Detroit's Theaters: A Study of Significance and Reuse

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DETOIT’S HISTORIC THEATERS: A STUDY OF SIGNIFICANCE AND REUSE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement of the Degree
Master of Science
Historic Preservation

by
Leigh Schoberth
May 2014

Accepted by:
Amalia Leifeste, Committee Chair
Barry Stiefel
Carter Hudgins
ABSTRACT

Detroit is frequently a case study for contemporary urban and economic issues. A specific component of Detroit’s built fabric that requires preservation attention in light of the city’s struggles is the undervalued theater district. Several of the theaters in the central district of Detroit are now threatened by demolition after years of neglect. The history and significance of the theaters, as well as careful consideration of the range of acceptable preservation treatment options, stand to inform a preservation plan for these and other cities’ theaters. One of the options is the reuse of the theaters. While the large scale of these theaters provides a generous canvas for reuse, the present deteriorated state and socio-economic context of the city presents numerous challenges. This thesis explores the significance of Detroit theaters while prioritizing and developing a range of appropriate preservation treatment options for currently abandoned theaters.

An examination of the history of past and current conditions of theaters throughout the city is provided through a comprehensive survey and locater map. Assessments accompany those theaters within the historic theater districts. Additional consideration was given to the National Theater, as a representative of abandoned theaters in Detroit. This thesis concludes with preservation recommendations for this theater and a tool to aid in preservation planning in Detroit and other communities.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, for without you none of this would have been possible. Words cannot express all the love and appreciation I have for you.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to those who helped me in this challenging, but rewarding process. First, thank you to my committee chair Amalia Leifesti, for all your support and guidance. This thesis would not have been possible without you. Also thank you to my other committee members Dr. Barry Stiefel and Carter Hudgins for all your help. To James Marisich from the City of Detroit, I cannot express my appreciation enough to you for allowing me access to the National Theater and your patience on that very cold day in December. A special thanks to the staff and archivists of the Detroit Historical Society and Bentley Historical Library for all your assistance.
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INTRODUCTION

Detroit’s history is intimately tied to the country’s industrialization and automobile manufacturing. Best known as “Motown” and “The Motor City,” the emphasis on the city as the center of automobile manufacturing has left many of Detroit’s other characteristics largely ignored. During the economic vitality provided by the wealth of the auto industry, Detroit became one of the prominent leaders in movie theater construction. The years between 1906 and 1928, marked the most prolific period of theater construction in the city.

Built concurrent with the development of the film industry, these theaters represent more than just a single building typology. The scale and lavish ornamentation are the epitome of social change, engineering and design of the era. Few theaters of the size and ornamentation of the theaters in Detroit were constructed in the country after the 1920s.

Beginning in the 1950s with the introduction of home television and other new forms of entertainment the need for this type of structure for public entertainment diminished. New technologies have continued to ease access to a variety of entertainment forms, threatening the future of theatre structures. Theaters are a threatened resource in Detroit; the number permanently lost due to demolition continues to rise.

A dichotomy exists in the treatment of Detroit’s theaters. Several of the larger theaters from the early twentieth-century theater district have survived the turbulent economy of the city. During the late 1980s, Detroit recorded the largest theater restoration program in the United States. According to Karyl Lynn Zietz in *The National Trust Guide to Great Opera Houses in America*, “Unlike most American urban centers, which razed their grand palaces, Detroit has preserved all six of its early twentieth-century
performance venues, whose restoration collectively represents one of the largest theater preservation programs in the world.”¹ These theaters were selected for restoration due to a combination of their downtown location and interest groups able to fund the projects. These restored theaters now function as performing arts venues. This statistic fails to address the overwhelming number of abandoned theaters in Detroit. Several abandoned theaters are located within the theater district while an even larger number are located in surrounding neighborhoods. Though the theaters have varying scales, locations and degrees of cultural significance, demolition and abandonment threaten many of them.²

With six early twentieth century theaters operating within Detroit as performing arts venues, converting additional threatened theaters to performing arts venues is no longer a viable option for their reuse.

Abandoned theaters join a large number of buildings in the city that have been left to decay in the past fifty years due to the downscaling of the automobile manufacturing industry, economic recession and shrinking urban population. Detroit’s challenges are well documented and acknowledged.³

Often the representative of urban decay, Detroit is frequently epitomized as the

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2 According to the online database Cinema Treasures, approximately 28,268 theaters have been built across the United States. Of these 21,714 are closed, nearly half that number is permanently recorded because they are demolished.; This number reflects a combination of nickelodeons, Movie Houses and Drive-In Theaters, not all are considered historic (older than fifty years). It is also important to note that this database is continually being updated. The numbers above reflect the current statistics as of February 2, 2013.; “Movie Theaters in United States” Cinema Treasures, Accessed March 17, 2014, http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/united-states.

“what not to do case.” In the fall of 2013, *Time* magazine capitalized on Detroit’s recent bankruptcy, its cover story “Is Your City Next? Lessons from Detroit’s Fight to Survive.” Additional press on the city includes news stories titled “Cities on the Brink: Lessons from Detroit” and “Bankrupt City: A Valuable Lesson for All.” The only optimistic idea present was that Detroit could serve as a wakeup call to other cities with questionable economies.

These challenges are met with many plans for revitalizing Detroit. John Gallagher’s *Reimagining Detroit: Opportunities for Redefining an American City*, asks the question “Where do we go from here?” John Gallagher has covered the urban redevelopment section for the Detroit Free Press for two decades. Rather than dwelling on how Detroit arrived at its depressed state he instead emphasizes that Detroit has a future. Current revitalization efforts are concentrated in downtown. Detroit natives and successful developers, Chuck Forbes, Michael Illich and Dan Gilbert, have each heavily invested in real estate in the city. Their efforts have already begun to change Detroit’s downtown landscape.

Although revitalization is a necessary step in the reemergence of the city, the strategies are not always preservation minded. Though only one component of the city’s urban fabric, theaters are a compelling study for revitalization keeping the preservation agenda central. Theaters present unique challenges for reuse. The complexity and size of the theater structures makes them difficult to adapt to other functions. Many from

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7 For more on the efforts of Chuck Forbes, Michael Illich and Dan Gilber see Appendix C.
different sectors of the population, including government officials, developers and citizens see demolition as the solution to vast numbers of neglected buildings.

The preservation of Detroit’s historic theaters should not be limited to those treated during the restoration campaign during the 1980s. It is necessary to recognize the historic and cultural significance of Detroit’s current abandoned theaters in order to prioritize and inform the reuse of these structures. The evaluation of significance, integrity and current condition serve to inform appropriate preservation treatments.

**Trajectory**

Placing Detroit’s theaters within the larger context of national patterns of theater construction and the development of the city is essential to understanding the current condition of the theater district. Chapter One provides the necessary historical context, through the examination of the history of theaters nationwide, the history of Detroit and a focused consideration of Detroit’s theaters. Through the examination of the history of theaters, the first subsection emphasizes the evolution of theaters’ distinct building typology, while also introducing styles, the development of film technology, and social context. This section provides a broader historic context for the development of the United States’ theater collection. The second subsection places the development of Detroit’s theater district within its historical context. This thesis does not furnish a comprehensive history. Instead this chapter focuses on the development of the city with direct effect on the city’s theaters. Questions like ‘What led to the development of the theater district and Detroit’s slow decline?’ are addressed. The final subsection concentrates on the specific patterns of theater construction within Detroit. This section outlines the evolution of Detroit’s theaters from nickelodeon to the last movie palace, through a chronological approach and the examination of selected theaters.

The scope of Detroit’s theater district is represented in a series of maps depicting
eras of construction, location, historic function and current condition in Chapter Two. These maps serve as the visual illustration of the development and theater construction patterns in Detroit.

Literature addressing historic theaters, their renovation and reuse is limited in utility. Numerous resources exist showcasing the magnificent restoration of historic theaters around the country. Relying heavily on the visual impact, text is limited with weight placed instead on the image. Few sources address technical facets of theater restoration. Reuse examples are limited, many showcasing the transition from cinematic to live performance venues. Chapter Three establishes a range of appropriate treatment options by engaging the National Register Criteria and Secretary of Interior’s Standards to evaluate theater reuse precedents.

Each of the subsequent chapters addresses an individual component of the necessary steps in the evaluation and selection of an appropriate treatment for the reuse of historic theater structures. Similar to the evaluation of the whole theater collection of Chapter Three, Chapter Four will evaluate the significance of an individual theater, through case study methodology, demonstrating the application of evaluation and treatment selection process outlined in this thesis. Detroit’s National Theater (1911), will serve as the representative of abandoned theaters to test a set of intervention guidelines and strategies. Evaluation methods include: architectural and building systems descriptions, the application of National Register Criteria for the evaluation of significance and integrity, and condition assessment to inform appropriate treatment options, as well as final recommendations.

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CHAPTER 1
HISTORIC CONTEXT

**History of Theaters**

Across the United States a proliferation of theater construction shaped downtown entertainment districts throughout the early nineteenth century; an era that would be hailed as the “Golden Age of Movie Palaces.” The Golden Age was a brief era in the continuous evolution of theater structures, when thousands of opulent movie palaces were constructed in cities across the United States. These grand palaces captured the attention of their audiences through architecture, music and moving images. However, these grand displays had humble beginnings as nickelodeons, vaudeville theaters and transitional theaters. The consideration of the evolution and national trends in theater construction is necessary to make an informed decision regarding treatment of a theater. The consideration of the history of this building typology provides historical context in which theaters were constructed and influences that lead to their construction. Both are key components in the consideration of a theater’s significance.

Early cinema began in the 1890s after the combined genius of Thomas Edison and George Eastman perfected the Kinetoscope in 1889. The Kinetoscope allowed an individual to view a short film, about 30 seconds, by looking into a large viewing box. Operated by turning the hand crank, the reel would project moving pictures. In 1893, the Kinetoscope made its first public appearance as an exhibit at the Chicago World’s Fair. Viewers flocked to peer through a small hole, for a glimpse of a series of still photos which, seen in quick sequence appeared to move.\(^9\) Within a year, the Kinetoscope

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became a regular feature of the Penny Arcade Entertainment Parlor.\textsuperscript{10} The popularity of the Kinetoscope attracted such large crowds, that soon thousands of penny-arcades opened featuring Edison’s Kinetoscope.\textsuperscript{11}

In the decade after the first public exhibit of the Kinetoscope, motion picture technology continued to develop. In 1896, Edison’s company sponsored a thirty minute “projected film” as a segment of a vaudeville show.\textsuperscript{12} Vaudeville was a theatrical entertainment form that was popular during the 1880s to 1930s. Each show was made up of a series of unrelated acts. Acts would include a range of talents from classical musicians to acrobats. After the first introduction of film, silent film clips were frequently used to fill the playbill.\textsuperscript{13} At first film was seen as a novelty; live entertainment continued as the main attraction of vaudeville until motion picture technology improved.\textsuperscript{14}

In 1902, Thomas Talley opened the first independent movie house, Talley’s Electric Theater. This first attempt proved unsuccessful, and Talley’s Electric closed after a few months. The next important step forward came three years later when the brothers Davis and John P. Harris opened the first successful movie house, The Nickelodeon in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Deriving its name from a conflation of the admission price, a nickel, and the Greek word for theater, the Nickelodeon marked the beginning of the entertainment revolution.\textsuperscript{15}

The Nickelodeon began as a converted storefront, seated about 100 people. Thousands would visit daily to view a short fifteen minute film, for five cents. By 1907

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} According to Benjamin Hampton penny arcades are “store rooms from which windows and doors had been removed, or set back, wide entrance hospitality inviting passers-by to enter and enjoy the marvels or talking machines and animated pictures…” Benjamin B. Hampton, \textit{History of the Movies}, (North Stratford, NH: Ayer Co Pub, 1931), 45.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Forsher, \textit{The Community of Cinema}, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Forsher, \textit{The Community of Cinema}, 13.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Forsher, \textit{The Community of Cinema}, 21.
\end{itemize}
nearly three-thousand “nickel place of amusement” or “5-cent theaters” were built across the United States. These were colloquially called nickelodeons, although the proper noun refers only technically to the first theater.16

Nickelodeons were small, family owned enterprises, many operated in converted store fronts. The rise in popularity of film and the proliferation of nickelodeon construction lead to the creation of *Moving Picture World* magazine. This weekly trade publication covered the early film empire from the nickelodeon to the movie palace. *Moving Picture World* provided consumers with movie reviews and owners with information on the newest equipment. In May 1907, the magazine captured the necessary ingredients for a nickelodeon in this tongue and cheek recipe:

- One storeroom, seating from 200-500 persons
- One phonograph with extra-large horn
- One young woman cashier
- One electric sign
- One cinematograph with operator
- One canvas on which to throw pictures
- One piano
- One barker
- One manager
- As many chairs as the store will hold
- A few brains and a little tact. Mix pepper and salt to taste. 17

16 Charlotte Herzog, divides the nickelodeon period into two categories of theaters, “The store theater” and “the nickelodeon.” The difference being, “the store theater” was a multi-functional space that included a screen area and retail space within the same structure. Early store theaters were sparse with basic wooden seats and no decoration. Due to the small space requirement a single store from could operate as a retail space while the back was separated and fit for motion pictures, “The nickelodeon” was a space that solely dedicated to the exhibition of film. The structure was typically a converted store front, but no longer featured the retail function. The nickelodeon was considered a more permanent version of the store theater and became the typical design in 1905. Charlotte Herzog, “The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of Its Architectural Style,” *Cinema Journal* 20, no. 2 (April 1, 1981),20, Accessed January 24, 2014, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1224831.; Forsher, *The Community of Cinema*, 15-16.

When the novelty of early projected motion pictures began to fade, owners were forced to seek new ways to draw the crowds. This resulted in modifications to many of the theater structures, and the first structures designed and dedicated solely to the exhibition of film. New marquees, lights and decoration were added to the exterior; the wood benches inside were swapped for more comfortable seating as show times increased (fig. 1.1).\(^\text{18}\)

Keeping with the architecture of the period, many purpose-built nickelodeons exhibited flourishes of Art Nouveau, while others created an identity all their own. “In Seattle, the Liberty Theater created a 40-foot-tall ‘Statue of Liberty’ that was surrounded by hundreds of lights.”\(^\text{19}\)

Other started to explore the

---

“exotic” motifs that would dominate the styles of later movie palaces.20

**Development of the Entertainment District**

The key to the success of the nickelodeon was timing and their accessibility. The beginning of movies coincided with the development of a culture driven by consumption and leisure. In the late 1800s, members of the working class found themselves with leisure time and entertainment districts began to develop in cities across the country. Entertainment districts were developed near shopping districts to optimize patronage through foot traffic. However, the leisure activities of the entertainment district were limited in the city, with traditional live entertainment catering to “high society.” Nothing within pre-1900 entertainment districts catered to the working class.

“Playhouses largely appealed to the upper-income class. Saloons were largely the domain of adult males. Weather limited parades. Amusement parks became the predominant form of mass-culture, but they were often physically located away from the primary urban core.”21 Vaudeville theaters were primarily a middle class form of entertainment.22 In 1905 nickelodeons joined the ranks of the entertainment district catering to working class patrons.23 So when nickelodeons offered a source of entertainment for a nickel each, going to the movies proved an enticing attraction.24 These changing trends directly influenced theater architecture.

21 Playhouses are also referred to as legitimate theaters in text. These titles are given to distinguish this type of live theater from vaudeville theaters and movie theaters. Forsher, *The Community of Cinema*, 19.
22 The attraction of the penny-arcade quickly dwindled within its first year. Although a resurgence of activity came in 1898, when real footage from the Spanish-American War drew the crowds, their life was short.
Before the nickelodeon and movie palaces, inexpensive forms of entertainment were limited to listening to the family Victrola or radio and were conducted within private residence. With rising living and working conditions a large portion of the urban population craved to “go places and do things.” Automobile ownership was limited in this period; only one in ten families owned one. So “going places” was limited to venues within walking distance or on public transportation routes.25

Following general trends during industrialization, improvements in mass transportation also coincided with the development of the entertainment district. In the 1890s only fifteen percent of streetcars were electrified. The other eighty-five percent were still dependent on horses. By 1902, nearly ninety-five percent of streetcars were converted to electric. This transport efficiency eased the commute from residential neighborhoods to downtown shopping and entertainment districts. The “places to go” and ways to get there co-evolved. Frequently, the location of the entertainment and shopping districts influenced the mass transportation routes.

**Changing Times**

When nickelodeons opened in the early 1900s, their sparse accommodations reflected new and accessible source of entertainment for the working class. Early nickelodeons were little more than a room with a screen. The meager accommodations satisfied the early patrons as they paid admission to be entertained rather than be seen.26 As moving picture popularity continued to grow, and the masses soon realized that motion pictures were not a passing fad. Improvements in the later movie venues, including better seating, began to draw crowds from more affluent classes.27

dawn of the movie theaters, no form of entertainment had been as popular or accessible.
The movie theater served as a gathering spot, and the center of nightlife. A theater
provided an environment a world away from the everyday. The movie theater became
where the most diverse population of Americans gathered together.

*First Movie Palace*

Nickelodeon style theaters continued to be constructed well into the 1920s, but
due to the growing popularity of motion pictures, storefront venues of first generation
movie houses proved to be too small. Many owners closed their doors, looking for larger
venues. Due to the early association between film exhibition and vaudeville shows,
nickelodeon owners looked to the larger vaudeville theaters as substitutes for the limited
space of the nickelodeons. This affiliation set the stage for Thomas Lamb’s Regent
Theater that would mark the beginning of the movie palace era.

The Regent Theater was constructed in 1913 and was recognized as the first
theater built for the exhibition of film (fig. 1.2). Located just north of Central Park in
NYC, the first movie palace architecture sought its inspiration from the Doge’s Palace
in Venice, Italy. Designed by Thomas W. Lamb, this modest replica of the Doge’s
Palace, imitates the white marble of the Doge’s Palace façade through the application of
white terra-cotta tiles with green accents. The interior spatial arrangement mimics that
of the playhouses and vaudeville theaters, imitating functional features such as ticket
office, lobby, auditorium, and additional seating in the balconies. The interior was in a

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contrasting style, exhibiting Spanish-Moorish inspired ornamentation.  

*Constructing when movies had not yet reached the zenith of their popularity, the Regent struggled to compete with the nearby vaudeville theaters. Recognizing eminent failure, owner Henry Marvin, brought in Samuel L. Rothapfel (Roxy) to rescue the Regent.  

Rothapfel closed the theater for several months, while he changed interior furnishings and set new lighting. The Regent re-opened in December with a new larger orchestra and improved picture quality. For its second debut, the Regent featured *The Last Days of Pompeii*, with music arranged specifically for the movie.

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35 For more about Roxy see Appendix C.
Although the Regent was constructed first, it was the Strand in New York City that set the precedent for the movie palace formula (fig. 1.3). Under Roxy’s management the Strand opened in 1914. It “started a new style in motion picture theaters: comfortable seats, thick rugs, elegant lounges, velvet draperies, gilt-and-marble ornamentation—all the trappings of wealth that had previously belonged to a select few in the orchestra of a legitimate theater—and all for twenty-five cents.”36 Several thousand theaters were constructed after the opening of the Regent simulating its style. Although their successors would render these transitional theaters modest in comparison, these transitional theaters signaled the beginning of the golden age of movie palaces.

**Studio System and Theater Real Estate**

The economic success of film exhibition resulted in the development of theater chains. A theater chain was the result of investment in the construction of multiple theaters in a particular region or throughout the nation. Theater chains quickly spread taking advantage of the movie boom. In the 1910s, theater owners allied with Hollywood film makers, taking the step from theater chains to the studio system. According to Tom Schatz author of *The Studio System and Conglomerate* Hollywood “the ‘studio system’ referred

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both to a factory-based mode of film production and also, crucially, to the vertical integration of production, distribution and exhibition.” The studio system guaranteed theater owners with quality A-class films, and money for reinvestment in new theater buildings. The studio system was the driving force behind the construction of movie palaces. Filmm studios competed to construct a theater more grand than their competitors. This competition directly resulted in many of the largest movie palaces.

Following the studio system’s incorporation in 1928, the film industry was quickly monopolized by the Big Eight studios. The largest studios—MGM, Warner Bros., 20th Century Fox, Paramount and RKO—produced, distributed and operated their own theater chains. The others, better known as the Little Three studios—Universal, Columbia and United Artists—generally produced fewer A-class films due to the lack of financial leverage. They also owned and operated fewer theaters than their larger counterparts. Theaters owned and operated by The Big Eight, can be found in many of the largest cities across the country. For example, Fox, one of the Big Eight studios had theaters in, Atlanta, St. Louis, San Francisco and Detroit.

With institutions running the film industry, the movie theater building typology history is governed by the same major studio chains. Frequently studio chains would commission the same architect to design multiple theaters. This resulted in the glorification of several architects as the “architects of the palaces.” Several of these architects, such as Rapp & Rapp, C. Howard Crane and John Eberson devoted large

38 Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 174.
39 The Big Eight dominated the film industry until lawsuit in the 1940s forced the conglomerates to sell off real estate.; Schatz, “The studio System and Conglomerate Hollywood,” 15.
40 The Fox Theater chain had theaters in various cities across the country. The list above highlights several of the larger venue locations.
portions of their careers to movie palaces and gained national recognition for their work.41 These architects are highlighted in Appendix C.

**Building Program**

In the twenty years following the construction of the Regent (1913), nearly 4,000 movie palaces were designed and constructed across the United States. The movie palace was a specific type of theater built between 1913 and 1932.42 “Most theater historians agree that although no real formula distinguishes the palace from the smaller house, movie palaces share certain characteristics.”43 The typical movie palace features that distinguished them from other types of venues were their large size, lavish decorations and service personnel.44

The grand movie palace styles were varied, drawing inspiration from European Opera Houses to exotic motifs from the Far East. Classification of theater styles has plagued architectural historians. Many theaters cannot be captured under one label, requiring several to be strung together. Movie palace architecture developed its own architectural language, blending modern comforts with classical motifs. Drawing inspiration from numerous style books, designers selected ornament with little regard to age or culture.45

The first theaters showcased designs based on established styles. The lingering influences of the Chicago World’s Fair mastery of traditional styles appealed to the

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43 Valerio et al., *Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse*, 11.
44 Service personnel included ushers and doormen. Additionally, because, the grandest of Movie Palaces were built before the advent of “talkies” a full orchestra was staffed for musical accompaniment. Smaller venues always had an organ, taking advantage of the instruments ability to emulate the multiplies orchestra of the larger structures. Valerio et al., *Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse*, 11.
appetites of the masses. These influences translated into a variety of theater styles
drawing inspiration from iconic Greek Temples to Baroque Palaces. Early theaters
blended classical motifs into a unique experience. Each element of the theater was
carefully selected for a flawless experience. Moviegoers’ impressions began with the
building façade and were crafted all the way to the proscenium arch.

The movie palaces began communication of meaning with the façade. Although
never as lavish as the interiors, the facades caught a passerby’s attention and signaled the
promise to a new experience. The most notable feature of the façade was the marquee.
Marquees were a two part system featuring an attraction board and vertical sign (fig. 1.4).
The attraction board was the horizontal element, which was updated with new signage
advertising the newest feature film. The vertical marquee was a fixed feature with the
theaters name.

The vertical marquee combined with ascending pilasters, terra-cotta ornament in
distinctive rich colors and vertical windows often emphasized the height of the building.
Typically, marquees were designed in a style independent of the rest of the building and
studded with several hundred lights. The glowing marquee was designed to catch the
attention of the passerby. It alerted all to the presence of the theater. The purpose was to
advertise and bring patrons to the box office. Pioneering the application of electric light

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46 Valerio et al., Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse, 26.
47 Proscenium arch is the arch that separates the stage from the auditorium.; Valerio et al., Movie
Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse, 25.
48 Frequently the application of terra-cotta tile distinguished the theater from the neighboring shops.
First appearing in the late 19th century as stone imitation, terra-cotta quickly gained favor with
architects for its fire and moisture resistant qualities. Available in colors never before witnessed on
exterior, architects continued to dazzle bystanders through brilliant shades of purple, gold and
crimson.
50 Pilasters are an architectural design element. A pilaster looks like an engaged column, but serves
only an ornamental function.
51 Frequently a theater chains or architects had a particular design (or elements) indicating their
ownership or involvement; Herzog, “The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of Its
Architectural Style.”
in advertisement, many marquees were fitted with special effects including chaser bulbs and rows of lights outlining the contours of the façade.⁵² Clearly proud of advances and opulent in term of lighting and electrical power, theater owners often boasted the amount of power required to run their marquee rivaled even the tallest office tower.⁵³

Figure 1.4: Chicago’s Marbro Theater exemplifies the typical two part marquee with vertical sign and attraction board. Photograph provided by Cinema Treasures.

⁵² Chaser bulbs cycle on and off to create the illusion of lights “chasing” each other.; Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 32.
⁵³ Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 40
To further entice the interest of a passerby, the theater entrance served as a “show window,” arousing curiosity and luring customers inside. The most common type of entrance was a recessed exterior vestibule or ticket lobby, enclosed with glass panel doors. The ticket booth was either a separate unit behind the entrance wall or engaged with the entrance wall and flanked by a set of glass doors.\(^{54}\)

After crossing through the bronze doors, patrons entered into one of the most unique building programs of the early twentieth century. The exterior walls contained within their limits a variety of spaces designed to serve the needs of the patron and the demands of a theater. Beyond the necessary spaces—lobby, auditorium—movie palaces provided numerous secondary spaces including lounges, children’s play areas and dressing rooms.\(^{55}\)

The lobbies served to distract and awe the patron. As senior architect of Rapp and Rapp, E.C.A Bullock described,

… the lobby must be a place of real interest, a place where the throng may be transformed…. In other words, the lobby should be so designed and so equipped that the fascination resulting from it will keep the mind of the patron off the fact that he is waiting…\(^{56}\)

Frequently within the lobby designers included a grand marble staircase with low risers, generous widths and lush carpets. Further elevating the illusion of verticality of the space were slender colonnades reaching several stories tall. Surfaces were treated with mirrors, heavy draperies and scagliola. Scagliola was a technique employed to create the illusion

\(^{54}\) Herzog, “The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of Its Architectural Style.”

\(^{55}\) Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 36. Valerio et al., Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse,11.

of marble (fig. 1.5). The extravagant lobbies were intended to increase anticipation of the auditorium decor.\footnote{Valerio et al., \textit{Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse}, 25.}

Within the auditorium patrons were engulfed by the enormity of the space and the entirety of its decorative personality. Movie palaces seated between 1,000 and 5,000 Patrons.\footnote{Valerio et al., \textit{Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse}, 11.} The largest of auditoriums occupied over half of a city block, reaching several stories high.\footnote{Galbraith, \textit{Motor City Marquees}, 78.}

The years following the first movie theaters, experiments in structural design eliminated the issues that plagued the nineteenth century opera houses. Early theaters were limited by structural technology resulting in squared off auditoriums and balcony support piers blocking patrons views. At first movie theaters were designed with shallow

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Uptown-Theater-lobby.jpg}
\caption{Chicago’s Uptown Theater lobby illustrates the opulent materiality of movie palaces. Photo provided by Cinema Treasure.}
\end{figure}
cantilevered balconies, often two or more stacked on top of each other. Cantilevering eliminated the need for support piers. In later movie palaces a larger balcony was able to be supported as cantilevering technology improved.60

Early palaces were constructed as freestanding theaters. Between 1925 and 1930 it became common practice to incorporate the theater into a multi-functional building, typically as a part of a multi-storied office building.61 The office tower was included as a precaution. Movies were a commercial investment, to compensate for the potential failure or fluctuations in profit if film exhibition rental of office spaces provided a secondary income for investors.62 The relationship between the architect of the theater and the architect of the office building component varied. Sometimes a separate architect was hired to design the office space. Despite instances where multiple designers were employed, the façade was designed to create the illusion of a unified structure despite the varying function inside. Frequently the only element distinguishing the theater from the office building entrance was the vertical marquee and attraction board.63

Movie palaces were a phenomenon found strictly in downtown. According to Joseph Valerio, author of Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse, “… the greater the distance from either the central business district or its primary commercial satellites, the smaller the theater.”64 However, more than just size and location differentiated movie palaces and the neighborhood movie house. Although neighborhood theaters were characterized by similar styles they were less lavish than the downtown palaces, and did not offer many of the additional luxuries, such as lounges and children’s play areas.65

60 Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 19-21.
61 Valerio et al., Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse, 11.
64 Valerio et al., Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse, 11.
65 Valerio et al., Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse, 11.
Styles

According to Ben Hall, there were two major schools in movie palace style and design, the standard and the atmospheric. The standard or “hard top” followed the stylistic precedents set by opera houses and vaudeville theaters. Atmospheric or “stars and clouds” borrowed motifs from nature, landscape architecture and open-air quality of ancient Greek and Roman amphitheaters through stage-set like walls. In the subsequent section, representative theaters further illustrate the major style trends in movie palaces.

The Chicago Theater was the first large scale movie palace with 3,880 seats designed in the standard style. The theater served as the flagship of the Balahan and Katz theater chain. The spectacle had begun with the façade designed after the French Arc de Triomphe (fig. 1.6). The six story marquee radiated from its location on

66 Hall, The Best Remaining Seats, 95.
67 Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 47.
State Street. The interior echoed the French Baroque styles of the second empire, with a lobby modeled after the Royal Chapel at Versailles. The grand stair case ascends to the multiple balcony levels (fig. 1.7).

Inside the auditorium crystal chandeliers and bronze light fixtures illuminate the murals of the ceiling cove. Replacing the traditional opera boxes, Rapp and Rapp incorporated decorative organ screens to augment the space.68

Theater architect John Eberson enlivened the classical style of standard theaters, he is credited with creating the “stars and clouds” or atmospheric style. His transformation began first by supplementing the ornate ceiling dome with a star covered blue sky. Employing a combination of electric lights and projected clouds, Eberson created a naturalistic impression of an evening sky. The illusion resonated with patrons, combined with the stage-set perimeter walls the design created the feeling as if they had been swept away to an ancient garden.69

Figure 1.8: The set-like perimeter walls of Eberson’s first atmospheric theater, the Hoblitzelle Majestic, Houston, TX. Photo provided by Cinema Treasures.

68 Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 48.
69 Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 67-68.
The Hoblitzelle Majestic set the stage as John Eberson’s first atmospheric theaters (fig 1.8). In each theater for which Eberson was commissioned, he strived to create a unique experience. His theaters swept patrons away from the city to the Italian countryside, an Egyptian temple yard, or Spanish patio, each under its own twinkling starlit sky.  

Eberson’s atmospheric theaters produced imitations. Frequently atmospheric theaters took on regional qualities, reflecting a blend of cultural histories of the state in which it was built. In Texas and Florida, Spanish influences were popular. In Ohio, architect Peter Hulsken chose a Dutch inspiration for the Holland Theater in Bellefontaine. Complete with gabled roofs, flower boxes and windmills, every detail reflected a single cultural origin.

In the decades following, theater architects began to experiment with other new styles. The following theaters represent the changing trends in later theater architecture as styles transitioned away from traditional styles to the more exotic inspirations.

In 1922, with the uncovering of King Tutankhamen’s tomb, in Egypt a resurgence of interest in ancient cultures developed. This interest resulted in a rise of popular styles derived from Central America to the

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70 Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 68-69.
71 Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 78.
Far East. Collectively these theaters have come to be referred to as the “Exotics.”\textsuperscript{72} These theaters expanded the architectural language of the “standard” theaters. Exotic theaters supplemented classical motifs for those inspired by “exotic” influences. Theaters inspired by the archaeological finds in Egypt were among the earliest explorations into exotic designs. Egyptian Revival architecture employed imagery and motifs adopted from ancient Egypt, sculpted deities, pharaohs, sun disks and scarabs.\textsuperscript{73} Among the first Egyptian Revival theaters was Hollywood Showman, Sid Granuman’s Egyptian Theater (fig. 1.9). The Egyptian Theater was designed by Meyer and Holler in 1922 along Hollywood Boulevard.\textsuperscript{74} The theater’s entrance was offset from the boulevard requiring its patrons to first pass through the forecourt before entering. The auditorium was lined with lotus columns wrapped with polychrome hieroglyphs.\textsuperscript{75} The Egyptian Revival quickly became one of the most popular exotic styles.\textsuperscript{76}

Inspiration was not limited to ancient Egyptian culture. Sid Graunuman’s last theater in Hollywood took its inspiration from Asian cultures. The Chinese, built in 1927, featured four ornate obelisks and gave the impression of a huge gate or entrance to an oriental garden. The interior applied an assortment of popular furnishings of the Chinese Chippendale style.\textsuperscript{77} With ornament inspired by the designs of cabinet maker Thomas Chippendale. Other theaters that looked to the Far East, choose more traditional representation of Chinese architecture. The Fifth Avenue Theater in Seattle was a “near perfect duplicate at twice the original scale, of the throne room of the Imperial Palace in Perking’s Forbidden City.”\textsuperscript{78}

\begin{itemize}
  \item[72] Valerio et al., \textit{Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse}, 26.
  \item[73] Naylor, \textit{American Picture Palaces}, 84.
  \item[74] Naylor, \textit{American Picture Palaces}, 84.
  \item[76] Valerio et al., \textit{Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse}, 26.
  \item[77] Naylor, \textit{American Picture Palaces}, 96-88.
  \item[78] Naylor, \textit{American Picture Palaces}, 103.
\end{itemize}
Introduction of Sound

The development of talking film ran parallel to the evolution of film venues from nickelodeons to movie palaces. Edison and his associates began to work on the development of talking pictures around the same time as the Kinetoscope became the main attraction at the penny arcades. However, it was not until 1927 that talking film technology became a standard feature of movie houses, with the introduction of Movietone. Between the early experimentation to the full integration of talking film in the 1920s, talking film technology went through numerous iterations including: photocinematophone, cameraphone and vitaphone. Movietone differed from these early versions by integrating the sound directly on the film.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{79} For more on the evolution of film sound technology, see \textit{The Best Remaining Seats}, by Ben Hall. Hall, \textit{The Best Remaining Seats}, 24.
Disputed Beauty

The Depression marked the end of the roaring twenties and the movie palace era. With the decline of moviegoers during the Depression, theaters were forced to cut back. Patrons were no longer greeted by doormen, guided to their seats by ushers or assisted by lounge attendants. The expense that had characterized the theaters of the twenties was considered over exuberant and wasteful during (and after) the Depression.\textsuperscript{80} However, theater architects still sought to awe patrons, so they adopted Art Deco as an economic measure, in an attempt to maintain the richness of design without the additional cost.

Art Deco marked a new period in theater construction. Art Deco theaters were characterized by mass produced and machine made ornament. Its geometric quality and jarring diagonals contrasted the organic and curvilinear forms of the classical styles and natural composition of the exotic styles.\textsuperscript{81} This “machine-age style” was first introduced in 1925 at the Paris Exposition of Decorative Arts, though it was not until 1930 that the style was embraced in its entirety in movie theater architecture.

The first Art Deco movie theater was the Pantages Theater built in Hollywood in 1931. It utilized stylized geometric patterns, bringing a richness of custom design without the cost of opulence. The simplification of styles extended throughout the building. The influence of the period was even noticeable in aesthetic changes to the marquee. The hundreds of lights of the golden age marquees eventually gave way to a simplified neon version.

During World War II, theaters began to see an increase in attendance again. Drawing crowds with news from abroad, many theaters exchanged their comedies and dramas for newsreels during the war. However, the rise of television and other forms of entertainment diverted attendance away from the theaters, and attendance dwindled.\textsuperscript{82}

\begin{flushleft}
80 Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 172.
81 Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 162, 172.
82 Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 174.
\end{flushleft}
In the post-war era, the movie industry experienced another resurgence of popularity; though this popularity was not accompanied by significant movie palace construction. During this period, movie corporations recovered their losses from the declined revenues during the Depression and War. This lucrative post-war period was short lived. In 1948, studio investment in theaters was disbanded in the case U.S. v. Paramount. Previously studios had been able to hold exclusive rights to the time’s best pictures. For a theater structure an investment from a movie corporation guaranteed first run films. After the court ruling, studios were forced to relinquish their “brick and mortar holdings.” Without studio investments in the physical theater structures, theater design received less investment, becoming more modest until the 1960s, when shopping-mall movie houses became the norm.\textsuperscript{83}

\textit{Paved into Oblivion}

The changing attitudes and architectural styles in contemporary United States, spelled the pending doom of many downtown movie palaces and theaters. Not recognized for their social and architectural significance, many theaters suffered from neglect, leading to eventual demolition. The first theater to be slated for demolition was the Paradise in Chicago. Due to flaws in the design, poor acoustics eventually drove attendance to the Marbor Theater nearby. The Paradise theater was closed in 1954. The land was sold to a supermarket chain and the theater was demolished. Theater demolition continued around the nation in the 1960s. The number of theaters lost to office building construction, hotels and parking lots is sizable. The theaters inherent size (many taking up nearly an entire city block) and location (occupying valuable downtown property) worked against theaters enduring in downtown cityscapes. Their undervalued significance

\textsuperscript{83} Valerio et al., \textit{Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse}, 35; Naylor, \textit{American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy}, 177.
has resulted in many larger cities demolishing these structures for new development. In many cities, few of the large picture palaces still exist.\textsuperscript{84}

\textbf{History of Detroit}

“In The old tradition of the Algonquin Indians, it was known by the name of Yon-do-ti, A Great Village; its first name was thus prophetic of its future.”\textsuperscript{85}

Detroit’s proximity to the Detroit River and its connections to the greater water shed has provided Detroit with a dynamic history. The city’s earliest written history is documented in the 1700s by the exploration of Antoine Laumet de La Mothe, sieur de Cadillac, the son of a magistrate from France and officer in the French navy.\textsuperscript{86} Cadillac’s knowledge of New England and the Great Lakes regions resulted in his position as the commandant of the frontier fort, Michillimackinac in 1694. Fort Michillimackinac was located at the straits of Mackinac where Lake Michigan and Lake Huron meet between Michigan’s Upper and Lower Peninsula.

The frontier fort served as a trading post to the surrounding lands. However the original location quickly proved to be ineffective. The lack of natural defenses and poor soil conditions prompted Cadillac to seek a new location. In 1699, Cadillac returned to France to propose a new location for the fort. Cadillac proposed a new site further south. Upon his return with approval for a new fort location, Cadillac, 100 French soldiers and

\textsuperscript{84} Naylor, \textit{American Picture Palaces}, 177.
\textsuperscript{85} Detroit received its present name from the French word for strait; Silas Farmer, \textit{The History of Detroit and Michigan}, (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Co, 1969), 3.
\textsuperscript{86} Richard Bak, \textit{Detroit: Across Three Centuries} (Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear Press, 2001), 12.
100 Algonquians constructed a new frontier outpost.

He [Cadillac] abandoned the post at Mackinac and moved the garrison south to the much narrower and more easily defended river that drained the upper lakes into Lake Erie. And he knew just the spot, a bend in the narrows where the river flowed temporarily from east to west, making the northern bank the perfect place to monitor traffic, control passage and keep the British from moving in on French trade with the native tribes.

The fort was a relatively modest structure, constructed of fifteen-foot high oak trunks. 87 The first building to be constructed was St. Anne’s Church in 1701. 88 Although it was a small primitive building with a crude altar, it served as the church until it was destroyed by a fire in 1703. Following the churches completion Cadillac set out to establish Detroit as a permanent settlement with homes and outbuildings. Early houses were drawn from rough-hewn oak or cedar logs beneath roofs of thatch or grass, with stone chimneys. It was not until approximately 1750 when the first brick kilns were built in Detroit. 89

As life in the new fort began to settle, additional homes were constructed outside of the stockade, private farms, and “ribbon farms” along the river were established. Ribbon farms were designed to allow the greatest number of farms to have available river frontage. These farms were found to be approximately 200 ft.-wide by as deep as two-to three miles.

Detroit quickly became a center of fur trade in the Great Lake region. From the surrounding woods, trappers brought pelts of elk, bear, minks, lynx, fox, and beaver among others furs to the post which were then shipped on to Montreal. Relations with the

88 St. Anne’s church is still a functioning parish. The parish is the second oldest in the country.
89 Stones for chimneys were brought from Stony and Monguagon Islands downriver near Lake Erie. Martelle, *Detroit: A Biography*, 6.
surrounding Native American tribes remained pleasant as the French treated them with respect.

In 1754 the Seven Years War began in Europe and soon spread to the new world. As a small settlement fort west of the fighting, Detroit was mostly uninvolved in the war until the fort was turned over to the British on November 29, 1760 as a result of France’s surrender at Quebec and Montreal. Under the British occupation, the fort continued to operate as a trade post, but its’ dominant function was as a military outpost. The relationship between the British and Native Americans was not like that with the French. Hostility existed and numerous massacres occurred.

Detroit played a minimal role during the Revolutionary War. After surrender, the British turned their claims to the region over to the American in 1783 by signing the Treaty of Paris. Unincentivized, the British were slow to leave and controlled the fort and its associated fur trade until 1796. On July 11, 1796, thirteen years after the Revolutionary War’s conclusion, the stars and stripes were raised above the fort for the first time. The town that had grown around the fort remained in occupation by the Americans, except for a brief period during the War of 1812 when General William Hull surrendered his troops to the British.

On January 18, 1802, Detroit was officially incorporated as a town. It was approximately a third of a square mile or 20 acres. On January 11, 1805, President Jefferson approved a Congressional act to establish the Michigan Territory. Local affairs were now under the control of a territorial governor and judges, and Detroit became the new capital. On June 11 of the same year, a fire destroyed much of Detroit. Only one of the town’s buildings remained standing after the fire was extinguished. Despite the

90 Captain Moses Porter was the first to raise the flag; Bak, *Detroit: Across Three Centuries*, 24.
tragedy, hopeful spirits prevailed. Father Gabriel Richard, a beloved citizen of Detroit, spoke optimistic of the future with the words, “We hope for better things; it will rise from the ashes.”

Shortly after the fire, Judge Augustus Woodward, a federal appointee was sent to govern the Michigan Territory. After only recently arriving in Detroit, he offered a plan to serve as the basis for the development of Detroit’s future. In 1806 by an Act of Congress a Land Board was established to lay out a town on the old site, plus an additional 10,000 acres. Woodward’s plan featured streets ranging from 60 feet to 200 feet wide, plus squares (Campus Martius), triangular parks (what is now Capitol Park), and circular parks (Grand Circus Park). It was believed that the plans for the design of the town were a reflection of those of Washington DC. Woodward’s original plan never became reality; however some aspects of it were incorporated in the development of the city.

As Father Gabriel Richard predicted, Detroit rose from the ashes with a new city plan and concentrated construction efforts after the fire. In 1806, the first brick building was constructed, the Bank of Michigan. The bank was a small simple one-story building. The first brick house was built in 1809. This house began as the primary residence of the Governor, General William Hull. The house served many uses in preceding years including a military headquarters and hospital. For over thirteen years this was the only brick house to exist in Detroit.

Detroit was beginning to evolve from a French settlement into an American frontier town when tragedy struck again less than a decade after the fire. The War of 1812 left Detroit and the surrounding areas in a devastated state. All wooden buildings

92 Bak, *Detroit: Across Three Centuries*, 34.
93 Bak, *Detroit: Across Three Centuries*, 18.
95 The structure was fifty-two feet square and was found at the corner of Jefferson and Randolph Streets. Arthur Pound and E. H. Suydam, *Detroit Dynamic City* (New York, NY: Appleton-Century Co., 1940), 129.
in the fort and the surrounding farms were destroyed. During the war, Detroit was briefly occupied by the British again, becoming the only American city to be occupied by a foreign army during this War.\textsuperscript{96} Within a few years of the war’s end conditions improved, and Detroit grew from what was once a trading post to a small city, as more people arrived from the east. By 1815, with a population of 850, Detroit was incorporated as a city. In addition to homes, the city now had churches, shops and schools, as well as a university—the Catholipistemiad, which later developed into present day University of Michigan.\textsuperscript{97} The population of Detroit continued to grow, reaching nearly 3,000 residents by 1820.

No roads worthy of naming existed prior to the founding of Fort Wayne and the establishment of the city of Detroit.\textsuperscript{98} Prior to 1812 travel was exclusively conducted by water and footpaths. The first surveyed road was the so-called Pontiac Road. Today it is known as Woodward Avenue.\textsuperscript{99} As appropriations were made for military roads and roads leading to the interior of Michigan, more people began to make their way to Detroit. From 1825 to 1835 roads were in progress to Chicago, Saginaw and smaller towns to the west. A system of plank roads were built leading from Detroit to various cities beginning in 1849. Plank roads were a significant improvement over the system of trails and roads that were in existence before 1849. These plank roads were made of boards and as long as they were properly maintained, provided a smooth surface for travel. They were constructed by laying planks of pine or oak, eight to sixteen feet long and three to four inches thick, across “sleepers” or “stringers” which were placed parallel to the direction of the road. Ditches were dug on either side of the road to provide proper drainage.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{96} General William Hull surrendered on August 16, 1812.; Bak, \textit{Detroit: Across Three Centuries}, 27.
\textsuperscript{97} In 1837 in preparation for statehood Catholipistemiad officially was named the University of Michigan and was relocated to Ann Arbor.; Poremba, \textit{Detroit in Its World Setting}.
\textsuperscript{98} Fort Wayne was known as Fort Detroit under the French, later renamed Fort Shelby by the British.
\textsuperscript{99} Farmer, \textit{The History of Detroit and Michigan}, 925.
\textsuperscript{100} Farmer, \textit{The History of Detroit and Michigan}, 926.
New transportation methods further augmented Detroit’s population growth. With the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, travel to Detroit from the New England states took only weeks instead of several months. The canal ran from Albany, NY on the Hudson River to Buffalo, NY on Lake Erie. The transportation barrier for those traveling west was lifted with the arrival of the steamer Walk-In-Water. The first voyage arrived in Detroit from Buffalo on April 28, 1818; the voyage took 44 hours. With the arrival of the first stage coach in 1822 and the opening of railroads in 1831, Detroit’s population continued to grow. By mid-century it had become the 21st largest city in the United States. One hundred and fifty years after the founding of Detroit there were over 26,000 people, more than 600 brick buildings and 4,000 wooden buildings.

The Michigan Territory was granted statehood in 1837, which Detroit continued to serve as the capital. Detroit remained the state capital for the next 10 years with many public buildings occupying the city center, including the State House, State Penitentiary and the City Hall.

Each year new buildings appeared on the Detroit landscape, including the National Theater (1848), the first structure of this kind in Detroit. As the city grew other aspects of life also flourished. Art exhibitions, musical and theatrical performances increased. Detroit became a stop on the western trek for troupes from New York to Chicago.

With the opening of a new set of locks at Sault Saint Marie shipping onLake

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101 Bak, Detroit: Across Three Centuries, 23.
102 Frank Angelo, Yesterday’s Detroit (Miami, FL: Seeman Publication, 1974), 25.
103 Peter Gavrilovich and Bill McGraw, The Detroit Almanac: 300 Years of Life in the Motor City (Detroit, MI: Detroit Free Press, 2006), 40.
104 City Hall was built in 1835 at the cost of $20,000 and was 50x100 feet. Pound and Suydam, Detroit Dynamic City, 166.
105 Opened on Jefferson Avenue, renamed Metropolitan Theater (1854) and later known as the Variety.; Poremba, Detroit in Its World Setting, 127.
Superior, Detroit became the point where goods from the northern regions passed. These goods were primarily lumber, iron ore and copper ore. Trade routes brought numerous manufacturing companies to the area. Beginning in the 1860s Michigan Car Company, Detroit Stove Works and Eureka Iron and Steel Works established operations in Detroit. With the addition of these and other institutions Detroit’s population continued to grow. In 1864 the Harper hospital along the Detroit Public Library opened. These institutions provided an increasing social livability. Streetcars, first horse-drawn and later electrical, were introduced. The establishment of street car routes opened the door for many to live farther away from city center.

After the Civil War, Detroit’s population swelled with another surge of migration and further expansion of industry. The population of Detroit quadrupled from 45,619 to 205,876 between 1860 and 1890. Within this population were the nouveau rich who built three-story Victorian and Italianate homes in an area known as Brush Park. This neighborhood of mansions would be replaced by even bigger mansions by 1927 in areas known as Indian Village and Palmer Woods. The city continued to grow with buildings erected and magnificent homes built by many of Detroit’s wealthy. In the home built by tobacco manufacture John Bagley in 1869, the first plate glass windows in Michigan were installed. On March 29, 1869 the Detroit Opera House opened across Campus Martius from where the new City Hall was being built. The City Hall was considered the showpiece of the city, with sandstone sculptures carved by local artist Julius Melchers outlining the base of the building’s cupola. The floors were black and white marble,

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107 Michigan Car Company manufactured railroad cars.
111 The home was built on Washington & Park and was an Italian Villa design.
113 City Hall was dedicated on July 4, 1871. The sculptures are civic virtues: Justice, Art, Industry and Commerce. Poremba, *Detroit in Its World Setting*, 151.
walls were covered with black walnut and a clock tower that was the highest point in the city.

By the middle of the 1870s, Detroit occupied 15 square miles. The majority of the buildings were constructed of brick and new structures were being erected monthly. The Moffat Building was the first to have a passenger elevator.¹¹⁴ In 1879, the six-story Newberry and McMillan buildings were completed becoming the city’s tallest buildings.¹¹⁵

With the advance in elevators and structural steel, the mid-1890’s brought unprecedented change to Detroit. The city’s first skyscraper, Hammond Building, an 11-story masonry structure opened in 1890. Other tall buildings followed, the 14-story Majestic building, 19-story Whitney Building in 1896.¹¹⁶ Marking a new era of particular relevance to this thesis subject, in 1896, the Detroit Opera House exhibited several reels of motion picture film. These films were the first played in Michigan and depicted a bicycle parade, wrestling match and a bull fight. On March 6, 1896, Charles Brady King drove the first gasoline operated automobile out of his workshop on to the city’s streets.¹¹⁷ That June, Henry Ford did the same.

By 1900 Detroit had grown to the 13th largest city in the United States with a population of over 286,000. Over half of the population was foreign-born and of the immigrant population almost 12% were non-English speaking. Detroit’s station as a commercial and trading center drastically evolved from Detroit’s early history, making way for industrialization. In the early 1900s, Detroit was the nation’s largest producer of heating and cooking stoves, a center for shipbuilding, major producer of pharmaceuticals

¹¹⁴ Poremba, Detroit, a Motor City History, 78.
¹¹⁵ Poremba, Detroit, a Motor City History, 81.
¹¹⁷ The automobile had a four cylinder motor and could reach twenty miles per hour. Pound and Suydam, Detroit Dynamic City, 270.
and was the center of production of iron, brass and copper.\textsuperscript{118} The production of automobiles was now becoming a more serious manufacturing consideration. By 1901, Ransome Olds started producing cars at the rate of one or two a day and selling them at a cost of $650. David Buick and the Packard brothers also joined the ranks of car manufactures. By 1902, 270 miles of Detroit’s roads were paved with cedar planks, strengthening Detroit’s image as an automobile center. In 1903 a local architect Albert Kahn designed the first Packard Motor Car building.\textsuperscript{119} This building was considered the most modern automobile manufacturing facility of its time, with reinforced concrete, and extra glass for light and ventilation.\textsuperscript{120} Kahn’s reputation soared as an outstanding architect for industrial buildings, homes, and hotels and in just a few short years he would become “the Architect of Ford,” designing the factory for Henry Ford’s Model T. The plant began producing cars by January of 1910.

Henry Ford’s insistence on producing cars affordable for everyone revolutionized the industry. Ford is credited with enormous leaps in the mass production of automobiles, specifically through the use of an assembly line. With this advance in production also came the $5, 8-hour work day in January 1914. These wages were almost double what the average laborer would make for a nine-hour day. This extraordinary move would help build the middle-class. The ability now to afford non-necessity goods and the extra leisure time opened the door for the average worker to spend more on entertainment. Detroit’s cityscape also became transformed at this time with a new main library to be built on Woodward Avenue and the opening of the Statler Hotel an 18-story building with 800 rooms at Grand Circus Park.\textsuperscript{121}

The automobile industry brought to Detroit not only jobs but a boom in real

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{118} Poremba, \textit{Detroit, a Motor City History}, 93.
\textsuperscript{119} For more on Albert Kahn and his designs see Appendix C.
\textsuperscript{120} Bak, \textit{Detroit: Across Three Centuries}, 125.
\textsuperscript{121} Poremba, \textit{Detroit, a Motor City History}, 104.
\end{flushleft}
estate sales and many forms of leisure entertainment, including watching the hometown baseball team, or rides along Belle Isle.\textsuperscript{122} The city auto plants were producing 4 million cars a year and building construction flourished. Landmark buildings with their bronze doors and marbled walls, such as the Detroit Institute of Arts, Fox Theater, Guardian, Penobscot and Fisher Building were just a fraction of the vast number of new and impressive buildings constructed. The Fox Theater (1928) was a testament to the lavish movie palaces being built.\textsuperscript{123} The Fisher Building (1928) which boosted a bowling alley, theater and 40 types of marble was just one representative of the lavish splendor that was found throughout the new buildings during this period in Detroit’s rise in history, only trailing New York and Chicago.\textsuperscript{124} With the arrival of concrete as a road surface in Detroit, road engineers around the country flocked to Detroit to study the innovation.\textsuperscript{125} In 1921 the Federal Highway Act provided funding for what lead to interstate freeways, solidifying the automobile’s future.

Detroit’s population had grown to well over 1.2 million by the 1930s, but with it street violence and organized crime rose. The Great Depression brought an end to the golden-age of Detroit. Due to the lack of industrial diversity, Detroit suffered greatly. Cars were no longer being bought and the sporadic unemployment auto workers had always faced was now chronic. Wages were cut, jobs were lost and homes repossessed. The city was economically paralyzed. Michigan and especially the city of Detroit were areas of the country that were greatly impacted during the Depression. Over 30,000 families in Detroit found themselves on welfare relief.\textsuperscript{126} The city’s crisis was made worse by heavy tax delinquency and debts. The auto industry that had once been a central

\textsuperscript{122} Bak, \textit{Detroit: Across Three Centuries}, 132.
\textsuperscript{124} Buildings included public buildings, movie palaces, hotels and skyscrapers.; Poremba, \textit{Detroit in Its World Setting}, 255.
\textsuperscript{125} By 1909, 394,000sq. yards of concrete roadway were found nationwide.; Martelle, \textit{Detroit: A Biography}, 72.
\textsuperscript{126} Poremba, \textit{Detroit, a Motor City History}, 117.
pillar in the American economy was not able to support the economy it had a large role in
growing. Due to the economic situation, many building projects were put on hold and
many were forgotten. The once stately Book-Cadillac Hotel fell into disuse along with
numerous other hotels and buildings. The 1930s did have several highlights for Detroit,
the opening of the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel, the Metropolitan Airport, and the Detroit
Tigers Baseball team won the pennant in 1934 and a new professional football team the
Lions came to call Detroit its home city.

As the new decade of the 1940s began, Detroit joined the national trend, rising
out of the economic problems of the 1930s. Roosevelt’s New Deal had helped put
people slowly back to work and the country found itself once more involved in a war in
Europe. With the growing demand for tools, machinery and weaponry for the war, Detroit
became an important defense manufacturing city. Factories that once produced cars were
quickly converted to the production of tanks, jeeps, aircraft and other war materials.
Hundreds of thousands of Detroiter enlisted to fight, leaving a significant hole in the
labor market. Many blacks and whites from the south and Appalachia relocated to Detroit
to fill the labor shortage. With this additional influx of people, Detroit swelled beyond
its housing capacity. Squatters filled the parks, empty storefronts and unused factories, a
stark contrast to the prosperity of just over a decade earlier. The housing situation grew
more tense and violence escalated. Racial tension over housing, jobs and equal pay had
become an increased concern. Work stoppage, walkouts and strikes were taking place at
auto factories. A full-scale riot took place on June 29, 1943, where 34 people died and
property damaged soared into the millions. These tensions would continue to build into
the future decades.

With the end of WWII, a new prosperity again emerged as a demand for cars

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127 Martelle, Detroit: A Biography, 114.
128 Situation began on Belle Isle with fights between young blacks and whites. Poremba, Detroit, a
Motor City History, 125.
and manufactured goods increased. Detroit’s population stood at 1.9 million. Though the economic situation improved, this prosperity did not alleviate the social tensions. The 1950s marked great changes in the city. With the lure of the open space of the surrounding suburbs before them and new highways being constructed, many headed for the so called “bedroom communities” outside the city center of Detroit. The citizens of Detroit who left the city in the 1950s were predominately white. Over 363,000 whites moved to the suburbs in the 50s while 182,000 blacks moved into the city. The construction of new freeways such as the John Lodge and the Edsel Ford displaced more than 17,000 residences from their homes, destroying several ethnic neighborhoods. Those displaced had to find other living accommodations.

This situation and others similar added to the racial tension that became a serious concern in Detroit. The auto companies which were again booming, outgrew their city locations and were relocated to new facilities built in other Michigan cities like Warren, Wayne and Livonia and to other states. By the late 1950s the loss of jobs was the beginning of a new trend for the city, unemployment and economic recession. This trend would resonate into Detroit’s future. As the decade came to a close over 15% of the population, and the city’s job center had relocated out of the city.

The 1960s brought real estate practices that tried to bar blacks from moving into what was considered a white neighborhood. Neighborhood associations were formed to preserve the segregationist status quo. These practices were also a contributing factor along with racial profiling by the police that ultimately ignited Detroit into violence and rioting. The situation in Detroit was similar to that of Los Angeles, San Francisco and other large urban centers throughout the country. For Detroit, the gradual migration of whites from the city turned into an exodus. By 1973, for the first time, Detroit had more black than white residents. In 1974, Coleman Young was elected as the first black

129 Areas included Black Bottom & Paradise Valley.; Poremba, Detroit, a Motor City History, 127.
mayor. Under his direction Detroit moved slowly forward. A popular bumper sticker in 1975 read, “Will the last person leaving Detroit please turn the lights out.” The 1970’s were a tough time for the “Motor City.” This decade was marked by a recession, the beginning of the energy crisis and the title of “Murder Capital.” Desegregation of city schools had begun, strikes from the school district’s service staff and teachers added more fuel to the already faltering educational institution and numerous business pillars of the city relocated. The economic rollercoaster of Detroit continued. By the end of the 70’s a number of downtown development projects were completed, including the Renaissance Center and Hart Plaza and the residential development known as Victoria Park. These developments were completed in the hope of revitalizing a dying city, as Detroit was being referred to by this time. One of the social ills these developments were designed and built to combat was the rate of homicide. Detroit was well known as the Murder Capital of the country, a title that has continued to brand Detroit. By 1987 the murder rate rose to 63 murders per 100,000 inhabitants. Since 1970 Detroit’s population had decreased by half from 1.2 million to just over 700,000 in the 2012 census. Nearly 250,000 people left the city in the 2000 decade alone. The average home once valued at $97,000 by 2003 dropped to $12,500.

Through the decades of the 90’s until present, economic upheavals have overshadowed the glimmers of revitalization and progress in the city. In 1990 the Madden Building opened on Jefferson Avenue, the first major complex to be built in ten years. A year later One Detroit Center opened its doors. In 1997 two Detroit landmarks, owned

130 Bak, Detroit: Across Three Centuries, 277.
131 Kresge Company (Kmart), Motown Records, AMC; Poremba, Detroit, a Motor City History, 137.
132 Martelle, Detroit: A Biography, 231.
135 One Detroit Center, 50-story150 Jefferson Ave.; Poremba, Detroit, a Motor City History, 147.
by Chuck Forbes, the Gem and Century Theaters were physically moved five blocks to make way for Comerica Park and Ford Field.\textsuperscript{136} Other signs of revitalization were the Compuware Corp which relocated with a new building at Woodward & Monroe (Campus Martius) and a new Fine and Performance Arts High School.\textsuperscript{137} Preservation Detroit brought forth plans to preserve and promote several districts in the city that were home to a collection of Victorian residential homes. The Detroit Symphony Orchestra promoted plans to develop an $80 million project adjacent to Orchestra Hall.

In 2008 two of the three major auto companies filed for bankruptcy, sending what many felt was a death blow to the already struggling city. As businesses and residents moved out, the tax base shrunk and left the city government in a state of collapse. By July of 2009 the city’s unemployment rate was 27.4\%.\textsuperscript{138} With the loss of revenue the city had to lay off 1,000 city employees, further compounding the city’s woes. However, in 2011, Detroit native Dan Gilbert, CEO of Quicken Loans bought the Dime Building adding it to three other downtown properties he owned. By the fall of that year over 4,000 of his employees were working in Detroit, countering the growing unemployment rate.\textsuperscript{139} He along with others such as Chuck Forbes (Forbes Management), Mike Illich (Olympia Entertainment) and Detroit’s leaders have heavy stakes in downtown Detroit’s revitalization. On July 18, 2013, the city filed for bankruptcy.\textsuperscript{140} Again, as Father Gabriel Richard, once said about Detroit, “We hope for better things; it will rise from the ashes”.\textsuperscript{141}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[136] Additional information about the Gem in Appendix A.
\item[137] Poremba, \textit{Detroit in Its World Setting}, 341-342.
\item[141] Bak, \textit{Detroit: Across Three Centuries}, 34.
\end{footnotes}
**Detroit’s Theaters**

The wealth generated by the automobile industry from 1900-1930 drew various cultural institutions to the city. This period of prosperity is connected to the development of Detroit’s theater district. “By the end of the 1920s, Detroiters could get off the streetcar on Broadway on a Friday night and find themselves surrounded by electrically lit marquees and big blade signs, beckoning them to enter.”\(^{142}\) Within blocks dozens of movie theaters were constructed during this “Golden Age.”

Two distinct entertainment districts existed in Detroit’s history. The location of the districts is tied directly to the early history of the city. After a fire destroyed Detroit in 1805, the only building left of the original settlement was a single stone fort. Judge Augustus Woodward who had only recently arrived in Detroit before the fire, offered a plan to serve as the basis for Detroit’s rebuilding efforts. The plan included street layouts and lot division with intermittent squares or parks.\(^{143}\) Initial surveying began at the 1788 military parade ground.\(^{144}\) This “point of origin” was the central location of Woodward’s plan. From here, the city expanded outward. Today the “point of origin” lies at the intersection of Monroe and Woodward at Campus Martius, one of Woodward’s planned squares. Campus Martius was situated in the center of the original shopping district.\(^{145}\) Following the national trends, the entertainment district developed near the commercial district, which in Detroit was the Campus Martius District.\(^{146}\) The Campus Martius District was home to many of the early theater structures including

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\(^{142}\) Bragg, “Detroit Opera House.”

\(^{143}\) Angelo, *Yesterday’s Detroit*, 18.

\(^{144}\) Campus Martius loosely translates to “military ground.”


\(^{146}\) Bragg, “Detroit Opera House.”
nickelodeons, vaudeville and the original Detroit Opera House.¹⁴⁷ In the first decades of the nineteenth-century a new shopping district was developed farther north at the Grand Circus Park District. Following the new development, movie impresario John Kunsky initiated the relocation of entertainment district to the Grand Circus Park district through new theater construction.¹⁴⁸ With the commencement of film entertainment, the term impresario came to include those who financed and organized film production and the construction of theater venues. Grand Circus Park became home to larger movie palaces of the 1920s.

*Origins of Movie Palaces*

In 1896 vaudeville and “legitimate” theaters were exhibiting the first films in cities across the country. The motion picture premier in Michigan was at the Detroit Opera House.” For more information on John Kunsky see Appendix C.

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¹⁴⁷ An impresario is a person who organizes and manages public entertainment, such as opera or concerts.; “Monroe Avenue Historic District,” City of Detroit Planning and Development Department, Accessed February 3, 2014, http://www.ci.detroit.mi.us/historic/districts/monroe_ave.pdf.

¹⁴⁸ Bragg, “Detroit Opera House.”
Opera House in 1896.\textsuperscript{149} Following the introduction of motion pictures Vaudeville theaters began to include short segments of film between acts. Opera houses and vaudeville theaters had all of the necessary structural requirements with respect to patron experience; projection equipment was easily installed to support film. Opera houses and vaudeville theaters allowed for early movie impresarios to introduce patrons to film, without the risk of financial failure. However the introduction at other venues did not lead to immediate popularity of film, as it was another decade before the first theater dedicated to the exhibition of film was constructed in Detroit.\textsuperscript{150}

John Kunsky and his partner Arthur Caille, advanced the cultural phenomenon of film in Detroit with the construction of the city’s first nickelodeon. In 1905, a small store front on 28 Monroe Avenue was converted into the 200-seat Casino Theater (fig. 1.12).\textsuperscript{151} The Casino was the first of numerous nickelodeons that lined Monroe Avenue. Nickelodeon proliferated quickly in the Campus Martius District. For example, the Cent Odeon (later renamed the Bijou) was opened one block south of the Casino on Monroe just two days later and was followed by another within the year.\textsuperscript{152}

From 1906 to 1922, seventy-eight nickelodeons were built.\textsuperscript{153} Following the opening of Detroit’s first movie palace, the construction of nickelodeons quickly dwindled. Between 1922 and 1928, only six nickelodeons were constructed in Detroit.\textsuperscript{154} Despite the construction of nickelodeons throughout the city, vaudeville theaters which predated nickelodeons remained an important outlet for movies.\textsuperscript{155} As the

\begin{thebibliography}{999}
\item Galbraith, Motor City Marquees, 18.
\item In 1922, the Capitol—Detroit’s first Movie Palace—opened.
\item Galbraith, Motor City Marquees.
\item Robert Clyde Allen, “Vaudeville and Film: 1895-1915” (master’s thesis: University of Iowa, 1980), 320,325.
\end{thebibliography}
popularity of film exhibition soared during the 1920s, small nickelodeon structures were unable to accommodate the growing number of patrons, forcing impresarios to look for larger venues in Detroit as across the nation. Vaudeville theaters were soon converted to film venues. As film became the dominant form of entertainment, remaining vaudeville theaters in Detroit were forced to convert to film or close their doors. The conversion allowed for the continued use of each purpose-built vaudeville theater, while providing film impresarios with a larger structure without initial construction costs.156

Among the vaudeville theaters in Detroit, the National Theater was constructed

in 1911. The National Theater was designed by Detroit architect, Albert Kahn. As a part of the Monroe block of the original entertainment district, the National Theater was surrounded by nickelodeons. Unable to compete, the National was forced to change its function and was fitted for motion picture technology c. 1915.157

The decade following the construction of the Casino (Detroit’s first nickelodeon), John Kunsky opened the Madison and Adams Theaters. Smaller than the movie palaces to come, these theaters were Detroit’s transition in theater architecture from the sparse architecture of the nickelodeon to the opulent movie palaces of the twenties.

The Adams Theater (1917) was designed by C. Howard Crane as a vaudeville theater seating 1,770.158 Following the national trends and the contemporary success of film, it was adapted for motion pictures within a year. The unique design of the Adams Theater demonstrated the desirable, but high-priced real estate of the Grand Circus Park District. In order to establish the building’s entrance on the high traffic boulevard of Adams, the theater was constructed with an attraction board on the busy street,

Figure 1.13: Adam Street facade of the Fine Arts building with marquee denoting Adams theater entrance. Photo provided by Cinema Treasure.


158 For more information on C. Howard Crane see Appendix C.
but with its auditorium footprint a block away on less expensive real estate. The two units were attached by a walkway this configuration became known as an “alley jumper.” At the Adams, patrons entered the theater through the Fine Arts building on Adams Boulevard. The Fine Arts building was built in 1905, and was modified in 1917 to incorporate the Adams Theater lobby. The entrance to the theater was distinguished by a marquee (fig. 1.13). The Adams Theater featured a modified vertical marquee with a simplified attraction board. In the lobby, patrons bought their tickets and concessions before “jumping the alley.” For patrons interested in sitting in the balcony, they ascended the stair crossing the alley via an enclosed sky bridge to the auditorium building. For those seated on the main floor, these patrons followed a tunnel beneath the alley.\footnote{Galbraith, Motor City Marquees, 39-40; Dan Austin, “Adams Theater,” Historic Detroit.org, Accessed January 24, 2014, http://www.historicdetroit.org/building/adams-theater/; Bryan Krefft, “Adams Theater in Detroit, MI,” Cinema Treasures, Accessed January 29, 2014, http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/2261.}

Although these theaters shared numerous characteristics with movie palaces, theater historians consider them to be a separate category in theater construction.\footnote{Valerio et al., Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse, 11.} Although they were smaller and featured less adornment their later movie palace counterpart, it was in these early transitional theaters that film entrepreneurs began to realize the power of the theater structure. They realized the magnetism of the glowing lights of the marquees, the suspense at the box office, and the elegant (and later exotic) styles of the interior. The experience of sitting among the plaster ornaments and colossal columns was enough to draw its patrons away from the doldrums of everyday life, before the film even began.\footnote{Hall, The Best Remaining Seats, 17.}
Movie Palaces and Their Neighborhood Equivalents

Theater construction and styles present in Detroit mimicked those trends present across the United States. In the following section, several theaters from Detroit illuminate the distinctive styles and defining elements of Detroit’s theaters. Selected theaters illustrate general construction and style trends that were present within the city. The theaters described are located within the selected study area.162

In 1922, Kunsky and his new partner George W. Trendle, opened the first movie palace in Detroit, Capitol Theater (later known as the Paramount, the Broadway-Capitol, Grand Circus and the Detroit Opera House). Completing Kunsky’s efforts to relocate the entertainment district from the Campus Martius District, the Capitol Theater was constructed in the Grand Circus Park District.163 Again, Kunsky employed C. Howard

Figure 1.14 Classically inspired facade of the Capitol Theater, c. 1922. Photo provided by Cinema Treasure.

162 Selection of theaters is further detailed in Chapter Two.
163 Bragg, “Detroit Opera House.”
Crane for the design of the Capitol Theater. With 4,250-seats the Capitol was the fifth largest theater in the world upon its completion. Inspired by the historic opera houses of Europe, Crane employed the Italian Renaissance style.\textsuperscript{164}

The main façade ascended above Broadway with colossal corinthian columns clad with glazed white terra-cotta tiles (fig. 1.14).\textsuperscript{165} Although a similar architectural language transcended both the façade and interior spaces, the marquee exhibited the block letters and electric lights of contemporary design and universal characteristics of marquees. The Capitol Theater featured an interior vestibule entrance. The ticket box was a separate unit not engaged with the entrance doors. Patrons then proceeded from this vestibule into the great hall or foyer. Its long promenade invited visitors to stroll its length, previewing the scale of the auditorium interior. Its expanse was augmented with the extravagant detailing of an European opera houses with large crystal chandeliers, lavish carpets, frescos and full height mirrors.

\textsuperscript{164} Galbraith, \textit{Motor City Marquees}, 55-58.
\textsuperscript{165} Bragg, “Detroit Opera House.”
Patrons entered the auditorium at the main level or proceed up the marble staircase to the balcony level (fig. 1.15). Within the auditorium the elegance continued with the intricately designed proscenium arch (fig. 1.16). The proscenium arch is the arch that frames the stage, creating a visual separation from the auditorium. The multi-faceted ceiling coffers and rose-red damask curtains completed the opera house aesthetic. The theater not only showcased Crane’s aesthetic intuition, but also his understanding of acoustic perfection. The vaulted ceiling with acoustical cove, perfectly captured the voices or instruments of the performer, distributing its sound evenly throughout the theater.166

Stylistically distinct from the Capitol Theater, the Grand Riviera was constructed on Detroit’s West Side in 1925. This “atmospheric” theater shows “stars and clouds” style and is the only theater in Detroit designed by architect John Eberson. A four-story vertical marquee and three great arched windows marked the theaters entrance. Once patrons purchased their tickets they preceded into the domed hexagonal lobby. The Grand Riviera’s design was inspired by the Italian Renaissance style like the Capitol, but now in an atmospheric manner. Continuing the allusion, the auditorium was designed to reflect the Italianate palazzo with an outdoor courtyard.

Figure 1.17: Set-like perimeter walls of Detroit’s atmospheric theater, Grand Riviera. Photo provided by Cinema Treasures

166 Bragg, “Detroit Opera House.”; Krefft, “Detroit Opera House in Detroit, MI.”
The stage-set-like walls were adorned with columns, sculptures and vines. Characteristic of theaters built between 1925 and 1930, the Michigan Theater and United Artist were designed as a component of a multi-story office building. The large office building helped to stabilize income for the property by offsetting the ups and downs of the theater seasons. Theaters constructed in multi-functional buildings were distinguished by a large arch and marquee on the exterior façade, denoting the theater’s entrance (fig. 1.18).

The Michigan Theater was designed by the Chicago based firm of C.W. Rapp and George L. Rapp. Constructed in 1926, the theater was the second largest in Detroit with a seating capacity of 4,038. Typical of movie palaces, the Michigan Theater featured a two part marquee with an attraction board and vertical sign. The attraction board projected out from the building, and combined with the recessed exterior entrance vestibule.

The Michigan Theater was

Figure 1.18: Michigan Theater marquee. Photo provided by Cinema Treasures.

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designed in a French Baroque style. The four-story lobby was adorned with ten-foot chandeliers, marble columns, and carefully selected oil paintings and sculptures. Patrons ascended the sweeping staircase with carved balustrades to the upper levels. The mezzanine level served as an exhibition space for the theater’s large sculptures.\textsuperscript{170} The auditorium was considered one of the most elegant with classically inspired ornament.\textsuperscript{171} Similar to the Michigan, the United Artists Theater built in 1927 was constructed with an adjoining office building. The attraction board was 7.5 feet wide with a sunburst design. The vertical marquee extended eight-stories. As the smallest of “the giants”, the United Artist seated 2,012 patrons.\textsuperscript{172} Detroit’s theater was one of three theaters designed by C. Howard Crane in the Spanish Gothic Style, for the United Artist chain.\textsuperscript{173}

As the twenties continued, traditional European Renaissance style was replaced by more exotic and eccentric architectural styles in Detroit as elsewhere. Among the last of the grand movie palaces built before the Depression was the Fox Theater (fig. 1.19). The largest of Detroit’s Theaters with 5,048 seats, the Fox Theater was designed by C. Howard Crane in the exotic style known as Siamese-Byzantine.\textsuperscript{174} The Siamese-Byzantine style is an eclectic style, showcasing a combination of motifs inspired from Egyptian, Far Eastern and Indian styles. The Fox Theater, in Detroit was the Fox Film Corporation’s flagship in the Midwest and the largest operating movie theater in the country.\textsuperscript{175}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{170} Several included replicas of fifth-century Roman sculpture of a horse and chariot and Canova’s eighteenth century ‘Cupid and Psyche.’ Austin, “Michigan Theater.”; Krefft, “Michigan Theater in Detroit, MI.”
\item \textsuperscript{171} Austin, “Michigan Theater.”; Krefft, “Michigan Theater in Detroit, MI.”
\item \textsuperscript{174} Galbraith, \textit{Motor City Marquees}, 76.
\item \textsuperscript{175} The fox theater opened with a staff of 400, including: 100 piece orchestra, 65 ushers, five usher captains, and five assistant managers.; Galbraith, \textit{Motor City Marquees}, 78.
\end{itemize}
The Fox Theater exhibits an engaged ticket box. Patrons purchased tickets outside before proceeding into the opulent lobby framed by colossal red faux marble columns reaching six stories high (fig. 1.20). The highly ornamented ceiling brackets display a variety of geometric motifs, terminating at the ceiling cove. The richness of the lobby was accentuated with gold gilding and guarded by statues. Patrons ascended the marble staircase to the even more opulent auditorium. Once inside patrons faced the proscenium arch capped with an extravagant golden elephant, a ceiling simulating an Arabian tent, and red marble columns paraded the perimeter walls with enriched ornaments similar to the lobby (fig. 1.21).

Although neighborhood theaters could not match the magnificence of the downtown movie palace, they were still quite lavish. A single neighborhood could brag of several theaters within walking distance. The typical movie theater today 2014, seats roughly 350, in contrast to the neighborhood theaters of the early twentieth-century which ranged from 1,500 to nearly 3,500 seats. The largest of neighborhood theaters were the Grand Riviera, Hollywood and Eastown.

Figure 1.19: Restored marquee of the Fox Theater. Photo by Author.

176 Galbraith, Motor City Marquees, 76-80.
177 Galbraith, Motor City Marquees, 76-80.
When the Hollywood theater opened in 1927 it was the third largest theater in Detroit at the time. With a seating capacity of 3,436, the Hollywood was less than fifty seats smaller than the Capitol Theater the city’s first movie palace. The Eastown Theater was the last of the large neighborhood theaters, built in 1931 for the Wisper-Wetsman theater circuit seating 2,300 patrons. 179 Both were constructed in revival styles.

Struggle to Survive

The beginning of the Depression marked a change in theater construction in Detroit as elsewhere. By the 1930s all eighty-four of the nickelodeon style theaters in Detroit were closed, as the construction of the movie palaces rendered them obsolete. Consistent with the national trends, theater construction and attendance dwindled in Detroit during the thirties. The Depression marked the end of the opulent movie palace construction. In the years before the Depression (1922-1928), the largest theaters were built ranging from over 1,000

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to 5,500-seats. A total of 199 theaters were constructed in Detroit between 1906 and 1928.180

Consistent with national trends, attendance increased during World War II. Many theaters exchanged their popular films for news from the war. Also during this time theaters were built specially for the exhibition of news reels. In Detroit, Telenews was built in 1941 (fig. 1.22). It operated as a newsreel theater until the 1960s, when the rise of home television and news channels rendered this theater obsolete and attendance dwindled.

Problems with attendance at all theaters, was compounded in Detroit. Following World War II the dynamics of the downtown began to change. The middle class population that had inhabited the downtown began to leave for the newly developed suburbs, as Detroit’s development expanded outward.181 The decline continued into the 1950s, as fewer people lived downtown and no longer ventured to the city for weekend shopping or entertainment. During this period many theaters began to experiment with new film technology to draw patrons back downtown. In 1952, the Madison Theater featured the first 3D film in Detroit. Soon the Michigan and State Theater began to show 3D

Figure 1.22: Detroit’s newsreel theater, Telenews Theater. Photo provided by Cinema Treasure.

180 Galbraith, Motor City Marquees,
181 Galbraith, Motor City Marquees,
films as well. However, due to the additional expense and multiple projectors, 3D films were discontinued by 1955.182

Cinerama, another innovative film technology dazzled crowds in New York, in 1952. The following year the excitement reached Detroit, when the Music Hall was selected as the second theater in the world to be fitted with Cinerama.183 “Cinerama was an ultra-wide screen process using three synchronized projectors, a deeply curved screen (actually two inch strips of material hung like vertical blinds) and a seven-track stereo sound system.”184 Due to the expense of additional projection equipment and inherent weaknesses of the technology, Cinerama was quickly discontinued.185

The “neighborhoods” surrounding the central business district, experienced similar abandonment and thus theaters also suffered from lack of attendance. Due to the small scale of the neighborhood theaters, they were unable to accommodate the new wide screen features or afford the equipment. Unable to sustain patronage, many closed and became the first demolitions of theaters from the golden era.186

Downtown Detroit faced further collapse after the riots during the 1960s. The riots caused what little white population was left to leave for the suburbs. Nearly empty, downtown faced economic depression and abandonment.187 However, the mass exodus of the 1960s left downtown Detroit with an unusually well preserved selection of historic theaters. While other cities, Chicago and New York had once been able to boast an equal number of grand movie palaces, many were lost to demolition during these cities

182 Galbraith, Motor City Marquees, 23.
183 Galbraith, Motor City Marquees, 24-26. Other types of wide screen technology included Cinescope from Fox theaters and Todd AO.
184 Galbraith, Motor City Marquees, 24.
185 Synchronization of the three separate projectors was challenging, and could be further complicated if film broke.
186 Galbraith, Motor City Marquees, 24.
187 Galbraith, Motor City Marquees, 29
continued development.\textsuperscript{188}

The unintended preservation of many of Detroit’s theaters resulted in diverging fates. Countless theaters were abandoned, countless more were lost, but Detroit was also home to the largest theater restoration program. During the 1980s, through the efforts of numerous preservation advocates six of Detroit’s historic movie theaters were restored.\textsuperscript{189} Their selection was largely based on location and the financial support of an interested party. The largest of the restored theaters is the Fox Theater. The Fox underwent an 8 million dollar restoration project completed in 1988.\textsuperscript{190}

The Fox was the only theater that did not suffer long periods of closure. In the 1960s as the collapse of downtown continued, the Fox began showing low-budget horror and beach party movies. Through a series of ownership changes in the 1970s and 1980s the Fox continued to show movies.\textsuperscript{191} In 1984, the Fox was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Three years later it was purchased by Little Caesar’s owner, Michael Illitch. Over the next year, 300 workers spend 300,000 hours and 550 gallons of paint among other building supplies in restoring the theater. The total restoration cost $8 million. In the fall of 1988 the Fox reopened, fully restored to its original glamour of the 1920s as a performing arts venue.\textsuperscript{192}

The transitional theaters Adams and Madison met partial demolition. In 1983 the Madison Theater closed. Two years later the unheated space flooded when pipes had burst on a cold winter day. The flooding led to extensive water damage, portions


\textsuperscript{189} The six restored theaters were: Detroit Opera House (Capitol), The Fox, State, Gem, Town and Music Hall. For more information about their restoration see Appendix A. For more information on their financial sponsors see Appendix C.


\textsuperscript{191} Galbraith, \textit{Motor City Marquees}: 79-80.

\textsuperscript{192} Galbraith, \textit{Motor City Marquees}, 80.
of the interior collapsed.\textsuperscript{193} What remained of its elaborate plasterwork and décor was demolished for surface-level parking in the early 2000s. All that now remains is the marquee commemorating its existence.\textsuperscript{194}

The Adams Theater continued to show films into the late 1950s. During the 1960s the theater was remodeled, its seating reduced and it served as a roadshow theater.\textsuperscript{195} However, during the 1970s the theater converted to a venue exclusively for adult films.\textsuperscript{196} After three homicides were committed on the premises, the Adams closed in 1988. In 2009, after sitting empty for nearly two decades, demolition began on the Adams Theater. All that remains now is the façade (fig. 1.23).\textsuperscript{197}

The Capitol Theater faced a turbulent past, but was rescued before complete demise by the Michigan Opera Theater. The history of the theater is marked with a series of closings and reopenings. Opening as the first movie palace in Detroit in 1922, the Capitol Theater

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig123.jpg}
\caption{Fine Arts Building facade with support scaffolding. Photo by Author.}
\end{figure}

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\textsuperscript{193} Galbraith, \textit{Motor City Marquees}, 100.
\textsuperscript{195} Austin, “Adams Theater.”
\textsuperscript{196} Austin, “Adams Theater.” ; Kreftt, “Adams Theater in Detroit, MI.”
\textsuperscript{197} Austin, “Adams Theater.”
operated through the 1920s as a first-run film theater, with a permanent orchestra on staff. The orchestra served to supplement the films with classical numbers and accompany local singers.198 The theater closed for a short period between 1932-1934 due to the Depression. After reopening, the Capitol continued to show films through the 1950s while its management was passed between various parties. The longest period of ownership came in the 1960s when it was bought and managed by United Detroit. In the 1980s, unable to compete with the Cineplexs in the suburbs, United Detroit converted the Capitol Theater into a concert venue. In 1985, it closed after a small fire. Many believed this was the end of the Capitol Theater. However, in 1989 the Michigan Opera Theater purchased the theater and began a multi-million dollar restoration campaign. The Capitol Theater or Detroit Opera House as it is now known, was among the six theaters of the restoration program in the 1980s.199 Restoration of the Detroit Opera House was completed in 1996.200

The current state of the Michigan Theater is frequently exhibited to convey the dire situation of significant architecture in Detroit. Although, it regularly noted as the most beautiful of Detroit’s theaters, in the late 1970s the theater faced demolition to make way for surface parking.201 However, due to structural concerns the demolition would create in the adjoining building, the theater was instead gutted, providing a “unique” parking experience (fig. 1.23).202

The neighborhood theaters did not fare as well as these six restored theaters in the entertainment district. The Hollywood theater was among the first demolished. The

198 Bragg, “Detroit Opera House.”
199 Bragg, “Detroit Opera House.”; Krefft, “Detroit Opera House in Detroit, MI.”
201 Austin, “Michigan Theater.”; Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 177-181.
202 Austin, “Michigan Theater.”
theater closed in 1958, and five years later it was demolished. 203 The Grand Riviera continued to show film until 1957, after which it served as a live theater, but it returned to film in 1962. The Grand Riviera was closed in 1974 after a seven year period of being a rock venue. In 1999, the theater was demolished. 204

Abandoned

The redevelopment of downtown Detroit has left several of the larger theaters such as the National, United Artist and Eastown’s fate are in limbo. Having been neglected for several decades, their lavish interiors have been left to decay. The complexity and size of the theaters makes them a challenging to reuse. The restoration program of the 1980s flooded downtown with performing arts venues, limiting the potential reuse options for the remaining theaters.


204 Galbraith, Motor City Marquees, 84; Krefft, “Riviera Theater, Detroit, MI.”
Figure 1.25: View from the balcony of the United Artist Theater, 2009. Photo provided by Cinema Treasure.
CHAPTER 2
23,211 SEATS: ANALYSIS OF DETROIT THEATER DISTRICT

Methodology

To establish the historic significance of Detroit’s movie theater structures, prioritize preservation of remaining movie theaters and guide treatment options, this study employed a multifaceted approach. This thesis consists of three main components: a survey/database to establish patterns of construction and current conditions of historic theaters; a series of maps to establish current and historic use, density and condition; and a case study to develop a range of treatment options for the selected theater as the representative of abandoned theaters in Detroit.

This study focused on the proliferation of theaters constructed in Detroit from 1906, when the first structure was completed to 1960, when multiplex theaters became standard theater construction. Consideration was only given to those theaters within the city limits of Detroit, not the greater metro area. Within the contemporary city limits 242 theaters were identified for consideration in the survey component of this study.

The first phase of the survey created a comprehensive database through the comparison of the catalogue established by Stuart Galbraith in *Motor City Marquee: A Comprehensive, Illustrated Reference to Motion Picture Theaters in the Detroit Area, 1906-1992* and the online database *Cinema Treasures*. The fusion of these databases together created a comprehensive representation of movie theaters in Detroit from 1906-1960. While Detroit was home to other types of theaters, including “legitimate” (live) theater, opera houses and vaudeville this survey focused on venues that were constructed specifically for the exhibition of film or were fitted for film after construction.

*Motor City Marquee*, provided an extensive catalogue documenting all known nickelodeons and movie places that had been constructed in Detroit. Stuart Galbraith
provided an extensive chronology of Detroit’s theater history by the examination of seating capacity, construction date and total number of theaters constructed. The book not only provided a vast number of theaters located within the city limits of Detroit, but also documented theaters built in metro Detroit and surrounding cities. However, *Motor City Marquees* does not extensively document the current condition of these theaters. Published in 1994, noted demolitions are limited and do not reflect the numerous losses that have occurred since its publication.

*Cinema Treasures* is an online database that is continually being updated to provide the largest guide to historic movie theaters. This database goes beyond the city of Detroit, documenting known theaters throughout the United States and the world. Each entry includes a minimum of theater name, address and date of construction.

Maps were generated noting era of construction, location and current condition. An initial base map was generated by using Wayne County GIS maps. Utilizing Google Maps, theaters were located based on addresses provided by the established databases and were placed on the base map using the software program Adobe Illustrator. The maps are incorporated as graphic representations later in this chapter.

Based upon the density of theater locations established by the survey and maps, a study area was selected for further investigation (fig 2.1). The boundaries for this region are: Edsel Ford Freeway

Figure 2.1: GIS map of Detroit. Map denoted contemporary city boundaries and study area.
to the North, Chrysler Freeway to the East, John C. Lodge Freeway to the West and South. Several theaters from outside of this area were included in this study based on significance and size. These exceptions include: Grand Rivera, Hollywood, and Eastown theaters. These exceptions served to represent the trends of theaters located outside of the central entertainment district in the following assessments.

Within the selected region, sixty-six theaters (including three neighborhood theaters) were identified during the period of consideration (1906-1960). This number reflects all theaters, including nickelodeon, vaudeville theaters (later converted to film), and movie palaces, identified within the region.

On October 13, 2013, on-site investigation was completed to identify current condition and function of theaters that still exist within the study area. From this initial survey, forty-one theaters were selected for further evaluation. Assessment emphasized overall conditions and evidence of past restoration. The results of this assessment are catalogued in Appendix A. Additionally, this catalogue includes primary information from the database, photographs, and a brief history of each theater.

While numerous theaters in Detroit have been adapted for live performance, examples of non-theatrical uses are limited. To strengthen the argument of reuse and establish a viable range of treatment options, precedents of reuse were considered outside of Detroit. Due to the geographic location of these precedents on-site visits were not feasible. Investigation of precedents was limited to research, examination of photographs and published material. Determination of the appropriateness of reuse precedents was based on: National Register Criteria for the evaluation of significance and integrity, and The Secretary of Interior’s Standards for the evaluation of treatment options. Precedents are discussed in further detail in Chapter Three.

The final component is an evaluation of an individual theater. The National Theater (1911) was selected as representative of abandoned theaters being considered
for reuse. This portion of the study employed a combination of on-site investigation, historic and archival research to evaluate its significance and formulate treatment recommendations. On-site investigations were conducted between October 2013 and January 2014. The results of this component of the study are in Chapter Four.

**Map Interpretation**

Theaters were constructed throughout the city of Detroit with hubs at Campus Martius and Grand Circus Park districts as previously established in Chapter One. The earliest theaters studied were constructed as opera houses and playhouses. However, the most abundant period of theater construction in Detroit coincided with the advent of motion pictures. The following represents the scope of Detroit’s theater district in a series of maps depicting eras of construction, location, historic function and current condition.

Movie house construction in Detroit began in 1906 with the conversion of store fronts into nickelodeons and when vaudeville shows were exchanged for motion pictures. Eventually these small scale theaters gave way to “The Giants” of the “Golden Era of Movie Palaces.” During this golden era theater construction reached its zenith, characterized by opulent large scale theaters. With changing attitudes during (and after) the Depression, the size and exuberance of theaters from the previous decade were cast into shadow. Size and opulence were scaled down and theater decoration became more subdued. New theater construction continued to dwindle in the 1940s. Based on these overarching trends the period of consideration was broken down into four eras: Pre-Movie Palace (1906-1921), Movie Palace (1922-1928), Depression (1929-1939) and Post-Depression (1940-1960) and are represented in separate maps.
Each of the maps locates and denotes historic functions for theaters built during each era. Theater functions are denoted through varying colors indicating their function. Historic function is divided into five categories:

• nickelodeons
• vaudeville
• transitional theaters
• movie palaces
• neighborhood theater

The second series of maps addresses the current condition and density of historic theaters. These maps locate all theaters built between 1906 and 1960 on a single map. The first map in this set utilizes a series of symbols to denote current conditions:

• reuse as performing arts venue
• other reuse function
• closed(abandoned)
• demolished

The final map illustrates the current density, through the removal of all demolished theaters.
LEGEND:
- NICKELÖDEON (71)
- VAUDEVILLE (6)
- TRANSITIONAL (67)
- MOVIE PALACE (9)
- NEIGHBORHOOD (0)
Map 1: Pre-Movie Palace Era (1906-1921)

The proliferation of theater construction that occurred in Detroit was intimately tied with development in the city and changing attitudes across the country. Detroit’s theaters were constructed during an era that would come to be characterized by its attitudes of consumerism and leisure. Detroit during this period was a prime representative of these changes happening across the country.

Ford’s improvement in production allowed for a reduced work day with an increased salary. Workers found themselves with an unprecedented amount of time for leisure and extra income to spend on entertainment. Film exhibition in Detroit coincided with this period of increased leisure, leading to the success of nickelodeons in Detroit.

The first nickelodeon opened in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania in 1905. Within a year, Detroit’s first nickelodeons opened in the original Campus Martius entertainment district. These early film venues were concentrated along Monroe Avenue of the Campus Martius district. In the following years more theaters were constructed in the original entertainment district. Within a decade sixty-three nickelodeons were constructed within the city limits, As denoted by red locator dots.

The entertainment district did not begin with the construction of the city’s first nickelodeon. This entertainment district began in 1848 with the construction of the original operatic National Theater. As the decades progressed other theater structures like the original Detroit Opera House, Garrick Theater (vaudeville) and other playhouses were constructed nearby. These construction patterns continued with the introduction of film. Theaters structures built outside the urban core populated major roads, including Michigan, Gratiot, and Woodward Avenue. These roads are identified on Map 1: Pre-Movie Palace Era.

The exponential growth in popularity of film triggered the transformation and construction of larger venues. Film impresarios found new venues in existing vaudeville
theaters. Taking advantage of the similar spatial arrangement, several vaudeville theaters were converted for film exhibition. Although other vaudeville theaters were constructed in Detroit, many of these theaters closed, due to the inability to compete with the new film venues. Although conversion dates vary, five vaudeville theaters are documented as exhibiting films by the end of the era. These theaters are identified with yellow locator dots.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Opened</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Architect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Grand Theatre</td>
<td>8024 Jefferson Avenue</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>1,837</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>118 Monroe</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>Albert Kahn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Globe</td>
<td>3520 Grand River</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>Harley &amp; Atchison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118</td>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>44 West Adams</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128</td>
<td>Town</td>
<td>3711 Woodward</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>2,286</td>
<td>C. Howard Crane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the era progressed, larger transitional theaters began to substitute the smaller nickelodeon structures. Eventually these theaters gave way for the construction of movie palaces.

![Graph showing the number of theaters constructed each year during the Pre-Movie Palace Era.](image)

Table 2.2: Number of theaters constructed each year during the Pre-Movie Palace Era.
Beginning in 1913, Detroit saw a rise in transitional theater construction. This trend continued through the decade until 1921, when a resurgence of nickelodeon construction occurred. The rise in transitional theater construction coincides directly with the construction of the first movie palace in New York.

During the pre-movie era, one hundred forty-four theaters were constructed: seventy-two nickelodeons, five vaudeville and sixty-seven transitional theaters. It is important to understand that the high quantity of theaters constructed during this period is largely due to the nature of nickelodeons. Most of these structures were actually conversions of retail space rather than new construction. Nickelodeons typically seated no more than one hundred people. Vaudeville, transitional theaters and later movie palace theaters were purpose-built structures for entertainment, seating anywhere from several hundred to a several thousand.
MAP 2: MOVIE PALACE ERA: 1922-1928

LEGEND:
- NICKELODON (12)
- VAUDEVILLE (0)
- TRANSITIONAL (0)
- MOVIE PALACE (7)
- NEIGHBORHOOD (35)
Map 2: Movie Palace Era: (1922-1928)

As detailed in Chapter One, John Kunsky a movie impresario foresaw the possibility of a new entertainment district near the Grand Circus Park. His relocation of the entertainment district began during the pre-movie palace era, with the construction of the Adams (vaudeville) and the Madison (transitional) theaters. However, his vision didn’t fully coalesce until the construction of the Capitol Theater, the first movie palace in the city. The Capitol was the largest theater of Kunsky’s circuit. The erection of the Capitol marked a new era of theater construction in the city.

The palaces that followed were commissioned by either Kunsky or one of the “Big Eight” studio system chains, with the exception of the Michigan Theater. During this “Golden Age of Movie Palaces” the city saw the construction of seven large scale downtown movie palaces. Their construction was concentrated near Grand Circus Park, with a combined seating capacity of 23,211 in downtown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Opened</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Architect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>148</td>
<td>Capitol</td>
<td>1526 Broadway</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>3485</td>
<td>C. Howard Crane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>2121 Woodward</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>2967</td>
<td>C. Howard Crane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>175</td>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>238 Bagley</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>4038</td>
<td>Rapp &amp; Rapp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186</td>
<td>Oriental</td>
<td>120 West Adams</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>2950</td>
<td>Percival R. Piera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>193</td>
<td>Fisher</td>
<td>West Grand Boulevard</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>2711</td>
<td>Graven and Mayger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>194</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>2211 Woodward</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>5048</td>
<td>C. Howard Crane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>199</td>
<td>United Artist</td>
<td>140 Bagley</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>C. Howard Crane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the city continued to expand, theater impresarios brought the opulence of the downtown movie palaces to surrounding neighborhoods. Those theaters built outside of the entertainment district, didn’t follow the patterns of construction from the previous

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205 The Michigan was part of a large development planned for the Bagley street region of the district. The theater was run by Balaban and Katz, Chicago’s equivalent of Kunsky.
era. Although several are clustered along major roads, most were integrated into the neighborhood.

The only theater type to bridge the transition to the movie palace era was the nickelodeons. Now obsolete due to the presence of movie palaces, the city saw fewer new structures in downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods than the decades before. As film was taking full control of the entertainment industry, vaudeville’s popularity dwindled and structures built for this purpose were no longer being constructed.

![Bar chart showing the number of theaters constructed each year during the Movie Palace Era.]

**Table 2.4:** Number of theaters constructed each year during the Movie Palace Era.

During this era fifty-four theaters were constructed: twelve nickelodeons, thirty-five neighborhood, and seven movie palaces.
Map 3: Depression Era (1929-1939)

The beginning of the Depression marked another phase in theater construction. Detroit suffered greatly during the Depression. Hardship was compounded in Detroit, due to its heavy reliance on automobile manufacturing. With cars no longer being purchased, unemployment swelled in the city. Without income, many were unable to partake in the entertainment and other luxuries of the previous era. As attendance dwindled, fewer theaters were constructed. The previously thriving entertainment district, remained without any new additions. The upside to this pattern was the accompanying lack of development pressures.

Theaters were not only fewer but less extravagant and smaller during this era. The expense spent on the construction of theaters was viewed unfavorably. The largest theater during this era was the Eastown, constructed in 1932. In comparison to the previous era, the Eastown is almost exactly half the size of the Fox. The number of theaters was equally diminished. The Depression had marked the end of the construction of nickelodeons and movie palaces.

Table 2.5: Number of theaters constructed each year during the Depression Era.
Theater construction moved away from the downtown core, foreshadowing the exodus of the following decades. Only twenty-seven theaters were constructed, half as many as the era before.
MAP 4: POST-DEPRESSION: 1940-1960

LEGEND:
- NICKELODEON (0)
- VAUDEVILLE (0)
- TRANSITIONAL (0)
- MOVIE PALACE (0)
- NEIGHBORHOOD (12)
Map 4: Post-Depression Era (1929-1939)

The Post-Depression era saw even fewer theaters constructed. With the social and economic issues of the city, during this period fewer theater patrons were going downtown. For those theaters that were constructed, their construction patterns reflect the population transference to the newly developed suburbs.

Table 2.6: Number of theaters constructed each year during the Post-Depression Era.
**Map 5: Current Condition (2013)**

Due to the social and economic issues that characterized the following decades, many of Detroit’s theaters suffered from neglect, decay and demolition. By 1960, Detroit had constructed 242 theaters. Since the first demolition in 1953, Detroit has lost approximately 189 theaters. Those that remain have been adapted for various uses or remain empty. As revitalization efforts continue within the city, those not restored face an uncertain future. As demolition continues, the rarity of Detroit’s golden age theaters increases. The current landscape of theaters can be seen in Map 6: Current Density.
CURRENT DENSITY: 2013

LEGEND:
- NICKELODEON
- VAUDEVILLE
- TRANSITIONAL
- MOVIE PALACE
- NEIGHBORHOOD
- DEMOLISHED
- CLOSED
- REUSE- PERFORM. VENUE
- REUSE- OTHER
- UNKNOWN
CHAPTER 3
EVALUATION, TREATMENT AND REUSE

Established preservation standards such as the National Register Criteria and Secretary of Interior’s Standards are utilized to inform and prioritize the preservation of historic buildings. These established doctrines were written to provide an all-inclusive reference for the evaluation and formulation of treatment options of all historic buildings. To evaluate significance and formulate treatment options that are congruent with established doctrines, the following standards were applied to evaluate the whole collection of theaters, not just those in Detroit. First, the National Register Criteria was used for the evaluation of significance and integrity. Secondly, origins of preservation theory are briefly explored to understand current preservation practices and how they influence the treatment of historic theaters. Finally, a range of reuse precedents are detailed to illustrate a range of reuse options.

Building Evaluation
Significance

The National Register of Historic Places, overseen by the National Parks Service (NPS) was developed to recognize significant contributions to our country’s history and heritage through the identification of important architecture. The National Register outlines criteria for the evaluation of significance and integrity.206

206 (a) that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; (b) that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; (c) that embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; (d) that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history; Rustin A. Quaide, “Section II: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, National Register of Historic Places Bulletin (NRB 15),” November 28, 2001, http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_2.htm.
Criterion A evaluates the significance of a building based on its associations with events that are nationally significant or reflect broad patterns of the nation’s history. The development and evolution of movie palace architecture was a direct reaction to social changes that were occurring during the early twentieth century. The 1920s marked the beginning of mass culture and consumerism. The extent of the social significance of these structures is often overlooked. The remaining movie palaces are a tangible representation of the social changes of the era. Literature available on the film industry is concentrated on film production, largely ignoring the related social implications. Prior to the dawn of the movie palace, no other form of entertainment had been as popular or accessible to the entire population. Theater architect George Rapp, expressed “Here is a shrine to democracy where the wealthy rub elbows with the poor” while reflecting on the recent construction of one of his movie palaces. Movie palaces provided the elegance of a night at the opera, at a relatively low admission, affordable for all. Patrons of the movie palaces were from all social classes, religious affiliations, ethnicities and ages. The movie palaces, and entertainment districts that developed around them, created the principal gathering of diverse groups of Americans. According to James Forsher, author of *The Community of Cinema*, “it [the advent of movies] represented in many ways the democratic socialization of American society during the early part of the twentieth-century.” The theater was intimately tied with a sense of community across the U.S. Under Criterion A, movie theaters demonstrate potential significance based on a theaters associations with broad patterns of the nation’s history.

Criterion B evaluates the significance of a structure based on its association with

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a significant person. Many film impresarios and architects featured in theater design, participated in the construction of this seminal architecture of the early twentieth-century. Today’s films studios are directly tied to notable film impresarios during this early period in film exhibition such as William Fox, founder of Twentieth Century Fox; Audolf Zukor first chairman of Paramount Picture; Sam and Jack Warner, of Warner Bros. Studio. Numerous architects dedicated their careers to theater design. The earliest names in theater design are Thomas W. Lamb and Samuel “Roxy” Rothafel. Their collaboration and experimentation with design was pivotal in the advancement of movie houses. Some theater structures are defined by their signature styles, like John Eberson and his “atmospheric style.” Other architects began their careers as a regional theater architect, like C. Howard Crane, but quickly became the architect of several theater chains, including Twentieth Century Fox and United Artist. Whether the architect of a theater was a nationally recognized name or a local figure the consideration of their influence on design is critical. Movie theaters possess potential significance under Criterion B due to its association with nationally notable architects, developers and persons.

Criterion C evaluates significance of a structure’s embodiment of characteristics of a building typology, method of construction or serves as representation of the work of a master. Large scale movie palaces were an architectural phenomenon that lasted only a few decades. Their opulence and size was a direct representation of the era of their construction. Although there was not a formula for the construction of movie theaters, each included fundamental spaces, (i.e. auditorium, lobby, projection booth, etc.) Every theater included these spaces, but each was designed and constructed as a

212 Forsher, The Community of Cinema, 12.
213 Naylor, American Picture Palaces, 24-30.
unique experience. Many theaters incorporated a fusion of decorative styles, resulting in a unique blend of motifs. Theater architecture served as a canvas for experimentation in engineering, design, styles and acoustics. Movie theaters are significant under Criterion C based on their distinct building typology.

Criterion D evaluates significance based on the opportunity for potential new information. This criterion is typically reserved for application to archeological sites. Due to the era of construction, urban setting, and this thesis’ focus on existing structures this criterion is not considered.

**Integrity**

The National Register Criteria also emphasizes the integrity through the retention of historic location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and associations. The National Registers defines these criteria as follows:

- Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred.
- Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure and style of a property.
- Setting is the physical environment of a history property.
- Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and on a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property.
- Workmanship is the physical evidence of the craft of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.
- Feeling is a property’s expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a

particular period of time.

- Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.  

The evaluation of the integrity of a historic theater can be challenging. General trends in theater history have resulted in numerous changes. Many theaters faced years of abuse as rock concert venues or the deterioration associated with vacancy. These unfortunate circumstances have resulted in changes in integrity.

Design, materials, workmanship and feeling are directly affected by the physical condition of the structure thereby directly influencing treatment selection. Design places a higher emphasis on the spatial arrange and overall character of the theater. Material and workmanship apply more directly to the finishes and ornamentation. Typically the design of a theater remains intact, without any extreme changes unless it has previously been adapted for a new incompatible function. However, because a large portion of interior finishes and ornament were constructed using various plaster application techniques a high level of material degradation may be present; directly affecting the integrity of materials and workmanship. According to Robert Young, author of *Historic Preservation Technology*, typical mechanisms of plaster decay are: poor construction, moisture, mechanical failure and occupant related damage. Various repairs strategies exist that could correct these issues prior to the accumulation of severe damage. However, in theaters preventative maintenance is often forgone. The loss of material can also greatly affect general feeling. A building that once inspired, instead stirs advocates in support of demolition and removal of the unsightly. The durability and public nature of exterior


finishes typically limits visible material degradation. In either case it is important to identify the level of integrity within each of the categories.

Location, setting and associations indirectly affect the integrity of theaters thereby directly influencing reuse selection. Physical damage is limited, but demolition or redevelopment can affect the physical context of the building. Changes in location have a similar effect to the context, but involve physically moving the building. Association is an intangible measurement of integrity; it is reflected in the communities understanding of the building. Associations are also directly tied to significance through Criterion B. The following integrity scale give quantitative value to application of these criteria for theaters.

**Integrity Scale (based on direct categories)**

1. **High Integrity: Minimal Change**
   - Design: no changes to plan, space or structure.
   - Materials: minimal damage, less than 10% material loss.
   - Workmanship: identifiable ornamentation and motifs.
   - Feeling: impressive, still evokes awe.

2. **Moderate Integrity: Moderate Change**
   - Design: no changes to plan, space or structure.
   - Materials: moderate damage, less than 50% material loss.
   - Workmanship: mostly identifiable ornamentation and motifs.
   - Feeling: impressive, still evokes awe.

3. **Low Integrity: Extensive Change**
   - Design: changes to plan, space or structure.
   - Materials: extensive damage, more than 50% material loss.
   - Workmanship: unable to identify ornamentation and motifs.
   - Feeling: evokes advocacy for demolition.
Identifying Character Defining Features

“A building’s character can be irreversibly damaged or changed in many ways...”218 The identification of character defining features is crucial to the evaluation of a building’s integrity and reuse. Identification of character defining features is outlined as a three step process by Lee Nelson, author of Preservation Brief 17, Architectural Character: Identify the Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings as an Aid to Preserving Their Character.219

Step 1: Identify the Overall Visual Aspects
This involves looking at the exterior of the building from a distance to identify overall features without focusing on the details. This is a general consideration of aspects such as: shape, roof, openings, projections, trim, materials and setting.

Step 2: Identify the Visual Character at Close Range
This involves looking at the exterior of the building closely, or approximately arm’s length away. The close proximity allows for consideration of surface and finish character, such as color, texture and workmanship.

Step 3: Identify the Visual Character of the Interior Spaces, Features and Finishes
This step applies a similar evaluation of step 1 and 2, but applies to the interior. To best understand the interior it is necessary to examine individual spaces, but also understand them within the context of the whole building. This step also allows for the evaluation of interior features and finishes that characterize the building or identify the function of the room. This allows for the consideration of: individual spaces, related or sequential spaces, interior features, finishes, and structure.

The selection of treatment and reuse is directly influenced by the evaluation of the significance and integrity of a theater.

218 Preservation brief 17
219 Preservation brief 17
Due to the dwindling number of theaters, selection of treatment and reuse should be determined based on a balance of significance, integrity and rarity. An illustrative example shows how the history of a theater informs its significance and integrity. The Little Theater in Detroit first opened its doors in 1928. This theater was constructed as an addition for the private women’s club, the Century Club. The theater featured a full stage, orchestra pit and sizable balcony. By the 1960s, with the decline of the city, the theater began showing adult films. With this change in function came a change in appearance. The interior was transformed from a classical revival style to an arena of red and black. Despite the low integrity of the structure, Charles Forbes purchased the theater in 1991 and began an eighteen month restoration program. Due to the extent of the losses of original fabric the restoration was largely based on archival photographs. Because the original was considered significant, resources for restoration were available and documentation of the original existed, the little theater restoration was able to overcome problems of limited original fabric and integrity. It reopened in 1993 as the Gem Theater (fig 3.1).

In the late 1990s, plans for urban renewal in the city included the construction of Comerica Park, the new home of the Detroit Tigers. The proposed location, threatened the Century Club and adjoining Little Theater (Gem) with demolition. To prevent the pending demolition, the Century Club and Little Theater (Gem) were moved five-blocks to a new location in 1997. Although the Little Theater’s tale is an extreme case, it emphasizes the insensitive changes that theaters frequently faced. These unfortunate circumstances have led to alteration of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship

221 Krefft, “Gem Theatre in Detroit, MI.”
223 Krefft, “Gem Theatre in Detroit, MI.”
and feelings. If evaluation had been placed only on the integrity of the existing structure, this “Gem” might never have been saved.

**Range of Treatment Options**

**Secretary of Interior’s Standards**

Understanding the significance and integrity of a theater directly informs the selection of a treatment option. However, not all preservation treatments are considered successful, nor is there one objective scale. Preservation theory is a constantly evolving topic, which is apparent in the consideration of the compendium of changing theory and practices through time. From the earliest preservation philosophies of the eighteenth century, two distinct philosophies emerged based on the works of Viollet-le-Duc and John
Ruskin.\textsuperscript{224} Viollet-le-Duc (1819-1879) is considered the world’s first restoration architect. However, his restoration philosophy is very different from today’s prominent ethic. Viollet-le-Duc’s restoration philosophy was, “to restore a building is not only to preserve it, to repair it, or to rebuild, but to bring it back to a state of completion such as may never have existed at any given moment.”\textsuperscript{225} The driving principle behind his philosophy was to not return buildings to a particular period, but to rebuild as he believed they should have been.\textsuperscript{226} The alterations proposed by Viollet-Le-Duc were not necessarily evident in original plans or documented intentions of the architect. John Ruskin (1819-1900), a contemporary of Viollet-Le-Duc, reasoned the opposite approach. He believed that a building did not reach its full beauty until it was several centuries old. Therefore old buildings should not be restored, they should be allowed to age. Consequently, any restoration ruins the beauty of a building.

Today, these contrasting extremes often characterize the scape vs. anti-scrape debate of the preservation field. This debate seeks to quantify the ideal degree of intervention in the treatment of a historic building. John Ruskin’s criticism of extensive changes, prioritized the retention of all layers of the buildings history, has aligned him with the anti-scrape philosophy. While Viollet-Le-Duc’s contrasting approach has aligned him with the scrape philosophy.

Camillo Bioto (1836-1914), Italian theorist was the first to propose that Viollet-le-Duc and Ruskin represented opposing extremes of historic preservation treatment options. He positioned his own theory between the extremes of these figures. His

\textsuperscript{225} Tyler, Ligibel, and Tyler, \textit{Historic Preservation}, 20.
\textsuperscript{226} Tyler, Ligibel, and Tyler, \textit{Historic Preservation}, 20.
restoration theories emphasized that changes to the structure should be differentiated but compatible.\textsuperscript{227}

Since these early contributions, numerous scholars have voiced their theories of preservation and several international standards of preservation were written, including the Athens Charter of 1931 and the Venice Charter of 1964. The Athens charter was adopted by the First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments. The Charter proposed seven main resolutions to create a unified approach to the treatment of buildings damaged during WWII.\textsuperscript{228} In 1964, the Second International Congress passed the Venice Charter. The Venice Charter served to update the Athens Charter.\textsuperscript{229}

The most recent doctrine was the creation of the United State’ the Secretary of Interior’s Standards in 1977. The Secretary of Interior’s Standards offer guidelines that recognize the extreme views of early theorist and utilize many of the preceding theories and standards. The employment of the term “anti-scrape” of Ruskin’s theory, today best coincides with the Secretary of Interior’s Standards definition of preservation, while “scrape” of Viollet-le-Duc is most closely associated with restoration.

Of the four treatment approaches, preservation places the highest value on retention of all historic fabric. The preservation treatment retains the highest portion of historic fabric and integrity. Preservation treatments reflect the evolution of the building, not favoring a particular period of construction. This treatment can be enacted through

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conservation efforts or maintenance. Rehabilitation, the next most sympathetic treatment, emphasizes the retention of historic materials, but allows more latitude for replacement. Replacement can be acceptable particularly in areas of deterioration and allows for programmatic reuse. Restoration focuses the treatment on the retention of material from the most significant period in the buildings history. This treatment allows for the removal of materials from all other periods, a limited “scrape”. The fourth treatment, reconstruction allows for the recreation of a non-surviving structure. Although reconstruction is a potential treatment in extreme cases with considerable documentation, this thesis focuses on the range of treatment options for existing structures. Therefore, reconstruction of lost theaters will not be considered in the following discussion. These treatments are not prescriptive treatments; rather they serve as guidelines to promote responsible preservation practices.

The selection of treatment is dependent on the building’s historical significance, among other considerations. The Secretary of Interior’s Standards utilizes the following guidelines for the selection of treatment:

Relative Importance in History

Relative importance in history is determined based on National Register criteria. For those structures already listed on the National Register, the Standards recommend individually listed building warrant preservation or restoration. While those, listed as contributing to a district have more flexibility, and are more frequently considered for rehabilitation or reuse.

**Physical Condition**

The consideration of the current physical condition informs the degree of the intervention. Depending on the extent of the damage, the treatments could range from preservation to reconstruction. When a high degree of material integrity is apparent and extensive alterations is not necessary, a preservation treatment may be all that is necessary. If the building has suffered more damage, extensive repairs or replacement may be necessary. Resulting in a range of possible treatments from restoration to reconstruction.

**Proposed Use**

It is essential to establish prior to selecting a treatment option if the building will continue to be used as it was historically or given a new use? If the building is to be adapted for a new use, a rehabilitation treatment will likely ensue.

**Mandated Code Requirements**

Compliance with code requirements can effect treatment selection. It is noted that necessary modifications should be result in minimal changes in appearance.\(^2\)\textsuperscript{34} However, due to the emphasis on the retention of historic function, the Secretary of Interior’s Standards do not explicitly outline guidelines for adaptive reuse. As it pertains to this thesis, adaptive reuse is considered any treatment option that results in a change in function from which it was originally designed. Though the rehabilitation guidelines are often applied to reuse projects, this is due to the inclusion of the ninth guideline of rehabilitation:

> New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The

new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportions and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.\textsuperscript{235}

Due to the lack of guidelines explicitly addressing adaptive reuse, the evaluation of reuse precedents will be evaluated based on the following principles: retention of historic materials and finishes, incorporation of character defining features (i.e. ornamentation, spatial arrangement, etc.), and the ability to serve the needs of its community. Following these guidelines allows for the recognition of the structure’s past as a theater and retention of historic materials, while allowing for the building to continue functioning by serving the needs of a community.

\textit{Demolition}

If time has already ravaged many of the significant features, less ideal approaches than gentle repair may be applicable. Frequently, exterior features and ornament are better preserved due to the durable nature of the material selected, i.e. terra-cotta for exterior application versus paint and plaster for interior ornamentation. Due to relatively delicate nature of plaster work, it is more vulnerable to moisture issues, resulting in extensive loss of interior finishes. Therefore, cases of extreme material degradation can prompt advocacy for partial or complete demolition. Partial demolition can be limited to the removal of significant interior features (i.e. proscenium arch, balcony, and interior finishes) or everything except for the dominant façade.

Due to the deteriorated state that characterizes abandoned theaters, complete demolition due to the economic demands of restoration or reuse is too often the selected treatment. Thousands of historic theaters have been lost since their “golden age,”

subsequently making each surviving structure increasingly more valuable. 236 According to the online database Cinema Treasures, approximately 28,268 theaters have been built across the United States. 237 Of these 21,714 are closed, nearly half that number have been demolished. 238 Demolition is not recommended until all other avenues are considered. It should only be employed if absolutely no other option is viable.

Selection of treatment is ultimately determined based on a combination of significance, integrity and finances. Restoration, as any building project, is a costly process, though it does not need to be completed all at once. The following matrix employs the previously established integrity scale and significance to inform treatment selection (fig. 3.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High Significance</th>
<th>Low Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Integrity</strong></td>
<td>Secretary of Interiors: Preservation</td>
<td>Secretary of Interiors: Rehabilitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate Integrity</strong></td>
<td>Secretary of Interiors: Restoration</td>
<td>Secretary of Interiors: Rehabilitation or Partial Demolition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Integrity</strong></td>
<td>Secretary of Interiors: Rehabilitation</td>
<td>Demolition</td>
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</tbody>
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**Reuse Options: Precedent Study**

The highly-inclusive nature of the Secretary of Interior’s Standards has resulted in a range of interpretations within each treatment category. Applications of the Secretary of Interior’s Standards have ranged from a literal application of one treatment to a blending

237 This number reflects a combination of Nickelodeons, Movie Houses and Drive-In Theaters, not all are considered historic (older than fifty years). It is also important to note that this database is continually being updated. The numbers above reflect the current statistics as of February 2, 2013.
of all four.

While the many features that define a theater can prove a challenge in reuse, communities across the nation have overcome these challenges in a variety of ways. Beginning in the late 1960s a resurgence of interest in downtown movie palaces resulted in a substantial number of rehabilitation and restoration projects across the country.239 The most successful preservation projects are when a theater structure is able to house the needs of a sponsor or its community.240 The examination of the following precedents will serve as is a quantitative measure of successful treatment options.

Since movie palaces were designed with consideration of acoustic quality, a trend quickly developed adapting old movie palaces into “new” symphony halls.241 This reuse option respects the Secretary of Interior’s guidelines for compatible use. The St. Louis Theater (1925) was designed by Chicago architectural firm Rapp & Rapp drawing influence from Palace of Versailles. As the largest theater in St. Louis, seating 4,100, it continued to exhibit films until it closed in 1966. Within a year restoration work began, and the theater became the new home of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. The auditorium was restored to its 1920’s appearance, and seating was reduced to 2,700 to provide the patrons with a more comfortable experience.242

The St. Louis, example represents a successful adaptation. The reuse of a historic theater as a symphony hall allowed for the retention of key features of the theater without compromising the needs of the sponsor. This project exhibits strong continuity between

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240 Sponsor is used here to identify a person or group that purchases or reuses the buildings, sometimes after a long period of vacancy
the existing structure and the new function.\textsuperscript{243} High significance and high integrity led to a treatment that blended preservation and rehabilitation.

Compatibility of function has the opportunity to encourage a sensitive treatment, it does not guarantee it. Other transformations have not always been as sensitive or successful. Too often during these conversions the theater can face significant loses with the addition of acoustic panels. Panels are frequently attached directly to the plasterwork—concealing significant ornamentation—or their application results in the removal of historic finishes.\textsuperscript{244}

In the nation’s capital, steady growth in the last few decades left the city with a growing demand for evening cultural events. The restoration of the Warner Theater filled a need. The Warner Theater first opened in Washington, DC, as the Earle Theater in 1924. Designed by C. Howard Crane in the French Renaissance style, the theater seated just less than 2,000 patrons. In 1926 it was taken over by Warner Bros. studio, and became the studio’s Washington location for first run films. The theater remained open until the riots of 1968 left the surrounding business district in ruins, the theater closed three years later. With renewed interest in the neighborhood during bicentennial celebration, the neighborhood witnessed a renaissance. Through the 1980s, the movie palace served as a concert venue. However, after years of abuse as a concert venue and the delicate nature of ornamental plaster work material degradation was apparent throughout the structure. In 1989 the theater closed for three years to undergo an extensive restoration. In 1992, the “new” Warner reopened as one of the city’s finest performing arts venues.\textsuperscript{245}

Such restorations and reuses have continued to renew many of these historic structures. A recent editorial in the Windsor Star unveiled a couple’s intentions to restore
the Walkerville Theater in Windsor Canada. Mary Lambros, recently purchased the aging theater located next to her upscale restaurant, Loreli’s. The Walkerville Theater was designed by nationally recognized theater architect, C. Howard Crane. Lambros envisions restoring the theater to its 1920s glamour while providing the area with a new cultural events center. The theater restoration is one of several projects currently being undertaken in the revitalization efforts in the area.

Similar cases of urban revitalization, centered on theater restoration and reuse are present in numerous cities. The largest of these was the Playhouse Square in downtown Cleveland, Ohio. This complex began as five separate theaters, constructed along Euclid Avenue, between February 1921 and November 1922. Four of the theaters were contiguous on the Northside of the street—Allen, Ohio, State and the Palace Theater—the fifth was across the street in the Hanna Office Building. The theaters exhibited silent films, vaudeville and legitimate theater. However, the all too familiar tale of closure befell these theaters during the 1960s. With the rise of white flight to the suburbs and the prevalence of household television sets, these downtown theaters closed in quick succession. They soon became a scene of vandalism and neglect. The threat of demolition in 1972 sparked a renewed interest in these theaters, from prominent community members, including local politicians, businessman and activists. In the following years, limited repairs allowed for intermittent performances as money was raised for complete restoration. Restoration began on the Ohio Theater in 1982. By the end of the decade the Ohio, State and Palace were reopened with regular performances.

247 Macaluso, “New Owners Eager to Restore Walkerville Theatre to Its ‘glory,’.”
248 Valerio et al., Movie Palaces, 81-84.
The Allen and Hanna Theaters were the last to be acquired, but by 1999 all five theaters had been restored.250

While reuse as a preforming arts venue is of the highest compatibility for a theater structure, numerous cities, like Detroit and Cleveland have already adapted a large number of theaters to this function. Due to the prolific number of large scale theaters constructed in these cities, many are left without a purpose. Unencumbered by the challenges of theater use, communities across the country have devised new creative ways to adapt these structures. Understanding that ideal reuse options are limited, the

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following precedents represent compatible alternatives. These precedents exhibit the ability for reuse to balance the retention of historic character and the sponsor’s needs.

The Brooklyn Paramount Theater was designed by Chicago based firm, Rapp & Rapp. The theater was constructed as the Brooklyn location of the Paramount Theater Chain. This 4,124 seat movie palace had three levels of seating, main level, mezzanine and balcony. The theater closed in 1962. That same year the Long Island University acquired the theater and began its transformation to serve as the University’s athletic center (fig. 3.4). The transformation resulted in a relatively compatible reuse. This treatment option diverged from the typical adaption of a theater, expanding the range of possibilities. This treatment could have easily resulted in a significant loss of historic fabric. Instead, it was a sensitive reuse that successfully preserved the spirit of the

Figure 3.3: Brooklyn Theater was transformed into a gymnasium for Long Island University View from balcony looking towards proscenium arch. Photo Provided by Cinema Treasure.
theater, while serving its sponsor’s needs. The transformation preserved the theaters defining features, including the proscenium arch, ornamented ceiling and the balcony. The mezzanine level was altered to accommodate the bleacher style seating. Additionally the lobby was preserved and now functions as a cafeteria.251

Urban Outfitters, a nationally recognized clothing chain has demonstrated sensitive adaption of various buildings in numerous cities. The downtown Charleston, South Carolina location was originally the home of the Garden Theater. The Garden Theater opened in 1918 as a vaudeville theater. Due to the increased popularity of motion pictures, it was later adapted for the exhibition of film. The theater featured films until it closed in 1970. Seven years later the theater was restored and used as performance space during Charleston’s Spoleto Festival. When the city’s lease expired in 2003, the space was then purchased by Urban Outfitters to serve as their downtown location (fig. 3.5). 252 This particular location exhibits a mix of integrated features and the loss of interior finishes. The proscenium arch and balcony are dominant features that have been integrated. The proscenium arch, defines the entrance

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to the fitting rooms. The balcony serves as a second level for retail space. However, throughout the loss of interior finishes is apparent. Whether this was deliberately removed to enhance a desired aesthetic quality or if the current aesthetic condition reflects material failure is unknown.

Efforts from various religious organizations have joined in the preservation of historic theaters. The Avalon Theater in Chicago was designed by John Eberson in his signature atmospheric style. Inspired by exotic Middle Eastern styles, the theater mimicked an open air bazaar. After closing in the late-1970s, the theater became the home of the Miracle Temple Church, remaining largely untouched under their care. Many of the features of a theater lend themselves well to religious setting, resulting in a large number of theaters reused as religious structures.\(^{253}\)

As indicated above the application of preservation treatments as outlined by the Secretary of Interior’s is typically applied to historic structures that have minimal repairs required. However, preservation treatments have been applied to extreme cases of material degradation. Several examples of this alternative application exist in Germany, including Reichstag in Berlin.\(^{254}\)

Reichstag was completed in 1894, as the house of parliament for the German Empire. During World War II the building suffered extensive damage. The main chamber was completely destroyed and the building was repaired only enough to keep the elements out. After World War II the Reichstag fell into disuse. After decades of indecision and failed restoration attempts success was obtained in 1992. Norman Foster was selected as the architect for the second restoration after a design competition. Rather than recommending restoration treatments, Foster’s design exhibited a combination of preservation, restoration and reconstruction. Throughout the interior, damage from


\(^{254}\) The Secretary of Interior’s Standards are United States guidelines being applied to an international project strictly to illustrate a point.
bombings is visible through the preservation of damaged wall fragments. Areas of restoration or reconstruction are distinguished from original material through visible difference in surface texture and material choice.\textsuperscript{255}

The Reichstag’s second restoration represents a blending of the four treatments outlined by the Secretary of Interior’s Standards. The project pushed the boundaries of preservation ideals and practices. The goal of most “mainstream” preservation treatments is a “like new” appearance. The Reichstag restoration expands the application of preservation treatments, by integrating the exhibition of material degradation within the restoration.

Although this example is not a direct representative of theater reuse, it is included to illustrate the untapped possibilities of preservation treatments. This range of treatments is targeting abandoned theaters. Steward Brand, author of \textit{How Buildings Learn} states, “An empty building rots fast and attracts trouble. Once it is left unheated and unventilated, any moisture that gets in immediately begins causing serious damage, with no one around to notice or worry.”\textsuperscript{256} Consequently, severe material degradation is frequently present. Although this degradation is caused by neglect rather than a significant event in history, it is still a period in the buildings history and evolution. Therefore, the acknowledgment of this period in a building’s history provides a truer representation of the buildings entire evolution.

The Pitkin Theater in Brooklyn, New York first opened in 1929. Designed by the architect of the first movie palace, Thomas W. Lamb, the theater showcased a fusion of Moorish and Neoclassical motifs. It operated as a movie theater until 1960s when the surrounding neighborhood suffered from population decline. The theater had briefly operated as a church after closure, but for the majority of the past decades it has remained

\textsuperscript{255} Reich, “Rust-Oration: The Preservation of Deindustrialization in Rust Belt Cities” 59-64.

empty. Material degradation has followed a long period of vacancy, much of the interior plaster and ornament had been lost.\textsuperscript{257} In 2008 the development firm POKO Partners LLC, purchased the decaying theater. The scale of the Pitkin Theater building provided a large interior volume, which allowed for the necessary division of spaces to operate as a charter school.\textsuperscript{258}

POKO’s vision for the theater was a sensitive restoration and renovation, preserving key detail and ornamentation. However, due to the interior condition and the functional demands of a school little of the interior was preserved. New York Times editorial stated, “Though the building has not been designated a landmark, the developers plan to keep most of the exterior intact while essentially building a whole new building

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{pitkin_exterior}
\caption{Preserved exterior of Pitkin Theater. Now functions are a charter school and retail space. Photo provided by Cinema Treasure.}
\end{figure}

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
The exterior shell and terra-cotta ornaments were preserved. However, when incompatible reuse functions are chosen, such as a school, features as the proscenium arch and balcony are lost.

As illustrated by the previous examples not all treatment options are ideal. The most successful theater reuse projects have been when the theater structure is able to house the needs of a sponsor or its community. The rehabilitation and reuse of theaters encourages sustainable practices and retention of historic character of a district, while serving as an anchor in urban revitalization projects.


260 Sponsor is used here to identify a person or group that purchases or reuses the buildings, sometimes after a long period of vacancy.
CHAPTER 4
NATIONAL THEATER CASE STUDY

On September 25, 1911 the National Theater opened as a vaudeville theater. Built among other notable structures—City Hall, Detroit Opera House and the city’s first nickelodeon—the National was the newest edition to the growing entertainment district around Campus Martius Square. In the hundred years that have passed since it’s construction, the city around has changed with little regard for the theater. The National Theater is now the last remaining structure of this original entertainment district. Despite being the last-standing specimen of original entertainment district and increased significance, it remains under imminent threat of demolition. That National Theater will serve as a case study application of the evaluation and treatment selection outlined in

Figure 4.1: National Theater c.1912. Photo provided by Bently Historical Library, University of Michigan.

260 “National Theater: Opening Will Take Place September 25,” Detroit Free Press, (Detroit, MI), September 17, 1911.
Chapter Three.

Architectural Description

Designed by Detroit Architect, Albert Kahn, the National exhibited a fusion of styles. Drawing from Beaux Art and Moorish inspirations, Kahn designed a unique architectural statement for the city of Detroit. The richness of material and ornamentation that characterized the more extravagant movie palaces is present in the National. Although not as extravagant, The National employs marble, bronze and plaster ornamentation that was typical of the later movie palaces.

Covered in white terra-cotta from Detroit’s Pewabic Pottery, the majestic façade demonstrates the elegance of symmetry with central arch flanked by twin gold-domed 64-foot Moorish towers; atop the domes were gold finials (fig. 4.1). Terracotta ornaments adorn the façade including a pair of eagles, carved rosettes and cupid figures. Originally the recessed arch featured an art glass window, with turquoise and gold

Figure 4.2: Lobby c. 1912. Right, engaged ticket booth. Left, doors to auditorium. Center, stairs to balcony. Photo provided by Bently Historical Library, University Of Michigan.

261 Pewabic Pottery see Appendix C.
accents. The arch and towers were illuminated by hundreds of bulbs at night. The glass plates of the canopy style marquee publicized the National Theater, drawing patrons in.

At the engaged ticket booth, flanked by two double glass doors, patrons purchased their tickets before entering the vaulted vestibule lined with tan Pewabic tile (fig. 4.2). Uncomfortably narrow, patrons did not linger here. Instead they filtered to the staircases in the side towers or proceeded through a second set of double doors to the main lobby. From here they proceeded to the auditorium.

Inside, Kahn’s full expression of Beaux Arts influences was apparent through the intricacy of the ornamental plasterwork (fig. 4.3). The auditorium featured a suspended plaster ceiling and ornamental proscenium arch. Its understated elegance combined bands of repeated motifs for a varying textural quality. Rosettes and cupid figures continue to the architectural language from the façade throughout the theater. The classical influence is characteristic of Kahn’s non-industrial architectural style.

The theater featured

Figure 4.3: Auditorium c. 1912. View from balcony. Photo provided by Bently Historical Library, University Of Michigan.
four distinct areas of seating: main floor, balcony, and two sets of opera box seats—one at floor level, the other suspended above. To gain access to the balcony level opera box seats, patrons entered through an obscured spiral staircase, hidden behind the proscenium arch. The balcony was accessed through a set of stairs constructed within the twin tower. The mezzanine foyer space was equally embellished providing gathering place before patrons found their seats. Plaster ornaments and stenciling continued the beaux arts motifs of the façade and auditorium.

Rooms off the mezzanine level housed the necessary, but secondary spaces within the theater including office spaces, storage and rest rooms. Above the rear of the balcony was the light booth, which was later transformed into the projection booth for film exhibition. Additional spaces were accessed behind the proscenium arch, obscured from view. Beneath the main stage were dressing rooms and the orchestra pit; hidden in the fly loft were set battens.

Building Systems

The evaluation of building systems is largely based on the evaluation of several drawings provided by the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan.262 A selection of the architectural drawings of the National Theater is provided in Appendix A.

The National Theater features a masonry wall construction. The exposed west façade verifies the structure as loadbearing masonry through the utilization of 5:1 common bond. This is confirmed by the stepped wall thickness indicated in the drawings. The structural walls are thickest near the foundation; a sectional drawing indicates a wall thickness of twenty-one inches or six wythes. Near the roof, the drawing indicates a thirteen inch thickness or approximately three wythes. Typical of theater construction

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262 The collection includes not only original drawings of the National Theater, but also letters, photographs and architectural drawings from other projects.
the National is divided into two main volumes: auditorium and fly loft. The fly loft is significantly taller with a stepped wall thickness. The section drawings also indicate steel beams and concrete for the construction of floor and roof support.

Due to the substantial mass of a theater structure, foundation design was a critical component of the building. Original drawings indicate a combination foundation system featuring both a basement and slab on grade construction. The foundation beneath the stage utilized a basement foundation to provide additional habitable space; which served as the performers’ dressing rooms. The main floor was slab on grade construction sloping upward from the stage to the lobby. Drawings indicate auditorium floors were finished with wood parquet flooring.

The roof combines the aesthetic of Beaux Arts style and the efficiency of a low slope roof. From the street, the roof appears to be a mansard roof. However, after careful consideration of the drawing the roof is more in tune with a gable roof system, covering only the front façade. The modified gable was constructed of wood rafters wrapped in press steel to create the allusion of cast brackets. The main roofing system is a low slope roof with parapet wall.

Mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems have been removed from the building. However, their historic location and plans are noted on additional drawings in the set procured from the Bently Historical Library. Systems include electrical, plumbing, sprinklers, and heat. Revised drawings from the collection indicate the installation of air conditioning in 1924. In order to accommodate these systems without disturbing the visual aesthetic, the plaster grills served to conceal air vents and lighting fixtures.

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264 Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Albert Kahn Papers Collection.
**History**

The history of the National Theater embodies the changing mediums of entertainment forms at the beginning of the twentieth century. The National Theater first opened in 1911, as a vaudeville theater. However, with the growing popularity of motion pictures, vaudeville’s appeal slowly faded. With newer theaters showing motion pictures smaller vaudeville theaters, like the National, were forced to convert to motion pictures to stay in operation. The exact date of when the National began exhibiting motion pictures is unknown. 265

As the decade continued, theater construction moved from the Campus Martius District to the new thriving entertainment district around Grand Circus Park. With the construction of the grand movie palaces, the original historic district and smaller theaters like the National were unable to compete. 266 The National Theater again changed functions, serving as a burlesque theater with a live orchestra. 267 Burlesque began in Victorian England, gaining popularity in the United States during the early twentieth century. Burlesque began as a musical theater parody, adapting well known opera or ballets to comedic shows. As the popularity of burlesque faded in England, it’s popularity flourished in the United States, with the addition of the strip tease element—although the level of nudity was limited by laws. 268 As the century progressed burlesque shows came to focus on female nudity and exotic dancers, rather than the comedy.

During the 1940’s the National Theater was promoted as the “Detroit’s biggest


and best” burlesque theater. However, by the 1970s burlesque was a fading fad. In the early 1970s, the National changed its name—The Palace Theater—and entertainment medium one last time. The National (Palace) operated as an adult film venue until it closed in 1975, when the National became another empty store front of what once had been a thriving entertainment district.

That same year, The National was listed with 13 other buildings on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing building of the Monroe Avenue Commercial District. The original statement of significance of the Monroe Avenue Historic District nomination stated:

The Monroe Avenue Historic District is significant for two reasons: it contains one of the few relatively intact pre and post-Civil War commercial block in the city (the block between Cadillac and Farmer), as well as an unusual theater designed by Albert Kahn; the district is a part of a larger district that was one of Detroit’s first theater district.

One year later, the theater was sold to the Parking Systems Inc., which manages Detroit’s parking lots. Fortunately, the theater was spared from demolition. It was instead sold to Donald Grain, a Detroit resident in 1977. Donald Grain intended to open the theater as a dine-in theater, treating patrons to classic films during dinner. Grain’s plans were never realized; he lost the building to the City of Detroit for lack of payment on back taxes in the early 1980s.

The National was spared from demolition again in the 1980s. On September 14,

1988 city council voted, 8-0 to raze 12 of the 13 buildings that occupied the Monroe Block. This demolition was carried out in the early 1990s, leaving the National Theater as the only remaining building from the original entertainment district.274 Though this has greatly impacted the integrity of the theater by changing its setting, there remains a great deal of integrity at the National Theater.

In June of 1990, a new investor took interest in the aging theater, proposing to transform the National into a “high-tech European-style dance club.” The plans included a two or three story addition, with a rooftop terrace. The plans never saw fruition. For the remaining of the decade, the National Theater remained empty, with little evidence of redevelopment plans until 1999, when it was purchased by James Wheeler. James Wheeler, Native of Detroit and internationally recognized collector of African American film memorabilia, stated his plan to restore the National. His intentions were to use the theater to show classical films, host film festivals and display his growing collection of memorabilia. Due to the overwhelming projected cost of restoration, the plans were again suspended.275

In 2000, the Campus Martius area saw revitalization through the construction of the new Compuware headquarters.276 In addition to the new headquarters, plans included the renovation of the National, which were never realized.277

Today, fears of demolition remain. A recent editorial characterized the current ownership situation as a “tug-of-war.”

The National Theater is caught in a tug-of-war between an owner who failed to

276 The Compuware Corporation is a software company aimed at information technology (IT) departments in large businesses.
deliver on promises to develop the gem for over a decade; the city of Detroit, which is trying to regain possession of the building; and Rock Ventures, LLC, Dan Gilbert’s real estate arm, which has bought up most of the property around it, and is eyeing the site for new development.278

The combination of multiple unsuccessful redevelopment plan, development in the area and the theater’s continuing deterioration contribute to the theater’s uncertain fate.

**Significance**

The growth of Detroit’s entertainment district paralleled the development of the city as established in Chapter One. With the construction of plank roads and the city’s first legitimate playhouse the (original) National Theater (1848), Detroit became a stop on the western trek of troupes from New York to Chicago. In the following decades Detroit’s entertainment district continued to grow (fig. 4.4). Other theater structures were constructed, offering multiple entertainment mediums. Among the earliest structures built was the (old) Detroit Opera House, the Casino—the city’s first nickelodeon, and the National Theater (1911). During the later period of movie palace construction, Detroit served as the Midwest venue for several of the national studio chains. The opulence and size of these theaters drew patronage away from the smaller venues of the old district. One-by-one each of these older theaters closed and were eventually demolished. The National Theater is the last remaining structure of the original entertainment district (fig. 4.5).279

Detroit architect, Albert Kahn is most recognized as a pioneer of industrial

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architecture. With works both in the United States and abroad, his plans implemented early forms of reinforced-concrete and windows revolutionizing industrial plants. Unlike his counterpart, C. Howard Crane, Albert Kahn was not nationally recognized for his theater design. Nicknamed the “Architect of Ford,” Kahn’s most notable contributions were in industrial architecture, including the River Rouge Plant in Detroit. The National Theater was his first and only theater in Detroit.  

Following the introduction of projected motion pictures in 1896, vaudeville theaters began to include short segments of motion pictures. These early theater structures were direct influences of the spatial arrangement and opulence of the later movie palaces. Journalist Dan Austin stated, “The interior represents the earliest surviving example of theater construction that would later characterize Detroit’s movie palaces of the roaring ‘20s.” The national theater possesses high significance according to National Register Criteria A, B and C.

**Condition Assessment**

The following condition assessment was conducted by the Author on December 2013, and further describes the National Theater’s current physical condition. Its condition contributes to its integrity and governs the selection of potential treatments based on authentic historic fabric and level of material degradation.

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Figure 4.4: Monroe Avenue c. 1911. Historic setting of the National Theater was in the heart of the thriving entertainment district.

Figure 4.5: Monroe Avenue, 2013. Current setting of the National Theater is a key area of redevelopment in Detroit.
# Materials List

| 01 Wood | 02 Masonry: Brick | 03 Concrete | 04 Metal | 05 Finishes | 06 Fenestration | 07 Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing |

## Existing Conditions

### 01 Wood

**Function**
- 01 Structural
- 02 Decorative

**Condition**
- 10 Biological
  - 11 Rot
  - 12 Fungi/Mold
  - 13 Insects
- 20 Chemical
  - 21 Pollutants
- 30 Physical
  - 31 Abrasion
  - 32 Fire
  - 33 Moisture
- 40 Radiation
  - 41 Sunlight
- 50 Anthropogenic
  - 51 Removal
  - 52 Poor Construction
  - 53 Graffiti

### 02 Masonry: Brick

**Function**
- 01 Structural
- 02 Decorative

**Condition**
- 10 Biological
- 20 Chemical
  - 21 Efflorescence
  - 22 Coatings
- 30 Physical
  - 31 Abrasion
  - 32 Mortar Failure
  - 33 Settlement
- 40 Radiation

### 03 Concrete

**Function**
- 01 Structural
- 02 Decorative

**Condition**
- 10 Biological
  - 11 Soiling
- 20 Chemical
  - 21 Corrosion (Reinforcement)
- 30 Physical
  - 31 Abrasion
  - 32 Erosion
  - 33 Aggregate Failure
  - 34 Binder Failure
- 40 Radiation
- 50 Anthropogenic
  - 51 Poor Construction

### 04 Metal

**Function**
- 01 Structural
- 02 Decorative

**Condition**
- 10 Biological
- 20 Chemical
  - 21 Corrosion
- 30 Physical
  - 31 Abrasion
  - 32 Deformation
- 40 Radiation
- 50 Anthropogenic
  - 51 Removal

### 05 Finishes

**Function**
- 01 Terra-cotta
- 02 Plaster
- 03 Paint

**Condition**
- 10 Biological
11 Soiling
20 Chemical
30 Physical
31 Abrasion
32 Support Failure
(i.e. wood lath rot)
33 Surface Failure
34 Material Failure
40 Radiation
50 Anthropogenic
51 Removal
52 Poor
Construction
53 Graffiti

06 Fenestration
Function
01 Windows
02 Doors
Condition
10 Biological
11 Rot
20 Chemical
30 Physical
31 Abrasion
40 Radiation
50 Anthropogenic
51 Poor
52 Past Treatments
Construction
53 Removal

07 Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing
Function
01 Mechanical
02 Electrical
03 Plumbing
Condition
10 Biological
20 Chemical
30 Physical
31 Abrasion
40 Radiation
50 Anthropogenic
51 Deferred
Maintenance
52 Asbestos
53 Removal
Materials List
01 Wood
02 Masonry: Brick
03 Concrete
04 Metal
05 Finishes
01 Terra-cotta
02 Plaster
03 Paint
06 Fenestration
07 MEP

Existing Condition
01.01/02 Wood: structural and decorative conditions.
01.01/02.11 Rot
01.01/02.12 Fungi/Mold
01.01/02.13 Insects
01.01/02.21 Pollutants
01.01/02.31 Abrasion
01.01/02.32 Fire
01.01/02.33 Moisture
01.01/02.41 Sunlight
01.01/02.51 Removal
01.01/02.52 Graffiti
01.01/.02.53 Past Treatments
02.01/02 Brick: structural and decorative conditions.
02.01/02.11 Rising Damp
02.01/02.12 Soiling
02.01/02.21 Efflorescence
02.01/02.21 Biegrowth
02.01/02.22 Coatings
02.01/02.31 Abrasion
02.01/02.32 Mortar Failure
02.01/02.33 Settlement
02.01/02.51 Removal
02.01/02.52 Poor Construction
02.01/02.53 Graffiti
03.01/02 Concrete: structural conditions
03.01/02.11 Soiling
03.01/02.21 Corrosion
03.01/02.31 Abrasion
03.01/02.32 Erosion
03.01/02.33 Aggregate Failure
03.01/02.34 Binder Failure
03.01/02.51 Poor Construction
04.01/02 Metal: structural and decorative conditions
04.01/02.21 Corrosion
04.01/02.31 Abrasion
04.01/02.32 Deformation
04.01/02.51 Removal
05.01/02/03: Finishes Condition
05.01/02/03.11 Soiling
05.01/02/03.21 Corrosion
05.01/02/03.31 Abrasion
05.01/02/03.32 Support Failure
05.01/02/03.33 Surface Failure
05.01/02/03.51 Removal
05.01/02/03.52 Poor Construction
05.01/02/03.53 Graffiti
06.01/02 Fenestration: Window and Door Conditions
06.01/02.11 Rot
06.01/02.31 Abrasion
06.01/02.51 Poor Construction
06.01/02.52 Corrosion
06.01/02.53 Removal
07.01/02/03 MEP
07.01/02/03.31 Abrasion
07.01/02/03.51 Deferred maintenance
07.01/02/03.52 asbestos
07.01/02/03.53 Removal

Typical Conditions:
Glaze Spalling
Soiling terra-cotta ornaments
Graffiti

Figure 4.6: Front Facade.
### Materials List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>02</td>
<td>Masonry: Brick</td>
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<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Metal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Finishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Fenestration</td>
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<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>MEP</td>
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#### Existing Condition

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<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.01.11</td>
<td>Rot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.01.12</td>
<td>Fungi/Mold</td>
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<tr>
<td>01.01.13</td>
<td>Insects</td>
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<td>01.01.21</td>
<td>Pollutants</td>
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<tr>
<td>01.01.31</td>
<td>Abrasion</td>
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<td>01.01.32</td>
<td>Fire</td>
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<td>Moisture</td>
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<td>Sunlight</td>
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<td>Graffiti</td>
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<td>01.01.53</td>
<td>Past Treatments</td>
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<td>Rising Damp</td>
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<td>Biegrowth</td>
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<td>Abrasion</td>
</tr>
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<td>02.01.32</td>
<td>Mortar Failure</td>
</tr>
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<td>Settlement</td>
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<td>Removal</td>
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<td>02.01.52</td>
<td>Graffiti</td>
</tr>
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<td>03.01.01</td>
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<td>03.01.11</td>
<td>Soiling</td>
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<td>Corrosion</td>
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<td>03.01.33</td>
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<td>Binder Failure</td>
</tr>
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<td>03.01.51</td>
<td>Poor Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04.01.01</td>
<td>Metal: structural and decorative conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04.01.11</td>
<td>Corrosion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04.01.21</td>
<td>Abrasion</td>
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<td>Finishes Condition</td>
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<td>Soiling</td>
</tr>
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<td>05.01.32</td>
<td>Abrasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.01.33</td>
<td>Support Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.01.51</td>
<td>Surface Failure</td>
</tr>
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<td>Graffiti</td>
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<td>Fenestration: Window and Door Conditions</td>
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<td>07.01.01</td>
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<td>Graffiti</td>
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<td>07.01.52</td>
<td>Asbestos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.01.53</td>
<td>Removal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Typical Conditions:

- Graffiti
- Mortar failure

**Figure 4.7: North Facade.**
**Condition Assessment 3: Auditorium facing North**

**Materials List**
- 01 Wood
- 02 Masonry: Brick
- 03 Concrete
- 04 Metal
- 05 Finishes
  - 03 Terra-cotta
  - 02 Plaster
  - 03 Paint
- 06 Fenestration
- 07 MEP

**Existing Condition**

**01.01/02 Wood: structural and decorative conditions.**
- 01.01/02.11 Rot
- 01.01/02.12 Fungi/Mold
- 01.01/02.13 Insects
- 01.01/02.21 Pollutants
- 01.01/02.31 Abrasion
- 01.01/02.51 Removal
- 01.01/02.52 Graffiti
- 01.01/02.53 Past Treatments

**02.01/02 Brick: structural and decorative conditions.**
- 02.01/02.11 Rising Damp
- 02.01/02.12 Soiling
- 02.01/02.21 Efflorescence
- 02.01/02.22 Biogrowth
- 02.01/02.31 Abrasion
- 02.01/02.32 Mortar Failure
- 02.01/02.33 Settlement
- 02.01/02.51 Removal
- 02.01/02.52 Poor Construction
- 02.01/02.53 Graffiti

**03.01/02 Concrete: structural conditions**
- 03.01/02.11 Soiling
- 03.01/02.21 Corrosion
- 03.01/02.31 Abrasion
- 03.01/02.32 Erosion
- 03.01/02.33 Aggregate Failure
- 03.01/02.34 Binder Failure
- 03.01/02.51 Poor Construction

**04.01/02 Metal: structural and decorative conditions**
- 04.01/02.21 Corrosion
- 04.01/02.31 Abrasion
- 04.01/02.32 Deformation
- 04.01/02.51 Removal

**05.01/02/03 Finishes Condition**
- 05.01/02.31 Soiling
- 05.01/02.32 Erosion
- 05.01/02.33 Aggregate Failure
- 05.01/02.34 Binder Failure
- 05.01/02.51 Poor Construction

**06.01/02 Fenestration: Window and Door Conditions**
- 06.01/02.11 Rot
- 06.01/02.31 Abrasion
- 06.01/02.51 Poor Construction
- 06.01/02.52 Corrosion
- 06.01/02.53 Removal

**07.01/02/03 MEP**
- 07.01/02.31 Soiling
- 07.01/02/03.11 Soiling
- 07.01/02/03.51 Removal

**Deferred maintenance**
- 07.01/02/03.51 Deferred maintenance

**Typical Conditions:**
- Plaster failure
- Missing finish material

**Figure 4.8:** Auditorium interior, photo taken facing east.
### Condition Assessment 4: Mezzanine Level

#### Materials List
- **01 Wood**
- **02 Masonry: Brick**
- **03 Concrete**
- **04 Metal**
- **05 Finishes**
  - **01 Terra-cotta**
  - **02 Plaster**
  - **03 Paint**
- **06 Fenestration**
- **07 MEP**

#### Existing Condition
- **01.01 Wood**: structural and decorative conditions.
  - **01.01.11 Rot**
  - **01.01.12 Fungi/Mold**
  - **01.01.13 Insects**
  - **01.01.21 Pollutants**
  - **01.01.31 Abrasion**
  - **01.01.32 Fire**
  - **01.01.33 Moisture**
  - **01.01.34 Sunlight**
  - **01.01.51 Removal**
  - **01.01.52 Graffiti**
  - **01.01.53 Past Treatments**
- **02.01 Wood**: structural and decorative conditions.
  - **02.01.11 Rising Damp**
  - **02.01.12 Soiling**
  - **02.01.21 Efflorescence**
  - **02.01.22 Biogrowth**
  - **02.01.23 Settling**
  - **02.01.31 Abrasion**
  - **02.01.32 Mortar Failure**
  - **02.01.33 Settlement**
  - **02.01.51 Removal**
  - **02.01.52 Poor Construction**
  - **02.01.53 Graffiti**
- **03.01/02 Brick**: structural conditions.
  - **03.01.11 Soiling**
  - **03.01.21 Corrosion**
  - **03.01.31 Abrasion**
- **04.01/02 Metal**: structural and decorative conditions.
  - **04.01.11 Corrosion**
  - **04.01.21 Abrasion**
  - **04.01.31 Deformation**
  - **04.01.32 Surface Failure**
  - **04.01.51 Removal**
- **05.01/02/03 Finishes**: structural and decorative conditions.
  - **05.01.11 Soiling**
  - **05.01.21 Corrosion**
  - **05.01.31 Abrasion**
  - **05.01.32 Surface Failure**
  - **05.01.51 Removal**
- **06.01/02 Fenestration**: Window and Door Conditions.
  - **06.01.11 Rot**
  - **06.01.21 Abrasion**
  - **06.01.22 Soiling**
  - **06.01.23 Corrosion**
  - **06.01.51 Removal**
- **07.01/02 MEP**: Deferred maintenance.
  - **07.01.11 Soiling**
  - **07.01.21 Abrasion**
  - **07.01.22 Support Failure**
  - **07.01.23 Surface Failure**
  - **07.01.51 Removal**

#### Typical Conditions:
- Paint Failure
- Plaster Failure

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Figure 4.9: Mezzanine level, photo taken facing east.
Condition Assessment of Auditorium facing South

Materials List
01 Wood
02 Masonry: Brick
03 Concrete
04 Metal
05 Finishes
- 01 Terra-cotta
- 02 Plaster
- 03 Paint
06 Fenestration
07 MEP

Existing Condition
01.01/02 Wood: structural and decorative conditions.
  01.01/02.11 Rot
  01.01/02.12 Fungi/Mold
  01.01/02.13 Insects
  01.01/02.21 Pollutants
  01.01/02.31 Abrasion
  01.01/02.32 Fire
  01.01/02.33 Moisture
  01.01/02.41 Sunlight
  01.01/02.51 Removal
  01.01/02.52 Graffiti
  01.01/02.53 Past Treatments

02.01/02 Brick: structural and decorative conditions.
  02.01/02.11 Rising Damp
  02.01/02.12 Soiling
  02.01/02.21 Efflorescence
  02.01/02.22 Coatings
  02.01/02.31 Abrasion
  02.01/02.32 Mortar Failure
  02.01/02.33 Settlement
  02.01/02.51 Removal
  02.01/02.52 Poor Construction
  02.01/02.53 Graffiti

03.01/02 Concrete: structural conditions
  03.01/02.11 Soiling
  03.01/02.12 Corrosion
  03.01/02.13 Erosion
  03.01/02.21 Efflorescence
  03.01/02.31 Abrasion
  03.01/02.32 Erosion
  03.01/02.33 Aggregate Failure
  03.01/02.34 Binder Failure
  03.01/02.51 Poor Construction

04.01/02 Metal: structural and decorative conditions
  04.01/02.11 Corrosion
  04.01/02.12 Abrasion
  04.01/02.21 Deformation
  04.01/02.31 Abrasion
  04.01/02.32 Corrosion
  04.01/02.33 Support Failure
  04.01/02.51 Removal
  04.01/02.52 Poor Construction
  04.01/02.53 Removal

05.01/02/03: Finishes Condition
  05.01/02.11 Soiling
  05.01/02.12 Abrasion
  05.01/02.13 Support Failure
  05.01/02.21 Corrosion
  05.01/02.33 Surface Failure
  05.01/02.51 Removal
  05.01/02.52 Poor Construction
  05.01/02.53 Graffiti

06.01/02 Fenestration: Window and Door Conditions
  06.01/02.11 Rot
  06.01/02.12 Soiling
  06.01/02.13 Corrosion
  06.01/02.21 Deformation
  06.01/02.31 Support Failure
  06.01/02.32 Corrosion
  06.01/02.33 Surface Failure
  06.01/02.51 Removal
  06.01/02.52 Poor Construction

07.01/02 MEP
  07.01/02.11 Soiling
  07.01/02.12 Corrosion
  07.01/02.13 Support Failure
  07.01/02.21 Corrosion
  07.01/02.33 Surface Failure
  07.01/02.51 Removal
  07.01/02.52 Poor Construction

Figure 4.10: Auditorium interior photo taken facing west, from the balcony.
Condition Assessment: Critical Details

Figure 4.11: Terra-cotta eagle ornament. One of two. Soiling

Figure 4.12: West tower. Graffiti.

Figure 4.13: Terra-cotta ornament. Soiling.

Figure 4.14: West tower. Glaze spalling.

Figure 4.15: Modified gable. Corrosion.

Figure 4.16: West Tower Window. Missing glass.
Figure 4.17: Engaged ticket booth. Missing tile and glass.

Figure 4.18: Auditorium entrance doors. Paint failure.

Figure 4.19: Lobby ceiling. Missing light fixtures.

Figure 4.20: Lobby entrance wall. Missing doors.

Figure 4.21: Stair entrance doors. Paint failure.

Figure 4.22: Auditorium entrance door. Paint failure.
Figure 4.23: West opera boxes. Plaster surface failure.

Figure 4.24: East opera boxes. Plaster surface failure.

Figure 4.25: Ceiling below balcony. Plaster surface failure.

Figure 4.26: Main ceiling. Plaster surface failure and missing light fixture.

Figure 4.27: Orchestra Pit. Material failure.

Figure 4.28: Flyloft.
Integrity

Unlike other theaters discussed as precedents, frequent changes in entertainment medium resulted in minimal changes to the National Theater. The worst damage to the theater occurred during its vacancy.

Demolition of neighboring structures has drastically altered the historic setting. Built as an addition to the original entertainment district, the National is not only the last building on the block, but also the last remaining building of the original entertainment district.

Despite demolition around the theater, the exterior structure and main façade exhibit high integrity. The main façade is largely intact with the most notable loss being the inlay of the art glass window and entrance doors. The original Pewabic tile and terra-cotta ornament are unaltered with little evidence of damage. The presence of these original materials, evidence of original workmanship and unaltered design result in a high integrity score of the exterior.

Inside overall integrity drops due to a high level of material degradation and missing elements. Several of the terra-cotta ornaments of the lobby space are missing, as well as the original light fixtures. Within the auditorium, much of the decorative plaster ornaments and ceiling are in severe disrepair. However, despite the deteriorated state ornamentation patterns and motifs are still identifiable. Additionally the original hyrib support system of the suspended plaster ceilings is still intact. Damage is limited to the finish surface of the system. The theater is also devoid of seating, projection equipment and screen, either through removal or decay. Despite these removals the design, associations and general feelings of the space are unaltered.

Based on the consideration of both the integrity of the exterior and interior spaces, the National Theater exhibits a moderate integrity based on the established scale from Chapter Three.
**Inventory of Existing Character Defining Features**  
( ) indicates missing or changed

Overall Visual Aspects: Exterior

- Flanking Towers
- Central Arch Window, Recessed
- Modified Gable Roof, Pressed Steel
- Engaged Ticket booth
  (Marquee)
  (Setting- Entertainment District)

Visual Character: Exterior

- Terra-cotta Tile and Ornaments

Interior Spaces, Features and Finishes

- Spaces: auditorium, projection room, lobby, mezzanine, balcony, stage
- Interior Features: Proscenium Arch, Balcony, Opera Box Seats, (Seats)
- Materials and Finishes: Suspended Plaster ceiling, Plaster ornament, (Curtains)

**Recommendations**

Comparison of the current condition of the National Theater and the treatment options explored in the precedent study would suggest a partial demolition, with a preservation treatment for the façade. However, such a treatment undermines the significance of this structure and its function as a theater. While the façade is the most public face of the building, it is the interior that contains the features that identify it as a theater. Therefore, these recommendations request:

1. Stabilization, cleaning and repair of the façade
2. Full or partial restoration of the interior spaces
3. Selection of new compatible use that will incorporate existing character defining features.
Ideally the National Theater would be fully restored and function as a performing art venue or movie theater again. However, this would not be sustainable function due to venues like the Fox Theater and Detroit Opera House already operating in close proximity. The National Theater would unlikely be able to compete. Instead another compatible function should be selected to ensure a successful and profitable reuse.

However, due to the current situation in Detroit, the identification of an ideal reuse is challenging. Typically the selection of a reuse would be selected based on what the community needs. Detroit’s revitalization is still in its infancy, therefore strong community needs are not clear. Whatever is proposed needs to be initially privately financed, financially sustainable, and publically supported. Past proposals had suggested a variety of reuse options from night club to dinner theater. If done correctly, (i.e. retaining character defining features) these reuses would have been compatible with the theater fabric and therefore have the potential to be a sensitive preservation project. The failed execution of any of the projects highlights the true difficulty and high up-front cost of restoration or rehabilitation.

Instead of expecting immediate results, the current condition of the National Theater and Detroit would benefit from longer view of return. This perspective can be captured in a series of short to long term goals.

**Short Term Goal 1. Preservation and Restoration of Façade**

1. **Recommendations:** As the most public face of the building, it is important that the façade cultivates support from the community. The current condition of the façade is in overall good condition, but evidence of material failure is apparent.

   • Address glaze spalling on terra-cotta tiles and identify cause. Glaze spalling can be an indication of a larger issue. This may signal issues with metal anchoring system or excess water penetration. See
Preservation Brief 7: The Preservation of Historic Glazed Architectural Terra-Cotta for more information of treatment and diagnosis.\footnote{283}

- Address missing window glass. Open windows allows for the elements to enter the interior of the structure precipitating further material degradation and integrity.
- Remove graffiti. Graffiti detracts from the visual appearance of the building, also indicating insignificance to the public. Removal process should be selected based on recommendation as provided in Preservation Brief 38: Removing Graffiti from Historic Masonry.\footnote{284}
- Cleaning of terra-cotta. Soiling is most apparent on ornament. See Preservation Brief 7: The Preservation of Historic Glazed Architectural Terra-Cotta for more information of treatment and diagnosis.\footnote{285}
- Replace exterior doors. Archival evidence of original doors is available and should be referenced to replicate historically accurate replacements.

**Short Term Goal 2. Interior stabilization**

1. Recommendations: If treatment selection is to be postponed until a later time, due to fund raising or reuse selection the building should be mothballed to limit additional deterioration until treatment is completed. A multi-step solution is recommended as outlined by Preservation Brief 31: Mothballing Historic Buildings.\footnote{286}


\footnote{285} Tiller, “Preservation Brief 7.”

Short Term Goal 3. Initiate fund raising

1. Recommendations: One of the challenges of rehabilitating a historic theater is the cost. Given the condition of municipal funding sources, finances should be generated from private donors, state or federal sources.

Mid Term Goal 1. Select treatment and reuse.

1. Recommendations: Before the project can continue, a treatment option and a reuse program must be selected. Recommended treatment is partial to full restoration based on building significance. Reuse function should be compatible, integrate identified character defining features and serve to benefit the community. The reuse function must be both financially sustainable and publicly supported.

Mid Term Goal 2. Replacement of Marquee

1. Recommendations: It is recommended that character defining features and the building history as a theater be recognized in the selection of treatment and reuse. Therefore, it is recommended that consideration be given to the replacement of the marquee. Though not an immediate threat, the replacement of the original marquee should be addressed within five years.

Long Term Goal 1. Execute treatment

1. Recommendations: Treatment should be either a partial or full restoration of the interior, while preserving exterior features.

Long Term Goal 2. Execute Rehabilitation

1. Recommendations: Rehabilitation should be conducted as necessary to accommodate compatible reuse function.

The employment of short to long term goals would limit additional damage to the theater due to vacancy, while postponing final treatment and reuse selection until the economic situation in Detroit is more stable or appropriate funds and public support are secured.
**Possible Reuse Options**

The following highlights a possible reuse, beyond those explored in the precedent studies or previously proposed. Considering the significance of the National Theater structure and the development of the entertainment district(s) in Detroit, a potential reuse would be a theater museum. The National Theater could be restored to its historic appearance and provide a functional exhibition space showcasing the history and significance of Detroit’s entertainment districts. This would allow for the preservation and recognition of the structure’s historic function and educate the public about the lost entertainment district of Detroit.

The success of similar establishments is apparent through reuse precedents in other cities. In Savannah, Georgia, The Georgia State Railroad Museum operates from a series of building that collectively represents “the oldest and largest existing nineteenth-century railroad operations complex in the nation.” The complex is composed of five buildings which exhibit a collection of permanent exhibits including historic locomotives and machinery. The museum has been in operation since 1989. Although these structures are not theaters, their size and history create an equally challenging reuse.

This recommendation is based on current activities that draw people to Detroit. Current draws to Detroit are theatrical performances at larger restored theaters like The Fox and Detroit Opera House, sports events, and historic architecture tours of the theaters and historic churches.\(^{287}\) The strong influence of two of the three attraction confirms the existing demand for a theater museum.

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\(^{287}\) Preservation Detroit offers an annual walking theater tour. This tour allows attendees to see the interiors of eight historic venues located near the Grand Circus Park District. Each stop provides historic insight into many of Detroit’s movie palaces. Each year the tour is sold out.
CONCLUSION

This diminishing resource is a tangible representative of American urban, architectural and social development. Historic theaters are an under-considered resource but a significant typology based on multiple National Register Criteria. The successful reuse of movie palaces is essentially due to the large number of theaters that have been adapted to performing arts venues and their location in historic downtowns. As the most compatible function for theaters this is an ideal reuse option. Typically these projects result in a restoration, rather than a more extensive rehabilitation. Performing arts venues allow for the retention of all character defining features. However, a large number of theaters remain unused, after the performing arts venues quota is filled.

The effects of the reuse of movie palaces as performing art venues are already apparent, as stated earlier, Detroit is home to the largest theater restoration program in the country. However, it is also one of the cities with the largest number of historic theaters still in existence—largely abandoned.

Detroit is an extreme case of prolific theater construction and the consequences of deindustrialization. Deindustrialization has left many of its theaters largely untouched until recent redevelopment and revitalization efforts have resulted in several demolitions.

As the potential of historic theater structures continues to be recognized, it is essential that reuse projects are conducted with sensitive and compatible programs or functions. The intended outcome of this study is not to define a single treatment, but to exhibit the true potential of theater reuse both in Detroit and across the country. Each theater was designed as an individual statement reflecting the community in which it was built, and should be treated as a unique opportunity.

The preceding chapters explored various components key to the evaluation and
selection of treatment options. The following provides guidelines for theater reuse. These guidelines were created through a combination of consideration of the Secretary of Interior’s Standards, National Register Criteria, and evaluation of reuse precedents. The guidelines are broken down into three major categories: evaluation, treatment options and determining reuse function. These guidelines are not prescriptive; rather they promote informed treatment selection.

**EVALUATION**

**History and Significance**

Understanding a theater’s history is crucial to understand buildings significance. It can reveal a related significant person or events? How this theater fits in the larger context of theater construction in the area? If later alterations occurred or if they should be considered for their own significance, thereby influencing treatment selection. Is the theater already listed on the National Register? Is the structure listed (individually) on the National Register? Or is it eligible? Is the structure listed on the National Register as contributing to a historic district?

**Structural and Physical Condition**

Existing conditions directly influence the appropriate treatment option and level of intervention. The severity of deterioration informs the selection of a preservation, restoration or rehabilitation approach. It also drives viability of project through cost implications.

**Integrity**

The following checklist is not a comprehensive list. It instead serves to begin to facilitate the evaluation of the integrity of a theater. The following places a higher emphasis on original fabric, but in some instances alterations to a structure may have acquired their own significance. Evaluation should be adjusted appropriately.
Location
Has the building been moved?

Design
Is the original floor plan largely intact? Have there been previous restoration or reuse campaigns? Have previous changes altered the relationship between spaces? or circulation patterns? Have notable defining features (see Character Defining Features below) been removed or altered in anyway?

Setting
Was the theater constructed in the entertainment district? Or was it in a neighborhood? How has the historic context changed? Have neighboring buildings been demolished? Has the area been redeveloped?

Materials
Are the historic materials intact? Has the structure suffered material degradation? Have previous repairs removed, replaced or altered past materials? Were replacements or alterations with compatible materials?

Workmanship
Does the physical evidence suggest original craft? Are the original techniques, motifs or patterns still visible?

Feeling
Does the theater still expression its historic aesthetic? Does it express the character of the era it was constructed in?

Association
Are the theater’s associations with historic event or person still understood?
**Architectural Character: Inventory of Character Defining Features**

Overall Visual Aspects: Exterior

- Shape
- Openings (windows, doors)
- Roof
- Projections (i.e. marquee, ticket booth)
- Setting

Visual Character: Exterior

- Materials
- Finish work
- Ornamentation

Interior Spaces, Features and Finishes

- Spaces: auditorium, projection room, lobby, mezzanine, balcony, stage
- Interior Features: proscenium arch, balcony, opera box seats, seating, organ, organ grilles/screens
- Materials and Finishes: suspended plaster ceiling, plaster ornament, curtains, textiles

**TREATMENT OPTIONS**

Information uncovered during the evaluation process directly influence the treatments. Treatment options are directly influenced by significance, integrity (direct factors: design, materials, workmanship and feeling) and current condition. Theaters with higher material integrity should be considered for reuse that takes advantage of their original fabric. Have changes occurred? Have they acquired their own significance? If yes, treatment should incorporate and respect these layers of building history.
DETERMINING REUSE FUNCTION

Information uncovered during the evaluation process directly influence the selection of reuse function. Selection of reuse function is directly influenced by significance, integrity (indirect factors: location and setting) and current condition. To ensure a successful reuse, it is necessary to consider the location and neighborhood context in which the theater currently exists. Does the neighborhood have a performing arts venue? Does it need one and/or another? What other needs could the reuse of a theater structure fulfill?

Compatible Uses

New use should maximize the retention of character defining features, while balancing the needs of the sponsor. The new use should require limited changes to finishes, ornamentation and spatial characteristics (i.e. proscenium arch or balcony in the auditorium space).

This this explored the reuse and significance Detroit’s theaters, but the methods outlined can serve as a guide for the reuse and evaluation of theaters in any city.
Appendix A: Theater Catalog

The following pages depict the thirty-one structures surveyed. This inventory does not include all of the nickelodeons constructed within the selected region, only the first two nickelodeons constructed in Detroit are introduced. This inventory can serve as a reference point for future work on theaters in Detroit and highlights the common threats to these great but diminishing historic resource.
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66 Telenews, Facade, photo by Author............................................................. 189
Cent Odeon, 1906

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|            | ☑ Vaudeville  
|            | ☑ Transitional  
|            | ☑ Movie Palace  
|            | ☑ Neighborhood | Current: ☑ Reuse: Venue  
|            |                  | ☑ Reuse: Other  
|            |                  | ☑ Closed  
|            |                  | ☑ Demolished  
|            |                  | ☑ Unknown |
| Commissioned By: | -- |
| Style: | -- |
| Name(s): | Bijou, New Gatety, Cine-x |
| Number of Seats: | Historic: 314 | Current: 0 |
| Current Condition: | Demolished |
| Advocates: | -- |
| Notes/ Anecdotes: | The second nickelodeon to open in the city. This storefront theater occupied the former location of a restaurant. It survived the transition through feature films, sound and wide screen format films, but closed in the mid-seventies. |
Cent Odeon & Columbia

Additional Images
**Family, 1909**

**Photographs**

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Photographs

- Interior
- Exterior

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## Columbia, 1911

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- Transitional  
- Movie Palace  
- Neighborhood  
Current:  - Reuse: Venue  
- Reuse: Other  
- Closed  
- Demolished  
- Unknown |
| Commissioned By: | John Kunsky |
| Style: | -- |
| Name(s): | -- |
| Number of Seats: | Historic: 1,006  
Current: 0 |
| Current Condition: | Demolished. |
| Advocates: | -- |
| Notes/ Anecdotes: | First movie theater in the original entertainment district.  
Among the first with a full orchestra and organ. Located on the same street as the National and Cent Odeon. |
## Nation Theater, 1911

### Photographs

- [Interior](#)
- [Exterior](#)

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☑ Reuse: Other  
☑ Closed  
☑ Demolished  
☑ Unknown |
| **Commissioned By:** | --          |
| **Style:**          | Beaux Arts  |
| **Name(s):**        | King’s Theater, The National Burlesque Theater, The Palace |
| **Number of Seats:** | Historic: 800  
Current: 0 |
| **Current Condition:** | Abandoned. Full condition assessment in Chapter Four. |
| **Advocates:**      | Preservation Detroit, The City of Detroit |
| **Notes/Anecdotes:** | Full history documented in Chapter Four. |
National Theater

Additional Images

4

5

6
National Theater

Additional Images
National Theater

Additional Images
National Theater

Additional Images
Additional Images

National Theater
### Photographs

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<td>In 1949 the theater was closed and transformed into a nightclub. In its later years it featured adult films. In the early 2000s the theater was closed for renovations. Portions of the building (facade &amp; ceiling) were restored. The space has been adapted for a multi-use venue including a liver performance venue. The theater reopened in October, 2013.</td>
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Photographs
Photograph not available.
### Architect
Fuller Clafin

### Function
- Historic: Nickelodeon, Vaudeville, Transitional, Movie Palace, Neighborhood
- Current: Reuse: Venue, Reuse: Other, Closed, Demolished, Unknown

### Address
4635 Woodward, Detroit, MI 48201

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<tr>
<td>Notes/ Anecdotes:</td>
<td>Remolded by C. Howard Crane in 1935. Closed in the late 1940s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Addison, 1914

**Architect:** C. Howard Crane

**Function:**
- Historic: Nickelodeon
- Vaudeville
- Transitional
- Movie Palace
- Neighborhood

**Current:**
- Reuse: Venue
- Reuse: Other
- Closed
- Demolished
- Unknown

**Commissioned By:** --

**Style:** --

**Name(s):** Fine Arts

**Number of Seats:**
- Historic: 582
- Current: unknown

**Current Condition:** Closed.

**Address:**
2954 Woodward, Detroit, MI, 48201

**Photographs**
- Photograph not available.

**Data**

First opened as a legitimate theater, but within a year was fitted for movies. In 1970s the theater was purchased and renovated by Joe Foster. For about a decade it served as a film venue featuring classic and family movies. Closed in 1980. During the 1990s the theater was used as a night club, until it closed in 1998. It now remains empty.
Majestic, 1915

Photographs
Photograph not available.

Interior

Exterior

Data
Address:
4126 Woodward, Detroit, MI 48201

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>C. Howard Crane</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Function:</td>
<td>Historic: Nickelodeon, Vaudeville, Transitional, Movie Palace, Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current: Reuse: Venue, Reuse: Other, Closed, Demolished, Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned By:</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style:</td>
<td>Italian Renaissance, Art Deco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Seats:</td>
<td>Historic: 1,651, Current: 1,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Condition:</td>
<td>Interior: restored, Exterior: areas of deterioration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates:</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes/Anecdotes:</td>
<td>Opened as a legitimate playhouse theater. By the late 1920s it had switched to film. In the early 1930s, the facade was remodeled to accommodate the widening of Woodward Ave. The theater closed in the 1950s. In 1987, the theater was restored and reopened as a concert venue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Rialto, 1917

### Photographs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interior</th>
<th>Exterior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photograph not available.</td>
<td>Photograph not available.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Data

Address:
345-7 Gratiot, Detroit, MI 48226

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>C. Howard Crane</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Function:  | Historic:  □ Nickelodeon  
              □ Vaudeville  
              □ Transitional  
              □ Movie Palace  
              □ Neighborhood  
              Current:  □ Reuse: Venue  
                          □ Reuse: Other  
                          □ Closed  
                          □ Demolished  
                          □ Unknown  |
| Commissioned By: | -- |
| Style: | -- |
| Name(s): | -- |
| Number of Seats: | Historic: 1,334  
                          Current: 0  |
| Current Condition: | -- |
| Advocates: | -- |
## Colonial, 1917

**Architect:** C. Howard Crane  
**Function:** Historic: Nickelodeon, Vaudeville, Transitional, Movie Palace, Neighborhood  
**Current:** Reuse: Venue, Reuse: Other, Closed, Demolished, Unknown

**Commissioned By:** Ben and Lou Cohen  
**Style:** --  
**Name(s):** --  
**Number of Seats:** Historic: 1,566  
**Current Condition:** Demolished.

**Address:** 2615 Woodward, Detroit, MI 48201

### Photographs
- Photograph not available.  
- Photograph not available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>C. Howard Crane</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Function:** | Historic: Nickelodeon, Vaudeville, Transitional, Movie Palace, Neighborhood  
**Current:** Reuse: Venue, Reuse: Other, Closed, Demolished, Unknown |
| **Commissioned By:** | Ben and Lou Cohen |
| **Style:** | -- |
| **Name(s):** | -- |
| **Number of Seats:** | Historic: 1,566  
**Current:** 0 |
| **Current Condition:** | Demolished. |
| **Advocates:** | -- |
| **Notes/ Anecdotes:** | Open in 1917, featuring both Vaudeville acts and film, but eventually began exclusively showing films. Closed in the mid 1970s, was demolished soon afterwards. |
Madison, 1917

Data

Address:
22 Witherell Street, Detroit, Mi 48226

Architect: C. Howard Crane


Commissioned By: John Kunsky

Style: Traditional, neoclassical

Name(s): --

Number of Seats: Historic: 1,806  Current: 0

Current Condition: Demolished

Advocates: --

Notes/ Anecdotes: Typical of theaters during this period, the Madison theater was built in combination with office building. During the 1940s it was sold to United Detroit, whom remodeled the theater in the 1960s (mostly exterior changes). Purchased by the Michigan Opera Theatre at the same time as the Detroit Opera House, but was unable to raise enough money. Sold and Demolished in early 2000s.
**Architect:** C. Howard Crane  
**Function:** Historic: Nickelodeon, Vaudeville, Transitional, Movie Palace, Neighborhood  
**Current:** Reuse: Venue, Reuse: Other, Closed, Demolished, Unknown  
**Commissioned By:** John Kunsky  
**Style:** Traditional, neoclassical  
**Number of Seats:** Historic: 1,700, Current: 0  
**Current Condition:** Demolished  
**Advocates:** --  
**Notes/ Anecdotes:** First opened as a vaudeville theater, but switched within its first year to film. Designed as an “alley-jumper.” Its entrance was constructed within the existing Fine Arts Building. The auditorium occupied a separate location behind. The auditorium was demolished in 2009.

**Address:**  
44 West Adams Avenue, Detroit, MI 48226

---

**Photographs**  
[Photograph not available.]

---

**Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>C. Howard Crane</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned By:</td>
<td>John Kunsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style:</td>
<td>Traditional, neoclassical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Seats:</td>
<td>Historic: 1,700, Current: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Condition:</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates:</td>
<td>--</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes/ Anecdotes: First opened as a vaudeville theater, but switched within its first year to film. Designed as an “alley-jumper.” Its entrance was constructed within the existing Fine Arts Building. The auditorium occupied a separate location behind. The auditorium was demolished in 2009.
### Deluxe, 1918

**Architect:** B.C. Wetzell

**Function:**
- Historic: Nickelodeon
- Vaudeville
- Transitional
- Movie Palace
- Neighborhood

**Current:**
- Reuse: Venue
- Reuse: Other
- Closed
- Demolished
- Unknown

**Commissioned By:** --

**Style:** --

**Name(s):** --

**Number of Seats:**
- Historic: 1486
- Current: 0

**Current Condition:** Demolished

**Address:**
118 Monroe, Detroit, MI 48202

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interior</th>
<th>Exterior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photograph not available.</td>
<td>Photograph not available.</td>
</tr>
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**Data**

**Notes/Anecdotes:** --

**Photographs**

Photograph not available.
Town, 1919

Photographs

Photograph not available.

Data

Address:
3711 Woodward Avenue, Detroit, MI 48201

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>C. Howard Crane</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Function:</td>
<td>Historic: Nickelodeon, Vaudeville, Transitional, Movie Palace, Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned By:</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style:</td>
<td>Neoclassical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td>Orchestra Hall, Paradise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Seats:</td>
<td>Historic: 2,300, Current: 2,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Condition:</td>
<td>Restored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates:</td>
<td>Save Orchestra Hall, Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes/ Anecdotes:</td>
<td>Built for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. In 1939 the orchestra was forced to leave, due to financial struggles. During their vacancy the theater served as a black movie and live theater venue. It closed in 1951. Save Orchestra Hall, Inc. was formed, in the 1970s to prevent demolition. After a 19 year restoration campaign, DSO returned home. Once again it functions as symphony hall.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Capitol, 1922

**Photographs**

Interior

Exterior

**Data**

Address:
1526 Broadway, Detroit, MI 48201

<table>
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<th>Architect:</th>
<th>C. Howard Crane</th>
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<td>Function:</td>
<td>Historic: Nickelodeon, Vaudeville, Transitional, Movie Palace, Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current: Reuse: Venue, Reuse: Other, Closed, Demolished, Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned By:</td>
<td>John Kunsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style:</td>
<td>Italian Renaissance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td>Paramount, Broadway-Capitol, Grand Circus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Seats:</td>
<td>Historic: 3,485, Current: 2,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Condition:</td>
<td>Restored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates:</td>
<td>Michigan Opera Theatre Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes/ Anecdotes:</td>
<td>The first movie palace in Detroit. When it opened it was the fifth largest palace in country. The various name changes, reflect different periods of ownership. Closed in 1985, after a fire. It was later purchased by the Michigan Opera Theater in 1989. 20 Million dollar restoration campaign. Restored interior to 1920s appearance and enlarged the stage. Reopened as the Detroit Opera House</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Photographs

- Interior
- Exterior

## Data

Address:
2121 Woodward Ave, Detroit, MI 48201

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>C. Howard Crane</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned By:</td>
<td>Kunsky-Loew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style:</td>
<td>Italian Renaissance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td>Palms-State, Palms, Fillmore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Seats:</td>
<td>Historic:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Condition:</td>
<td>Restored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates:</td>
<td>Charles Forbes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes/ Anecdotes:</td>
<td>Was restored by Charles Forbes along with the Little (Gem) Theater in the 1990s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grand Riviera, 1925

Architect: John Eberson
Function: Historic: Nickelodeon, Vaudeville, Transitional, Movie Palace, Neighborhood
Current: Reuse: Venue, Reuse: Other, Closed, Demolished, Unknown
Commissioned By: --
Style: Italian Villa, Atmospheric Style
Name(s): Riviera
Number of Seats: Historic: 2,766, Current: 0
Current Condition: Demolished
Advocates: --
Notes/Anecdotes: The only theater in Detroit designed by John Eberson in his signature atmospheric style. The theater closed in 1974, and remained closed until it was demolished in 1999.

Address:
9222 Grand River, Detroit, MI 48208

Architect: John Eberson
Function: Historic: Nickelodeon, Vaudeville, Transitional, Movie Palace, Neighborhood
Current: Reuse: Venue, Reuse: Other, Closed, Demolished, Unknown
Commissioned By: --
Style: Italian Villa, Atmospheric Style
Name(s): Riviera
Number of Seats: Historic: 2,766, Current: 0
Current Condition: Demolished
Advocates: --
Notes/Anecdotes: The only theater in Detroit designed by John Eberson in his signature atmospheric style. The theater closed in 1974, and remained closed until it was demolished in 1999.

Address:
9222 Grand River, Detroit, MI 48208
Grand Riviera

Additional Images

1. Exterior of Grand Riviera
2. Interior ceiling detail
3. Interior balcony detail
Michigan, 1926

### Photographs

![Interior](image1.png) ![Exterior](image2.png)

### Data

Address:
238 Bagley Avenue, Detroit, MI 48226

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>C.W. Rapp and George L. Rapp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Function:</td>
<td>Historic: Nickelodeon, Vaudeville, Transitional, Movie Palace, Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current: Reuse: Venue, Reuse: Other, Closed, Demolished, Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned By:</td>
<td>John Kunsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style:</td>
<td>French Baroque, Italian Renaissance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Seats:</td>
<td>Historic: 4,038, Current: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Condition:</td>
<td>Partial Demolition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates:</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes/ Anecdotes:</td>
<td>Often stated that it was the most beautiful of Detroit’s movie palaces. The theater closed in 1967 and operated as a night club during the 1970s. After the night club closed, the intention was to demolish the theater for parking. However, it was determined, demolition would jeopardize the adjoining office building. Instead it was gutted and converted into a parking garage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Michigan

Additional Images

36

37

38

39
Summit, 1927

Photographs

Photograph not available.

Interior

Exterior

Data

Address:
300 West Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>Herbert J. Krapp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Function:</td>
<td>Historic: Nickelodeon, Vaudeville, Transitional, Movie Palace, Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned By:</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style:</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td>Cass, Summit Cinerama, Pandora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Seats:</td>
<td>Historic: 1,050, Current: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Condition:</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates:</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes/Anecdotes:
Opened as a legitimate theater as the Cass theater. In 1965 the theater underwent a significant remodel and reopened as Detroit’s second cinerama theater. Through the 1970s the theater featured foreign films. In 1977 the theater closed and was demolished.
**Little Theater, 1927**

### Photographs
- Interior
- Exterior

### Data

**Address:**
333 Madison St., Detroit, MI 48226

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>George Mason</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **Function:** | Historic: □ Nickelodeon  
            □ Vaudeville/Other  
            □ Transitional  
            □ Movie Palace  
            □ Neighborhood  
| **Current:** | □ Reuse: Venue  
            □ Reuse: Other  
            □ Closed  
            □ Demolished  
            □ Unknown  |
| **Commissioned By:** | The Century Club- Private Women’s Organization |
| **Style:** | Italian Renaissance |
| **Name(s):** | Rivoli, Drury Lane, Europa, Cinema, World, Gem Art, Gem |
| **Number of Seats:** | Historic: 453  
                      Current: 200 |
| **Current Condition:** | Restored. |
| **Advocates:** | Charles Forbes |
| **Notes/Anecdotes:** | Opened with a full stage, orchestra pit and balcony for use by the Century club. During the decline of the city during the 1960s it changed to adult films. It closed in 1978, remained closed until Charles Forbes purchased the “Little Theater.” In 1997 to avoid demolition, the theater was moved. The move, is recorded as the heaviest building moved on wheels, at about five million pounds. |
# Hollywood, 1927

## Photographs

- Photograph not available.

## Data

**Address:**
4809 West Fort, Detroit, MI 48209

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>Charles N. Agree</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current: Reuse: Venue, Reuse: Other, Closed, Demolished, Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned By:</td>
<td>Ben and Lou Cohen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style:</td>
<td>Spanish Revival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Seats:</td>
<td>Historic: 3,436, Current: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Condition:</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocates:</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes/ Anecdotes:</td>
<td>When it opened, it was the third largest theater in Detroit. The theater closed in the 1950s. It was demolished in the 1960s to provide surface parking.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Fisher, 1928**

**Architect:** Graven & Mayger

**Function:** Historic: Nickelodeon, Vaudeville, Transitional, Movie Palace, Neighborhood

**Current:** Reuse: Venue

**Commissioned By:** John Kunsky

**Style:** Original: Mayan, Current: Mid-Century/1960s

**Number of Seats:** Historic: 2,711, Current: 2,100

**Current Condition:** Restored.

**Advocates:** --

**Notes/Anecdotes:** Opened in 1928, as the centerpiece of John Kunsky's circuit. In the 1960s, the theatre was remodeled, based on designs provided by Rapp & Rapp. Since then it has continued to be a touring Broadway show destination.

**Address:**
3011 W. Grand Blvd, Detroit, MI 48202

---

**Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>Graven &amp; Mayger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned By:</td>
<td>John Kunsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style:</td>
<td>Original: Mayan, Current: Mid-Century/1960s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Seats:</td>
<td>Historic: 2,711, Current: 2,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Condition:</td>
<td>Restored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates:</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes/Anecdotes:</td>
<td>Opened in 1928, as the centerpiece of John Kunsky's circuit. In the 1960s, the theatre was remodeled, based on designs provided by Rapp &amp; Rapp. Since then it has continued to be a touring Broadway show destination.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Architect: C. Howard Crane
Function: Historic: Nickelodeon Vaudeville Transitional Movie Palace Neighborhood
Current: Reuse: Venue Reuse: Other Closed Demolished Unknown
Commissioned By: William Fox
Style: Siamese-Byzantine
Name(s): --
Number of Seats: Historic: 5,048 Current: 5,048
Current Condition: Restored.
Advocates: Michael Illich, Olympia Development
Notes/Anecdotes: Is the largest theatre in Detroit. In 1988 the Fox underwent an 8.1 million dollar restoration to return it to its 1920s appearance. Now offers Broadway shows, concerts, host special events and films.
Additional Images

47

48

49

50

51

52
**United Artist, 1928**

**Photographs**

- Interior
- Exterior

**Data**

**Address:**
140 Bagley Avenue, Detroit, MI 48226

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>C. Howard Crane</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned By:</td>
<td>United Artists Circuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style:</td>
<td>Spanish Gothic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Seats:</td>
<td>Historic: 2,012 Current: unknown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Condition:</td>
<td>Closed</td>
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<td>Advocates:</td>
<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notes/ Anecdotes:</td>
<td>Similar theaters were designed by C. Howard Crane in Los Angeles and Chicago for the United Artist Studio Chain. Major remodeling during the 1960s, but the auditorium was untouched. In 1971 the theater closed, its furnishings and artwork were auctioned off.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
United Artist

Additional Images

185
Music Hall, 1928

**Photographs**

Interior  
Exterior

**Data**

Address:  
350 Madison, Detroit, MI 48226

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>William Kapp</th>
</tr>
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<td>□ Nickelodeon</td>
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<tr>
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<td>□ Vaudeville/Other</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Transitional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Movie Palace</td>
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<td>Reuse:</td>
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<td>□ Venue</td>
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<td></td>
<td>□ Other</td>
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<td>□ Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Demolished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned By:</td>
<td>Matilda Dodge Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style:</td>
<td>Spanish Renaissance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td>Wilson Theater</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Seats:</td>
<td>Historic: 1,918</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current: 1,722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Condition:</td>
<td>Restored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates:</td>
<td>Kresge Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes/Anecdotes:</td>
<td>It opened as a legitimate playhouse, the Wilson Theater. It was equipped with projection equipment and offered the occasional film. 1945-1953 the theater operated as the home of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, becoming the Music Hall. Following the decades the theater had several intermittent period of closure. In 1973 it was purchased by the Kresge Foundation and renovated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

186
Music Hall

Additional Images
Loop, 1928

**Photographs**

Photograph not available.  Photograph not available.

**Data**

Address:
48 Michigan Ave, Detroit, MI 48226

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>H.D. Ilgenfritz</th>
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<td>Historic:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Nickelodeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Vaudeville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Movie Palace</td>
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<td>☐ Reuse: Other</td>
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<tr>
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<td>☐ Closed</td>
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<td>☐ Demolished</td>
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<td>☐ Unknown</td>
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<td>Notes/Anecdotes:</td>
<td>Offered movie 24-hours a day. Closed in 1956, later demolished.</td>
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# Times Square, 1929

## Photographs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Exterior</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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## Data

Address: 443 Abbot, Detroit, MI 48226

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>Christian W. Brandt</th>
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| Function:  | Historic:  
- Nickelodeon  
- Vaudeville  
- Transitional  
- Movie Palace  
- Neighborhood  | Current:  
- Reuse: Venue  
- Reuse: Other  
- Closed  
- Demolished  
- Unknown |
| Commissioned By: | -- |
| Style: | -- |
| Name(s): | -- |
| Number of Seats: | Historic: 900  
Current: 0 |
| Current Condition: | Demolished. |
| Advocates: | -- |
| Notes/ Anecdotes: | Closed in 1958, later demolished. |
## Eastown, 1931

### Photographs

Photograph not available.

- **Interior**
- **Exterior**

### Data

**Address:**
8041 Harper, Detroit, MI 48213

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect:</th>
<th>V.J. Waier &amp; Co.</th>
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| **Function:** | Historic: ☐ Nickelodeon  
☐ Vaudeville  
☐ Transitional  
☐ Movie Palace  
☐ Neighborhood | Current: ☐ Reuse: Venue  
☐ Reuse: Other  
☐ Closed  
☐ Demolished  
☐ Unknown |
| **Commissioned By:** | Wisper-Wetsman Theater |
| **Style:** | Renaissance Revival, Baroque |
| **Name(s):** | Showcase Theater, Eastown Palace |
| **Number of Seats:** | Historic: 2,500  
Current: 0 |
| **Current Condition:** | Closed. |
| **Advocates:** | -- |
| **Notes/Anecdotes:** | During the 1960s the Eastown theater served as a rock concert venue. Performers include: Alice Cooper, The Doors, Pink Floyd and the Grateful Dead. It was forced to shut down in 1973. Later it operated as a Jazz Club, Adult Film Theater, and finally a church. In 2010 the neighboring apartment building burned, the theater was unharmed, it has since been empty. |
Eastown

Additional Images

[Image]
Roxy, 1932

Photographs

<table>
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Data

Address:
2745 Woodward Ave, Detroit, MI 48201

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<td>Style:</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Number of Seats:</td>
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<td>Notes/Anecdotes:</td>
<td>The theater closed in 1972. It has since been demolished.</td>
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</table>
## Midtown, 1941

### Photographs

- Interior: Photograph not available.
- Exterior: Photograph not available.

### Data

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711 West Canfeild, Detroit, MI 48201

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<tr>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td>Studio Midtown, Midtown Art, Midtown Follies</td>
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<td>Evangelistic Tabernacle of Faith Congregation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notes/Anecdotes:</td>
<td>Opened in 1941, closed in 1970s. For nearly a decade it has served as a church for the Evangelistic Tabernacle of Faith Congregation.</td>
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## Photographs

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## Data

Address:
1540 Woodward, Detroit, MI 48226

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<td>Notes/Anecdotes:</td>
<td>The telenews theater operated as a newsreel theater, until the 1960s. The availability of home television sets made the newsreel theater obsolete. In 1969 the theater was remodelled and renamed the Plaza featuring adult films, then foreign films until 1991 when the theater closed. In 2000 the theater opened as a nightclub, Bleu Room.</td>
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The following database represents Detroit’s entire theater collection. This database provides basic information obtained on each theaters constructed within the city limits between 1906-1960.
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<thead>
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<td>314</td>
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<td>1907</td>
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Appendix C:  
Architect and Preservation Advocate Bios

The following pages provide brief biographical information on theater architects, as well as notable theater preservation advocates in Detroit.
**C. Howard Crane**

Charles Howard Crane was Detroit’s greatest theater architect and his designs are among the city’s most opulent movie palaces, including the Fox and United Artists Theaters. He designed more than 250 theaters featured not only in Detroit but in major cities across the United States. His designs are known for their attention to decorative craftsmanship, immense seating arrangements and excellent acoustics. Although best known for his theater designs, other works include Detroit’s Olympia Stadium, and Lafayette building.290

**John Eberson**

Eberson designed his first theater, the Jewel, in Hamilton, Ohio. He attained national and even international acclaim for his atmospheric theatres, many of them executed in exotic revival styles, including Italian Renaissance, Moorish Revival and others. They often featured ceilings painted to look like the nighttime sky, complete with stars and clouds. Eberson’s firm was responsible for nearly 100 atmospheric theaters by the end of the 1920s, including the Grand Riviera in Detroit.291 His atmospheric features went on to become the gold standard for subsequent atmospheric theaters.

**Charles Forbes**

Theater owner Chuck Forbes a retired salaried employee of Ford Motor Co. began

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Investing in real estate across the country, including his hometown of Detroit. Forbes said he wanted to preserve at least one example of a small, a medium and a large theater from the 1920s for future generations to enjoy. He started with the medium-sized State Theatre now known as the Fillmore Detroit, and then purchased the Fox Theatre, a large venue, (Ilitch family later bought the Fox). His small theater, the Gem and Century buildings. Each have been restored. The construction of Comerica Park threatened the building again in 1997, but Chuck Forbes opted to have the building moved instead of seeing it torn down.292

**Dan Gilbert**

Daniel Gilbert is the chairman and founder of Rock Ventures and Quicken Loans Inc. Quicken Loans moved its headquarters and 1,700 of its team members to downtown Detroit in August 2010, where Gilbert and the company are helping lead a revitalization of Detroit’s urban core. Today, Gilbert-owned businesses employ 11,500 people in the city. In 2011, Gilbert’s Rock Ventures group purchased several buildings in downtown Detroit, including the historic Madison Theatre Building, Chase Tower and Two Detroit Center, Dime Building, First National Building and three smaller buildings on Woodward Avenue. In 2012, Rock Ventures, purchased the former Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago Detroit Branch Building, One Woodward Avenue, 1201 Woodward (Kresge Building), and five smaller buildings on Woodward Avenue and Broadway Street, totaling 630,000 square feet of commercial space in downtown Detroit. In 2013, Rock Ventures purchase the 1001 Woodward office tower, several smaller buildings in

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the downtown area and announced, along with The Downtown Detroit Partnership and the Detroit Economic Growth Group, a plan for Detroit’s urban core. Rock Ventures’ downtown Detroit real estate investments include more than 30 properties (buildings and/or store fronts) totaling 7.6 million square feet. Four million square feet is commercial space; another 3.6 million square feet is parking (10,096 parking spaces)

Gilbert began his buying spree for Detroit real estate after moving his Quicken Loans headquarters downtown in August 2010, filling up vacant space in the Compuware building facing Campus Martius. He now owns or controls more than 30 buildings, from skyscrapers to the Greektown Casino to Woodward Avenue storefronts.293

Mike Ilitch

An American entrepreneur, founder and owner of the Little Caesars Pizza franchise. He owns the Detroit Red Wings of the National Hockey League and Detroit Tigers of Major League Baseball. Ilitch has been at the center of Detroit’s downtown redevelopment efforts; he purchased and renovated the Fox Theatre and relocated his business headquarters (Ilitch Holdings) to the adjoining office building. His most recent project proposal includes a new hockey arena in downtown Detroit is in the works part of a new $650 million entertainment district in the bankrupt city.294

Albert Kahn

Known as the “Architect of Detroit,” he founded his architectural firm Albert Kahn Associates in 1895. He was recognized as a world leader in industrial architecture design, developing a style of construction using reinforced concrete to replace wood in factory walls, roofs, and supports. During his lifetime he built over 1000 buildings for Ford Motor Company alone.295 By 1938, Kahn’s firm was responsible for 20 percent of all architect-designed factories in the U.S.” His designs were not limited to industrial architecture, several of his other building in the city of Detroit include: Fisher Building, National Theater, the three major daily newspaper buildings, Belle Isle Aquarium &Conservatory, Temple Beth-El, Griswold Building and many churches, hospitals and residences. Numerous of his classically inspired building can be found on the University of Michigan’s campus in Ann Arbor. As of 2006, Kahn had approximately 60 buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Twelve Albert Kahn buildings are recognized by official Michigan historical markers.296

John Kunsky

John Kunsky is one of the most notable theater impressarios in Detroit. As the first in motion pictures with the opening of the city’s first nickelodeon, his name became synonymous with movie theaters in the following decades. Following the opening of his first nickelodeon, the Casino, Kunsky opened serveral smaller theaters before investing in larger venues. He hired architect C. Howard Crane to design the first true movie theater in Detroit, the Columbia. The theater opened its doors in 1911. Other theaters commissioned

by Kunsky were: The Strand (1915), the Alhambra (1915), Adams Theater (1917), Madison (1917), Redford (1928), and the his final movie palace the Fisher (1928). By 1928, he owned twenty movie theaters, including four of the largest first-run theaters in Detroit. With his partner, he worked to relocate the city’s entertainment center from Monroe Street and Campus Martius to the growing shopping district surrounding Grand Circus Park. 297

**Pewabic Potty Factory**

Pewabic Pottery was founded in 1903 by Mary Chase Perry and her partner, Horace Caulkins. Pewabic’s was first located on Alfred Street in Detroit. Four years later, Pewabic Pottery moved to a new facility on East Jefferson. In 1991, the building (which still houses the Pottery) and its contents were designated a National Historic Landmark and today is Michigan’s only historic pottery factory. Works produced by Pewabic Pottery can be seen throughout the United States. In Michigan, Pewabic installations can be found in countless churches (including Christ Church at Cranbrook, Holy Redeemer Church and St. Paul Cathedral in Detroit), schools, commercial buildings and public facilities (such as Detroit’s Guardian Building, the Detroit Public Library, and the new Comerica Ballpark, Detroit People Mover Stations and private residences. 298

Rapp & Rapp

The architectural firm Rapp and Rapp was active in Chicago, Illinois during the early
20th century. The firm is well known as one of the leading designers of early 20th
century movie palaces. It designed over 400 theatres, including the Majestic Theater,
Dubuque, Iowa (1910), the Chicago Theatre (1921), Michigan Theater, Detroit (1926),
Bismarck Hotel and Theatre (1926), Oriental Theater, Chicago (1926), and the Paramount
Theatres in New York (1926) and Aurora (1931).299

Samuel Rothafel (Roxy)

Roxy managed many of New York’s most important theaters, including the Regent,
Strand, Rialto, Rivoli, Capitol, Roxy, and Radio City Music Hall. He also helped engineer
the integration of film, music, and live performance in silent film exhibition, pioneered
the convergence of film, broadcasting, and music publishing and recording in the 1920s,
as well as and helped movies and movie going become the dominant form of mass
entertainment between the world wars.300

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299 Christine Shang-Oak Lee, “The Revitalization and Neglected: Rapp and Rapp Movie Palaces in
300 Ross Melnick, American Showman: Samuel “Roxy” Rothafel and the Birth of the Entertainment
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