the country.

Thomas W. Lamb, Rapp & Rapp, and John Eberson: Family Backgrounds

The Big Three's diverse backgrounds, as the leading movie palace specialist architects, naturally yielded a degree of influence over the field's subsequent character.

Cornelius Ward “C.W.” Rapp (1861-1926) and George Leslie Rapp (1878-1941), founders of C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, Architects (“Rapp & Rapp”), were natives of Carbondale, Illinois and the youngest sons of a large family of architects born to Isaac Rapp (1830-1913) of Orange, New Jersey and Georgiana Shaw (d. 1912), a native of the British Isle of Jersey.⁸ Isaac, himself an architect-builder, had been raised in New York where he was apprenticed to a house joiner and possibly an architect for a period of four years. In 1855, he left New York for new opportunities in Carbondale, 300 miles south of Chicago.⁹ Founded in 1852, Carbondale was one of a number of new towns established along the recently chartered Illinois Central Railroad.¹⁰ In 1856, Georgiana and the growing number of Rapp children joined Isaac in Carbondale.

Isaac Rapp became Carbondale’s leading architect-builder, ultimately credited with shaping the nature and quality of the town’s nineteenth-century built environment more than any other individual.¹¹ His eastern training in the building trades set him apart from his local competitors, leading to commissions to design or construct many of the town’s earliest buildings, including the residences of many of its most prominent citizens, its first church, several commercial buildings, and a succession of structures at Southern Illinois Normal University (later Southern Illinois University) between 1874 and 1887.¹²

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⁸ Background on Isaac Rapp and his family can be found in the monograph on his eldest son, Isaac Hamilton Rapp in Carl D. Sheppard, *Creator of the Santa Fe Style: Isaac Hamilton Rapp, Architect* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 11-12. Isaac Rapp’s death was announced in the “Isaac Rapp Dead,” [Carbondale, IL] *Daily Free Press* (27 December 1913): 1. Georgiana Rapp’s death was noted in “Obituary,” [Carbondale, IL] *Daily Free Press* (17 November 1912): 3.

⁹ Sheppard, *Creator of the Santa Fe Style*, 11.

¹⁰ Details of Carbondale’s founding are outlined in Susan E. Maycock, *An Architectural History of Carbondale, Illinois* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University, 1983), xiii-xv.

¹¹ Maycock, *An Architectural History of Carbondale, Illinois*, 22.

¹² Isaac Rapp Sr. erected the Brush Home (1857), the residence of Carbondale’s founder, Daniel Brush, from plans by St. Louis architect J.H. McClure. He went on to design and construct the Chapman House

In the context of the younger Rapps' careers, their father's most significant commission was the renovation of a Carbondale commercial building into the First National Bank (1894).¹³ In addition to the bank and a store, the upper level of the remodeled building included an opera house for the presentation of vaudeville and melodramas with seating for five hundred. While it is unclear whether any of the Rapp brothers worked with their father on this project, it is notable that the closely interconnected family had this early experience with theatrical design.

Isaac and Georgiana's family included nine children: Harriet Cornelius, Isaac Hamilton (1854-1933), William Morris (1865-1920), Alfred, Annie Augusta, Louis B. (d.1910), Charles R., Cornelius Ward, and George Leslie.¹⁴ Five of the seven Rapp brothers ultimately became architects, including: Isaac Hamilton, William Morris, Louis B., Cornelius Ward, and George Leslie.¹⁵ The three eldest established their careers in

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(1868-69), the city's most elaborate Italianate residence. The city's first church was Presbyterian and built from plans by J.H. McClure. He also designed and built the New Brush Block for his daughter Harriet and her husband. At Southern Illinois Normal University, Isaac Rapp served as head of carpentry during the construction of the first building (1874). Upon the destruction of this building by fire in 1883, Isaac Rapp constructed a temporary wooden replacement building. Finally, in 1885-87, he was superintendent of construction for the new permanent building designed by the Saint Louis architect Isaac Taylor. In 1867, Isaac Rapp also established the Carbondale Planing and Moulding Mill to meet increased local demand for building materials resulting from a post-Civil War economic boom, supplying sash, doors, blinds, window and door frames, flooring and a variety of moldings. Maycock, *An Architectural History of Carbondale, Illinois*, xiv, 17, 27, and 30-33 and Sheppard, *Creator of the Santa Fe Style*, 11-12. There were also civic buildings outside Carbondale in Illinois, such as the Jackson County Courthouse (1870s) in Murphysboro and the Williamson County Courthouse (Charles E. Brush, 1887) in Marion. *The Carbondale Daily Free Press* 5 January 1927.

¹³ Maycock, *An Architectural History of Carbondale, Illinois*, 94.

¹⁴ The members of the Rapp family are listed in Sheppard, *Creator of the Santa Fe Style*, 12. There is often some confusion in regards to the exact number of Isaac and Georgiana's children, particularly the boys. Several architects in the family's next generation cause additional confusion. The Rapps were among Carbondale's most respected families. Both Rapp daughters married into prominent local families, the eldest, Harriet marrying Daniel Harmon Brush, the son of the town's founder.

¹⁵ Of the two remaining brothers, Alfred Rapp became a pharmacist and Charles R. Rapp became a cashier at the Trinidad National Bank in Trinidad, Colorado. Sheppard, *Creator of the Santa Fe Style*, 12. Charles R. Rapp followed his elder brothers to Colorado, settling with them in Trinidad around 1902 and finding work in a local bank.

Trinidad, Colorado when in 1892, Isaac Hamilton Rapp and William Morris Rapp formed I.H. & W.M. Rapp (variously also known as Rapp & Rapp or Rapp, Rapp & Hendrickson), where Louis B. Rapp was employed as a draftsman.¹⁶ The firm specialized in the design of public buildings, completing projects in southern Colorado and throughout New Mexico in a variety of contemporary modes styles. However, the firm is best known for canonizing the Spanish Pueblo Revival as the regional architectural expression for New Mexico.¹⁷

Thomas White Lamb (1871-1942) was born in Dundee, Scotland, at a time in which the area was enjoying a period of prosperity fueled by new industrial development and associated trade with the British Empire.¹⁸ The Lambs departed Scotland for unknown reasons when Thomas was still a child and immigrated to North America.¹⁹ Despite emigrating at a young age, Lamb later exhibited a strong affinity for the work of his countrymen, Robert and James Adam, whose distinctive strain of neoclassicism frequently manifested in his later theaters. The Lambs initially settled in Canada but

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¹⁶ Arthur C. Hendrickson joined the firm in 1902 as a draftsman and later became a partner in 1909. Sheppard, *Creator of the Santa Fe Style*, 15. Louis B. Rapp joined the firm in 1904, having only relocated to Trinidad in 1903 from St. Louis for health reasons. "Local Items," [Carbondale, IL] Free Press (7 January 1903): 2.

¹⁷ Their best-known works in the style were the Museum of New Mexico, Museum of Fine Arts (1916) and the La Fonda Hotel (1920), both in Santa Fe. The Colorado-based Rapp firm prospered until William Morris Rapp's sudden death in 1920, which was followed the next year by the death of associate Arthur C. Hendrickson.

¹⁸ Thomas Lamb's mother was Sarah Lamb (d. 1931). He later credited her with playing a critical role in his success as an architect. "Mrs. Sarah Lamb Dies at 85," *New York Times* (31 Jul. 1931): 17. Dundee's prosperity in the late nineteenth century partly stemmed from its status as "Juteopolis," the world's jute capitol, a rough fiber imported from India and manufactured into sacks, burlap, canvas, and twine. On Dundee, see Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Dundee on Record* (Edinburgh: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, 1992), 25-27.

¹⁹ Background on the Lamb family is from Hilary Russell, "An Architect's Progress: Thomas White Lamb," TMs (photocopy), p.1, American Theatre Architecture Archives, Elmhurst, Illinois.

moved to the New York City area in 1883, when Lamb was twelve.²⁰ There, Lamb's father found work in a large engineering firm, a job that may have influenced the direction of his son's subsequent career.²¹

John Adolph Emil Eberson (1875-1954) was also an immigrant, having been born to John Emil and Lorna Eberson in Cernauti, Bukovina, an ethnically diverse Duchy of Austria-Hungary located on the slopes of the Carpathian Mountains.²² His father operated a lumber business, working as a timber cruiser who shipped white pine to England and the Americas. He also had a lucrative contract to supply ties for a portion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad.²³ The younger Eberson began his schooling in the region's capital, Cernauti, a city noted as a cultural and educational center.²⁴ Architecturally, Cernauti had close ties to Vienna during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, evident in its mixture of late Gothic, Baroque, Neoclassical, and Secessionist architecture, which prompted its nickname, "Little Vienna."

Education and Early Architectural Careers

The Big Three founders' backgrounds in architecture placed them slightly outside the American architectural establishment, since none of the founding members received formal education in accordance with the predominant École des Beaux Arts model. This

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²⁰ "Thomas W. Lamb, 71; A Noted Architect," *New York Times* (27 Feb. 1942): 17.

²¹ Russell, "An Architect's Progress," p.1.

²² Background information on John Eberson and his firm is based upon a firm-written history published in Paul Greenhalgh, ed., *Theater Catalog 1948-49* (Philadelphia, PA: Jay Emmanuel Publications, Inc., 1949), 2-31. This appears to be the most extensive history of the firm written during John Eberson's lifetime. Additional biographical information on John Eberson is from his entry in the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White & Company, 1955), 562-563. Bukovina existed until 1918, when it was united with Romania. In 2014, the region that once comprised Bukovina is divided between Romania and the Ukraine.

²³ Drew Eberson to Elroy E. Quenroe, January 25, 1975, John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records, Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach, FL.

²⁴ John Eberson's early education is detailed in Greenhalgh, *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, 3.

distinction appears to have permitted the designers the freedom for greater experimentation befitting the unique nature of motion picture theater commissions. However, it also may have been the source of the criticism their work engendered from architects and other critics at-large with more defined architectural ideologies.

C.W. Rapp, like his three older architect-brothers, received his architectural training through an apprenticeship with his father, an arrangement prompted by the prohibitive cost of architectural schooling.²⁵ In 1889, he entered a partnership with architect C.P. Thomas to form the Chicago-based firm Thomas & Rapp.²⁶ Thomas, an Englishman who came to Chicago by way of Montreal in 1869, specialized in residential design, particularly multi-story flats with commercial space on the ground floor.²⁷

Thomas & Rapp maintained this specialty; between 1890 and 1895, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* recorded 26 of the firm's commissions, of which 19 were apartments, flats, and

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²⁵ Charles Ward Rapp, C.W. Rapp and George L. Rapp's grandnephew, ascribes the elder brothers' lack of formalized training to expense. Charles Ward Rapp to Andrew Corsini, October 24, 1986. Rapp & Rapp Subject File, American Theatre Architecture Archives, Elmhurst, IL. Carl D. Sheppard, Isaac Hamilton Rapp's biographer incorrectly states that both C.W. and George obtained formal architectural training. He suggests that the elder Rapp brother-architects apprenticed with their father due to the scarcity of advanced architecture schools. Sheppard, *Creator of the Santa Fe Style*, 12. However the University of Illinois architecture school that several Rapps would later attend had been established in 1873. After C.W. Rapp established his own architectural practice, he continued to occasionally work with his father. In 1905, C.W. and his brother George assisted Isaac in the completion of one of his final jobs, the First Presbyterian Church in Carbondale. C.W. Rapp had designed the structure, which Isaac Rapp then built.

²⁶ The formation of the partnership was January 1, 1889 according to "Co-partnership," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (13 Jan. 1889): 6. The firm's offices were initially established in the offices in the Equitable Building before relocating to the Title and Trust Building in 1893. "Removal," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (30 June 1893): 13.

²⁷ Background on C.P. Thomas is from the "Chicago Architects," *Chicago Daily* (30 June 1876): 5. Prior to the formation of Thomas & Rapp, C.P. Thomas was a partner in at least two other Chicago architectural firms: Wheelock & Thomas, which was dissolved by the end of June 1876, and Thomas & Rodger, which was disbanded in February 1888. The dissolution of Wheelock & Thomas was noted in Ibid. The dissolution of Thomas & Roger was noted in "Dissolution," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (26 February 1888): 7. Thomas' work in Chicago prior to the formation of his partnership with C.W. Rapp included the Bookseller's Building, the Dore Building, the Mackin Hotel, the Merchant's Building and the Union Building. In 1875, Thomas traveled throughout Europe studying and obtaining plans of the French flat system. "Chicago Architects," 5.

single-family residences. The firm also designed at least two mixed-use entertainment facilities, providing C.W. Rapp experience with this type.²⁸ In 1894, the firm designed the Oakland Music Hall at Cottage Grove Avenue and Fortieth Street, a four-story building with a 1,000-seat hall for dances, entertainments, and receptions on the top two floors, complete with a stage, dressing rooms, and other amenities for theatrical performances.²⁹ The following year, Thomas & Rapp completed designs for Thornton Hall at Sixty-Ninth and Wright streets, a six-story building with a third-floor dance hall, banquet hall, and Masonic lodge.³⁰

Thomas & Rapp was dissolved by January 1901, after which Rapp established his own independent practice.³¹ The roots of the latter were laid during his partnership with Thomas, when he was appointed state architect for Illinois under the administration of Governor John Peter Altgeld, who served from 1893 to 1897.³² In this capacity, Rapp designed Altgeld Hall (1896) at Southern Illinois Normal University, providing science classrooms, a library, and a gymnasium.³³ This project led to a second commission for Rapp at the university long after the Altgeld Administration ended: the Wheeler Library (1903), which also housed a museum, biological laboratory, and a YMCA/YWCA

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²⁸ C.P. Thomas already had experience in the area, having previously worked on the McVicker's Theater in Chicago. The firm's other non-residential work included schools, wholesale stores, and warehouses.

²⁹ The ground floor had six stores and the second contained offices. "Music Hall for Oakland," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (9 December 1894): 31.

³⁰ This \$50,000, six-story structure was designed with six stores on the ground floor with flats and offices directly above. "New Hall for Englewood," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (17 March 1895): 12.

³¹ The reasons for the dissolution of Thomas & Rapp remain unclear. That month the *Chicago Daily Tribune* noted that C.P. Thomas had relocated to Toronto and had established his own offices in the Portland Block. "Sheridan Road Apartments," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (20 January 1901): A42.

³² C.W. Rapp's work as Illinois State Architect was undertaken outside the Thomas & Rapp practice.

³³ The \$40,000 Altgeld Hall was the first expansion of the university's facilities beyond the initial structure constructed by Isaac Rapp Sr. As with the university's prior structures, C.W. Rapp's father acted as superintendent of construction. Sheppard, *Creator of the Santa Fe Style*, 39-40.

meeting room. Rapp's most significant civic commission as state architect was the Coles County Courthouse in Charleston completed in 1898.³⁴

George Rapp was the sole member of the Big Three to receive formal architectural education, obtaining a B.S. in 1899 from the University of Illinois.³⁵ The program (only one of two in the United States to eschew École des Beaux Arts-based curriculum at the time) had been established formally in 1873 by Nathan Clifford Ricker and modeled upon German architectural education, with an emphasis on construction, technology, and culture.³⁶ Ricker maintained that the program's lack of École methodology fostered the development of a new architecture reflecting modern American life.

Ricker's educational methods are broadly familiar today.³⁷ Instruction in drawing and sketching preceded work on a series of programs for buildings of increasing complexity. He sought to produce graduates fit for office work that were well versed in the science of construction. The cultivation of taste was less emphasized. Students' final term thesis involved the design of a large building, which was approached as if it were a professional commission involving the preparation of plans, details, and specifications.

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³⁴ For further details on the courthouse see David Hight and Brian Conway, "Coles County Courthouse National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form" (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, 1977).

³⁵ *Alumni Record of the University of Illinois* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1913), 229.

³⁶ Architectural instruction had begun informally at the University of Illinois in 1870. For an overview of the founding of the University of Illinois architectural program and its curriculum, see Wayne Michael Charney and John W. Stamper, "Nathan Clifford Ricker and the Beginning of Architectural Education in Illinois," *Illinois Historical Journal* 79 (Winter, 1986): 257-266 and Anthony Alofsin, "Tempering the Ecole: Nathan Ricker at the University of Illinois, Langford Warren at Harvard, and Their Followers," in *The History of History in American Schools of Architecture, 1865-1975*, ed. Gwendolyn Wright and Janet Parks (New York: Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture and Princeton University Press, 1990), 73-88.

³⁷ The curriculum is detailed in Charney and Stamper, "Nathan Clifford Ricker and the Beginning of Architectural Education in Illinois," 260-61 and Roula Geraniotis, "The University of Illinois and German Architectural Education," *Journal of Architectural Education* 38.4 (1985): 15.

Ricker complimented design instruction with shop practice, in which students were urged to acquire skills in the use of materials by constructing scale models of building components.

A central principle of the program was past forms could be developed, perfected, and adapted for modern use through knowledge of structure and the nature of new materials. This process would be a “perfection” of history, producing what Ricker deemed a “living architecture.”³⁸ Graduates of the program emerged with differing conceptions of modern American architecture. Prairie School architect-graduates such as Walter Burley Griffin and William Drummond believed that architectural style could be best found in an expression of structure. Others graduates, such as Rapp, produced work that utilized historical forms in unconventional ways adapted to modern uses.

George Rapp gained his experience in theater design in the Chicago office of Edmund Krause (1859-1935), which he joined in 1899 following his graduation and a period of informal architectural studies in Europe.³⁹ Krause, a native of Germany, established his practice in 1885 and became a noted designer of large apartment blocks.⁴⁰ Among his most significant clients during Rapp’s tenure was Ernest J. Lehmann, founder of the Fair Department Store, who commissioned a number of projects, notably delivery

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³⁸ Charney and Stamper, “Nathan Clifford Ricker and the Beginning of Architectural Education in Illinois,” 265.

³⁹ The nature of George Rapp’s architectural studies in Europe is unclear. As there is no evidence that he undertook additional formal studies, they likely consisted of travels throughout the continent. Illinois Society of Architects, “George L. Rapp... 1878-9/17/41, Dec. 1941,” Rapp & Rapp Subject File, American Theatre Architecture Archives, Elmhurst, IL. Edmund R. Krause attended an architectural school in his native Germany before immigrating to the United States in 1880. For Edmund R. Krause and his work see LeRoy Blommaert, “Edmund Krause- Edgewater Architect,” *Edgewater Scrapbook* 16, no.3 (Fall 2005) and the Chicago History Museum’s Index to the American Contractor’s Chicago Building Permit Column, 1898-1912.

⁴⁰ These included the Majestic Apartments (1893), the Lessing Apartment Complex (1898), and the Green Brier (1903).

stations and warehouses.⁴¹ Lehmann's widow, Augusta, commissioned Krause to design the Majestic Building and Theater (1906) at 71-75 Monroe Street in Chicago's Loop.⁴² In 1904-1905, Rapp assisted in the design of the \$1 million, 20-story office tower and vaudeville house. Rapp's precise contributions are unclear; he is most often been credited with a series of themed lounges in the theater.⁴³ However, it was Rapp's reputation as a theater architect that benefitted from the success of the Majestic in the following years.

In contrast to the Rapp brothers, Thomas Lamb was a largely self-taught architect, having begun his career by 1892 when, at the age of twenty-one, he was doing "general work" out of a building at 487 5th Ave.⁴⁴ He addressed his lack of formal architectural training by collaborating with other architects on his earliest projects. This arrangement was evidenced in the first recorded entry in Lamb's job book: the St. Nicolas Skating Rink at 157 West 66th Street, dating to 1895, was also credited to Ernest Flagg and W.B. Chambers. In 1894, the 23-year-old Lamb enrolled in the General Science Program at Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, graduating in 1898 with a Bachelor of Science degree. His coursework consisted primarily of mathematics and the sciences.⁴⁵ Lamb completed only two courses directly related to architecture: mechanical drawing and acoustics.

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⁴¹ The *American Contractor* lists 60 Chicago building permits issued in Krause's name between 1898 and 1912. Of these, Ernest J. Lehmann, his family members or his estate, commissioned 25 projects. An additional six building permits were issued for properties owned by the Fair Department Store.

⁴² "Building News of the Week," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (28 August 1904): C6.

⁴³ George is attributed this role in Steve Levin, ed., "Conclave Issue: Chicago Three Centuries of Theaters," *Marquee: The Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 35, no. 1 (2003): 9.

⁴⁴ Lamb is listed in an 1892 AIA directory. Russell, "An Architect's Progress," p.1

⁴⁵ In 1894, Lamb took algebra, geometry, philosophy and chemistry. In 1895, he took algebra, geometry, astronomy and chemistry. In 1896, Lamb completed courses in analytical geometry, mechanics, trigonometry and geology. In 1897, he took mechanical drawing. In 1898, Lamb took courses in applied

Lamb gained much of his architectural knowledge in the field, working for five years in the City of New York's Bureau of Buildings.⁴⁶ While studying at Cooper Union and maintaining his nascent architectural practice, Lamb began working as a building inspector, then later as a plan examiner. Lamb may have viewed his coursework at Cooper Union as supplementary to the practical architectural knowledge that he was gaining through his job. Regardless, it is clear that Lamb's employment at the Bureau of Buildings laid the groundwork for his subsequent success as both an architect and theater design specialist. Lamb later recalled that through this work he "encountered a wide variety of building types and construction problems."⁴⁷

In addition to gaining practical knowledge, Lamb's tenure at the Bureau of Buildings put him into contact with William Fox and Marcus Loew, both of whom were seeking architects for their early theaters. They recognized Lamb as a young man with "ready knowledge of the building code and quick solutions to the nagging problems of sight lines, acoustics and structure posed by theaters."⁴⁸ Lamb ultimately developed close personal friendships with both men, and each later provided him with a steady stream of theatrical commissions in the 1910s that set his architectural career in motion.

John Eberson was also a self-taught architect. He attended a preparatory school in Dresden before relocating to Vienna in 1893 to attend the Vienna College of Technology (Technical University).⁴⁹ Although the institution offered architectural coursework,

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mechanics, acoustics and optics, thermodynamics, qualitative chemical analysis and descriptive geometry. Details on Lamb's education are from Russell, "An Architect's Progress," p.1.

⁴⁶ For Lamb's work with the Bureau of Buildings see Russell, "An Architect's Progress," p.1.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ In at least one instance, Eberson claimed to have attended art school in Dresden but there is no further indication of either the extent of these studies or when they might have occurred. John Eberson, "The

Eberson's studies were confined to electrical engineering with some coursework in chemistry.⁵⁰ Despite not undertaking formal architectural training, Eberson's time in Vienna did influence his later career.⁵¹ During the late nineteenth century, the city was undergoing a remarkable modernization through the construction of the Ringstrasse, a precinct built atop the city's old fortifications.⁵² When Eberson arrived in 1893, the newly developed boulevards were lined with churches, housing blocks, museums, railroad stations, theaters, and other public buildings. The resulting eclectic assemblage of Neo-Baroque, Neoclassical, Neo-Gothic, and Neo-Romanesque structures appear to have left a lasting impression.

In the spring of 1901, Eberson immigrated to the United States, a decision made in part by his growing disillusionment with what he viewed as the militaristic climate in Europe.⁵³ This decision was precipitated by an altercation with a superior officer after about a year's service in the 14th Hussaren Regiment of the Austrian Army, in which he

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Atmospheric Theatre," *Motion Picture News* (12 June 1926): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide section. Several sources have stated John Eberson attended the University of Vienna. However given Eberson's course of study, the institution must have been the Technical University. The most authoritative source stating that Eberson studied at the University of Vienna John Eberson's education is Greenhalgh, *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, 3. Later sources stating Eberson attended the University of Vienna are likely derived from this original source. Drew Eberson stated in 1975 that his father attended "technical schools" in Dresden and Vienna. He also stated that the family had no record of the degree. Drew Eberson to Elroy E. Quenroe, January 25, 1975, John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records, Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach, FL. A profile of the firm appearing in *Architectural Record* in 1930 noted that John Eberson "is a graduate of a university in Vienna." "Eberson & Eberson," *Architectural Record* (Oct. 1930): 136. The first recent suggestion that Eberson attended the College of Technology is Jane Preddy, "Loew's Theater and Office Building," in *The Making of Virginia Architecture*, ed. Charles E. Brownell, Calder Loth, William M.S. Rasmussen and Richard Guy Wilson (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1993), 372-373.

⁵⁰ Drew Eberson to Elroy E. Quenroe, January 25, 1975, John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records, Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach, FL.

⁵¹ This theory is put forth in Jane Preddy, *Palaces of Dreams: The Movie Theaters of John Eberson, Architect* (San Antonio: McNay Art Museum, 1990).

⁵² Background on Vienna during the second half of the nineteenth century is from Rolf Toman, ed., *Vienna Art and Architecture* (Cologne: Könemann, 1999), 164-169.

⁵³ John Eberson was later said to have immigrated to the United States because he had inherited his father's love and admiration for the country's democracy. Greenhalgh, *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, 3.

had enlisted in 1896 following his graduation.⁵⁴ He settled in St. Louis, at least in part, on the basis of the city's sizable German-speaking population.⁵⁵ When Eberson arrived, the city was in the midst of preparations for the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exhibition, and he hoped to capitalize on the increased local demand for skilled tradesmen by opening an electrical supply and contracting business.⁵⁶

Eberson transitioned to theater design in 1901 when he entered a business partnership with the Johnston Theatrical Company. He met George Johnston (d. 1908), the St-Louis-based company's head, through his short-lived electrical supply business while installing equipment in a theater in Vicksburg, Mississippi. Johnston, a contractor-promoter, architect, and scenic designer, travelled to small towns throughout the Midwest and South promoting the local need for an "opera house" to accommodate travelling vaudeville productions and exhibit motion pictures, which, if the idea met with local enthusiasm, he would then build.⁵⁷ Eberson worked as Johnston's "understudy,"

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⁵⁴ Eberson's graduation date is noted in *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, 562. Drew Eberson stated that his father sneezed and was slapped by the officer resulting in an exchange of blows. Drew Eberson to Elroy E. Quenroe, January 25, 1975, John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records, Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach, FL. Jane Preddy suggests that Eberson immigrated to the United States to avoid incarceration in the aftermath of this incident. Richard Stapleford and Jane Preddy, *Temples of Illusion: The Atmospheric Theaters of John Eberson* (New York: Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery at Hunter College, 1988), 13.

⁵⁵ Upon Eberson's arrival in the United States, he had almost no knowledge of English. The majority of St. Louis' immigrants were German as were the majority of those with foreign-born parents. The city also had a sizable Austrian community. Despite this large German-speaking community, the population was encouraged to rapidly assimilate into the English-speaking population. James Neal Primm, *Lion of the Valley: St. Louis, Missouri, 1764-1980* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1998), 338-339, and 432-433. Accordingly, John Eberson set about teaching himself English, initially learning about 400 words that he determined were needed for everyday conversation. Eberson ultimately became fluent in English through continued independent study and regular attendance at church. Greenhalgh, *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, 3.

⁵⁶ St. Louis' preparations for the fair and its impact on the city are detailed in Primm, *Lion of the Valley*, 372-395. Greenhalgh, *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, 3.

⁵⁷ Johnston's last name was sometimes spelled "Johnson." Greenhalgh, *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, 3. The term "opera house" was attached simply to add an air of respectable legitimacy to the operation. Johnston's standard practice was to hold a series of community meetings and construct the theater only if the

preparing plans and specifications for theaters.⁵⁸ Although he had no previous experience in architectural design, he learned on the job, becoming a jack-of-all-trades in theater construction. He not only designed theaters but also supervised every aspect of their construction: overseeing test borings, excavation work, foundation work, the laying of brick, the detailing of millwork, the framing of wood trusses, and electrical and heating layouts and installations.⁵⁹ Eberson also worked on site as a carpenter, decorator, and scenic painter.

The Johnston Theatrical Company's projects are not well documented, but by 1906, the firm is said to have completed over 100 "opera houses," many from a standardized plan.⁶⁰ A representative example was three stories in height, constructed of

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townspeople and local investors would pre-buy all the seats for the first performances -- money that would then serve as his fee. This practice is seen in numerous newspaper account of Johnston's activity. This can be seen as early as 1901 in Hamilton, Ohio, where the required sale of seats amounted to \$12,500. In this instance individual tickets cost \$10 and entitled the holder to three performances. "Three Performances for only One Ticket: The Generous Proposition," *Hamilton Democrat* (14 May 1901): 2. In 1906, Johnston initiated a similar proposal in Racine, Wisconsin where he planned a 1,260-seat theater to cost \$70,000. Here locals were to buy all 1,260-seats for the opening night performance at \$10 apiece. That money would then be paid to Johnston upon the completion of the theater's roof. "Conditions of New Opera House," *Racine Daily Journal* (12 May 1906): 1.

⁵⁸ The date Eberson joined the Johnston Theatrical Company is noted in *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, 562. John Eberson found success in his personal life during his years with the Johnston Theatrical Company. On February 2, 1903, he married Beatrice Lamb in Muscatine, Iowa. "Understudy Now Married," *Hamilton Evening Sun* (7 February 1903): 5. The new Mrs. Eberson, a native of London, England, met John Eberson through his work (the Johnston Theatrical Company was said to have erected a theater in Muscatine, Iowa). It is likely that Eberson met his wife through this project, as she was then residing in Muscatine. "Conditions of New Opera House," 1. Beatrice Eberson was the daughter of Frank Lamb of London, who was a railway employee. *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, 563. Beatrice would later collaborate with her husband's firm on the decoration of their movie palaces with the title Color and Decorative Adviser. Greenhalgh, *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, 7. The couple initially settled in Hamilton, Ohio where Eberson was serving as George Johnston's "understudy," overseeing the construction of the Jefferson Theater. They ultimately had three children, a son Drew Calvin and two daughters, Lorna Mary and Elsa.

⁵⁹ Greenhalgh, *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, 3.

⁶⁰ These projects included theaters in Fort Wayne, Indiana; Moline, Illinois; Muskogee, Oklahoma; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Muscatine, Iowa; Sedalia, Missouri; Hamilton, Ohio; and Appleton and Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. "Big Theatre Business," *Chillicothe Daily Constitution* (7 May 1904): 2 and "Conditions of New Opera House," 1. The description is from an unrealized Johnston Theatrical Company theater proposed for Racine, Wisconsin. "Conditions of New Opera House," 1.

brick and stone and approximately 75 x 150 feet. The auditorium seated 500 patrons in the orchestra, 350 in the balcony, and 410 in a gallery. There were also 10 private boxes and a stage designed to accommodate the scenery of the largest touring companies.

Early Firm History

The Big Three's formative years coincided with the emergence of the motion picture theater as a distinct building type. Accordingly, their early careers trace the path from the nickelodeon to the immediate precursors to the movie palace. Lamb quickly emerged as the leader in the development of purpose-built motion picture theaters by virtue of his longstanding associations with the leaders of the nascent motion picture exhibition industry and his New York base. Throughout this period, he consistently produced innovative and increasingly palatial motion picture theaters that became the new national standard for the type. The Rapps and Eberson also established their practices as theater specialists during this period, steadily receiving commissions, establishing lasting business relationships, and gradually making names as firms of regional importance.

Lamb established himself as a pioneer in the nascent field of motion picture theater design at the outset of his career. His earliest independent architectural work included apartments, stables, depots, and theater projects, the majority of which remained unrealized.⁶¹ In 1904, Lamb completed his first documented theater, alterations to the

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⁶¹ Thomas Lamb's job book is not a complete record of his earliest commissions. This is particularly true for the first decade of his career. Furthermore, early entries often do not contain enough information to determine if a given project was realized. Thomas W. Lamb, "Job Book," D (photocopy), American Theatre Architecture Archives, Elmhurst, Illinois.

Gotham Theater at 165 East 125th Street in Harlem.⁶² According to his job book, this was followed by additional theater renovation projects, largely in and around New York.

Lamb's career as a theater designer began in earnest with the Nicoland Theater (1908) on Westchester Avenue near 156th Street in the Bronx, which was considered the first purpose-built motion picture theater in New York.⁶³ William Fox commissioned a second precedent-setting early motion picture theater, the City (1910) at 116 E. 14th Street, which established a model for a large, purpose-built combination vaudeville and movie house.⁶⁴ In the absence of other examples, Lamb modeled the façade after a nickelodeon, but the ornate 2,267-seat auditorium resembled contemporary legitimate theaters.

In the 1910s, Lamb became the favored architect for William Fox and Marcus Loew, and the latter ultimately proved to be his principal client through the 1930s.⁶⁵ Fox, inspired by the success of the City Theater, commissioned a series of increasingly palatial New York combination vaudeville and motion picture houses.⁶⁶ Loew's commissioned

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⁶² Russell, "An Architect's Progress," p.2.

⁶³ The Nicoland had only a brief existence as a motion picture theater, closing in 1917 and undergoing conversion to retail space. Russell, "An Architect's Progress," p.4.

⁶⁴ The now-demolished City Theater opened April 18, 1910. Lamb incorporated several technical refinements to enhance the audience's experience: a noticeably steep incline in upper seating levels that brought patrons closer to the stage, good sightlines and the elimination of view obstructing posts on all but the orchestra level. The only specific technical provision that Lamb was asked to provide for motion picture exhibition was space for a projection booth. Arthur Brounet executed the theater's decorative scheme, which was French Renaissance with scagliola marble, gold leaf, and a large auditorium mural. Lamb recalled its design process in Thomas W. Lamb, "Good Old Days to these Better New Days," *Motion Picture News* (30 June 1928): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide section.

⁶⁵ Later accounts state that Marcus Loew commissioned a theater from Lamb in 1908 and William Fox did so in 1909. Thomas Lamb himself stated that William Fox had given him the City Theater commission in the spring of 1909. Ibid. Lamb's obituary states that he designed a theater for Marcus Loew in 1908. Russell, "An Architect's Progress," p.2. William Fox had previously acquired the Gotham Theater at 165 East 125th Street, which Lamb had previously renovated in 1904 for Sullivan and Kraus. This was one of a series of existing theaters Fox renovated into combination houses presenting vaudeville and motion pictures. Donald C. King, "The William Fox Story," *Marquee: The Journal of The Theatre Historical Society* 19, no. 4 (1987): 4-9.

⁶⁶ These included the Washington (1910), the Riverside (1911), the Audubon (1912), the Cortona (1912), the Ridgewood (1913), the Riviera (1914), the Japanese Garden (1914), and the Nemo (1919).

not only theaters in New York but also projects in other major cities, which permitted Lamb to establish a distinctive architectural image for the chain.⁶⁷

Lamb's principal contribution to the field in the 1910s was the development of the deluxe motion picture theater, which was the immediate precursor to the movie palace.⁶⁸ Between 1913 and 1919, he produced a rapid succession of highly influential examples of this intermediate type in New York: the Regent (1913) in Harlem for Henry Marvin, the Strand (1914) at Broadway and 47th Street for Mitchell and Moe Mark (which became Lamb's own standard solution for subsequent theaters), and the Rialto (1916) and the Rivoli (1917) theatres for Crawford Livingston and Felix Kahn.⁶⁹ Lamb's line of influential motion picture theaters of the 1910s culminated with the 5,000-seat Capitol (1919) at Broadway and West 51st Street, which, at over 5,000-seats, eclipsed the neighboring Strand, Rialto, and Rivoli in both size and grandiose-ness. Lamb later maintained that the Capitol "formed the basis for a new era in theater design and construction" i.e., the movie palace.⁷⁰

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⁶⁷ These commissions included Loew's Avenue B (1913) in New York, Loew's Orpheum (1913) in New York, Loew's Orpheum (1916) in Boston, Loew's New Columbia (1917) in Boston, Loew's Victoria (1917) in New York, Loew's Metropolitan (1918) in Brooklyn, Loew's Palace (1918) in Washington, D.C., and Loew's Astoria (1919) in Queens. During this association, Lamb, like many Loew's executives, was often paid with company stock. As a result, he was the third largest Loew's shareholder at one time. Russell, "An Architect's Progress," p.10.

⁶⁸ Thomas Lamb experienced great changes in his personal life during the 1910s. He was widowed twice between 1909 and 1919. Lamb and his first wife had three children, only one of whom, Thomas A. Lamb, lived into adulthood. After being widowed around 1909, Lamb married his former secretary, Elizabeth Jung. Together they had three sons: Bruce, Stuart and William. In 1919, Elizabeth passed away during the influenza epidemic. Thomas Lamb met his third wife, Rheta Hurry, while working at his Toronto office. They had two children: Richard and Nancy. Russell, "An Architect's Progress," p. 20.

⁶⁹ Lamb's Strand model theaters included the Mark Strand (1915) in Lynn, Massachusetts; the Maryland (1915) in Hagerstown, Maryland; and Loew's Orpheum (1916) in Boston. More ambitious examples included Loew's Palace (1918) in Washington D.C. and Loew's Victoria (1917) in New York. The Strand model was also employed in the auditorium of Loew's New Columbia (1917) in Boston, which Lamb completely reconstructed.

⁷⁰ Lamb, "Good Old Days to these Better New Days," Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide.

John Eberson established his eponymous St. Louis-based firm in 1904, the same year as the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition.⁷¹ Eberson met his most significant theater client at the fair, Karl Hoblitzelle, who was working with the exposition's Director of Works and devising plans to establish a circuit of vaudeville theaters.⁷² Hoblitzelle realized this ambition as the Texas-based Interstate Amusement Circuit, which commissioned Eberson to design its earliest theaters, including the Majestic theaters in Birmingham, Alabama (c.1905) and Savannah, Georgia (c.1905).⁷³ Despite these early commissions, Eberson received only a handful of significant commissions before 1908, compelling him to take outside architectural work with J.F. Bender Brothers to sustain a regular income, and possibly, the Johnston Theatrical Company.⁷⁴

In about 1908, Eberson relocated his office to Hamilton, Ohio, a regional center of industry where he hoped to supplement his lagging theater designs with industrial

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⁷¹ John Eberson's surviving office records and history of firm differ in regards to the exact date that Eberson established his own architectural firm, offering a range of dates from 1904 to 1908. Ambiguity similarly surrounds the date that Eberson left the Johnston Theatrical Company. The most comprehensive firm history published during Eberson's lifetime does not provide an exact date. However it does note that "the architectural history of John Eberson" had then lasted for forty-five years. This suggests a date around 1903-1904. However it is unclear whether this refers to the period that Eberson began working as an architect with the Johnston firm or the date that he established his own practice. Norman Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theater Architecture," in *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, ed. Paul Greenhalgh (Philadelphia, PA: Jay Emmanuel Publications, Inc., 1949), 8. John Eberson's entry in the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* states that he both left the Johnston firm and established his own practice in 1904. *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, 562. The Louisiana Purchase Exhibition's theatrical but relatively inexpensive buildings also inspired John Eberson's subsequent theatrical designs. Jane Preddy, "Grand Illusions," *American Heritage* (September/October 1990): 114-120.

⁷² Stapleford and Preddy, *Temples of Illusion* and Ann Kathryn Yoklavich, "John Eberson's Theaters in Texas" (University of Texas at Austin, 1987), 13.

⁷³ Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theater Architecture," 9. The date that Eberson began working with Interstate is noted in Yoklavich, "John Eberson's Theaters in Texas," 14-15.

⁷⁴ There is some suggestion that the relationship between Eberson and the Johnston Theatrical Company lasted over six years. As the relationship started around 1901, this suggests a date near 1907. Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theater Architecture," 8 and "Theatre Builder Johnson is Dead," *Republican News* [Hamilton, Ohio] (6 January 1908): 4.

commissions.⁷⁵ He was already well known in Hamilton, having overseen a theater commission there for Johnston and from having maintained a family residence there following the completion of this initial project. His theater commissions are not well documented, but they were primarily for the design of vaudeville houses, combination houses, and “relatively minor” motion picture houses – work that earned him the nickname “Opera House John.”⁷⁶ The firm gained these commissions through his reputation with Johnston as a designer of “practical and economical, yet artistic theaters.”⁷⁷ Eberson then expanded this creed to the “nine Ps” or “Prepare Practical Plans for Pretty Playhouses - Please Patrons - Pay Profits.”⁷⁸

Eberson quickly outgrew Hamilton, and relocated his office to Chicago in 1910 since he required a base in a larger city more central to the motion picture industry in order to continue securing theater commissions.⁷⁹ Once in Chicago, commissions from regional vaudeville and motion picture exhibitors dominated Eberson’s practice. The firm’s proximity to Michigan, then in the midst of an economic boom due to the

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⁷⁵ In 1908, Eberson received what he later considered one of his first important non-theatrical commissions from a client in Hamilton. This was a \$200 front porch addition for a Mrs. Sheehan. Morse, “An American Cavalcade of Theater Architecture,” 8. This strategy proved successful and the firm received a number of prominent industrial commissions in Hamilton including foundries, engine shops, machine shops, paper mills, pattern warehouses and safe works. Around 1909-1910, this work led to one of Eberson’s first international commissions, a paper mill in Japan. Morse, “An American Cavalcade of Theater Architecture,” 9 and Stapleford and Preddy, *Temples of Illusion*.

⁷⁶ Known clients included well-known showmen such as Chamberlain & Kindt, Judge Foley, and George Seip. Projects included the Jewel Theater (1909) in Hamilton, the Crown Theater (1909) in Chicago for Bob Rickson, the Walnut Street Theater (1910) in Louisville, Kentucky for Louis Seelbach and the Walnut Street Amusement Company, and theaters in Little Rock, Arkansas for Ed Korruthers. Surviving firm records have little information on this period. Furthermore, firm histories dating to Eberson’s lifetime do not elaborate on the period. Information on this period of Eberson’s career has been taken from contemporary coverage in local newspapers. Morse, “An American Cavalcade of Theater Architecture,” 8.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Eberson, “The Atmospheric Theatre,” Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide.

⁷⁹ Eberson appears to have remained in Hamilton, Ohio at least into June 1910 as he is listed as a resident of that city in local newspaper coverage of the opening of the Walnut Street Theater in Louisville dating to that time. “Hamilton Men Take Over New Theatre Friday,” *Republican News* [Hamilton, Ohio] (4 June 1910): 7.

automobile industry, brought about one of the most prolific of these associations.⁸⁰

Walter Scott Butterfield, founder of the Michigan-based Butterfield Circuit and a friend of the Eberson family, commissioned the firm to design and construct theaters for his expanding chain in Battle Creek, Flint, and Jackson. In Texas, the Interstate Amusement Company also retained the firm to design the Majestic theaters in Houston (1910), Fort Worth (1911), and San Antonio (1913).

In relocating to Chicago, Eberson became the second member of the fledgling Big Three to be based in that city. C.W. Rapp ended his independent practice and George Rapp left the Krause office to form C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, Architects in 1906, which was based in Chicago and specialized in the design of vaudeville and motion picture theaters from the outset. The brothers established their office in the Chicago Title and Trust Building; C.W. Rapp took a leading design role and George Rapp took a leading role in sales.⁸¹ They found immediate success, obtaining commissions for vaudeville theaters based upon George Rapp's association with the Chicago Majestic.⁸² The firm became associated with several regional Orpheum affiliates, notably the Allardt Brothers circuit and the Western Vaudeville Association, both operating in the Midwest and Canada.

Rapp & Rapp's key early commission was the Majestic Theater (1907) in Des Moines, Iowa, designed as a "sister theater" to the Chicago Majestic. The Majestic was significant as an early instance in which the firm employed a number of key architectural elements that would characterize its first movie palaces a decade later: French

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⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ In 1919, C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, Architects relocated to the twelfth floor of the State-Lake Building, which they had designed. Charles Ward Rapp, "A Brief Rapp and Rapp History." Unpublished manuscript, American Theater Architecture Archive, Elmhurst, IL, 1978, 2.

Renaissance motifs, a monumental façade, and numerous lavishly-appointed support spaces for audience comfort. Perhaps most significantly, it was fireproof and had a “hanging balcony” that eliminated obtrusive support posts in the 1,700-seat auditorium. The Orpheum circuit adopted the Des Moines Majestic as a standard solution for its subsequent theaters, guaranteeing the firm a steady stream of commissions that sustained it through the formative years.⁸³ Through about 1912, the firm’s output was characterized by the continual adaptation and further development of the Des Moines model to different programs across the Midwest on behalf of Orpheum and various affiliates. Representative theaters include the Majestic (1908) in Cedar Rapids, the Majestic (1910) in Dubuque, and the Orpheum (1911) in Madison.⁸⁴

The formative period of Rapp & Rapp’s career ended with C.W. Rapp’s 1912 marriage to Mary Payne Root. That March, the newlyweds embarked on a Parisian honeymoon. While the emergence of French motifs in the Rapp’s theatrical designs dated to the outset of their practice, C.W. Rapp’s firsthand exposure to French architecture cemented the firm’s preference for palatial interiors derived from that country’s architectural patrimony.⁸⁵ In Paris, C.W. Rapp became especially fascinated with the

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⁸³ Orpheum initially announced that there would be some design variation in subsequent Orpheum Circuit theaters according to local conditions but the basic Des Moines scheme would be adhered to. “Majestic Theatre Finished,” *Des Moines Daily News* (16 November 1907): 1 and 6.

⁸⁴ Other examples include the Bijou (1909) in Dubuque, the Orpheum (1910) in South Bend, the Orpheum (1912) in Fort William, Ontario, Canada, and the Orpheum (1912) in Racine. The Bijou Theater in Dubuque, Iowa was a renovation of an existing theater dating to the 1840s for the Western Vaudeville Association. It burned a few months after reopening and was replaced by the Majestic Theater completed in 1910. Only the Majestic in Dubuque survives with any of its original character among the firm’s earliest theaters.

⁸⁵ Mary Rapp later took credit for the selection of France as a honeymoon destination, stating that she had convinced her husband that a firsthand study of French architecture would benefit his work. She also prompted the cancellation of their April 1912 return voyage on the RMS *Titanic* so that her husband might extend his study of French architecture. Charles Ward Rapp to Andrew Corsini, June 8, 1984 and Charles Ward Rapp to Andrew Corsini, October 24, 1986, American Theatre Architecture Archives, Elmhurst, IL.

Opéra and variations of its features, especially its grand staircase, which would subsequently be incorporated into the firm's theatrical designs. The Al. Ringling Memorial Theater (1915) in Baraboo, Wisconsin commissioned by Albert "Al." C. Ringling (of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus) was a direct result of this trip. The project's budget allowed the firm to fully indulge in its increasingly palatial aesthetic sensibilities for the first time, which resulted in the firm's production of its own proto-movie palace.⁸⁶

Movie Palaces, 1921-1925

The movie palace's gradual emergence as a distinct building type culminated in 1921 with Rapp & Rapp's completion of the Tivoli Theater in Chicago for Balaban & Katz, which emerged as the definitive model. Rapp & Rapp vaulted from theater architects of regional significance to the national status of the field's second leader alongside Lamb, whose innovations in deluxe motion picture theater design they had appropriated and improved. Eberson's meteoric rise to national prominence also occurred in the first half of the 1920s with the first atmospheric theaters, an illusionistic outdoor auditorium scheme reproducing a courtyard or garden environment under the night sky

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C.W. and George Rapp both apparently traveled internationally on several occasions for the benefit of their work. A visit to France by George Rapp is documented in an undated postcard he sent to his brother William Morris Rapp in Trinidad, Colorado. The postcard is found in the Rapp and Rapp Collection, Chicago History Museum. Additionally, members of the firm are also said to have traveled in the Orient. This was said to have inspired the design of the Oriental Theater in Chicago. "Will Decorate Big Masonic Movie Along East Indian Lines," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (2 November 1924): G22.

⁸⁶ The Al. Ringling Theater is often cited as the first movie palace, but can best be viewed as one of a number of contemporary experiments in applying palatial design to a purpose-built motion picture theater. Andrew Craig Morrison in Theatre Historical Society of America, "The Al. Ringling Theater," *Theatre Historical Society of America Annual*, no. 17 (1990): 6. Other notable work following C.W. Rapp's return from Europe included the Windsor (1914) in Chicago for Lubliner & Trinz and the Palace (1915) in Fort Wayne for Stouder & Barnett. The firm also designed additional theaters Orpheum-affiliated theaters, including the Columbia (1913) in Davenport, the Orpheum (1914) in Quincy, Illinois, the Orpheum (1914) in Champaign, and the Palace (1915) in Rockford.

that constituted the most important innovation in the type's rapid development since the Rapps' definition of its salient characteristics a few years earlier. Accordingly, by the mid 1920s, the Rapps, Eberson, and Lamb were all established as the field's leaders. The Big Three obtained and solidified this status through their enduring relationships with key exhibitors: Lamb with Loew's, Rapp & Rapp with Balaban & Katz, and Eberson with the Interstate Amusement Company.

Rapp & Rapp's development of the first movie palaces was fostered by its status as virtual architects-in-residence for Balaban & Katz. Abraham Joseph "A.J." and Barney Balaban were apparently familiar with the firm prior to the formation of Balaban & Katz, having spent "hours" in their offices "studying blueprints for theaters we couldn't afford to build!"⁸⁷ In 1916, they introduced their new partner Sam Katz to the Rapps' work with a visit to the Al. Ringling theater in Baraboo. Katz was impressed, and the firm was retained to design the new chain's ambitious scheme of large, palatial motion picture theaters in Chicago's neighborhood business districts and in the Loop.⁸⁸ In addition to the Tivoli, this initial building program included the Central Park (1917), located in North Lawndale on the far West Side of the city, the Riviera (1918), located in the Uptown neighborhood on the city's North Side, and the Chicago (1921) in the Loop.⁸⁹ A second group of movie palaces included the Uptown (1925) in the Uptown neighborhood, the

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⁸⁷ On Balaban & Katz and Rapp & Rapp, see Carrie Balaban, *Continuous Performance: The Story of A.J. Balaban as told to his wife Carrie Balaban* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1942), 50 and Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 41.

⁸⁸ A detailed history of Balaban & Katz can be found in Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 40-43.

⁸⁹ Balaban & Katz had acquired the unfinished Riviera Theater from other exhibitors. Although it was originally designed by other architects, C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp completed the unfinished theater along the lines of their other Balaban & Katz movie palaces.

Norshore (1926) in the North Side Rogers Park neighborhood, and the Oriental (1926) in the Loop.

Rapp & Rapp's less-heralded contemporary commissions from other regional exhibitors also helped define the nascent type.⁹⁰ Early work included the Capitol (1920) in St. Paul, a 2,500-seat theater that was one part of a large commercial building designed by another architect, and the Lindo (1921) in Freeport, Illinois, a stand-alone 1,200-seat house with no balcony, which permitted the firm to gain further expertise in adapting the movie palace to a variety of local conditions. Following the completion of the first Balaban & Katz theaters, regional exhibitors commissioned the firm to design similar movie palaces. Saxe Brothers of Milwaukee, for example, commissioned a succession of movie palaces into the late 1920s, including four in Milwaukee and theaters in Fond du Lac, Kenosha, and Madison.⁹¹ Rapp & Rapp's development of the movie palace typology paralleled its continued design of vaudeville theaters, which now resembled smaller and more sedate examples of the former but increasingly shared their palatial appointments⁹²

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⁹⁰ This work also included the Strand (1918) in Madison, Wisconsin for Miffin Realty, the Capitol (1920) in Davenport for H.C. Kahl, the Parthenon (1921) in Hammond, Indiana for Warner Brothers, the Tivoli (1921) in Chattanooga for the Signal Amusement Co., and the Miller (1922) in Wichita, Kansas for Publix Theaters.

⁹¹ These projects were the Wisconsin Theater (1924) in Milwaukee, the Modjeska Theater (1924) in Milwaukee, the Retlaw Theater (1925) in Fond du Lac, the Uptown (1927) in Milwaukee, the Gateway Theater (1927) in Kenosha, and the Capitol Theater (1928) in Madison.

⁹² E.C.A. Bullock noted that the primary difference between the firm's movie palaces and vaudeville theaters was the smaller size of the latter. Their largest vaudeville theaters were said to be between 2,500 and 2,800-seat capacities while their largest movie palaces were closer to 5,000-seats in size. E.C.A. Bullock, "The Theatre of To-Day," *Motion Picture News* (21 Nov. 1925): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide section. For the Keith-Albee circuit the firm designed the Palace Theater (1919) in Cincinnati, Ohio, Keith's 105th Street Theater (1921) in Cleveland, Ohio, the B.F. Keith Palace Theater (1922) in Cleveland, Ohio, the Keith's Theater (1922) in Dayton, Ohio and the Keith-Albee Palace Theater (1926) in Akron, Ohio. Rapp & Rapp was a leader in the development of "Junior Orpheums," a new format of first-rate entertainment at "popular" prices that included vaudeville acts, two films, and a symphony orchestra. Junior Orpheum theaters offered this low cost entertainment in palatial movie palace-like environments and served as training grounds for performers before they played the big time. The firm collaborated with Orpheum's favored architect, Gustave Albert Lansburgh, on the design of the

John Eberson redefined his career in the early 1920s by popularizing the atmospheric theater, which propelled him into the top tier of motion picture specialists as the final member of the Big Three. The atmospheric theater also brought Eberson a steady stream of increasingly prestigious commissions throughout the decade.⁹³

Eberson's full realization of the atmospheric theater in 1923 occurred at just the moment when exhibitors' focus shifted from establishing motion picture's respectability toward a continual search for new modes of theater design.⁹⁴ Exhibitors widely embraced this new mode of design, which proved a great success in attracting novelty-loving moviegoers away from their competition and was less expensive to construct and operate than a traditionally designed movie palace.⁹⁵

The atmospheric theater's development primarily occurred through Eberson's continuing relationship with Interstate Amusement. In the early 1920s, Eberson completed a series of Interstate theaters that provided him with opportunities to experiment with illusionistic outdoor motifs: the Majestic (1921) in Dallas, the Orpheum (1922) in Wichita, and the Majestic (1923) in Houston. The latter was John Eberson's first fully-realized atmospheric movie palace, the culmination of his experimentation with this novel mode of theatrical design dating back to Interstate commissions of the previous decade.⁹⁶ However, it was the Capitol Theater (1925) in Chicago, built for Jack Cooney's

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prototypical Junior Orpheum, the State Lake (1919) in Chicago, and went on to complete other examples: the Main Street (1921) in Kansas City and the St. Louis (1925) in St. Louis.

⁹³ This led to the establishment of short-lived branch offices in Houston and Miami. Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theater Architecture," 10.

⁹⁴ John Eberson had been experimenting with atmospheric design since at least 1910-11.

⁹⁵ John Eberson, "New Theatres for Old," *Motion Picture News* (30 December 1927): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide section and Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theater Architecture," 9.

⁹⁶ Although the Majestic Theater (1923) in Houston is frequently deemed the first atmospheric theater, Drew Eberson noted that it was "my father's first large success" with the type. This is in keeping with the

National Theater Corporation, which first brought atmospheric design and Eberson himself widespread attention.⁹⁷

Thomas Lamb was the industry's workhorse, turning out a large number of theaters during the early 1920s but was overshadowed by the flashier and more innovative products of the Rapp and Eberson offices. Loew's remained loyal, awarding Lamb the commissions for its New York corporate headquarters and flagship theater, the Loew's State Building and Theater (1921), and for regional outposts (which occasionally involved multiple theaters in the same city) in the Northeast, Midwest, and South in addition to numerous houses in and around the chain's New York base.⁹⁸ Lamb also remained popular with Keith-Albee and other vaudeville circuits, which favored more restrained if still luxurious theaters of the type produced by Lamb.

Movie Palace Boom, 1926-1929

During the second half of the 1920s, the Big Three became closely associated with Hollywood studio-exhibitors, which perpetuated their dominance of movie palace design. Loew's, Paramount-Publix, Warner Bros., Fox, and R.K.O. initiated large-scale movie palace building programs in this period, and the Big Three were routinely awarded

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prior development of several earlier examples of the type by the firm. Drew Eberson to Elroy E. Quenroe, 8 January 1975, John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records, Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach, FL.

⁹⁷ "Blending Art and Showmanship," *Motion Picture News* (7 October 1927): 1058-1060, 1063 and 1079.

⁹⁸ These include Loew's theaters in Brooklyn (1920 and 1921), Memphis (two in 1920), Cleveland (three in 1921), Indianapolis (1921), New Rochelle, New York (1921), Manhattan (three; two in 1921 and one in 1925), Buffalo (1921), Newark (1921), Boston (1922), and St Louis (1924). The Keith-Albee Circuit commissioned theaters in Syracuse, New York (1920), Uniontown, Pennsylvania, (1922), Brooklyn (1925), and Boston (1925). A sampling of other notable projects of the early 1920s includes the Strand in Far Rockaway, New York (1920) for Sol Brill, the Palace in Dallas (1921) for Earl Hulsey of Southern Enterprises, the State in New Brunswick (1921) for Walter Reade, the McVickers in Chicago (1922) for Jones, Link & Schaefer, the Ambassador (1923) and Tivoli (1924) theaters in Washington, D.C. for Harry Crandall, and the Fox Theater in Philadelphia (1923) for William Fox.

their most prestigious movie palace commissions. The Hollywood studio-chains drove a movie palace boom that spread the Big Three's work across the country.

John Eberson benefited from the continued popularity of his atmospheric theaters, and his office remained busy through the period, further spreading the type on behalf of both the Hollywood studio-chains and regional exhibitors.⁹⁹ Drew Eberson (1904-1989) aided his father in this process, becoming a partner in the renamed John and Drew Eberson, Architects in 1926. To facilitate work for the New York-based national chains, the firm also opened a New York branch office in 1926 in the Rodin Studio Building at 200 West 57th Street, which became its sole base of operations three years later.¹⁰⁰ This move was likely due in part to Loew's, which engaged the firm to design a series of atmospheric movie palaces in the Midwest, Northeast and South.¹⁰¹ These commissions represented a major coup for the firm, as Lamb and architects associated with him had previously dominated the design of Loew's theaters.

Rapp & Rapp continued to proliferate its well-known Balaban & Katz-style movie palaces but now did so on an increasingly national scale. Paramount-Publix

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⁹⁹ Adolph Zukor of Paramount commissioned the Olympia (1926) in Miami and the Tampa (1926) in Tampa. Universal Pictures' Carl Laemmle commissioned Eberson to design atmospheric movie palaces in Brooklyn (1927) and Kansas City (1928) for his nascent chain. There was also the Paradise Theater (1928) in Chicago for Balaban & Katz, the Majestic Theater (1929) in San Antonio for Interstate, the Grand Riviera (1925) and Annex (1927) theaters in Detroit for Charles Munz, the Ritz Theater (1926) in Tulsa for Ralph Talbot, and the Palace (1926) in Canton, Ohio for Harry Harper Ink.

¹⁰⁰ Between 1926 and 1929, John Eberson divided his time between the Chicago and New York offices. Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theater Architecture," 11. The closure of the Chicago office in 1929 was ascribed to the New York office handling most of the firm's work. "Talkies Take John Eberson to Manhattan," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (21 July 1929): B3. In 1929, it was announced that in New York office would relocate to a building under construction at 370 Lexington Avenue. "Architects Rent in New Building," *New York Times* (1 November 1929): 50.

¹⁰¹ The resulting theaters were in Baltimore, Maryland (1926), Richmond, Virginia (1928), Louisville, Kentucky (1928), Queens (1929), Akron, Ohio (1929), and the Bronx (1929). There is some suggestion that John Eberson's New York office was opened as a condition of receiving the Loew's commissions. Drew Eberson to Elroy E. Quenroe, January 25, 1975, John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records, Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach, FL.

emerged as the Rapps' most significant client, and the firm functioned as its de-facto in-house architect much as it had for Balaban & Katz earlier in the decade, likely due to Sam Katz's control of Publix Theaters. This relationship gained the firm a steady stream of prestigious commissions, including the company's headquarters and flagship theater (1926) on Times Square and its western outposts in Denver (1927), Seattle (1928), and Portland (1928), as well as important houses in Brooklyn (1929) and Toledo (1929). Loew's also increasingly turned to the firm for important commissions as the decade progressed, which culminated in two of the so-called "Wonder Theaters:" the Loew's Kings (1929) in Brooklyn and the Loew's Jersey (1929) in Jersey City.¹⁰² C.W. Rapp did not live to see his firm's late 1920s pinnacle, dying suddenly at the age of 65 on the evening of 28 June 1926 in his Chicago home from a cerebral hemorrhage said to be brought on by "his close application to the many interests of his firm in the last few months."¹⁰³

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¹⁰² Rapp & Rapp also completed Loew's movie palaces in Pittsburgh (1927) and Providence (1928). Fox commissioned the Fox Theater (1927) in Washington, D.C. as part of the larger National Press Building. The Orpheum Circuit continued to retain the firm to design Junior Orpheum theaters, including the New Palace Theater (1926) in Chicago, the Orpheum theaters in Madison, Wisconsin (1927), in Omaha, Nebraska (1927), in Sioux City, Iowa (1927), and in Memphis, Tennessee (1928). The firm also continued to obtain significant movie palace commissions from regional motion picture exhibitors. This included Shea's Buffalo Theater (1926) in Buffalo, New York for Michael Shea, the Rialto Square Theater (1926) for the Rubens Brothers in Joliet, Illinois, the Michigan Theater (1926), the Birmingham Theater (1927) and the Royal Oak Theater (1928) for the Kunsy chain in and around Detroit, Michigan, the Ambassador Theater (1926) in St. Louis, Missouri for the Skouras Brothers, the Piccadilly Theater (1927) in Chicago for H. Schoenstadt & Sons, and the Tivoli Theater (1929) in Aurora, Illinois for Great States Theaters.

¹⁰³ "C.W. Rapp of Architect Firm is Dead at 65," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (30 June 1926): 16. C.W. Rapp's obituary was a testament to Rapp & Rapp's success through the first half of the 1920s. It highlighted prominent examples of the firm's recent Chicago work: the Chicago, Riviera, Tivoli and Uptown theaters, the Masonic Temple and Oriental Theater, the Eitel buildings consisting of the Metropolitan Office Building, the Bismarck Hotel and the Palace Theater, and the Hotel Windermere East. Special note was made of work outside the Chicago: the Paramount Office Building in New York (then under construction), the National Press Building in Washington D.C., the Leland Hotel and Michigan Building and Theater in Detroit, and other unspecified "large" projects in St. Louis, Cleveland, Buffalo, Kansas City, and Milwaukee. In June of 1926, these unidentified theaters were the Ambassador (opened on August 26th of that year) and the St. Louis (1925) in St. Louis, Keith's 105th Street (1921) and Palace (1922) in Cleveland,

Thomas Lamb remained busy but overshadowed until his office overhauled its movie palace designs in the late 1920s.¹⁰⁴ Despite increased challenges from rival firms, Loew's remained Lamb's most important client. Lamb-designed Loew's movie palaces were built in the Midwest and South as well as in New York, including major commissions in Kansas City (1927), Columbus (1928), Syracuse (1928), and Brooklyn (1929).¹⁰⁵ The firm also completed its masterwork in this period, the Fox Theater (1929) in San Francisco, which seated 5,000 and represented one of the pinnacles of movie palace design.¹⁰⁶ Lamb also worked extensively for Keith-Albee and regional vaudeville circuits, producing work that differed little from movie palaces.¹⁰⁷

More than Movie Palaces

In the 1920s, the Big Three solidified their reputations as designers of other building types. They obtained much of this expertise in the course of their movie palace

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Shea's Buffalo (1926) in Buffalo, the Main Street (1921) in Kansas City, and the Wisconsin (1924) and the Modjeska (1924) in Milwaukee. C.W. Rapp's wife, Mary, survived him. On June 30, a morning service was held at his Chicago home before a funeral at the First Presbyterian Church in Carbondale and an afternoon burial in the Oakland Cemetery. "Funeral of Ward Rapp Today," *Carbondale Free Press* (30 June 1926): 1. George Rapp continued to operate the firm as C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp in honor of his brother.
¹⁰⁴ Lamb's firm incorporated in 1927 as Thomas W. Lamb, Inc. "Building Designer Accused by State," *New York Times* (24 Apr. 1947): 22. The Lamb office relocated several times during its existence. Among its earliest locations was a previously unused space in the American Theater/Roof Garden Theater building at Eighth Avenue and 42nd Street.

¹⁰⁵ These included theaters in New Orleans (1926) and Norfolk (1926), New York (1927), Kansas City (1927), Syracuse (1928), Columbus (1928), and Brooklyn (1929). Loew's and United Artists jointly operated the Ohio in Columbus as part of a short-lived union that produced several other notable movie palaces.

¹⁰⁶ Smaller numbers of commissions came from a variety of other national and regional chains. These included the Stanley Corporation of America for the Stanley Theater (1928) in Utica, William Fox for the Academy of Music (1926) in New York and the Savoy Theater (1926) in Brooklyn, Walter Reade for the Mayfair (1926) in Asbury Park, New Jersey, and Sol Brill for the Oasis Theater (1926) in Queens.

¹⁰⁷ Among the most prolific of these associations was with Keith-Albee, for whom theaters were constructed in Brooklyn (1926), Columbus, Ohio (1926), White Plains, New York (1927), Cincinnati, Ohio (1927), Huntington, West Virginia (1928), Boston (1928) and Flushing, Queens (1928). The firm also completed a handful of movie palaces for Frederick F. Proctor (1851-1929), who operated a New York-based vaudeville and motion picture theater circuit. These projects were the New Proctor's Theater (1926) in Schenectady, New York, Proctor's 86th Street Theater (1927) in New York, the Proctor's Theater (1927, in association with Herbert J. Krapp) in New Rochelle, New York, and Proctor's 58th Street Theater (1928) in New York.

commissions, which were frequently designed as one part of larger revenue-producing commercial buildings of varying size.¹⁰⁸ The resulting buildings were often as prestigious within their respective communities as the theaters they contained. For instance, Lamb and Rapp & Rapp designed the Times Square corporate headquarters and flagship theaters for their respective leading clients: the Loew's Building (1921) and the Paramount Building (1926).

The Big Three's relationships with leading regional and national motion picture exhibitors, as well as leading vaudeville circuits, provided a sufficient number of commissions to sustain their practices during the 1920s movie-palace boom years. However, the firms also designed a substantial number of other prominent buildings.¹⁰⁹ Lamb completed the third incarnation of Madison Square Garden (1925), which succeeded Stanford White's celebrated structure of 1890 on a different site. His designs for Greyhound bus terminals at New York's Penn Station (1935), Pittsburgh (1936), and Detroit (1938) pioneered the company's trademark Streamline Moderne architectural

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¹⁰⁸ Lamb's larger commercial buildings attached to movie palaces include the Fox Building and Fox Theater (1923) in Philadelphia, the Midland Building and Loew's Midland (1927) in Kansas City, Missouri, and the Loew's Building and Loew's State (1927) in Syracuse. Rapp & Rapp's work in this type included the Eitel Block (1926) in Chicago with the Metropolitan Office Building, the Bismarck Hotel and the Palace Theater, and the National Press Building and Fox Theater (1927) in Washington, D.C. Eberson built large commercial blocks in association with the following projects: the Orpheum (1922) in Wichita, the Olympia (1925) in Miami, the Tampa (1926) in Tampa, the State (1929) in Sydney, the Majestic (1929) in San Antonio, and the Midwest (1930) in Oklahoma City. Eberson worked alongside other architects on the Ritz (1926) in Tulsa, the Metropolitan (1926) in Houston, the Worth (1927) in Fort Worth, and the Emboyd (1928) in Fort Wayne.

¹⁰⁹ Lamb's also designed the Pythian Temple (1927), the Hotel Paramount (1928), and the Pickwick Arms Hotel (1930) in New York, the Fountain Square Hotel (1927) in Cincinnati, and the French Casino (1934) in Miami Beach. In 1932, the firm received a measure of international recognition when it received an "honorable mention" in the design competition for the Palace of the Soviets in Moscow. Rapp & Rapp's work included the Stromberg Motor Devices Building (1910), the Jackson Shore Apartments (1917), and the Trianon Ballroom (1922) in Chicago. They also developed a civic plan for a section of Detroit's central business district, the so-called "Metropolitan District" that was to contain banks, hotels, offices, theaters, and other high-rise commercial buildings. Eberson's significant work also included the Shirkmere Apartment Hotel (1923) in Wichita.

aesthetic, which was further developed by William Strudwick “W.S.” Arrasmith.¹¹⁰

Rapp & Rapp completed a handful of prominent high-rise hotels and office buildings in the Midwest, including the Hotel Windermere East (1924) and Lake-State Building (1926) in Chicago and the Leland Hotel (1926) in Detroit; but its most recognizable work was the Corn Palace (1921) in Mitchell, South Dakota. Eberson’s notable work included the York Rite Masonic Temple (1925) in Wichita and a series of high-rise bank and office buildings: the Neils Esperson (1925) and Mellie Esperson (1938) buildings in Houston and the Central National Bank (1929) in Richmond.

The Last Movie Palaces: 1930-1932

During the first years of the Depression, the Big Three appeared well positioned to weather the economic downturn through their associations with the Hollywood studio-chains. Motion picture exhibitors maintained the film industry was “Depression-proof,” and movie palace construction continued on projects planned before the economic downturn and on ambitious new expansion schemes. The Big Three’s major clients were among the most active: Loew’s in New York; Publix in the Midwest, Northeast, and South; and Warner Bros. in California, the Midwest, and the Northeast. It was not until 1930 that effects of the economic downturn became apparent and the theater construction boom that began the previous decade gradually ebbed.

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¹¹⁰Arrasmith succeeded Lamb as Greyhound’s favored architect and further developed the company’s Streamline architectural image. In 1937, Lamb himself attested to the character of Arrasmith’s work and his abilities. He subsequently lost the commission for the Washington, D.C. Greyhound station to Arrasmith. W.S. Arrasmith went on to eventually take charge of Greyhound’s entire building program. Further information on Greyhound and Arrasmith can be found in Frank E. Wrenick, *The Streamline Era Greyhound Terminals: The Architecture of W.S. Arrasmith* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2007), 49-58.

Rapp & Rapp was most prolific, continuing its close association with Publix, which was engaged in a large-scale building scheme in smaller-to-mid-sized cities. The firm generally received the most prestigious of these commissions, which comprised approximately a dozen theaters.¹¹¹ Two Chicago movie palaces operated by the Publix subsidiary Balaban & Katz were especially significant: the Gateway Theater (1930) on the Northwest side and the Southtown Theater (1931) on the South-Side. Rapp & Rapp also completed movie palaces for Warner Bros. in West Chester, Pennsylvania (1930), Erie (1931), Milwaukee (1931), and Youngstown (1931). R.K.O. commissioned the firm's final movie palace, the Orpheum Theater (1932) in Denver, Colorado.

Lamb dominated Loew's large-scale commissions in the New York area, which were uniformly unusually large-scale projects for the period: Loew's 175th Street (1930), Loew's Triboro (1931) in Astoria, and Loew's 72nd Street (1932).¹¹² Publix, Warner Bros., and Fox commissioned a handful of movie palaces in the Northeast between them. Lamb's design of Warner Bros.' Hollywood Theater (1930) on Times Square was the most prestigious of the firm's non-Loew's movie palaces in the final years.

Eberson's foremost client was Warner Bros., for whom the firm completed movie palaces in Oklahoma City (1930), Mansfield, Ohio (1931), and Morgantown, West

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¹¹¹ Rapp & Rapp-designed Publix theaters completed during the early 1930s were located in Salem, Massachusetts (1930), Middletown, New York (1930), Peekskill, New York (1930), Lynn, Massachusetts (1930), Stapleton, New York (1930), Hamilton, Ohio (1931), Middletown, Ohio (1931), Aurora, Illinois (1931), and Charlottesville, Virginia (1931). The Rapps also completed two Chicago movie palaces operated by the Publix subsidiary Balaban & Katz; the Gateway Theater (1930) on the northwest side and the Southtown Theater (1931) on the south-side.

¹¹² The firm also completed extensive renovations to Loew's Grand (1932) in Atlanta, which would later be the site for the premiere of *Gone with the Wind*. Publix commissioned the Paramount (1930) in Plainfield, New Jersey, which entailed the extension of and reconstruction of a pre-existing theater. Warner Bros. commissioned theaters in Torrington, Connecticut (1931) and Ridgewood, New Jersey (1932). Fox commissioned the Fox (1932) in Hackensack, New Jersey.

Virginia (1931). The firm also completed two Publix movie palaces and one theater for longtime client the Harris Amusement Company.¹¹³ Eberson's most significant projects completed in the early 1930s were built for Jacob and Si Fabian and leased by R.K.O.: the Plaza (1931) in Schenectady and the Palace (1931) in Albany, which was the firm's final American movie palace.

Despite the Big Three's output in the early 1930s, such projects were an increasing rarity, as the majority of their commissions in this period remained unrealized. The Big Three's job books and film trade publications list scores of movie palaces that remained on the drawing boards as exhibitors curtailed their expansion plans. In relation to Rapp & Rapp and Eberson, the majority of these projects were planned for Warner Bros. and Publix in small-to-mid-sized cities the Northeast, Midwest, and South, in keeping with their built work of this period.¹¹⁴ Lamb's unbuilt work included projects for

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¹¹³Eberson's Publix movie palaces of the early 1930s were in Nashville (1930) and Cincinnati (1931). The firm only designed the Cincinnati theater's interior, which was jointly operated by R.K.O. Cincinnati architect Edward Schulte designed the façade. The Harris Amusement Company commissioned the Butler Theater (1930) in Butler, Pennsylvania.

¹¹⁴ Eberson's unbuilt Warner Bros. movie palace commissions included projects in Mansfield, Ohio, Newark, New Jersey, Perth Amboy, New Jersey, Trenton, New Jersey, White Plains, New York, Wilkesburg, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C. In 1930, the firm completed a series of standardized movie palace schemes for Warner Bros. Publix engaged Eberson to design unexecuted movie palaces in North Platte, Nebraska and Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania. The Warner Bros. standardized schemes are reprinted and discussed in Jane Preddy, "Glitz, Glamour & Sparkle: The Deco Theaters of John Eberson," *Annual of the Theatre Historical Society of America*, no. 16 (1989): 16-21. Rapp & Rapp designed unrealized Publix movie palaces for Miami, Florida (1931), Brookline, Massachusetts (1931), Lawrence, Massachusetts (1930), Manchester, New Hampshire (1930), Newburgh, New York (1930), Plattsburgh, New York (1930), Elyria, Ohio (1930) and Roanoke, Virginia (1930). Warner Bros. commissioned Rapp & Rapp to design the unrealized New Apollo Theater (1930) in Washington, D.C. Documentation for C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp's unrealized depression-era commissions can be found in the firm's job book housed in the Rapp & Rapp Collection at the Chicago History Museum and in period film trade journals including *Motion Picture News*, *Exhibitors-Herald World* and *Motion Picture Herald*. Additional information can also be found in local newspapers. On the New Apollo project, see Nelson B. Bell, "Behind the Screens," *Washington Post* (24 April 1930): 8, Nelson B. Bell, "Behind the Screens," *Washington Post* (26 June 1930): 10 and "New Apollo Movie Plan to Seat 2,500," *Washington Post* (29 June 1930): R2. Rapp & Rapp also lost a number of significant international commissions to the Depression. Publix and Warner Bros. both engaged the firm to design their planned European movie palace chains. The former's plan

Warner Bros., Fox/Skouras, and R.K.O., which were primarily planned for the Northeast and Midwest with an outlying project in California.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

Movie palaces' complexity and field's constant state of change favored the emergence of an industry of specialist architects. The Big Three's dominance of the field originated in their early associations with key regional exhibitors who dominated the field and provided commissions that allowed them to gradually define a new type of motion picture theater -- Thomas Lamb with Loew's and William Fox, Rapp & Rapp with Balaban & Katz, and John Eberson with the Interstate Amusement Company. By the second half of the 1920s, many of these figures led the Hollywood studio-exhibitors that controlled the motion picture industry and proliferated the Big Three's work across the country. Lamb, the Rapps, and Eberson capitalized on their earliest commissions and subsequent work, producing a steady stream of design innovations throughout the brief period of movie palace construction that further solidified their status as the field's pacesetters.

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included movie palaces in Belfast, Northern Ireland (1931), Brussels, Belgium (1931) and Glasgow, Scotland (1931). There was also a planned new La Scala opera house in Milan commissioned by the Italian government. For more on Rapp & Rapp's international commissions, see Chapter Six. The European Warner Bros. projects and the Italian work in Rapp. *A Brief Rapp and Rapp History*, 2.

¹¹⁵ Lamb's job book lists unbuilt movie palaces for Warner Bros. in Cincinnati, Ohio (1929), Mount Vernon, New York (1930), Oakland, California (1930), Hackensack, New Jersey (1930), Albany, New York (1930), and Washington, D.C. (1930). Fox/Skouras Brothers planned to erect Lamb-designed movie palaces in cities including Ossining, New York (1929), Youngstown, Ohio (1929), New York City (1930), and New Haven, Connecticut (1931). For R.K.O., movie palaces were planned for Brooklyn (three projects in 1929), Baltimore (1929), Philadelphia (1930), Albany, New York (1930), New York City (1930), Wilmington, Delaware (1930), Larchmont, New York (1931), and Poughkeepsie, New York (1931).

Chapter 3

The Big Three: Inventing the American Movie Palace, 1913-1926

We are living in a truly remarkable age in theater building. In little more than a decade we have progressed from the storefront to the veritable palace, until today more than twenty percent of our motion picture theatres may be classed as modern in every respect.

Today there seems to be no limit to what builders of theatres demand, and there seems to be no limit as to what can be done.¹

--E.C.A. Bullock, chief designer of Rapp & Rapp, 1925

Movie palaces were a fleeting phenomenon, spanning less than two decades between the completion of the first prototypical example in 1913 and the cessation of the type's construction after 1932. If there was one constant in this period of continual change in motion picture theater design, it was Thomas Lamb, Rapp & Rapp, and John Eberson's status as leaders of the field. The Big Three successively emerged as architects of national prominence by shaping the type's initial development and solidified their status by steering the course of its subsequent evolution.

The movie palace design field was fiercely competitive among the relatively small group of architects who obtained steady commissions for the type, and their respective innovations fed off each other. Movie palace architects always had an eye on their competition in search of anything they could appropriate to outdo the latest theater down the street or across town. In six key points in movie palace development, one or more members of the Big Three produced a theater that reshaped the field. Other architects quickly absorbed and adapted each advancement into their own work.

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¹ E.C.A. Bullock, "The Theatre of To-day," *Motion Picture News* (21 Nov. 1925): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide.

Accordingly, it is useful to examine not only through the most innovative example in each period but also representative work by the other two leading firms that demonstrates the transmission of earlier advances.

The period between 1913 and 1926 encompassed the emergence of the movie palace type and the beginnings of its spread throughout the country. Motion picture exhibitors and architects' foremost concern was imbuing the medium with respectability by breaking its nickelodeon-era ethnic and working class stigmas to attract the middle class. Movie palaces' enduring popular image was shaped by this priority; palatial structures would provide an acceptable site for the interaction of moviegoers belonging to a wide spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds. Exhibitors were satisfied that this goal was achieved soon after the movie palace's salient characteristics were defined definitively in 1921. During the remainder of the initial period, the focus of movie palace development shifted towards adaptation to a variety of conditions in cities and towns as the type was proliferated across the country, and to the introduction of new modes of design.

1913-1915: Proto-Movie Palaces

By the 1910s, Thomas Lamb was established at the forefront of the nascent field of motion picture theater design on the basis of his earliest work in New York. These projects included both the city's first purpose-built motion picture theater and a precedent-setting, early, large-scale combination vaudeville and motion picture theater.² During the following decade, Lamb emerged as the leading figure in the field through the design of a series of palatial New York motion picture theaters that revolutionized the

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² These were the Nicoland (c.1908) on Westchester Avenue near 156th Street in the Bronx and the City Theater (1910) at 116 E. 14th Street in Manhattan. See Chapter Two for further discussion of both theaters.

type's design and laid the foundation for the movie palace: the Regent (1913), Strand (1914), Rialto (1916), Rivoli (1917), and Capitol (1919).

The Regent Theater in Harlem was the first purpose-built, so-called "deluxe" motion picture theater in the United States: a large-scale movie venue presenting highbrow films in a refined environment specifically tailored to the middle-class.³ Henry Marvin, founder of the Biograph Company, developed the Regent to further elevate film as an art form by presenting it in an environment superior to that of a nickelodeon or a converted legitimate theater, and to capitalize on recent advances that increased middle-class interest in the medium (particularly the advent of multi-reel, feature-length motion pictures). While there were already numerous large theaters in New York exhibiting motion pictures, they were primarily combination vaudeville houses or converted from other uses. Deluxe motion pictures theaters were already operating in other cities, but they were adapted from venues originally built for live entertainment. The Regent,

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³ In June 1912, the St. Nicholas-Seventh Avenue Theatre Company purchased a lot for \$100 for the construction of the theater. The Regent opened on February 8, 1913 under the management of Claude H. Talley. Its opening program included popular music selections from the Orpheus Male Quartet, the house orchestra directed by Conrad S. Koschat, Arthur Depew, formerly of Wanamaker's Department Store in Philadelphia, at the organ, and the film *Pandora's Box*. The latter was presented in Kinemacolor, a remarkably innovative process for 1913 wherein black and white films were projected through colored filters to create a remarkably realistic picture-postcard effect. Its effectiveness was enhanced by the theater's screen with black borders that served to enhance the picture's brightness and definition. "Theatrical Notes," *New York Times* (5 Feb. 1913): 11, "New Regent Theatre Opens," *New York Times* (9 Feb. 1913): 17, "A De Luxe Presentation," *Motion Picture News* (6 Dec. 1913): 16, "Motion Picture Theatre Construction Department," *Motion Picture News* (6 Dec. 1913): 28-32, Ben Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats: The Golden Age of the Movie Palace* (New York: Bramhall House, 1961), 30-35, Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 246-48, "The Architecture of Thomas Lamb," TMS (photocopy), p.6-8, American Theatre Architecture Archive, Elmhurst, Illinois, Jay Shockley, *Regent Theater* (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1994), LP-1841, and Ross Melnick, *American Showman: Samuel 'Roxy' Rothafel and the Birth of the Entertainment Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 81-91. The Regent reopened under Samuel Rothafel's management in December of 1913 with the film *Last Days of Pompeii* after a period of closure for alterations. Roxy ultimately remained at the Regent for less than six months. It successively then became part of B.S. Moss' chain of vaudeville and motion picture theaters, the Keith-Moss-Proctor circuit, and Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO). In 1964, the First Corinthian Baptist Church, an African American congregation, purchased the Regent from RKO. It remains (as of 2013) in use as a church.

constructed at a cost of \$600,000, was built exclusively for motion pictures.

Vaudeville would be excluded from its program in favor of musical programs provided by an eight-piece orchestra, a string ensemble, and a \$15,000 pipe organ that was the city's first such instrument in a movie theater. Uniformed ushers and printed programs added to the Regent's rather self-consciously dignified atmosphere.

In the Regent, Lamb produced the first motion picture theater with architectural pretensions.⁴ His design largely reproduced the form of a contemporary, high-class neighborhood vaudeville theater, but it was groundbreaking for a building of this type as a venue built exclusively for motion pictures. The Regent also brought together a number of architectural features that became standard in motion picture theater design, pointing the way to the movie palace. Henry Marvin brought this novel product directly to his desired clientele, building the Regent over 70 blocks north of Times Square in a predominantly middle-class German and Eastern European Jewish neighborhood in Harlem.⁵ The Regent was advantageously located at southwest corner of Seventh Avenue and West 116th Street, which was the intersection of two of Harlem's main entertainment thoroughfares. Its rectangular corner lot comprised approximately half the block's Seventh Avenue frontage, which contained the main entrance, while the auditorium block stretched back along West 116th Street. On this site, Lamb produced a three-story commercial building facing Seventh Avenue and incorporating six revenue-producing ground floor storefronts that fronted the auditorium, which itself was oriented parallel to 116th Street.

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⁴ Stern, Gilmartin, and Mellins, *New York 1930*, 246.

⁵ Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Harlem had emerged as a significant entertainment center, ultimately featuring a wide variety of legitimate, burlesque, vaudeville, and motion picture theaters.

The exterior was particularly innovative: a two-part commercial block conveying a monumentality and permanence previously uncommon to theaters exclusively dedicated to motion pictures (Figure 3-1). It had a broad façade, reflecting the entire width of the auditorium block behind and imbuing a bulk to the building that was enhanced by the corner lot siting. This arrangement sharply contrasted with the characteristically diminutive and ephemeral nickelodeon. The Regent's Seventh Avenue façade -- as a polychrome terra cotta interpretation of a Venetian palazzo -- was a departure from the Beaux-Arts-inspired classicism prevalent in contemporary theater design, which enabled it to stand apart from the surrounding sober residential blocks and immediately be read as a venue for entertainment. The façade's design wrapped around the corner two bays on the 116th Street front, and was characterized by a light-colored, diaper-patterned flat expanse on the two upper stories that was juxtaposed with a deeply recessed central entrance arch rising to a central stepped frontispiece and a ground floor arcade. Loggias occupied the corners of the third story below a bracketed cornice and tile roof. In contrast to the main façade, the auditorium elevations were utilitarian, faced with Sienna iron spot Roman brick with terra cotta trim.

Lamb's interior adhered to the conventions of vaudeville theater design and featured little public space outside the auditorium, but the latter incorporated functional refinements specifically tailored to motion picture exhibition, particularly in terms of improved sight lines to the screen and in terms of audience comfort.⁶ The 1,875-seat auditorium had a single cantilevered balcony with a shallow rake supported by columns behind the last row of orchestra seating (Figure 3-2). This arrangement replaced the

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⁶ "The Architecture of Thomas Lamb." 6-8.

multiple tiers of steep galleries with numerous sight line-obstructing support columns often found in opera houses and the double-balcony configuration common in legitimate theaters, which was more inconvenient for patrons stretching to get a good view of the stage. Limiting the Regent's program to motion pictures and musical performances permitted the reduction of the stage depth to incorporate additional income-producing orchestra seating. The auditorium was also unprecedented in a purpose-built motion picture theater for the ornateness of its decorative scheme, which culminated in Prince Jean Polealogue's proscenium soundboard mural reproducing Francisco Pradillo's "Surrender of Granada" (Figure 3-3).

Marvin's vision of a deluxe motion picture theater did not find fiscal success, and it was ultimately Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel's introduction of new exhibition methods that turned the Regent around financially by the end of its first year of operation. Accordingly, it was Roxy's later contributions to the Regent (alongside Lamb's original architectural design) that laid the groundwork for the emergence of the movie palace type by demonstrating the viability of a large purpose-built theater exclusively devoted to motion pictures. Roxy relocated the projection booth from the top of the balcony to the rear of the orchestra level to eliminate "keystoning," the distortion of the picture if it is projected from a high angle. He also moved the orchestra to center stage, building a permanent set modeled after a conservatory, with potted plants, a small electric fountain, and a pair of balconies flanking the screen to showcase vocalists (Figure 3-4). Roxy installed indirect colored lighting throughout the theater, most notably in the auditorium, where it both enhanced the movie-going experience and addressed city building codes. He also doubled the size of the Regent's house orchestra and assembled a music library

on par with that of an opera house. This supported his revolutionary idea that the musical accompaniment to a film should reflect the action on the screen rather than be entirely unrelated to the particular scene.

Lamb's second transformational New York proto-movie palace of the 1910s was the Strand (1914) on the upper part of Times Square: a million-dollar theater of unprecedented size and palatial design that translated the Regent's architectural and exhibition innovations to a more complex program.⁷ While the Regent's success under Roxy had proven the viability of deluxe motion picture theaters, it was the Strand that finally put the age of the nickelodeon to rest in America's largest cities. Lamb produced a model for large-scale, urban motion picture theaters with innovative solutions for maximizing the income potential of its site, the efficient handling of continuous streams of vast crowds, and architectural style that would draw passersby. He later recalled the Strand as the forerunner of "the large capacity" movie palaces of the 1920s. Indeed, it was enormously influential to other architects, who adopted it as the basis for the type's development during the remainder of the decade. For the Lamb office, the Strand became

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⁷ The Strand opened on April 11 1914 with a program that included the 50-piece Strand Concert Orchestra's rendition of the national anthem accompanying Thomas Edison's *The Birth of the Star Spangled Banner*, musical interludes, a newsreel, a travelogue, a short comedy, and the feature film *Spoilers* starring William Farnum, who was in attendance. "More Theatres for This City," *New York Times* (7 Sep. 1913): X1, "Opening of the Strand," *Moving Picture World* (18 Apr. 1914): 371, "Million-Dollar Theatre Opens," *Motion Picture News* (18 Apr. 1914): 23-24, "Crowds Flock to Strand Opening," *Motion Picture News* (25 Apr. 1914): 18, "Mark Strand Theatre Anniversary Section," *Moving Picture World* (18 Apr. 1925): 661-62, Thomas Lamb, "An Interview with Thomas W. Lamb," *Motion Picture News* (30 June 1928): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide Section, Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats*, 37-41, Stern, Gilmartin, and Mellins, *New York 1930*, 248-52, Ross Melnick and Andreas Fuchs, *Cinema Treasures: A New Look at Classic Movie Theaters* (St. Paul: MBI Publishing Company, 2004), 27-8, and Ross Melnick, *American Showman: Samuel 'Roxy' Rothafel and the Birth of the Entertainment Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 94-107. The Strand operated under a number of names during its existence and underwent substantial alterations, including subdivision, before being demolished in 1987.

the standard solution for subsequent theater commissions through World War I, and it was still being employed in some instances well into the 1920s.

Following the Regent's success uptown, it was inevitable that a deluxe motion picture theater would appear in the heart of New York's entertainment center around Times Square to challenge the hegemony of its existing pantheon of amusements. This endeavor was attempted sooner than even Roxy may have anticipated, within two months of his appointment as manager of the Regent. In October 1912, the Mitchel H. Mark Reality Company, founded by pioneering Buffalo nickelodeon operator-brothers Mitchel and Moe Mark and their partner Max Spiegel, leased the site of the Brewster Carriage Factory on 47th Street and Broadway to build a "million-dollar" theater. Determining what type of entertainment the new theater would showcase proved to be an unanswered question, even as plans were accepted in May 1913 and construction commenced in July. Initially, in January 1913, the new theater was envisioned as a venue for 50-cent vaudeville: as the Hippodrome, with admission prices of ten to twenty cents. By July, it was conceived as a legitimate theater, while in October, it was planned as a new home for the Metropolitan Opera, and later as a home for musical comedies and operettas. The Regent's success ended this prolonged period of indecision just four months before the theater's completion, and the Mitchel H. Mark Reality Company successfully secured Roxy himself to manage a motion picture theater that would test the medium's full potential on one of the best locations "in the entire world."⁸

In the Strand, Lamb canonized the development of purpose-built motion picture theaters as one part of substantial revenue-producing commercial blocks. This level of

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⁸ Melnick, *American Showman*, 95.

development was necessitated by the theater's "tremendously expensive" site on the northwest corner of Broadway and 47th Street, on the upper part of Times Square (Figure 3-5).⁹ Lamb developed the site with a four-story, two-part commercial block on Broadway and a three-story wing on West 47th Street along the side of the auditorium. This arrangement gave the building continuous ground level storefronts along its street frontages with leased office space on the upper floors.

Lamb's exterior treatment was the next influential development in the increasing monumentality of motion picture theater facades. This arrangement was facilitated by the commercial block, which increased the theater's visibility on Times Square. The initial Beaux Arts-inspired design drew heavily from the Petit Palais, with a mansard roof, corner turret, engaged Corinthian columns, and a large window over the theater entry (Figure 3-6). This scheme was progressively simplified through successive designs into an exceedingly restrained, classical, white terra cotta façade with an abstracted temple front above the ground floor that featured Corinthian pilasters interspersed with cast-iron spandrels, all topped by a balustrade (Figure 3-7). Apart from the vertical sign and glass and copper canopy over the theater entry, the building could be mistaken for an office or retail building rather than a theater. The dignified exterior not only proved to be an effective contrast with the more bombastic facades around Times Square, but it also conveyed a sense of stability that heralded the arrival of motion pictures as a lasting form of American popular entertainment.

The Strand's interior program pioneered a number of functional solutions to facilitate the profitable operation of a large motion picture theater. Traffic circulation was

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⁹ The Strand's Broadway frontage was 155 feet and its West 47th Street frontage was 277 feet.

of paramount importance in a theater offering continual showings. Lamb accommodated incoming and outgoing crowds, which could number nearly 3,000 for each show, through a network of spaces that kept each group separate. Incoming patrons entered a long entrance lobby off the main Broadway entrance, where they could gather protected from the elements (Figure 3-8). To access the auditorium, incoming patrons passed through a set of doors into a two-story inner lobby that led them directly into the orchestra or up a set of adjacent stairs to the balcony. Outgoing crowds on all levels of the auditorium departed through doors along the sidewalls either directly to street level or down staircases. Patrons in the orchestra could also exit via the inner lobby through open-air passages to the street.

To ensure that all levels of the auditorium would be patronized, Lamb sought to overcome the perception that balcony seating was inconvenient by breaking up the journey with a spacious mezzanine promenade (Figure 3-9). The mezzanine promenade functioned as the theater's social hub for patrons seated throughout the auditorium, featuring an oval opening that looked down upon the rear orchestra seating. From the mezzanine promenade, vomitories and stairs comfortably led patrons to the balcony seating.

In the same manner as the Regent, the Strand's 2,860-seat auditorium was designed to meet the unique functional requirements of motion picture exhibition but at an unprecedented scale (Figure 3-10). A single balcony configuration was employed for both patron convenience and improved sightlines. The stage was once more reduced in size to permit more income-producing orchestra seating. To facilitate frequent audience turnover and to limit disruption during performances, orchestra seating was arranged in a

series of aisles and cross aisles, while two crossover aisles were inserted in the balcony. Additionally, aisles were large and ample space was provided between each row of seats. Lamb also carefully considered acoustics for the 25-piece, in-house orchestra, the theater organs, and for live performances. A panel above the proscenium curved up and out to join the central dome, bouncing sound out into the auditorium, and ornament had the double function of checking reverberation and absorbing sound. The lighting scheme incorporated direct and indirect lighting in the alcoves formed by the ornamental plaster. Lighting was most intense in the entrance lobby, to allow one's eyes to adjust to the more dimly lit auditorium. Like the Regent, the Strand featured a permanent stage set to showcase the orchestra, which once again included a small fountain and greenery.

The decorative scheme was representative of motion picture theater design in its infancy, as it gradually began to discard the conventions of legitimate and vaudeville theaters (Figure 3-11). Deluxe motion picture theater décor was shaped by the need to “look expensive and luxurious” to the average moviegoer and to wear well over time in the face of heavy use by thousands each day, rather than accurately reproducing a specific historical source of inspiration.¹⁰ In the Strand, the auditorium was eclectic, with heavy plaster moldings and a profusion of gilding (which sharply contrast with the well-studied Adam interiors characteristic of Lamb's work a few years later). The Regent's decoration was largely confined to the area around the proscenium and ceiling, in the manner of a legitimate theater; but the Strand's was more evenly distributed throughout the auditorium, which tied the large space together and made it feel more intimate. Murals added an element of respectability: a series entitled “The Senses” along the

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¹⁰ “The Architecture of Thomas Lamb,” 17-18.

balcony sidewalls, and a larger example on the proscenium soundboard entitled “The Dream’s Life,” added finesse to the whole design. In this end, Lamb also incorporated boxes flanking the proscenium in the manner of an opera house, which were adorned with large canopies recalling a royal box.

Lamb’s succession of well-publicized, deluxe motion picture theaters in New York eclipsed the development of another proto-movie palace that would prove influential: Rapp & Rapp’s Al. Ringling Theater (1915) in Baraboo, Wisconsin.¹¹ The Chicago-based firm only merited regional importance when it completed the Al. Ringling, which, albeit diminutive in size (seating only 874) and was largely unheralded upon its completion, was the prototype for the firm’s influential Balaban & Katz movie palaces that definitively canonized the movie palace typology over the following decade. The Al. Ringling also made its own notable contributions to the evolving field of motion picture theater design by exhibiting a greater sense of showmanship, theatricality, and escapism through a more monumental conception of public spaces, the skillful use of period styles, and by reproducing elements of European landmarks in spaces throughout the building.

The Al. Ringling was a transformative theater design for Rapp & Rapp, largely stemming from the unique nature of the commission. C. August Albrecht “Al.” Ringling (1852-1916), the eldest of the Ringling Brothers of circus fame, conceived the theater as a memorial to himself as well as a gift to his adopted hometown of Baraboo. He

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¹¹ The Al. Ringling Theater opened on November 17, 1915 with the comedic opera *Lady Luxury* and E.G. Olson at the Wurlitzer organ. C. August Albrecht Ringling always abbreviated his name “Al. Ringling” with a period to distinguish himself from his younger brother, Alfred, who was ALF. Ringling. Accordingly, the theater is correctly spelled “Al. Ringling.” The Theatre Historical Society maintains that this was the first movie palace, despite its diminutive size. Theater Historical Society of America, “The Al. Ringling Theatre,” *Theatre Historical Society of America Annual* 17 (1990): 6. The Al. Ringling is gradually undergoing restoration as it continues to exhibit movies and live entertainment.

envisioned an extravagantly palatial playhouse, costing \$100,000, which would provide the small town (then the winter quarters of the Ringling Brothers portion of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus) with a multi-purpose entertainment venue. In the theater's early years, it hosted numerous touring companies of Broadway musicals which stopped over on their way between Minneapolis and Chicago or Milwaukee. The Al. Ringling was also designed to exhibit motion pictures from the outset, with the first film being shown the week after the grand opening.

In the Al. Ringling, Rapp & Rapp discarded the Des Moines Majestic model, the standardized solution that had shaped, in varying degrees, the character of theatrical designs for nearly a decade. Notably, this also represented a break with the architectural imagery of 19th-century American playhouses still prevalent in contemporary motion picture theater design. The Al. Ringling's ample budget facilitated these changes, affording the firm an opportunity to further develop a number of features characteristic of its work from the outset of its career, namely an interest in French Renaissance architecture, monumental façades, and special attention to developing commodious public spaces. The Al. Ringling's budget provided the firm its first chance to fully realize its palatial French aesthetic and interest in developing escapist interiors based on well-known foreign buildings -- and interest that arose out of C.W. Rapp's 1912 European honeymoon.

The Al. Ringling was built to the same plan as the firm's earlier Orpheum (1914) in Champaign, Illinois (Figure 3-12). In Baraboo, the theater occupied a rectangular mid-block lot on 4th Avenue facing the central square, along with an attached two-story commercial block with stores and office space (Figure 3-13). The auditorium was

oriented perpendicularly to 4th Avenue, with the rear of its stage house abutting an alleyway.

Rapp & Rapp imbued the Al. Ringling with a sense of showmanship, perhaps inspired by the client, not found in its earlier work, which endured to become one of the firm's principal contributions to movie palace design. In Baraboo, this was manifest in an element of escapism throughout the theater via more elaborate finishes. This distinction was evident in the exterior, which reproduced the overall form of the Orpheum in Champaign: two stories, divided into four bays, with the theater entrance located at the far right of the attached two-part commercial block (Figures 3-14 and 3-15). The Al. Ringling's façade was given a much more elaborate treatment as a Beaux-Arts composition executed in grey terra cotta, with a curved roofline and a large window above the theater entry that stood apart from anything else in town.

The Al. Ringling contained a succession of escapist interior spaces, which began with a small elliptical entrance lobby containing the ticket booth (Figure 3-16). The lobby's focal points included a plasterwork frieze reproducing panels from Luca della Robbia's *Cantoria* (1431-1438), originally in the Florence Duomo; a painted ceiling depicting a sky with putti playing amongst the clouds; and a small ornamental fountain built into the west wall. On the mezzanine level, a ladies' lounge occupying the space behind the large window above the theater entry was placed at the top of an impressive white marble staircase and behind a small vestibule (Figure 3-17). Although both the lobby and ladies' lounge entrance were of relatively modest scale, they represented the beginnings of a more monumental treatment of public spaces within a motion picture theater.

Rapp & Rapp closely modeled the auditorium after Jacques-Ange Gabriel's Opera (1763-70) at the Palace of Versailles (Figures 3-18 and 3-19).¹² It took the form of a truncated ellipse, cut off on its north end by the proscenium. Above, the level ceiling was supported by a wide cove. The side and rear walls were divided into fifteen bays by an engaged Corinthian colonnade. An additional projecting bay framed by paired Corinthian engaged columns flanked each side of the proscenium. Seventeen boxes projected from each of the bays, replacing a balcony. This layout was essentially that of the Orpheum in Champaign but embellished with more ornate plasterwork, painted panels, rich draperies, and more elaborate lighting fixtures. The focal points of the decorative scheme were a series of mural panels on the ceiling cove depicting putti and allegories of pleasurable emotions and the ceiling painted to resemble the sky.

In contrast to Rapp & Rapp and Lamb, John Eberson did not produce an influential proto-movie palace in the early to mid-1910s; instead he quietly began experimenting with illusionistic outdoor decorative motifs, a process that ultimately resulted in the atmospheric theaters of the following decade that revolutionized the type's design. Atmospheric movie palaces substituted traditional auditorium ceiling decoration with a smooth plaster surface painted dark blue to create the illusion of the sky. The sidewalls were designed as the facades of buildings, lending the entire auditorium the illusion of an open-air courtyard beneath the night sky complete with star-like small lights and projected clouds. While illusionistic outdoor auditoriums were not without precedent in theatrical architecture, Eberson was not consciously emulating earlier

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¹² The Al. Ringling's auditorium also shows similarities to Victor Louis' Grand Theater (1777-80) in Boudreaux, France. Naylor, "The Al. Ringling Theatre," 9.

schemes, and his work can be distinguished through its extension of the auditorium design into the rest of the theater as an overall theme.

Eberson developed his variety of illusionistic outdoor motifs through a series of Interstate Amusement Company commissions in Texas. The Majestic (1911) in Fort Worth was an early example, featuring a gentlemen's smoking room that appeared to be a partially open-air Roman atrium shaded by a trellis entwined with foliage (Figure 3-20). A series of murals along the upper walls depicting a surrounding landscape enhanced the effect. The Majestic (1913) in San Antonio appears to have been the first Eberson theater to exhibit atmospheric elements in its auditorium.¹³ It was one part of G.A. Stowers' 10-story Stowers' Building on Houston Street and Main Avenue, and was operated by the Interstate Amusement Company as a combination vaudeville and motion picture theater (Figure 3-21). Eberson designed only the theater portion of the building, which had an understated entrance on Main Avenue consisting of an arch and projecting canopy (Figure 3-22).

The Majestic's interior extended the theme of a Roman garden in the time of Nero, first implemented in its Fort Worth predecessor, through the entire theater. The

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¹³ The Majestic Theater opened on November 24, 1913 with a program that included an address by the mayor, the Majestic Orchestra, a variety of novelty acts including 'Colonel Pattee and his Old Soldier Fiddlers,' and concluded with feature films. "Public Reception in Majestic Foyer," *San Antonio Light* (22 Nov. 1913): 7, "New Majestic Opens to the Pubic Monday," *San Antonio Light* (23 Nov. 1913), 25, "Majestic Opening Bill is Full of Novelties," *San Antonio Light* (23 Nov. 1913): 23, and "Nearly Every Seat Filled at Majestic," *San Antonio Light* (25 Nov. 1913): 5. John Eberson was mentioned in contemporary coverage, but the interior decoration was solely attributed to O.W. Mitchell of the Chicago firm Mitchell, Holbach & Company. The Stowers Building containing the theater was erected in two stages. It was originally completed c.1908 as the Clower's Building after the furniture store of the same name. In 1913, a large extension was completed along Main Avenue that also contained the Majestic Theater. The entire building was then renamed the Stowers' Building after its owner, G.A. Stowers and its main tenant, the G.A. Stowers Furniture Co. The building's expansion, although not the theater, was announced in "New Skyscraper is proposed for Houston Street," *San Antonio Express* (23 Dec. 1911): 1. Following the 1929 opening of the New Majestic Theater in 1929 (also designed by Eberson), the older Majestic was renamed the State Theater. The State Theater was demolished in the 1950s to make way for parking space. The remaining Stowers' Building was imploded in 1982.

lobby walls, foyers, and other public spaces had a faux ashlar masonry treatment mimicking garden walls (Figure 3-23), an effect enhanced by niches, wall fountains, and flower-filled vases. In the same manner as fully atmospheric movie palaces of the following decade, the Majestic's theme culminated in the 2,200-seat auditorium (Figure 3-24). The sidewalls resembled the façades of buildings, treated with the same faux ashlar masonry seen throughout the theater's public entrance spaces. Corinthian columns framed the boxes at each side of the proscenium, which were designed as "balconies." Entrances into the auditorium were fashioned to resemble exterior doors and windows. Above the entablature, the auditorium ceiling dissolved into a grid of trelliswork entwined with autumn foliage framing glimpses of the sky complete with twinkling electric stars (Figures 3-25 and 3-26). Lighting effects changed the sky's color from sunset to dawn. The auditorium was also noteworthy for its lack of view-obstructing support columns on any of its four levels: the orchestra, a shallow smoking balcony, a larger balcony, and a segregated balcony accessed from a separate entrance (Figure 3-27). This was accomplished through the utilization of a cantilevering system utilizing large concrete beams reinforced with steel.¹⁴ Notably, this was a more advanced structural system than that used in the contemporary Regent in New York, which had posts at the rear of its orchestra seating to support the balcony.

1921: The Balaban & Katz Movie Palace

Rapp & Rapp's Tivoli Theater (1921) in Chicago was the first fully realized movie palace, and the culmination of a progression of purpose-built, palatial motion picture theaters (beginning with the Regent) that endeavored to lend movies a certain

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¹⁴ This was described as "the largest concrete beam in the world" in "Concrete Beam is Largest Ever Cast," *San Antonio Light* (23 Feb. 1913): 20.

respectability for the middle-classes.¹⁵ The Tivoli, built at a cost of \$2,000,000, brought together the features developed in the proto-movie palaces of the previous decade and surpassed them: a bombastic façade, colossal interior spaces affording generous views, lavish decorative embellishments, and numerous novel functional solutions to enhance the audience's experience. While what theater constitutes the first movie palace is debatable, it is certain that the Tivoli eclipsed all prior motion picture theaters and set the standard against which everything in the coming decade was measured. The Tivoli's widespread influence vaulted Rapp & Rapp from a firm of regional significance to the status of the field's leader, eclipsing even Lamb.

The form of the Tivoli, like the preceding generation of motion picture theaters, was shaped by the need to broaden the appeal of movie going. To establish a loyal middle class audience for Balaban & Katz's venue, the Rapps endeavored to dispel the medium's working-class and ethnic associations through the use of classical architectural motifs that were associated loosely with reputable institutions, such as banks, civic buildings, hotels, and railway stations.¹⁶ The use of an architectural language that equated with upstanding environments in a motion picture theater was intended to give the medium equal respectability and to ensure proper decorum.

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¹⁵ The Tivoli opened on February 16, 1921. In 1963, the theater was razed and replaced with a parking lot that remains to this day. "The Tivoli Theatre, Chicago," *Western Architect* (July 1921): 73, "Tivoli Theatre Is Modeled After Famous Peace Treaty Building," *Motion Picture News* (9 April 1921): 2486 and 2488, E.C.A. Bullock, "The Theatre of To-day," *Motion Picture News* (21 May 1925) and Arthur Fredrick Adams, "Beauty Plus Facility Aim in Rapp Designs," *Motion Picture Herald* (8 Aug. 1931): 108-121, Carrie Balaban, *Continuous Performance: The Story of A.J. Balaban* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1942), 67-71, Robert Headley, ed., "Balaban & Katz Tivoli Theatre," *Marquee: Journal of the Theatre Historical Society* 17 (Fourth Quarter 1985): 4-39, and Steve Levin, ed., "Tivoli and Chicago Theatres: Eightieth Anniversary Tribute," *Marquee: Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 33 (Third Quarter 2001): 4-9.

¹⁶ Christine Basque, "The Paradoxes of Paradise: Elements of Conflict in Chicago's Balaban & Katz Movie Palaces," *Marquee: Journal of the Theatre Historical Society* 27 (Second Quarter 1995): 4 and Douglas Gomery. "The Growth of Movie Monopolies: The Case of Balaban & Katz," *Wide Angle* 3 (1979): 57.

Balaban & Katz secured a site on “the busiest corner on the South Side,” on Cottage Grove Avenue near 63rd Street, in the Woodlawn neighborhood (Figure 3-28).¹⁷ This site was in the heart of an established business and entertainment district south of the University of Chicago with several small theaters serving a prosperous residential population inhabiting single-family houses and numerous apartment buildings. Additionally, Cottage Grove Avenue and 63rd Street was a busy transfer corner, where the EL crossed two major streetcar lines, and it was easily accessible by motorcar via the nearby boulevard system as well.

The Tivoli had a mid-block site that was longer along Cottage Grove Avenue than it was deep, resulting in a long rectangular theater plan. This location and the requirement to accommodate as large a seating capacity as possible resulted in the theater being a stand-alone structure without any income-producing commercial space. The lobby, foyers, and vestibules stretched along the northern edge of the site, occupying the full length between Cottage Grove Avenue and the alleyway (Figures 3-29 and 3-30). The auditorium was parallel to the street with the stage at the southern end of the lot.

With the Tivoli, the Rapp office found the definitive solution to a fundamental functional distinction between motion picture theaters and legitimate theaters, namely, that performances in the former ran continuously throughout the day, in contrast to the latter, where the audience simply arrived at their pre-booked show time and proceeded directly to the seats. Accordingly, a prime concern in movie-palace design was efficient circulation of incoming and outgoing crowds. While the Tivoli’s circulation system recalls the solution employed by the Lamb office in the Strand, it was a more

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¹⁷ Headley, “Balaban & Katz Tivoli Theatre,” 14.

sophisticated scheme that completely separated both groups in a manner that provided increased comfort and convenience. This system was based upon the principle that the lobby should hold as large a number of audience members in relation to the auditorium capacity as possible, and facilitated by a team of ushers. Accordingly, Tivoli's immense grand lobby held 1,500 patrons awaiting admission into the 3,414 seats in the auditorium. Patrons seated on the main floor exited the rear of the auditorium to the left, passing through the orchestra foyer into an exit vestibule that opened onto the street (Figure 3-31). Balcony and Mezzanine audience members exited the theater in the same manner via stairs. Once this process was complete, five large gates separating the lobby from the orchestra foyer were opened allowing the waiting crowd to fill the auditorium (Figure 3-32). At the same time, ushers would allow patrons to process up the grand staircase to the mezzanine and balcony.

The Tivoli was conceived as an attraction in its own right, an escapist environment that often overshadowed whatever was on the screen. This experience began with the first glimpse of the facade, which was designed to serve as an advertisement to draw patrons inside (Figure 3-33). To accomplish this, its design had to compensate for the vast, blind exterior wall of the auditorium, comprising about three-fourths of the street frontage. Rapp & Rapp's solution was to differentiate the facade above the main entry with white terra cotta to detract from the long mass of the brick auditorium wall. The facade became a triumphal arch above the marquee framing a large window. This composition harmonized with adjacent commercial buildings but also stood apart through its graceful curves, which contrasted with the sharp lines of its neighbors, and drew the attention of passersby by offering enticing glimpses into its lobby through the window.

At night, the Tivoli was outlined in stud lighting, its marquee and vertical sign were lit, and light streamed through the large window. This blazed “a trail to the theater,” offering an especially impressive sight in 1921, when electric lighting had been common for only 20 years.¹⁸

Rapp & Rapp designed the interior to control moviegoers’ psychology. Throughout the interior, the refined palatial environment made the interaction between differing social classes in the Tivoli acceptable, and encouraged polite behavior. The immense lobby was designed to “keep the patron’s mind off the fact that he is waiting,” and to be a space of “genuine interest...where waiting throngs may be transformed from the usual pushing, complaining mob into one of a joyous mood” (Figures 3-34, 3-35, and 3-36).¹⁹ In the Tivoli, going to the movies was akin to going to church, as patrons were welcomed into a lobby modeled after Jules Hardouin-Mansart’s Royal Chapel at Versailles. Chicago moviegoers had never seen anything like it; in fact, such a space was unprecedented in a motion picture theater. Measured from the floor to the highest point of the ceiling, the lobby rose to a height equivalent to that of a six-story building and stretched 125 feet from the entrance to the foot of the grand staircase, occupying the entire width of the building. This immense height was made possible by the large lot, which permitted situating the lobby completely behind the auditorium rather than the usual arrangement of placing it beneath the balcony. The sides of the lobby were defined by four Corinthian columns, which rose from the mezzanine level to support the frescoed ceiling. Opposite the entry, the grand staircase replaced the Royal Chapel’s altar. Above

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¹⁸ Bullock, “The Theatre of To-day,” *Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide* and Gomery, “The Growth of Movie Monopolies,” *Wide Angle* 3 (1979): 57.

¹⁹ Bullock, “The Theatre of To-day,” *Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide*.

the entrance, the large window flooded the space with natural light. The lobby had a notably restrained decorative scheme for a palatial motion picture theater, which effectively enhanced the impression of the space's height and emphasized its overall lines, contributing a feeling of lightness that successfully imbued the atmosphere of the Royal Chapel.

In the auditorium, the Rapp office endeavored to create an intimate atmosphere, despite the space's vast size (Figures 3-37 and 3-38).²⁰ The guiding principal being "no matter in what section of the house they may be seated, a feeling of intimate contact [must be felt] with the stage."²¹ To accomplish this, the proscenium was designed to appear large and all other features were subdivided into smaller elements. For instance, the auditorium ceiling, which could have emphasized the auditorium's cavernous size, was broken into smaller units (Figure 3-39). Additionally, stage lighting was employed throughout the auditorium in an effort to make the entire space seem part of the stage itself. Seating in the orchestra, mezzanine and balcony was arranged in a U-shaped plan to provide good sightlines and bring the audience closer to the screen. Accordingly, patrons seated in the balcony almost feel that this level reached nearly to the stage, giving the illusion that they were seated in the orchestra.

The Tivoli's stage facilities were indicative of the evolving conception of the movie palace entertainment and motion picture exhibition technology. Motion picture screens of the period were rather diminutive compared to the size of the proscenium. Accordingly, the Tivoli featured a false proscenium (stage set-like elements) that framed

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²⁰ "Tivoli Theatre Is Modeled After Famous Peace Treaty Building," 2486 and Bullock, "The Theatre of To-day," Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide.

²¹ Ibid.

the movie screen and made it appear more substantial. The original orchestra pit extended back into the stage, an arrangement that permitted a larger number of seats but confined live entertainment to a narrow space in front of the screen and stages flanking each side of the false proscenium. Balaban & Katz quickly recognized the need for a larger stage to enable the presentation of stage shows and redesigned the stages and orchestra pits of its first four houses.

Rapp & Rapp's Tivoli eclipsed most of the other major houses opened in 1921, including Lamb's major contemporary project, the Loew's State Theater on Times Square.²² Following the Tivoli's completion, the Lamb office suddenly found itself no longer the most innovative in the field. Rather, it came to be regarded as the leader of a more conservative mode of movie palace design, producing motion picture theaters that exhibited the type's functional characteristics executed in a less fanciful manner. This work was not dramatically different from the firm's palatial motion picture theaters of the previous decade, and was not vastly different from their output a half-decade later, which is conservative in a field that evolved rapidly. Despite no longer producing groundbreaking work, Lamb continued to be influential and extremely prolific, defining the motion picture going experience in many American cities, particularly in the Northeast. His work was also emulated by a group of other theater specialists of regional importance, partially comprising architects that emerged from the Lamb office.

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²² The Loew's State opened on 29 August 1921. In 1924, the State lost its status as Loew's flagship to the newly acquired Capitol Theater (1919). The State was extensively renovated twice, in 1959 and 1968, before the entire building was demolished in 1987. "Loew's State Theatre, New York," *Architecture and Building* 53, no. 10 (Oct. 1921): 81, pls. 162-66, "Latest of Loew's Houses a Triumph in Theatre Construction," *Motion Picture News* (22 Oct. 1921): 2192 and 2194, "Tall Office Building and Theatre Latest Times Square Improvement," *New York Times* (8 Feb. 1920): W18, "Mr. Loew's New Theatre," *New York Times* (28 Aug. 1921): 64, "Loew's New State Opens," *New York Times* (30 Aug. 1921): 19, and Steve Levin, ed., "Loew's State, New York City," *Marquee: The Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 32 (Third Quarter 2000): 14-21.

The State was designed to function as the circuit's new flagship and as part of a larger project that also contained Loew's corporate headquarters. Loew's assembled an L-shaped site the northeast corner of Broadway and West 45th Street with an "annex" extending to West 46th Street (Figure 3-40). This arrangement wrapped around four existing commercial buildings at the corner of Broadway and West 46th Street. At its rear, the site directly abutted existing structures, including the Lyceum Theater (1903). This site was developed as a large-scale commercial block consisting of the Loew's Building, a sixteen-story skyscraper that fronted the auditorium, which was nearly parallel to the front of the office building that contained the main theater entrance.

A particular challenge in designing this type of movie palace lay in appropriately expressing the theater on the building's exterior (Figure 3-41). The Loew's Building was a dignified presence on Times Square, resembling a high-rise bank more than a theater.²³ It was designed as a granite and marble, vertical mass divided horizontally into three parts: an elongated monumental base, consisting of a two-story storefront section that contained a central theater entrance, supported a five-story level with six Ionic columns on the Broadway façade and three on the West 45th Street façade. From this rose a plain seven-story shaft capped by a two-story attic below the monumental cornice. The only external expressions of the theater were a rather modest marquee and the vertical sign, which was the largest in the city.

The State's interior exemplified the Lamb office's style of the mid-1910s through the mid-1920s: elegant and cohesive but staid in comparison to the Tivoli. This décor was inspired by the work of 18th-century Scottish architect Robert Adam (1728-92), who

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²³ The Lamb office reused the Loew's Building's design for the Fox Theater (1923) in Philadelphia, although the two office buildings were not identical.

became associated with Lamb's output to such a degree that one contemporary critic suggested, (only partly in jest) that the firm's name should be changed to Lamb & Adam.²⁴ Lamb justified his office's long adherence to Adam-inspired design with his conviction that it "most ably reflected the moods and preferences of the American people," likely referring to its air of unpretentious opulence and unceremonious good manners. Furthermore, it suited Lamb's priorities for palatial motion picture theater design, conveying both a sense of grandeur and familiarity. Also known through revivals as a middle-class "living room" style, the Adamesque imparted a needed sense of elegance and costliness without being forbidding. The Adam style also lent Lamb's work a more modern image, the lightness of its ornamentation serving as a stark contrast to the heavy plasterwork and eclecticism of earlier theaters such as the Strand. Its use also reduced costs, the low relief ornamentation being comparatively inexpensive and simple to produce in cast plaster.

In the State, Adamesque motifs were carried out in an elaborated manner that also incorporated other influences befitting a flagship theater. The grand lobby -- a two-story rectangular space with staircases at each end that led to the mezzanine and balcony as well as doors leading directly into the orchestra -- was certainly impressive but could not compare with its counterpart in the Tivoli (Figure 3-42). Its ceiling was deeply coffered, supporting three large Bohemian-glass pendant chandeliers taken from a Vanderbilt mansion. The walls were plain to offset a mural by A. Battisti & Son entitled "The Strolling Players," depicting the progress of drama, which ran above the staircases and

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²⁴ On Lamb and the Adam style, see Thomas W. Lamb, "Good Old Days to these Better New Days," *Motion Picture News* (30 June 1928), Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats*, 106 and Hilary Russell, "All that Glitters: A Memorial to Ottawa's Capitol Theatre and its Predecessors," *Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History*, no. 13 (1975): 45-47.

entry. On the wall directly opposite the entry was a niche containing the lobby's most novel feature, a fishpond and "electric" fountain with changing multi-colored lights. The Adam-inspired mezzanine promenade (occupying the underside of the balcony) was the theater's second major public space, (Figure 3-43) from which patrons could proceed to the balcony or into the men and women's retiring rooms. A large open well enclosed by a Sienna marble balustrade occupied the center of the long space, providing views into the orchestra. Despite the sober reputation of Lamb's theaters of this period, they frequently featured touches of non-architectural whimsy. Here, the attractions of the mezzanine promenade included live canaries in gold cages and parrots and a monkey who had the run of the theater.

The auditorium was representative of Lamb's practice of standardization (Figure 3-44). Similarly to other movie palace specialists, the firm facilitated its large workload with occasional reuse of everything from decorative details to entire building components. The State's auditorium duplicated (at a significantly smaller scale) the basic composition of the firm's famous Capitol Theater, completed two years earlier and located nearby (Figure 3-45). It seated 3,316 to the Capitol's 5,300, but was more richly detailed. This was most noticeable in the boxes flanking the proscenium, which were composed as canopies supported by Solomonic columns, and the sounding board, which was painted to resemble the sky. Above the balcony, the upper sidewalls were composed as columnar screens reminiscent of those found in Adam's work. Above, the ceiling was composed of a large oval dome framed by a series of coffers containing indirect glass lighting fixtures. The dome dominated the entire space, decorated as a sunburst radiating out from a large chandelier hanging from its center. Its indirect lighting provided a warm

glow that, along with the surrounding fixtures located in the coffers, provided much of the auditorium's atmosphere.

In contrast to Lamb and Rapp & Rapp, John Eberson remained a lesser-known figure by the end of 1921. His commissions contemporary to the Tivoli and Loew's State were primarily vaudeville theaters with provisions for film, but they were representative of the evolving conception of palatial motion picture theater design prior to the former's impact. Eberson was still searching for the appropriate expression for palatial vaudeville-cum-motion picture theaters, veering between traditional decorative modes and atmospheric motifs and experimenting with increasingly monumental public support spaces.

The Strand Theater (1921) in Lansing, Michigan is among Eberson's lesser-known works that is noteworthy, nonetheless, as an uncommon response to a particularly complex program and as another early application of atmospheric motifs.²⁵ Built for W.S. Butterfield as a vaudeville and motion picture theater combination, the Strand occupied a long mid-block site at 217 S. Washington Avenue in Lansing's retail and theater district. The irregular lot extended back to S. Grand Avenue (Figure 3-46), and the site was developed to accommodate a variety of uses in addition to the theater, including a bowling alley, a ballroom, offices, a large restaurant, and stores, which were accommodated through the unusual incorporation of an arcade. The front half of the site was occupied by a two-story building with a basement while a separate three-story block of stores and offices fronted the stage house on Grand Avenue.

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²⁵ The Strand opened on April 21, 1921. In 1941, John and Drew Eberson extensively remodeled the Strand, introducing modernistic motifs in the auditorium and simplifying the façade. Following the theater's closure in 1980, the arcade was renovated for office space and the auditorium was partially demolished for parking.

Despite the building's wide variety of commercial functions, it read foremost as a theater. The entire Washington Avenue façade was faced in red brick with extensive white terra cotta, French Renaissance-inspired ornament (Figure 3-47). It was a two-part commercial block with a slightly off-center, three-story gabled façade above the main entrance flanked by attached, two-story storefronts of varying size. This hierarchy was reinforced by more elaborate ornamentation and a large window above the main entry, which was designed as a theater façade (complete with a marquee and projecting sign) rather than that of an arcade. The hierarchical subdivision of elevations into distinct components based upon function would emerge as a common arrangement in movie palace design, often denoting them from other types of theaters.

In contrast to the building's up-to-date façade, the Strand's interiors were old-fashioned in comparison to the Tivoli. The arcade, a transitional space between the theater and the street, functioned like a lobby, constituting (alongside the auditorium) the building's most significant interior space (Figure 3-48). In contrast to the theater's interiors, the arcade was treated simply, taking its character from its two-story height and from the light streaming in from the skylight running its length and from the open street entrance. The theater itself was French Renaissance in inspiration, characterized by somewhat heavy ornamentation. Its major public support space was a two-story foyer located just off the arcade, which was given a monumental treatment despite its relatively modest size, with faux ashlar masonry walls, a grand staircase, and a dome (Figure 3-49). The 1,774-seat auditorium's decorative scheme resembled those common in the preceding decade, with ornamentation concentrated on the proscenium and boxes while the remainder of the space was left mostly unadorned (Figure 3-50). Eberson did

introduce atmospheric motifs into the ceiling design by painting the large dome above the balcony to resemble the sky. The atmospheric element was introduced rather tentatively, as it lacked any sort of connection to the theater's overall decorative scheme.

1923-1925: The Atmospheric Theater and Proliferating the Movie Palace

By the mid-1920s, the movie palace was firmly defined as a building type, and exhibitors and architects focused on its proliferation throughout the country. Eberson, in search of a means to set his work apart from his competitors, shrewdly looked ahead to the next phase of the type's development. He understood "variety is the primary demand of an amusement-loving public," enabling him to anticipate the rapid shift in movie palace design agendas, from theaters focused on increasing film's middle class appeal to those that provided audiences something more adventurous than the halls of Versailles.²⁶ This shift would manifest in two primary strains of movie palace design:

The first was exoticism, part of a broader architectural trend fueled by the discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922, which led to a renewed interest in ancient Egyptian architecture and eventually that of a variety of Asian, Central American, Middle Eastern, and Native American cultures. Eberson was uniquely positioned to popularize the second strain, the atmospheric theater, having spent over a decade experimenting with illusionistic outdoor motifs.

Eberson's development of the atmospheric theater culminated in this period, establishing him as a leader in the field alongside Lamb and Rapp & Rapp. A fully-realized atmospheric auditorium was a blend of stagecraft and architecture that enveloped moviegoers in a garden or courtyard scene by eliminating traditional décor in favor of a

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²⁶ John Eberson, "The Atmospheric Theatre," *Motion Picture News* (12 June 1926): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide Section.

smooth plaster ceiling with small lights resembling stars, projected clouds that resembled the sky, and sidewalls designed as the fanciful facades of surrounding structures (Figure 3-51). In essence, audiences were brought into a stage set which often made them feel as if they were involved in the entertainment itself. This scheme appealed to exhibitors for two reasons: it memorably satisfied audiences' desire for novelty, and Eberson marketed it as a more cost-effective alternative in both initial construction and subsequent upkeep than a traditionally decorated theater.

In retrospect, Eberson credited *Motion Picture News* editorials by William A. Johnston with providing a theoretical foundation for the atmospheric theater.²⁷ Johnston had asserted:

It is the climax of showmanship to be able to make your audience feel at home, to make them feel that they have a most important role to play in the entertainment they are attending, and that it is most necessary to create a warm and friendly atmosphere in the theater.²⁸

Eberson styled himself as a showman and concluded that the prevailing practice of designing ever more elaborate and larger interpretations of classical models had reached its saturation point. The continuation of this practice resulted in increasingly oppressive theaters that overshadowed the stage and screen. Furthermore, theaters modeled after European monuments could inspire awe in patrons, but they did not put them at ease or readily frame their minds to receive entertainment. Eberson endeavored to create a “different conception of atmosphere carried out in architectural treatment” and concluded the ideal auditorium scheme was one modeled on the outdoors. In an atmospheric theater,

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²⁷ On the influence of William A. Johnston's writings, see John Eberson, “New Theatres For Old,” *Motion Picture News* (30 December 1927): Theater Building and Equipment Buyers Guide Section. Regarding the atmospheric theater catering to the uneducated masses, see John Eberson, “The Atmospheric Theatre,” *Motion Picture News* (12 June 1926): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide Section.

²⁸ Eberson, “New Theatres For Old,” Theater Building and Equipment Buyers Guide Section.

a patron “enjoys the natural beauty of skies and flowers he has been brought up to love. He does not feel himself in entirely strange surroundings; he relaxes; he is interested; we appeal to his imagination.”²⁹ Atmospheric theaters also reflected Eberson's recognition that movie palaces served the movie going masses, and in most cases “they do not know art, but rather feel it. An atmospheric theater based on nature’s school of color harmony is art which is felt by everybody.”³⁰ Rather than trying to elevate taste in the manner of the Tivoli, Eberson’s atmospheric theaters catered to those who did not possess refined taste.

Eberson never explicitly stated the atmospheric theater’s specific source(s) of inspiration, but his background provides some insight.³¹ It has been suggested that during his years as a student in Dresden and Vienna, he encountered profusely ornamented buildings and precedents for illusionary ceilings, of which there was a long tradition in European architecture, and theatrical stage sets translated into permanent structures. The Louisiana Purchase Exhibition’s theatrical yet relatively inexpensive temporary buildings, rendered with a variety of faux finishing techniques, also likely left an impression. Finally, he was engaged in scenic painting during his tenure with the Johnston Theatrical Company, which led to an interest in employing illusionistic effects in theater construction.

The Eberson office persistently denied the influence of other architects’ contemporary experiments with illusionistic outdoor auditorium effects, likely to

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²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The influence of Eberson’s European background and the St. Louis fair on atmospheric design is noted in Jane Preddy, *Palaces of Dreams: The Movie Theatres of John Eberson, Architect* (San Antonio: McNay Art Museum, 1990) and Jane Preddy, “Grand Illusions,” *American Heritage* (September/October 1990): 114-120. The influence of Eberson’s work with the Johnston Theatrical Company is noted in *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White & Company, 1955), 562.

establish its own provenance of atmospheric motifs. A frequently noted parallel is the Cort Theater (1909) in Chicago, a small playhouse designed by J.E.O. Pridmore.³² Its auditorium was modeled after the ancient Greek theater at Taormina, and contained a ceiling consisting of a Roman pergola of vine clad beams and lattice through which one glimpsed the night sky with twinkling stars (Figure 3-52). The illusion was enhanced by trompe-l'oeil paintings behind the boxes flanking the stage and on the curtain, which reproduced a view of the Ionian coast. There was also the older tradition of winter garden theaters, which were open-air, roof-garden theaters popular during the 1880s and 90s. Recalling their origins, winter garden theaters were typically the upper unit of a double-decker theater complex. Lamb emerged as a leader in their design with the American Roof (1909) in New York, constructed above the existing American Theater (1893) to replace an open-air roof garden. The resulting two-story 1,440-seat auditorium recreated the rustic atmosphere of the Adirondacks with birch bark walls, imitation trees framing the proscenium, abundant foliage, and a ceiling with star-like electric lights (Figure 3-53). In light of these precedents and parallels, Eberson can most accurately be credited with popularizing illusionistic outdoor auditoriums in motion picture venues and with

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³² The Cort Theater was located at 132 North Dearborn Street in the Loop. It was an intimate theater with only 14 rows between the footlights and the lobby, and a modest stage that facilitated only small productions. The Cort was a popular venue for twenty-five years before its closure in 1934 and subsequent demolition. See "Chicago's Newest Playhouse Fashioned on Greek Model," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (2 May 1909): G12, "The Kissing Girl...Presented at the New Cort Theater," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (26 Oct. 1909): 5, and "Cort Theater Surrenders to Drama Famine," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (7 Oct. 1934): D2. Charles C. Haight had designed the original American Theater and roof garden. William Morris, an independent vaudeville operator, had commissioned Thomas Lamb's addition. Lamb's subsequent illusionistic outdoor theaters included the Winter Garden (1913) in Toronto and the Japanese Garden (1913) in New York at 97th and Broadway. Prior to his adoption of Eberson-style atmospheric auditorium design in the mid-1920s, Lamb confined his use of illusionistic outdoor motifs to double-decker theaters, in keeping with his conception of their origins in the open-air roof garden tradition. Hilary Russell, "An Architect's Progress: Thomas White Lamb," TMs (photocopy), p.5, American Theatre Architecture Archive, Elmhurst, Illinois.

further developing them as the "atmospheric style," which constituted a decorative theme rather than shaped the entire theater's design.

Eberson's Majestic Theater (1923) in Houston, built for the Interstate Amusement Company, was the first fully realized atmospheric theater.³³ The Majestic occupied an approximately quarter-block corner site at 904-908 Rusk Avenue, which was developed with the four-story theater and an attached, two-part commercial block (Figure 3-54). While the Majestic was built to exhibit motion pictures, it initially functioned primarily as a vaudeville house and did not include the large public spaces found in the Tivoli. Eberson did incorporate a traffic management system to handle incoming and outgoing crowds through separate entrance and exit lobbies (on Rusk Avenue) and auditorium exits (onto Travis Street). Notably, the Majestic was segregated and included a separate entrance on Travis Street in which a series of stairs led up to a section in the balcony.

Eberson customarily developed the decorative inspiration of his atmospheric auditoriums into a larger theme that shaped the design of the entire theater, which is a key distinction from earlier precedents for illusionistic open-air auditoriums. The Majestic

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³³ The Majestic opened on 29 January 1923. Despite being the first atmospheric theater, the Houston Majestic was not widely published in the film and architectural trade presses. In contrast, its predecessor, the Majestic Theatre (1921) in Dallas, which had a semi-atmospheric auditorium, received more attention. See "Majestic Theatre, Dallas, Texas," *Architecture and Building* 53, no. 11 (Nov. 1921): 89, pls. 189-91 and "The New Majestic Theatre, Dallas, Texas," *Architecture* 46, no. 3 (Sep. 1922): 277-80. The Capitol Theater (1925) in Chicago, Eberson's immediate follow-up to the Houston Majestic, brought the atmospheric formula into one of the centers of American architecture for the first time was widely published. See, for instance, John Eberson, "A Description of the Capitol Theater, Chicago," *Architectural Forum* 42 (June 1925): 373-76, "Capitol Theater, Chicago," *Architect* 6 (July 1926): pls. 91-96 and G.H. Edgell, *The American Architecture of To-Day* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), 329-32. The Houston Majestic has attracted more attention from recent scholars. The most comprehensive study of the Majestic is Ann Kathryn Yoklavich, *John Eberson's Theaters in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 1987), 140-174. Also see Richard Schroder, *Lone Star Picture Shows* (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 2001), 66-68 and David Welling, *Cinema Houston: From Nickelodeon to Megaplex* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 52-63. On the appeal of atmospheric theaters to exhibitors, see John Eberson, "New Theatres For Old," *Motion Picture News* (30 December 1927): Theater Building and Equipment Buyers Guide Section.

drew inspiration from the Italian Renaissance, which was clearly expressed on the wide four-story terra cotta façade on Rusk Avenue, modeled after a palazzo (Figure 3-55). Similarly to the Tivoli, the interiors immersed audiences in an escapist environment by reproducing elements from specific European buildings, albeit in a more modest fashion. The entrance lobby replicated a ceiling from the Villa Cambiaso in Genoa while the orchestra foyer reproduced features from the Vatican, including door heads from a gallery at St. Peter's and the Polyhymnia as well as the Ducal Palace at Urbino (Figure 3-56).

The 2,094-seat auditorium, the culminating theater space, was modeled after an Italian Renaissance garden (Figures 3-57 and 3-58). This scene was intended to provide a novel surprise for patrons upon their first visit to the theater and provide a restful environment thereafter; it represented a significant step forward over previous applications of atmospheric motifs. The closest earlier precedent was the Orpheum Theater (1922) in Wichita, Kansas (Figure 3-59). While the Orpheum's Andalusian theme extended throughout the building, its auditorium was only semi-atmospheric, the open-air illusion confined to the ceiling between the edge of the balcony and the balcony cross aisle, while the front and back of the house were conventional. In contrast, the Majestic's auditorium discarded all decorative remnants of the opera house. Viewed from the upper reaches of the balcony the sidewalls resembled a plaster stage set placed within the smooth shell of the auditorium. The sidewalls were asymmetrical, a dramatic break from convention exhibited in the majority of the firm's subsequent atmospheric theaters (Figures 3-60 and 3-61). Each sidewall was composed as a vignette in keeping with the theater's Italian Renaissance theme. The left sidewall was referred to as the "Italian

Palace,” with elements drawn from Florence and Venice, in addition to Moorish Spain. On the right, its counterpart was deemed the “terrace garden,” complete with a balustrade and a temple. Both sidewalls were adorned with foliage, stuffed birds, and statuary, primarily reproduced from the collections of the Louvre and the Vatican. The proscenium was a loose interpretation of a Roman triumphal arch, through which the audience glimpsed an idyllic garden, an illusion created by the painted scene on the fire curtain.

In addition to their decoration, atmospheric auditoriums were highly dependent on technology, particularly lighting effects, to successfully create their outdoor illusion. Interstate owner Karl Hoblitzelle dictated that the Majestic’s auditorium reproduce a South Texas sunset above its Italian garden. The audience was entertained with drifting clouds as they found their seats. Entertainment programs began with sunsets in the western corner of the auditorium. Once the sunlight disappeared, a warm glow was emitted from the palace facades and the various garden structures, the moon rose, and the stars twinkled above. Dawn’s arrival in the east signaled the end of the show. The “stars” were formed by small holes drilled into the ceiling in constellation patterns. Each was filled with small lights wired to blink randomly. The cloud effects were produced by revolving gauze discs in front of a magic lantern, a system later manufactured by the Brenkert Light Projection Company of Detroit as the Brenograph, which could project a variety of effects on the ceiling (Figure 3-62). The lighting effects were controlled by a switchboard backstage; the individual in charge of this operation was deemed a “painter of lights,” blending the duties of an engineer and an artist. A separate individual controlled the cloud projection devices.

Eberson's full realization of the atmospheric theater paralleled Rapp & Rapp's proliferation of its Balaban & Katz-style movie palace, which entailed a decade of steady commissions. During the first half of the 1920s, the firm developed its expertise by adapting the nascent movie palace to a wide variety of conditions, ranging from well-known commissions such as the firm's largest movie palace, the Uptown (1925) located in its namesake neighborhood in Chicago, to comparatively unknown works, like the diminutive Retlaw (1925) in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. The latter represents the Rapp urban movie palace model adapted to a town, bringing local audiences a movie-going experience associated with much larger metropolitan areas.³⁴

Fond du Lac, located 60 miles northwest of Milwaukee at the confluence of several highways, prospered in the 1920s with a growing population fueled by industrial development. During the first half of the decade, the town was steadily acquiring the physical characteristics of a city, most visibly a pair of tall buildings (the seven-story Commercial National Bank (1923) and the eight-story Hotel Retlaw (1922-23)), which towered over the low-rise downtown. This development boom also prompted two competing movie palace schemes, planned for sites located one block apart on Main Street, which were ultimately both realized during the same year, an unusual situation for a town of that size. The Fischer Theater Company, affiliated with Famous Players-Lasky,

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³⁴ The Retlaw Theater opened on December 26, 1925, just over a month after the competing Fond Du Lac Theater, which had opened on November 25th. Its opening night program included an overture by the 18-piece Wisconsin Theater Concert Orchestra conducted by Rudolph Kopp, stage presentations, a theater organ performance, a newsreel, and the photoplay *Classified* starring Corinne Griffith. "Saxe's Retlaw, Fond du Lac, Wis. Holds Premiere," *Motion Picture News* (16 Jan. 1926): 320. The Retlaw was converted to a triplex in 1984, and two more theaters were added to the building the following year. However, the subdivision of the auditorium was done in such a way to preserve as much of the original features as possible. The Retlaw closed in 1998 due to an inability to keep up with newer motion picture exhibition technology. A series of subsequent uses resulted in the removal of the auditorium subdivisions, revealing that most of the original décor was intact. In 2013, the theater was vacant and for sale.

erected the \$750,000 Fond Du Lac Theater at 27-29 North Main Street with 2,000-seats and an attached 3-story retail and apartment building. Walter Schroeder (1878-1967), a Milwaukee businessman who had previously erected the Hotel Retlaw ('Walter' spelled backwards) as part of his regional hotel chain, financed a \$600,000 movie palace scheme at 23 South Main Street to be owned and operated by Saxe Amusement Enterprises of Milwaukee. The Saxe brothers, John and Thomas, operated Wisconsin's largest theater chain; they were also established clients of Rapp & Rapp, having commissioned the firm to design two of its first Milwaukee movie palaces, the Wisconsin (1924) and the Modjeska (1924).³⁵ They retained the firm to design a 1,140-seat movie palace, which would be the state's largest single floor theater.

To differentiate the Retlaw from the larger Fond Du Lac Theater, Saxe conceived of it as one part of a larger entertainment complex also containing a rooftop dance floor planned to accommodate 2,500 couples, which was the largest such space outside Milwaukee and something of a trademark of the chain's theaters.³⁶ These diverse functions were accommodated on the approximately one-third block rectangular site at the northeast corner of South Main and Sheboygan streets by a three-part commercial block (Figures 3-63 and 3-64). The theater was L-shaped with a long lobby stretching back to the auditorium at the rear of the lot, which was parallel to South Main Street. This wrapped around an attached three-story building containing ground floor storefronts, a second floor lounge for roof garden patrons, and the semi open-air ballroom on the third floor.

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³⁵ Saxe Amusement Enterprises continued to commission Rapp & Rapp to design movie palaces until 1927, when it was sold to a Fox subsidiary. These included the Uptown (1927) in Milwaukee and the Gateway (1927) in Kenosha.

³⁶ Saxe's Wisconsin and Modjeska theaters in Milwaukee also had large roof gardens.

The Retlaw's design demonstrates the adaptability of the firm's movie palace design lineage to a variety of conditions. This was immediately apparent from the facade, which employed the arrangement pioneered at the Tivoli and subsequently reused repeatedly by the firm, consisting of an off-center theater entry defined by a large arched window meant to call attention to the theater and, here, meant to differentiate it from the attached commercial block (Figures 3-65). The latter was further accomplished through differing materials: the three-story theater façade was terra cotta, while the dominant material of the commercial block was face brick and a wooden-frame third story housing the semi-open roof garden.³⁷ While the theater façade above the marquee was of the same overall form as the Tivoli and other Rapp-designed movie palaces, the triumphal arch motif was abstracted and simplified (Figure 3-66). The result was notably modern, almost Art Deco: ornamentation was confined to a very wide cornice consisting of a foliated pattern and three shields.

This simplification was carried throughout the interior, which was luxurious but designed with an increased reliance on simple lines and a reduction of plasterwork ornamentation (Figure 3-67). Like the Tivoli, the Retlaw's patrons passed through a carefully planned sequence of spaces removed from their everyday lives that placed them in the frame of mind to be entertained. The act of paying for admission to the theater was conducted in its most ornamented space apart from the auditorium, an enclosed, three-storied ticket lobby. It was located just behind the large façade window, which was

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³⁷ The roof garden does not appear on the firm's plans for the theater. Rather, the attached commercial building is two-stories, its second story drawn as a single large commercial space. Work on the roof garden was not begun until 22 days before the theater's opening. To complete the space in time, crews worked 24 hours a day. The completed roof garden was framed out of rough lumber with a beam and latticework ceiling. Its exterior was composed of large windows, which could be opened to lend the space an outdoor-effect. The 8,000 square-foot maple dance floor was built on a multitude of small springs to provide "give" for the dancers.

flanked on the adjoining walls with large mirrors, recreating a modest version of the firm's favored Hall of Mirrors imagery. From here, one entered a long two-story lobby that was comparatively plain, with pilasters dividing each wall into three bays -- an arrangement that faintly recalled the monumental columned lobby of the firm's largest theaters. A staircase accessed off the lobby led down to the basement, which contained the women's retiring rooms, decorated with elaborate fittings, while a similar set of stairs in the foyer led down to a men's smoking room, both of which were "commodious" and fitted with marble for "beauty and sanitation."

A one-story foyer was partially open to the balcony-less auditorium. The latter appears to have been an entirely original composition within the firm's work, discarding the typical semi-stock architectural components. Its sidewalls were rather plain, drawing attention to the stage and screen. A rectangular proscenium was flanked by light coves framed by Solomonic columns and organ screens designed as faux boxes. Above, the ceiling was relatively flat save for a large central dome. The auditorium also contained a \$30,000 organ made specifically for the Retlaw by the Bartola Musical Instrument Company in Oshkosh, capable of providing musical accompaniment and sound effects for silent films.

Rapp & Rapp and Eberson's rise during the early 1920s somewhat eclipsed Lamb. Despite remaining one of the nation's most prolific theater specialists and an undisputed leader in the field, Lamb's work was no longer considered as innovative as it had been during the previous decade. Instead, Lamb became the leader of a conservative school of movie palace design primarily made up of former members of his office and those who closely mimicked its work. Unlike the majority of competing firms, he was

slow to adopt the innovations in movie palace design pioneered by the Rapp and Eberson offices that were redefining the field in the early 1920s. Lamb's theaters continued to exhibit the characteristics of the now decade-old Strand model.

Although the firm occasionally turned to other influences, its theatres remained most notable for the persistence of Adam-inspired décor. The resulting movie palaces were characteristically dignified and tasteful, but as the decade wore on, they became staid in comparison to the ostentatious examples that were increasingly being opened down the street or across town. This restraint gave Lamb's work the appearance of large vaudeville theaters instead of movie palaces. Despite this, he maintained numerous loyal clients, among them leading vaudeville and motion picture exhibition circuits. Among the latter, Loew's remained the Lamb office's most significant continuing business relationship, through which its work in this period reached its fullest expression.

The Loew's State Theater (1924) in St. Louis was representative of Lamb's output of this period, characterized by a mixture of elements indicative of both the firm's work as a whole and components unique to the architectural identity it created for Loew's.³⁸ In St. Louis, Lamb's design responded to a particularly challenging site. Marcus Loew made the unorthodox decision to build his new \$1,200,000 theater downtown instead of in the city's primary entertainment district centered on Grand

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³⁸ The Loew's State opened on August 24, 1924 with a program highlighted by Don Albert conducting the Loew's State Symphony, a compilation of news events "heighted with color and musical effects," Tom Terry on the Wurlitzer organ, a cartoon comedy, Ted Wheem's Famous Victor Record Orchestra, Dorma Lee singing a prologue, the feature film *Revelation*, a formal dedication with a speech by Marcus Loew, and appearances by stage and screen celebrities. Prices at opening ranged from 25¢ for general seating to 50¢ for box and lodge seats with programs running continuously from 11 to 11 each day. The theater operated for 53 years until its unpublicized closure in 1977. In 1983, the auditorium was demolished and the theater lobby within the Washington Avenue portion of the complex was remodeled for retail. The remaining commercial building was ultimately demolished when the entire block was cleared for convention center expansion. See Robert Bagley, "Loew's State Theatre," *Marquee: The Journal of the Theatre Historical Society* 10, no. 4 (1978): 3-9.

Avenue in Midtown. Rather than enter the crowded Midtown market, Loew felt that it would be easier to carve out a niche in the less crowded downtown district. He maintained that there was an as yet untapped market in the central business district, which had a number of older theaters but lacked a large modern motion picture theater, let alone a movie palace.³⁹ In 1919, Loew's acquired a rectangular lot at the northeast corner of Washington Avenue and North Eighth Street (Figure 3-68). Its Washington Avenue frontage placed it on one of the downtown's most important arteries, one block from Stix, Baer & Fuller, a leading department store, and near numerous other stores and hotels. However, an alleyway bisected the block, running from North Eighth Street to North Seventh Street to provide rear service entries to the existing buildings fronting Washington Avenue, which seemingly limited the site's potential for a large theater.⁴⁰ In response to this challenge, the site was developed as three-story commercial block on Washington Avenue containing the theater entrance and lobby, which was separated by the alley from a longer auditorium block on Lucas Avenue and connected only by a bridge on the second level. This unusual arrangement and the orientation of the latter parallel to Lucas Avenue with its stage house abutting Eighth Street allowed for the largest possible auditorium.

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³⁹ While the Loew's State was only moderately successful in drawing patronage away from Midtown, it did attract the construction of a competing downtown movie palace. This was the Skouras Brothers' Ambassador (1926, C.W. & Geo L. Rapp), located two blocks away. Lamb included a plot diagram sketch of a theater bridging an alley in a manner similar to the Loew's State. See Thomas W. Lamb, "Construction and Equipment of Modern Theatres," *Motion Picture News* (21 Apr. 1923): 1922.

⁴⁰ In 1919, the city approved a proposal devised by the architectural firm of T.P. Barnett Co. on behalf of Loew's to remove the alleyway from the planned theater site. This scheme required the reconstruction of the entire block, inserting a dead end L-shaped alley that opened onto Lucas Avenue to provide service access to the commercial buildings on the remainder of the block. However, the original alleyway through the theater site was retained for unknown reasons.

The State was modeled after the circuit's flagship on Times Square, which was immediately apparent from the Washington Avenue commercial building containing its main entry (Figure 3-69). Both were variations of a distinctive Loew's façade treatment that originated earlier in the firm's work, but was further developed in the circuit's theaters in Cleveland (1921), Indianapolis (1921) and Boston (1922) (Figure 3-70). Excepting the corporate headquarters, they were three to four-story structures of white terra cotta or light-colored brick with pilasters or engaged columns framing large windows. There was no outward expression of the theaters aside from their marquees and vertical signs. While diminutive compared to its neighbors, the Loew's Building in St. Louis was a particularly elaborate example of this model: a three-story, two-part commercial block clad in white terra cotta with engaged columns framing the second and third floor windows with contrasting dark casings.

In the public spaces, Lamb endeavored to compensate for the theater's inconvenient layout by gently guiding patrons through an unusual route up and over the bridge spanning the alleyway to the auditorium. If his interiors lacked the degree of escapism associated with the Rapps' French royal treatment and Eberson's atmospheric auditoriums, they characteristically immersed moviegoers in a luxurious environment filled with objects of interest. Passersby on Washington encountered an ornate open vestibule with a black marble box office, hanging light fixtures, and brass entry doors. Inside, patrons entered a rotunda-like two-story lobby clad in white marble with a grand staircase leading up to the short passage spanning the alleyway (Figure 3-71). A pair of fountains stocked with fish invited patrons to linger a moment in the lobby before ascending the staircase. They could then cross a short passage spanning the alleyway into

the mezzanine level of the auditorium building, entering a large hemispherical-shaped promenade (Figure 3-72). Lamb favored the substitution of mezzanine foyers with sizable promenades tucked under the balcony to function as a second major public space alongside the lobby and as a center of circulation encouraging audiences to fill the upper levels of the auditorium. The promenade featured variations of many of the firm's favored design elements: a large mural (here an illusionistic scene depicting a clipper ship and rowboat), wood paneling, and a large well open to the auditorium that, by virtue of the theater's unusual layout, functioned as the access for orchestra seating via twin staircases. Accordingly, patrons found it more convenient to sit in the balcony, which was atypical.

The auditorium was representative of Lamb's mature Adam-inspired work, belonging to a scheme employed with some variation in the majority of the firm's commissions for both vaudeville circuits and motion picture exhibitors into the second half of the 1920s. This example was a moderately elaborated version of the basic scheme, seating 3,600 in the orchestra, balcony, and a series of boxes stepping down to the organ screens. The entire space was composed as a series of sweeping curved lines (Figures 3-73 and 3-74). A large arch defined each of the sidewalls from the rear of the balcony to the first descending opera box, containing a large mural. The firm's customary delicate Adamesque plaster relief ornamentation softened the auditorium's classical lines, aided here by extensive use of patterned fabric wall coverings. At the rear of the orchestra, the auditorium was open to stairs descending down from the mezzanine promenade, another typical Lamb arrangement. Large Corinthian pilasters flanked the organ screens, which

featured a mural depicting the muses. The ceiling consisted of a cove-lit dome with a sizable crystal chandelier.

Conclusion

By 1926, the movie palace was a well-defined building type that had fulfilled its initial purpose of attracting a middle class audience. Thomas Lamb, Rapp & Rapp, and John Eberson were at the forefront of this process, collectively shaping the type's character as it emerged as a distinct type of motion picture theater between 1913 and 1921 and during its initial proliferation across the country through the mid-1920s. Accordingly, they were well positioned to lead the next phase of movie palace development as the industry turned its focus away from concerns of respectability and building an audience towards a continual race against itself to offer audiences something new.

Chapter 4

The Big Three: The Evolving Movie Palace, 1927-1932

Public demands variety. Since variety is the demand of an amusement loving public, and we mean decisive variety, it is only reasonable to assume that such variety will be appreciated in the place of entertainment as well as in entertainment itself.¹

--John Eberson, 1926

Then we come to the motion picture, and here we find ourselves today creating and building super cinemas of enormous capacities, excelling in splendor, in luxury and in furnishings the most palatial homes of princes and crowned kings for and on behalf of His Excellency – the American citizen. Every one of them a prince or princess.

The best of the best and still to be outdone by the next effort of our proud and ambitious owners, and executed by our great architects and builders.²

--John Eberson, 1929

The period between 1927 and 1932 encompassed both the movie palace's pinnacle and its precipitous final decline. By the second half of the 1920s, Americans were increasingly accustomed to movie palaces, and the type settled into a standardized formula in terms of the architectural features, amenities, and overall experience that patrons could expect from theater to theater. While the type's continued proliferation, particularly into smaller cities and towns, remained a major focus for exhibitors and architects throughout the period, architectural variety emerged as the principal emphasis in movie palace development.

During the late-1920s movie-palace boom, it was no longer sufficient to simply build a new theater. Rather, each had to offer something different in order to eclipse those

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¹ John Eberson, "The Atmospheric Theatre," *Motion Picture News* (12 June 1926): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide.

² John Eberson, "New Theatres for Old," in *Film Daily Yearbook*, ed. Maurice Kann (New York: John W. Alicoate, 1929), 931 and 933.

that preceded it locally or nationally. This demand led to the type's steady rise to a pinnacle of colossal size, more exotic or elaborate decoration, and ever more novel amenities for moviegoers' comfort and amusement through the end of the decade.

During movie palace's final years of construction in the early 1930s, the type exhibited a number of new characteristics, which are frequently attributed solely to the Depression. However, factors predating the economic downturn led to transformative changes in the previously sacrosanct movie palace formula: the coming of sound, Art Deco, and a focus on construction in smaller urban areas due to the increasing saturation of larger markets. The movie palace originated as a response to the requirements of feature-length, silent motion picture exhibition, and the advent of talking pictures increasingly rendered some features obsolete while encouraging new solutions in auditorium design. Movie palace architects' embrace of Art Deco coincided with the introduction of sound, and theaters on the drawing boards in the late 1920s employed it as one solution to differing acoustical requirements. The emphasis on smaller houses prompted architects to pare down the type's salient features while carefully preserving the movie palace experience for local audiences. Movie palaces began to exhibit these changes during the first years of the Depression, as theaters planned before the downturn continued to be carried out through 1932. The Depression accelerated these changes and led to further economizing before the industry ceased building activity altogether as part of its retrenchment.

1927: Movie Palace Boom

John and Drew Eberson produced a continual stream of atmospheric movie palaces during the second half of the 1920s. In undertaking this work, the firm strove to

consistently provide patrons with something new, incorporating novel features and amenities, experimenting with unconventional auditorium configurations to heighten the outdoor illusion, and adapting their model to commissions of differing size and budget. Similar to other movie palace architects, the Eberson office was able to operate efficiently a veritable production line by developing semi-stock elements that would appear in theater after theater reproduced directly or modified to varying degrees. As one example of simplification, its atmospheric movie palaces ultimately drew from a select palate of sources, primarily Italian Renaissance and Spanish and less commonly French and Persian design patrimonies.³

The firm also facilitated the efficient completion of its atmospheric movie palaces by establishing an in-house theater decorating company, Michel Angelo Studios.⁴ The firm had found it impossible to find local craftsmen in most American cities skilled in the highly-specialized techniques required for its atmospheric theaters. John Eberson closely oversaw Michel Angelo Studios, which consisted of about 30 artists, decorators, scenery

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³ The firm's unexecuted Chicago-area movie palace plans reveal additional influences. These included an Egyptian atmospheric movie palace planned for Chicago's Northwest side and illustrated in "To Entertain the Northwest Side," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (25 Apr. 1926): B1 and Eberson, "The Atmospheric Theatre," Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide Section. There was also a Gothic-inspired movie palace and hotel project for Cicero to be operated by National Theaters. "Fourteenth Century Castle Cinema for Capricious Cicero," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (19 Sep. 1926): B1. Another project was a "Moorish-African" ballroom, hotel, Masonic hall, movie palace, office, and retail complex planned by Lubliner & Trinz for the northwest corner of Michigan Avenue and 47th Street. "Huge Cinema and Ballroom; 4th-Michigan," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (26 Sep. 1926): B1.

⁴ Michel Angelo Studios was advertised as an independent company, but it was in fact based out of John and Drew Eberson's Chicago office at 212 East Superior Street. Like the Eberson firm as a whole, Michel Angelo Studios was very much a family business. Drew Eberson undertook finishing touches, and to make sure everything came together in right manner, John's wife Beatrice (an interior designer by trade) and their daughters Elsa and Lorna made decorative banners. Drew Eberson, "The Building of an Atmospheric Theatre," January 1989, John Eberson Subject File, American Theatre Architecture Archives, Elmhurst, IL and "Blending Art and Showmanship: The Atmospheric Theatre Originated by John Eberson and Outgrowth of a New Industrial Development," *Motion Picture News* (7 Oct. 1927): 1079.

designers, and other specialists trained in modeling, painting, and sculpting techniques.⁵ This staff traveled between the firm's theatre projects installing plaster ornamentation, texturing and painting the walls, positioning statuary, arranging trees, positioning stuffed birds, and selecting furnishings.

In 1927, the firm completed two movie palaces in Nebraska that were representative of the rapid evolution and the wide breadth of its atmospheric work since the completion of the Houston Majestic: the Capitol Theater in Grand Island and the Riviera Theater in Omaha. The latter, commissioned by A.H. Blank Theaters and operated in association with Publix, was among the most ornate atmospheric movie palaces yet produced by the firm, costing \$1,000,000.⁶ It was built at the southwest corner of 20th and Farnam streets, at the western edge of the city's central business district (Figure 4-1). This site was located in a primarily low-rise district comprising automobile-related businesses and hotels. Accordingly, the Riviera was planned in a manner reminiscent of a neighborhood movie palace without a large commercial building. Early plans included a large atmospheric restaurant, but the rectangular lot was ultimately developed with the theater and three stores facing Farnam Street (Figure 4-2). The 2,776-seat auditorium was parallel to Farnam Street with the lobby and foyers stretching along 20th Street. Incoming and outgoing crowds were handled separately and

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⁵ Drew Eberson, "The Building of an Atmospheric Theatre" and Drew Eberson to C.W. Poston, November 3, 1980, John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records, Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach, FL

⁶ The Riviera opened on March 26, 1927, and was renamed the Paramount within two years after A.H. Blank sold the theater. During the Depression, the lobby was temporary converted into a miniature golf course. The theater also used as a bowling alley for a short period. However it was not extensively altered until 1962, when it was renamed the Astro and underwent an extensive remodeling program. It closed as a movie theater in 1980, and after surviving a threat of demolition, was partially restored in the 1990s as a children's theater. On the Riviera, see "Omaha's Atmospheric Theatre – The Riviera," *Motion Picture News* (June 1927): Showman Section.

efficiently through a system of foyers, holdout gates, stairs, and exit vestibules modeled after the Tivoli.

The Riviera's exterior exhibits the firm's increasingly exotic conception of atmospheric movie palace facades (Figure 4-3). It was an irregular composition faced with the firm's favored treatment of tapestry brick juxtaposed with terra cotta ornamentation. The façade's predominant inspiration was the architecture of Moorish Spain combined with touches of the "walls of the palaces of Venice, Florence, Milan, and Rome."⁷ Its focal point was a domed minaret that rose above the corner theater entry, which, along with the attached vertical sign, dominated the immediate surroundings and the adjacent approaches in and out of the downtown area. An Italian influence could be seen in the ornamental details, notably the groups of three attached Corinthian columns topped with griffins rising from the second level of the Farnam and 20th street facades.

Interiors became even more flamboyant compared to earlier atmospherics, often bringing atmospheric effects into lobby, foyers, and other public spaces outside the auditorium. The entire theater would still be designed around a central theme, now typically broken down into a series of smaller related vignettes. The Riviera contained three levels of public spaces in addition to the auditorium. A patron would encounter atmospheric effects immediately upon entering the building in the two-story lobby, which was modeled after a "semi-rural Italian court" beneath the open blue sky (Figure 4-4). This vignette was enhanced by what had become the firm's favored interior decorative finishes and details, which were employed throughout the Riviera's public spaces: tile floors, roughly textured plaster walls, wrought iron fixtures, and faux wooden beams and

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⁷ Ibid.

railings. The lobby led into a long foyer, which taken with the lobby, stretched back the full depth of the lot and contained stairs to the basement and mezzanine (Figure 4-5). This space was inspired by a loggia of an Italian palace, carrying through the lobby's decorative finishes but enclosed by Solomonic columns and adorned with art, statuary, vines, and weathered beams. A large well in the ceiling provided a view up into the mezzanine foyer, which had an atmospheric ceiling (Figure 4-6). The mezzanine foyer provided access to the balcony via three sets of stairs opening to the cross aisle, a ladies' parlor, and a men's smoking room. Similarly, it was filled with antiques and reproduction furnishings, art works, and objet d'art. The basement contained a variety of sizable public support spaces: a large lounge, a ladies' parlor, a men's smoking room, and a children's playroom and nursery. Particularly novel was the wall between the lounge and playroom, made up of two large aquariums.

In the Riviera, Eberson departed even farther from the Houston Majestic's conventional model of auditorium design. Eberson continually experimented with sidewall configurations in an effort to perfect the outdoor illusion in his atmospheric theaters. At the Riviera, this involved lowering the sidewalls, breaking them into smaller components, and developing more whimsical organ screen treatments. The Riviera's auditorium was modeled after an Italian garden, employing the firm's customary asymmetrical sidewall treatment (Figures 4-7, 4-8, and 4-9). On the left, the organ screen resembled the façade of a two-story Italian palace, separated from the balcony sidewall by a one-story terrace. Its counterpart on the right was slightly lower, modeled after an Italian garden terrace. Both were centered upon a series of stage set-like vignettes, the largest of which was a large "Venetian fountain" located at the upper level of the Italian

garden terrace (Figure 4-10). The exits flanking the stage were occupied by smaller scenes of interest, such as the countryside garden on the right. In addition to the customary profusion of statuary, urns, foliage and stuffed birds, each of these scenes was centered upon a functional fountain⁸ The proscenium arch was designed along the lines of the firm's favored gateway motif, with a tiled roof, an illusion again aided by the scene painted on the fire curtain. Another of their common elements was the use of a trellis on the ceiling above the rear portion of the balcony to mask the air returns.

The Riviera's opening was just two days after that of the Capitol Theater in Grand Island, which was the firm's smallest atmospheric theater, seating 1,200.⁹ Its design, constrained by a \$200,000 budget and a small lot size, was a study in the reduction of both the movie palace formula and the atmospheric style to their minimum requirements. S.N. Wolbach, a Grand Island banker and department store owner, initiated the development of a local movie palace as an act of boosterism to lend Grand Island a metropolitan image in hopes of promoting its growth. Wolbach enlisted Carl Laemmle, a business friend and president of Universal Pictures, to resolve financing issues and to bring in an architect. Eberson's atmospheric style was appealing for two reasons: it would make the planned movie palace (in itself a mark of distinction for a town) novel in

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⁸ Drew Eberson recalled that a manager approached him at one of his father's newly opened atmospheric theaters regarding a problem: the manager called his attention to a section of seating near the sidewall and complained that patrons there kept getting up and leaving the auditorium. At first the manager thought something might be wrong with the seats. However Drew pointed out a trickling fountain adjoining the seating area in question. After the fountain was turned off, there were no further problems. Drew Eberson (speech delivered at the Theater Equipment Dealers Association luncheon, Ponte Verde, Florida, 10 Feb. 1971), John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records, Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach.

⁹ The Capitol Theater opened on March 24, 1927, having been built by the Hostettler Amusement Company and the Universal Film Corporation. It endured at least one renovation and the gradual dispersal of many of its decorative elements before closure in 1985. It was subsequently demolished for a parking lot. See "Atmospheric Design for the Baby Theatre," *Motion Picture News* (May 1927): Showman Section and John Sorenson, *Our Show Houses: The History of Movie Theaters in Grand Island, Nebraska* (Grand Island: Hall County Historical Society, 1990), 10-13, 43-44, 54-58.

design, and it was less expensive to build than a hardtop movie palace. The chosen site at 109 W. Second Street was near Grand Island's other recently-built monument to modernity, the ten-story Yancey Hotel (Figure 4-11). The diminutive movie palace lot was 66 feet on Second Street and 132 feet back to an alley, which was developed with a two-part commercial block of three-stories. With the exception of two small stores flanking the ticket lobby, the entire structure was dedicated to the theater itself. The auditorium occupied the majority of this space, limiting the size and number of public support spaces. It was fully equipped for both motion picture and vaudeville, with an organ and an orchestra pit accommodating up to 30 musicians.¹⁰

The Capitol's theme was "a garden in old Spain," which was carried out in a blend of the Churriguersque and Italian Renaissance.¹¹ Its façade was relatively simple, but was characterized by enough of what the local press deemed "peculiar" Spanish-inspired ornamentation to effectively imbue the building with an exoticism that stood out in the town (Figures 4-12). This design reproduced, at a smaller scale, the Palace Theater in Canton, Ohio, which the firm had completed the previous year (Figure 4-13). In Grand Island, the façade was designed as a single mass, increasing the small theater's impression of size. It was composed of the firm's trademark combination of brick juxtaposed with light-colored terra cotta ornamentation. The latter was used sparingly, concentrated around the windows on the second floor in two crests and in cresting and finials along the roofline.

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¹⁰ At its prime, the theater employed an orchestra of eight. Sorenson, *Our Show Houses*, 12, 55-56.

¹¹ Churriguersque was a late 17th- and 18th-century variation of Italian Baroque architecture incorporating Gothic and Moorish decorative elements.

Although the Capitol's interior was modest in comparison to the Riviera's and the firm's other contemporary theaters, it incorporated the characteristic elements of their larger oeuvre.¹² The ticket lobby was open to the street and constituted one of the theater's most intricately decorated spaces, with a coffered ceiling and a rough plaster wall treatment and a tile floor, two of the firm's favored treatments for interior spaces (Figure 4-14). This level of detailing in the ticket area was due to the theater's lack of an interior lobby, an arrangement that dictated many patrons gather in this space or on the street to await the next show.

The ticket lobby's four large wooden doors opened directly into a foyer divided from the auditorium by an open partition (Figure 4-15). Although a small space, the foyer, as customary in a larger movie palace, contained objects of interest for patrons: several pieces of art and an unusual drinking fountain that overflowed into a miniature fishpond. The mezzanine foyer was the theater's principal public support space, functioning as an art-filled promenade providing access to the lounges and the balcony (Figure 4-16).

The auditorium's Spanish patio design demonstrates the wide adaptability of Eberson's atmospheric formula to varying budgets and conditions (Figures 4-17 and 4-18).¹³ He incorporated all the hallmarks of the style, but carried them out in a simplified manner. However, Eberson's ownership of his own decorative firm ensured that these elements would be of high quality. Furthermore, the focal point of an atmospheric theater was its ceiling effects, which were not economized, while the other decorative elements

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¹² The basement contained various service rooms including ushers' quarters, musicians' rooms, a music library, dressing rooms, and mechanical rooms.

¹³ The Capitol's auditorium seated 700 on its main floor and 500 in the balcony.

of the auditorium would only be experienced in low-light conditions. The sidewalls were asymmetrical, but only subtly, drawing inspiration from an eclectic array of sources ranging from the Casina Pio IV in the Vatican gardens to Moorish Spanish architecture (Figures 4-19 and 4-20). These were simplified by an increased usage of flat plaster surfaces rendered in the firm's "broom pebble dash" rough plaster. To compensate for the rather plain sidewalls, the proscenium arch was given a particularly fanciful treatment, modeled after "a mammoth Spanish gateway" with hanging arches, pinnacles, and finials. In addition, the firm drew inspiration from the gardens of the Villa Salviati in adorning the auditorium with the customary foliage, stuffed birds, and reproduction statuary. However these decorative details were pared down. Despite this economy, the statuary, which primarily depicted subjects from classical mythology, was carefully catalogued as a primary point of interest for local audiences in the opening press coverage.

While Eberson focused on developing new modes of atmospheric design, Rapp & Rapp continued to proliferate its Balaban & Katz-style movie palaces, which remained the national standard for motion picture exhibition. Loew's and United Artists' Penn Theater (1927) in Pittsburgh is representative of the Rapp office's architectural vocabulary as it had developed by the second half of the 1920s, primarily characterized by further elaboration of its trademark French royal court imagery.¹⁴ The Penn was the

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¹⁴ Deemed a "Temple of the Cinema," Loew's and United Artists' Penn Theater opened on September 6, 1927. It was originally scheduled to open on Labor Day but the death of Marcus Loew that day delayed the opening. The opening program included Ted Lewis and his band, Don Albert conducting the Loew's and United Artists' Symphony Orchestra, Ken Widenor at the Robert Morton Organ, a newsreel, and *Adam and Evil* starring Lew Cody and Aileen Pringle. In 1964, the theater was closed due to rising operating costs in the face of declining attendance, reopening briefly in 1967. While the Penn's original design has been somewhat overlooked, it is well known today in its heavily renovated guise as Heinz Hall (1971), an early movie palace reuse project. Unlike other such projects, the Penn's three-year, \$10 million conversion into a symphony by Stotz, Hess, MacLachlan & Fosner entailed major alterations to its original design, particularly to the exterior and auditorium. The latter was stripped of much of its plaster ornament, most on

product of a brief partnership between Loew's and United Artists, which resulted in several movie palaces constructed between 1926 and 1928, including theaters by Lamb in Columbus (1928) and Eberson in Louisville (1928).¹⁵ Loew's led the development of these projects as part of a broader effort to reshape the architectural image of its theaters. Loew's theaters' design had remained virtually monopolized by Lamb and other architects approved by him, but Lamb's conservative designs were now glaringly passé, resembling over-scaled vaudeville theaters in comparison to the flamboyant Midwestern-inspired movie palaces being opened by Loew's rivals. Accordingly, Loew's selectively turned to the leading proponents of the more ostentatious school of movie palace design as it expanded its circuit during the second half of the 1920s.

The Penn was the first of Loew's "new look" movie palaces to open. Occupying the southeast corner of Sixth Street and Penn Avenue, it was situated near a number of Pittsburgh's older downtown theaters and directly opposite the Rosenbaum Department Store (1915) (Figure 4-21). In 1927, this intersection was at the center of a building boom, which (in addition to the \$5 million Penn Theater) included the 13-story Roosevelt Hotel (1927) on the northeast corner and the Stanley Theater (Hoffman & Henon, 1928), rising a block east on Penn Avenue.¹⁶ The Penn's quarter-block rectangular site was

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the organ screens and along the sidewalls, where the openings were sealed with acoustical panels. On the exterior, the attached commercial block was rebuilt as an extension of the lobby and main entrance. The original entry was removed and the large arched window was extended down to the street level. On Loew's and United Artists' Penn Theater, see E.C.A. Bullock, "Architect Describes Penn Theater Features," *Pittsburgh Press* (4 Sep. 1927); Loew's and United Artists' Section and "New Heights for the Baroque Design- The Penn," *Motion Picture News* (4 Feb. 1928): 327-328. The conversion of the theater to Heinz Hall is detailed in Donald L. MacLachlan, "Heinz Hall for the Performing Arts," *Marquee: Journal of the Theatre Historical Society* 3, no. 4 (1971): 2-7.

¹⁵ Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 98-99 and Steve Levin, ed., "Loew's Theatres: 100 Years," *Marquee: The Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 36, no. 3 (2004): 3.

¹⁶ "Halt Building in \$100,000,000 Projects by Wage Dispute," *Pittsburgh Press* (1 Mar. 1927): 1. The Penn and Stanley Theaters were also part a local movie palace building boom that also included the Enright

developed with the theater and an attached five-story commercial building at the corner of Sixth and Penn, which contained ground floor storefronts, offices above, and a large restaurant in the basement. The theater was L-shaped, wrapping around the commercial block, with its main entry on Sixth Street and the auditorium oriented parallel to Penn Avenue.

In keeping with the majority of Rapp-designed movie palaces of this period, the Penn exhibited a mixture of new and familiar architectural elements. Its exterior exemplified the firm's standard solution for medium to large-scale combination theater and commercial buildings (Figure 4-22). While the attached commercial building was realized at a relatively modest size, it was designed to carry an additional ten-stories of offices. This arrangement places the Penn within the context of several of the firm's recently completed large-scale movie palace projects, notably the Paramount Building and Theater (1926) in New York and the Michigan Building and Theater (1926) in Detroit (Figure 4-23). In each case, the problem of expressing the theater entry on the exterior of a mixed-use commercial building was resolved with the inclusion of the familiar arch framing a large recessed window. The Penn's exterior can be read as the base of one of these larger projects, taking the form of a two-part commercial block rendered in terra cotta and modeled after the Italian Renaissance. Its façade above the theater entry was given a notably more ornate treatment than its precursors, indicative of the general trend towards elaboration seen in the firm's work as the 1920s progressed. By virtue of the theater's location at the intersection of two important streets, it had the

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(1928, Hoffman & Henon) in East Liberty, the only one of the three to have subsequently been demolished. At 3,486 seats, the Penn was the second largest of the city's new movie palaces. The Stanley was the largest with a 3,886 capacity, while the Enright seated 3,231.

unusual arrangement of two vertical signs and marquees: one pair at the main entrance on Sixth Street and the other at a side exit onto Penn Avenue.

The Penn's interiors exemplified the firm's mature style. Its grand lobby was another variation of the Royal Chapel of Versailles, which loosely reproduced the corresponding space in the Tivoli (Figure 4-24). While the latter was notable for its solemnity, meant to inspire dignified patron behavior and to increase the respectability of the nascent film medium, this was no longer a primary consideration in 1927 when movie going was a well-established pastime and competition encouraged ever more elaborate theaters. Accordingly, the Penn's grand lobby was among the firm's most lavish applications of the Tivoli lobby scheme: Rococo in inspiration, lined with Corinthian columns, the entire room was clad in Breche opal and Levanto marbles and a "Venetian" ceiling was painted depicting allegorical figures. The grand lobby was designed to impress patrons with its framed vistas, containing a variety of spaces to study the fifty-foot high vaulted ceiling and the grand staircase opposite the entry, including a the firm's customary music room carved out of the mezzanine level above the main entry and overlooks from the balcony level. Patrons could then proceed into the grand foyer, which ran perpendicular to the grand lobby, directly behind the auditorium, which resembled a smaller version of the main lobby (Figure 4-25). The theater's primary retiring rooms were located in the basement with additional facilities on the mezzanine and balcony levels. The former were accessed from the lobby and foyer, and included a general lounge, a ladies private lounge, a Louis XIV cosmetic room, a Marie Antoinette women's smoking room, and a gentleman's suite with a smoking room modeled after the Palazzo Davanzati in Florence.

While the Penn's exterior and public support spaces were variations of familiar Rapp elements, the auditorium was unique within the firm's work, demonstrating experimental ceiling and sidewall decorative treatments (Figure 26). E.C.A. Bullock deemed the space "Italian in spirit" and highly decorative.¹⁷ The auditorium seated 3,486 in an orchestra, mezzanine and balcony, among the firm's larger movie palaces. Its "unusual" sidewalls were composed of backlit openings of varying size flanking three niches containing an interconnected false staircase (Figure 4-27). This experimentation with illusionistic sidewall elements would culminate at the end of the decade in the firm's atmospheric movie palaces. The organ screens took the form of heavily ornamented opera boxes, each covered by a canopy supported by abstracted columns and set back into a niche flanking the proscenium. In contrast to the usual practice, the proscenium was rather understated, accented by only a modest band of ornamental plasterwork around its edge. Instead, the ceiling was the auditorium's focal point, a unique composition designed to provide a variety of colored lighting effects and enhance the space's feeling of vast size. This consisted of a large central dome ringed by twelve smaller illuminated coves. The remaining ceiling surfaces were sparingly decorated with cast and painted ornament, consisting of small rosettes that appeared to be dissolving away from the domes and drifting down into the sidewalls.

Rapp & Rapp and Eberson's growing dominance of the field prompted the Lamb office to rapidly undergo what its founder considered "radical changes" during the second

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¹⁷ Bullock, "Architect Describes Penn Theater Features," Loew's and United Artists' Section.

half of the 1920s.¹⁸ Lamb shook off his staid image by departing from his trademark Adam influences in favor of his rivals' ostentatious modes of movie palace design. This change occurred out of necessity, as previously loyal clients (most significantly Loew's) increasingly looked towards Lamb's rivals for their most prestigious commissions (such as Loew's Penn). The motion picture theater design field remained driven by novelty, as the perception remained that audiences desired ever more exotic and ornate new movie palaces. Lamb himself detected a "change in the temperament and moods on the American public with regard to the design of public institutions such as motion picture theatres" leading to a "lessening in the response of the average patron to the charm of architectural backgrounds patterned after the Adam brothers," conceding that audiences were demanding "something more gay, more flashy," and always something new.¹⁹ Accordingly, after almost a decade of nearly imperceptible change, the firm's work evolved rapidly between about 1925 and 1927 into what Lamb deemed his "de luxe" theaters.²⁰ Exteriors became markedly more theatrical, while Adam-inspired interiors were increasingly discarded in favor of "the periods of Louis XVI and the very rich productions in the Italian Baroque style," among others.²¹ The Lamb office proved remarkably adept at undertaking this transformation, aided in this regard by the circa 1926 addition of Emil Mlinar as the firm's chief draftsman. The firm now

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¹⁸ On the evolution of Lamb's movie palaces during the second half of the 1920s, see Thomas W. Lamb, "Good Old Days to these Better New Days," *Motion Picture News* (30 June 1928): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyer's Guide.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Thomas Lamb used to the term "de luxe" theater to describe movie palaces with a mezzanine level of seating between the orchestra and balcony. However, he also used it more broadly to refer to his more flamboyant movie palaces of the later 1920s. This is not to be confused with his "deluxe" motion picture theaters of the 1910s such as the Regent and Strand. On the evolution of Lamb's movie palaces during the second half of the 1920s, see Lamb, "Good Old Days to these Better New Days," Theatre Building and Equipment Buyer's Guide.

²¹ Ibid.

characteristically turned out movie palaces that overshadowed those of its principal rivals in terms of opulence. In 1927, these changes first became apparent in its built work with the completion of the Mayfair in Asbury Park, Loew's Canal in New York, and Loew's Midland in Kansas City, Missouri.

Loew's Midland (1926-1927) was the Lamb office's major commission completed in 1927 and the largest of its initial group of re-conceptualized movie palaces.²² In 1924, Herbert M. Woolf, president of a local luxury goods department store and a co-partner in a company operating 16 Kansas movie houses, became convinced that Kansas City needed a large motion picture in the manner of the 5,230-seat Capitol Theater (Lamb, 1919) in New York and the 3,869-seat Chicago Theater (Rapp & Rapp, 1921) in its eponymous city. While Kansas City had several sizable downtown theaters, these were primarily venues for vaudeville dating from the beginning of the decade or earlier. Woolf was able to interest Marcus Loew in his scheme and the latter signed on to construct a combined movie palace and office building, which ultimately cost \$4,500,000 including the price of the land. The Midland Investment Company, established by Loew's Nicholas Schenck (Marcus Loew's successor as president) and Woolf (as vice-president),

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²² Loew's Midland Theater opened October 28, 1927 with a program highlighted by the Midland Grand Orchestra with guest conducted by celebrated violinist David Rubinoff playing Tchaikovsky's "March Slav;" speeches by special guests including Kansas City Mayor Albert Beach and Loew's vice-president Edward Schiller; a Loew's newsreel documenting the theater's construction; Hans Fiath on the Mighty-Voiced Robert Morton Organ; Anatole Friedland and his Club Antole Review; and Hollywood stars Buddy Rodgers, Aileen Pringle, and Ramon Navarro, the latter on hand to introduce his new film *The Road to Romance* (1927). The Midland ended its role as a movie palace in 1961, when the theater closed. Following brief service as an arena for a professional bowling league, Durwood Theaters (later AMC) reopened it as a movie theater with the addition of two smaller theaters. In 1981, the theater ceased showing movies and became a venue for live performances. For background and description of the Midland, see B. Andrew Corsini, ed., "The Midland Theatre, Kansas City, MO.," *Theatre Historical Society of American Annual*, no. 6 (1979): 3-5 and Edward J. Miszczuk, "Loew's Midland Theater-Midland Building," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1977.

financed and managed the project. Lamb would be the principal architect and the Boller Brothers, a Kansas City-based theatre specialist firm, acted as associate architects.

The Midland occupied a slightly L-shaped lot on the northwest corner of Main and West 13th streets that extended back to Baltimore Avenue (Figure 4-28). On Main Street, the lot was strategically located between two large preexisting theaters on one of the city's major retail thoroughfares. The project was developed as a large-scale commercial block with a six-story theater (and basement levels) fronting Main Street and a twelve-story office building that wrapped around the stage house on Baltimore Avenue.

The French Renaissance exterior was transitional, consisting of a mixture of Lamb's familiar architectural vocabulary and new influences (Figure 4-29). At the Midland, a particular emphasis was placed upon monumentality to capitalize upon the prominent site in the city's retail and theater district and on exterior architectural expression of the theater within the larger block. A terra cotta-clad block containing ground floor storefronts and upper level office space occupied the entire lot, varying in height from five to four stories due to the site's slope from west to east and north to south. On each of the three street frontages, the building was a variation of Lamb's classical Loew's treatment. The theater served as the base for the Midland Office Building on Baltimore Avenue, a three-part vertical block modeled after the Loew's Building in Manhattan (Figure 4-30). This design was an understated variation of its predecessor on Times Square, in keeping with its function as an office building with ground level storefronts rather than the primary theater entry. The latter was located in the eastern façade on Main Street, incorporated into a five-story portion of the block that also contained stores and offices. It was divided into five bays, four of which conformed to Loew's

façade treatment. The Main Street façade also introduced two novel elements that expressed the theatrical nature of the building and differentiated it from its neighbors: a four-story false window above the marquee in the manner of Rapp & Rapp and a mansard roof with oval-shaped windows that hid air conditioning cooling towers. Along West 13th Street, the exterior of the auditorium sidewall was given an unusually monumental treatment. This consisted of an arcade on the upper three stories that masked a fire escape and suitably bridged the distance between the Midland Office Building and the Main Street section containing the theater entrance.

While the Midland's exterior was transitional, the interiors credited to Emil Mlinar represented a decisive break. Restrained Adam influences were discarded in favor of a flamboyant French and Italian Baroque decorative scheme with French Renaissance, Rococo and First-and Second-Empire elements.²³ Lamb's application of these architectural influences, widely used in movie palaces during the late 1920s, was distinctive, in that it was characterized by a vigorous exuberance with extensive use of lavish finishes. Lamb specifically viewed the Midland as setting a new standard of "de luxe" movie palace design, so high in terms of luxury that it would be difficult to maintain.

The lobby and grand foyer, an interconnected L-shaped space, exemplified Lamb's new aesthetic (Figures 4-31 and 4-32). Its unified decorative scheme loosely recalled the familiar Hall of Mirrors motif but with far richer materials than typically

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²³ Noted in "Loew's Kansas City Homes Scheduled for Oct.," *Motion Picture News* (14 Oct. 1927): 1199. Thomas Lamb's comments on the Midland's design are detailed in Lamb, "Good Old Days to these Better New Days," Theatre Building and Equipment Buyer's Guide. Another significant part of the Midland's interior were the lounges, particularly the Vanderbilt Room. For a discussion of these areas, please see Chapter Five.

applied by other firms. The walls were lined floor-to-ceiling with walnut wainscoting and large beveled glass mirrors. Fluted Corinthian pilasters and columns with gilt capitals supported a heavy gilt entablature decorated with putti and other embellishments. The vaulted lobby ceiling had a shallow central cove-lit dome ringed by small murals and encrusted with gilded ornamentation that featured a 14-foot Czechoslovakian-crystal chandelier, which was complemented by three similar large chandeliers in the foyer. Lamb viewed the contrast between the “warmth and dignity” of the walnut columns and the overlaid gold as resembling Empire Style furniture.

The auditorium’s Louis XIV-inspired design was restrained, which was intended to emphasize the six-story, nearly 4,000-seat (3,573) space’s enormous size rather than overpower moviegoers with abundant ornamentation (Figures 4-33 and 4-34). Its vastness was reinforced by the repetition of elements without too prominent an emphasis placed on any one detail.²⁴ The ceiling and walls blended together “to provide “a pleasing but retiring background or setting for the stage.”²⁵ Above the balcony, each sidewall featured a series of three receding alcoves varying in height from three to four stories. Each contained a plaster-and-damask window-like embellishment. The organ screens flanking each side of the proscenium arch resembled larger and more elaborate versions of the sidewall elements, here vaguely ecclesiastical with massive walnut Corinthian columns, extensive gilding, life-sized putti, and murals (Figure 4-35). Lamb felt there was a generally unrecognized decorative value in monotony, which he felt was one of the most quieting and soothing effects that can be applied to a large space. He compared it to the almost “narcotic effect” of gazing at the waves at sea, at trees in the

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²⁴ Lamb, “Good Old Days to these Better New Days,” Theatre Building and Equipment Buyer’s Guide.

²⁵ Ibid.

forest or stars at night. This sublime monotony was best seen in the ceiling design, which consisted of large vaults and plaster coffers surrounding a large central dome that supported a 28-foot Czechoslovakian-glass/crystal chandelier (Figure 4-36). The seemingly endless repetition of the former effectively emphasized the immensity of the space. A series of French-inspired murals interspersed throughout the auditorium provided one of the few major sources of variation. They were meant to be rewarding discoveries for moviegoers, as they were not readily apparent within the immense space. The major focal point was an enormous replica of Empress Josephine's crown above the proscenium arch, which dramatically tied into the grand drape.

1928-1929: The Pinnacle

During the closing years of the 1920s, the Big Three were at parity in terms of influence and innovation as movie palace design reached a pinnacle of colossal size, novel amenities, and extreme opulence and exoticism. John and Drew Eberson's atmospheric movie palace designs also reached their zenith in this period with the completion of the firm's largest American examples, all of which opened within a year: the Paradise (1928) in Chicago, Loew's Valencia (1929) in Queens, the new Majestic (1929) in San Antonio, and Loew's Paradise (1929) in the Bronx. The firm regarded the Paradise Theater in Chicago as its masterwork, a remarkably novel application of atmospheric motifs almost unrestrained by budgetary considerations.²⁶ Although the firm continued to turn out atmospheric movie palaces for several more years, the Paradise

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²⁶ The firm's regard of the Paradise as a masterpiece is noted in Norman Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theatre Architecture," in *Theatre Catalog 1948-49*, ed. Paul Greenhalgh, (Philadelphia, PA: Jay Emmanuel Publications, Inc., 1949), 10-11.

represents the fullest expression of the design strands that ran through its development as a type.

The Paradise Theater was the product of particularly intense competition between local motion picture exhibitors in a single Chicago neighborhood.²⁷ It was located in West Garfield Park on the city's west side, in the Madison Street-Crawford Avenue (Pulaski Road) shopping and entertainment district. This neighborhood underwent a significant building boom during the mid-to-late 1920s, emerging as a desirable location for movie palace development. There were already several nickelodeons and other smaller theaters in the area, but parcels suitable for large theaters were scarce. Balaban & Katz had attempted to enter the neighborhood the previous decade, but was blocked by rival Marks Brothers, who held an option on the last large parcel on Madison Street.²⁸ J. Louis Guyon, owner of Guyon's Paradise Ballroom on Crawford Avenue, the city's largest such facility, controlled the largest parcels of land in the neighborhood. He commissioned the Paradise Theater, to be named after his ballroom and located on a large lot at the southeast corner of Maypole and Crawford avenues (Figure 4-37). However, Guyon was engaged in another major project, a ten-story hotel located adjacent to his

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²⁷ The Paradise Theater opened on September 14, 1928 with "A Garden in Paradise, a special inaugural orchestra production directed by H. Leopold Spitalny, Mark Fisher and His Syncopating Orchestra, The Original Collegians-the Ritz Brothers, and *The Fleet's In* starring Clara Bow. A rendering of the Paradise appeared in "West Side's Newest Cinema," *Chicago Sunday Tribune* (12 Feb. 1928): B1. Film exhibition trade press coverage primarily focused on Balaban & Katz's initial advertising scheme, which employed illustrations of the theater to attract patrons. See "Exploiting Architecture," *Motion Picture News* (3 Nov. 1928): 1356. The most complete study of the theater is Joseph DuciBella, ed., "Paradise Theatre," *Theatre Historical Society Annual*, no. 4 (1977): 1-37. Publicity surrounding the Paradise's opening attributed the great expense lavished upon it to Balaban & Katz's desire to provide the West Side, the area of the city where its founders had grown up and opened their first large motion picture theater, with the finest movie palace in the city. "Dream Theater Is Built on Great West Side," *Chicago Evening American* (15 Sep. 1928): 21-22.

²⁸ Balaban & Katz was subsequently forced to build their theater, the Rapp & Rapp-designed Central Park Theater (1917), sixteen blocks away. By the late 1920s, the newer theaters overshadowed the Central Park, leading Balaban & Katz's desire to erect a newer movie palace in the area.

ballroom, which proved costlier than expected and thus forced him to relinquish the unfinished theater. Southside exhibitors, the Cooney Brothers, took over the Paradise, but the large project put them in bankruptcy. Balaban & Katz acquired the still incomplete Paradise Theater as a means to take on the Marks Brothers, who were erecting their own large movie palace -- the Marbro Theater (Edward Eichenbaum of Levy & Klein, 1927) - - only a few blocks away on their Madison Street property (Figure 4-38).

Balaban & Katz directed the vast profits of its successful Chicago-area movie palaces towards ensuring that the Paradise would outdraw the Marbro, which was larger and better situated. Eberson received a \$1,500,000 budget and was directed to embellish his original plans, allowing him to indulge his whims and incorporate more costly materials.²⁹ In contrast to the majority of the firm's atmospheric theaters, the Paradise's design was original, setting aside the firm's customary sources of inspiration and standardized architectural elements. For instance, rather than the customary mass-produced Caproni plaster casts, the increased budget allowed for specially commissioned pieces from Lorado Taft Studios, executed in white marble. The Paradise's exceptional character can also be attributed to many of the southern European craftsmen employed by Michel Angelo Studios to execute the decoration of its movie palaces around the country who lived in the surrounding neighborhood. Accordingly, these craftsmen took special care in carrying out the decoration of their local movie palace, relishing the project as a unique opportunity to regularly enjoy their own work.

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²⁹ This cost was listed in "Partial List of Structures Designed by John and Drew Eberson, Architects," Undated, John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records, Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach, Florida and Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theatre Architecture," 10. The cost is listed as being for both the theater and commercial building.

Balaban & Katz's effort to dominate the Madison-Crawford entertainment district began on the street with the Paradise's façade (Figure 4-39).³⁰ The façade was designed to draw patrons away from the Marbro, which was located directly on Madison Street, the neighborhood's primary commercial artery, and to entice them to journey several blocks out of their way up Crawford Avenue. In response to this and the neighborhood's increasing scale of commercial development, the theater was one part of the Paradise Theater Building, a massive three-part commercial block that also included a four-story attached office and retail structure that stretched half a block to the theater entrance (Figure 4-40). The building was a hybrid Second Empire and French Renaissance tour-de-force executed in buff terra cotta with a slate-blue mansard roof with gold-leaf trim. Above the theater entrance was a dome, seven-stories high, towering above the remainder of the commercial block, and a large false window hung with draperies that seemingly offered a glimpse into the interior. This powerful composition was enhanced by the city's largest example of a "Chicago-style" marquee and a tall vertical sign. The former referred to the variety flamboyant, oversized movie palace marquees first popularized in the city, consisting here of a sunburst motif of at least ten colors with chasers and flashers.

The interior reflected Eberson unleashed, offering something new even for patrons familiar with Chicago's other atmospheric movie palaces. By 1927, *Motion Picture News* noted that the movie palace building program in Chicago had been so

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³⁰ Balaban & Katz's effort to dominate motion picture exhibition in the Madison Street-Crawford Avenue entertainment district quickly proved successful. The Paradise outshined its neighborhood competition through not only its architectural design, but also through Balaban & Katz's booking practices. The Marks Brothers sued Balaban & Katz claiming unfair competition. In 1929, the suit was settled when the Marks Brothers sold out to Balaban & Katz's parent company, Paramount-Publix. This gave Balaban & Katz control of both the Paradise and the Marbro.

extensive that a new theater, which two years ago would have been the national talk of the motion picture exhibition industry for its opulence or large seating capacity, would now open without any comment beyond its immediate neighborhood.³¹ The Paradise was designed to jolt Chicago moviegoers out of their movie palace ennui. To begin this effort, John Eberson developed a detailed theme:

We picture a Louis sending a message through the land calling for painters, sculptors, gardeners, artisans of all kinds, and he gives them a command to transform the spacious lawns lying in front of his palace into a festive ground, as he is going to entertain his grantees and dames in a glorious and magical night-fest.

Months and months of artful effort and vast energy is devoted to the transformation and for the festive decoration of these lawns – an evening feast, gigantic arches, enchanting colonnades, illuminated lattice garden houses, mystic pyrotechnic effects all silhouetted against the entrancing moonlit sky of a beautiful summer night, surprises, illuminated fountains, music niches, lovers lanes- a marvelous setting for a fantastic artful dance, the frills of the satin and silk-gowned nobles of the Court, the coquettish silk and ruffle-covered damsels, the air laden with the smell of jasmine.³²

Immediately upon stepping inside the Paradise, Chicago moviegoers encountered the unexpected: a soaring five-story vestibule or outer lobby which occupied the space underneath the dome (Figure 4-41). This vast space was intended to surprise patrons, who were accustomed low-ceilinged vestibules in Chicago theaters. The outer lobby introduced the auditorium's decorative scheme, a unique atmospheric treatment. Rather than building facades, the rather delicate-looking walls of the outer lobby resembled garden pavilions or screens through which one could glimpse the sky. The customary “stars” outlined the constellations, and ceiling and walls were decorated with symbols of

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³¹ J.S. Dickerson, “Middle-West Theater Map Shows Decided Changes,” *Motion Picture News* (30 December 1927): 2019.

³² Eberson, “The Atmospheric Theatre,” Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide Section.

the Zodiac painted in light shades of blue, which gave them a ghostly quality against the blue “sky.” In comparison to the vestibule, the main lobby was understated and modest in scale, conceived again as a foil to Chicago moviegoers’ expectations of a movie palace (Figure 4-42). It was French in inspiration with intricately detailed beige plaster walls and a series of ceiling murals that lent a Baroque character. The Paradise’s orchestra and balcony foyers were also subdued, given a quiet residential quality to contrast with excitement of the outer lobby and in preparation for the massive auditorium (Figure 4-43). Below, the basement contained a series of themed lounges: Chinese, Central American, Japanese, and Art Deco (Figure 4-44).

Jaded Chicago moviegoers had seen nothing, including the firm’s earlier atmospherics in the city, which prepared them for the Paradise’s 3,606-seat auditorium (Figure 4-45). Patrons’ first impression was of the incredible vastness of the midnight blue “sky” above a seemingly endless expanse of seats.³³ This effect was partly achieved by the size of the auditorium, measuring 138-feet wide by 130-feet long, with seven aisles in the orchestra. The great “sky” expense was further enhanced by the extension of the sky behind the sidewalls to the floor level. Eberson’s ongoing deconstruction of sidewalls culminated here in the freestanding “side stages” that occupied the long space

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³³ The Paradise’s large atmospheric ceiling ultimately led to its demise. Paramount-Publix’s acquisition of the Marks Brothers’ theaters gave Balaban & Katz two nearly 4,000-seat movie palaces with blocks of each other in a neighborhood business district, a situation that proved unsustainable. Following the introduction of talkies, the Marbro gained the reputation of having the superior acoustics between the two theaters. Consequently, patrons began favored the Marbro and the Paradise’s attendance declined. It was closed from late 1931 to early 1934 due to the Depression and lack of product. The Paradise never proved profitable, continuing to struggle as new film technologies were introduced. In 1956, Balaban & Katz seized an opportunity to rid themselves of the perennially underperforming movie palace through a land-lease deal that involved providing a vacant tract for land for a new supermarket within six months. “Workman Begin Demolition of B&K Paradise,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1 Jun. 1956): C5. Razing the Paradise ultimately lasted into the spring of 1958, as the theater was much more solidly built than the plans indicated. The supermarket was built over the foundation of the Paradise, including the basement lounges, which remained underneath. In 1976, the supermarket, which itself proved unsuccessful, burned and was razed.

between the organ screens and the balcony rail (Figures 4-46 and 4-47). These were characteristically asymmetrical, resembling colonnades, which provided glimpses into a French garden decorated with fountains and statuary. Behind the colonnades were side aisles (which necessitated that surfaces and sculptural decorations were finished on both sides) featuring shrubbery that hid a light-trough for the sky. The latter contained cobalt blue lights, forming one of two horizons, alongside lighting at the top of the sidewalls.

Despite the auditorium's multitude of novel features, its focus remained the proscenium (Figure 4-48). This was topped by a canopy of delicate, projecting ornamentation and three life-size horse sculptures that seemingly leapt out over the audience from a mural depicting Apollo in his chariot riding out of a sunburst.

Intermission brought a sunrise over the stage gradually illuminating Eberson's French garden. Even the fire curtain departed from the firm's conventions, substituting the usual illusionistic scene with birds of paradise.

Eberson's atmospheric motifs appeared in both Rapp & Rapp and Lamb's movie palaces in the late 1920s. The latter incorporated atmospheric theaters into his work as an extension of the continued revitalization of his firm's movie palace designs, which brought it into stylistic parity with the Rapps and Eberson. Lamb produced atmospheric theaters despite his own reservations about this mode of design. In 1928, after his firm had completed several atmospheric theaters and was engaged in the design of others, Lamb noted:

My personal opinion is that this type of work will not be lasting. My objection to it, mainly, is that valuable space is used up on each side of the auditorium for effects that would otherwise be used for seats. Another thing, these various effects require "reveals" and ornamental details that are very likely to be accumulators

for dust and dirt, therefore increasing greatly the cost of upkeep. So far as building cost is concerned, there is very little if any saving in the “Atmospheric” type of construction.

However, the fact remains that in a community having a number of theaters of the regular type, one of these “Atmospheric” theaters is quite welcome and will retain its novelty character for a considerable length of time.³⁴

Despite Lamb’s personal ambivalence about atmospheric design, his firm readily adopted it at the behest of clients, becoming the first member of the Big Three after Eberson himself to complete such a movie palace.

The Keith-Albee Theater (1928) in Flushing, New York was representative of the Lamb office’s application of atmospheric design.³⁵ In May 1926, the Keith-Albee Vaudeville Circuit announced plans to erect a downtown Flushing playhouse as one part of a 20-theater expansion. Prior to the finalization of the theater’s plans, in December

³⁴ Lamb, “Good Old Days to these Better New Days,” Theatre Building and Equipment Buyer’s Guide.

³⁵ The Keith-Albee opened on December 25, 1928 with an opening program that included a vaudeville bill headed by “The Honey Troupe in an Amazing Interlude of Gymnastics,” Pathé News, Bernie Cowham at the Wurlitzer organ, and the feature film *Three Week Ends* starring Clara Bow, among other attractions. While motion pictures were shown, the theater’s primary attraction was vaudeville. Shows ran twice a day with reserved seats only, changing each week. “Keith-Albee Plan 20 New Theatres,” *New York Times* (31 May 1926): 10, “Keith and Orpheum Combine Circuits,” *New York Times* (9 Dec. 1927): 37, “2 Keith-Albee Theatres Opening on Christmas Day,” *Motion Picture News* (22 Dec. 1928): 1887, and Anthony W. Robins, *RKO Keith’s Flushing Theater*, (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1984), LP-1257. The theater was later renamed the RKO Keith’s, eventually operating primarily as a movie theater. In the mid-1970s, the auditorium was sensitively triplexed with minor damage to the original atmospheric design. Since the early 1980s, the Keith’s has been at the subject of an ongoing preservation saga. In 1982, it was listed on the National Register. Two years later, in 1984, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the theater’s interior as one of the city’s few surviving examples of a movie palace. However, the Board of Estimate eliminated the triplex auditorium’s designation, leaving only the ticket lobby and grand foyer protected. Following the theater’s closure in 1986, its new owners, the Farrington & Northern Development Corporation, began converting it into a shopping arcade. Landmarks issued a stop-work order following damage to the grand foyer. The theater subsequently became derelict. Despite suggestions that the auditorium had been gutted, recent investigations have revealed that substantial portions of its ornamentation have survived. Efforts by local preservationists to have the auditorium re-designated have thus far proven unsuccessful. Under new ownership, plans have been announced to replace the theater with a high-rise apartment building incorporating the landmarked ticket lobby and grand foyer as the entrance. See Christopher Grey, “Streetscapes: Flushing’s RKO Keith’s - A Magnificent, but Mutilated, Palatial Landmark,” *New York Times* (1 Apr. 1990): R8 and Christian Kellenberg, “RKO Flushing,” *The Marquee: Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 44, no. 4 (2012): 4-10.

1927, Keith-Albee merged with the Orpheum Circuit to form Keith-Albee-Orpheum (KAO), which ultimately became Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO) in October 1928.

Keith-Albee acquired a mid-block, roughly rectangular lot on Northern Boulevard at the head of Main Street. Lamb was commissioned to design an approximately \$750,000, 2,974-seat vaudeville and motion picture house. The Keith's would operate it as a subscription house, wherein local residents purchased season tickets and returned each week to see a new entertainment program. In addition to the theater, the scheme included a three-story commercial building with ground floor storefronts and two floors of upper level offices.

Lamb's atmospheric movie palaces have been routinely dismissed as less sophisticated copies of Eberson's work.³⁶ However, the Flushing Keith's design, while selectively employing Eberson's characteristic influences, reveals a distinctive approach to the atmospheric movie palace: slightly more formal, less rustic, infused with the Baroque-inspired elements found in the firm's contemporary theaters and incorporating various other design features long characteristic of its work, such as murals and large fountains. These differences were readily apparent in the three-story building on Northern Boulevard containing the theater entrance (Figure 4-49). This structure was a two-part commercial block clad in a greyish-white cast stone, eschewing Eberson's trademark brick, and defined by a series of projecting window bays trimmed with brass on the second and third floors. The bays and roofline divided the façade into three parts: an off-centered theater entrance and two office wings of varying length. Above the theater entry, the window bays were narrower and the roofline rose to a stepped parapet. The latter

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³⁶ See, for example, David Naylor, *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1981), 123 and Levin, "Loew's Theatres: 100 Years," 23-29.

gave the building a fanciful, vaguely Mission or Spanish Colonial character that might have been more at home in Coney Island or on Atlantic City's boardwalk than in downtown Flushing.

The interior contained a series of three atmospheric spaces on par with Eberson's own work but unmistakably a product of the Lamb office. Its theme was a succession of Mexican gardens and courtyards with Churrigueresque décor.³⁷ Patrons were immediately immersed in an illusionistic environment, passing from the street through an open vestibule with a freestanding ticket booth and a set of doors into the ticket lobby (Figure 4-50). The latter was a square, two-story room with a second ticket booth along the east wall. While the first floor was simple with rough plastered walls, the upper level resembled an elaborate overhanging gallery with gilded plaster carvings and columns. A blue sky could be glimpsed through the gallery and the partially open ceiling.

These tentative illusionistic outdoor effects could not have prepared patrons for what they were about to encounter through a second set of doors in the grand foyer, the theater's most inventive interior space (Figure 4-51). The grand foyer, resembling a Mexican courtyard, was a gracious three story, semi-ovular shaped space with sweeping twin staircases along the east and west walls leading up to a mezzanine promenade and the balcony. Its focal point was an 18-foot marble and polychrome terra cotta ornamental fountain stocked with goldfish, which occupied the center of the hall. The entire space was encircled on the second floor by an elaborate arcade of Solomonic columns and

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³⁷ Keith-Albee, rather than the Lamb office, probably made the decision that the theater be atmospheric. The firm had completed an earlier atmospheric theater for the circuit, the Keith-Albee (1928) in Huntington, West Virginia, the previous May, which was deemed "Mexican baroque." The Flushing Keith's was variously described in contemporary publications as Spanish Renaissance and Mexican Baroque. See, for example, "2 Keith-Albee Theatres Opening on Christmas Day," 1887

gilded arches through which one could glimpse a painted blue horizon. This was surmounted by gilded Churrigueresque ornamentation that appeared to dissolve into an atmospheric sky.

In comparison to the novel grand foyer, the Mexican Baroque auditorium was conventional but provided a suitable climax to the theater's three-part progression of increasingly sizable atmospheric public spaces (Figure 4-52 and 4-53). It adhered to Eberson's basic formula for an atmospheric auditorium, with its asymmetrical sidewalls resembling building facades. While derivative in its overall design, its details were heavily derived from Lamb's own earlier work, particularly the Ohio Theater (1928) in Columbus. The latter was a non-atmospheric Mexican baroque-inspired house, which became a model for the firm's work in this period, including for the simpler Keith-Albee Theater (1928) in Huntington, West Virginia. This was seen in the Flushing Keith's auditorium's proscenium and organ screens, which were elaborated variations of the much-used Ohio Theater model. The organ screens were also subtly asymmetrical, rising as a series of spiral columns, arches, and niches of varying size towards the atmospheric ceiling. These flanked the proscenium, which was a heavily ornamented Churrigueresque arch of gilded wood and plaster supported on each side by a pier capped with a niche and an urn. A curving arcade enclosed the rear of the balcony, a particularly novel solution for the often-problematic design of the back of the house. The sidewalls incorporated a series of murals, unusual in an atmospheric auditorium but a hallmark of Lamb's auditoriums.

Similar to Lamb's and Eberson's, Rapp & Rapp's movie palace designs reached their zenith in the late 1920s, as the firm completed a succession of prestigious

commissions across the country for Loew's and Publix. While the French Renaissance continued to dominate the Rapp office's output, a variety of other influences appeared or became more prominent as the firm continually strove to offer clients and the public something new in the face of intense competition from other architects. These new influences included Eberson's atmospheric style, which was already widely employed by other architects, including Lamb. The Paramount Theater (1929) in Toledo, Ohio is representative of how Eberson's work influenced other movie palace architects and the process by which the atmospheric style was adapted into their own design vocabularies.

Toledo's Paramount, like many of the firm's Publix commissions, first introduced the Balaban & Katz-style movie palace to local audiences.³⁸ Hailed as a "Modern Temple of Sight and Sound" and the first theater built expressly for the perfect coordination of light projection and sound synchronization, the Paramount was constructed for approximately \$2,314,000 exclusive of the cost of the land. The theater was built at 518-20 Adams Street, at the intersection with Huron Street, several blocks from Toledo's primary downtown theater district at Adams and St. Clair streets (Figure 4-54). However, the Paramount was strategically situated at the convergence of two primary retail arteries

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³⁸ The Paramount opened on February 16, 1929 with an inaugural program that included Wilye Stahl conducting the Toledo-Paramount Symphonic Orchestra, a Paramount newsreel, Eddie Cantor in *That Certain Party* (a Paramount "singing, talking novelty,"), Dwight Brown at the Wurlitzer organ, Paul Spor and the Toledo-Paramount Stage Band, a cartoon, and the feature film *Redskin* starring Richard Dix. "Toledo Welcomes Publix Theater- Modern Temple of Sight and Sound," *Toledo News-Bee* (18 Feb. 1929): Paramount Section. The Paramount had the misfortune to open just before the Great Depression, which struck Toledo hard. It closed in 1932 due to lack of business, reopening for several months but never really making a profit during its existence despite a number of successful programs. Despite a number of gimmicks to draw steady patronage, including conversion to Cinerama in 1960-61, the Paramount's operating costs continued to rise until 1965, when a decision was made to tear it down for a parking lot. The Paramount was reasonably well published as a notable example of atmospheric design upon its opening, see "The Toledo Theatre, Toledo, Ohio," *Motion Picture News* (4 May 1929): 1452-1454, R.W. Sexton, *American Theatres of Today* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1930), 113-115, and Arthur Frederick Adams, "Theatre Design Breaks With The Past," *Motion Picture News* (28 June 1930): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide. There is also a recent pictorial history, Joseph DuciBella, "Toledo Paramount," *Theatre Historical Society of America Annual*, no. 19 (1992): 1-26.

and directly across Adams Street from Lasalle and Koch, one of the city's leading department stores. It occupied an almost rectangular lot comprising nearly a quarter-block, bordered by commercial buildings on Huron and an alleyway running perpendicular to Adams. Although the original plans called for the theater to occupy the entire quarter-block, it ultimately was built around two holdout commercial buildings at the intersection of the alleyway with Adams Street.

The site was developed with the theater and an attached four-story commercial building at Adams and Huron containing retail spaces and offices. In plan, a long lobby led back from the theater entrance on Adams Street to a large rotunda fronting the auditorium, which was parallel to Huron Street (Figure 4-55). The firm's well-tested circulation system (pioneered at the Tivoli) ensured the efficient handling of incoming and outgoing crowds. In the lobby, railings separated patrons waiting to enter the auditorium from those departing the theater through the same space. The auditorium was also emptied through a network of stairs and a pair of exit lobbies, one opening onto the alleyway and the other onto Huron Street.

The Paramount's exterior and public spaces demonstrate the Rapp office's continued practice of selectively reusing architectural components (ranging from decorative details to facades, lobbies, and auditoriums) from project to project in order to reduce costs and efficiently handle a large number of commissions. These elements were modified and combined with new components to create an original movie palace design. The Paramount's attached two-part commercial block was a reproduction of the building fronting the Rialto (1926) in Joliet, Illinois (Figures 4-56 and 4-57). Although the latter was significantly larger, containing a department store in addition to smaller retail spaces

and offices, and surrounded both sides of theater entry, the two examples shared the same fundamental design. The theater facade on Adams Street was a simplified variation of that of the Uptown (1925) in Chicago (Figure 4-58). Its twin belfries and central parapet lent a quasi-ecclesiastical quality that distinguished the theater from adjacent structures.³⁹

Inside, the firm's conception of atmospheric movie palace stripped away much of Eberson's customary flamboyance and rusticity in favor of formal solemnity that offered no hint in the public spaces of what was to come in the atmospheric auditorium. The French and Italian Renaissance-inspired principal public spaces, the adjoining grand lobby and rotunda, were simplified reproductions of corresponding interiors in the Joliet Rialto (Figures 4-59, 4-60, and 4-61). In both spaces within the Paramount, the Rialto's intricate relief plasterwork was largely replaced with a painted decorative scheme that culminated in the "Pompeian" grand lobby ceiling modeled after the Villa Madama in Rome. Despite the firm's experimentation with new types of decoration, it still referenced the Hall of Mirrors in the grand lobby through a series of alternating Corinthian pilasters with large mirrors illuminated by large chandeliers. The final major public space was an ovular-shaped basement lounge located directly below the rotunda, which provided access to the men and women's retiring rooms (Figure 4-62). This room was the Rapp office at its most informal, dispensing with the classicism of the French and Italian Renaissance that pervaded the rest of the theater in favor of Spanish influences. The

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³⁹ The Paramount's location at the intersection of two important streets resulted in the unusual inclusion of two vertical signs and marquees, one pair located above the main entry on Adams Street and the second above a side exit on Huron Street. As customary in the firm's work, but especially critical here on a major thoroughfare, the long exterior frontage of the auditorium block was enlivened with arches and cartouches that sat above a rusticated base.

women's retiring room was expressed in tile work and stucco walls, while the comparatively intimate scale, carpeting, and Spanish Renaissance furnishings imbued a sense of relaxed domesticity.

The Paramount's 3,406-seat auditorium was a mixture of the Rapp office's own variation of the atmospheric type and details drawn directly from Eberson's work (Figures 4-63 and 4-64).⁴⁰ However, the end result was unmistakably a product of the Rapps, characterized by a more elegant, if less fanciful, application of atmospheric motifs. The Paramount's auditorium was described as the interior of a large Italian garden, but like the remainder of the theater, it also incorporated hints of the firm's favored French Renaissance motifs.⁴¹ Publix requested that the auditorium be modeled after the Paradise in Chicago, which it controlled through its Balaban & Katz subsidiary.⁴² This influence was seen in the wall ornamentation, the shapes of openings along the sidewalls, and more superficially, the bird of paradise fire curtain (Figure 4-65).

Despite drawing inspiration from the Paradise, the Paramount's auditorium differed in character, being more formal and less overpowering. Rapp & Rapp did not incorporate the Paradise's more whimsical features: its asymmetry, delicate sidewalls, a profusion of specially designed statuary, and the Apollo mural above the proscenium. The dimensions of the two auditoriums also contributed to their divergent characters. While both theaters were of similar seating capacity, the Paramount's auditorium was narrower and taller whereas the Paradise's conveyed the impression of great width. The

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⁴⁰ The Rapp office completed only one other fully atmospheric theater, the Gateway (1930) in Chicago. Built at the time when the firm was experimenting Art Deco, its atmospheric auditorium was combined with an Art Deco exterior and lobby. This gives the theatre a strongly Art Deco feel and places it more in the context of the firm's work in that style.

⁴¹ "The Toledo Theatre, Toledo, Ohio," 1453.

⁴² Although it opened only five months after the Paradise, the latter's prolonged design and construction period permitted the Rapp office to familiarize itself with Eberson's design.

former's height was due to the necessary inclusion of a mezzanine and a steep balcony, which required higher sidewalls (Figure 4-66). This was considered an undesirable arrangement in an atmospheric auditorium, hindering the creation of a successful outdoor illusion. The firm addressed this problem by applying elements of its recently developed variant of the type, the semi-atmospheric. Pioneered at the Paramount (1928) in Brooklyn, semi-atmospheric auditoriums were a composite of an atmospheric theater and a hardtop auditorium (Figure 4-67). The sidewalls were composed of a series of niches containing garden vignettes (complete with foliage, fountains, and statuary) set against a blue background. Above, the ceiling was deconstructed, appearing at first glance to be largely of conventional design but perforated and dissolving into trellis-like sections providing glimpses of the sky.

Although the Toledo Paramount's auditorium was fully atmospheric, it was designed to facilitate easy conversion into a semi-atmospheric theater if desired later.⁴³ This intention could be seen in the sidewalls, which exhibited hints of the Paradise's delicate "side stage" colonnades, but through their mass and height leant a feeling of enclosure that recalled a semi-atmospheric auditorium with its niches containing small outdoor vignettes. The organ screens were also a variation of their counterparts in Brooklyn, each featuring a double staircase that folded back upon itself up three tiers to a landing at the same levels as the balcony, which was framed by statuary and cypress trees. Stretching behind, the sidewalls had a rhythmic quality, almost appearing to

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⁴³ Arthur Frederick Adam's description of the theater indicates a degree of uncertainty of the Paramount's design. In addition to possible conversion to a semi-atmospheric theater, the auditorium ceiling was also designed so that traditional ceiling decoration could also be inserted. Adams envisioned this executed in the "new art" or Art Deco, which would "achieve something strikingly original." Adams, "Theatre Design Breaks With The Past," 27. A "Clavilux," or color organ devised by Thomas Wilfred replaced a Brenograph to produce the auditorium's atmospheric effects. "Light Effects Very Realistic," *Toledo News-Bee* (18 Feb. 1929): Paramount Section.

dissolve into the sky. An usual feature was the auditorium lighting, which partly consisted of Art Deco fixtures affixed to sidewalls, somewhat at odds with the Italian garden setting but hinting at the rapid evolution the firm's built work would exhibit the following year.

1930-1932: The Last Movie Palaces

The Big Three's work was invigorated during the final period of movie palace construction between 1930 and 1932 as they swiftly adapted to the period's design challenges, which included smaller theater commissions, the advent of talking movies and other technological innovations, evolving tastes, and the need for greater economy due to the growing impact of the Depression on the larger American economy. Rapp & Rapp was the most prolific member of the Big Three in the final years of movie palace construction. The majority of the firm's commissions came from Publix, for whom it produced a series of "cost conscious" movie palaces that facilitated further expansion and provided a distinctive architectural identity. This work was highly influential in shaping movie palaces designed for the chain by other architects, significantly through its extensive coverage in publications by the film trade press.⁴⁴

Rapp & Rapp's final movie palace commissions were primarily for "smaller" houses, seating between 1,500 and 2,200-persons, which reflected exhibitors' contemporary focus upon expanding into small to mid-sized cities that had not kept pace with the type's development. While the firm adapted to smaller-scale movie palace

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⁴⁴ This attention included not only coverage of individual theaters but also articles on their work and illustrations of their designs. At least nine of the firm's movie palaces completed between 1930 and 1932 were illustrated in a descriptive article, which was customarily written by the firm's chief designer Arthur Frederick Adams. For background on Rapp & Rapp's work of this period, see Adams, "Theatre Design Breaks with the Past," 20-42.

design and technological innovations such as the inclusion of sound technology and the use of wider screens, it maintained that the field's biggest challenge remained balancing what George Rapp deemed "advances in the public's wants and expectations" with the necessity to reduce building costs in light of the new economic situation.⁴⁵ In response, Rapp & Rapp discarded purely French Renaissance movie palace designs in favor of those that incorporated Art Deco or locally favored motifs. Its application of these motifs varied, but a constant was an increased reliance upon inexpensive painted decoration over more expensive plaster relief ornamentation. The firm, like other movie palace architects, also kept costs down by continuing the practice of routinely reusing a handful of designs for facades, lobbies, and auditoriums. However, movie palaces were never identical, as the firm's semi-stock components were slightly modified and recombined in different ways to suit each program.

The Paramount (1930) in Lynn, Massachusetts was Rapp & Rapp's first fully Art Deco movie palace and was representative of the standardized architectural idiom the firm developed for Publix that other architects subsequently employed throughout the chain.⁴⁶ Rapp & Rapp regarded this new architectural vocabulary a decisive break with the past, although the firm noted that the best of the past would be updated for continued

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⁴⁵ George L. Rapp, "History of Cinema Theater Architecture," in *Living Architecture*, ed. Arthur Woltersdorf (Chicago: A. Kroch, 1930), 63.

⁴⁶ The Paramount Theater in Lynn opened on 18 July 1930 with *The Social Lion* starring Jack Oakie. In 1964, the theater was demolished. Rapp & Rapp's subsequent purely Art Deco movie palaces were the Paramount (1930) in Stapleton, Staten Island and the Warner (1930) in West Chester, Pennsylvania. Arthur Frederick Adams, "A New Publix Theatre with a Note of the Modernistic," *Exhibitor's Herald-World* (15 February 1930): 24-25, "Striking Brilliance and Unusual Beauty of Design Distinguish New Theatre," *Lynn Daily Evening Item* (17 July 1930): 11, and Arthur Frederick Adams, "The Paramount in Lynn," *Exhibitors Herald-World* (30 August 1930): 21-23.

use.⁴⁷ Accordingly, Publix's new architectural image consisted not only of Art Deco elements but also a handful of other trademark components and motifs. *Exhibitors Herald-World* promoted the Paramount as an important early example of the appropriate application of "modernistic" or Art Deco design to a movie palace. In a 1930 series of editorials and articles on Rapp & Rapp-designed movie palaces, the film trade publication observed that Art Deco was gradually making its appearance in American motion picture theaters.⁴⁸ In order for Art Deco to gain favor with the public, it was necessary to develop a new "American conception" of modernism distinct from European models. Arthur Frederick Adams, Rapp & Rapp's chief designer, proclaimed that theater architects should be particularly careful to distinguish their work from German precedents, which had shaped American conceptions of modernism and met with public disapproval. American movie palace architects would have to reevaluate modern design for the movie-going public. Rapp & Rapp felt that a new style needed to emerge which balanced the "severity" of modern lines with the romanticism necessary in a movie palace. The Lynn Paramount was upheld as an example of a movie palace that utilized the Art Deco style "without going to extremes in the way of color and decoration" and with "cautious consideration of community modes."⁴⁹

Rapp & Rapp's early 1930s Publix movie palaces represented a careful balance between the chain's standardized architectural idiom and unique responses to local conditions. The Lynn Paramount was located at the corner of Union Street at Burchstead

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⁴⁷ Rapp & Rapp's work of this period is discussed in Adams, "Theatre Design Breaks With The Past," Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide.

⁴⁸ See Adams, "A New Publix Theatre with a Note of the Modernistic," 24-25; Adams, "The Paramount in Lynn," 21-23; and Arthur Frederick Adams, "A New Warner House that follows the Modern Trend," *Exhibitors Herald-World* (20 December 1930): 29-30.

⁴⁹ Adams, "A New Publix Theatre with a Note of the Modernistic," 25.

Place, forming the northern edge of the theater district and downtown (Figure 4-68).

This site contained eight shallow stores, six of which were retained adjacent to the theater entry. The published presentation drawing of the Paramount's façade indicates that early plans for the theater included the unrealized replacement or remodeling the six existing stores to harmonize with the theater (Figure 4-69). As built, the Paramount was L-shaped, with a narrow lobby replacing two stores along Union Street and extending out from the large auditorium occupying "waste ground" at the rear of the preexisting stores (Figure 4-70).

The Lynn Paramount exemplified Rapp & Rapp's new, lower-budget façade treatment, which eliminated excess ornamentation and architectural features and focused attention on an architecturally integrated vertical sign. Adams designated this arrangement a "functional façade," which was rendered in a variety of motifs depending on the particular program: Art Deco, Elizabethan, Venetian, or in locally favored influenced styles (Figure 4-71).⁵⁰ In Lynn, Rapp & Rapp evidently felt that the heavily industrial city's urban fabric and the site's location on the fringe of downtown permitted the use of a stark Art Deco, functional façade nearly identical to that of the Gateway Theater (1930) in Chicago, which opened the previous month (Figure 4-72). The cast

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⁵⁰ Arthur Frederick Adams referenced this arrangement as a "functional façade" in Adams, "A New Warner House that follows the Modern Trend," 29. Functional façade design is also discussed in relation to the Gateway Theater in Arthur Frederick Adams, "Publix Adds Another to its Great Chicago Group," *Exhibitors Herald-World* (10 May 1930): 36-37 and "Add to Theatre as Neighborhood Grows; New Slant," *Motion Picture News* (12 July 1930): 39 and 72. The firm later employed variants of this Art Deco functional façade design in the Paramount theaters in Stapleton, New York (1930) and Hamilton, Ohio (1931), the Warner theaters in West Chester (1930) and Erie, Pennsylvania (1931), and the Southtown Theater (1931) in Chicago. It also applied to its Art Deco to more substantial combination theater and commercial blocks: the Warner theaters in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1931) and Youngstown, Ohio (1931). Rapp & Rapp also rendered functional facades in a variety of locally popular styles, including Elizabethan at the Paramount theaters in Peekskill, New York (1930) and Middletown, Ohio (1931), and Jeffersonian at the Paramount Theater in Charlottesville, Virginia (1931).

stone façade above the marquee comprised “a series of vertical elements, each mounting higher towards the center, an integrated vertical sign bearing the theater’s name, to form a soaring mass – in skyscraper fashion” that were sparingly ornamented with Art Deco details.⁵¹

Rapp & Rapp’s movie palaces of this period frequently were hybrids, a pastiche of disparate motifs utilized in the various components of the building. For instance, the Gateway in Chicago had an Art Deco façade, a French Renaissance lobby, and an atmospheric auditorium. The Lynn Paramount was among the firm’s few purely Art Deco theaters. Its grand lobby was unique within the firm’s work, largely shaped by the need to compensate for conditions that dictated that the space have a flat ceiling (Figure 4-73). The firm addressed this limitation by introducing a series of step-downs between the ceiling and the lobby walls that were set off from one another by a contrasting color scheme in black, gold, and silver. Sparingly decorated walls deferred to the space’s focal points: a pair of floor-to-ceiling Art Deco damask wall panels, the two grand staircases, and large mirrors located above the entrance and rear of the lobby.

The auditorium seated 2,561 in a 2,028-seat orchestra and in a shallow 475-seat mezzanine-style balcony, which was the firm’s standard solution for movie palaces in this period (Figures 4-74 and 4-75).⁵² This theater was the first of three Rapp-designed movie palaces that utilized this modified Art Deco auditorium scheme. Although this treatment is a departure from Publix’s most characteristic auditorium design of this

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⁵¹ Adams, “The Paramount in Lynn,” 21.

⁵² Only two of Rapp & Rapp’s Depression-era movie palaces had a full balcony: the Warner Theater (1931) in Milwaukee and the Orpheum Theater (1932) in Denver, Colorado. The Paramount’s Art Deco auditorium scheme was also used in the Warner Theater (1930) in West Chester, Pennsylvania and the Paramount Theater (1930) in Stapleton, New York. A variation of this scheme was also adopted by the British architectural firm Verity and Beverly for the Paramount (1932) in Leeds, England.

period – deemed “a modern treatment of the Baroque period” with its distinctive fête galante tapestries along the sidewalls -- it demonstrates that Publix’s new architectural image was not dependent on any single element (Figure 4-76).

Two considerations, in addition to budgetary limitations, shaped the nature of the Paramount’s Art Deco auditorium design. The first was the site, which prescribed a lower auditorium ceiling height. Second was the need to create the most beneficial conditions for talking pictures. To address the first factor and to prevent a squat appearance to the proscenium, the firm adopted a similar solution to that it employed in the grand lobby, projecting decorative plaster relief into the ceiling. The auditorium’s color scheme (black, gold, and silver) continued from the lobby for design coherence. In addressing the second consideration, the firm eliminated all curved surfaces and replaced them with angles, bevels, and breaks to maximize the reproduction and transmission of sound. The decorative treatment emphasized “the beauty of line” with sharply contrasting coloring and lighting effects from fixtures concealed in coves in the ceiling.

Rapp & Rapp was the most prolific member of the Big Three in the early 1930s, but the Ebersson office was the most visionary in developing comprehensive solutions to the period’s challenges. However, the firm’s influence was ultimately limited because these solutions were not realized or published. The Eberssons employed four major strains of movie palace design in the early 1930s: atmospheric, period motifs, Art Deco, and hybrids of these three modes. While the firm continued to produce atmospheric movie palaces, they were no longer its main emphasis. Instead, it focused on the development of smaller, lower-cost Art Deco movie palaces. Ebersson made this shift not only in response to the uncertain economic climate but also to the industry’s increased focus on expansion

into smaller urban areas and the advent of talking pictures.⁵³ He recognized the latter as transformative to movie palace design; whereas silent motion picture exhibition needed elaborate auditoriums to attract a mass audience, the talkies needed no such assistance. In the sound era, audiences required restful surroundings to focus on the film.

Eberson understood that if movie palace construction was to continue in the new economic climate, costs had to be reduced in ways beyond employing less costly decoration. He determined that the greatest cost in the construction of a new motion picture theater was the labor. His solution was standardization, reducing labor through the mass production and pre-assembly of certain components. In October 1930, the firm completed four standardized Art Deco movie palace schemes suitable for medium to small cities for Warner Bros. (Figure 4-77).⁵⁴ The four schemes were “Sketches A, B, C and D” and ranged in cost from \$151,400 to \$340,750. Each scheme was superficially similar in plan, exterior design, and auditorium decorations, but they ranged in size from 1,110 to 2,050 seats. The four schemes all contained two storefronts flanking the theater entrance, a small lobby, a modest orchestra and mezzanine foyers, and a stage fronted by an orchestra space. Balconies were included in all four designs ranging from a shallow 390-seat mezzanine in the smallest scheme to a sizable 650-seat arrangement in the largest. Their respective costs were based upon their increasing dimensions, seating capacity, and elaborateness of décor from A to D. Various fittings added to the cost,

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⁵³ John Eberson’s views on Depression-era movie palace design are detailed in *Motion Picture News* 6 December 1930.

⁵⁴ The Eberson office’s standardized movie palace schemes were not published. John Eberson did author an article discussing the schemes, but they were not illustrated. John Eberson, “Rough Cast Concrete with Glazed Tile and Rustless Metal for Standard Theatres,” *Motion Picture News* (6 December 1930): 39, 43, and 64. Plans for four schemes were illustrated and discussed in Jane Preddy, “Glitz, Glamour & Sparkle: The Deco Theatres of John Eberson,” *Annual of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 16 (1989): 16-21. The original office material relating to the schemes is not found among the material in the John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records, Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach, Florida.

including acoustical banners, box office equipment, decorative furnishings, draperies, projection booth equipment, scenery, and various types of lighting.

Eberson's standardized movie palace schemes remained unrealized, but they strongly shaped the firm's contemporary Art Deco theaters designed for Warner Bros., Publix, and other exhibitors. The result was the emergence of a dramatically different type of movie palace from the firm's usual work: Art Deco theaters that balanced greater economy with maintaining the luxurious atmosphere expected of the movie palace experience. This approach mirrored that of the firm's principal rivals, but each member of the Big Three developed a distinctive interpretation of the Art Deco movie palace. Unfortunately, the firm's most impressive Art Deco movie palace designs remained unbuilt, such as the Warner (1930) in Perth Amboy and the Paramount (1931) in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

The Warner Theater (1931) in Morgantown, West Virginia (1931), strongly recalled the architectural character of the firm's standardized schemes.⁵⁵ Eberson described the Warner's architecture as "modern, but devoid of the bizarre, German or French overdone Art Deco feeling."⁵⁶ *Motion Picture Herald* praised the Warner as an archetypical example of a low-cost small town movie palace, which it noted was becoming increasingly common. In the Warner, the journal concluded the firm arrived "at a modern aesthetic that yet is hospitable to a certain theatricalism, a spirit of fantasy."⁵⁷

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⁵⁵ The Warner Theater opened on June 12, 1931. In later years, the theater was later subdivided to function as a multiplex. In 2010, the theater closed, but it remains standing (2014) and in good condition. The Warner is the only surviving Eberson-designed Art Deco movie palace. This status should not be confused with the numerous surviving Eberson Streamline Moderne motion picture theaters constructed in the post-movie palace era. "The Warner Theatre in Morgantown," *Motion Picture Herald* (1 August 1931): 10-13.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

Eberson designed the Warner as a variation of the three smallest standardized schemes. The theater was located on a rectangular High Street lot, Morgantown's principal business thoroughfare (Figure 4-78). This site was developed with a theater and three one-story attached storefronts. Economy was introduced in plan by placing all the principal public spaces and service rooms on the theater's main floor, reducing construction costs.

The exterior was more modest than any of the schemes Eberson provided, but it was clearly of the same design lineage (Figure 4-79). This diminutive design of vitrified brick and stone trim was a functional façade at its simplest, characterized by Art Deco brick patterns and a series of piers extending above the cornice line to form stylized crenellations. In keeping with the purpose of a functional façade, a large vertical sign and marquee dominated the exterior. The exceedingly modest nature of the façade can also be attributed to the fact that the version completed in 1931 was envisioned as temporary, provisions having been made for an expected two additional stories.⁵⁸

Inside, the Warner's public spaces exemplified Eberson's new Art Deco aesthetic. The lobby, foyer, and lounge were decorated with simply painted walls in vivid Art Deco patterns (Figure 4-80). In the manner of a larger movie palace, the interior was filled with paintings, other artwork, colorful furnishings, and vivid carpeting. The auditorium seated 1,300, placing the Warner between the two smallest standardized schemes in terms of capacity, and featured a shallow mezzanine-style balcony (Figures 4-81 and 4-82).⁵⁹ Like the other interiors, the auditorium's Art Deco decorative treatment primarily relied on painted stencil effects. Its ceiling and proscenium arch were painted with vivid Art Deco

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⁵⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁹ The auditorium seated 870 in the orchestra and 430 in the shallow mezzanine balcony.

patterns in red, orchid, heliotrope, and black. The sidewalls were composed as a series of “panels and niches” lined with acoustic silk and velour that were indirectly lit in a three-color scheme.

In the same manner as Eberson and Rapp & Rapp, Lamb employed a distinctive cost-cutting Art Deco aesthetic to his movie palaces completed in the early 1930s. The Lamb office completed three such movie palaces: the Warner Theater (1931) in Torrington, Connecticut, the Fox Theater (1932) in Hackensack and the Warner Theater (1932) in Ridgewood, both in New Jersey (Figure 4-83). Exteriors took the form of a distinctive, pared-down variation of the “functional façade” while interiors were characterized by the same budget-friendly reliance on painted decorations utilized by their rivals, and auditoriums were most commonly given a distinctive star-burst ceiling treatment.

Despite adopting an Art Deco mode of movie palace design, the Lamb office’s output in this period was dominated by the second strain of movie palace design prevalent in this period: the assortment of highly ornate atmospheric, exotic, and period styles carried over from the late 1920s which had characterized the firm’s work since Loew’s Midland. While many movie palace architects employed this mode of historicist or eclectic design in this period, among the Big Three it dominated only Lamb’s work. This difference stemmed from Loew’s desires, which remained the firm’s primary client. In the late 1920s, the circuit was undertaking an ambitious movie palace building program in and around New York. These were the five “Wonder Theaters,” which were exclusively designed by the Big Three. Lamb’s Wonder Theater commission was the final movie palace completed, Loew’s 175th Street (1930) in Manhattan. Although the

firm only received a single Wonder Theater commission, it designed additional large-scale New York movie palaces for Loew's during the same period that supplemented the Wonder Theaters -- effectively "Junior Wonder Theaters" of similar architectural character to their more heralded sister theaters. These commissions included the Loew's Pitkin (1929) in Brooklyn, Loew's Triboro (1931) in Astoria, Queens and Loew's 72nd Street (1932) in Manhattan.

Loew's Triboro in Astoria was representative of Lamb's Depression-era work.⁶⁰ The Triboro was a neighborhood movie palace, located at the corner of Steinway Street and 28th Avenue. Its rectangular lot was developed with a 3,328-seat theater and a one-story wing of attached storefronts along Steinway Street. This made the Triboro the largest theater in the borough of Queens and among the circuit's largest houses in the New York area. The cost of the site, construction, and furnishings totaled \$2,000,000.

The Triboro was an architectural hybrid, incorporating each of the firm's three major influences of the late 1920s: exoticism in its façade, an ostentatious French and Italian Baroque lobby, and an atmospheric auditorium. This reflected not only movie palace eclecticism, but also the industry's enduring practice of reusing architectural components and recombining them into an original theater design. The façade was a "modern" variation of "the early Aztec Indian style" (Figure 4-84). Lamb emerged as a leading proponent of exoticism in movie palace design in the late 1920s, writing in 1928, "exotic ornament, colors and scenes are particularly effective in creating an atmosphere

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⁶⁰ Loew's Triboro Theater opened on February 21, 1931. In 1974, the theater was demolished despite an impassioned local effort to save it. Charles A. Aaronson, "A New Loew Neighborhood Theatre," *Motion Picture Herald* (11 April 1931): 31-33, David C. Berliner, "Area Seeks to Save Theater," *New York Times* (1 Sep. 1974): 79, and Steve Levin, ed., "Loew's Triboro," Marquee: *The Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 36, no.3 (2004): 26.

in which the mind is free to frolic and becomes receptive to entertainment.”⁶¹

Exoticism was a dominant influence in all the Lamb-designed movie palaces in Loew's New York expansion scheme. This was clearly expressed on the “Oriental” facades of two of these movie palaces, the Pitkin and the 175th Street (Figure 4-85). The Triboro's brick and terra cotta exterior resembled form of the Pitkin, a monumental pylon rising from the corner of the lot above the entry and extending back to the auditorium block flanked by a series of one-story storefronts comprising the remainder of the main elevation (Figure 4-86). It was stark in comparison to the Pitkin, due to the more rustic quality of its Aztec-inspired ornamentation, a composition that effectively emphasized its simple geometry and the attached vertical sign and marquee.

Inside, the lobby design could be traced back the Loew's Midland's lavish French and Italian Baroque grand foyer (Figure 4-87). It was described as Italian Renaissance “adapted to a modern theatrical scheme.”⁶² The Spanish and Italian-influenced auditorium recalled that of the Flushing Keith's and the firm's other previous atmospheric theaters (Figures 4-88 and 4-89). Lamb's application of atmospheric motifs remained largely consistent: the sidewalls and organ screens remained asymmetrical and the space was slightly more formal than Eberson's examples. Organ screens continued to employ the basic scheme established at the Ohio Theater, which was also employed at the Flushing Keith's. The proscenium arch was especially unique, heavily ornamented and flat-topped in contrast to the customary gateway arch motif prevalent in atmospheric auditoriums (Figure 4-90). Atmospheric movie palaces were somewhat passé in 1931 in comparison to Art Deco theaters, despite still being erected by the Big Three at this

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⁶¹ Lamb, “Good Old Days to these Better New Days,” Theatre Building and Equipment Buyer's Guide.

⁶² Aaronson, “A New Loew Neighborhood Theatre,” 31.

date.⁶³ However, Lamb's usage of a slightly out-of-date style can be explained within the larger context of stylistic continuity among the near contemporaneous Loew's Wonder Theaters and their New York-area offshoots.

Conclusion

Despite the Big Three's efforts to keep the type viable, the movie palace industry collapsed in 1932 in the face of the tightening effects of the Depression. That year saw only a handful of scattered movie palaces completed in the United States, which represented a sharp decline compared to just a year earlier when large-scale construction continued. By 1933, the movie palace was a defunct building type in the United States. This situation would have been inconceivable to most observers, including the Big Three, just three years before during the late 1920s movie palace boom when there seemed to be no limit to what could be achieved.

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⁶³ Noted in Levin, "Loew's Theaters: 100 Years," 28.

Chapter 5

Illuminating Main Street: Marketing the Movie Palace as a Tastemaker

Movie palaces, as prominent Main Street fixtures across the United States, fulfilled a key role during the early twentieth century alongside other prominent building types, such as hotels and department stores, in exposing and educating Americans about architecture and the decorative arts. While the role of motion pictures as tastemakers has been well documented, the corresponding influence of movie palaces has been largely overlooked.¹ Moviegoers, on average, visited a local movie palace at least once a week as features changed, making theaters, alongside the films they exhibited, influential arbiters of taste. This influence was particularly strong in relation to the domestic interior, where movie palaces were marketed as vehicles to promote highbrow taste to middle-class homemakers and to Americanize working-class, ethnic, and immigrant audiences.

The Better Homes Movement and *Good Furniture Magazine*

The Better Homes Movement, a nationwide domestic reform campaign concerned with the role of American women and domestic architecture, enthusiastically promoted the concept of movie palaces as educational and influential as a tastemaker.² Marie Meloney, editor of *The Delineator*, a women's magazine with a circulation of one million readers, was a principal founder of the movement. The campaign emerged in fits and starts during World War I and increasingly thereafter, in response to women's increasing

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¹ See, for instance, Donald Albrecht, *Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture in the Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986) and Juan Antonio Ramírez, *Architecture for the Screen: A Critical Study of Set Design in Hollywood's Golden Age* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2004).

² For an overview of the Better Homes Movement, see Janet Hutchison, "The Cure for Domestic Neglect: Better Homes in America, 1922-1935," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 2 (1986): 168-178.

roles outside the home, rising divorce rates, and 1920 census data that indicated that less than half of Americans owned their own home. Proponents of the Better Homes Movement (who included architects, builders, magazine publishers, manufacturers, social reformers, and others) sought to uplift the housewife and to improve the conditions of the American home by advocating homeownership, design education, modernization, and by endeavoring to expand the market for American-made products. The campaign, which coalesced in 1922 as Better Homes in America, was also an agent of Americanization, associating homeownership with democratic American, middle-class values, and strove to bring low-income, minority, and immigrant citizens into the consumer economy as a gateway into acceptance into mainstream society.

Better Homes in America enjoyed wide support from all levels of government and industry. President Warren G. Harding, 28 governors, and other federal and state officials endorsed the movement. Vice-President Calvin Coolidge served as an honorary head of its National Advisory Council, while Herbert Hoover, as Secretary of Commerce, was a chairman. Better Homes in America's activities centered on a national network of local committees that held annual campaigns (deemed "Better Homes Weeks") advocating home construction and remodeling and providing decorating and furnishing advice. In 1922, President Harding and Secretary Hoover opened the first Better Homes Week, which included the erection of the National Better Home, a demonstration house in Washington, D.C. By 1924, the government had assumed more control, and Better Homes in America was incorporated as a national educational organization.³ Its

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³ Ibid., 169.

leadership included government officials, representatives of women's clubs, welfare and health organizations, and farm and home bureaus.

The Better Homes Movement's advocacy of the movie palace as a source of domestic inspiration dated to its nascent years and the efforts of *Good Furniture Magazine*. First published in 1914 by the Dean-Hicks Company of Grand Rapids, *Good Furniture* was a self-proclaimed pioneer of the Better Homes Movement, reaching a monthly readership of home furniture manufacturers and retailers. In 1915, the magazine initiated "the first definitive step" towards the movement by organizing a banquet for 80 prominent figures in art, education, and business to discuss "the general welfare of industrial art in this country" and to identify the principal challenges confronting the educator, artist, manufacturer, and distributor in regard to "the wares produced by American craftsmanship."⁴ The consensus was that a great deal of educational work needed to be done as quickly as possible to help the American woman furnish her home in better taste. *Good Furniture* set out to improve the ostensibly poor state of the home in a manner that reflected its readership, by improving domestic décor and furnishings, which were said to consist of poor quality pieces in assorted styles, arranged inharmoniously. This situation was not the fault of homemakers, but of uneducated retailers driven solely by profit misguiding similarly uneducated consumers.

Good Furniture argued against furniture manufacturers and retailers simply producing and selling designs that catered to the current market, rather they must be educated to produce and select wares with discrimination and to advise their customers

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⁴ *Good Furniture's* role in the development of the Better Homes Movement is detailed in Henry W. Frohne, "Good Furniture Magazine, Since 1914 Pioneer of the Better Homes Movement," *Good Furniture Magazine* (Oct. 1922): 193-195.

knowledgeably.⁵ Well-educated manufactures and retailers could then provide the American public with the goods necessary to improve the standards of their homes, and by extension, national taste. This process was also intended to promote the development of “a distinctive type of American art,” which, in keeping with both contemporary taste and the product lines of its readership, would take the form of adapted American and European revivalist styles.⁶

The magazine positioned itself as the central source of design education for its manufacturer and retailer readership. Each month its “special articles” were heavily illustrated art historical overviews of a wide variety of topics ranging from the work of an individual artist or architect to the regional development of various types of decorative art. The articles stressed American subject matter but also extensively covered European art, while non-Western art was included less frequently. Representative articles included “The Span-American Style: Mission Furniture of Three Centuries,” “Philippe de LaSalle: The Raphael of Silk Design,” and “Unpublished Drawings by Thomas Chippendale.”⁷ Art historical topics were often introduced in multi-part series of varying length, such as the five-part “French Furniture from the Sixteenth Century to the early Nineteenth

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⁵ W.G. Watrous, “Up building a Great Industry: The Story of Good Furniture Magazine,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (Jun. 1920): 271.

⁶ Albert F. Lyons, “The Better Homes Movement of the National Association of Decorative Arts and Industries,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (Mar. 1920): 115.

⁷ William Laurel Harris, “The Span-American Style: Mission Furniture of Three Centuries,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (Jan. 1921): 23-30 and Advertising Section 38, George Leland Hunter, “Philippe de LaSalle: The Raphael of Silk Design,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (Mar. 1921): 139-150 and William Laurel Harris, “Unpublished Drawings by Thomas Chippendale,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (Oct. 1921): 175-179 and Advertising Section 36, 38.

Century” published in 1920 and the 1922 series, “Early American Wallpapers” (Figure 5-1).⁸

Good Furniture supplemented art historical education with extensive practical instruction for retailers, in a monthly section eventually called “current topics of trade interest.” The magazine included advice on matters ranging from store window displays to extensive coverage of major metropolitan and regional markets, profiles of domestic and international home furnishing stores, and coverage of trade exhibitions. There were also monthly articles devoted to the progress of the Better Homes Movement, complete with advice to the furniture retailer on how to effectively and profitably promote the campaign to its customers.

In addition to art historical education and trade matters, *Good Furniture* kept its readership abreast of contemporary architectural developments, regularly covering recently completed civic buildings, hotels, high-rises, and residences from the viewpoint of their interior decoration and furnishing. For example, in 1922, the magazine inaugurated an ongoing series on domestic architectural trends with “American Homes that Successfully Adapt Historic Styles to Modern Requirements,” discussing the influence of Colonial houses on contemporary residential design.⁹ In regard to commercial buildings, *Good Furniture* felt its readership would benefit from the study of readily accessible examples of period design. “A New Idea In Hotel Decoration: The

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⁸ See, for example, W.G. Blakie Murdoch, “French Furniture From the Sixteenth Century to the Early Nineteenth Century: The Regency and Louis XV,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (Mar. 1920): 96-107 and George Leland Hunter, “Early American Wallpapers-Part 1,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (July 1922): 27-36.

⁹ “American Homes that Successfully Adapt Historic Styles to Modern Requirements,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (Dec. 1922): 251-256.

Drake, Chicago” was representative of this coverage, emphasizing the hotel’s domestic atmosphere, and including plans and extensive interior illustrations.¹⁰

Movie palaces were among the most prominent of *Good Furniture*’s featured commercial building types. Between 1921 and 1927, the magazine devoted six articles to movie palace design.¹¹ This was in recognition of the average movie palace patron’s weekly attendance, which gave the type wide exposure and thus a remarkable potential to influence taste.¹² *Good Furniture* felt movie palaces could aid the Better Homes Movement in two ways, first by educating the public about period art, architecture, and decorative arts, and second by providing homemakers inspiration for the decoration of their own residences that could be capitalized upon by its retailer readership.

Good Furniture inaugurated its movie palace coverage in 1921 with an article on Rapp & Rapp’s newly completed Tivoli Theater in Chicago (Figure 5-2).¹³ Like the contemporary motion picture exhibition trade press and architectural publications, it recognized the Tivoli and the firm’s other early Chicago-style movie palaces as transformational examples of motion picture theater design. The magazine was drawn to the Tivoli’s well-studied palatial French Renaissance interiors, which reproduced

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¹⁰ Henry W. Frohne, “A New Idea in Hotel Decoration: The Drake, Chicago,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (May 1921): 235-244.

¹¹ These were “The New Tivoli Theater: How its Fine Furnishings Educate Home Making Taste,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (July 1921): 20-23; “The Theater as an Ally for Promoting Better Homes: How its Vigorous Methods of Attracting Home Makers May be Adapted to the Retail Furnishing Store,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (Aug. 1921): 79-82; “An American Theater Inspired by Versailles,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (Sep. 1921): 122-124; “Capitol Theater at Davenport,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (Nov. 1921): 233-234 & Advertising Section 34; “The Paramount Theatre: New York’s Splendid Motion Picture Palace,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (Feb. 1927): 93-97; and R.W. Sexton, “The Design of the Modern Theater Interior,” *Good Furniture Magazine* (Aug. 1927): 89-93.

¹² Sexton, “The Design of the Modern Theater Interior,” 90.

¹³ “The New Tivoli Theater,” 21-23.

European monuments and were filled with harmonious art and furnishings. *Good*

Furniture noted:

The Tivoli is more than a theater, a place to go and see movies. It is an art gallery as well, with the best works of celebrated artists decorating the walls. Here are choice paintings by famous masters. They are chosen to harmonize with the mural decorations of the theater, genre paintings, portraits, and landscapes. The works of art shown are of a quality and in sufficient numbers to make this feature alone well worth a visit to the playhouse. And the works of art are all not confined to paintings. Here on the promenade is a choice bit of statuary done by a master sculptor, exquisite yet unobtrusive. There is a niche with its drinking fountain, beautifully designed.

The Tivoli is an educational institution in the sense that one can study there the harmony of historic periods in furniture, in the mural decorations of the walls and ceilings, in the decorative works of bronze and marble, and note the beautiful ensemble effect that has been secured through the correlation of the sympathetic work of the artist, decorator and craftsman.¹⁴

In 1921, *Good Furniture* followed its Tivoli article with coverage of three additional movie palaces, all the work of Rapp & Rapp. These examples spanned the firm's development of its new type of movie palace from the prototypical Al. Ringling (1915) in Baraboo, Wisconsin to two of the Tivoli's immediate predecessors outside Chicago, the Capitol theaters in St. Paul (1919) and Davenport, Iowa (1920) (Figure 5-3). This coverage was primarily descriptive in nature, examining each theater's major public spaces and providing information about their respective historical models. Special attention was paid to smaller support spaces such as foyers, lounges, suites, and promenades, noting throughout which particular furnishings and arrangements might capture the interest of homemakers.

The magazine's editors were particularly interested in movie palaces located in small cities and towns, which it argued were especially beneficial to the Better Homes

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¹⁴ Ibid., 22.

Movement because they often filled the cultural void left by the absence of an art museum.¹⁵ *Good Furniture's* coverage of the Al. Ringling and the Capitol in Davenport stressed the educational value of immersing American audiences in replicas of environments they might otherwise never encounter. Accordingly, the magazine praised the Al. Ringling's auditorium, which was modeled after the opera at Versailles, and the entrance lobby, with its frieze reproducing panels from Luca della Robbia's *Cantoria* (1431-38) in the Florence Duomo, as well as the Capitol's French Renaissance interiors (Figures 3-18 and 3-20).

Good Furniture maintained movie palace development was of vital interest to home furnishing retailers because "public taste is thereby educated and that means more and better business for the store that is progressive enough to go after it."¹⁶ Summarizing movie palace's educational potential, *Good Furniture* noted:

When one stops to realize the tremendous educational effect which the modern theater has on the minds of its patrons as a teacher and educator - especially since the advent of the "movie" - and reflects that there are many persons who get practically all their ideas of the outside world, impressions of national characters, their knowledge of styles and fashions and their suggestions of a thousand different kinds, it is evident that the cinema theater has come to mean something more than just an institution for entertainment. It is today a gathering place for the men and women of a neighborhood - a sort of Mecca to which repair pilgrims in search of relaxation and education; a family institution visited by mother and father and children.¹⁷

A member of the Rapp office quoted in the magazine's coverage of the Tivoli struck a similar chord:

We believe the purpose of every theater is to instruct as well as to amuse. What more effective lesson in historic design and architectural beauty and in color

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¹⁵ "An American Theater Inspired by the Opera at Versailles," 122-124 and "Capitol Theater at Davenport," 233-234, 34.

¹⁶ "Capitol Theater at Davenport," 233.

¹⁷ Ibid.

harmony could be given the people than this art theater, which impresses one unconsciously every time one enters its portals and teaches thousands to appreciate the beauties of art and architecture?

The theater of today is becoming an object lesson in the correlation of the fine arts. Persons who perhaps would never visit a palatial hotel with its paintings, its Renaissance or French Period furniture, its statuary and other works of art, see these things today at the theater, which since the advent of the cinema have become great community centers. In time, the public adapts those things in its homes, which are accordingly beautified.¹⁸

The attraction that movie palaces themselves yielded over the American movie-going public was evident from audience behavior on their opening nights, when it was routinely noted that many patrons never entered the auditorium at all, instead spending their time wandering through the theater looking at the paintings and the statuary.¹⁹

Good Furniture evoked a domestic quality in movie palaces, drawing comparisons between their smaller public spaces and the home. In this context, movie palaces effectively functioned as showrooms for the décor advocated by the Better Homes Movement (Figure 5-4). The magazine focused on everything from carpets, fabrics, furniture, lighting, paintings, and statuary to wall treatments, in addition to architecture. In regard to the Al. Ringling, the magazine remarked:

It is gratifying to see the French mode so admirably displayed, that American homemakers may gain a real understanding of the French spirit of decoration and furnishing.²⁰ The French spirit frequently eludes Americans since the French textiles and furniture designs exhibited are not shown in sympathetic surroundings. True effectiveness of the French manner rises out of a subtle unity of relationship between the architectural motifs and the interior decoration.

As people come more often to these meeting places of fine period design...they are unconsciously absorbing ideas which they will adapt in their own home interiors – ideas for color harmony; of furniture, lamp and drapery design, and

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¹⁸ “The New Tivoli Theater,” 23.

¹⁹ “The Paramount Theater,” 93.

²⁰ “An American Theater Inspired by the Opera at Versailles,” 121.

materials suited to making up such designs.²¹ Gradually these ideas aid in producing better-furnished homes. So the theater is indirectly first aid to the retailer, educating his customers along the lines of better furnishing.

The magazine urged home furnishing manufacturers and retailers to capitalize on the influence of local movie palaces to benefit both their own commercial interests and the Better Homes Movement. This entailed keeping abreast of not only the decorative trends and furnishings associated with the latest films but also familiarizing themselves with the design and furnishings of local movie palaces. Ideally, home furnishing manufacturers and retailers would then produce and carry lines of furniture that would allow homemakers to take home a piece of the movie-palace experience at any budget, anything from a fully-furnished room to a single piece of art.

Good Furniture did not embrace all modes of movie palace design, limiting its attention to European period revival aesthetics, particularly the Tivoli-influenced variety that reproduced elements of specific historic buildings. As movie-palace design evolved during the course of the decade and architects increasingly turned out more exotic and ostentatious theaters, *Good Furniture's* coverage of the type abruptly ceased, in stark contrast to its almost monthly coverage in 1921 of the Rapp's work. This break lasted until 1927, when the magazine resumed periodic movie palace coverage.

Randolph William Sexton, associate editor of *The American Architect*, wrote *Good Furniture's* final article on movie palaces, which was critical of recent examples of the type.²² Sexton viewed the average contemporary motion picture theater interior as

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²¹ "Capitol Theater at Davenport," 34.

²² Sexton, "The Design of the Modern Theatre Interior," 89-93. Sexton was familiar with motion picture theater design through his work as editor of *The American Architect*, which routinely covered the type's design. In 1927, Sexton was the editor of the first of what ultimately became two volumes of *American Theatres of Today*, containing practical information on numerous aspects of building legitimate and motion

overly ornamented. He maintained that good design took its form from mass, its primary considerations being good lines and proportions. Ornamentation was secondary, primarily meant to accentuate the lines of the mass. Movie palace design, he argued, now placed emphasis on sheer quantity of ornamentation rather than its placement and quality. To illustrate these points, he included an illustration of the proscenium of Eberson's Tampa Theater (1926), an Andalusian-influenced atmospheric movie palace (Figure 5-5). Sexton noted:

The average motion picture theater patron, frequently lacking in education in art, is perfectly willing to accept whatever the theater affords as the very best in art and architecture. He and she have for so long held the theater and what it represents as symbolic of the most refined luxury that it will always stand for them as their ideal.

The problem would seem to be to cultivate in the minds of the masses the fact that the secret of beauty lies in good line and proportion; that over-ornamentation suggests vulgarity, and that simple harmony is more desirable than elaborate gorgeousness.²³

Sexton placed the blame for this state of affairs on contemporary motion picture exhibitors rather than movie palace architects. He saw a correlation between the steadily-increasing elaboration of movie sets since the introduction of the medium and theater architects' production of more and more exotic and ostentatious movie palaces. However, Sexton concluded that theaters should not be conceived as houses in which to entertain patrons but as houses in which patrons are entertained. He opined that motion picture theater design must be based on the fundamental principles of architecture: that sincerity and honesty must be paramount, and that design must be developed logically from the

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picture theaters and representative examples of recent work. R.W. Sexton, *American Theatres of Today* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1927).

²³ Sexton, "The Design of the Modern Theatre Interior," 92.

structure's form. Illusionistic effects must be left to the producers of the entertainment shown within.

The Domestic Nature of the Movie Palace

The idea of a movie palace as a model for the domestic interior may seem surprising, to say the least, in light of the modern understanding of the type, which is primarily shaped by extant examples adapted into performing arts centers. Therein, the type's original domestic quality is almost entirely lost, frequently leaving the false impression of the type as a progression of monumental spaces. This vanished domestic quality stemmed from a series of smaller support spaces: foyers and innumerable lounges that were filled with art, occasionally museum-quality pieces from well known artists, and antique as well as furniture reproductions that lent an aura akin to the rarefied environments found in the residences of the wealthiest Americans (Figure 5-6). These formerly domestic-like spaces are now often left sparsely furnished and unassuming in a performing arts center, as their original appointments typically proved ephemeral, lost during operational lifetime of the movie palace or following its closure (Figure 5-7).

Movie palaces' ancillary spaces were another manifestation of the unique functional requirements associated with continuous performances. These more intimate public spaces supplemented the commodious lobby, foyers, and ambulatories as part of a traffic circulation system handling the constant stream of incoming and outgoing crowds. They also provided additional areas of interest for waiting crowds, who could spend time examining the seemingly endless profusion of art that filled these areas. The Rapp office's dictum that lobbies should keep "the patron's mind off the fact that he is waiting" and to be "of genuine interest...where waiting throngs may be transformed from the

usual pushing, complaining mob into one of a joyous mood” applied to smaller public spaces as well.²⁴ Sexton concurred, noting “these rooms should be intimate in design, not in any way suggestive of the theater, but rather of a purely personal character.”²⁵ Their purpose is to “allow the occupant to entirely forget for the time being any annoyance he may have felt in not being able to immediately obtain a seat.”²⁶ Movie palaces, by virtue of the longer duration of their entertainment programs, their large waiting crowds, and their high-capacity auditoriums necessitated a high number of lounges and retiring rooms for patron comfort.

Balaban & Katz’s Tivoli and Chicago theaters collectively set the standard for movie palace foyers, lounges and smaller support spaces. The Tivoli popularized the definitive solution to movie palace traffic circulation and the inclusion of art-filled foyers and landings, while the Chicago introduced a more fully developed conception of lounges and rest room facilities (Figure 5-8).²⁷ Such amenities were not new to motion picture theater design, but as Lamb noted, “retiring rooms, smoking rooms and lounges” were previously “very little considered” and furnished “on a budget system for the lowest amount possible.”²⁸ In contrast, the Rapp’s design for the Chicago developed these areas as major patron attractions, incorporating a remarkable assortment of lavishly appointed foyers and lounges of varying size on each level of the theater. Each of these spaces was designed with a theme including harmonious furnishings. For example, the Chicago’s basement contained the theater’s primary lounge groupings differentiated in decor,

²⁴ E.C.A. Bullock, “The Theater of To-Day,” *Motion Picture News* 21 Nov. 1925.

²⁵ Sexton, *American Theatres of Today*.18.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Robert Headley, ed., “Special Issue: Balaban & Katz Tivoli Theatre,” *Marquee: The Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 17, no. 4 (1985): 6.

²⁸ Thomas W. Lamb, “Good Old Days to these Better Days,” *Motion Picture News* (30 June 1928): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyer’s Guide.

including a long, quasi-atmospheric general lounge that stretched between a Venetian-inspired men's smoking room (adorned with a series of murals) and adjoining lavatory and a "Moorish-Persian" ladies lounge with a fountain, powder room, and toilet (Figures 5-9).

By the second half of the 1920s, moviegoers could expect a wide range of facilities inside a newly erected movie palace. In a larger movie palace, men and women's lounge suites (each comprising several rooms) were located on several levels of the theater, in addition to an assortment of general lounges, music rooms, and children's playrooms. Men's suites typically included a smoking room or lounge in addition to the lavatories. Women's lounges were more impressive, as more space was customarily devoted to them, including cosmetic rooms, parlors, and lounges in addition to toilets.²⁹ For instance, women's suites in the 4,651-seat San Francisco Fox (Lamb, 1929) provided three rooms to the men's one in both its basement and balcony lounges, not including the lavatories themselves. Movie palace public spaces were filled with a variety of object of interest for patrons. These comprised furniture, paintings, sculptures, and objet d'art, sometimes as well as aquariums, aviaries, fishponds, fountains, and pianos, among other novel features (Figures 5-10).

Movie palace lounges often did not conform to the dominant stylistic inspiration of the remainder of the theater. Architects and decorators customarily treated these more intimate areas (especially women's lounges) as opportunities to incorporate less familiar influences that introduced audiences to these styles and assisted the designers in gaining facility with their use. This encompassed various forms of exoticism, influences

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²⁹ Steve Levin, ed., "Fox Theatre, San Francisco, California," *Theatre Historical Society of America Annual*, no. 30 (2003): 17.

considered unsuitable for an entire theater, and modern styles. The latter often first appeared in a theater architect's work in a powder room before emerging as the dominant influence in a movie palace design. For example, Eberson's Paradise (1928) had an Art Deco general lounge several years before the completion of the firm's first movie palace fully in that style, the Butler (1930) in Butler, Pennsylvania (Figure 4-60).

Despite *Good Furniture's* praise, the art, furniture, and décor within an individual space did not always conform to a single period. The goal of movie palace architects and decorators was not to archaeologically or academically reproduce period styles but to convey a feeling of luxury and comfort to patrons. While the items in a movie palace might have disparate origins, they were generally harmonious to the public's largely untrained eye.

The stylistic discrepancy between movie palace lounges and the remainder of the theater, and the occasional discordant note in the furnishing of these rooms, paralleled the decorative practices employed in Gilded Age mansions. Similarly to a movie palace, the residences of the Vanderbilts, Astors, Whitneys, and other families featured period rooms that departed from the property's dominant stylistic theme. Popularized in the 1880s by architects Richard Morris Hunt, George Post, Stanford White, and others, and executed by decorating firms such as Herter Brothers and Allard of Paris, period rooms of the Gilded Age -- which variously ranging from Louis XIV, XV or XVI salons to Moorish or Japanese smoking rooms -- bore a striking similarity to those inside a movie palace (Figure 5-11).³⁰ Movie palaces, in a sense, democratized these previously exclusive spaces by making them available to a wider spectrum of the American public. This

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³⁰ For a brief background on Gilded Age period rooms, see Wayne Craven, *Gilded Mansions: Grand Architecture and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009), 119.

development was not unnoticed at that time, one newspaper noting that “the grandeur that once was only for the eyes of New York’s 400” will be open to anyone who could afford a ticket.³¹

Movie palace furniture primarily consisted of sturdy, custom-made reproduction and contemporary pieces due to the tremendous wear-and-tear placed upon movie palace accouterment. Furniture often came from local or regional department stores and home-furnishing retailers (Figure 5-12). For instance, Marshall Field’s department store decorated and furnished the Chicago Theater, while a competing department store, Mandel Brothers, handled the Tivoli. The former’s representative work included a suite of Empire furniture, newly made but faithful to its namesake period, placed in an eponymous third floor lounge (Figure 5-13).

In addition to custom-made reproduction furniture, movie palace patrons encountered a wide variety of decorative art throughout the theater. These features ranged from art tile, ornamental fountains to Michel Angelo Studio’s custom-made Spanish tapestries produced by members of Eberson’s family. All of these pieces were highly aspirational yet often readily available to interested moviegoers, contributing to the showroom atmosphere highlighted by *Good Furniture*.

Movie palace antiques typically dated to the Eighteenth and Nineteenth-centuries, ranging in size from small objet d’art to salvaged period rooms obtained from antique stores, auction houses, large-scale importers, and a variety of other sources in the United States and abroad. In 1927, for example, Marcus Loew announced the acquisition of fittings from the Cornelius Vanderbilt II house, the “Chateau,” at the northwest corner of

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³¹ “Pet Vanderbilt Trinkets to Deck Movie Houses,” *Milwaukee Journal* (7 Apr. 1927): 1.

Fifth Avenue and 57th Street (1 West 57th Street) in New York, for installation in the new Lamb-designed Midland Theater in Kansas City (Figure 5-14).³² The mansion was a relic of the late Cornelius Vanderbilt II and his wife Alice's desire for a New York townhouse that manifested their seniority within the Vanderbilt family hierarchy, especially in relation to younger brother William Kissam Vanderbilt and his spouse Alva, with whom they were engaged in an ongoing game of architectural one-upmanship. In 1879, Cornelius and Alice commissioned George B. Post to design the first phase of their new home, which was completed in 1882. A decade later, it was necessary to raise the stakes, and George B. Post, this time with Richard Morris Hunt as a consultant, designed a large extension with a new main façade on 58th Street which conformed to the original house's Beaux Arts interpretation of the French Renaissance style of Francois I, specifically the château at Blois in the Loire Valley. The additions were completed in

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³² "To Use Vanderbilt Rooms: Loew plans Chateau Furnishings for Kansas City Theatre," *New York Times* (7 Apr. 1927): 32. There is a good deal of confusion, both contemporary and in recent scholarship, surrounding the origin of the Midland's Moorish-inspired Vanderbilt Room fittings. A number of sources point to the William K. Vanderbilt house (Richard Morris Hunt, 1878-1883), the "Petit Chateau" at 660 Fifth Avenue, the residence of Cornelius' younger brother and his wife Alva, which was demolished in 1926. See, for example Edward J. Mischczuk, "Loew's Midland Theater-Midland Building," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1977. The William K. Vanderbilt house had a Moorish billiard room executed by Léon Marcotte and Co. that was of similar character to the Cornelius Vanderbilt II house's smoking room. This appears to be a source of some of the confusion over Vanderbilt Room's correct attribution. For instance, David Naylor's seminal *American Picture Palaces* included a purported photo of "the Vanderbilt's Oriental Room" from the "W.K. Vanderbilt" mansion to illustrate the original context of the Midland's Vanderbilt Room and a chandelier in the Loew's State in Syracuse. However, this image is a well-known view of the Cornelius Vanderbilt II house's Moorish Smoking Room. David Naylor, *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1981), 38, 118 and 124-125. A possible additional source of confusion is the 1927 *New York Times* article, which also noted that Warner Bros. had recently paid several thousand dollars for fixtures from a number of rooms in the "W.K. Vanderbilt mansion" for use in its own planned movie palaces. A close comparison of the Cornelius Vanderbilt II house's smoking room to the Midland's Vanderbilt Room and a study of associated fixtures installed in other Loew's movie palaces, reveals that this residence was most likely the original source. For background on the Cornelius Vanderbilt II House, see Robert A.M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman. *New York 1880: Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999), 596-600 and Craven, *Gilded Mansions*, 130-149. The Cornelius Vanderbilt II house's Colonial Room is much less known than its Moorish counterpart. Alice Vanderbilt used the room for her collection of New England memorabilia commemorating her early ancestors. Jerry E. Patterson, *The Vanderbilts* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Publishers, 1989), 132.

1894; they more than doubled the home's original size and made it the largest private residence ever constructed in New York.

Marcus Loew acquired the fittings from two of the Vanderbilt house's rooms, the "Colonial Room" and the Moorish Smoking Room, as it was being prepared for its spring 1927 demolition.³³ The latter room dated to the mansion's original 1879-82 building campaign, designed by Post and decorated under the supervision of Lockwood de Forest, an occasional partner of Louis Comfort Tiffany's (Figure 5-15). Located on the first floor of the 58th Street side of the mansion, and opening to the ballroom and dining room, the Moorish Smoking Room was purportedly an exact replica of a room in the Alhambra, based upon studies of its mosaics and tiles undertaken onsite by agents dispatched by Vanderbilt and Post. If the resulting room was a rather loose interpretation of the original, it was fashionably exotic, characterized by a 40-foot domed ceiling with iridescent metallic tinted ornamentation; a large Tiffany chandelier and smaller light fixtures; a version of John La Farge's stained-glass window, *Peonies Blown in the Wind*; walls covered with mosaics and opalescent blue glass tiles set in a geometric design; and colorful Oriental carpets.

The Midland Theater's Vanderbilt Room was not a full reconstruction of the Moorish Smoking Room, as often noted, but it utilized selected original decorative elements (notably the inlaid art glass wainscoting of abstract floral and geometric

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³³ In 1896, just two years after the home was finished, Cornelius suffered a stroke from which he never fully recovered. The couple retreated from society and Cornelius died in 1899. The widowed Alice had little use for the mansion and it was boarded up following her move to a smaller residence. In 1926, she sold it to a realty corporation for nearly \$7 million for commercial development. The Bergdorf Goodman building (Buchman & Kahn, 1928) was built on the site.

designs) as the basis for a new design (Figure 5-16).³⁴ The Vanderbilt Room was relatively small, measuring 20-feet square, retaining the original's smoking room function as one part of the basement ladies suite, which also included an anterior, peacock-themed cosmetic room designed to both compliment and subtly prepare patrons for the ensuing space (Figure 5-17).

Movie palace artwork was generally museum quality, encompassing the occasional Old Master painting, numerous Nineteenth-century paintings and sculptures, and a variety of contemporary works. Old Master and Nineteenth-century paintings were typically attributed to lesser-known artists or were minor works of more recognized figures, while contemporary work was often of well-known subjects or copies of famous works. For example, the Paramount Theater (Rapp & Rapp, 1926) on Times Square originally possessed a collection of 58 canvases, among them works by the American painter Oscar E. Berninghaus (1874-1952), French academic painter Charles Édouard Delort (1841-1895), American painter Daniel Huntington (1816-1906), Dutch portrait painter Sir Peter Lely (1618-1680), French history and genre scene painter Adolphe-Alexandre Lesrel (1839-1929), French genre painter Etienne Adolphe Piot (1850-1910), German-born Düsseldorf school painter Adolf Schreyer (1828-1899), and French Barbizon School painter Félix Ziem (1821-1911).³⁵ Known works in the theater's

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³⁴ It is not clear which other Vanderbilt Room features were reused from the Moorish Smoking Room or which features, if any, were taken from the Colonial Room referenced in the *New York Times* article. As previously noted, the original room's dominant feature, the large Tiffany chandelier, was reused in another Loew's movie palace. Other elements from the Cornelius Vanderbilt II house that the *Times* mentioned would be reused in the Midland, including the aforementioned inlaid glass wainscoting, lighting fixtures of inlaid glass, and the onyx columns of the Colonial Room. It is unclear whether the four marble columns supporting the arcade on the Vanderbilt Room's east wall are from the mansion. The Moorish Smoking Room's John La Farge stained-glass window was not incorporated into the Vanderbilt Room.

³⁵ This listing is from a 1963 inventory undertaken by the Birnbaum Auction Galleries, which acquired the theater's contents following its closure, excerpted in the [New York] *Herald Tribune*. Accordingly, this

collection included French artist Rosa Bonheur's (1822-1899) *Watering Place; The Peace Conference* depicting George Clemenceau, Woodrow Wilson and other World War I figures by American painter George Sheridan Knowles (1863-1931); and Norwegian Impressionist Frits Thaulow's (1847-1906) *Twilight in Norway*.

The Paramount also contained thirty-odd bronzes, including an unsigned life-sized pigmy elephant, a Pan by the French sculptor Alexandre Charpentier (1856-1909), a bust of "a Chinese" by French sculptor Charles Henri Joseph Cordier (1827-1905), French sculptor Ernest Dubois' (1863-1930) *Return of the Prodigal Son*, a bust of George Washington after Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741-1828), an equestrian statue of Napoleon by French sculptor Jules Edmond Masson (1871-1932), and a bust of Abraham Lincoln dating to 1907 by Paul Morris (1865-1916).³⁶ There were approximately forty-five marbles, including two life-sized figures by American sculptor Joseph Mozier (1812-1870), a work by American sculptor Thomas Ball (1819-1911) and Italian artist Adriatico Froli (1858-1925), in addition to numerous unsigned works in the classical mold (Figure 5-18).

The New York Paramount

In 1927, *Good Furniture* covered the New York Paramount, providing a thorough overview of the variety of public spaces within a movie palace and how they might be

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inventory only lists the artwork that remained in the Paramount until this date and does not account for any original pieces that had been previously removed. The *Herald Tribune* article was reprinted in "Sequel: Times Square Paramount," *The Marquee: Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 22, no. 3 (1990): 8-9. The *Herald Tribune* also lists paintings by "Ribera Bo," perhaps a misprinting of Spanish artist Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652), Schweninger, likely referring to an unspecified member of the Nineteenth-century family of Viennese artists, and a "Weiland."

³⁶ Deverou's *Sleeping Woman* was another bronze sculpture in the theater's collection.

viewed as domestic, if only in the grandest sense.³⁷ The New York Paramount, Famous Players-Lasky's (later Paramount-Publix) flagship theater, was one part of the 33-story, \$17 million Paramount Building located in Times Square on the west side of Broadway between West 43rd and West 44th streets, which contained the company's corporate headquarters and leased commercial space (Figure 5-19).³⁸ Rapp & Rapp imported its trademark Chicago-style movie palace to New York for the first time, eclipsing anything the city's moviegoers had yet seen in terms of luxury, if not sheer size.³⁹ The quantity of the Paramount's public spaces was greater than average, but their design and decoration were representative of what audiences would have encountered nationally.

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³⁷ "The Paramount Theater," 93-98. The Paramount Theater's opening on November 19, 1926 was timed to coincide with New York City's tercentenary celebrations. This event was attended by a multitude of notable guests including E.F. Albee, A.J. Balaban, Irving Berlin, Louise Brooks, Richard Dix, George Eastman, D.W. Griffith, Arthur Hammerstein, Sinclair Lewis, Mae Murray, S.L. Rothafel, New York Governor Alfred E. Smith, Gloria Swanson, and New York Mayor Jimmy Walker. Thomas Edison was also in attendance and was acknowledged by a speaker to several rounds of applause from the audience. President Coolidge sent a congratulatory telegram that was read aloud to the audience. The 5,000 invited guests then enjoyed a program including a recital by renowned organist Jesse Crawford, a musical tribute to New York's theatrical history and the feature film *God Gave Me Twenty Cents* starring Lois Moran. "Record in Building Aim at Paramount," *New York Times* (28 Mar. 1926): 13, "Huge Dome Throws Light into Suburbs," *New York Times* (10 Jun. 1927): 16, "Brilliant Opening at the New Paramount," *New York Times* (20 Nov. 1926): 3 and "President's Good Wishes," *New York Times* (21 Nov. 1926): 30. The Paramount is fully described in "Paramount a Symbol of Progress," *Motion Picture News* (4 Dec. 1926): 2171-2172 and 2180-2181 and "Times Square Paramount," *Theatre Historical Society of America Annual*, no. 3 (1976).

³⁸ The Paramount Building was a two-part vertical block with a distinctive series of eight setbacks that both responded to New York's 1916 zoning laws and referenced the company's Paramount logo. This was topped by a four-sided clock tower, an observation deck, and an illuminated nineteen-foot diameter glass globe that indicated the hour by flashing colors: red on odd hours and white on even ones. The auditorium block was located behind the office and retail building to maximize the income potential of the valuable Times Square frontage. In total, the Paramount Building contained 250,000 square feet of office space, 6,000 square feet of retail space in seven ground floor stores, and a 2,000 square foot basement. Famous Players-Lasky initially occupied the sixth through twelfth floors. The remaining spaces originally rented for an average price of \$3.45 per foot. "Record in Building Aim at Paramount," *New York Times* (28 Mar. 1926): 13.

³⁹ Steve Levin, ed., "New York Paramount: Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Tribute," *The Marquee: Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 33, no. 3 (2001): 26.

The Paramount's principal novelty for moviegoers was an extraordinary array of interior public spaces, a total of 26 distinctive lobbies, foyers, lounges, and retiring rooms.⁴⁰ Newspaper advertisements during the Paramount's opening week proclaimed that it would become the "meeting place of all New York," accommodating 6,000 patrons: nearly 4,000 in the auditorium itself and 2,000 additional waiting moviegoers in supreme comfort in dozens of luxurious lounging rooms in the basement, mezzanine and balcony levels filled with soft music to speed the minutes. There would be no crowding, no wandering about looking for seats, simply comfort and convenience for waiting patrons. In the days after the opening, the *New York Times* repeatedly noted that guests were just as interested, if not more so, in touring the theater as they were in the show.⁴¹

Good Furniture concurred:

There is so much to see in the Paramount, that a great portion of the audiences does not go into the auditorium at all, but wanders about looking at the paintings, the statuary, the beautiful bronze work, the tremendous chandeliers; marveling at the great distances; enjoying the rich color harmonies; and, in fact, absorbing a great impression of opulence. For very little money, even if one does not care for pictures, one can enjoy one of the most astounding sights in modern building, and become quite saturated with an atmosphere of gorgeousness and even extravagance, while listening to the splash of fountains and the distant orchestra and organ.⁴²

Good Furniture treated the first two public spaces encountered by patrons only in passing: the ticket (outer) lobby and the Hall of Nations. The ticket lobby was a semi-circular space just inside the Broadway entrance that corresponded with a large window above the marquee, which flooded the space with light during the day and provided

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⁴⁰ "We Must Have the Best," *Motion Picture News* (24 July 1926): 336 and advertisement in *Wall Street Journal* (19 Nov. 1926): 4.

⁴¹ "President's Good Wishes," *New York Times* (21 Nov. 1926): 30 and "15,000 at the Paramount," *New York Times* (22 Nov. 1926): 23. It was estimated that 15,000 people were admitted to the Paramount on a single day just after opening with receipts over \$8,000. The first week's income was in excess of \$80,000, a new world record. "Paramount Net Income Large," *Wall Street Journal* (29 Nov. 1926): 1.

⁴² "The Paramount Theater," 93.

passersby on Times Square enticing glimpses of interior at night (Figure 5-20).

Designed to impress patrons immediately upon entering the theater, the ticket lobby gave an impression of size that belied its relatively modest dimensions, with its 50-foot height and the semi-circular colonnade of engaged Ionic columns, and of richness with its varicolored marbles, bronze railings, large chandelier, and crystal tulip light fixtures. The Hall of Nations, a low-ceilinged passage between the ticket lobby and Grand Hall, was featured solely on the basis of a namesake display of 37 stones from famous structures in 17 countries collected by the Famous Players-Lasky's Foreign Department, which included pieces of St. Paul's Cathedral and the U.S. Capitol (Figure 5-21).⁴³

The Grand Hall, or main lobby, was the Paramount's principal public space outside the auditorium, constituting a vast space 150-feet in length, 45-feet wide and 50-feet high that astounded patrons upon their first glimpse through a broad archway from the Hall of Nations (Figures 5-22 and 5-23).⁴⁴ Rapp & Rapp modeled it after the grand stair hall of Charles Garnier's Paris Opera (1860-1875), a space the Grand Hall eclipsed in size, and its favored influence for lobbies, the Royal Chapel at Versailles, of which this was a particularly stately variant. The entire room was lined with Italian Breche Centella marble with accents of gold and black. Paired Corinthian columns supported a faux barrel-vaulted ceiling with an allegorical painting entitled *The Spirit of Light* depicting a blazing sun from which emerged four equestrian figures transforming into golden clouds. Four bronze and crystal chandeliers provided the principal source of illumination,

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⁴³ "Brilliant Opening at New Paramount," *New York Times* (20 Nov. 1926): 3.

⁴⁴ The Grand Hall was the hub of the Paramount's Tivoli-style traffic management system. At one side of the hall were exit doors to West 43rd Street; on the opposite side were openings to the orchestra foyer with large bronze gates. Patrons seated on the mezzanine and balcony levels proceed down staircases to exit through the Hall of Nations to also exit onto West 43rd Street. Ambulatories made it possible for exiting crowds to bypass the Grand Hall entirely. Exits along the auditorium sidewalls led departing moviegoers to courts leading to West 44th Street.

supplemented with brackets of similar design. The focal point was the grand staircase opposite the entry, which rose to a landing with a large marble fountain surmounted by sculpture of a veiled female figure. From here, the staircase split into two flights that reached each side of the hall's mezzanine level. Like the Paris Opera's grand stair hall, the Grand Hall had a variety of overlooks, allowing patrons to both observe the passing scene below and to be seen themselves.

Good Furniture focused on the 25 smaller rooms located in the basement, mezzanine, and balcony levels that supplemented the Grand Hall as the theater's most appropriate spaces for models of the domestic interior. These spaces functioned as overflow space for awaiting crowds, support spaces for the comfort of seated audience, and inducements for patrons to seat themselves in the theater's upper levels. *Good Furniture* found the Elizabethan Lounge, which served as the general basement lounge for men and women, to be one of the theater's two most significant smaller public spaces (Figure 5-24). This lounge was modeled after a walnut-paneled room of the period with a red brocade rug and a richly carved faux fireplace. From the Elizabethan Lounge, patrons could access the men and women's basement lounge suites. At one end, the ladies basement suite included the Venetian Room, which served as a cosmetic room and the Chinoiserie Room that functioned as the women's smoking room, with black furniture, gold and black satin upholstery, gold Chinese brocade wall hangings, and Chinese bronzes, lacquers, and objet d'art. The men's basement lounge suite was accessed from the opposite end of the Elizabethan Lounge. This included the College Room (or University Room), which was the men's smoking room, with wall panels ornamented with the escutcheons of various colleges (Figure 5-25).

The foyers and lounge suites on the mezzanine and balcony levels were similarly themed; among them were the Club Room, the Empire Room, the Fraternity Room, the Galleries, the Hunting Room, the Marie Antoinette Room, the Peacock Promenade, and the Powder Box, all characteristically fitted. Particularly notable among these areas was the Colonial Room, which had wallpaper with scenes of early American life (Figure 5-26). Their distinctive names and décor were intended to allow each room within this multitude of spaces to function as an immediately recognizable meeting place for parties joining each other inside the theater.

Good Furniture regarded the Music Room, located directly above the Hall of Nations on the mezzanine level and overlooking the Grand Hall and ticket lobby, the second of the theater's two most significant domestic-like spaces (Figure 5-27). The Music Room was conceived as a venue for occasional concerts by a small orchestra, a meeting place for patrons, and for the use of those who wished to observe the passing crowds in the Grand Hall and ticket lobby below. This room also functioned as a central circulation point within the theater, encouraging patrons to seat themselves in the upper seating areas and providing access up to the balcony and down to the Hall of Nations below. Rapp & Rapp modeled the room after a French salon, with architecture and furnishings of the Louis XV and Louis XVI periods (Figure 5-28). The vases, clocks, paintings, and statuary were all antiques from the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, while the furniture, carpeting and fabric wall covering were high-quality reproductions. *Good Furniture* made special note of the Aubusson-style carpet, the round Louis XV table set with a painted center encircled by portrait miniatures, a console with painted panels and ormolu moldings, and two smaller consoles of marquetry and ormolu. The

latter flanked the room's focal point, a niche containing a scagliola fountain topped by a Carrera statue of Peter Pan.

By 1927, *Good Furniture* felt the public was by in large accustomed to auditoriums of varying magnificence. Accordingly, the magazine found the Paramount's French Renaissance-inspired auditorium largely conventional in design, but notable for the richness of its ivory, rose, and turquoise decorative scheme and feeling of intimacy despite being ten-stories high (Figures 5-29 and 5-30). At 3,664 seats, the auditorium was sizable, but far from the largest in Times Square.⁴⁵ There were, however, several notable features: the sounding board panel featured a low relief sculpture entitled *The Spirit of Music* with a figural group symbolizing music in silver and gold. Each organ screen featured an illuminated crystal screen depicting a jeweled tree of life. Marble fountains occupied arches at the base of each organ grill.⁴⁶ The most novel feature was the Gallery Promenade, a furnished walkway along the rim of the dome for the use of patrons waiting to be seated. From this vantage point high above the auditorium, they could enjoy a dizzying view down upon the audience and perhaps a glimpse at the screen (Figure 5-31). The promenade was another incentive for patrons to explore the theater's upper levels and sit in the balcony.

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⁴⁵ When the Paramount opened, the Capitol Theater (1919), designed by Lamb, was the largest motion picture theater in the Times Square area with 5,230 seats. In 1927, the 5,886-seat Roxy Theater designed by W.W. Ahlschlager finally overtook the Capitol as the largest movie palace in the vicinity. Although the primary objective of movie palace design was to incorporate as many seats as possible on a given site, the Paramount instead devoted nearly fifty percent of its space to foyers, lobbies, lounges, and other smaller public spaces. This befitted its status as a circuit flagship located in the country's premier entertainment center but was also a practical consideration on the narrow site. Rapp & Rapp likely determined that accommodating additional seats would result in an auditorium that was too narrow for its depth, which would have compromised the audience's intimacy with the screen. Instead the Paramount balanced the more functional, if smaller, seating capacity with grander support spaces.

⁴⁶ The firm had previously employed such fountains at the Chicago Theater. They proved to be problematic to maintain and their noise agitated patrons.

Good Furniture completed its study of the Paramount by focusing on selected aspects of its decoration, noting that there were pictures and statuary throughout the theater and calling special attention to the foyers, which were lined with mounted and lighted paintings (Figure 5-32). The magazine proclaimed that one could ramble in these areas for hours, as in an art gallery, and do nothing but look at the paintings. Irrespective of the quality of the paintings themselves, they made an impression upon the public, which, by in large, could hardly be lured into an art gallery, or so the editors felt. For this alone, movie palaces fulfilled a worthy purpose. The magazine felt that the strength of the Paramount's interior furnishings was its floor coverings and bronzes. Hand-tufted rugs of appropriate design, woven in Austria and Czechoslovakia, adorned most of the public spaces. The irregular, half-moon shaped, 115-foot long mezzanine foyer rug was particularly notable, woven in one piece; it was reputedly the largest in the world (Figure 5-33). Bronze work, noted throughout the magazine's coverage of the theater's various rooms, was of especially intricate design.

The magazine concluded that movie palaces "may well be numbered among the best and most consistent patrons of the industrial arts," and by extension, aids to the Better Homes Movement.⁴⁷ Art connoisseurs might quibble with certain details of the Paramount's public spaces -- the placement of the chandelier here and the patterns on the chairs there -- or feel that the theater was overdone. However, *Good Furniture* realized that for the average moviegoer, the benefits of his/her exposure to these period surroundings and the benefits to the Better Homes Movement at large outweighed any potential reservations.

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⁴⁷ "The Paramount Theater," 98.

Measuring the Influence of the Movie Palace on Domestic Taste

What then can be said about the influence of movie palace design upon domestic taste? Although the type was enthusiastically marketed as an appropriate inspiration for home decoration, it is difficult to separate their specific influence from other contemporary sources promoting a similar aesthetic. While recreating the “domestic” spaces within a movie palace was financially out-of-reach for the middle-class homemaker, this is not what *Good Furniture* intended through its promotion of movie palaces. Rather the magazine positioned “domestic” movie palace spaces as instructional showrooms where homemakers would elevate their taste and be given inspiration to draw from as they could afford. Ideally, this process would benefit *Good Furniture*’s manufacturer and retailer readership, all of which were directed to produce and carry goods that allowed movie palaces’ period designs to be translated into the middle-class home. In the broadest sense, it can be concluded that movie palaces reinforced the domestic tastes promoted elsewhere, with the added inducement of a bit of Hollywood glamour.

Chapter 6

Exporting the Movie Palace: The Big Three's International Commissions and Influence

Movie palaces' influence on motion picture theater design outside the United States during the interwar decades represents a significant episode within the larger narrative of the internationalization of American architecture. The type's widespread exportation was intimately tied to the leading Hollywood studio-exhibitors' contemporary rise to international dominance in terms of both the popularity of their films and through their foreign expansion plans. Movie palaces offered the highest international standard of movie going, and the type's wide influence also stemmed from being remarkably well publicized, which led foreign exhibitors and architects to travel to the United States to study it almost from its inception.

By the onset of the Second World War, movie palaces had spread throughout Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, Europe, and South America in addition to North America. The Big Three were at the center of this process, and their international commissions and influence exemplify three ways the building type proliferated outside the United States. Lamb worked for a Hollywood studio-exhibitor expanding its theater building activities overseas, while Eberson completed a group of movie palaces for an international exhibitor. Rapp & Rapp's American movie palaces heavily influenced a British firm working for a Hollywood studio-exhibitor in that country.

Thomas W. Lamb and Loew's International

Lamb obtained the most far-flung theater commissions of any American movie palace architect, and he was by far the most prolific outside North America. This status was primarily due to his enduring relationship with Loew's, which resulted in numerous commissions as the company developed an extensive international chain. Lamb began working outside the United States relatively early in his career, completing an influential double-decker theater complex in Toronto: Loew's Yonge Street (1913) and Winter Garden (1914) (Figure 6-1). Canada subsequently emerged as the second major center of Lamb's work, leading him to open a Toronto office.¹

Between about 1915 and the mid-1920s, Lamb and Detroit-based specialist architect C. Howard Crane separately dominated Canada's earliest movie palace commissions through their work for rival chains, establishing the national character of the type through the design of the most prestigious theaters in major cities across the country.² In Lamb's case, the resulting theaters were primarily defined by the Adam influences seen in his contemporary American work. Lamb exclusively designed Loew's Canadian movie palaces, which included theaters in Hamilton (1917), Montreal (1917), Ottawa (1920), Toronto (1920), Windsor (1920), and London (1924). Famous Players Canadian Corporation, a subsidiary of Adolph Zukor's United States-based Famous

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¹ Other early Canadian work included His Majesty's Theater (1916) in Toronto and the Temple Theater (1919) in Brantford for the Allen vaudeville chain. On Lamb's Canadian theaters, see Hilary Russell, "All that Glitters: A Memorial to Ottawa's Capitol Theatre and its Predecessors," *Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History* 13 (1975): 7-125.

² C. Howard Crane's Canadian work is treated in Paul Moore, "Allen Theatres: North America's First National Cinema Chain," *Marquee: Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 41, no. 3 (2009): 4-6 and 22-23; and Philip Dombowsky, "C. Howard Crane's Allen Theatres," *Marquee: Journal of the Theatre Historical Society of America* 41, no. 3 (2009): 7-21.

Players-Lasky, was a second major client (Figure 6-2).³ Lamb was awarded the commission for its most significant movie palaces: the Capitol theaters in Winnipeg (1921), Vancouver (1921), Regina (1921), Montreal (1921), and Calgary (1921). He also designed the Pantages theaters in Toronto (1920) and Hamilton (1921).

In the mid-1920s, Lamb's association with Loew's led to the completion of his first theater outside North America, in England, where his work was already hugely influential in the nation's post-war cinema development. The resulting project was the single most prestigious commission undertaken by an American architect in that country. Hollywood studio-exhibitors were aggressively expanding into foreign markets during the 1920s in response to the international popularity of their films. The movie palace's associated exportation was inevitable due to the type's close association with Hollywood films. Britain was a particularly productive foreign market for Hollywood films, making it a center of American efforts to expand theater chains overseas.⁴ The Hollywood studio-exhibitors felt that the development of their own movie palaces in Britain would give them a distinct advantage over local exhibitors, the majority of whom were still operating converted legitimate theaters or unsophisticated early purpose-built cinemas.

Movie palaces made the United States the undisputed leader in international cinema design. However, early British and American cinema development was nearly

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³ Lamb had previously completed the Regent Theater (1916) in Toronto for Nathan L. Nathanson, which involved the complete reconstruction of a legitimate theater into the city's first large palatial theater exclusively devoted to motion pictures. Nathanson was Famous Players Canadian Corporation's founder and awarded Lamb the Capitol theater commissions. He also developed the Lamb-designed Pantages theaters in Toronto and Hamilton, which were operated by the Pantages circuit.

⁴ Bosley Crowther, *The Lion's Share: The Story of an Entertainment Empire* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1957), 128.

identical.⁵ Britain entered the film age on February 21, 1896 when a program of short films made by the Lumière brothers using their Cinématographe was shown in the Great Hall of the Polytechnic Institution in London.⁶ It proved so popular that it was transferred within weeks to the larger Empire music hall on Leicester Square, where it began an 18-month run. By 1896, films were exhibited throughout Britain in a variety of often hastily converted venues. The Central Hall (1907) in Colne, Lancashire is generally regarded as Britain's earliest purpose-built cinema although it had other uses and exhibited film only two nights a week (Figure 6-3). It is certain that by 1909, purpose-built cinemas were appearing across Britain, and even small towns had cinemas prior to the onset of World War I in August 1914. Larger cinemas, occasionally purpose-built, also began to appear in Britain just before the war, developed in response to the advent of feature-length films.

The First World War was the key point of divergence between American and British cinema development, curbing the latter's construction between 1914 and 1920 due to wartime and a post-war housing shortages that led to restrictions on luxury building.⁷ These conditions left British cinema development sidelined during the critical period of motion picture exhibition that saw the development and early proliferation of the movie palace across the Atlantic. Furthermore, American companies dominated the British market in the immediate post-war period. British film production was slow to recover after the war, and Hollywood companies filled the void by renting existing theaters and importing block-booking methods. New cinemas would need to be constructed to provide

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⁵ Noted in Richard Gray, *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture* (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1996), 43.

⁶ Information on the formative years of British film exhibition is from Gray, *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture*, 18-21 and 29-34; and Allen Eyles, *Old Cinemas* (Buckinghamshire: Shire Books, 2001), 4-7.

⁷ On World War I and the immediate post-war situation in Britain, see Dennis Sharp, *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 86-97; and Gray, *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture*, 35-42.

room for the exhibition of British films. This endeavor proved difficult as British cinema architects were far behind their American counterparts in terms of size, plan, decoration, and presentation techniques. Following the lifting of the post-war building restrictions, the influence of the new American model was immediate; British architect Robert Atkinson designed the Regent (1921) in Brighton, the product of a 1919 study trip to the United States to view the latest developments in American motion picture theater design.⁸ The Regent demonstrated the influence of Lamb's Capitol (1919) in New York in its plan and proscenium (Figure 6-4).

During 1920s, the Hollywood studio-exhibitors began erecting British movie palaces to launch their films, further solidifying the American-style development of the nation's cinemas.⁹ The West End of London was the initial focus of these activities. Despite its status as the nexus of British entertainment, West End motion picture exhibition remained primarily confined to converted venues. The Hollywood companies first leased existing theaters while they developed plans to build their own movie palaces, maintaining that only purpose-built, American-style palatial venues could adequately showcase their films. Suitably ornate surroundings aside, their new West End show houses would need to efficiently accommodate the continual stream of large audiences that filled auditoriums during the long runs of hit films. Famous Players-Lasky leased the London Pavilion (1885) in 1923, a music hall on Piccadilly Circus. Loew's, which had inaugurated its international activities in 1920, appeared in Britain as Jury-Metro-

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⁸ The Royal Institute of British Architects commissioned Atkinson's study tour for the purpose of reporting on American architectural education. During this period, he was employed by Provincial Cinematograph Theatres and also used the trip as an opportunity to gather information on the latest theater design trends for the Regent project in Brighton. Gray, *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture*, 42.

⁹ The initial Hollywood expansion in Britain and the West End is discussed in Allen Eyles and Keith Skone, *London's West End Cinemas* (Sutton: Keystone Publications, 1991), 6, 44-45 and 72-73; and Gray, *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture*, 47-50.

Goldwyn, its British distribution organization, to capitalize on greater local familiarity with its film brand. Between 1925 and 1928, it leased the Tivoli (1923) on the Strand, one of the earliest, large West End cinemas designed after American precedents. It also acquired the Empire music hall (1884) on Leicester Square in 1925 as a site for its new theater (Figure 6-5).

Jury-Metro-Goldwyn's new Empire, Leicester Square (1926-1928), designed by Lamb in association with F.G.M. Chancellor of Frank Matcham & Co. of London as local consultant and supervisor, was a bold manifestation of Hollywood's arrival in the West End, a massive movie palace designed by an American architect in the very heart of popular entertainment in the British Empire.¹⁰ That this was accomplished through the demolition of the pre-eminent music hall of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras

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¹⁰ The new Empire Leicester Square opened November 9, 1928 to an audience that included daughters of the King of Spain, members of the Diplomatic Corps, Loew's officials, and various social personalities. They viewed an opening program that included the house orchestra conducted by Don Albert, a formal dedication via movietone by Sir Kynaston Studd, the Lord Mayor-elect of London, several newsreels, filmed good wishes from stage and screen notables, a surprise "talkie" interview with several British stars of the British International Pictures (BIP) studios, selections from *The Showboat* on the organ, and the feature film *Trelawney of the Wells* starring Norma Shearer. The Empire was a remarkable success, offering a steady stream of popular MGM films in the 1930s, 40s and 50s; it was estimated that 12 million moviegoers had paid admission during its first six years of operation. In 1937, this success prompted the opening a 432-seat annex in the basement of a neighboring building. The Empire advertised itself as "The Showplace of the Nation," after the slogan used by Radio City Music Hall. In keeping with this image, from 1949 to 1952, it presented lavish stage shows. While the Empire was quick to adapt to technological change, it became increasingly hard to fill the auditorium when it offered less popular films. In 1961, the theater was closed for reconstruction following the run of *Ben Hur*. During its 33-year existence, the reconstructed Empire's box office had sold no fewer than 46,950,263 tickets, which was almost one ticket for each person in the entire population. The theater was gutted to its walls and rebuilt according to the designs of George Coles in 1961-2, with a ballroom occupying the area formerly given to the orchestra and a smaller 1,336-seat, stadium-style cinema above. The only surviving Lamb feature was the Leicester Square façade, which was long covered with an advertising billboard. It currently (2013) remains in operation as a cinema with the 1962 auditorium set to be subdivided for IMAX presentations. See "London's £700,000 Luxury Palace: Wonders of the New Empire," *The Bioscope* (10 Oct. 1928): 34, "The New Empire a Reality: Distinguished First Night Audience," *The Bioscope* (7 Nov. 1928): 33 and 38, "The New Empire," *The Times* [London] (9 Nov. 1928), "The new Empire, Leicester Square," *The Builder* (16 Nov. 1928): 799-800, David High, *The First Hundred Years: The Story of the Empire, Leicester Square* (Woldingham: David High, 1985), 35-53, Eyles and Skone, *London's West End Cinemas*, 54-57, and Gray, *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture*, 50.

dramatically signified the increasing popularity of film at the expense of earlier forms of amusement.

Loew's enduring association with Lamb was especially advantageous in the design of its British outpost. His school of restrained classical movie palace design was the dominant influence on British cinemas during the 1920s, shaping the work of the field's first recognized leaders, including Frank Verity and Robert Atkinson.

Accordingly, the new Empire would be the first British movie palace designed by the figure whose work the country's leading cinema architects were striving to reproduce on behalf of rival exhibitors. Lamb's directive was to produce a recognizably "American" cinema that would eclipse anything in the West End; in essence, to import a contemporary Loew's movie palace to Britain. He went about this rather literally, producing a £750,000 movie palace that relied heavily on proven architectural solutions from his work in the United States.

To reproduce an American-style movie palace with its succession of monumental public spaces, Jury-Metro-Goldwyn acquired additional property to greatly enlarge the original, 1,200-seat Empire's site, which was located on the north side of Leicester Square on a site that extended back to Lisle Street (Figure 6-6). The enlarged site extended eastward along Lisle Street to Leicester Place, comprising approximately 27,000 square feet. Lamb reoriented the auditorium at the corner of Lisle Street and Leicester Place from the original theater's north to south arrangement to be parallel to Leicester Square. This configuration facilitated the inclusion of 3,344 seats, nearly triple the capacity of the original theater. An L-shaped extension attached to the auditorium block contained many of the major public spaces. The main entrance remained in the

portion extending to Leicester Square, while the Leicester Street exit lobby wing constituted the only portion of the old Empire retained in the 1928 theater, completed by Frank Verity in 1893 as a secondary entry addition to the original building.

Movie palace architects routinely recycled components ranging from facades to decorative details to facilitate faster turnover, but the practice here also served to emphasize the Empire's American character. The Leicester Square façade was a variation of the Albee Theater (1927) on Fountain Square in Cincinnati, which were both on the firm's drawing boards beginning in 1925 (Figures 6-7 and 6-8).¹¹ This scheme was a particularly monumental solution to the problem of a movie palace fronting a major public space, rising above the plain marquee as a large Palladian arch with a large recessed window. The Empire façade was wider and more heavily ornamented than its Cincinnati counterpart, featuring the same Adam-inspired decoration surrounding the window and adjoining recessed wall surfaces. Dignified by day, the façade was seen to its best effect at night, when the cavernous recess was floodlit to vie for attention on Leicester Square.

The new Empire's interior was almost overpowering in terms of its vast size and luxury, presenting London moviegoers with a seemingly endless profusion of rich materials, art, and furnishings. This environment prompted the trade press to imbue the theater with the democratic pretensions associated with American movie palaces, "the Empire-goer of 1928 will, for his shilling or so, become, in sensation, a luxury-lapped millionaire."¹² The Empire's predominant inspiration was the Italian Renaissance, but the

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¹¹ The Empire Leicester Square was entered in Lamb's job book on January 3, 1925 while the Albee was recorded on September 19, 1925.

¹² "London's £700,000 Luxury Palace: Wonders of the New Empire," 34.

interiors drew from a variety of classical influences including the Lamb's favored Adamesque motifs. One trade publication deemed this eclectic treatment the "Encyclo-classical style," which was said to be a uniquely American decorative treatment.

Like the Leicester Square façade, the major public spaces were adapted from the firm's earlier work, most notably the Capitol (1919) in New York, which served as Loew's flagship since 1924 and was well-known among British cinema architects for its influence on Robert Atkinson's seminal Regent (1921) in Brighton. The first major public space, the Grand Foyer, was a variation of the Albee's lobby layout, a 44-foot wide by 34-foot high space dominated by a divided grand staircase (Figures 6-9, 6-10, and 6-11). Lamb reproduced the Capitol's lobby's decorative scheme to immerse London moviegoers in a lavish and recognizably American environment: rich dark walnut paneling with gilt ornament, large mirrors between Corinthian pilasters and columns, a marble grand staircase, and a large cut-glass chandelier and brackets.

The interconnected mezzanine lounge and 400-seat tearoom, a 108-foot-long by 32-foot-wide space beneath the balcony, was modeled after the Capitol's grand promenade (Figures 6-12, 6-13, and 6-14). Both spaces functioned as an enlarged mezzanine foyer that provided access to the balcony and to the men and women's lounges. The dark walnut-paneled lounge was the smaller of the two adjoining spaces, most notable for its cove-lit, shallow domed ceiling and a raised semi-circular alcove with a large marble fountain occupying the space between the lounge entrances (Figures 6-15). In comparison to the Capitol, the tearoom was more elaborate, also paneled in dark walnut with gold accents with a long ceiling ornamented with Lamb's trademark Adam-influenced, low-relief plaster ornament set off by a pale apple green background. Waring

& Gillow, a British company, decorated the interiors, which were filled with handmade carpets, brocade wall panels, specially-made walnut and gilt furniture, and marble tables, among other fixtures.

In contrast to the other major interior spaces, the auditorium was an original design (Figures 6-16 and 6-17). At 3,344 seats, it had the largest capacity of any theater in the West End.¹³ Its layout was particularly noteworthy, being virtually square in plan, 120-feet long from the rear wall to the proscenium, with the balcony extending over almost all of the orchestra. This arrangement gave the balcony over forty percent of the auditorium seating with 1,428 to the orchestra's 1,916, which placed it among the largest in the country. To ensure that orchestra patrons seated under the balcony did not feel claustrophobic and that those seated in the rear would have a clear view of the screen, a good deal of space was left overhead and a large cove-lit dome was inserted into the underside of the balcony. This configuration resembled a ceiling over the rear orchestra seats, which alongside the large balcony, created the impression for patrons that each of the two seating levels was its own distinct auditorium.¹⁴

The auditorium's decorative scheme was "High Renaissance," conforming to the character of the Grand Foyer and other public spaces with a dado of walnut paneling, Corinthian pilasters flanking the organ screens on each side of the 54-foot-wide proscenium, and low-relief plasterwork (Figure 6-18). It was carried out in warm browns, ivory, and rose with gilt embellishments and gold- and wine-colored brocade panels on the walls under the balcony. The ceiling consisted of a massive gilded dome, 82-feet

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¹³ The Empire had full stage facilities and a Wurlitzer organ. It was wired for Vitaphone sound effects from the outset.

¹⁴ "London's £700,000 Luxury Palace: Wonders of the New Empire," 34.

above the orchestra, with bronze ribs extending downward into a wide circle (Figure 6-19). Between the ribs, were 48 circles alternatively filled with signs of the zodiac and other allegorical symbols. The dome was lit with a total of 1,328 lamps in four colors, which, along with the similar lighting scheme in the dome on the underside of the balcony, could be blended to create different moods in the auditorium.

The Empire Leicester Square was only part of Loew's growing foreign interests, which also encompassed the acquisition of existing theater chains outside North America and the establishment of international distribution agencies. By the 1930s, the success of these initial endeavors and the international popularity of MGM films, among other factors, prompted Loew's to increase its investment abroad by inaugurating an ambitious building program of large American-style theaters in Africa, Asia, Australia, the Caribbean, and South America. Loew's International, which handled the company's interests outside the United States and Canada, operated the new theaters, but they were branded "Metro" and publicized locally as part of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to better associate them with the company's MGM films.

Lamb shaped the Metro theaters' American character, obtaining the commission, beginning in 1931, to design many of the most prestigious units. This ultimately encompassed the theaters in Johannesburg, (1932), Calcutta (1935), Durban (1937), Bombay (1938), San Juan, Puerto Rico (1939), Adelaide (1939), and Cairo (1940). There was also at least one fully designed but unrealized additional project, the Metro (1934) in Sydney (Figures 6-20 and 6-21).¹⁵ These were movie palaces in all but one respect, their

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¹⁵ Lamb's job book also lists unrealized international Loew's theaters in Trinidad (1932), Honduras (1932), Jamaica (1934), Santiago, Chile (1934), Amsterdam (1934/1935/1937), Osaka (1935), Shinjuku, Japan (1935), Tokyo (1935), Brisbane (1935), Shanghai (1935), Milan (1936/1937), Ghent (1936), Columbia

elimination of stage facilities. However, they offered international audiences the other principal trappings of the luxurious standard of movie going associated with the type in the United States. Lamb created the chain's distinctive architectural identity: stark geometric exteriors with American-style signage, impressive grand lobbies, a profusion of lavishly appointed foyers and lounges, and large auditoriums redolent with a sense of movement, all carried out in fashionable Art Deco motifs. The Metro theaters did not directly reproduce the firm's work in the United States in the manner of the Empire Leicester Square; rather, they represented a continuation of the Art Deco design lineage exhibited in a handful of its final movie palaces in the United States. Despite their American character, there was an intrinsic foreign, occasionally exotic, quality to their design in terms of massing, materials, and in the application of Art Deco appropriate to their locations in far-flung corners of globe. Subsequent Metro theaters attributed to other architects also employed Lamb's vocabulary, lending the entire far-flung international chain a uniform architectural image.

(1936), Sao Paulo (1937), Cape Town (1939), and Kingston, Jamaica (1939). A number of these Metro theaters were ultimately realized but have been attributed to other architects. This includes the theaters in Santiago, Brisbane, and Sao Paulo. For instance, the Metro Theater (1937) in Brisbane was credited to William Fountain of MGM (Loew's International) and T.R. Hall and L.B. Phillips. Fountain worked as a building surveyor in the Lamb office for more than five years prior to his association with MGM, in which he acted as a designer and supervisor. In the latter capacity, which began in October 1934, he was tasked with working with the Lamb office in Australia and India on the construction of its new theaters. This included Lamb's Metro in Calcutta, which was somewhat similar to the Brisbane Metro. Fountain's association with the Lamb office, the listing of the Brisbane Metro in Lamb's job book and the realized theater's similarity to the Calcutta theater, suggests the firm may have had some hand in shaping the theater's design. Australian coverage of Fountain's death in a plane crash states that he was still a member of the Lamb office. "7 Are Believed Killed in Australian Plane Crash," *New York Times* (21 Feb. 1937): 19, "Narrowing the Search," *Sydney Morning Herald* (22 Feb. 1937): 9, "Stinson Thought to have Crashed into Sea," *Northern Star* [Lismore, NSW] (22 Feb. 1937): 5, "Air Liner Found," *Mercury* [Hobart] (1 Mar. 1937): 9, "Two Survive 8 Days Beside Plane Wreck; 4 Died in Crash; 1 Killed on Way to Get Help," *New York Times* (1 Mar. 1937): 1, and "2 Found Alive, 5 Die in Crash of Big Airliner," *Washington Post* (1 Mar. 1937): 1 and 3. The Brisbane Metro is described and illustrated in Sylvia Yates, "Metro: Theatre of the Stars," *Kino Cinema Quarterly*, no. 73 (Spring 2000): 15-17.

The Metro (1932) in Johannesburg was the first of the new Lamb-designed projects and the city's second theater constructed specifically for talking pictures. It established a high standard for American-style movie-going that would remain locally unsurpassed in many respects.¹⁶ Loew's International's new theater was a prominent component of the city's rapidly emerging metropolitan character during the 1920s and 1930s, which elicited comparisons to a miniature Manhattan for the vast field of skyscrapers that sprouted in the city center. This rapid development represented an astounding transformation for a city founded in only 1886 as a haphazard group of tents erected by gold miners. Johannesburg's remarkable prosperity was fueled by political developments and government policies during the 1920s advantageous to its companies' economic interests. The city's growth was further accelerated by South Africa's abandonment of the international gold standard in 1932, which increased local wealth and population due to the skyrocketing value of the metal and an associated expansion of its mines.

Beginning in about 1930, Johannesburg's remarkable growth precipitated a local cinema-building boom. South Africa, like Britain, experienced its greatest period of large-scale motion picture theater construction later than the United States, beginning with the advent of talkies and lasting through the 1930s. Johannesburg's city center had

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¹⁶ The Metro opened on November 4, 1932 with *The Passionate Plummer* starring Buster Keaton. During its first year or so of operation, the Metro ran continuous performances in the American manner. However, the practice never caught on in South Africa. The theater closed in 1972 and was demolished, still holding its title of the largest cinema constructed in South Africa. See "The Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Theatre Johannesburg," *The South African Architectural Record* 18 (Apr. 1933): 75-80, L. Cumming George, ed., *Architecture in South Africa Volume One* (Cape Town: The Specialty Press of S.A. LTD: 1933), 55-56, Arnold Benjamin, *Lost Johannesburg* (Johannesburg: Macmillan South Africa, 1979), 76-77, Gerhard-Mark van der Waal, *From Mining Camp to Metropolis: Buildings of Johannesburg, 1886-1940* (Melville: Chris van Rensburg Publications, 1986), 189-193, and Clive M. Chipkin, *Johannesburg Style: Architecture and Society, 1880s-1960s* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1993), 97-98. Johannesburg's development between 1920 and 1940 is discussed in Waal, *From Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 165-179.

two principal concentrations of motion picture theaters. Commissioner Street, a major east-west artery, developed a series of large combination theater and commercial buildings. The Metro was in the second area, located north of the shopping district in a low-rise area around Jeppe and Bree streets. The theater occupied a rectangular half-block site on the northeast corner of Bree and Hoek streets that extended north to Plein Street. Lamb designed a theater with three attached shops on Bree Street and four along Plein Street (Figure 6-22).

The Metro was among the most prominent early examples of Art Deco architecture in South Africa, dramatically transforming its immediate surroundings.¹⁷ In February 1931, the Lamb office obtained the Metro commission, signing a contract for a £82,000 theater, and dispatched A.B. Boettcher from New York as its Johannesburg representative to work alongside local supervising architects Cowin, Powers & Ellis. Following Loew's International's (as Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) selection of a site, the customary survey of existing conditions was undertaken and an extensive photographic record was sent to New York. Surviving photographs document the site's immediate surroundings along Bree and Plein streets, which consisted of an assortment of late nineteenth-century, one-to-three-story vernacular commercial buildings, single-family residences, and scattered four-to-six-story, twentieth-century structures on adjacent blocks at the intersection of important streets (Figure 6-23). There were also photographs of Union House (Stucke & Harrison and Emley & Williamson, 1928-29), located at the

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¹⁷ The Metro was included among the most significant early examples of early South African modernism in George, *Architecture in South Africa Volume One*, 33 and 55-56. Lamb's job book records the Metro commission on February 12, 1931 and the contract drawings were signed on December 31, 1931. The cost is listed in South African pounds. The Metro's cost was listed in "Witwatersrand," *South African Builder* (Jan. 1932): 35. South African Architectural Record listed a different amount, £79,600 without ventilation, seating, the organ, decoration and the furnishings. "The Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Theatre Johannesburg," 75. Both prices were listed in South African pounds.

opposite end of the city center from the theater site, which was recognized as an early local example of an Art Deco high-rise, particularly noted for its tower corner treatment (Figure 6-24).¹⁸ During the 1930s, the South African architectural profession, like that of other countries, was divided between proponents of Beaux-Arts classicism, Art Deco, and the emergent International Style. The Lamb office's study of Union House suggests an interest in studying the city's early Art Deco architecture and advancing it as an appropriate image for the city, a sentiment it would perpetuate in all the subsequent Metro theaters.

Externally, the Metro balanced a response to local conditions with the need to establish a distinctive architectural identity for the nascent international chain. In the manner of an American movie palace, the exterior was designed to both fit comfortably into its surroundings and to stand apart in order to draw patronage. Lamb likely omitted a large commercial block to conform to the then low-rise character of the immediate area; he further reduced the building's scale by breaking down the auditorium's bulk through the use of setbacks. The resulting form was a monumental pylon rising above the corner entry that extended back to the auditorium block along Hoek Street, with an attached two-story wing containing ground floor storefronts constituting the remainder of the Bree Street frontage (Figure 6-25). This was a common movie palace composition, most recently employed by Lamb in the Loew's Pitkin (1929) in Brooklyn and the Loew's Triboro (1931) in Astoria, Queens.

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¹⁸ On the Union House as an early example of modern architecture in Johannesburg, see George, *Architecture in South Africa Volume One*, 57. South Africa's architecture during the 1930s is discussed in Mary Martin, "Art Deco Architecture in South Africa," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 20 (1994): 8-37.

In contrast to the Metro's deferential scale, the exterior design was a stark, largely unadorned geometric mass, representing an especially powerful application of the functional façade treatment seen in contemporary American movie palaces, which was heightened in effect here by the corner lot (Figure 6-26). The Hoek Street elevation, corresponding to the side of the auditorium, imbued a sense of pulsating movement through a series of bays, defined by stylized pilasters and modernized Greek ornamentation, that grew successively taller from Plein to Bree streets creating a stepped roofline that culminated at the American-style signage mounted above the corner entry (Figure 6-27). There was also a hint of exoticism, if only loosely appropriate to the theater's location, in the façade's subtle resemblance to an Art Deco Egyptian temple, with its thick-appearing walls, limited window openings, and a concrete exterior finish that resembled large stone blocks, an illusion created through the application of faux joints. This culminated in the pylon above the corner entrance, which featured pilasters topped with abstracted papyrus-like capitols. The Metro's Egyptian influence was even clearer within the context of an early auditorium decorative scheme featuring large murals depicting scenes along the Nile. Lamb's subsequent Metro theaters, along with those designed by other architects, codified an exterior treatment that combined the basic elements seen in Johannesburg with a greater degree of verticality to resemble low-rise American skyscrapers (Figure 6-28).

The Metro garnered attention from the South African architectural trade press for offering a "distinctly American" movie-going experience on the basis of its "democratic" plan, wherein moviegoers, regardless of social-economic class, intermingled (all areas of

the theater were accessible to patrons seated in every part of the auditorium).¹⁹ This American practice befitted a “democratic age,” resulting in “patrons of the cheaper seats mingling with those in the stalls and the wearers of dress suits or khaki slacks are on the same footing in this building.”²⁰ The Metro’s recognition as a democratic institution mirrored that of the early American movie palaces, but it similarly overlooked the fact that movie palaces were institutions of racial inequality, particularly in South Africa, which had an official policy of segregation that was a precursor to apartheid.

In the Metro, Johannesburg audiences encountered a succession of American-style public spaces with “luxurious” décor and furnishings executed by New York firms that were unprecedented in local motion picture theaters, and which by all accounts caused a sensation.²¹ The principal public space was a double-height, elliptical grand foyer with a curving grand staircase, which was sparingly ornamented, primarily relying on the shape of the room and the richness of its materials to make an impression (Figure 6-29). In the American manner, special attention was given to smaller domestic-like spaces, principally the interconnected mezzanine promenade, mezzanine lounge, and women and men’s lounges, which were filled with objets d’art and furnishings (Figures 6-30, 6-31, and 6-32). The mezzanine lounge resembled the living room of a large house, again decorated with restraint to emphasize the profusion of Art Deco couches, chairs, sofa tables, lamps, geometric carpeting, and window hangings. Like the grand foyer, the sophisticated, semi-circular ladies cosmetic room’s character stemmed from its shape and fittings rather than ornament, culminating in a series of elaborate dressing tables and

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¹⁹ Noted in “The Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Theatre Johannesburg,” 76.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The Metro also had an air conditioning system built by the Carrier Company of New York.

circular mirrors illuminated by concealed lighting. The men's smoking room and the adjacent retiring room were equally impressive, the latter featuring striking orange-and-black tiled walls while the former had framed sporting prints and wall paper with undulating patterns that picked up on the theater's theme of movement.

The auditorium was Art Deco in style, like many of Lamb's contemporary projects in the United States, but it made a definitive break from historicism, likely in response to the city's rapidly modernizing cityscape (Figures 6-33 and 6-34). Lamb's decorative scheme shaped by acoustical considerations for talking pictures and carried out in russet, orange, amber, and muted blue paint. The low-rise exterior belied the vast size of the auditorium, which at 2,570 seats, was the largest cinema in South Africa throughout its existence.²² Alongside the façade, the auditorium's decorative treatment proved the most significant element in defining subsequent Metros, serving here as a culmination of the theater's theme of movement. The latter was seen in the series of vertical elements that rose up the organ screens to pulsate outward into the auditorium from above the proscenium in sweeping ripples. In contrast, the sidewall treatments were simple, defined by a series of bays that increased in height towards the rear of the auditorium and were filled with geometric fabric panels meant for sound absorption. The auditorium was seen to its best effect when the indirect lighting, wall brackets along the sidewalls, and the chandeliers hanging in front of the organ screens were suddenly turned off, plunging the space into total darkness just before the booming Wurlitzer organ rose up out of the stage to herald the imminent arrival of the latest MGM film.²³

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²² This capacity was divided into 1,536 seats in the orchestra and 1,034 in the balcony.

²³ Chipkin, *Johannesburg Style*, 98.

John Eberson's Australian Atmospheric Movie Palaces

While Lamb received far-flung international theater commissions, Eberson was the single most influential American movie palace architect abroad. His status as such arose, not unexpectedly, from his development of the atmospheric movie palace, the widespread proliferation of which was a particularly striking manifestation of the type's dominance in the realm of international cinema design. During the 1920s and 1930s, nearly 300 atmospheric motion picture theaters appeared in cities across Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, Latin America, and New Zealand, in addition to the United States and Canada. These were primarily attributed to local architects and varied widely both in terms their application of the motifs and in the effectiveness of the outdoor illusion. Returning to Johannesburg, the Colosseum Theater (1933) on Commissioner Street was a particularly sophisticated example, designed by South African architect P. Rogers Cooke, who emerged as the country's leading specialist in atmospheric movie palace design; the interior architect-artist was William Timlin.²⁴ Externally, it was a large Art Deco office block with Egyptian sculpture and decoration in the form of a pharaoh and his concubine, cobras, and falcons. While the grand foyer and lounges continued the exterior's Egyptian Art Deco theme, the 2,279-seat auditorium was fully atmospheric, with the constellations of the southern hemisphere and drifting clouds overhead; sidewalls that evoked a fairytale landscape of romanticized rustic medieval buildings lit from within; organ screens decorated with dragons; and a proscenium arch that resembled a roughly-hewn stone bridge (Figure 6-35).

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²⁴ The Colosseum Theater was built for African Consolidated Theaters and opened on October 4, 1933. It was demolished in 1985. See L. Cumming George, *Architecture in South Africa Volume Two* (Cape Town: Specialty Press of S.A., LTD, 1934), 41-42; van der Waal, *From Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 193, Chipkin, *Johannesburg Style*, 99-101; and Martin, "Art Deco Architecture in South Africa," 27-37.

The Eberson office also undertook a handful of atmospheric movie palace commissions for international exhibitors.²⁵ These projects included its final example, the Grand Rex (1932) on Boulevard Poissonnière in Paris, in association with French architect Auguste Bluysen, for independent exhibitor Jacques Haik. Bluysen designed the modernistic exterior and likely the public spaces outside the auditorium. Eberson, represented in Paris by his chief draftsman Alexandre Mercil, designed the 3,300-seat auditorium (Figure 6-36). The firm produced a unique, fully-atmospheric design that drew inspiration from contemporary French culture, immersing Parisian moviegoers in an exotic French colonial landscape under the requisite twinkling stars. Sidewalls resembled a Moroccan village with minarets as well as a profusion of arches and balconies, while the proscenium arch was a large rainbow flanked by tall cypresses, palm trees, and other exotic vegetation.

Eberson was also involved in unrealized foreign movie palace commissions, such a 1928 project for which he traveled to London to collaborate with a group of English architects on atmospheric theaters planned for that city and the provinces.²⁶ Eberson's largest concentration of movie palaces outside the United States was in Australia, which were commissioned by Union Theaters, the country's largest film company with its

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²⁵ The firm also completed a number of large motion picture theaters in Latin America beginning in the late 1930s, maintaining a Mexico City office for a time to handle its work in the region, which also included non-theatrical projects. Its projects in the region included the Orfeon (1938) and El Roble (1950) theaters in Mexico City, which each seated over 4,000 patrons, and the Junin (1950) in Caracas, Venezuela. The Grand Rex in Paris opened on December 8, 1932 with *The Three Musketeers*. It was equipped for live performances and had a fifty-piece orchestra. Although additional screens have been added, the original auditorium is intact and is presently the largest motion picture theater auditorium in Europe. Named a historic monument by the French Ministry of Culture, it is presently used for films, live shows, concerts, and its famous annual Water Magic shows of dancing fountains. Francis Lacloche, *Architectures de cinémas* (Paris: Éditions du Moniteur, 1981), 97-99.

²⁶ This project is noted in "Eberson to Collaborate with English Architects," *Motion Picture News* (2 June 1928): 1836. Eberson sailed from New York for London on the *Leviathan* on May 26, 1928. He is not known to be associated with any of the realized British atmospheric theaters.

production arm Australasian Films. However, his role was minimized locally in favor of associated native architects, apparently out of a simmering nationalist sentiment within the Australian motion picture industry in the face of increasing American dominance. This issue was particularly strong in Australia; the country was the largest user of Hollywood films by 1926, importing twice the amount of Britain, and the American influence on cinema design was more pronounced there than in any other country outside North America.²⁷

Australian motion picture exhibition closely mirrored that of the United States from the outset. Beginning a year after the Lumière brothers' 1895 debut of the Cinématographe in Paris, films were being exhibited at a vaudeville theater in Melbourne and in a variety of venues in Sydney. The country's first purpose-built motion picture theater, the Kings in Sydney, opened in 1910. By 1924, the influence of the movie palace had arrived with the opening of three large-capacity "picture palaces" within the span of a few months: the Winter Garden (Ballantyne & Hare) in Brisbane, the Capitol (Walter Burley Griffin) in Melbourne, and the Prince Edward (Robertson & Marks) in Sydney (Figure 6-37). The influence of the movie palace stemmed not only from admiration of the building type and the amenities it offered, but also through pressure from American film distributors who desired them as suitable venues for their products that would bring in greater revenue through their large size.

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²⁷ The American dominance over Australian film exhibition is noted in Ross Thorne, *Picture Palace Architecture in Australia* (South Melbourne: Sun Books, 1976), 4-5 and 21-26; David Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies: A History of British Cinemas and their Audiences* (London: Architectural Press, 1981), 63-65; and Ross Thorne, *Cinemas of Australia via USA* (Sydney: Architecture Department of Sydney University, 1981), 59 and 68. On the formative years of Australian motion picture exhibition, see Thorne, *Picture Palace Architecture in Australia*, 6-26; and Simon Brand, *Picture Palaces and Flea-Pits: Eighty Years of Australians at the Pictures* (Sydney: Dreamweaver Books, 1983), 20-37.

Stuart F. Doyle (1887-1945), the general manager of Union Theaters, went about importing movie palaces in the most direct manner among the leading Australian-owned chains, becoming the only such exhibitor to retain a leading American specialist architect. Doyle was a keen observer of the international motion picture exhibition industry, having undertaken a series of lengthy study trips abroad during the 1920s to familiarize himself with the latest developments in the field.²⁸ In 1927, he traveled to the United States with well-known Australian theater architect Henry White to study the newest examples of the type in connection with plans to construct American-style movie palaces in each of Australia's mainland state capitals. The trip was at least partially made at the behest of Eberson, who invited Doyle to inspect his atmospheric movie palaces. Doyle was already somewhat familiar with Eberson's atmospheric theaters from coverage in *Motion Picture News*, but he was especially impressed upon inspecting these houses in person, particularly the Riviera (1927) in Omaha (Figure 6-38). He felt that introducing this innovation in movie palace design would give Union Theaters an edge over its principal rival, Hoyts, with whom it was engaged in a theater building war. Doyle

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²⁸ In 1922, Doyle traveled extensively in England, continental Europe and the United States, becoming convinced of the superiority of American movie palaces over what he encountered elsewhere. Details of Doyle's 1922 trip abroad are found in "Moving Pictures: Artist Advancement - Mr. Stuart Doyle's Views," *Register* [Adelaide] (19 June 1922): 8, and "His Majesty's Theater," *Mercury* [Hobart] (14 Mar. 1923): 8. Doyle's invitation to the United States by Eberson is noted in "Sydney's Capitol: A Beautiful Theatre-Prospects for Adelaide," *Register* [Adelaide] (9 June 1928): 10. *Motion Picture News*' role in Eberson's Union Theaters commissions is noted in "Eberson to Design Australia Theatres as Result of Buyers Guide," *Motion Picture News* (8 Apr. 1927): 1253. His return and the findings of his study tour were reported extensively in Australian newspapers, beyond even the major cities. Eberson and White's completion of four to five plans was noted in the first article, "3 New Theatres for Sydney-Newest Design-American Lessons," *Evening News* [Sydney] (2 June 1927): 13. However, subsequent reporting mentioned White but omitted Eberson, simply stating that plans had been made for atmospheric theaters, the implication being that White alone designed these plans while in the United States. See, for example "American Theatres" Mr. Stuart Doyle's Impressions," *Brisbane Courier* (2 June 1927): 25; "Atmospheric Film Theatre," *Argus* [Melbourne] (3 June 1927): 15; and "New Theatres-Mr. Stuart Doyle's Plan-Investigations in America," *Sydney Morning Herald* (3 June 1927): 15. Henry White's tenure in the Eberson office is noted in "Casual Commercial Captains-Sydney Business Men's Methods Trenchantly Criticized-Mr. H.E. White's Plea for American Efficiency," *Sunday Times* [Sydney] (10 July 1927): 16.

commissioned Eberson to immediately produce plans for four or five movie palaces “equal or better than anything in the United States” in collaboration with White. The latter’s initial role was to advise the firm on Australian building practices, for which he spent several weeks in the Eberson offices in Chicago and New York working alongside various department heads.

Doyle’s American trip, his subsequent descriptive accounts of atmospheric theaters, and Union Theaters’ evolving plans (between 1927 and 1929) for a series of movie palaces in “a style hitherto unknown to Australia” attracted nationwide interest.²⁹ This building program would be the long-delayed realization of Doyle’s ambition, announced in 1921, to establish ‘Million Dollar Theaters’ in each of the mainland capital cities. The realization of this scheme strained Union Theaters’ finances to their limit, but with the Australian economy booming in the 1920s, Doyle was confident that the investment would be returned in the first five years of their operation. Union Theaters ultimately built four movie palaces, which Eberson designed in association with local architects: the Capitol (1928) and State (1929) in Sydney with Henry E. White, and the Ambassadors (1928) in Perth and State (1929) in Melbourne with Bohringer, Taylor & Johnson. With the exception of the State in Sydney, they were all atmospheric theaters.

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²⁹ Doyle’s original 1921 plan for the ‘Million Dollar Theaters’ is noted in Thorne, *Picture Palace Architecture in Australia*, 17-18, and Terry O’Brien, *The Greater Union Story: 1910-1985* (Sydney: Greater Union Pty Limited, 1985), 38 and 54-55. They had a planned cost of £200,000 apiece and a seating capacity of 3,000 to 4,000. The renewed plans were announced in June 1927, immediately upon Doyle’s return from the United States. This was then envisioned to include two atmospheric theaters in Sydney and one in Melbourne. The second Sydney atmospheric likely evolved into the State Theater. See “New Theatres-Mr. Stuart Doyle’s Plan-Investigations in America,” 15; “Atmospheric Film Theatre,” *Argus* (3 June 1927): 15; and “American Theatres: Mr. Stuart Doyle’s Impressions,” 25. By August 1927, these plans had evolved to include the Capitol and State theaters in Sydney in addition to Capitols in Adelaide, Perth, and Melbourne (the latter on the Bourke Street site of the Gaiety and Bijou theaters). “Venetian Palace at Haymarket: Huge Movie Theatre,” *Evening News* [Sydney] (2 Aug. 1927): 9, and “New Picture Theatres,” *Register* [Adelaide] (3 Aug. 1927): 13. The financial strain of these projects on Union Theaters and their role its collapse was noted in Brand, *Picture Palaces and Flea Pits*, 87-88, and O’Brien, *The Greater Union Story*, 64.

Eberson also designed atmospherics for Adelaide and Brisbane, but the onset of the Depression halted these plans.³⁰ Doyle's initial movie palaces were unable to recoup their costs, which ultimately led to the liquidation of Union Theaters.

Eberson's contributions to Union Theaters' movie palaces remain misunderstood, having been downplayed by Union Theaters and the associated Australian architects.³¹

His office designed at least the interiors of the four theaters in the United States, while Henry White or Bohringer, Taylor & Johnson alternately adapted the plans to local

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³⁰ The State Theater in Adelaide, which was first announced in August 1927, as an atmospheric theater similar to the Capitol in Sydney. By March 1929, these plans had evolved into a £550,000 replica of the State in Melbourne to be built on the enlarged site of West's Olympia on Hindley Street. The final iteration of the project, which was announced in August 1929, was a £250,000 hybrid of the State theaters in Sydney and Melbourne with a large Gothic entry hall, "a period room" leading to the orchestra, a balcony promenade in the Spanish style, and a Florentine garden-inspired atmospheric auditorium. In July 1928, Union Theaters announced plans to build a £280,000 atmospheric movie palace in Brisbane that would be an "exact replica" of Eberson's Capitol in Sydney. Doyle considered several sites, including that of the Stand Theater site at the corner of Queen and Albert streets. On the State Theater in Adelaide, see "New Picture Theatres," 13; "Union Theatres: A Progressive Policy," *Advertiser* [Adelaide] (3 Apr. 1928): 11; "Sydney's Capitol: A Beautiful Theatre—Prospects for Adelaide," 10; "Union Theatres: Purchase of Adelaide Property," *Sydney Morning Herald* (5 Jan. 1929): 10; "New Union Theatre will house its patrons in luxury like this," *News* [Adelaide] (1 Mar. 1929): 7; "State Theatre for Adelaide on Site of West's Pictures," *Advertiser* [Adelaide] (2 Mar. 1929): 15; "Adelaide's New Half-A-Million Picture Theatre," *Register-News* [Adelaide] (7 March 1929): 23; "State Theatre for Adelaide," *News* [Adelaide] (2 Aug. 1929): 2; "Too Cost £250,00: New State Theatre," *Mail* [Adelaide] (3 Aug. 1929): 3; and "State Theatre for Adelaide: Project now Abandoned," *Barrier Miner* [Broken Hill, NSW] (24 Aug. 1929): 8. Eberson's involvement in the Adelaide theater was noted in "Eberson & Eberson," *Architectural Record* (Oct. 1930): 136. The project was suspended in late August 1929 due to an increased Federal tax on theater receipts. It was noted that plans for the theater were then complete. On the Brisbane theater, see "New Theatre for Brisbane," *Mourning Bulletin* [Rockhampton, QLD] (24 July 1928): 7, and "Building Real Estate," *Brisbane Courier* (21 Aug. 1928): 21. The *Brisbane Courier* also ran illustrations of the Capitol in Sydney to give local audiences an idea of what to expect from their planned replica theater. "Plan of a section of the interior," *Brisbane Courier* (25 July 1928): 16 and "A portion of the seating accommodation," *Brisbane Courier* (27 July 1928): 16. Both the Adelaide and Brisbane projects were finally abandoned in December 1929 following Union Theaters entry into a temporary "mutual working agreement" with rival Hoyts Theaters as they were planned to compete with the latter's Regent theaters in each city. "Mutual Plan-Hoyts and Union Theatres-Local Talkies-Building Schemes Shelved," *Evening News* [Sydney] (11 Dec. 1929): 1. Costs in this section are in Australian pounds.

³¹ This is seen in recent Australian architectural publications. The Capitol in Sydney is often credited solely to Henry E. White. In Melbourne, Bohringer, Taylor & Johnson are most often solely credited with the State's design. Eberson more consistently receives credit for the State in Sydney, although Henry White is typically listed as the primary architect. See, for instance, Richard Apperly, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1998), 176 and 193; Graham Jahn, *Sydney Architecture* (Sydney: Watermark Press, 1997), 67 and 119; and Philip Goad, *Melbourne Architecture* (Sydney: Watermark Press, 1999), 125.

conditions as required and perhaps contributed to their exterior designs. Eberson's leading role was acknowledged in Australia immediately following Doyle's return from his American trip in reports that he had produced the aforementioned plans for four or five movie palaces. The subsequent coverage of individual theaters frequently acknowledged Eberson's popularization of atmospheric theaters in the United States and his meetings with Doyle, but was vague and inconsistent regarding his role in the specific project, while overstating the contributions of Henry White or Bohringer, Taylor & Johnson. Furthermore, Henry White and Bohringer, Taylor & Johnson omitted Eberson's name on the plans circulated in Australia, although his firm had supplied them with finished drawings. In contrast, the American film exhibition trade press credited Eberson with the Union Theater commissions, constituting its rare coverage of the country's theater development.³² In 1928, *Motion Picture News* noted Eberson had designed the Capitol in Sydney and had been retained to design three additional theaters, subsequently noting planned houses in Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney.

The ambiguity surrounding Eberson's contributions may have at least partially stemmed from Union Theaters' efforts to emphasize its Australian-ness. Despite being fully Australian-owned and producing its own movies through Australasian Films, Union Theaters offered a distinctly American movie going experience, having secured contracts in the early 1920s with many Hollywood companies (including Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Paramount, and Universal) to exhibit their films in Australia. Union Theaters was also a

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³² "Australian Theatre War On," *Motion Picture News* (1 Apr. 1927): 1173; "Eberson to Design Australia Theatres as Result of Buyers Guide," 1253; "Formal Design for Theatre in Sydney, Australia," *Motion Picture News* (1 July 1927): 2503; "Eberson Engaged to Design 3 More for Australasian," *Motion Picture News* (5 May 1928): 1466; "Talkies for Australia: Sound Installations and Construction of Atmospheric Theatres Occupy Centre of Stage," *Motion Picture News* (27 Oct. 1928): 1272; "Combination Shopping Center and Theatre Building Project," *Motion Picture News* (6 July 1929): 94-95; and "The State, Sydney, is Newest House Built by Union Theatres," *Motion Picture News* (5 Oct. 1929): 1221-1223.

leader in the development of American-influenced picture palaces, being involved in the construction of both the Winter Garden and Prince Edward theaters. During the second half of the 1920s, Australian exhibitors feared that the Hollywood companies would follow through with their expressed desires to build their own theaters in the country, which would lead to the loss of their contracts to exhibit popular American films. Union Theaters responded by developing movie palaces to ensure its competitiveness if these plans came to pass and by emphasizing its status as an Australian-owned company. The latter position was seen in the publicity surrounding its theater openings, wherein Australian workmanship and materials were consistently highlighted. In this environment, it is not surprising that the contributions of local associated architects were stressed over those of an American architect.

Eberson's three Australian atmospheric movie palaces were literal translations of his recent American work. The designs were facilitated by the use of Eberson's in-house decorative firm, Michel Angelo Studios, and by exporting statuary and numbered architectural elements from the United States for careful reassembly and replication in Australia. This level of control ensured that all three theaters would exhibit a number of the firm's signature touches, which distinguished its work from the many international imitators. They were also all variations of a single basic design that was developed to be adapted for multiple Australian movie palaces.

The Capitol (1928) in Sydney was the first of Union Theaters' new movie palaces, introducing Australian moviegoers to atmospheric design and providing the

model for the chain's two such subsequent theaters.³³ It was particularly novel among Eberson's movie palace commissions for being built within the walls of an existing building. Union Theaters had acquired the long-term lease of the Hippodrome (R.H. Brodrick, 1913-16) at Hay, Parker, and Campbell streets in the city's Haymarket district, which had been built by the Sydney City Council for the Wirth Bros. circus incorporating significant parts of the New Belmore Markets (George McRae, 1892-93) previously located on the site. In May 1927, Henry White submitted plans to the city council for the complete removal and reconstruction of the Hippodrome's interior.³⁴ These plans detailed only structural alterations for a 2,973-seat single balcony theater to replace the pre-existing amphitheater, which were later supplemented by Eberson's interior scheme, bringing the total cost to £180,000. The Capitol's opening was the culmination of nearly a year's worth of publicity in the Australian press about atmospheric theaters. These efforts paid off handsomely, as 23,000 people attended the theater in its first two days. Union Theaters attempted to capitalize on the excitement by promising the erection of "Capitol" theaters in other Australian cities.

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³³ The Capitol opened on April 7, 1928 with a program that included the Capitol Orchestra, Fred School at the Wurlitzer Organ, and the feature film *His Lady* starring John Barrymore and Dolores Costello. It remained a movie palace until 1972, when it became the home of musicals and rock concerts. In 1994-95, it was restored and expanded to become a venue for live theater. "Venetian Palace at Haymarket: Huge Movie Theatre-Features of Capitol," *Evening News* [Sydney] (2 Aug. 1927): 9; "The Capitol: Dedication of Theatre," *Sydney Morning Herald* (13 Aug. 1927): 16; "Theatre Statuary: Public Exhibition," *Sydney Morning Herald* (12 Sep. 1927): 15; "Movie Star Books First Capitol Seats: Colleen Moore to Visit Sydney," *Evening News* [Sydney] (20 Sep. 1927): 9; "Statuary Arrives," *Sydney Morning Herald* (14 Oct. 1927): 16; "The Sky's the Limit," *Sunday Times* [Sydney] (4 Dec. 1927): 19; "Beautiful Statuary for Sydney's New Capitol Theatre," *Sunday Times* [Sydney] (19 Feb. 1928): 10; "Costly Furnishings," *Sunday Times* (18 Mar. 1928): 36; "Capitol's Triumph: Shadowland's Fairyland," *Sunday Times* [Sydney] (8 Apr. 1928): 14; "Gala Night: Capitol Opening," *Evening News* [Sydney] (9 Apr. 1928): 6; "Sydney Capitol: Magnificent Picture Theatre," *Brisbane Courier* (9 Apr. 1928): 8; "The Capitol: Richly Ornamented Theatre-Opening Ceremony," *Sydney Morning Herald* (9 Apr. 1928): 4; "To-Day's Diary," *Evening News* [Sydney] (11 Apr. 1928): 8; Brand, *Picture Palaces and Flea Pits*, 88-97; Thorne, *Cinemas of Australia via USA*, 167-173; O'Brien, *The Greater Union Story*, 55-7; and Ross Thorne, *The Capitol Theatre: A Case for Retention* (Sydney: University of Sydney, Department of Architecture, 1985): 1-15.

³⁴ These alterations included raising the roof, reducing the stage by half its depth, inserting a single balcony in place of two-tier amphitheater seating, and re-raking the orchestra floor.

The Ambassadors (1928) in Perth was the first result of these efforts, promoted as an exact replica of the Capitol and planned to share the same name, although it was actually the least similar among Union Theaters' three atmospheric movie palaces.³⁵ This theater was also the smallest of Union Theaters' Ebersson-designed atmospheric houses in terms of seating capacity, with 1,993 seats, but had the most impressive public spaces. Planning began in 1926, when Sir Thomas Coombe, a partner and local managing director of Union Theaters, announced plans for "the Regent" theater on Hay Street in the city's central shopping district. Ebersson was already attached to the project at this early date, which long preceded Doyle's trip to the United States. Charles Bohringer of Bohringer, Taylor & Johnson ultimately acted as local architect for the £250,000 theater.

Melbourne's State Theater (1929) was Union Theaters' final realized atmospheric movie palace and was also then the largest theater in the Southern Hemisphere, with

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³⁵ The Ambassadors Theater opened on September 28, 1928 with a program that included Les Waldron at the Wurlitzer organ, Bert Howell and his orchestra, and the feature film *Glorious Betsy* starring Dolores Costello. It was later taken over by Hoyts and extensively remodeled, including the façade and the removal of auditorium statuary, foliage, and birds. The Ambassadors closed in February 1972 and was demolished. "New Perth Theatre," *Sunday Times* [Perth] (26 Sep. 1926): 13; "What is an Atmospheric Theatre: The New Hay Street Entertainment House and How it Will Appear from Within," *Mirror* [Perth] (2 July 1927): 9; "New Atmospheric Theatre for Perth," *Sunday Times* [Perth] (3 July 1927): 3; "New City Theatre Being Built on Hay Street," *Sunday Times* [Perth] (3 July 1927): 15; "Trend in Theatre Design: Ambassadors' Features," *Daily News* [Perth] (10 Dec. 1927): 5; "Footlights Gossip," *West Australian* [Perth] (24 Dec. 1927): 7; "Description of the Ambassadors Atmospheric Theatre," *Sunday Times* [Perth] (8 Jan. 1928): 8; "Capitol Theatre," *Sunday Times* [Perth] (15 Jan. 1928): 8; "Wonderful Statuary: Display at Ambassadors," *Daily News* [Perth] (4 Apr. 1928): 6; "Scientific Building: Modern Construction-Mr. Bohringer in Perth," *Daily News* [Perth] (28 Sep. 1928): 1; "Art at Ambassadors," *Daily News* [Perth] (28 Sep. 1928): 20; "Atmosphere of Enchantment: Technicians Recreate Old-World," *Daily News* [Perth] (28 Sep. 1928): 27; "Illusion Perfect," *Daily News* [Perth] (28 Sep. 1928): 20; "Making the Heavens: Putting Twinkle in Stars," *Daily News* [Perth] (28 Sep. 1928): 21; "The Ambassadors," *Daily News* [Perth] (28 Sep. 1928): 28; "Theatre Evolution: Mr. Bohringer's Views," *Daily News* [Perth] (28 Sep. 1928): 18; Thorne, *Cinemas of Australia via USA*, 74-76; Max D. Bell, and *Perth: A Cinema History* (Sussex: The Book Guild Limited, 1986), 68-72. In the 1926 scheme, Ebersson was to work alongside local architect Thomas Anthoness. The descriptions of the project suggest that it was not an atmospheric theater.

3,371 seats.³⁶ The State evolved from an earlier scheme for an even larger 4,500-seat theater planned for a site on Bourke Street, the nexus of the shopping district, upon property owned by Benjamin and John Fuller. As realized, the State occupied an especially prominent location on the northwest corner of Flinders and Russell streets: the enlarged former site of the disused *Morning Post* building, which was visible to the thousands of commuters exiting the nearby Flinders Street Station and to tram traffic. Bohringer, Taylor & Johnson again acted as local architects for the theater, which cost £500,000.

Eberson's three atmospheric theaters had variations of the same plan, wherein the proscenium was parallel to the façade with public spaces in between (Figures 6-39 and 6-40). In the Capitol and State, the entire theater was contained within the auditorium block while the public spaces were tucked beneath the underside of the balcony. The Eberson office excelled at this type of compact planning, devoting maximum space to the auditorium while incorporating modestly-scaled but commodious public spaces.

Although the Ambassadors was the smallest in terms of capacity, it had a deeper lot

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³⁶ The State Theater opened on February 23, 1929 with two films, *The Fleet's In* starring Clara Bow and *The Cameraman* starring Buster Keaton. In 1962, the State closed and its auditorium was extensively reconstructed as two cinemas in a sympathetic manner that preserved elements of the original design. It remains in this condition in its currently use for live performances. "New Theatres: Sydney Company's Project," *Brisbane Courier* (4 August 1927): 16; "New Theatres: Mr. Bohringer Returns," *Daily News* [Perth] (14 June 1928): 9; "State Theatre: Flinders Street Structure," *Examiner* [Launceston, Tas.] (21 Sep. 1928): 11; "New Theatre for Melbourne: Mr. Stuart Doyle Active in America," *Sunday Times* [Perth] (30 Sep. 1928): 2; "Largest Australian Theatre," *Canberra Times* (5 Oct. 1928): 6; "Theatre to Cost £500,000: Ornate Flinders Street Structure," *Argus* [Melbourne] (6 November 1928): 9; "£500,000 Building: Melbourne's New Theatre," *Daily News* [Perth] (23 Nov. 1928): 10; "Theatre for £500,000 for Melbourne," *Sunday Times* [Sydney] (23 Dec. 1928): 11; "New State Theatre," *Argus* [Melbourne] (8 Jan. 1929): 10; "New State Theatre: Remarkable Feat in Construction," *Portland Guardian* [Vic.] (21 Jan. 1929): 2; "Motion Picture Progress: The Atmospheric Theatre," *Canberra Times* (11 Jan. 1929): 6; "Victoria's New State Theatre," *Border Watch* [Mount Gambier, SA] (26 Feb. 1929): 6; Brand, *Picture Palaces and Flea Pits*, 97; O'Brien, *The Greater Union Story: 1910-1985*, 57-59; and Thorne, *Cinemas of Australia via USA*, 328-39.

relative to its auditorium than the other two atmospherics, which permitted it to extend beyond the confines of the auditorium block to allow for larger public spaces.

Union Theatres' Australian atmospherics did not reproduce the facades of Eberson's prior theaters, but the two movie palaces built from the ground up reflected the spirit of his American work, successfully imbuing an element of escapism that hinted at what was to be seen in the interior. The Capitol's conversion from the Hippodrome involved only relatively minor exterior alterations, but these did include the infill of some of the brick arches and bays with rough-hewn plaster that recalled Eberson's familiar rustic wall treatment (Figure 6-41). In Perth, the Ambassadors exhibited a number of identifiable Eberson façade elements, although their impact was lessened by the theater's long mid-block frontage that stretched the entire width of the auditorium (Figure 6-42). The Omaha Riviera, which so impressed Doyle on his American study tour, was the likely source of the succession of engaged, spiral Corinthian columns that divided the two-story façade, with its high parapet, into bays and framed the two sets of paired arched windows. In Melbourne, the State's exterior recalled that of the Omaha Riviera in its overall form and exoticism (Figure 6-43). The building's massing was asymmetrical, culminating in a clock tower at the corner of Flinders and Russell streets with a copper dome. Its exterior was "Saracenic," exhibiting a minaret copied from an Ottoman mosque in Cairo on the Flinders Street façade, which was complemented by a profusion of smaller minarets, domes, balconettes, and the engaged columns topped by griffins seen in Omaha.

The Eberson office also avoided wholesale reproduction of its earlier American work in the interiors, but there were certain similarities to the Omaha Riviera in the

decorative details of the Capitol and State. In both theaters, the principal public spaces consisted of a two-story, combined entrance vestibule and foyer (Figure 6-44). They were nearly identical, taking the form of “Florentine courtyards” that, like the Riviera, immediately introduced moviegoers to atmospheric motifs with a domed blue ceiling. Both spaces had rustic decorative schemes redolent of Eberson’s signature elements: roughly textured stucco-like walls, spiral columns, tiled floors, polychromatic paintwork, and banners (Figure 6-45).

The Ambassadors’ generous footprint permitted a complex series of larger, interconnected public spaces, which were carried out in elaborate Venetian motifs that endeavored to capture “the rich spirit of the Italian Renaissance”(Figures 6-46 and 6-47).³⁷ These unique spaces provided increasing glimpses of an atmospheric ceiling as one proceeded up the grand staircase past a mezzanine landing to a large balcony foyer. In the course of ascension, the staircase twice passed below a copy of the Rialto Bridge, which was visible upon first entering the building. The balcony foyer was an atmospheric Italian courtyard encircled with a low wall featuring a variety of niches, grottoes, and a fountain (Figure 6-48). Similarly to an atmospheric auditorium, the foyer was filled with statuary, stuffed birds, cypresses, vines, and other foliage beneath a domed ceiling made to appear as the summer sky.

Eberson developed a single auditorium design for Union Theaters, which was modified only slightly for each of the three theaters despite their variance in size from 1,993 seats in Perth to 3,371 in Melbourne. This scheme was variously conceived of as a Florentine garden or courtyard that drew upon a number of disparate Italian elements

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³⁷ On the Ambassadors’ interior, see “Illusion Perfect,” 20.

(Figures 6-49 and 6-50). Similar to the other major interior spaces, it was redolent of familiar Eberson components. The primary inspiration appears to have been the Grand Riviera (1925) in Detroit, which was among the cities that Doyle visited in 1927.³⁸ Eberson employed his standard asymmetrical sidewall configuration: one sidewall had a Florentine garden vignette with a round temple seen in the Houston Majestic and the Grand Riviera, while the other had a Venetian palace façade with a “flirtation” balcony modeled after the Doge’s Palace that again recalled both earlier theaters (Figures 6-51 and 6-52). These vignettes were replete with copies of famous museum pieces of well-known subject matter, birds, cypress trees, orange trees, vines, and other decorative foliage. These elements were reversed with minor differences between the Capitol and State, while the Ambassadors was a down-scaled version of the former. The proscenium represented a Venetian palace façade topped with a red tile roof and a series of niches containing backlit peacocks. A large trellis with hanging artificial vines spanned the ceiling above the rear of the balcony.³⁹

Rapp & Rapp: Paramount-Publix’s International Movie Palace Style

In contrast to Eberson Australian atmospherics and Lamb’s international Loew’s theaters, Rapp & Rapp’s contribution to foreign movie palace development lay in the influence its American work yielded over its counterparts abroad rather than its own commissions. The firm was attached to a number of commissions for theaters outside the United States; however, only one such project was ultimately realized. This was the

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³⁸ Doyle visited Chicago, Detroit, and New York in addition to Omaha and other cities. In Chicago, Doyle visited the Eberson-designed Capitol Theater (1925) and subsequently purchased copies of its artwork. “Eberson to Design Australia Theatres as Result of Buyers Guide,” 1253.

³⁹ Eberson localized the usual sky effects in each theater, configuring the stars to appear as they would on opening night.

Orpheum Theater (1912) in Fort William, Ontario, commissioned by John C. Murray and another of the firm's projects operated by the Allardt Bros. vaudeville circuit of the Midwest and Canada (Figure 6-53).⁴⁰ The Orpheum was similar in character to the firm's contemporary vaudeville theaters in the United States, developed as one part of a two-story commercial block containing retail space, offices, and a hotel in addition to the 948-seat theater. Its façade heralded the design of the firm's movie palaces-to-come with a large three-story window above the theater entry, while the interior was French Renaissance-inspired.

The firm's more ambitious foreign theater commissions never left the drawing board.⁴¹ In 1931, Paramount-Publix engaged the firm to design several movie palaces for its growing European circuit, including theaters in Belfast, Brussels, and Glasgow. It also entered negotiations with Warner Bros. to design that circuit's planned European movie palaces. In 1928, the firm produced designs for a large commercial building in Milan with a theater, hotel, and offices (Figure 6-54). There were also discussions with the Italian government regarding a possible new La Scala opera house in the same city.

Rapp & Rapp's movie palaces were ultimately found only in the United States, but in the early 1930s, its work shaped the character of Paramount-Publix's British

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⁴⁰ The Orpheum opened on February 5, 1912. Carl Wirth, a local architect and builder, supervised the erection of the theater. "Best Playhouse in the Dominion Opens Monday," *Fort William Daily-Times* (3 Feb. 1912): 11. In 1970, Fort William amalgamated with the city of Port Arthur and several adjoining townships to form Thunder Bay. The Orpheum was demolished in 1958. Rapp & Rapp's office records list a sketch for a (likely unrealized) Allardt vaudeville theater in Winnipeg.

⁴¹ The Publix projects are listed in the firm's job book and record of sketches. Although the Rapp-designed Paramount was not constructed in Glasgow, Verity & Beverly's later Paramount Theater (1934) was built on the same site. The European Warner Bros. and Italian projects are mentioned in Charles Ward Rapp, "A Brief Rapp and Rapp History." Unpublished manuscript, American Theatre Architecture Archive, Theatre Historical Society of America, Elmhurst, IL, 1978. 2. The firm's surviving office records are unclear whether the proposed Milan theater and the new La Scala were the same project.

subsidiary Paramount Pictures, Ltd.'s expanding circuit of "super cinemas."⁴²

Paramount had entered the British motion picture exhibition market in 1923 by hiring the London Pavilion (1885) on Piccadilly Circus. Paramount subsequently became the first Hollywood studio-exhibitor to build an American-style movie palace in London, and later emerged as the most successful in establishing a purpose-built British circuit.

In 1926, Paramount (as Famous Players-Lasky) opened its West End showcase, the Plaza on Lower Regent Street, to function as a British premiere house for its films.⁴³ The Plaza not only offered Paramount films to London audiences but also a full movie-palace experience with variety acts, including the Plaza Tiller Girls, twelve chorus girls noted for their precision dancing, orchestral accompaniment to motion pictures, and Britain's first pipe organ (an imported Wurlitzer) that could rise from the orchestra pit into view when played. Paramount hired British architect Francis "Frank" Thomas Verity (1867-1937) to design the Plaza rather than an American, in part to mitigate issues associated with its position as a foreign studio entering the market, a prospect that engendered a great deal of anxiety among local exhibitors who feared a full-scale transatlantic invasion.

In hiring Verity, Paramount aligned itself with a figure that gave the nascent building type recognition from the British architectural establishment when his Shepherd's Bush Pavilion (1923) was awarded the Royal Institute of British Architects'

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⁴² The Paramount-Publix Corporation's foreign department oversaw the operation of its international theaters and distribution. In Britain, its local subsidiary was Paramount Pictures, Ltd., which is hereafter referenced as Paramount, while the American theater circuit is referred to as Publix.

⁴³ The Plaza opened on March 1, 1926 with the British production of *Nell Gwyn*, starring Dorothy Gish, for an audience that included members of the Royal Family. It operated as a movie palace until 1967, when Verity's interior was gutted for conversion into two modern theaters. The original exterior survives today, although the building was gutted again in the early 2000s to accommodate a ground floor Tesco store, five basement cinemas, and upper story offices. Eyles and Skone, *London's West End Cinemas*, 47-49.

bronze metal for best London Street frontage.⁴⁴ He had been educated at the Royal College of Art, University College, the Architectural Association, and the Royal Academy with an additional period of study in Paris. Verity's specialty in motion picture theater design was an outgrowth of a partnership with his father, Thomas Verity (1837-1891), who was among the most prominent Victorian theater architects. Frank Verity continued the practice after his father's death, further honing his skills as a theater architect in a number of commissions for Edwardian playhouses.

The Plaza was the most fully realized example of an American-style movie palace yet built in Britain, costing nearly £400,000.⁴⁵ Paramount secured an excellent, if compact, site on Lower Regent Street at the corner of Jermyn Street facing Piccadilly Circus. The Plaza was part of the ongoing redevelopment of Regent Street, which had been in progress since the First World War. Verity proved to be an adept planner of urban motion picture theaters, accommodating four integrated storefronts along Regent Street and a 1,896-seat auditorium on the constricted site. He accomplished this, in part, by placing the orchestra (stalls) well below ground level and accommodating the access stairs for the right side of the auditorium below the pavement of Jermyn Street. The design had to conform to the unified standards dictated by the Crown Estate, notably that the building be faced with stone. The result was a sedate Palladian exterior with French ornamental flourishes (Figure 6-55). However, Verity took full advantage of the prominent site by placing the theater entrance on the corner facing Piccadilly Circus and

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⁴⁴ Verity was not yet exclusively known as a theater design specialist at the time of the Shepherd's Bush Pavilion commission; rather, he was recognized for alterations to the Buckingham Palace ballroom on behalf of Edward VII and as a designer of luxury blocks of London flats. Gray, *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture*, 39, and Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies*, 53-55.

⁴⁵ This cost includes only the construction and equipment. The cost rose to nearly £500,000, including the price of the land. Eyles and Skone, *London's West End Cinemas* (1984), 47.

topping it with a flashy blue and gold dome that allowed it to stand apart from surrounding buildings.

Verity and decorator Marc-Henri Levy gave the Plaza an “American-style” interior modeled after the work of Lamb, then viewed internationally as the dean of classically-derived movie palace design.⁴⁶ The foyers and auditorium were Italian Renaissance in inspiration. Like the American movie palaces, the Plaza’s interior was filled with Italian antique furniture and artwork. The auditorium had seating on three levels: the 1,138-seat stalls located below the street level, an 84-seat Royal Circle, and a 674-seat balcony (Figure 6-56). This two-balcony arrangement recalled the mezzanine plan found in the United States. The Royal Circle, the lower of the two balconies, was only three rows deep as it fronted the grand foyer, which was tucked between the ceiling of the stalls and the underside of the second balcony to fit on the compact site. Auditorium décor closely followed American precedents, dominated by arched organ screens framed by pairs of Corinthian pilasters. The sidewalls above the upper balcony were composed of arches framing murals depicting a Florentine landscape.

The Plaza’s success, the continued investment in the market by other Hollywood studio-exhibitors, and the continued widespread emulation of American-style movie palaces by British exhibitors convinced Paramount of the viability of constructing additional theaters in the United Kingdom. Paramount set its sights beyond London with a scheme to construct large-scale American-style movie palaces (or “super cinemas”) in Britain’s major provincial cities to act as local premiere houses for its films. Like the Plaza, they would offer a complete American movie-palace experience for motion

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⁴⁶ Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies*, 56, and Gray, *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture*, 48.

pictures and stage shows through the inclusion of full stage facilities. This scheme ultimately encompassed seven new Paramount theaters, located in Manchester (1930), Newcastle-on-Tyne (1931), Leeds (1932), Liverpool (1934), Glasgow (1934), and Birmingham (1937), in addition to a theater on London's Tottenham Court Road (1936). Paramount marketed each of its new movie palaces on the basis of their American character and Hollywood sophistication, promising a grander movie-going experience than anything provincial British audiences had experienced.

Paramount continued its association with Verity, appointing him permanent European consulting architect, mirroring the Rapps' de facto relationship with the circuit in the United States. In 1927, he completed two additional theaters for the circuit, the Carlton in London's Haymarket and the Paramount in Paris.⁴⁷ Verity was assisted in his early Paramount commissions by his son-in-law, Samuel Beverly (1897-1959), who had joined the firm in 1922; the two later became partners in the renamed Verity & Beverly. Verity had retired by the time the firm undertook the provincial Paramount theaters, and it was Beverly who oversaw their design.

Verity & Beverly's three initial provincial Paramount super cinemas appropriated design elements directly from Publix's contemporary Rapp & Rapp-designed movie palaces in the United States, which collectively defined the circuit's distinctive architectural vocabulary.⁴⁸ The Paramount (1931) in Aurora, Illinois gave these architectural elements their fullest expression, mostly notably in its hybrid Art Deco and

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⁴⁷ Unlike the Plaza, a substantial portion of the Carlton interior survives despite its 1978 subdivision into three screens. On the Paramount Theater in Paris, see "The Finest Theatre in Paris," *Motion Picture News* (2 June 1928): 1845-1846. Verity designed the Paris Paramount in association with R.E. Hall & Company of New York. Background on Verity & Beverly is from Jill Lever, ed., *Catalogue of the Drawings Collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects: T-Z* (Amersham, England: Avebury Publishing Co. Ltd., 1984), 92.

⁴⁸ See Chapter Four for further discussion of Publix's Rapp & Rapp-devised architectural image.

Baroque auditorium (Figure 6-57). Its most influential single feature being a series of sidewall tapestries with Watteau-inspired *fête galante* scenes. Although the Aurora Paramount was not completed until September of 1931, it was recorded in the Rapp job book in 1928, and the plans were reputedly circulated in the Publix offices as the *de facto* model for future movie palaces. Between 1930 and 1932, Paramount theaters with variations of the Aurora auditorium scheme appeared across the United States from Boston to Denver. The first British Paramounts were developed at this same time, so it was natural for this trademark style to be utilized in order to associate them with the company's architectural identity.

The Paramount (1930) in Manchester was the first of the circuit's provincial British super cinemas. British observers hailed it as a worthy successor to the Plaza in London, which "set the standard for cinema architecture in this country," and for introducing to provincial England the "hyper-ornamental manner" embodied by the leading American Publix houses.⁴⁹ Architecturally, it was transitional: a mixture of Verity & Beverly's earlier motion picture theaters, Paramount-Publix's new Rapp-developed motifs, and other American design influences associated with the circuit.

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⁴⁹ The Manchester Paramount opened on October 6, 1930 with a program that included *The Love Parade* starring Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald. Opening week live entertainment included Gaston and André dancers "direct from Paris" and the Plaza Tiller Girls. The Paramount was renamed The Odeon in 1940, having been sold to that circuit in 1939. In 1973, it was temporarily closed for twinning. Additional screens were added in 1979 and 1992. The Odeon closed for good in 2004 and was demolished in 2013, despite calls for its restoration. Its owners had deliberately damaged the interior to avoid having it listed. On the Paramount, see "Manchester's Great New Cinema," *Manchester Evening News* (2 Oct. 1930): 4; "Paramount on Parade: Super Cinema-Theatre for Manchester," *The Cinema News and Property Gazette* (5 Nov. 1930): xxviii; "Paramount's First British Provincial Theatre," *Motion Picture Herald* (14 Feb. 1931): Better Theatres Section 9, and 14-16. For a nostalgic history of the Paramount, see Derek J. Southall, *Magic in the Dark: The Cinemas of Central Manchester and Ardwick Green* (Manchester: Neil Richardson, 1999): 35-40.

Verity & Beverly's Manchester Paramount façade was not a reproduction of a contemporary Publix movie palace in the United States, but the same principals guided its design (Figure 6-58). The theater occupied a deep lot on Oxford Street between George and St James streets, placing it within an existing city-center nexus of motion picture theaters and along a principal commercial thoroughfare. This site was developed with a two-part commercial block entirely occupied by the theater itself. There was as yet no dominant tradition of British cinema exterior design to reconcile with the Rapps' functional façade treatment, but Verity & Beverly did adapt it to the surrounding architectural context. The result was an austere white stone block along the Oxford Street frontage defined by stylized Corinthian pilasters, which framed double-height bays of small windows. Its crisp, white facade effectively stood apart from the surrounding older Victorian buildings, but primary served as a backdrop for the vertical sign, marquee, and attached wraparound canopy.

Paramount's economic necessity of having as large a seating capacity as possible on its expensive and constricted Manchester center-city site limited the size of the Paramount's interior spaces outside the auditorium, most notably precluding the inclusion of a grand lobby in the manner of a American movie palace. There were three principal spaces: an entrance vestibule, mezzanine, and balcony foyers (Figure 6-59).⁵⁰ Marc-Henri Levy and Gaston Laverdet carried out the interior decoration. The entrance vestibule was mildly Art Deco, as it was primarily seen in the pilasters, light fixtures, and small ornamental details. These motifs continued in the balcony foyer, which was sparsely furnished in contrast to its art-filled American counterparts. *Motion Picture Herald* found

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⁵⁰ The Paramount also had a café, which was a requisite feature of British super cinemas.

the results rather plain from an American perspective, but noted that they were noticeably more ornamented than the “conservative” British norm.

The Manchester Paramount contained the most direct reproduction of an American movie palace auditorium then found outside London, and it was also ultimately the largest of the circuit’s provincial super cinemas at 3,000 seats (Figure 6-60). This large seating capacity was accommodated on a rather constricted site through the use of an American-style balcony and mezzanine that remained unique among British motion picture theaters.⁵¹ The auditorium also boasted the largest Wurlitzer organ in Europe and a 34-foot deep stage equipped to present live entertainment ranging from operas to variety shows. There were other superlatives, notably the Paramount’s status as the first theater outside London with a system to scientifically maintain a comfortable environment in terms of temperature control.

Verity & Beverly and Marc-Henri & Laverdet’s auditorium’s decorative treatment was indicative of both the adaptability of Publix’s new American architectural vocabulary and a degree of uncertainty at the outset of the circuit’s expansion regarding the appropriate expression for Britain. Opening publicity referred to it as “a free treatment of Baroque,” but it was a catch-all scheme that incorporated three disparate modes of movie palace design associated with the circuit in Britain and the United States. The first and most prominent was the Lamb-influenced classicism that characterized the circuit’s Plaza and Carlton theaters in London, which was seen here in the proscenium, the rather heavy organ screens, and the entablature ringing the ceiling (Figure 6-61).

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⁵¹ The orchestra (stalls) seated 1,400, the mezzanine seated 650, and the balcony seated 950. While the balcony-mezzanine arrangement was widely employed in the United States, it was generally considered prohibitively expensive in Britain and consequently never gained popularity. Gray, *Cinemas in Britain*, 96.

Publix's American model was the second influence, seen in the emphasis on painted decoration and the trademark sidewall composition of *fête galante* tapestries and Art Deco pilasters. Third, was the atmospheric ceiling, which was another variety of movie palace design associated with Paramount in Britain. This mode debuted in Britain in 1928, and the following year, the first of four Paramount-financed atmospheric theaters in London opened.⁵² The Manchester Paramount's auditorium did not recreate an open-air courtyard in the manner of a full atmospheric, but was intended to simulate a roofless tent. This design was not universally well received, as at least one contemporary critic maintained the "compromise" atmospheric ceiling was "artificial" and out of character with the spirit of repose conveyed by the remainder of the décor.⁵³

The Paramount (1931) in Newcastle-upon-Tyne was the circuit's second provincial super cinema, representing a more direct translation of a contemporary Publix theater in the United States than its Manchester predecessor.⁵⁴ Newcastle's "Cathedral of

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⁵² These were the Astoria theaters in Brixton (1929), Old Kent Road (1930), Streatham (1930), and Finsbury Park (1930) designed by Edward A. Stone. In December of 1930, Paramount took over all four theaters. The Astoria theaters in Brixton and Finsbury Park were fully atmospheric, while those in Old Kent Road and Streatham were semi-atmospheric. Marc-Henri Levy, who worked on the Plaza and Manchester Paramount, carried out the interior decoration on the Astorias in Brixton, Streatham (with Gaston Laverdet) and Finsbury Park (with Gaston Laverdet). On British atmospheric theaters, see Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies*, 80-83, and Gray, *Cinemas in Britain*, 64-66. The British atmospheric theater-building boom was rather short lived. While atmospheric theaters were considered less expensive than their traditional counterparts in the United States, the opposite was true in Britain.

⁵³ "Paramount on Parade," xxviii.

⁵⁴ The Newcastle Paramount opened on September 7, 1931 with a program that included Vincent Trippett on the Wurlitzer organ, Anton (formerly of the Milan Opera House) conducting the Paramount symphony orchestra, an address by Lord Mayor of Newcastle, Alderman David Adams, the Francis A. Mangan stage spectacle, *The Ladder of Roses*, and the Paramount film *Monte Carlo* (1930) starring Jack Buchanan and Jeanette MacDonald. The Paramount exclusively screened the first presentation of Paramount films in the Newcastle area with a complete change of program every Monday. In addition to motion pictures, it presented original stage productions, musical and scenic novelties, the Paramount orchestra, and the Wurlitzer organ each week. The stage productions were Frank A. Mangan creations exclusive to the circuit and coming to Newcastle directly from the Plaza in London. In 1939, the Paramount was taken over by Odeon and renamed the following year. The Odeon was subdivided in 1975 and 1980 before finally closing in 2002. In 2000, it was listed as a Grade II building, however it was controversially delisted the following year. It currently sits unused as debate surrounds its preservation. See "Paramount Theatre, Newcastle,"

Motion Pictures” astounded local audiences and the British trade press, beyond the usual hyperbole accompanying the opening of a movie palace, with interiors that brought the North East of England the sophisticated modernity of the 1925 Paris Exposition by way of America. The trade press also recognized it as a significant advance over Publix’s earlier British theaters in terms of comfort and luxury on the basis of newly-introduced American functional features.

Verity & Beverly’s exterior design was another example of Publix’s favored functional façade treatment adapted to the requirements of the program and surrounding architectural context (Figure 6-62). The theater’s mid-block site on Pilgrim Street between New Bridge Street and Market Street East, was considered among the circuit’s most prestigious British locations outside London’s West End, being directly adjacent to the city’s major shopping district.⁵⁵ Like the Manchester Paramount, the site was developed without income-producing retail or office spaces, taking the form of a six-story, two-part commercial block. The Paramount was across Pilgrim Street from a number of dignified nineteenth-century, neoclassical residential and commercial buildings developed by Richard Grainger, a builder whose projects with architect John Dobson were responsible for much of the character of central Newcastle; it also shared the same block with the prominent Carliol House (1924-8).

Cinema, Theatre & General Construction (Sep. 1931): 29; “5,000 Turned Away from New Cinema: Women 10 Hours on Paramount Queue,” *Newcastle Evening World* (8 Sep. 1931): 8; “A Symphony in Gold: Newcastle’s Last Word in Super Supers,” *The Cinema News and Property Gazette* (7 Oct. 1931): vi; “Luxury and Magnificence: Paramount’s New Newcastle House,” *Cinema, Theatre & General Construction* (Oct. 1931): 35; W.H. Mooring, “Two New Circuit Theatres in England,” *Motion Picture Herald* (21 Nov. 1931): 22-24; Gray, *Cinemas in Britain* 96 and 107-108; Edward Dietz, “The Paramount, Newcastle upon Tyne,” *Picture House*, no. 26 (Summer 2001): 3-13; and Frank Manders, *Cinemas of Newcastle* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Tyne Bridge Publishing, 2005): 70-73.

⁵⁵ The Paramount Theater in Leeds had an equally advantageous location. Dietz, “The Paramount, Newcastle upon Tyne,” 4.

Verity & Beverly's design challenge was reconciling the theater's sizable bulk and minimal fenestration (necessary since the exterior directly abutted the foyers and other interior spaces in which natural light was a detriment) to these surroundings. The resulting facade was imposing if rather stark, clad in grey stone on its lower two levels and buff-colored brick above with additional grey stone trim and ornamentation. In response to its neoclassical neighbors, the upper levels were a simplified temple front with six stylized Corinthian pilasters supporting an entablature and an attic story. The largest windows were on the third level, the central three with balconies corresponded to a suite of management offices. In the manner of an American functional façade, these details were suitably dignified but simple enough to be secondary to the signage. The Paramount's vertical sign and marquee, which spanned the entire frontage, were identical to the circuit's contemporary American signage.

The interior reproduced the character of an American movie palace's public spaces to a degree not seen in the circuit's prior British theaters, primarily through the inclusion of larger foyer spaces, which were standard in the United States but routinely deemed a poor use of real estate in Britain, and its decoration.⁵⁶ Charles M. Fox, a supervising architect in Publix's construction department in New York, designed an interior closely modeled after the 1925 Paris Exposition, which constituted an early example of such a decorative scheme in provincial Britain.⁵⁷ The double-height foyer, the

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⁵⁶ Paramount's earlier British theaters conformed to these prevailing local attitudes, as demonstrated by the Plaza and Manchester Paramount, incorporating only minimal foyers. Large foyers proved their worth in the Newcastle Paramount and became a standard feature of the circuit's subsequent British super cinemas.

⁵⁷ Charles Fox was credited as Publix's "art director" in relation to the Newcastle Paramount. The full extent of his involvement in the design of Publix's contemporary movie palaces in the United States is not clear. It appears that he worked alongside the various architects involved with the circuit's Depression-era movie palace expansion to insure a consistent look from theater to theater. This may have involved insuring their conformity to the Rapps' Aurora Paramount model. Fox's title as Publix's supervising architect was

theater's principal public space, had a largely-painted decorative scheme in pale terra cotta and green that culminated a series of panels along the upper walls with Art Deco-stylized nymphs, leaping deer, and masks surrounded by sunrays that were taken from French pattern books (Figure 6-63). Materials and fixtures throughout added to the feeling of luxury: metal balustrades and railings with stylized floral motifs, and Lalique-style chandeliers and wall brackets specially manufactured by Best & Lloyd of Birmingham. The stalls' ambulatory, main balcony foyer, and upper balcony foyer were furnished and decorated as veritable art galleries in the American manner, with an estimated £3,000 spent on original works (Figure 6-64). Patrons and the trade press were impressed with the ladies' cosmetic room, located off the main balcony foyer -- a particularly novel feature in provincial the northeast of England, decorated in a pink and beige Art Deco scheme yet in a manner somewhat different in character than the remainder of the interior (Figure 6-65).

The 2,601-seat auditorium was a reproduction Charles Fox's design for the Paramount Theater (Temple H. Buell, 1930) in Denver, which itself was modeled after the Rapps' plans for the then-uncompleted Aurora Paramount (Figure 6-66).⁵⁸ Fox fully

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noted in "Sues Publix Theatres: Architect Asks Receiver for Unit of Paramount Publix," *New York Times* (5 May 1933): 28. He sued Paramount-Publix for breach of contract due to nonpayment following its 1933 bankruptcy.

⁵⁸ The Newcastle Paramount's direct relationship to its predecessor in Denver has been overlooked in existing British and American scholarship, which treats it solely as a variation of Aurora Paramount. Further complicating matters, the Denver Paramount's interior is often attributed to the Rapp office with Temple Buell said to have designed only the exterior. However, there is no hint in either the surviving Rapp and Buell office records that the former was directly involved in the Denver Paramount's design. Any such connection would have been through the Publix construction department having the plans for the unexecuted Aurora Paramount. Temple Buell did have a connection to the Rapp office, having worked for the firm prior to his 1921 relocation to Denver for health reasons and subsequent establishment of his own practice. In 1964, the Buell office indicated there was no Rapp involvement in the Denver Paramount's design in response to an inquiry that noted its similarity to the Aurora Paramount. Temple Buell himself was abroad when the firm received the inquiry and its was answered by another member of the office who stated that any similarity could be accounted for by Buell's early work in the Rapp office. However, the

reproduced Publix's "modern French Baroque" decorative scheme. The sidewalls consisted of a series of gold-leaf pilasters rising almost the full height of the wall, and through the balcony where needed, to bloom into light fixtures topped by crouching *art décoratif* figures.⁵⁹ Publix's distinctive silk tapestries depicting Watteau-inspired *Commedia dell'arte* figures filled bays with pointed tops between the pilasters, also extending nearly the full height of the sidewall (Figure 6-67). The organ screens were of similar character while the proscenium was simple, resembling a stretched sidewall panel with a curtain painted in a similar Watteau-like scene. Decoration around the panels, on the upper sidewalls, and ceiling was stenciled and hand painted, a design that originated as a cost-saving technique in the United States. The ceiling featured a large, reflective medallion-like element with indirect lights from which suspended a large chandelier; collectively, this composition represented an Art Deco reinterpretation of atmospheric

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Rapps' work during the period in which Buell was in the office bore little resemblance to that of the early 1930s. Brother Andrew, Portland, to Temple H. Buell, Denver, 15 September 1964, Temple Hoyne Buell Architectural Records, WH1397, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library; and Wayne L. Weaver, Buell & Company, Denver, to Brother Andrew, Portland, 6 October 1964, Temple Hoyne Buell Architectural Records, WH1397, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library. Charles Fox's role in the Denver Paramount's design was explicitly acknowledged by Temple Buell in correspondence with the Publix construction department in New York upon the theater's completion. Publix had earlier forwarded the Buell office a sketch prepared by Fox with instructions to "work it out along the lines suggested, maintaining the effect and feeling shown by the sketch throughout." This was followed by correspondence back and forth between the Buell office and the Publix construction department as the details were finalized. Publix itself had the final say on the design. Publix Theatres Corporation, New York, to R.L. Jordan, T.H. Buell & Co., Denver, 14 June 1929, Temple Hoyne Buell Architectural Records, WH1397, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library; John G. Schneberger, Construction Department, Publix Theatres Corporation, New York, to T.H. Buell, Denver, 30 August 1929, Temple Hoyne Buell Architectural Records, WH1397, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library; and T.H. Buell & Co., Denver, to Morris Greenberg, Construction Department, Publix Corporation, New York, 5 September 1930, Temple Hoyne Buell Architectural Records, WH1397, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library. Following the Denver Paramount's completion, Temple Buell met with Publix officials about how the scheme could be developed for larger theaters without increasing the unit cost. T.H. Buell, Denver, to B.B. Buchanan, Construction Department, Publix Theatres Corporation, New York, 26 September 1930, Temple Hoyne Buell Architectural Records, WH1397, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library. The Newcastle Paramount's auditorium, like its sister in Manchester, featured a Wurlitzer organ that could be lifted to the level of the stage. It also had a climate control system enabling a constant spring-like temperature of 65 to 70 degrees in winter or summer.

⁵⁹ These panels were executed in London and shipped to Newcastle. In Denver, the silk tapestries were credited to Victor Mondo.

design, with the chandelier representing a sun which radiated painted sunrays against a dark blue, sky-like background. Lighting effects allowed the entire space to be lit in various colors: blue one minute, red the next, then green before blending several of them together.

The Paramount (1932) in Leeds was the third unit in the circuit's expansion, and the most significant in terms of the study of the Rapps' influence on motion picture theater design outside the United States.⁶⁰ It was also the first to depart from the American functional façade model, an arrangement dictated by its location at the corner of the Headrow and Briggate. This site, alongside that of the Newcastle Paramount, was considered the most advantageous in the circuit outside the West End for its location at the intersection two major city-center shopping streets. The Paramount was a major component of the Headrow redevelopment, a narrow east-west street that was widened into an avenue between 1928 and 1932 in order to alleviate traffic congestion in the city center. This necessitated the demolition of buildings along the north side. Sir Reginald Blomfield, who had previously worked on the rebuilding of Regent Street, designed the

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⁶⁰ The Leeds Paramount opened on February 22, 1932 and was built for a cost of £250,000. It opened with a program that included a welcome address by The Lord Mayor of Leeds, Alderman F.B. Simpson, the 30-piece Paramount Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Vicoli (which performed a rendition of Tchaikovsky's "1812"), the Paramount Sound News, Rex O'Grady at the Wurlitzer organ, *The Dakotas*, a cowboy act, a film of Paramount's history on the occasion of its 20th anniversary, a song by soprano Paula Ruby, several dancing acts, "The Volcano" starring the Francis A. Mangan Tiller Girls, and Ernst Lubitsch's *The Smiling Lieutenant* (1931) starring Maurice Chevalier and Claudette Colbert. It subsequently offered Leeds audiences orchestral music, stage presentations "of the same type as those shown at the Paramount theatres in London and Paris," and Wurlitzer organ performances in addition to motion pictures. In 1939, the Paramount was taken over by the Odeon circuit and renamed the following year. The Odeon closed in 1968 for twinning, with additional screens added in 1978 and 1988. In 2001, the Leeds Odeon closed due to local competition and was subsequently gutted and rebuilt as an apartment and retail complex. Sir Reginald Bloomfield's exterior is a Grade II listed building. See "New Leeds Theatre," *Yorkshire Post* (19 Feb. 1932): 12; "A Paramount First Night," *Yorkshire Post* (23 Feb. 1932): 4; "Paramount's Latest Super: Verity & Beverly's Leeds 2,500-Seater," *The Cinema News and Property Gazette* (2 Mar. 1932): viii; W.H. Mooring, "A New Paramount Theatre in England," *Motion Picture Herald* (7 May 1932): 8; and 19-21, and Robert E. Preedy, *Leeds Cinemas* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2005), 26-32.

replacement buildings in a uniform, neo-Baroque style of red brick and Portland stone. Pavilions, balustrades, urns, and other decorative features provided architectural interest along the length of the long building elevations. Blomfield provided the design for the building that would house the Paramount, which was then executed by George H. Shipley and G.W. Atkinson (Figure 6-68). The building's only external expressions as a theater were the three-faced marquee above the prominent corner entry and neon lighting.

Verity & Beverly's Leeds Paramount was the culmination of the progressively more-American character of the circuit's first three British theaters in terms of the size of its public spaces.⁶¹ Paramount desired a particularly impressive interior in Leeds, maintaining that this was required to differentiate the theater as a center of entertainment from the everyday "drabness" of the industrial city.⁶² Large public spaces were facilitated by an unusually sprawling plan more akin to American examples than the compact sites of the previous British Paramounts: it was L-shaped, with the auditorium and a narrow entrance vestibule and lobby extension running parallel to the long Headrow frontage, behind shallow shops and display windows. The Art Deco interiors could easily be mistaken for a Publix house in the United States, particularly in the grand lobby, a two-story elliptical room defined by stylized columns on the upper level and a curved double staircase (Figure 6-69). Similar to the other Paramount houses, the public spaces were filled with artwork, including oil paintings valued at over four figures.

The auditorium was the most notable single space in the context of the Rapps' influence on international motion picture theater design (Figure 6-70). It seated 2,556 in

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⁶¹ There was no mention of Charles Fox's involvement in contemporary coverage, but the firm was said to have worked alongside Publix's director of construction, E.H. Perkins.

⁶² "A New Paramount Theatre in England," 19.

its orchestra and balcony (ultimately the second smallest of the seven 1930s British Paramounts). The room was a reproduction of a Rapp auditorium design first used in the Paramount theaters in Lynn, Massachusetts (1930) and Stapleton, New York (1930) (Figure 6-71).⁶³ This was a fully Art Deco scheme, as opposed to the modern Baroque treatment employed in Newcastle. It was otherwise unique to the Rapps' own work, not employed by any other architect working for Publix in the United States. However, the firm did employ it in the design of one movie palace for another circuit, the Warner (1930) in West Chester, Pennsylvania. The scheme was defined by angularity, originally meant to enhance acoustics for talking pictures. Its sidewalls were a series of bays formed by stylized pilasters that melded into the ceiling. The proscenium vaguely resembled an Asian-influenced gateway, consisting of a series of stepped modernistic swirls. In Leeds, this scene was combined with elements from the circuit's modern Baroque scheme, namely the Watteau-inspired silk sidewall tapestries and a simplified version of the sunray ceiling.

In the mid-1930s, Verity & Beverly began redefining Paramount's British architectural identity, moving away from the Rapp-developed American vocabulary towards one that incorporated aspects of contemporary Continental models. The Leeds Paramount's immediate successor, the Liverpool Paramount (1934), was transitional, featuring the circuit's most literal American-style functional façade but an auditorium that more loosely interpreted the modern Baroque treatment.⁶⁴ This evolution became more dramatic in the final three British Paramounts, located in Glasgow (1934),

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⁶³ The Lynn Paramount is discussed in Chapter Four.

⁶⁴ On the Liverpool Paramount, see Harold Ackroyd, *Picture Palaces of Liverpool* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Press, 2002), 160-164. The Liverpool Paramount opened on October 15, 1934. Following the removal of the original interior in 1968 for modernization and subdivision, it was demolished in 2010-11.

Tottenham Court Road (1936) in London, and Birmingham (1937), which continued to feature the American functional innovations and amenities but made a complete break with the circuit's earlier architectural image.

The circuit's transition away from American precedents reflected the larger trend in British cinema design in the mid-to-late-1930s. American-style cinemas were popular with British moviegoers, but like their counterparts in the United States, they were subject to criticism from the architectural community. There was no harsher and more influential critic of American-influenced British cinemas than the acerbic architectural writer P. Morton Shand. Although not an architect, Shand was a passionate proponent of the Modern Movement. In a series of articles in *Architectural Review* and in his polemical book *Modern Picture-Houses and Theaters*, he lambasted American movie palace design.⁶⁵ Atmospheric theaters were “nauseating stick-jaw candy, so fulsomely flavored with the syrupy romanticism of popular novels and the “see Naples and die” herd-nostalgia which speeds Cook's conducted tours on their weary ways.”⁶⁶ He condemned the Empire Leicester Square as “the monstrous fruit of an Anglo-American collaboration...one of the most supremely parvenu buildings in the world...a glorified gin palace.”⁶⁷ While these remarks were controversial, British architects and exhibitors took them to heart.

To correct the course of British cinema design, Shand evangelized that architects must look to the Continent. During the 1920s, British architects had largely ignored

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⁶⁵ P. Morton Shand, *Modern Picture-Houses and Theaters* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1930). Shand's influence on British cinema design is discussed in Sharp, *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies*, 92-94, and Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies*, 57, 60-62, 75, and 177.

⁶⁶ Shand, *Modern Picture-Houses and Theaters*, 19.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

contemporary Continental developments in motion picture theater design. The latter found its fullest expression in Germany's so-called "night architecture" or Lichtspielhäuser of the 1920s, which took its name and stylistic inspiration from the fact that movie-going was primarily a nighttime activity.⁶⁸ Lichtspielhäuser such as the UFA Universum (Erich Mendelsohn, 1928) and the Titania-Palast (Ernst Schöffler, Carlo Schloenbach & Carl Jacobi, 1928) in Berlin attracted attention with their facades best characterized only by powerful massing, dramatic nighttime illumination, and large areas of glass that provided glimpses of interior activity (Figure 6-72). Auditoriums were stark, giving nothing to take the audience's attention away from the screen (Figure 6-73). These were machines for viewing the movies in tune with contemporary Modernist theory. The fact that influential German Modernists such as Erich Mendelsohn and Max Taut produced cinema designs led to their widespread acceptance of the country's cinema designs among British architectural circles. In Britain, these influences were exemplified by Oscar Deutsch's Odeon circuit, which incorporated them in the second half of the 1930s as part of its own distinctly British, modern cinema style.

Verity & Beverly had additional reasons for developing new sources of inspiration for the remaining British Paramounts. While Britain enjoyed its greatest cinema-building boom between 1928 and 1938, the United States experienced it during the 1920s.⁶⁹ By the mid-1930s, American movie-palace construction had ended, curtailed by the effects of the Depression. Accordingly, Publix's further expansion in the United

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⁶⁸ On Continental European and German cinemas and their influence in Britain, see Peter Boeger, *Architektur der Lichtspieltheater in Berlin: Bauten und Projekte 1919-1930* (Berlin: Verlag Willmuth Arenhövel, 1993); Sharp, *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies*, 152-160; and Gray, *Cinemas in Britain*, 80-82.

⁶⁹ Sharp, *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies*, 97.

States, which employed its Rapp-influenced architectural identity, had been discontinued, leaving the British circuit without a ready American model.

The Paramount (1936) on Tottenham Court Road in London was the first of the circuit's theaters to fully exhibit Continental influences.⁷⁰ Its site on the north end of Tottenham Court Road, at the corner of Grafton Way, was previously occupied by Shoolbred's department store. Despite its location, it was not intended to function as an additional West End premier house, but rather to serve a densely populated inner district previously ignored by exhibitors. In a gesture to attract this desired audience, the theater's corner entrance faced away from central London. Verity & Beverly placed all of the emphasis on the relatively unadorned exterior, on the corner entry with its five narrow windows grouped above the marquee. In the German manner, the exterior was meant to be seen at night, when thin neon lights outlined its massing and a large illuminated "Paramount" sign and billboards announced the feature attraction. Its exterior windows glowed from within, beckoning passing shoppers inside (Figure 6-74). While the interior took few stylistic references from the circuit's Rapp-influenced theaters of the early 1930s, it retained their characteristic large-scale support spaces and provisions for stage performances -- features that were largely omitted by the rival Odeon circuit. The 2,568-seat auditorium exhibited the influence of Friedrich Lipp's Atrium Cinema (1927) in Berlin in its proscenium, which consisted of three arches of increasing scale undulating outward (Figures 6-75 and 6-76).

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⁷⁰ The Tottenham Court Road Paramount opened on February 10, 1936. It initially offered live shows, an orchestra, the Paramount Tiller Girls, variety acts, and performances on the Compton organ in addition to motion pictures. Odeon acquired the theater in 1942 and renamed it in 1946. In 1960, it was closed and demolished for a parking lot, which remains on the site today. Eyles and Skone, *London's West End Cinemas*, 75-77, and Gray, *Cinemas in Britain: One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture*, 107-108.

In 1937, the final British Paramount opened in Birmingham. Only two years later, Oscar Deutsch's Odeon group gradually acquired Paramount's British circuit.⁷¹ The latter's plans to erect cinemas in Leeds, Manchester, and Newcastle became apparent in 1937, worrying Paramount over the continued viability of its provincial movie palaces. Paramount's small British circuit could not compete with the much larger Odeon's booking power. Odeon had been able to expand rapidly while remaining profitable by constructing smaller and less-expensive cinemas. Faced with the choice of expanding its own circuit or divesting its cinemas, Paramount chose the latter, feeling "the growth of nationalistic feeling" on the eve of the Second World War made the climate unfavorable for the further expansion of an American circuit. In November 1939, it reached an agreement with Odeon for the latter to lease the Paramounts in Leeds, Manchester, and Newcastle and the four London Astorias. Odeon leased a second group of Paramounts in August 1942: those in Birmingham, Glasgow, Liverpool, and London's Tottenham Court Road. Paramount retained only its two West End houses, the Plaza and Carlton, to premiere its own releases. Odeon also secured the exclusive British rights to present Paramount pictures outside the West End. The deal was a coup for Deutsch (who died prior to the acquisition of the final group), as it brought into his circuit a group of large, high-grossing, American-style super cinemas that he had previously considered unprofitable to build himself.

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⁷¹ The Birmingham Paramount is illustrated in Christine Wilkinson and Margaret Hanson, *Birmingham Cinemas* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2003), 106-108. It is the only former British Paramount designed by Verity & Beverly still in use as a cinema, although the auditorium has been multiplexed. On Odeon's lease of the British Paramounts, see Gray, *Cinemas in Britain*, 157-158; Allen Eyles, *Odeon Cinemas 1: Oscar Deutsch Entertains Our Nation* (London: Cinema Theatre Association, 2002), 221-222; and Allen Eyles, *Odeon Cinemas 2: From Arthur Rank to the Multiplex* (London: Cinema Theatre Association, 2005), 11. Following Odeon's takeover of the British Paramounts, it eliminated stage shows, orchestras, and other live performances excepting the organist, deeming them unprofitable.

Conclusion

The movie palace's spread outside the United States was met with broad acceptance from international moviegoers and a degree of resistance from architectural critics and local exhibitors. International audiences were drawn to the type's sophistication, which encompassed a total environment for viewing films (Hollywood and otherwise) that was characteristically superior in terms of comfort, luxury, and overall movie-going experience to preexisting theaters. The movie palace's development overseas was associated not only with the growing Hollywood dominance of international movie going, but more subtly with a broader American cultural influence that occasionally came into conflict with nationalist sentiments. To mitigate this resistance, both Hollywood and domestic exhibitors frequently emphasized local connections, which variously ranged from programming to the use of construction labor to employing local architects. Despite these efforts, movie palaces remained intrinsically American until the type's foreign development evolved beyond a close adherence to the Big Three's work, a process that often occurred through the efforts of domestic exhibitors.

As the field's leaders in the United States, the Big Three were at the forefront of the movie palace's exportation. Outside North America, the influence of their work preceded or, in Rapp & Rapp's case, substituted their own international movie palace commissions, as foreign architects drew upon the Big Three's oeuvre for inspiration in the first foreign examples of the type. In Australia and Britain, the Big Three's own work appeared in the second wave of movie palace construction, which saw the proliferation of a series of literal reproductions in each country's major cities. The movie palaces

established by Paramount in Britain and Loew's International across the globe exemplified the gradual evolution of the type during the 1930s beyond close emulation of American precedents. This evolution was in response to local conditions and new influences, although the same basic principals continued to guide their design. In this way, movie palace development outside North America can be seen as the final phase of the type's development, providing a glimpse into how it might have evolved had the Depression not halted its construction in the United States.

Afterward

The movie industry reached its nadir in 1933, when nearly a third of the nation's theaters closed. Faced with less disposable income at the onset of the Depression, many Americans abandoned motion pictures entirely in favor of cheaper forms of entertainment, such as radio, which required a substantial initial outlay but provided unlimited free programs thereafter. The industry began to see signs of recovery in 1934, when attendance increased, some theaters reopened, and some studios began to see a modest profit.¹ However, long-term recovery occurred only gradually in fits and starts through 1940. Although the industry's crisis was of relatively short duration, it prompted vast changes in motion picture exhibition by the time theater construction resumed in the mid-1930s.

Movie palace construction ceased after 1932, but the vast network of existing theaters saturating most American cities continued to define motion picture exhibition into the post-war years. The old Balaban & Katz movie palace formula underwent a variety of changes in existing theaters as the industry retrenched during the lean Depression years.² Attendance-boosting strategies (such as "Bank Nights," games, and door prizes) were instituted. The Depression also put an end to constantly rising ticket costs, a trend since the nickelodeon era, as moviegoers were offered a bargain in the form of double or even triple features. Concession stands appeared in lobbies as a new source of exhibitor income, which represented a remarkable turn-around, as movie palace

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¹ Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, rev. and updated ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 162.

² For motion picture exhibitors' Depression-era practices see Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 66-82.

operators during the 1920s had steadfastly refused to sell food due to its association with cheaper forms of entertainment.³ Theater operators cut costs by allowing maintenance to lapse, which left movie palaces noticeably run-down.⁴ The movie palace service system of innumerable door attendants, ushers, nurses, and other personnel was another casualty. After 1932, all but the minimum number of ushers needed for crowd control had been eliminated. Stage shows were also eliminated in most movie houses, which represented the culmination of an ongoing process since the introduction of sound. Going forward, live entertainment was typically found only in leading movie theaters.

The Big Three, like motion picture exhibitors, were caught off-guard by the industry's sharp decline in 1932-33. Although the leading firms proved adept at adapting their movie palace designs to leaner economic times, they were unprepared for the type's total collapse. Lamb's office was able to weather the end of movie palace construction through its extensive foreign commissions, newsreel theater commissions, and non-theatrical work. Rapp & Rapp kept its doors open with a handful of non-theatrical commissions, including designs for facilities at the 1933 Century of Progress exposition in Chicago, and through theater renovation projects (Figure Af-1).⁵ Eberson faced the

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³ Among the cheaper forms of entertainment customarily selling food to patrons were carnivals and burlesque houses. Furthermore, it was held that movie palaces did not need any extra revenue that might be gained from the selling of concessions. During this period, independent confectionary stores were customarily found adjacent to movie theaters, allowing patrons to purchase food and drinks before or after the show. Theater concessions were introduced in three stages: first came candy stands; popcorn came next; then soft drinks appeared last, immediately after World War II. Soda could not be introduced into movie theatre concession stands until the end of wartime sugar rationing. Another new addition of the early post-war years was the formalization of the intermissions as a set second opportunity to sell more concession goods to patrons. By 1936, movie theatre concession sales topped \$10 million. The average exhibitor kept half of all earnings at the concession stand, which often represented their sole profit. Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 80.

⁴ Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 79.

⁵ Century of Progress projects mentioned in C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp's job book were an Oriental Village, the Ripley "Believe It or Not" Odditorium, a Press Building and Publishers' Club, and the Hearst Newspaper and Magazine Building. An additional project related to the Century of Progress was a planned Rialto

most devastating consequences, declaring personal bankruptcy, which forced him to sell his home in Mamaroneck, New York.⁶ He was able to keep his firm open by downsizing and subsisting on small commissions and scattered theatre renovation projects.⁷

In the mid-1930s, motion picture theatre construction in the United States resumed, but the movie palace typology was financially and functionally obsolete. New conditions within the motion picture exhibition industry and changes in American society precipitated a focus on a new type of movie theater: the 1,000-seat neighborhood house, which persisted into the 1950s.⁸ Movie palaces saturated the majority of the nation's downtowns, but changing consumer demographics (largely due to the widespread adoption of the automobile) were taking customers farther away from city centers.⁹ Accordingly, exhibitors felt that the neighborhood house (which was built in the business districts of towns belonging to a larger metropolitan area, mid-to-smaller-sized cities, and neighborhoods) offered the most potential for expansion. The type required a comparatively lower initial investment due to less expensive real estate as well as lower construction and building material costs.

Bridge Concessions for M.H. Colman & Co., conceived as a Streamline Moderne Ponte Vecchio. It was to be constructed on the 23rd street Bridge leading to the fairgrounds and would contain shops and restaurants. "Bridge of Shops Planned for 23rd Street Entrance," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (7 May 1933): A10. It is unclear whether these projects were realized.

⁶ Jane Preddy, ed., "Glitz, Glamour & Sparkle: The Deco Theatres of John Eberson," *Theatre Historical Society of America Annual*, no. 16 (1989): 21-22.

⁷ These employees included Alex Mercil, A.C. Liska and Mary Mulligan. Norman Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theater Architecture," in *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, ed. Paul Greenhalgh (Philadelphia, PA: Jay Emmanuel Publications, Inc., 1949), 11, 13 and Paul Greenhalgh, ed., *Theater Catalog 1948-49* (Philadelphia, PA: Jay Emmanuel Publications, Inc., 1949), 28.

⁸ Greenhalgh, *Theatre Catalog 1948-49*, 28.

⁹ Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theatre Architecture," 13.

Eberson reinvented himself to become the lead developer of the 1,000-seat neighborhood house, which positioned his office as the most influential and prolific of the Big Three in the post-movie palace years. His office defined a type of motion picture theater that was drastically different than the movie palace, one in which the primary design consideration was audience comfort: good sight lines, finely tuned acoustics, correct temperatures, and safety.¹⁰ Movie palaces' colossal size, historicizing décor (which was now viewed as an unnecessary distraction from the screen), and expensive stage houses were eliminated. Eberson's most influential work in defining the new type was a series of Streamline Moderne theaters in and around Washington, D.C.¹¹ The most innovative was the Warner Bros.-operated Silver Theater (1938) in Silver Spring, Maryland, which was part of a mixed-use shopping center complex commissioned by William Alexander Julian that featured shops, a gas station, and a parking lot (Figures Af-2 and Af-3).¹²

Lamb's American work was less innovative than Eberson's in the late 1930s, but his office did complete a number of notable theaters. This work consisted of a number of Art Deco or Streamline quasi-movie palaces, which were larger than the average movie

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¹⁰ These priorities were noted in Preddy, "Glitz, Glamour & Sparkle," 15.

¹¹ For Warner Bros., the firm completed the Penn (1936), the Sheridan (1937) and the Beverly (1939) in Washington, D.C. The majority of Eberson's other commissions in this period came from smaller regional chains and independent exhibitors such as the Harris Amusement Company of Pittsburgh and the Schine Circuit of New York state.

Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theatre Architecture," 13-15.

¹² Eberson had called attention to opportunities of developing shopping centers as theatre sites as early as 1930. John Eberson, "Why Not Theatres As Shopping Center, Too," *Motion Picture News* (6 September 1930): 65 and 84 and Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theatre Architecture," 15. On the Silver Spring Shopping Center, Eberson's innovations therein, and regional shopping center development in Washington, D.C., see Richard Longstreth, "The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, D.C., 1930-1942," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 51, no. 1 (Mar. 1992): 5-34.

houses of the period but still eliminated stage facilities.¹³ A notable example was the Lake Theater (1936) in Oak Park, Illinois. The Lamb office was a leader in the development of newsreel theaters through its work for the Trans-Lux Daylight Screen Corporation's Trans-Lux Newsreel Theater chain, which began in the final years of movie palace construction (Figure Af-4).¹⁴ Each of the resulting 150-600 seat venues exhibited both newsreels and short subjects.

Rapp & Rapp was the least successful member of the Big Three in adapting to the post-movie palace era. In 1938, George Rapp retired, dying suddenly a few years later, on 17 July 1941, at his lodge at Mineral Lake in Wisconsin after sustaining head injuries in a stroke-induced fall.¹⁵ His nephews, Mason Rapp and Daniel Brush, and Charles McCarthy, a longtime member of the office, subsequently reformed the firm as Rapp & Rapp, Architects.¹⁶ The firm, now based solely in Chicago, was primarily of regional

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¹³ Other work included the Lincoln Theatre (1936) in Miami Beach, the Criterion Theatre (1936) in New York, the Community theatres (1937) in Toms River, New Jersey (1937) and Saratoga Springs, New York (1937), Loew's Post Road (1939) in the Bronx, and the RKO Midway (1942) in Queens.

¹⁴ Lamb's newsreel theaters included projects in Manhattan (1931, 1937 and 1940), Detroit (1932), Brooklyn (1933), Philadelphia (1934), and Washington, D.C. (1937). Background on the Trans-Lux Daylight Screen Corporation is from Ray Gingell, "Trans-Lux," *Marquee: The Journal of the Theatre Historical Society* 7, no. 3 (1975): 20-21.

¹⁵ "Retired Chicago Architect Dies from Fall Injuries," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (18 July 1941): 14 and Charles Ward Rapp to Andrew Corsini, July 19, 1985, Rapp & Rapp Subject File, American Theatre Architecture Archives, Theatre Historical Society of America, Elmhurst, IL. In December of 1941, George Rapp's accomplishments were listed in a lengthy obituary published by the Illinois Society of Architects. It listed the Central Park Theatre as Rapp & Rapp's first successful design and several of their subsequent Balaban & Katz movie palaces. Mention was also made of the firm's large mixed-use theatrical buildings in Chicago; the Bismarck Hotel adjoining the Palace Theatre; and the Masonic Temple containing the Oriental Theatre. It was also recognized that the firm did not limit itself to theatrical design, the Fort Dearborn Bank Building offered as testament to this fact. The obituary went on to list several of the firm's important works outside Chicago; the Paramount Theatre in New York City, the Ambassador Theatre and office building in St. Louis, the Leland Hotel in Detroit, and the Keith's Theatre and office building in Cleveland. The National Press Club in Washington, D.C. was singled out as one of George Rapp's outstanding achievements. Illinois Society of Architects, "George L. Rapp... 1878-9/17/41, Dec. 1941," American Theatre Architecture Archives, Theatre Historical Society of America, Elmhurst, Illinois.

¹⁶ George Rapp had previously incorporated his firm in 1936 to give outright interest to longtime principals: Arthur Frederick Adams, Daniel H. Brush, Jr., Charles A. McCarthy, and Mason Rapp. Charles Ward Rapp, "A Brief Rapp and Rapp History." Unpublished manuscript, American Theater Architecture Archive, Theatre Historical Society of America, Elmhurst, IL, 1978, 1. C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, Inc.

importance. Its realized theater work was scarce, consisting of three projects for Balaban & Katz in the Chicago area: the Will Rogers (1936), Luna (1936), and Cine (1937) (Af-5 and Af-6). Their fourth and final theater of the 1930s was Warner Bros.' Rhodes (1937) in Chicago.¹⁷ In the absence of steady theater commissions, the firm sustained itself through non-theatrical work and renovation work and as consultants.¹⁸

The motion picture exhibition industry saw increased attendance following the onset of World War II.¹⁹ Between 1941 and 1945, as hostilities escalated overseas, Americans went to the movies in record numbers. Following the United States' declaration of war, movie theatre construction ceased as the country focused its resources on the war effort. The Eberson office received a number of war-related government commissions.²⁰ Rapp & Rapp also worked for the U.S. government during the war,

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"Resume Submitted for Defense Work." (1940). Architectural records for buildings by Rapp & Rapp, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL.

¹⁷ There were also a number of unrealized motion picture theatre commissions, including three Chicago-area projects for Sam C. Meyers announced in 1937: the Maple Theatre, the Glenwin Theatre in Glencoe and the Bay Theatre in Wilmette. The Maple Theatre was planned for the northeast corner of Devon and Maplewood. It would have seated approximately 1,000 and cost around \$150,000. "Start Erecting Devon Avenue Picture House," *Chicago Sunday Tribune* (7 March 1937): B6. The Glenwin Theatre was planned for the northeast corner of Scott Avenue and Glencoe Road. It would seat 1,100 patrons and according to some accounts, to be located at the northeastern corner of Scott and Linden avenues (as opposed to the northeast corner of Scott Avenue and Glencoe Road). "First View of Hubbard Woods Theater," *Glencoe News* (5 March 1937): 6, "Work Underway on Glencoe's 2 New Theaters," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (19 May 1940): B10. It was estimated to cost between \$175,000 and \$200,000 for land and building. "Babies Get Equal Break With Cars At New Theater," *Chicago Sunday Tribune* (10 March 1940): B12, "Glencoe Will Have A Second Movie Theater," *Chicago Sunday Tribune* (5 May 1940): 27. These theatres would be leased from Sam C. Meyers to Balaban & Katz. The Bay Theatre was planned for Green Bay Road. Although construction appears to have commenced on both the Maple and Glenwin theatres, they were never completed.

¹⁸ The latter included Radio City Music Hall (1933) in New York and the Municipal Auditorium (1939) in Charleston, West Virginia.

¹⁹ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 82.

²⁰ The Eberson office's government work included a 1,500-bed hospital at Brentwood and Camp Hero at Montauk Point on Long Island, housing and other facilities at Fort Monmouth, and projects at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Both Eberson's also provided wartime service: John Eberson as a member of the War Production Board and Drew Eberson as a Colonel in the U.S. Army, serving in the Corps of Engineers. The firm's wartime activities are detailed in Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theatre Architecture," 15-16, Greenhalgh, *Theatre Catalog 1948-49*, 30-31, and "Drew Eberson, 85, a Designer of Theaters," *New York Times* (11 July 1989): A16. The government remained an important

designing the Ross Auditorium (1944) at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in Illinois.²¹ However, the firm's primary wartime focus was on entering the housing industry, designing both individual houses and larger subdivisions.²² Lastly, Lamb died suddenly on 26 February 1942 at the age of 71 while visiting the New York real estate office of Cross & Brown.²³ After his death, Thomas W. Lamb, Inc. declared bankruptcy and temporarily suspended operations.²⁴

Motion picture's wartime resurgence initially appeared set to continue into the postwar years. In 1946, motion picture attendance reached an all-time high, with the average moviegoer attending three times a month.²⁵ Movie attendance in the United States rose to nearly three-fourths of the total "potential audience," the industry's estimate of all Americans capable of attending the movies.

Following the war, John Eberson was the last surviving Big Three principal founder. His office, as well as the Rapp and Lamb successor firms, found varying degrees of success in the postwar years. Picking up much as before the war, the Eberson office

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Eberson client during the post-war years, commissioning military and naval projects such as airfields, quartermaster depots, separation centers and supply ports. A number of these projects were located in the Panama Canal Zone.

²¹ The firm had submitted its credentials to the government for consideration in defense related work in 1940. Rapp, "Resume Submitted for Defense Work."

²² In these projects, the firm endeavored to stress individuality in both the design of each house and the surrounding landscaping. "Colonial Home in Glenview," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (12 January 1941): NW4.

²³ Thomas Lamb was survived by his wife, Rhett, five sons: Thomas A. Lamb, Bruce J. Lamb, Richard G. Lamb, Stuart M. Lamb and William G. Lamb, and a daughter, Nancy B. Lamb. His *New York Times* obituary summarized his foremost accomplishments as Madison Square Garden, the Pythian Temple "and scores of theatres in several parts of the world, among them the Capitol and Rivoli in this city." It also noted that while Lamb achieved his greatest fame in the realm of theatre and amusement building design, he also completed many non-theatrical buildings in New York including apartment hotels, parking structures and a bus terminal. "Thomas W. Lamb, 71; A Noted Architect," *New York Times* (27 Feb. 1942): 17.

²⁴ Thomas W. Lamb, Inc. eventually emerged from bankruptcy and resumed normal operations. By 1947, John B. Sanger was serving as the corporation's president and Reginald B. Hoydge, Lamb's brother-in-law, continued to serve vice-president, a position he had held under Lamb. "Building Designer Accused by State," *New York Times* (21 Feb. 1947): 22.

²⁵ The post-war American motion picture exhibition industry is treated in Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 269-285.

received new motion picture theater commissions into the 1950s for areas experiencing rapid population growth and from the resurrection of delayed pre-war projects. Many of these theatres were of 1,000-seat neighborhood types that the firm helped define before the war (Figure Af-7).²⁶ After Eberson died, on 5 March 1954 at age 79, Drew Eberson operated the firm under his own name until 1973.²⁷

Rapp & Rapp downsized to lower operating costs in the face of a reduced workload.²⁸ The firm's final commission was the Fisher Theater (1961) in Detroit, which

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²⁶ Latin America also emerged as an important source of theatrical commissions, so much so that the firm opened an office in Mexico City. The firm designed the Orfeon (1938) and the El Roble (1950) theatres in Mexico City, and received commissions for theatres in Cuba, Guatemala and Venezuela. While the Junin Theatre and office building (1950) in Caracas, Venezuela was completed, no other information exists in the firm's records regarding the projects in Cuba and Guatemala. Morse, "An American Cavalcade of Theatre Architecture," 16-17.

²⁷ Beatrice Eberson, Drew, two daughters, and four grandchildren survived John Eberson. "Obituaries," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (7 March 1954): 37. His obituary in the *New York Times* credited him with the design of five hundred theatres in the U.S. and abroad. It highlighted the two biggest achievements of Eberson's career: the creation of the atmospheric theatre, "a design popular during the twenties," and the refinement of the Depression-era neighborhood theater. "John Eberson, 79, Architect, is Dead," *New York Times* (7 March 1954): 90. It was estimated that at this time, the firm had 1,200 building projects to its credit, valued at \$400,000,000. *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White & Company, 1955), 562. Beatrice Eberson passed away on July 14, 1954 at the age of 69 following a brief illness, just a few months after her husband. "Mrs. John Eberson," *New York Times* (16 July 1954): 21. The firm's names at various points in its history are laid out in a profile of Drew Eberson's work in Paul Greenhalgh, ed., *Motion Picture Exhibitor- 1967 Theatre Catalog Edition* (Philadelphia: Jay Emmanuel Publications, Inc., 1967): 4. The firm appears to have been still been referred to occasionally as John and Drew Eberson, Architects during this period. Following the firm's closure, Drew Eberson practiced architecture from his home in Stamford, Connecticut until 1982. Beginning in the early 1970s, he detected a resurgence of interest in atmospheric theatres and began to both highlight his father's role as the type's creator and to advocate for their preservation. This included maintaining much of the firm's office material as a personal archive in his home. Drew Eberson to Editor of *Box Office*, February 3, 1972, John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records, Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach, FL. Drew Eberson died on 8 July 1989 at the age of 85 from pneumonia in Bloomfield, Connecticut. The *New York Times* noted that he had designed and renovated many motion picture theatres in the United States and abroad. It emphasized the accomplishments of his father as "one of the country's most influential theatre architects" and the two Ebersons' partnership. "Drew Eberson, 85, a Designer of Theaters," A16.

²⁸ Rapp & Rapp's postwar commissions included automobile showrooms, drive-in banks, industrial buildings, and theater renovations to incorporate new technologies such as Cinerama and Cinemascope. The firm completed two drive-in theatres: the Niles Drive-In (1948) in Niles, Michigan and the Hammond Drive-In (1949) in Hammond, Indiana. Ward Rapp claimed the firm was a leader in the development of drive-in banking architecture and in modern windowless factories. The C.P. Clare plant in Chicago on Pratt Avenue near McCormick was an example of the latter. Rapp & Rapp purposely avoided designing suburban multiplexes out of distaste for the "slap-dash, low budget treatment" that it found characteristic of the type. Rapp, *A Brief Rapp and Rapp History*, 3-4.

was a reconstruction of a movie palace into a legitimate house (Figure Af-8).²⁹ In 1965, Mason Rapp closed the office in light of Daniel Brush's 1960 death, Charles McCarthy's declining health, and only intermittent commissions.³⁰ As for Lamb, his nephew-in-law and longtime office member, John J. McNamara, operated a successor firm under his own name for 35 years, which continued to specialize in theater design.³¹

Despite initial indications of continued postwar prosperity at the wartime levels, the motion picture industry ultimately confronted significant challenges in the postwar years that would lead to the final collapse of the aging movie palaces. One was the inroad made by radio. By the mid-1940s, it had emerged as a mature and influential medium. In a 1945 survey, 85 percent of respondents replied that they would give up movies over the radio when asked to choose between the two mediums.³² A major part of radio's appeal was the convenience it offered an increasingly suburban American audience, who could listen to it at any time of the day in the comfort of their own homes, rather than travel increasing distances downtown or to older neighborhood commercial districts to see a film in a faded movie palace.³³

The biggest challenge to the industry was the Justice Department's antitrust lawsuit against the principal Hollywood studio-chains. In 1938, the Justice Department

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²⁹ To undertake this large-scale project, the small Rapp & Rapp office added extra staff and worked virtually around the clock. The theater was contained within the larger Fisher Building designed by Albert Kahn. Former Rapp & Rapp employees Graven & Mayger designed the original 1928 movie palace. Ibid.

³⁰ At the time of Rapp & Rapp's closure, the office was located at 230 N. Michigan Avenue in Chicago. In 1974, Mason Rapp noted that he closed the firm in 1966. Mason G. Rapp to Steven Levin December 26, 1974. Rapp & Rapp Subject File, American Theatre Architecture Archives, Theatre Historical Society of America, Elmhurst, IL. The date of Rapp & Rapp closure is given as 1965 in Rapp, *A Brief Rapp and Rapp History*, 5.

³¹ David W. Dunlap, "John J. McNamara, an Architect and Theater Designer, Dies at 90." *New York Times* (9 May 1988): D11.

³² Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 269.

³³ In the 1945 audience survey, 87% of respondents owned a working radio. Average daily listening was 4.6 hours for men and 5.9 hours for women. In contrast, the average moviegoer in 1946, the peak year of attendance, went to the movies three times a month.

under the Roosevelt administration filed an antitrust suit, arguing the only means to prevent monopolistic abuse of power in the industry was to end to the movie industry's vertical integration. In 1944, the lawsuit was revived due to government dissatisfaction with compromises reached in 1940. Finally, in the 1948 decision, *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc., et al.*, the studios were forced to divest themselves of their theater chains.³⁴ By 1956, the Hollywood studio-chains had relinquished ownership or control of their theaters.

The vast changes in post-war American society posed another significant challenge to the motion picture industry, ultimately necessitating new exhibition formats to replace the aging movie palaces. Foremost were the effects of suburbanization and the baby boom.³⁵ As record numbers of Americans moved to the growing suburbs, they were also abandoning the established networks of downtown and neighborhood movie theaters. Furthermore, younger adults, previously the most loyal audience, now focused their attention and discretionary income on housing and raising a family.

These factors contributed to a decline in attendance following the 1946 peak, even before television made a significant impact beginning around 1949-1950.³⁶ By 1953, when it was estimated that 46.2 percent of American households owned a television, movie going had declined by nearly one-half from the 1946 high mark. These changes heralded the arrival of a new period of motion picture exhibition, one in which film-going

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³⁴ For further details on the impact of the federal antitrust suit, see Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 89-91.

³⁵ Television is frequently cited as a major contributor to the decline of movie going in the United States. While the new medium may have contributed to motion pictures' decline, it did not initiate it. Television can more accurately be said to have replaced radio. For further details see Ibid., 83-85 and 88.

³⁶ Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 272.

would be characterized by new suburban multiplexes rather than antiquated movie palaces.

Appendix One:

Individuals and Organizations Associated with the Lamb office

The following three appendices are not intended to be a comprehensive list of employees associated with each firm, rather they detail notable individuals and organizations encountered during research.

Arthur Brounet: Arthur Brounet was a New York-based decorating firm that advertised itself as general interior decorators, mural painters, and color scheme specialists for “high class” theaters, homes, and other buildings.¹ Thomas Lamb retained the firm on numerous occasions, particularly for the execution of mural decorations. Among the Lamb-designed theaters that featured Brounet murals were the City (1910) in New York, the Cort (1912) in New York, the Eltinge (1912) in New York, the Keith’s 81st Street (1913) in New York, the Candler (1914) in New York, the Loew’s (1917) in Hamilton, Ontario, and the Loew’s (1917) in Montreal.

Louis Joseph Théophile Décary: Louis Joseph Théophile Décary (1882-1952) was born in St. Jérôme, Quebec.² He studied architecture at M.I.T. but did not attain a degree. In 1912, he formed Dufort & Décary, a short-lived firm with Joseph Cajetan Dufort, whom he knew from M.I.T.³ During Décary’s career, he was a member of a number of architectural offices, including Ross & MacFarlane and Edward & W.S. Maxwell in Montreal, and John Eberson in New York. Décary successively worked in Lamb’s Toronto and New York offices. The Lamb-designed movie palaces on which he worked

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¹ Hilary Russell, “An Architect’s Progress: Thomas White Lamb,” TMs (photocopy), p.5, American Theatre Architecture Archives, Elmhurst, Illinois.

² Décary’s background and work is detailed in Dane Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era, 1884-1938* (Waterloo, Ontario: Penumbra Press, 1993), 51-52, 90.

³ Dufort & Décary’s work included the Corona Theater (1912) in Montreal.

included the Capitol (1921) in Montreal. By the 1930s, Décary was working in Paris while also maintaining his own office in Montreal.

Ann Dornan: Ann Dornan was one of the first women to graduate from Columbia's School of Architecture. She worked in the Lamb office as chief draftsman until circa 1925, when she left the Lamb office to become a buyer and interior consultant for Loew's.

William F. Fountain: William Fountain (d. 20 Feb. 1937), a native of Elizabeth, New Jersey, worked as a building supervisor for Lamb for more than five years before leaving the New York office to work under contract for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in October 1934.⁴ While working for MGM for two and a half years, Fountain continued "cooperating" with the Lamb office to erect motion picture theaters outside North America, including projects in India and Australia.⁵ This included the Metro Cinema in Calcutta (1935) and the Metro Theater (1937) in Brisbane. By 1937, Fountain was based in Brisbane, Australia; he was killed in a plane crash en route between Brisbane and Sydney on February 20, 1937.

Eva Leo Fox: Eva (Eve) Fox was married to William Fox and acted as a decorator on a number of his movie palaces, including on the Lamb-designed Fox Theater (1929) in San Francisco. Eve Fox had no formal training in interior decoration; her taste was shaped by a desire to find the most lavish, yet affordable objects available.⁶

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⁴ *New York Times* 21 Feb. 1937, *New York Times* 1 Mar. 1937, *Chicago Daily Tribune* 1 Mar. 1937 and *Washington Post* 1 Mar. 1937.

⁵ *New York Times* 21 Feb. 1937.

⁶ According to William Fox's niece, the couple's taste was informed by their status as formerly poor immigrants that had come into money later in life. Mary Bagley, "An Interview with Angela Fox Dunn," *Marquee: Journal of the Theatre Historical Society* 19, no. 4 (1987): 10.

Reginald T. Hoydge: Reginald Hoydge was Lamb's brother-in-law. He served as Thomas W. Lamb, Inc.'s vice-president under Lamb and then under John Sanger after 1942.⁷

Theo Jung: Theo Jung was Lamb's brother-in-law by his second wife. By the mid-twenties, Jung occupied a senior position in the firm, in charge of daily meetings with job captains in Lamb's absence.

John J. McNamara: John McNamara (d. 26 Apr. 1988 at age 90) was married to Lamb's niece. He worked as an architect with Thomas W. Lamb, Inc. before taking the firm's reins after Lamb's death. He maintained his own practice under his name for 35 years.⁸ Like Lamb, McNamara specialized in theater design, but he also engaged in a number of theater renovations, including alterations to a number of Lamb-designed theaters in New York, including the Capitol (c.1959) and the Loew's State (c.1959).

Emil Mlinar: Emil Mlinar served as the firm's chief draftsman, apparently succeeding Ann Dornan in this capacity by 1926. Prior to working for the Lamb firm, Mlinar worked in the Detroit office of theater-specialist C. Howard Crane.

Rambusch Decorating Co.: The Rambusch Decorating Co., a New York-based decorating firm, was founded in 1898 by Frode Rambusch, a native of Denmark, and later headed by Harold W. Rambusch. Lamb frequently retained their services, a relationship that dated back to at least 1911.⁹ In a typical movie palace commission,

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⁷ *New York Times* 21 Feb. 1937.

⁸ *New York Times* 9 May 1988.

⁹ Harold Rambusch was the decorator for Lamb's Washington Theater (1911) at 149th Street and Amsterdam Avenue in New York. Hilary Russell, "An Architect's Progress: Thomas White Lamb," *Marquee: Journal of the Theatre Historical Society* 21, no. 1 (1989): 31.

Rambusch executed the finishing touches, including carrying out the architect's designs for ornamental details and making color choices. Lamb noted:

The decorative scheme is the most essential part of the house after the architectural background has been set, and the quality of this decoration, though inspired by the architect, is largely left for the decorator to complete.

The decorator puts the final finish on the interior of various buildings, and it is he who establishes the final tone and atmosphere of the room. It is he who makes a ballroom gay and festive, a church subdued and serious, a lecture hall neutral and unemotional.

In the theater people come to be entertained, but in order that they may be entertained, it is wise to put them in a receptive and friendly frame of mind. This the decorator can do much toward accomplishing. Particularly in the theater itself, is it his ambition to create a depth and warmth of atmosphere.¹⁰

John B. Sanger: Sanger assumed the presidency of Thomas W. Lamb, Inc. after Lamb's death in 1942.¹¹ He had previously been associated with the firm for a number of years.

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¹⁰ Thomas W. Lamb, "Good Old Days to these Better New Days." *Motion Picture News* (20 June 1928): Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide.

¹¹ *New York Times* 24 Apr. 1947.

Appendix Two:

Individuals and Organizations Associated with the Rapp office

Arthur Frederick Adams, Sr.: Arthur Frederick Adams (22 Oct. 1893-9 Sept. 1977) served as C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp's chief designer, in charge of the firm's Departments of Design and Decoration.¹ A native of London, England, Adams immigrated to the United States where he grew up in Spokane and Seattle, Washington. Adams studied at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, where he won four medals for his architectural designs between 1911 and 1913.² He subsequently undertook additional architectural studies at Columbia University.

Adams joined the Rapp office around 1919, at which time it was working on the early Balaban & Katz movie palaces. In 1922, Adams won fourth place and first honorable mention in the Chicago Tribune Tower Competition. The following year he was commissioned by the National Terra Cotta Society to travel throughout northern Italy to study and photograph terra cotta architectural details dating from the Italian Renaissance. This trip resulted in a book meant to inspire the use of Italian terra cotta details in modern architecture.³ Adams later incorporated many variations of these details into Rapp theaters. In the 1920s and early 1930s, he wrote many of the architectural

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¹ Charles Ward Rapp, "A Brief Rapp and Rapp History, 1978." TMs (photocopy), p. 2, Rapp & Rapp Subject File, American Theatre Architecture Archive, Theatre Historical Society of America, Elmhurst, IL. and Arthur Frederick Adams, "Theatre Design Breaks With The Past," *Motion Picture News* (28 June 1930)L Theatre Building and Equipment Buyers Guide.

² Mentioned in C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, Inc., *The Recent Work of C.W. & George L. Rapp Architects, Chicago and New York*. (New York: Architectural Catalogue Company, 1927) 74. The medals Adams received included the Architecture Rendu "Premiere Seconde Medaille" in 1911-12, Architecture Rendu "Premiere Medaille" in 1912-13, and the Architecture Rendu "Premiere Seconde Medaille," which he received twice in 1912-13.

³ This work is Arthur Frederick Adams, *Terra Cotta of the Italian Renaissance*. (New York: National Terra Cotta Society, 1925).

descriptions and press releases for the firm's movie palaces that were published in architectural and film trade journals. In 1936, Adams was given interest in the newly incorporated C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, Inc. by George Rapp in recognition of the vital role he had long played in the firm.⁴ He apparently left the firm by the time it was renamed as Rapp & Rapp, Architects in 1941. Adams retired in 1968.⁵

Elmer F. Behrens: Behrens worked in the Rapp office until 1923, when he established his own practice. He designed a number of Illinois motion picture theaters, including the Ridge (1924) in Park Ridge, the York (1924) in Elmhurst, the Arcadia (1926) in St. Charles, the El Tovar (1928) in Crystal Lake, the Pekin (1928) in Pekin, and the Egyptian (1929) in DeKalb.

Daniel Harmon Brush Jr.: Brush (24 June 1884-11 Feb. 1960) was the son of Harriet Cornelius (nee Rapp, C.W. and George's sister) and Daniel Harmon Brush (1848-1920), the son and namesake of Carbondale, Illinois' founder.⁶ A native of Carbondale, he attended the Central High School in Columbus, Ohio and then obtained a B.S. in civil engineering from the University of Illinois in 1906. During World War I, Brush served in the First Division of the United States Army.⁷ Brush became associated with his uncles' firm around 1920 and acted as the firm's construction and field supervisor (he also assumed various office administrative duties such as preparing contracts and

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⁴ C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, Inc. "Resume Submitted for Defense Work." (1940). Rapp & Rapp Collection. Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL.

⁵ Arthur Frederick Adams was also associated with the Chicago firm Naes & Murray.

⁶ Brigadier General Daniel H. Brush's death was noted in "High Tributes Paid to Brig. Gen. Dan H. Brush [Carbondale, IL] *Daily Free Press* (20 March 1920): 1 and 3. The family also included a sister and one brother, Rapp Brush. In 1920, Rapp Brush was a Major in the United States infantry.

⁷Ibid. .

specifications). In 1936, Brush was given interest in the newly incorporated C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, Inc. by his uncle George.⁸ He became a partner in the renamed Rapp & Rapp following George Rapp's death and apparently remained with the firm until his own death.

Temple Hoyne Buell: Temple H. Buell (1895-1990) was a native of Chicago who obtained an architectural degree from the University of Illinois and a master's degree in architecture from Columbia University. In 1919, Buell worked in the Chicago office of Marshall & Fox, then worked in the Rapp office from 1920 to about 1922.⁹ Buell then relocated to Denver for health reasons, where he established his own architectural firm in 1923, which ultimately grew to one of the largest practices in the Rocky Mountain region. Buell designed at least two movie palaces during his independent practice, the Paramount (1930) in Denver and the Paramount (1930) in Cheyenne.¹⁰

Edwin Corliss Atlee (E.C.A. or Ted) Bullock: Bullock (b. 21 Oct. 1888) was the son of Annie Augusta (nee Rapp, C.W. and George's sister) and Edwin C. Bullock.¹¹ He was born in Fort Riley, Kansas and studied at the Southern Illinois Normal University and the University Academy. In 1910, Bullock completed a B.S. in architecture from the

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⁸ C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, Inc. "Resume Submitted for Defense Work." (1940). Rapp & Rapp Collection. Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL.

⁹ Thomas J. Noel and Barbara S. Norgen, *Denver the City Beautiful and its Architects, 1893-1941* (Denver: Historic Denver, Inc., 1987), 192-193.

¹⁰ There has been some suggestion that Buell worked with C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp in the design of the Denver Paramount. The author could find no conclusive evidence in the surviving Buell or Rapp architectural records. The Paramount Theater in Cheyenne was a renovation of the pre-existing Capitol Avenue Theater (1905).

¹¹ E.C.A. Bullock's mother Annie Rapp Bullock was remarried to Frank Clements. "Local and General," [Carbondale, IL] *Daily Free Press* (2 Nov. 1914):2.

University of Illinois. He worked in the firm's New York office,¹² but left his uncles' office in 1926 to establish his own New York-based architectural practice.

William F. Clark: Clark was associated with the Rapp firm for many years. In 1945, he and Arthur Frederick Adams won the W-G-N Chicago Theater of the Air competition for “the most beautiful and efficient radio studio theater in the world.”¹³

Oscar W. Dauber: Dauber joined C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp around 1920 and served as the firm's chief mechanical engineer, working on mechanical design and layout.¹⁴ In 1936, he left the firm and established his own practice in the La Salle-Wacker Building. From there, Dauber practiced mechanical and electrical engineering and acted as a consultant on air conditioning installations.

Graven & Mayger: Arthur Guy Mayger (1890-1948), a native of Deer Lodge, Montana, was a graduate of the American Beaux Arts School of Design in New York. He served as an infantry captain during World War I.¹⁵ Anker S. Graven (1891-1932) was born in Menomonie, Wisconsin to Scandinavian immigrants. In 1917, he graduated from the University of Illinois's architecture program. During the World War I, Graven served with in the Navy.

The pair joined the Rapp office around 1916-1917, where Mayger worked as a designer, remaining until 1926 when they formed the Chicago-based firm Graven &

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¹² Rapp, “Resume Submitted for Defense Work.”

¹³ “Two Win \$5,000 with Design for WGN Theater,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (4 Feb. 1945): 22.

¹⁴ “News of Architects,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (6 Dec. 1936): B6.

¹⁵ “Two Architects are Honored,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (11 Sept. 1927): L1 and “News of the Architects,” *Chicago Tribune* (4 Apr. 1926): B2.

Mayger.¹⁶ Graven & Mayger capitalized on the expertise they gained in the Rapp office, obtaining a number of prominent movie palace commissions including the Alabama (1927) in Birmingham, the Fisher (1928) and Hollywood (1927) theaters in Detroit, the Minneapolis (1928) in Minneapolis, the Palace (1928) in Rochester, New York and the Tennessee (1928) in Knoxville.¹⁷ Much of this work demonstrates similarities to Rapps' output, most notably the style and composition of the exteriors, lobbies, and auditoriums of the Minnesota and the Palace theaters.¹⁸

Graven & Mayger proved to be short-lived partnership: all of the firm's movie palaces were completed between 1927 and 1928. By 1929, Graven had established the Chicago-based A.S. Graven, Inc., architects.¹⁹ In 1930, Mayger was practicing independently in New York City.²⁰

A.S. Graven, Inc., architectural work included commissions from Paramount-Publix in the Midwest and the South. This work included the Paramount-Publix Film Exchange (c.1930) in Chicago and the Paramount theaters in Ashland, Kentucky (1931) and Steubenville, Ohio (1931). The two Paramount theaters employed the chain's

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¹⁶ Graven & Mayger was based at 307 (upper) Michigan Avenue. "News of the Architects," *Chicago Tribune* (4 Apr. 1926): B2. "Two Architects are Honored," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (11 Sept. 1927): L1 noted that the pair had been with the firm for about ten years before leaving eighteen months prior to form Graven & Mayger.

¹⁷ In the design of the Hollywood Theater in Detroit, Graven & Mayger acted as associate architects to Charles N. Agree. Other theaters credited to Graven & Mayger include the Avalon (1928) in Detroit and the Geneva (1928) in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

¹⁸ Steve Levin, "Editor's Page," *Marquee: The Journal* of the Theatre Historical Society of America 29, no.4 (1997): 3. Levin also notes that it is certainly possible that Graven & Maygar helped to develop these motifs in the first place while in the Rapp office. The emergence of these motifs in the Rapps' work does coincide with the pair's tenure.

¹⁹ Among A.S. Graven, Inc.'s designers was Morris Hobbs.

²⁰ Little has been uncovered about Arthur G. Mayger's work following the dissolution of Graven & Mayger. He died at age 51 following a heart attack in the Lane Bryant store in New York. "Obituaries," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (12 Dec. 1948): 46.

trademark architectural motifs as developed by the Rapps. Graven also designed the West Bend (1929) in West Bend, Wisconsin and the Mississippi Hotel and Orpheum Theater complex (1931) in Davenport, Iowa. In 1932, A.S. Graven's career was cut short by his accidental death at the age of forty-one.²¹

Simeon (S.) Charles Lee: S. Charles Lee (1899-1990) was a native of Chicago who began architectural training at age 15 in the office of Chicago architect and theater specialist Henry Newhouse.²² Lee then completed a two-year intensive course of study in architecture at the Chicago Technical College. Following service during World War I at the Great Lakes Naval Station, Lee undertook additional architectural studies at the Armour Institute of Technology, from which he was graduated in 1921.

Subsequently, Lee began working for C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp in the design department, where he was tasked with taking programs from C.W. or George Rapp and developing them into preliminary drawings and detail plans.²³ ²⁴ During Lee's tenure with the firm, he gained valuable knowledge about the theater design business. Most importantly, he came to understand audience psychology and the economic issues of the field and how both could be expressed in theater architecture. Lee also gained experience in the design of large, mixed-use commercial blocks incorporating theaters. Notable projects that Lee worked on with the Rapps included the Tivoli (1921) in Chicago, the

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²¹ Anker S. Graven drowned at Lake Rice, Minnesota at age 41 along with two other hunters. "Anker Graven Rites Tomorrow in Wisconsin," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (19 Oct. 1932): 22. He was survived by his wife La Verne (Steinley) Graven and his son Peder Graven.

²² For background on S. Charles Lee see Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts of the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater Starring S. Charles Lee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 12-33.

²³ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁴ Details of S. Charles Lee's time in the Rapp office are from *Ibid.*, 41-42.

Tivoli (1921) in Chattanooga, the Chicago (1921) in Chicago and Keith's Palace (1921) in Cleveland.

In December of 1921, S. Charles Lee took a leave of absence from the Rapp office to travel to California. He ultimately chose to remain in Los Angeles and resigned his position with the Rapps, establishing his own architectural firm in 1923. He went on to become one of the West coast's most prolific theater architects, constructing movie palaces throughout the region, including such diverse work as the Fox Wilshire (1930) in Beverly Hills, the Los Angeles Theater (1931) in Los Angeles, and the Fox (1931) in Phoenix. Following the decline of the movie palace typology, Lee was a prolific and influential architect during the transition to new types of motion picture theaters.

Lieberman & Hein: Beginning around 1915, C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp retained the Chicago firm of Lieberman & Hein as structural engineers. Like the Rapps, Lieberman & Hein was based in the State-Lake Theater at 190 N. State Street. The firm appears to have specialized in theaters.

Charles A. McCarthy: Charles McCarthy was trained as an architect and joined the firm around 1911. He was in charge of the drafting department, preparing and developing plans. In 1936, McCarthy was given interest in the newly incorporated C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, Inc. by George Rapp.²⁵ He became a partner in the reorganized Rapp & Rapp following George Rapp's death, and remained with the firm until his own declining health became a factor in its closure.

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²⁵ Rapp, "Resume Submitted for Defense Work."

McNulty Brothers Company: McNulty Brothers was one of the largest plastering firms in the United States. It worked under contract for many architectural firms, including C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp. Among its employees was Eugene Romero, who executed plaster sculpture models for the Rialto Theater (1926) in Joliet, Illinois, among other theaters.

Mason G. Rapp: Mason Rapp (April 1, 1906-1978) was the eldest son of William Morris Rapp (of the firm I.H. & W.M. Rapp) and his wife Mary (nee Garardi) Rapp. He attended the New Mexico Military Academy and obtained an architecture degree from the University of Illinois in 1929. Mason Rapp began working at C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp (for his uncles) around 1920 on a part-time basis. He joined the firm full-time following the completion of his architecture degree, acting as a designer and consultant.

Mason Rapp oversaw a number of important projects that were unrealized due to the Great Depression, including the Warner Brothers' chain of European movie palaces and talks with Tito Schipa, representing the Italian Government, for the design of a new La Scala Opera House. In 1936, he was given interest in the newly incorporated C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, Inc. by George Rapp.²⁶ Following the latter's 1941 death, Mason Rapp formed a new partnership (Rapp & Rapp, Architects) with Daniel Brush and Charles McCarthy. He served as the president of the firm at the time of its closure in 1965. Following this, Mason Rapp worked independently as an architectural consultant. He died on 3 May 1978 at the age of 72.²⁷

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²⁶ C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, Inc. "Resume Submitted for Defense Work." (1940). Rapp & Rapp Collection. Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL.

²⁷ Biographical information for Mason Rapp is listed in his obituary. "Architect Mason Rapp dead at 72," *Chicago Tribune* (4 May 1978).

Wellington J. Schaefer: Schaefer underwent architectural training for four years of under Maurice Prevost in New York.²⁸ He later won the Chicago Architectural Club Traveling Scholarship and spent two years at the American Academy in Rome. In addition to C.W. & Geo. L. Rapp, Schaefer worked for Marshall & Fox as well as Graham, Anderson, Probst & White. In 1936, Schaefer established the firm of Probst & Probst with Edward E. Probst and Marvin Probst.²⁹

Eric Stenbeck: Eric Stenbeck, an architect, was with the Rapp office for fifteen years.³⁰

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²⁸ "3 Architects Quit Old Firm; Form New Unit," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (28 June 1936): 18.

²⁹ Schaefer had worked alongside Edward E. Probst and Marvin Probst at Graham, Anderson, Probst & White.

³⁰ Earl H. Reed to Brother Andrew Corsini August 27, 1965, Rapp & Rapp Subject File, American Theatre Architecture Archives, Theatre Historical Society of America, Elmhurst, IL.

Appendix Three:

Individuals and Organizations Associated with the Eberson office

Fernando F. Batisti: Batisti, a graduate of Columbia University's School of Architecture, was a designer in the Eberson office.

A.O. Budina: Budina, an architect, oversaw the New York Eberson office prior to the closure of its counterpart in Chicago.

Beatrice Lamb Eberson: Beatrice (d.1954), John Eberson's wife, was a London-born interior designer who worked with the firm as a color and decorative advisor.

Drew Eberson: Drew Calvin Eberson (29 Feb. 1904-8 July 1989) was born in Hamilton, Ohio to John and Beatrice Eberson. He grew up during the formative years of motion picture exhibition and was influenced by his father's emerging career as a theater designer.¹ From the age of six or seven, he was put to work checking concrete pours on the construction sites of his father's vaudeville houses.²

Drew graduated from the Northwestern Military and Naval Academy at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, after which he matriculated to the School of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, studying under Dean Laird and Paul Cret.³ During the course of these studies, Drew spent summers working in architectural offices as a laborer and as

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¹ Biographical details on Drew Eberson are taken from Paul Greenhalgh, ed., *Theatre Catalog 1948-49* (Philadelphia, PA: Jay Emmanuel Publications, Inc., 1949), *Theater* 5.

² Drew Eberson Speech to TOA, October 28, 1963. Copy in the John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records at the Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach, FL.

³ Greenhalgh, *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, 5.

a construction field supervisor.⁴ He performed duties that ranged from counting cement bags to laying out the stars on auditorium ceilings.⁵

In 1926, Drew withdrew from the architecture program at the University of Pennsylvania prior to the completion of his degree in order to join his father's firm as a junior draftsman in response to an increased workload resulting from Loew's commissions. Upon joining the firm full-time, Drew initially served in an "apprenticeship,"⁶ during which time he undertook the finishing touches to his father's atmospheric theaters as well as drafting. This entailed ordering and placing statuary, laying out the stars on the ceiling, fine-tuning cloud machines, hanging banners, and adjusting stuffed pigeons.

Drew supplemented his architectural training and the experience gained in his father's office with a tour of Europe in 1928, which included "studying and sketching" in Spain, Italy, Hungary, Germany, Switzerland, and England.⁷ He was also tasked with looking after the firm's interests in England and France.⁸ Upon the completion of this European tour, Drew returned to the United States and obtained his architectural license in Illinois.⁹

The Depression-era downturn in theater construction prompted Drew to join the New York offices of Warner Brothers as an architect.¹⁰ There, he primarily performed

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⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Preservation News* February 1983.

⁶ Drew Eberson, "Paradise Theater – Grand Concourse – New York City, New York," John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records, Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach, FL.

⁷ Greenhalgh, *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, 5 and *Chicago Daily Tribune* 2 September 1928.

⁸ These "interests" in England and France are not identified although the French project might have been in relation to the firm's later Rex Theater (1932) in Paris. *Chicago Daily Tribune* 2 September 1928.

⁹ Greenhalgh, *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, 5.

¹⁰ Ibid.

routine theater maintenance and renovation. He later relocated to Hollywood and worked as an assistant director for Warner Brothers on a variety of projects including “A” and “B” pictures, shorts, previews, and screen tests. This included work with stars such as James Cagney, Bette Davis, Paul Muni, Dick Powell, and Ann Sheridan.¹¹

The resumption of motion picture theater construction in the later 1930s prompted Drew to rejoin his father’s practice as a full partner.¹² With the onset of World War II, Drew volunteered with the Corps of Engineers and was commissioned ultimately as a Colonel in the U.S. Army.¹³ This wartime association resulted in work from the Corps of Engineers and other U.S. Government agencies in the postwar years. Among the most notable of these were several major projects in the Canal Zone in Panama. In 1946, Drew married Peggy Latta, the daughter of C.J. Latta, managing director of the Associated British Picture Corp., Ltd.¹⁴ During his postwar tenure with John and Drew Eberson, Drew took charge of several international projects, traveling to Cuba, Guatemala, and Venezuela.

Drew continued as a full partner with his father in the firm until the latter’s death in 1954,¹⁵ after which he continued the practice in New York City as Drew Eberson, Architect until 1973, when work levels declined to the point that it was no longer

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¹¹ These films included “Penrod and Sam,” “The Case of the Velvet Claws,” and several Perry Mason projects. Ibid.

¹² Following his return to the firm, Drew also ventured into film exhibition, designing and operating a motion picture theater in Florida. This was the Daytona in Daytona Beach.

¹³ Drew Eberson’s work for the Corps of Engineers included the completion of Camp Kilmer, Camp Shanks, the Belle Mead Quartermaster Depot and the Somerville Quartermaster Depot. Overseas, Eberson’s wartime service was in the China-Burma-India theater. Greenhalgh, *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, 5.

¹⁴ The marriage took place on November 23, 1946. Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

profitable to maintain the office. After closing the firm, Drew Eberson continued to practice architecture independently from his home in Connecticut.

Robert E. Hall: Hall worked in the firm as a specifications writer and civil engineer.

Walter Hare: Hare was a member of the firm during its years in Hamilton, Ohio.

William A. Hartman: Hartman, an artist, previously had worked under Arthur Dow and Hugo Froehlich. At the Eberson firm, he headed the Art Department, managing the “colorists,” and was credited by John Eberson with developing the “color work” found in the firm’s theaters.¹⁶ Eberson also noted that Hartman should be credited with instilling in him a good deal of his appreciation for the Italian Renaissance.

Freddie Jones: Jones was a member of the firm during its years in Hamilton, Ohio.

Bill Johnson: Johnson was a member of the firm during its years in Hamilton, Ohio.

Clementine T. Lanzolla: Lanzolla was Drew Eberson’s secretary.

Carl Lehrmann: Lehrmann, a graduate of the Building Teknikum in Odensee, Denmark, was a senior draftsman and an architectural engineer with the firm.

A.C. Liska: Liska was the firm’s chief designer and John Eberson’s aide. He had been associated with Eberson for almost eighteen years as of June 1926.¹⁷ He remained with the firm following its Depression downsizing.

Alexandre Mercil: A key member of the firm beginning in 1926, Mercil was the chief draftsman, chief supervisor, and a consultant in all phases of theater and building construction.¹⁸ A native of Longueuil, Quebec, Mercil gained his architectural training

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¹⁶ *Motion Picture News* 12 June 1926.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*.

¹⁸ Alexandre Mercil was born on February 18, 1892. Biographical information on Mercil and his role in the Eberson firm is further detailed in Greenhalgh, *Theater Catalog 1948-49*, 6.

through four year of apprenticeship divided between the offices of Joseph Perrault, a Canadian architect, and the architectural division of the Canadian Pacific Railway.¹⁹ He subsequently worked for several Canadian architectural firms and continued his formal studies at the Atelier Swales, a Canadian branch of the Beaux Arts Society of Architects School of Design in New York.²⁰ He came into contact with the Eberson firm while working as assistant chief designer for the Bureau of Architecture of the School Board of Chicago.²¹ In the Eberson Office, Mercil was tasked with traveling to far-flung sites to prepare sketches for prospective theaters. He would then return to the office to prepare plans and specifications before returning to the construction site as chief supervisor.²² He remained among the firm's core members as it was downsized during the Great Depression.

Michel Angelo Studios: The success of an atmospheric theater is entirely is dependent on the quality of its decoration. John Eberson found that craftsmen skilled in the execution of this highly-specialized décor were impossible to find in most American cities. Accordingly, he established his own theater decorating company, Michel Angelo Studios.²³ Although advertised in trade journals as an independent company, Michel Angelo Studios was in fact a team of specialists within the Eberson firm and was based out of its Chicago office at 212 East Superior Street.

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¹⁹ His work during this period primarily consisted of apartments, churches, hotels, post offices, railroad stations and schools.

²⁰ The Canadian firms were Painter and Swales in Montreal and Vancouver, and Ross and McDonald in Vancouver.

²¹ Mercil held this position for around five years, designing a number of schools and auditoriums. Prior to this position in Chicago, Mercil was on the staff of the Board of Education in Akron, Ohio. Beginning in the summer of 1919, he designed several Akron schools.

²² Among the more notable projects for which Mercil acted in this capacity was the Rex Theater in Paris, France. He handled the sketches, plans, specifications, and supervised construction.

²³ *Motion Picture News* 12 June 1926, 30 December 1927 and 7 October 1930.

Like the Eberson firm as a whole, the makeup of Michel Angelo Studios was centered on the Eberson family itself. While William Hartman, head of the firm's art department, was Michel Angelo Studios' "decorative foreman," John Eberson closely oversaw the entire operation.²⁴ Drew Eberson worked with Michel Angelo Studios to undertake finishing touches and to make sure everything came together in the right manner. John's wife Beatrice and their daughters Elsa and Lorna made decorative banners. The remainder of the firm (about thirty individuals in total) comprised decorators, artists, scenery designers and other specialists trained in the variety of modeling, painting, and sculpting techniques employed by Eberson in the decoration of his atmospheric theaters.²⁵

Members of Michel Angelo Studios traveled between Eberson's theater projects installing plaster ornamentation, painting the walls, positioning statuary, arranging trees, placing birds, and selecting furnishings. However, Michel Angelo Studios not only executed the decoration of Eberson's own designs, but also worked on a contract basis on theaters built by other architects, such as the Florida (1926) in St. Petersburg, the Florida (1927) in Jacksonville, and the Carolina (1927) in Charlotte.²⁶ Atmospheric theaters decorated by Michel Angelo Studios were notable for their refinement of illusionistic outdoor motifs not always found in theaters completed by non-specialists.

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²⁴ Drew Eberson to C.W. Poston, November 3, 1980, John and Drew Eberson Architectural Records, Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach, FL.

²⁵ Drew Eberson, "The Building of an Atmospheric Theater" Undated, John Eberson Subject File, American Theater Architecture Archives, Elmhurst, IL.

²⁶ Roy A. Benjamin and Robert E. Hall designed both theaters for Publix Theaters. Robert E. Hall and Charles C. Cook designed the Carolina Theater. All these theaters were part of Publix's larger expansion during the second half of the twenties throughout the South that also included Eberson's Olympia Theater in Miami and Tampa Theater in Tampa.

Mary A. Milligan: Milligan was John Eberson's bookkeeper and secretary. She remained with the downsized firm through its leanest Depression years, between 1933 and 1936.

Raymond Monk: Monk was in charge of Eberson's Miami office. He was noted for balancing his training in engineering and construction with an understanding of the firm's aesthetic sensibilities.²⁷

Wellington J. Schaeffer: Schaeffer worked as designer in the firm.

Sanford "Sandy" Waldron: Waldron, a graduate of the Pratt Institute, was a draftsman with the firm.

Harry E. Weaver: Weaver, an architect, was in charge of the firm's Houston office.

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²⁷ *Motion Picture News* 12 June 1926.

Figure In-1: Rapp & Rapp, Paramount Theater, Charlottesville, Virginia, 1931, Sanborn Map showing theater at right.

Figure In-2: Rapp & Rapp, Paramount Theater, Charlottesville, Virginia, Main Street façade ca. 1964.

Figure In-3: Rapp & Rapp, Paramount Theater, Charlottesville, Virginia, 1931, main lobby towards entrance.

Figure In-4: Rapp & Rapp, Paramount Theater, Charlottesville, Virginia, 1931, east sidewall tapestry.

Figure In-5: Rapp & Rapp, Paramount Theater, Charlottesville, Virginia, 1931, view of auditorium from stage, 1974.

Figure In-6: Hebert J. Knapp, Ritz Theater, New York, New York, 1921, legitimate theater façade.

Figure In-7: Hebert J. Knapp, Ritz Theater, New York, New York, 1921, legitimate theater auditorium with two balconies.

Figure In-8: G. Albert Lansburgh, Orpheum Theater, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1913, vaudeville theater facade.

Figure In-9: G. Albert Lansburgh, Orpheum Theater, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1913, vaudeville theater auditorium.

Figure In-10: Five Theater Plans

Figure In-11: Rapp & Rapp, National Press Building and Fox Theater, Washington, D.C., 1927, movie palace as one part of a large commercial block with theater entry at left.

Figure In-12: Rapp & Rapp, Paramount Theater, Hamilton, Ohio, 1931, movie palace with an attached commercial block.

Figure In-13: John Eberson, Palace Theater, Canton, Ohio, 1926, movie palace with an integrated shop to the left of the theater entrance.

Figure In-14: Thomas Lamb, Fox Theater, Hackensack, New Jersey, 1932, stand-alone movie palace.

Figure In-15: Rapp & Rapp, Portland (Paramount) Theater, Portland, Oregon, 1928, movie palace façade incorporating curves to stand out from surrounding buildings.

Figure In-16: John Eberson, Loew's Theater, Richmond, Virginia, 1928, exotic movie palace façade.

Figure In-17: Thomas Lamb, Loew's State, St. Louis, Missouri, 1924, ticket booth.

Figure In-18: Rapp & Rapp, Michigan Theater, Detroit, Michigan, 1926, grand lobby.

Figure In-19: John Ebertson, Riviera Theater, Omaha, Nebraska, 1927, basement nursery.

Figure In-20: Rapp & Rapp, Michigan Theater, Detroit, Michigan, 1926, house from balcony in 4,000-seat theater.

Figure In-21: Victor Hugo Koehler, Lyric Theater, New York, New York, 1903, balcony with support posts.

Figure In-22: Thomas Lamb, Fox Theater, San Francisco, California, 1929, underside of cantilevered balcony.

Figure 3-1: Thomas Lamb, Regent Theater, New York, New York, 1913, exterior.

Figure 3-2: Thomas Lamb, Regent Theater, New York, New York, 1913, house from stage showing lack on support posts in orchestra.

Figure 3-3: Thomas Lamb, Regent Theater, New York, New York, 1913, auditorium.

Figure 3-4: Thomas Lamb, Regent Theater, New York, New York, 1913, stage with permanent set.

Figure 3-5: Thomas Lamb, Strand Theater, New York, New York, 1914, Sanborn map detail of site.

Figure 3-6: Thomas Lamb, Strand Theater, New York, New York, 1914, early exterior design.

Figure 3-7: Thomas Lamb, Strand Theater, New York, New York, 1914, exterior.

Figure 3-8: Thomas Lamb, Strand Theater, New York, New York, 1914, lobby.

Figure 3-9: Thomas Lamb, Strand Theater, New York, New York, 1914, well in mezzanine promenade.

Figure 3-10: Thomas Lamb, Strand Theater, New York, New York, 1914, views of auditorium with balcony and proscenium.

Figure 3-11: Thomas Lamb, Strand Theater, New York, New York, 1914, house from balcony toward boxes.

Figure 3-12: Rapp & Rapp, Al. Ringling Theater, Baraboo, Wisconsin, 1915, simplified plans.

Figure 3-13: Rapp & Rapp, Al. Ringling Theater, Baraboo, Wisconsin, 1915, Sanborn map of site.

Figure 3-14: Rapp & Rapp, Al. Ringling Theater, Baraboo, Wisconsin, 1915, exterior.

Figure 3-15: Rapp & Rapp, Orpheum Theater, Champaign, Illinois, 1914, exterior.

Figure 3-16: Rapp & Rapp, Al. Ringling Theater, Baraboo, Wisconsin, entrance lobby with frieze and fountain.

Figure 3-17: Rapp & Rapp, Al. Ringling Theater, Baraboo, Wisconsin, entrance to ladies' lounge.

Figure 3-18: Rapp & Rapp, Al. Ringling Theater, Baraboo, Wisconsin, 1915, house from rear.

Figure 3-19: Rapp & Rapp Al. Ringling Theater, Baraboo, Wisconsin, 1915, house from stage.

Figure 3-20: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, Fort Worth, Texas, 1911, men's smoking room.

Figure 3-21: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, San Antonio, Texas, 1913, Sanborn map of site.

Figure 3-22: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, San Antonio, Texas, 1913, theater entrance.

Figure 3-23: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, San Antonio, Texas, 1913, lobby.

Figure 3-24: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, San Antonio, Texas, 1913, boxes.

Figure 3-25: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, San Antonio, Texas, 1913, ceiling above boxes.

Figure 3-26: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, San Antonio, Texas, 1913, auditorium ceiling.

Figure 3-27: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, San Antonio, Texas, 1913, house form stage.

Figure 3-28: Rapp & Rapp, Tivoli Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1921, Sanborn map of site with EL station at top.

Figure 3-29: Rapp & Rapp, Tivoli Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1921, simplified orchestra plan.

Figure 3-30: Rapp & Rapp, Tivoli Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1921, simplified mezzanine plan.

Figure 3-31: Rapp & Rapp, Tivoli Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1921, orchestra foyer towards exit vestibule.

Figure 3-32: Rapp & Rapp, Tivoli Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1921, lobby showing gates closing off the orchestra foyer.

Figure 3-33: Rapp & Rapp, Tivoli Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1921, exterior with original marquee and vertical sign.

Figure 3-34: Rapp & Rapp, Tivoli Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1921, lobby from entry.

Figure 3-35: Jules Hardouin-Mansart, Royal Chapel, Versailles, France, 1699-1710, view towards altar.

Figure 3-36: Rapp & Rapp, Tivoli Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1921, lobby view towards entry.

Figure 3-37: Rapp & Rapp, Tivoli Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1921, house from balcony.

Figure 3-38: Rapp & Rapp, Tivoli Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1921, house from stage.

Figure 3-39: Rapp & Rapp, Tivoli Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1921, ceiling.

Figure 3-40: Thomas Lamb, Loew's State Theater, New York, New York, 1921, Sanborn map of site.

Figure 3-41: Thomas Lamb, Loew's State Building, New York, New York, 1921, exterior.

Figure 3-42: Thomas Lamb, Loew's State Theater, New York, New York, 1921, grand lobby.

Figure 3-43: Thomas Lamb, Loew's State Theater, New York, New York, 1921, mezzanine promenade after 1959 renovation.

Figure 3-44: Thomas Lamb, Loew's State Theater, New York, New York, 1921, house from balcony.

Figure 3-45: Thomas Lamb, Capitol Theater, New York, New York, 1919, house from stage.

Figure 3-46: John Eberson, Strand Theater, Lansing, Michigan, 1921, Sanborn map of site.

Figure 3-47: John Eberson, Strand Theater, Lansing, Michigan, 1921, exterior.

Figure 3-48: John Eberson, Strand Theater, Lansing, Michigan, 1921, arcade from entry towards theater.

Figure 3-49: John Eberson, Strand Theater, Lansing, Michigan, 1921, foyer.

Figure 3-50: John Eberson, Strand Theater, Lansing, Michigan, 1921, house from stage.

Figure 3-51: John Eberson, Grand Riviera, Detroit, Michigan, 1925, atmospheric auditorium.

Figure 3-52: J.E.O. Pridmore, Cort Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1909, auditorium.

Figure 3-53: Thomas Lamb, American Roof Theater, New York, New York, 1909, auditorium.

Figure 3-54: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, Houston, Texas, 1923, Sanborn map of site.

Figure 3-55: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, Houston, Texas, 1923, exterior.

Figure 3-56: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, Houston, Texas, 1923, orchestra foyer.

Figure 3-57: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, Houston, Texas, 1923, house from balcony.

Figure 3-58: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, Houston, Texas, 1923, house from stage.

Figure 3-59: John Eberson, Orpheum Theater, Wichita, Kansas, 1922, semi-atmospheric sidewall.

Figure 3-60: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, Houston, Texas, 1923, sidewall.

Figure 3-61: John Eberson, Majestic Theater, Houston, Texas, 1923, sidewall.

Figure 3-64: Rapp & Rapp, Retlaw Theater, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, 1925, orchestra plan.

Figure 3-65: Rapp & Rapp, Retlaw Theater, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, 1925, main street elevation.

Figure 3-66: Rapp & Rapp, Retlaw Theater, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, 1925, exterior nearing completion.

Figure 3-67: Rapp & Rapp, Retlaw Theater, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, 1925, section showing simplified decorative scheme.

Figure 3-68: Thomas Lamb, Loew's State Theater, St. Louis, Missouri, 1924, Sanborn map showing theater at left bisected by alley.

Figure 3-69: Thomas Lamb, Loew's State Theater, St. Louis, Missouri, 1924, exterior nearing completion.

Figure 3-70: Thomas Lamb, Loew's State Theater, Boston, Massachusetts, 1922, exterior.

Figure 3-71: Thomas Lamb, Loew's State Theater, St. Louis, Missouri, 1924, lobby.

Figure 3-72: Thomas Lamb, Loew's State Theater, St. Louis, Missouri, 1924, mezzanine promenade.

Figure 3-73: Thomas Lamb, Loew's State Theater, St. Louis, Missouri, 1924, house from stage.

Figure 3-74: Thomas Lamb, Loew's State Theater, St. Louis, Missouri, 1924, boxes.

Figure 4-1: John Eberson, Riviera Theater, Omaha, Nebraska, 1927, Sanborn map showing theater site (as the Paramount). Note predominance of automobile-related businesses.

Figure 4-2: John Eberson, Riviera Theater, Omaha, Nebraska, 1927, orchestra plan.

Figure 4-3: John Eberson, Riviera Theater, Omaha, Nebraska, 1927, exterior.

Figure 4-4: John Eberson, Riviera Theater, Omaha, Nebraska, 1927, lobby.

Figure 4-5: John Eberson, Riviera Theater, Omaha, Nebraska, 1927, foyer.

Figure 4-6: John Eberson, Riviera Theater, Omaha, Nebraska, 1927, mezzanine foyer.

Figure 4-7: John Eberson, Riviera Theater, Omaha, Nebraska, 1927, house from balcony.

Figure 4-8: John Eberson, Riviera Theater, Omaha, Nebraska, 1927, right sidewall.

Figure 4-9: John Eberson, Riviera Theater, Omaha, Nebraska, 1927, left sidewall.

Figure 4-10: John Eberson, Riviera Theater, Omaha, Nebraska, 1927, “Venetian fountain” sidewall vignette.

Figure 4-12: John Eberson, Capitol Theater, Grand Island, Nebraska, 1927, exterior.

Figure 4-13: John Eberson, Palace Theater, Canton, Ohio, 1926, exterior.

Figure 4-14: John Eberson, Capitol Theater, Grand Island, Nebraska, 1927, ticket lobby.

Figure 4-15: John Eberson, Capitol Theater, Grand Island, Nebraska, 1927, orchestra foyer.

Figure 4-16: John Eberson, Capitol Theater, Grand Island, Nebraska, 1927, mezzanine foyer.

Figure 4-17: John Eberson, Capitol Theater, Grand Island, Nebraska, 1927, proscenium.

Figure 4-18: John Eberson, Capitol Theater, Grand Island, Nebraska, 1927, house from stage.

Figure 4-19: John Eberson, Capitol Theater, Grand Island, Nebraska, 1927, sidewall.

Figure 4-20: John Eberson, Capitol Theater, Grand Island, Nebraska, 1927, sidewall.

Figure 4-21: Rapp & Rapp, Loew's Penn, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1927, Sanborn map of site.

Figure 4-22: Rapp & Rapp, Loew's Penn, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1927, presentation drawing of exterior.

Figure 4-23: Rapp & Rapp, Michigan Theater, Detroit, Michigan, 1926, large window above the marquee to lure patrons.

Figure 4-24: Rapp & Rapp, Loew's Penn, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1927, grand lobby.

Figure 4-25: Rapp & Rapp, Loew's Penn, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1927, grand foyer.

Figure 4-26: Rapp & Rapp, Loew's Penn, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1917, house from balcony.

Figure 4-27: Rapp & Rapp, Loew's Penn, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1927, sidewall.

Figure 4-28: Thomas Lamb, Loew's Midland, Kansas City, Missouri, 1927: Sanborn map of site.

Figure 4-29: Thomas Lamb, Loew's Midland, Kansas City, Missouri, 1927, exterior.

Figure 4-30: Thomas Lamb, Midland Building, Kansas City, Missouri, 1927, exterior.

Figure 4-31: Thomas Lamb, Loew's Midland, Kansas City, Missouri, 1927, lobby.

Figure 4-32: Thomas Lamb, Loew's Midland, Kansas City, Missouri, 1927, grand foyer.

Figure 4-33: Thomas Lamb, Loew's Midland, Kansas City, Missouri, 1927, house from balcony.

Figure 4-34: Thomas Lamb, Loew's Midland, Kansas City, Missouri, 1927, house from stage.

Figure 4-35: Thomas Lamb, Loew's Midland, Kansas City, Missouri, 1927, organ screen.

Figure 4-36: Thomas Lamb, Loew's Midland, Kansas City, Missouri, 1927, auditorium ceiling.

Figure 4-37: John Eberson, Paradise Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1928, Sanborn map of site.

Figure 4-38: Levy & Klein, Marbro Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1927, exterior.

Figure 4-39: John Eberson, Paradise Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1928, façade.

Figure 4-40: John Eberson, Paradise Theater Building, Chicago, Illinois, 1928, exterior of commercial building.

Figure 4-41: John Eberson, Paradise Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1928, vestibule.

Figure 4-42: John Eberson, Paradise Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1928, lobby.

Figure 4-43: John Eberson, Paradise Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1928, orchestra foyer.

Figure 4-44: John Eberson, Paradise Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1928, lounge.

Figure 4-45: John Eberson, Paradise Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1928, house from balcony.

Figure 4-46: John Eberson, Paradise Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1928, auditorium.

Figure 4-47: John Eberson, Paradise Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1928, "side stage."

Figure 4-48: John Eberson, Paradise Theater, Chicago, Illinois, 1928, proscenium.

Figure 4-49: Thomas Lamb, Keith-Albee Theater, Flushing, Queens, New York, 1928, exterior.

Figure 4-50: Thomas Lamb, Keith-Albee Theater, Flushing, Queens, New York, 1928, ticket lobby ceiling.

Figure 4-51: Thomas Lamb, Keith-Albee Theater, Flushing, Queens, New York, 1928, grand foyer.

Figure 4-52: Thomas Lamb, Keith-Albee Theater, Flushing, Queens, New York, 1928, house from balcony.

Figure 4-53: Thomas Lamb, Keith-Albee Theater, Flushing, Queens, New York, 1928, auditorium section.

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John Eberson, famous American architect, conducts Mr. and Mrs. Stuart F. Doyle through the new Riviera Theatre, Omaha, which will be duplicated for Union Theatres here. Others in the group are Abe Blank, head of the Blank Circuit; the Riviera's "Personality Girl," who acts as hostess at the new house; and Henry White, Sydney architect.

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Figure 6-76: Friedrich Lipp, Atrium Cinema, Berlin, Germany, 1927, proscenium.

A "PONTE VECCHIO" JUST OUTSIDE THE FAIR

Above is an adaptation of the famous Ponte Vecchio, over the Arno, at Florence, Italy, to be constructed on each side of the section of the 23d street bridge east of the Illinois Central tracks by H. M. Colman & Co. from plans by C. W. and George L. Rapp. It's called the Rialto Bridge Concessions. There'll be 125 twelve foot wide units for shops facing a covered walk 378 feet long. Details are given elsewhere on this page.

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