

7. Description

Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions)	Condition	Check One
Art Deco	<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered
	<input type="checkbox"/> fair	
	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	Check One
	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed	<input type="checkbox"/> moved & date _____

Narrative description of present and original physical appearance is found on one or more continuation sheets.

8. Spokane Register Criteria and Statement of Significance

Applicable Spokane Register of Historic Places Criteria—mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for Spokane Register listing:

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Spokane history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory history.

Narrative statement of significance is found on one or more continuation sheets.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography is found on one or more continuation sheets.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2/3 city block; 46,500 sq. ft. Slightly more than 1 acre
UTM Coordinates Zone 11, easting 468000 northing 5278100
Verbal Boundary Description Railroad Addition, lots 3, 4, 5, 6 of Block 4
Verbal Boundary Justification

11. Form Prepared By

Name and Title Lawrence Kreisman, M.A., M. Arch.
Organization
Telephone Number/E-mail (206) 523-8441 (h); (206) 622-6952 x224 (w) larryk@historicseattle.org
Street and Number 5763 27th Avenue N.E.
City, State, Zip Code Seattle, WA 98105
Date March 6, 2001

12. Additional Documentation

(See attached)

13. Signature of Owner(s)

14. For Official Use Only:

Date Received: _____ Attest: Jenni D. Foster

Date Heard: 12/10/01 City Clerk

Commission Decision: _____ Approved

Council/Board Action: Approved as to Form: [Signature]
Assistant City Attorney

Date: 12/10/01

We hereby certify that this property has been listed in the Spokane Register of Historic Places.

[Signature]
MAYOR, City of Spokane City Administrator
or

CHAIR, Spokane County Commissioners

CHAIR, Spokane City/County Historic Landmarks Commission

[Signature]
OFFICER, City/County Historic Preservation Officer
City/County Historic Preservation Office
Sixth Floor - City Hall, Spokane, WA 99201

The Site

The 155' x 200' building is located on the eastern 2/3rd of the block bordered by Monroe Street, West Sprague Avenue, and West First Avenue. The principal entrances are on opposite sides of the building, fronting Sprague and First Avenue. These entrances reflect the symmetric arrangements of vestibules and lobbies that cut through the public areas of the building. The First Avenue entrance was originally referred to as the carriage drop-off entrance. To the west of the stage house for the building is a vacant lot that has been contributed to the Spokane Symphony for expansion of the stage house. At the time of construction, a building occupied that lot.

Original Exterior

The Fox Theater was built using progressive construction methods that relied upon concrete for all exterior walls, facing, and trim. Above the ground floor storefronts, wooden forms lined with fiberboard were spaced in such a way as to have their position indicated in the concrete surface. The walls of the main auditorium were poured with sliding or "slip" forms in one continuous pouring, the forms being raised as the work progressed. Ten days were required to complete the operation.

The large butterfly panels of the Monroe Street façade are 9'-6" by 12'-9" in size; the projection or relief is 10" from the plans of the wall. They were poured in place in plaster moulds made by the Spokane Ornamental Plaster Works, and their concrete is integral to that of the remainder of the building. According to contemporary press accounts, the delicate butterfly pattern that runs along the cornice line of the Fox was originally painted green and beige. A finishing color coat was applied over the exterior to produce a uniform gray-white tone. Aluminum trim was used for the shop windows. Small clay tile was applied as a base course.

The opening description from *The Spokane Spokesman-Review* (September 3, 1931) reflected contemporary conservative taste and skepticism about the new up-to-date style of the theater. The criticism was hardly disguised, and there were many backhanded compliments about the stark exterior:

Spokane residents already have become familiar with the modernistic exterior of the new theater. Its great bare, dust-colored walls with incidental ornamental devices and flutings to give a play of light and shade have occasioned wide command. The architectural style is so unusual, so bizarre and so futuristic, that the casual passerby catches his breath in surprise and wonder. Certainly Spokane has seen nothing like it before.

The row of shops with their bright interiors, green tile bases, and unusual features catches the eye. At first, the ensemble strikes the eye as a jumble of rectangular, geometrical figures, piled one upon the other at random. More detailed study, however, reveals classic beauty of proportion and line, even if severe and austere cold.

Original Interior

Fortunately, the entertainment value of the interior spurred the journalist to more positive descriptions once he stepped through the doors into the foyer:

Ornamental metal doors swing open and project him at once into a veritable fairyland of chased glass, gleaming aluminum, warmly colored walls, flaming sunbursts of light, shimmering mirrors, floral mural decorations and thick, warm, rich carpets of blue and red.

The foyer itself seems almost as large as many theaters. Broad, easy staircases above the checkroom lead to the lounge, the restrooms, and the balcony.

Overhead is a starlike centerpiece in aluminum and gold that covers most of the ceiling and conceals the lights. The walls meet the ceiling with a fluted border done in silver. Floral decorations on the walls and ceiling are sparsely used in keeping with the chaste expanses of metal and glass.

The great sidewall, which contains the exquisite metal doors leading to the auditorium on the lower floor, is a thing of rare beauty. It is divided into panels that extend from the floor to the ceiling. One holds a large mirror that catches every ray of light and throws it back to be picked up again and again by the burnished metal lights and the metal and glass panels of the balustrade.

Above the doors great aluminum sunbursts shoot to the ceiling. The general effect is highly unconventional, but its beauty is unmistakable. First night patrons will linger long in this lovely foyer.

The men, if they saunter upstairs, will find their rest room decorated in murals portraying sports and athletics. The ladies will find their quarters rich, sumptuous, and in superlative taste.

The author of a September 19 article in *Pacific Builder and Engineer* focused his attention on the colors of the interior of the Fox:

Soft and elegant tones of green and rose pastel shades of terra cotta, relieved by metallic; units done in various tones of silver, ranging from the pure metal color to gun-barrel steel, and in gold leaf ranging from oxide green copper to pure red copper and pure gold leaf—all these are exquisitely combined in a decorative scheme fit for an enchanted fairyland.

Touches of black, graphite black, slate gray, and gunmetal give contrast to the warmer tones, and form a foil for the higher keyed ranges of color.

The foyer wall panels have for their main decorative features beautiful hand-painted panels approximately eight feet wide and 24 feet high. Created in modern manner, they present flat tones of green and gray silvers, a fantastic foliage, starting at the base and flanking the metal aisle doors on each side. These panels are best described as a "fantasy in modern flora."

Next to catch the eye is the balustrade—polished aluminum and heavy plate glass. No one item in the decorative scheme outdoes this particular effect.

The mezzanine walls are done in four modern landscapes, executed in flat tones and shade with the foreground similar to that of the foyer. The ceiling is carried out in the modern ornament described for the wall panels. It is done in various tones of the pastel shades of green and silver. The cornice topping off the walls has been treated in tones of silver and gold, punctuated by touches of slate black.

The doors throughout, with the exception of those in the foyer, are flush, one-panel doors, hand-decorated with embossed and hand-applied ornament and further embellished with hand-lining in gold, silver and gray on a slate black background.

He proceeded to describe the lounges:

The men's lounge is decorated in graduating colors, starting from a gray, extending to a warm tan and ending in a peculiar shade of terra cotta red and dull lavender.

A similar idea has been executed in the ladies' cosmetic room. Appliqued figures are done in silver on a black ground of rose, lavender, and pastel shades of green. The ladies' lounge has for its decorative treatment a blended wall, starting from a soft gray green at the bottom and running into an ultramarine blue at the top. Painted weeping willow tree foliage is done in shades of silver hung from the metal cornice. A gold leaf ceiling adds the feminine touch.

The *Spokesman-Review* journalist was captivated by the richness of the auditorium:

Patrons should save their gasps of amazement for the thrill that sheer beauty affords when they reach the auditorium, a spacious place with 1450 seats downstairs and 900 seats in the balcony, 240 of which are loge seats.

The general treatment is modified modern with straight lines predominating and the familiar frescoes giving way to panels and parallelograms in a riot of greens, blues, tans, golds, and silver. Walls blend almost imperceptibly into the ceiling. The perspective is slightly exaggerated to accentuate the feeling of size.

Everything ties into the gigantic sunburst of the ceiling that spreads fanlike from the top of the proscenium arch out almost to the balcony. This is a mass of warmly tinted geometrical figures, all harmoniously colored and decorated. It conceals indirect lighting fixtures. Decorations are built into the structure and are not merely applied with a brush.

The narrow wall panels extend from the floor to ceiling. At the ceiling the panels appear to continue at an angle to the central sunburst. Rich colorings in blue, green, and tan, with conventional floral decorations, are used in the panels, all blending perfectly (sic) into a color scheme that is soft, warm and free from all harshness and garishness.

The ceiling is studded with silver stars, each concealing lights. Over the balcony are artistic drop lights of silver and alabaster, all carrying out the sunburst effect. Somewhat similar suspended lights illuminate the lower floor under the balcony with dainty wall bracket lamps and sconces at intervals...

The seats, uniform throughout the house from the fifth row on the aisle downstairs to the last row in the balcony are upholstered in mulberry plush, with the seats in green leather. The loge seats are slightly different, being larger and with higher backs and the arms are upholstered in green leather like the seats. Otherwise, each seat is as good as another...

The proscenium arch is 50 feet wide. It is flanked by four ornamental columns on each side. Just beyond them on each side are the organ grills, elaborate art pieces, beautifully colored and carrying out once more the sunburst motif. These have soft draperies and ornaments in the niches. Steps on each side connect the stage and the main aisles.

The Wurlitzer pipe organ is concealed with the exception of the console in the orchestra pit. It contains stops that are new to Spokane and promise unusual tone combinations. The orchestra pit sinks below the floor level, but is not the type that can be lowered and raised at will. The house orchestra will be a regular Fox feature.

The reporter from *Pacific Builder and Engineer* was also impressed by the sunburst, and by the color treatments of the space:

Turning to the main auditorium, the ceiling becomes the true piece de resistance, with its gigantic sunburst done in metal, glass and painted ornamentation. The thought behind the entire scheme is that of a gigantic sunburst with radiating rays emerging from it in an ornamental form in the general shape of a fan. The ceiling must be seen to be appreciated.

The proscenium arch is decorated with metallics, ranging from silver to gold and copper, picked in with colors from the main ceiling to echo, recall and tie into the main ceiling in a harmony of exquisite color effects.

Changes to the Original Building and Current Condition

Exterior and Storefronts:

In general the concrete exterior of the theater is in good condition. The principal alteration has been replacement of the original marquees on West Sprague and on West First Avenue by 1955. The original ticket booth was removed and replaced by new entrance doors to the vestibule and lighting was replaced in later alterations.

The exterior, which had originally been one color and had relied upon light and shadow to highlight its bas-reliefs, was painted (ca. 1975) in pale blue with its abstract butterflies in shades of brown and beige. In 1995-96, the exterior was repainted closer to its original "gray white", but its bas reliefs were picked out in dark green and red and the butterflies further highlighted with lavender and yellow.

The storefronts and surrounds are generally intact, although certain pilasters have replacement tile. The blue and gold decorative glazed tile capitols of the pilasters are also generally intact, as are the aluminum ventilator grills. Some of these are missing, and some of the backing for them is also missing. Fabric awnings block these from view.

The window on the First Avenue side, which allowed patrons a view of the cooling system, has been covered over. The vertical FOX sign on the roof, which originally rotated, is now stationary. Two additional red FOX signs on either side of the building are not original, but appear in photographs of the theater in 1955 and were probably added when the marquee was altered.

Interior painted Surfaces:

The most significant surface change to the interior has been the over-painting of walls and ceilings in the lobbies, lounges, and auditorium. The ceiling and walls of the lobby were selectively "freshened" with red paint, some of which covered original ceiling decorative painting. The gold plaster sidewalls of the auditorium were painted ivory, presumably to "lighten and brighten" the room. Also at that time, it is suggested that some of the decorative murals were touched up, but this has not been, in fact, determined. It is more likely that some of the geometric trim and molding received new coats of brighter silver and black paint than would have originally been used. Murals in the rest rooms and the adjoining lounges on either side of the mezzanine are painted over in beige, although both rest rooms retain original black and white ceramic floor tile and marble dividers. The chased aluminum doors to the auditorium were also painted on the auditorium side, covering over some decoration in the process.

The lobby and auditorium murals and paintings, where they have not been painted over, are either good or restorable. The worst conditions are above the balcony, where partitions constructed in 1975 (when this section was divided into two small theaters) have damaged the decorative painting at the ceiling. A Spokane Daily Chronicle article on September 2, 1931

revealed that to avoid the cracking of plaster or concrete in temperature extremes, all walls and ceilings first were covered with canvas and the paint applied afterwards." This probably referred only to the mural walls in the lobby and mezzanine. In the auditorium, painting appears to have been directly on the smooth plaster ceilings and acoustical textured side walls.

Plaster

There are numerous locations where painted plaster is damaged or chipped, particularly fronting the balcony and at the proscenium. It is not clear how much "touch up" of interior decorations previous owners in the auditorium or in the lobby accomplished.

Staircase

The extraordinary staircase from the foyer to the mezzanine level is reasonably intact. There is an aluminum cap missing from one of the two ebony and rose marble newel posts. Aluminum balusters and the alternating chased floral glass panels are in good condition, as are the ebony handrails.

Lighting Fixtures:

A large number of original aluminum and glass lighting fixtures are intact. The most important of these fixtures are the sunburst fixture above the proscenium in the auditorium and the etched and frosted glass centerpiece of the lobby (where some missing pieces have been replaced by plain frosted glass). Two types of floral and geometric fixtures with decorative plaster medallions illuminate the seating area below the balcony. There are also elaborate sconces at the sides of the auditorium and in the main lobby. The original suspended fixtures that hung over the balcony are missing (only the diamond-shaped ceiling plates remain). Suspended boat-like fixtures in the vestibule and star fixtures in the West Sprague Avenue lobby are missing. They would have been identical to those fixtures still intact in the West First Avenue vestibule and lobby. There are also missing wall sconces at the back of the auditorium, and all the fixtures in the mezzanine lounges have been replaced.

Furniture and fittings

The stunning Art Deco safety curtain originally made for the Fox is intact and its colors are probably closer to the original palette than other parts of the theatre because it has been protected from fading. It is composed of a rhythmic series of vertical banners in pastel colors that frame a central medallion. These banners relate to the plaster fluted side walls framing the proscenium.

Apart from a number of rows of seats in the auditorium proper, there are no original furnishings remaining in the theater. Original seats had geometric Art Deco end plates (evidenced in the first three rows of orchestra seats and others in the balcony). There appear to have been three or four replacement seat rows installed at different periods, based upon the various seat shapes and end plates to these rows. Originally, lobby furniture included upholstered davenport and chairs, tables, and standing fixtures that are visible in early lobby photographs. No lounge photographs have come to light to reveal how these rooms were furnished. Portieres originally hung from the archways into the lounges at either side of the mezzanine. Draperies also softened the light that enters now from the great windows on the Monroe Street side of the mezzanine. If there was a wood dance floor on this level, it is now covered by carpet. The original geometric carpet designed by Heinsbergen "to fit with the general decorative scheme of the theater" in hues of blue and red, was probably removed and replaced in 1975 by a floral carpet in blues and greens. This, in turn, was replaced in 1996 by a red and blue veined pattern carpet that, along with the red walls and ceiling in the lobby, draws attention away from the subtle coloring of mural decorations and ornamental metal and glass. The theater organ was removed many years ago and is reported to be in a private residence in San Bernadino, California.

The Fox Theater is significant for its cultural and social contribution to the Spokane community. Although movies had been shown in downtown theaters for some time, the construction of the Fox in 1930-31 marked the first time that a motion picture company had built its own theater in Spokane to showcase its own movies. It represents the confidence of a major Hollywood film distributor, Fox West Coast Theaters, through its investment in a major motion picture house in Spokane as the nation entered the first years of a depression that would cripple its industries and put thousands of people out of work. Today, it represents the largest Art Deco theater still in existence north of the San Francisco Bay area.

Architecturally, the Fox is one of two significant and progressive buildings that mark the culmination of Seattle architect R.C. Reamer's distinguished career. The other, the Edmond Meany Hotel in Seattle, shares many characteristics with the Fox, as it was being designed in the Seattle office at almost the same time and both incorporated similar construction, materials, and finishes. The modernistic style, the use of poured in place concrete, and the abstract, stylized ornamentation was up-to-date and sophisticated. For the conservative Washington public, these experiments in a softer modernism than the International style were received with mixed reviews at their opening but were also recognized for their innovation and for placing Seattle and Spokane on the national map, architecturally.

The theater interiors are also significant as the work of a master of theater interior decoration, Los Angeles designer Anthony Heinsbergen, at the peak of his career. The Fox Theater came out of the same office and at the same time as Heinsbergen Decorating Company was developing the interiors for some of the finest Art Deco motion picture palaces in America—the Oakland Paramount, the Wiltern Theater in Los Angeles, and the Warner Grand in San Pedro.

Historic Context: Theater Enterprises in Spokane

Exploitation of gold, silver, and other natural resources, rebuilding of the downtown after the 1889 Fire and railway connections to the rest of the country pushed Spokane into the twentieth century. In terms of its entertainment industry, Spokane's theaters evolved from saloons and variety halls in makeshift spaces to specially designed stages to suit larger, more sophisticated audiences.

Beginning with construction of the 1,588 seat Auditorium Theater, built on the ashes of the Fire of 1889, citizens of Spokane enjoyed a myriad of theatrical offerings from nearly a dozen theaters around downtown. From live performance halls for popular vaudeville and other travelling shows of the early twentieth century in theaters such as the Spokane, Columbia, American, Orpheum and Pantages, to early motion pictures at the Liberty and the Clemmer, Spokane appeared to have a sophisticated and varied cultural curiosity.

The large number of theaters already in Spokane is an indication of the popularity of this type of entertainment, and perhaps was an incentive to the burgeoning motion picture industry to build one of its own theaters here. The industry marketed its films by promoting the fantasy of escape and romance created by the exotic exteriors and sumptuous interiors of fantastic and fanciful movie palaces.

The opening of the Fox on September 3, 1931 also changed the moviegoer experience. Its scale—2/3 of a city block—and its modernistic exterior and interior brought the glamour of Paris, New York, and Los Angeles to Spokane. An article in the September 19, 1931 issue of *Pacific Builder and Engineer* described it as "one of the most striking pieces of architecture to be

found in Spokane." The theater was the 29th to be operated in the state of Washington by the Fox West Coast Theaters and, with a capacity of between 2,250 and 2,400 (the number varies considerably, depending upon the source) was also one of the largest. Its modernistic or Art Deco style was the subject of praise, controversy and conversation for months following the opening.

Unfortunately, the nationwide Depression had a severe impact upon the entertainment industry everywhere. In Spokane, two theaters, the Auditorium and Avalon (originally Columbia) permanently closed. Remarkably, the Fox held on. It survived the Depression, the war years, the post-World War II rise of the television, and the move of families to outlying suburbs. Beginning in October 1975, the theater became a triplex. That remodel left the foyer and main auditorium intact but divided the balcony into two small screen theaters.

Theater Architects: Weavers of Dreams

Theatrical showmen were concerned with pleasing the public, with bringing to the stage entertainment which would satisfy extremes of taste, education, and culture and of course, making money doing it. Initially, the novelty of vaudeville or motion pictures was enough to bring crowds into the theaters. The unadorned nickelodeons set up in downtown storefronts were thriving businesses from the time they made their first appearance in the 1890s.

But when the novelty wore thin and competition for paying customers intensified, showmen started to cater to the comforts of customers in a way unheard of except in royal households. Early vaudeville theaters had simple, restrained exteriors with European opera house decors inside—box seats, gilt plaster, and velvet plush. As houses became larger and more elaborate, more flamboyant Baroque and Renaissance period styles replaced simple classical motifs. The mid-1920s saw the rise of the "exotic" theaters, with decor and ornamentation from the far corners of the world. European palaces, Gothic cathedrals, Spanish courtyards, Egyptian tombs, Mayan and Aztec cities, and Persian casbahs all became fodder for the fantasy worlds of the motion picture palace.

Because money was so freely poured into them to please public taste, and because of the freedom designers were given to create imaginative forms, theater buildings became the temples of the twentieth century American City. The stage performance in fact often took second billing to the grandeur and exoticism of the auditorium. Three Seattle architects—E.W. Houghton, B. Marcus Priteca, and R.C. Reamer—built regional and national reputations on the basis of their local designs. All three were engaged to design Spokane theaters. E.W. Houghton designed the Spokane, American, and Clemmer theaters. B. Marcus Priteca designed the 1918 Pantages Theater (later the Orpheum). R. C. Reamer designed the Fox Theater. Reamer was certainly brought to Spokane on the basis of his previous successes—the Chinese styled 5th Avenue Theater in Seattle (1926) and the Spanish Renaissance styled Mt. Baker Theater in Bellingham (1927).

In 1926, Seattle based Pacific Northwest Theaters turned its back on Western Europe to look to the Far East for inspiration. The Chinese theme was not a totally surprising choice, given Seattle's leading role in Trans-Pacific trade. R.C. Reamer's firm replicated rooms in the Summer Palace and in the Forbidden City. The dome of a Ming dynasty royal audience hall, dominated by the guardian dragon that symbolized the Emperor, is at twice the actual size. Billed as the most authentic example of Chinese timber construction outside of Asia, it was a masterpiece of the plasterers' art.

For an impression of how poetry and legend not only shaped the architecture but of the image of the architect as well, one need only go to the misty, romantic homage to R.C. Reamer in the opening night program of the 5th Avenue Theatre. It painted him in almost God-like terms as "Weaver of Dreams." The view presented was that architects, endowed with creative genius and trained to recognize and interpret the architecture and decorative styles of every culture, could pick and choose among them to come up with the perfect building.

The Nation Goes Modernistic

The United States was invited to participate in the International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Art in Paris in 1925. However, the rules and regulations for admission were directed to works that show new inspiration and real originality. According to the conclusions of a commission appointed by the Secretary of Commerce, the U.S. had nothing original to bring to the show and, therefore, did not participate.

The Government did send 108 delegates from many cultural and trade associations and business areas. Five prominent architects were sent. In their *Report on the Paris Exposition*, D. Everett Waid, President, AIA and Charles Butler, FAIA, stated, "As a nation we now live artistically largely on warmed-over dishes. In a number of lines of manufacture, we are little more than producing antiquarians. We copy, modify, and adopt the older styles with few suggestions of a new idea. It is true that this practice of reproducing the older forms has been an invaluable education to our people...It would seem equally true, on the other hand, that the richness and complexity of American life calls for excursions into new fields that may yield not only innovations, but examples well suited to the living conditions of our times."

In observing the buildings of the exposition, one delegate commented, "The essential, all-pervading characteristics of these buildings—that is, their simplifications of mass and effect—is eminently adaptable to our own prevailing methods of construction wherein stone, cement, brick and terra cotta play so large a part."

The Americans were particularly impressed by the exhibition buildings, "notable for the lack of any false construction features used for decorative effect such as columns, pediments, and exterior domes. The walls were in large part plain, except where ornament was concentrated at a few telling points. The ornament was usually in the form of low-modeled relief either of conventional flower forms or figures." This is the design theory that was acted upon by R. C. Reamer for the facades of the Spokane Fox Theater.

American Art Deco

Modernistic buildings symbolized the new century with boldness and vision. Architects incorporated a lively catalogue of designs that expressed the bold power and intense rhythm of twentieth century America. And architects, engineers, artists, sculptors, stonemasons, metal, ceramic, and glass crafts people merged their individual talents for the greater ensemble. Building was "theater" and money was spent to exploit its dramatic possibilities. Executed in marble, bronze, etched glass, chrome, gold leaf, aluminum, exotic woods, and polychrome terra cotta, these designs provided urban America with some of its finest and most visible public art.

It was in the nation's skyscrapers and commercial buildings and in its vaudeville and motion picture theaters that these new designs and materials gained popularity. And even when the Depression halted commercial development, movie theaters in the Art Deco and Streamlined moderne continued to be designed and opened in hundreds of large and small cities well into the late 1940s.

Although Art Deco buildings throughout the country had much in common, they occasionally reflected regional character as well in order to give buildings a special relevance to local residents. New York buildings had their share of ornament devoted to power, energy, transportation, communication, and industry. Miami resort hotels in the 1930s had their palm trees, seashells, ship's railings and portholes, and a bevy of flamingoes and crocodiles. Los Angeles Deco, influenced by Hollywood, the motion picture industry, Spanish Colonial heritage, and cultures to the south, incorporated colorful Mayan and Mission themes, along with

From kings he borrows, and from dynasties, dipping into the coffers of the past for his materials. To the castle of a Saxon monarch he goes for staunchness and solidity, to a temple of Ilium for beauty, to be fashioned into forms of majesty and grace. A Grecian urn yields him a perfect line, a Pompeian frieze, perhaps, a rhythmic pattern. In a Byzantine seraglio or a Mohammedan mosque, he may find his colors, and from the palace of a Chinese emperor take what he desires of richness and magnificence, of poetry and symmetry, of works of structural skill and exquisite craftsmanship, with which to materialize his vision. Then, with a genius that is all his own, he shapes it, out of his inner consciousness conjuring it into the thing of coordinated beauty that stands forth, at last, an edifice. Thus does he create--the Weaver of Dreams, designer of this building and this theatre--R.C. Reamer, the Architect.

Art Deco: New Designs for the New Century

Twenty-five years into the twentieth century, American builders were no longer looking back romantically at a past not of their own making to inspire them. They were embracing the technology and "know how" that defined America and looking to the future with optimism and excitement. They found the stylistic representation of the era in Paris when, in 1925, that city hosted the International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Art (from which the term "Art Deco" was eventually coined). The Exposition did much to package and promote to the American architect the designs and materials that had been popular for over a decade in Europe.

Art Deco responded to the pulse of the jazz age with vibrant forms in bold and vivid colors that coalesced with the curvilinear shapes of nineteenth century design, successfully bridging the artistic gap between past and future. It became the vehicle for changing the image of cities across the nation.

Inspiration came from a wide variety of naturalistic and technological images: ziggurats, chevrons, zig zags, waterfalls, sunbursts, ferns, and flowers. Animals and plant forms were combined with abstract suggestions of energy and speed, such as waves, lightning bolts, new modes of transportation, even machinery. The sources for these patterns were diverse, evolving from earlier decorative movements, such as the Secession in Germany and Austria, the work of C. R. Mackintosh and the Glasgow School of Design, and Art Nouveau or Jugendstil design throughout Europe.

But more defined geometry, symmetry, stylization and abstraction of images and the vibrant combinations of colors and patterns were inspired by Picasso, Matisse, and Braque during the rise of Cubism and Fauvism and by costume and set designs for the Ballets Russe. Archeological discoveries encouraged increasingly exotic designs. King Tutankhamen's tomb discovery in 1922, the excavation of pre-Columbian, Mayan, and Incan ruins, and more frequent exposure to the cultures of Africa and the Far East supplied ample new design ideas, color palettes, and patterns. The design input made "Art Deco" the most original and simultaneously the most eclectic melting pot ever created and, consequently, the most difficult to easily define.

In its time, Art Deco was called "moderne" or "modernistic," which distinguished this highly decorative design trend from the nearly parallel movement that became known as International Modern and eventually superseded "Art Deco." Its values--function, economy, and new manufactured materials--redefined the character of America's downtown streets.

Pacific Northwest buildings found the fern frond a fitting symbol, as well as evergreen trees, snow capped mountain ranges, and water imagery that reflected the natural attractions of place.

The new look, while short-lived, was popularized in cities coast to coast. But it did not gain the approval of the academic architectural community. An International Modern Architecture Exhibition organized by the Museum of Modern Art in 1932 shows the influence of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius—leaders of the so-called International School. Raymond Hood's American Radiator Building, one of the most influential 1920s modernistic skyscrapers, was included in the show, but it was described as having been built in "the gaudy taste of the Paris Exposition of 1925." The organizers of the exhibit saw "modernistic" buildings as just another massing of decorative trappings that disguised the true nature of building construction and materials.

Only recently has the deluge of modernistic decoration from Vienna, Paris, Stockholm, and Amsterdam begun to diminish, but not before our more advanced architects, already stimulated by Saarinen's success, had accepted the modernistic mode with enthusiasm and ornamented their buildings with zigzags and chevrons instead of Gothic crockets and Classical modelings. The modernistic style has become merely another way of decorating surfaces." (Catalogue from the MOMA exhibition, 1932).

R. C. Reamer

Seattle and Spokane in the 1920s were conservative towns in which building styles were generally constructed along established historical period eclectic styles. Architectural offices did far more eclectic commissions than they did modern designs. Though tastes were changing, acceptance was not immediate.

Robert Reamer's firm, operating during this transitional period from 1921–1935, played a prominent role in initiating and finally perfecting the modernistic idiom in the Northwest. But more than that, Reamer's work and that produced by his firm— from his signature Old Faithful Inn (1902) and remarkable Prairie School Canyon Lodge (1911) in Yellowstone Park to the culmination of his career, The Edmond Meany—indicate the high degree of disciplined and keenly expressed understanding this man had for the natural site, user needs and comforts, proportion, scale, and the overall visual "delight" a building provided. His structures brought a high degree of sophistication, elegance, and diversity into the wilds of Wyoming and Montana and into the instant cities of Washington State.

Reamer (1873, Oberlin, Ohio–1938, Seattle Washington) was fortunate enough to have made the acquaintance of Harry W. Child, the Montana entrepreneur, banker, and co-founder of Yellowstone Park Transportation Company, while working in San Diego between 1897 and 1902. He was hired to design nearly 25 structures in the Yellowstone area, including hotels, stables, barns, residences, a railroad station, and a studio. Reamer's work in the Pacific Northwest began with designs for a community hotel (the Olympic Hotel) in downtown Seattle for the Metropolitan Building Company in 1921. He lost this contract due to the insistence by the United Hotel Corporation, the future operators, that its company architects, George Post of New York, do the work. Nevertheless, he eventually did become the directing architect for the Metropolitan Building Company. Bjarne Moe, one of Reamer's designers from 1928–1931, indicated that the office expanded to nine draftspeople/designers and that he, along with Leonard Bindon and Frank Wynkoop, were often in charge of projects. Reamer apparently gave his designers free reign to work on their own. Frank Wynkoop designed the Fox Theater in Centralia, which was Art Deco in its treatment (he may have been the lead designer for Reamer's firm on the Spokane Fox Theater as well). Reamer also may have designed theaters in downtown Portland and Wenatchee, although these have not been verified.

Reamer was definitely influenced by the prevailing styles of each period. In his early work, he experimented with the shingle style and the Prairie school; the culmination was the Canyon Hotel. In the eclectic medium, the Skinner Building of 1925-26 represents a highly successful adaptation of Italian Renaissance facades for an office block. It belies the exotic and extraordinarily colorful interior of the 5th Avenue Theater—the largest and most authentic example of traditional Chinese timber architecture and decoration outside of Asia. His Mt. Baker Theater of 1927 stretched his eclectic projects to Spanish Renaissance revival.

Reamer and Art Deco in the Northwest

Modernistic or Art Deco design first appeared in some transitional buildings in Seattle as early as 1928. R.C. Reamer did the headquarters and ticket office of the Great Northern Railway at Fourth Avenue and Union Street. The building rid itself of the overhanging cornices and applied terra cotta ornament typical of its older surrounding buildings. The sandstone facade relied upon incised ornamentation. The crisp, smooth geometry of the box was maintained despite several floral bronze and incised stone decorative bands. The imagery itself combined classical and modernistic motifs. The window mullions, for instance, rose from vase-like forms at their bases to set back skyscraper forms at their tops. The original interior of the ticket office was modeled after the green and tan rail cars of the Orient Express, known for their exquisite "Art Deco" interiors by leading French designers Ruhlmann and Lalique.

A year later, Reamer completed the 1411 Fourth Avenue Building for investor C.D. Stimson (1927-29). The facade showed a variety of historical and contemporary design references, including strap work detailing and images that may have been derived from the Celtic bestiary. But the vestibule, tobacco shop bronze work, lighting fixtures, chevron based moldings and elevator doors borrow from the Cubist forms of France's leading artists. They incorporate the decorative art vocabulary popularized in that country's 1925 Exposition. Frosted and etched glass lighting fixtures recall the work of Rene Lalique and prefigure those designed for the Fox Theater.

In Spokane, the Art Deco design vocabulary makes its presence known in the City Parking Ramp by Whitehouse and Price in 1928, in the Montgomery Ward Department Store (now the City Hall) in 1929, and in the Rookery.

Concurrent projects in Reamer's office during the design of the Spokane Fox Theater were the Seattle Times Building and the Meany Hotel. In 1930, Reamer's Seattle Times headquarters merged classical and contemporary ornament in much the same way as his earlier Great Northern Building. The building was crowned with classical palmettes, and had fluted pilasters. But the new style was evidenced in the entrance door aluminum grillwork, which were clearly borrowed from the work of Edgar Brandt, the famed French metal artist. This work in aluminum provided the model for the extensive use of the material for vents, grills, balusters, and lighting in the Fox Theater.

The Edmond Meany Hotel removed itself further from Greco-Roman traditions, using instead the pure modernistic forms of the new design vocabulary. The vertical fluting of its concrete walls and the application of several chevron patterns in relief provide the only exterior decoration. The hotel was the Northwest prototype for the use of cast-in-place exposed concrete and certainly encouraged its use for the Fox Theater as well.

When the Meany Hotel opened in November 1931, *The Hotel News of the West* wrote "new moderne continental architecture, which has found its greatest expression in Germany since the war, was architect R.C. Reamer's inspiration for the spectacular novelty achieved in the structure. Simplicity is the keynote of its architectural magnificence and artistic beauty...In

created in this style. The Edmond Meany is a striking example of the beauty of the moderne, correctly executed and unspoiled by the inclusion of any period furniture."

Some of the design changes occurring in his office may have been stimulated by first-hand observation. In June 1929, Reamer returned from a six-week cross-country tour, where the spirit of the "new architecture" in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles had touched him. His firm had already begun to experiment with the new decorative forms in the 1411 4th Avenue and Great Northern buildings. As mentioned above, they, along with the Seattle Times Building, represent a transitional stage from classicism to modernistic that was followed by the pure "modernistic" Fox Theater and Edmond Meany Hotel. In addition to the change in style, the firm switched to the more utilitarian poured concrete shells instead of the stone veneers he had gained a reputation for using for his facades.

As briefly discussed above, Reamer's latter projects are worth comparing because they share a number of ideas. The butterfly concrete relief panels of the Fox appear to have their roots in the abstract decorative aluminum spandrels of the Seattle Times Building. The floral incised sandstone at the Times building entrance is similar to the incised concrete decorations flanking the portals of the Fox Theater. The fluted pilasters of the Times façade relate to the fluted vertical patterning of poured concrete that define the Meany Hotel and that break up the massive exterior façade of the Fox theater.

The statement of the Washington Chapter of the AIA in honoring Reamer's Skinner Building is as applicable to his work on the Fox Theater and the Meany Hotel: "For excellence of plan, simplicity, dignity and beauty of exterior, and the honest use of material in well-designed and well-executed detail."

The skills of the firm were in the quality and sophistication afforded to each project. Every part of the building seemed to have been thought out with equal care, especially the details, such as decorative grillwork, cut stone or concrete friezes, fixtures, and furniture. Reamer was concerned with the total concept and personally supervised interior decoration.

Leonard Bindon, in his twenties when he worked in Reamer's office, recalls that his employer had native skills and imagination and that he never was a copier. Rather, he formulated a personal interpretation of prevailing moods, such as the "Art Deco" or "moderne" styles, and acted upon these ideas. He credits Reamer with a keen intuitive sense of construction.

Reamer's daughter, Jane White, confirmed this in a 1977 letter,

He would pour everything into plans for a certain building, then once completed, seemed to turn away, seeking a new challenge. He never discussed architectural styles with me, thus I do not know what his preference may have been. He seemed to keep rather detached from the established modes and molds and to prefer never repeating what he had once done before. Every undertaking, large or small, was approached as a thing apart, to be developed individually, as he envisioned...I think it is safe to say that my father lived for the pure joy of creating. He was forever searching for new ideas and when one appeared, it was cause for elation.

Whitehouse and Price

Harold Whitehouse (1884-1974) came to Spokane in 1907, after studying at the Boston Art Club and working as a draftsman for the marine architectural firm of Fox, Jenney, and Gale in Massachusetts. Whitehouse's early career in Spokane was primarily in residential work, with the firm of George Keith. Whitehouse became interested in building a cathedral for the

Episcopal Church, and in 1911 left his practice to return to Cornell University architecture school. When he returned to Spokane in 1914, he entered into practice with Ernest V. Price.

Ernest V. Price (1881–1975) came to Spokane in 1910, after completing an architectural degree at Cornell University. He became manager of the Sterling Stone Company before entering into partnership with Whitehouse in 1914. Whitehouse and Price were one of the most prolific firms in Spokane until their retirement in 1964. They are credited with the design of the Lincoln Building, Hutton Settlement, Culmstock Arms Apartment, the Civic Building, Farragut Naval Station and the old Spokane Coliseum, in addition to over 200 schools and many residences. Their most visible achievement is the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist on Spokane's South Hill. Their experience with Art Deco is evidenced in the City Parking Ramp of 1928.

Anthony B. Heinsbergen

Anthony B. Heinsbergen was responsible for the interior treatment of the Fox Theater, including murals and the carpet design. Heinsbergen was B. Marcus Priteca's chief decorator from 1916 to 1928 and did the interiors of a large number of motion picture palaces throughout the U.S. and Canada for Pantages, Warner, and Orpheum. One of these was the Spokane Pantages in 1918. While he was proficient in all the historic eclectic styles, the brilliant work of his company, Heinsbergen Decorating Company, in the late 1920s and early 1930s in "Art Deco" made him the perfect choice for Reamer's Fox. Of particular note are the interior wall and ceiling treatments of the quintessential Art Deco motion picture palaces, the Oakland Paramount and the Wiltern Theater in Los Angeles, both of which opened in the same year as the Spokane Fox.

Some west coast theaters with interiors by Heinsbergen:

Theater	Location	Date	Architect	Style
Capitol	Yakima	1920,	B. Marcus Priteca	Renaissance
Orpheum	Vancouver BC	1927	B. Marcus Priteca	Renaissance
Fox	San Diego, CA	1929	Weeks and Day	Spanish Gothic
Paramount	Oakland, CA	1931	Miller & Pflueger	Art Deco
Wiltern	Los Angeles	1931	G. A. Lansburgh	Art Deco
Warner Grand	Sarr Pedro	1931	B. Marcus Priteca	Art Deco
4 th Avenue	Anchorage	1947	Priteca and Porreca	Art Deco

Art Deco theaters probably known to Reamer and certainly to Heinsbergen:

Warner	Morgantown WV	1929	John Ebersson
Avalon	Catalina Island	1929	Webber & Spaulding
Pantages	Hollywood, CA	1930	B. Marcus Priteca
Madison	Mansfield Ohio	1930	John Ebersson
Fox Wilshire	Beverly Hills, CA	1930	S. Charles Lee
Fox Theatre	Phoenix	1931	S. Charles Lee

Fox West Coast and the Studio System

William Fox, the Chicago film producer whose Fox Studios eventually merged with Twentieth Century Pictures, was a successful film distributor and theater operator. In downtown Los Angeles, he developed a theater/office complex on Hill and Broadway—The William Fox Building and the Los Angeles Theater. While S. Charles Lee's design for the theater, which opened in 1931, was a resplendent reflection of the past, the office building, designed by Samuel Tilden Norton was a setback high-rise (which in Los Angeles was limited to 13 stories) in the Art Deco style. Its ornament of geometric and curvilinear cast relief triangles, flowers, zigzags,

and waves were the epitome of the French style that he would appreciate in his newest film showplace, the Spokane Fox.

Between 1914 and 1922, at least four thousand new theaters opened across America, most of them palaces, replacing the smaller nickelodeons. In the 1920s, the percentage of motion picture theatres owned by independent exhibitors steadily decreased. Independents were defined as owning fewer than four theatres. Larger circuit-theatre chains were operated by exhibitors who had no financial affiliation with producer-distributors but who banded together or were bought by single-interest owners to accrue the same advantages of strength in numbers as the studios were acquiring.

The studios were the third group of exhibitors—such as Paramount, United Artists, RKO, and Loews. Fox West Coast Theatres (FWC) was a subsidiary of Wesco Corporation, and was controlled by Fox. In 1927, Harold Franklin, president of FWC, stated that of the eighteen thousand motion picture theaters in the U.S., one thousand were owned and operated by studios. He rationalized this first-run monopoly as “natural and logical... (so as) to maintain a contact with the ultimate consumer... At the same time (the system) afford(s) independent theater owners an opportunity to gauge the public reaction to the pictures presented, and serv(es) as a guide to value.”

By 1930, Paramount-Publix, Fox-Loew, Warner Brothers, and RKO owned between twenty-five hundred and three thousand theaters in the U.S. and Canada, which included most of the first-run and many of the second-run theaters in those countries. The Federal Trade Commission responded by filing an antitrust suit against Fox and the other studios which dragged on for a decade but eventually saw the breakup of the studio system—and the ultimate closure and demolition of many of the great movie palaces.

The Development of the Spokane Fox

The Fox evolved over the course of four years from an atmospheric “Hispano-Italian” theater by John Ebersson to its final form and Art Deco fittings under the direction of R. C. Reamer. It was caught up in a series of buyouts and takeovers that shaped the motion picture industry.

The attraction of a city the size of Spokane to the motion picture industry was evident early in 1927, when West Coast Company agent L.N. Rosenbaum purchased 2/3 of a city block on Sprague and Monroe for a million dollar “atmospheric” movie house. Rosenbaum owned such buildings as the Flatiron Building in New York City, and was concurrently building a Famous Players theater in Seattle. West Coast Company at that time was one of the largest theater building companies in the country, and already owned theaters in major cities, including Chicago, Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Seattle. No stranger to marketing hyperbole, Mr. Rosenbaum declared, “This will be the greatest and most momentous development in Spokane in recent years. It is a great tribute to Spokane that the West Coast company has selected Spokane for this character of improvement and means that Spokane citizens will have as fine type of amusement as any in New York.”

The theater project underwent a long design evolution to become the Fox that is familiar to patrons today. New York architect John Ebersson, author of the “atmospheric” theater, designed the first in a series of plans for the theater. Tired of stereotyped theater architecture in formal styles such as Adam and Baroque, Ebersson designed an elaborate Hispano-Italian palace with a large rotunda and double tower over the entrance at Sprague and Monroe. The auditorium was to represent an Italian garden under a moonlit sky. The building was to be fringed with shops on the ground level. (An interesting sidenote: fifteen years earlier, Ebersson designed Spanish lanterns and brackets for installation in Spokane’s new Davenport Hotel.)

The Great Depression apparently had an impact on the West Coast Company, as little work was done on the project beyond demolition and clearing of the site. William Fox, Los Angeles motion picture magnate, acquired the property in September 1928 when he purchased the West Coast Company. Fox continued plans for the theater in Spokane, now named the "Fox" after himself. He offered preliminary sketches of a Spanish atmospheric theater with a tall central tower, again with the street space devoted to "exclusive shops". But the site remained empty during the early years of the Depression, with only the exposed basement levels of the previous buildings as a reminder of lofty ideas. During 1928-29, press releases were issued stating the continued commitment of Fox West Coast Corp. to the project. In November 1929, Fox had responded to President Hoover's call for support of his national industrial stabilization program, and budgeted \$15 million for theater projects in California, Washington, Montana, Oregon, Missouri, and Colorado, including the Spokane project.

Walter T. Douglas was the Fox West Coast Theater Corporation representative in Seattle. He was instrumental in acquiring the services of architect R.C.Reamer for the Fox. As an executive with the Metropolitan Building Company, developers of the University of Washington holdings in downtown Seattle, Douglas had worked with Reamer on an addition to the Olympic Hotel and both the 5th Avenue Theater in Seattle and the Mt. Baker Theater in Bellingham. Not surprisingly, with this new firm in charge, the Fox Theater rendering published in the Spokesman-Review on January 5, 1930 resembled the Mt. Baker Theater in Bellingham.

Reamer selected the local firm of Whitehouse and Price as his associate architects. Whitehouse and Price were well-known Spokane architects, at that time working on the design and construction of the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist on Spokane's South Hill. Reamer had charge of the preparation of general plans, while Whitehouse and Price acted as construction managers. The budget for the building remained at the pre-Depression price of \$1 million.

Reamer moved away from historicism in a new "modernistic design," published in the Chronicle on July 1, 1930. It represented an important trend away from the "atmospheric" and into the "modern" or Art Deco style of theaters that became increasingly popular in the 1930s. This design was of an austere concrete "arena" far removed from the more romantic "palaces" of the previous decade.

Instead, the Fox in Spokane was contemporary with the latest designs coming out of Hollywood. The main entrance was on Sprague, 25 feet west of Monroe. From a two story high box-like façade on Monroe, the theater proper rose in a series of three curving setbacks with incised Art Deco cornices to a maximum height of seven stories. The concrete work combined horizontal and vertical ribbing to differentiate the base structure from the auditorium and stage areas. A vertical tower rose from the base structure with FOX letters stacked in four directions.

By the time construction of the Fox began in August of 1930, Reamer's "modern" design had been pared down even further. The stair-step setback roofline had been eliminated, along with a more elaborate exterior lobby treatment. The ocean liner curvilinear exterior detailing gave way to a boxier form, and the seven-story stage area shrank to the height of the auditorium. The building was generally more compact and less ornamental than in earlier drawings. Construction cost \$450,000, and furnishings \$100,000. While there may have been cost-cutting measures, they in fact resulted in a building of greater clarity and integrity.

The cost cutting was not apparent inside, resplendent in chased (etched) glass, aluminum, mirrors, and murals. The foyer, 30 feet in width, extended the entire width of the building. A grand staircase rose from the foyer to a large lounge 100 feet long and 55 feet wide above the Monroe street shops. Anthony Heinsbergen's murals encompassed ocean, land, and sky imagery with fantasy castles and landscape that recall children's book illustrations in their style.

While R. C. Reamer rarely penned articles describing his work, he was listed as the author of a short article, "The Fox Theater at Spokane, Washington." Printed in the March 1932 issue of *The Architect and Engineer*. It provides some insight into his design goals, as well as technical understanding of the building of the structure.

The theater or playhouse has for its basic purpose entertainment, play. It is a place where people gather together for relaxation from the routine order of their lives and for participation in the joys, the happiness, the dangers, the thrilling excitements, the loves, the tragedies of those who in person, or in well-nigh as realistic pictures, appear before them. The theater therefore is essentially imaginative in its appeal, and its arrangement and its decoration should be in conformity with this fundamental characteristic. The playhouse is for play—for romance—for escape from the uneventful monotony of life. As such, it is appropriate that its exterior suggest to the beholder the entertainment and the pleasure that is to be found within and invite his entrance to that happy place which (sic) the cause and humdrum dullness of life are safely walled away.

The theater is likewise a business and a commercial enterprise. It aims to make money. For the furtherance of this purpose the achievement of desired effects, of "atmosphere," of attractiveness, of comfort and of all those arrangements necessary for the care and handling of the audience without undue cost or excessive expense is, as always, desirable.

Local contractors Alloway and Georg were in charge of the construction, which began in August 1930. Construction costs were placed at \$400,000, with decorating and equipment to cost \$200,000. The site itself was valued at \$350,000. Local tradesmen were used in the construction as much as possible. James Smyth, Plumbing and Heating contracted to do the heating, ventilating, plumbing and cooling systems, and York Ice Machinery Corp. installed the elaborate and new air conditioning system. Brown-Johnson Co., supplied 4,000 pounds of cast aluminum. The castings were made in Portland and all milling and fabricating was done in the Spokane shop of the Company for the ornamental etched stair balustrades, lighting fixtures, and trim. W.P. Fuller & Co. provided all the glasswork on the interior. This included the nine hundred square feet of sandblasted and etched glass for the ceiling lights, as well as the 200 square feet of 1" baluster glass panels for the main stair rail.

The pace of work on the Fox accelerated during the late summer of 1931. Spokane's 50th Anniversary Golden Jubilee was planned for September, and the opening of the Fox was to coincide with those festivities. Local reporters were at a loss to describe the "modernness" of this "bizarre" new architecture. The Spokesman-Review called the architecture "so unusual, as bizarre and so futuristic that the casual passerby catches his breath in surprise and wonder. Certainly Spokane has seen nothing like it before." The reporter continued with his description of the building, "...classic beauty of proportion and line, even if severe and austere cold." Another said the Fox was 'unique among the great theatres of the country...a high vaulted hall of towering span and mighty depth, of lavish magnificence and bewildering beauty.'

Much was made in the Spokane Chronicle about the "air conditioning", and a special viewing window was installed on the First Avenue side for patrons to view the equipment, which cost about \$43,000. The system took in 6 cubic feet of washed fresh air per minute per person, with total circulation of 66,000 cubic feet of air per minute, and was the first of its kind in Spokane, and one of the largest in any western theater. Automatic controls regulated temperature and humidity. Special acoustical plaster was applied to the walls, and the most modern Western Electric sound equipment made the Fox "one of the finest sound houses in the entire country" Projection machines were "Super Simplex" with special lenses in each of the projectors to give an unusual depth of focus. Radio broadcast equipment was installed onstage and beside the pipe organ sounding boards, in addition to equipment in front of the theater for broadcasting speaking

The neon lighting alone cost \$9,000. On the roof a large rotating illuminated sign spelled "FOX" in letters three feet high. Over thirty-five hundred incandescent bulbs were used for interior lighting. Proclaiming the Fox to be the "last word in beauty and efficiency", Hollywood seemed to be making a statement that this was no cut-rate Depression-era theater that was being provided to Spokane, but rather the finest and most up-to-date in both architecture and materials.

More than \$25,000 was spent on the interior decorating of the theater, designed by Anthony Heinsbergen of Los Angeles. A special corps of artists from his studio supervised the work performed by local artisans. Unable to categorize the unusual designs without falling back on ancient cultures, local reporters described its features by comparison, referring to its "old Egyptian" sunbursts, and maintaining that there was "similarity between the modern treatment in architecture and decoration of the Fox as that used by the ancient Persians." The reporter from the Spokane Chronicle saw the theater as a palace or a temple. He described the sunburst above the proscenium arch as rays of color sweeping over the ceiling and down the walls in a "phantasmagoria" of color. The foyer was "a symphony of silver and gray green in a French moderne scheme of decorative design heightened by a brilliant star of chased glass that forms the central motif of the ceiling."

On opening night, September 3, 1931, downtown streets were blocked by thousands of people waiting to catch sight of movie stars en route from the Davenport Hotel to the Fox to view the premiere stage show and the opening film, "Merely Mary Ann", starring Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell. Visiting Hollywood stars included Anita Page, Victor McLaglen, George O'Brien, El Brendel and child star Mitzi Green. Fox Vice-President Howard Sheehan and round-the-world flyers Wiley Post and Harold Gaffy were also on hand for the festivities. The Fox was lighted to the brilliance of noonday with batteries of powerful studio sunlamps. Ceremonies at the Fox included bands, speeches, and airplanes from Felts Field "zooming over the theater to be picked out by studio sunlight arcs". The Hollywood stars and officials paraded across the stage before entering the theater, where the long program lasted until 11:00 PM. This event was followed by dinner and dancing at the Davenport's Golden Jubilee Frolic. Entertainment was provided outside the Fox for the thousands of unlucky souls who were not able to get tickets for the opening. The program for opening night declared the occasion as "one of supreme civic importance. Here is a great forward step for Spokane...visible evidence of a mighty world-wide organization's great faith in this City."

According to the Spokesman-Review of September 3, 1931, "Fox executives have declared the Spokane Fox theater is the finest, most modern and most artistic of some 300 on the circuit. It is, of course, the newest. It has been given the latest ideas worked out in experience. Fox theaters are not built on standard plans. Each is a distinct unit, with its own architecture and color scheme. The Spokane Fox theater, therefore, represents the last word in theater construction, decoration, and equipment. There is no other in existence just like it."

Changing Times

The opening format of motion pictures and Fanchon and Marco stage shows lasted only about six months. After the demise of stage shows, the theater presented motion pictures almost exclusively, although attempts were made early on to show vaudeville. Many live performances were held in the Fox. Among the well-known stars were Frank Sinatra (1935), Katherine Cornell, the "high priestess of tears" (1939), Boris Karloff (1943), local opera star Patrice Munsel (1946), and Katherine Hepburn (1951). The Bolshoi Ballet played at the Fox in 1959 during its first American tour, in a performance of 'Romeo and Juliet'. In later years, the theater was used for Community Concerts before World War II, and as a venue for the Spokane Symphony from 1968-1974.

In 1975, the theater, owned by Mann Theatre Corp., was converted into a triplex. Interior alterations primarily involved partitioning the balcony into two theaters. The Spokesman Review noted that the theater's "Buck Rogers art deco" would survive the triplex conversion. The Fox continued in this configuration, showing discount movies from 1989 until its closure in 2000.

Remodeling in 1996 by owner Act III Theaters included a complete exterior paint job, including painting the formed-concrete eagles and butterflies. Further work included restoration of the neon "FOX" beacon tower, installation of new carpet, repair of many of the light fixtures, partial repair of two sunburst fixtures, one on the lobby wall and one on the lobby ceiling, and touch up of the painted murals and plaster.

In May of 2000, the Spokane Club announced its intention to buy the Fox Theater, demolish it, and build a parking garage in its place. Simultaneously, the Spokane Symphony announced its interest in purchasing the building to use as performing arts center and home for the Spokane Symphony. An outpouring of community support encouraged the Spokane Club to drop its purchase plans, and enabled the Symphony to buy the theater from owner Regal Cinemas for \$1.2 million. In November 2000, the Symphony celebrated the purchase of the Fox with a gala "pre-opening." The Fox ceased operations as a movie theater in September 2000, but continues to operate as a performing arts hall while renovation plans continue. Fundraising efforts are underway to convert the Fox into a state-of-the-art performance hall for the Symphony, which expects to open in 2002.

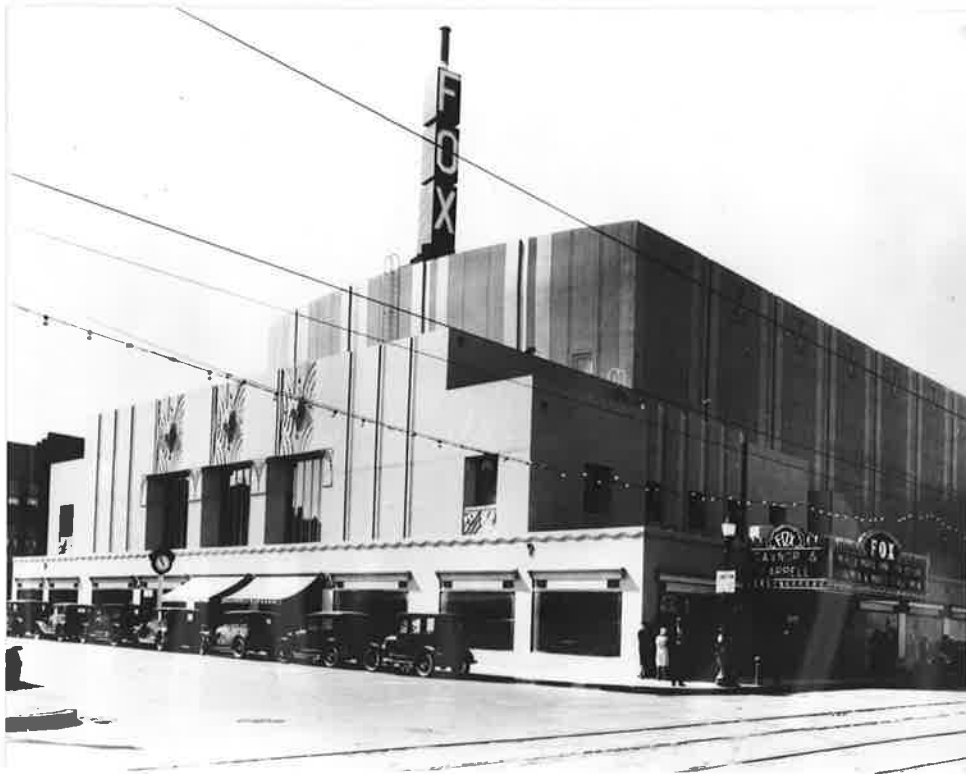
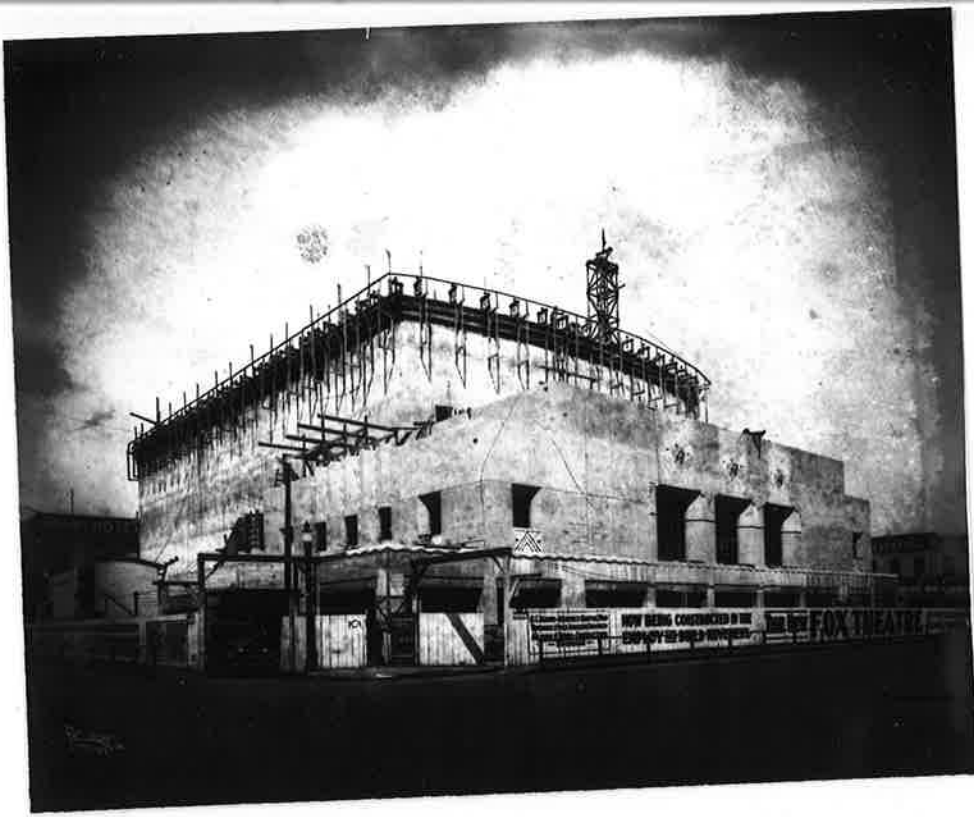
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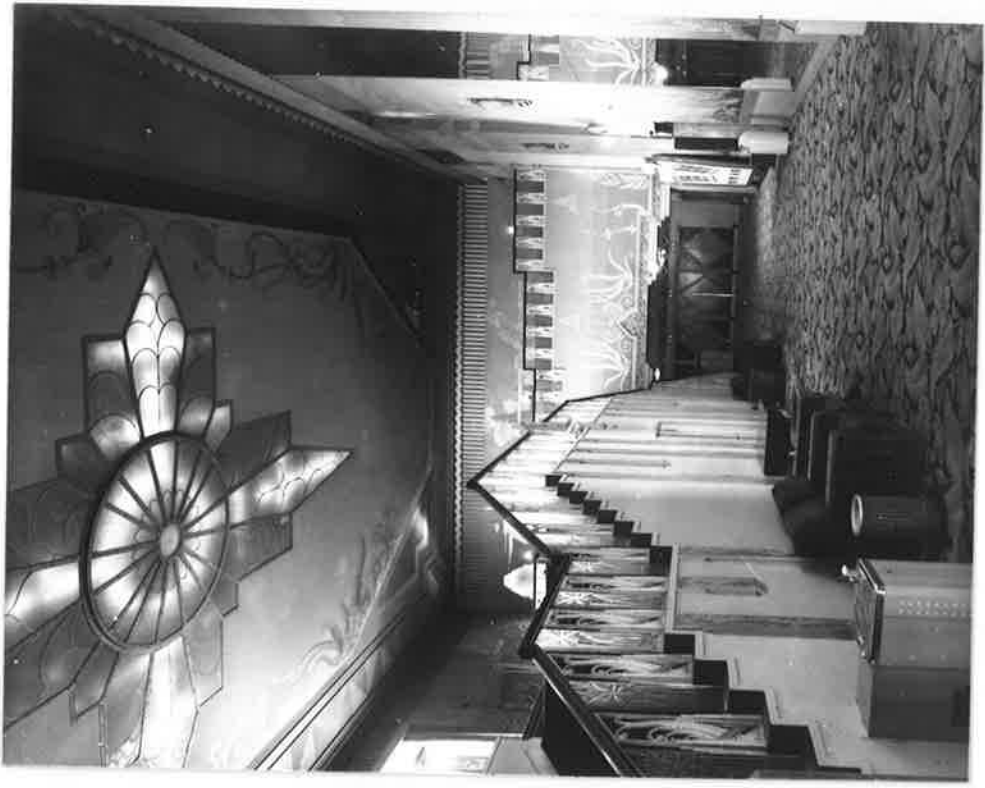
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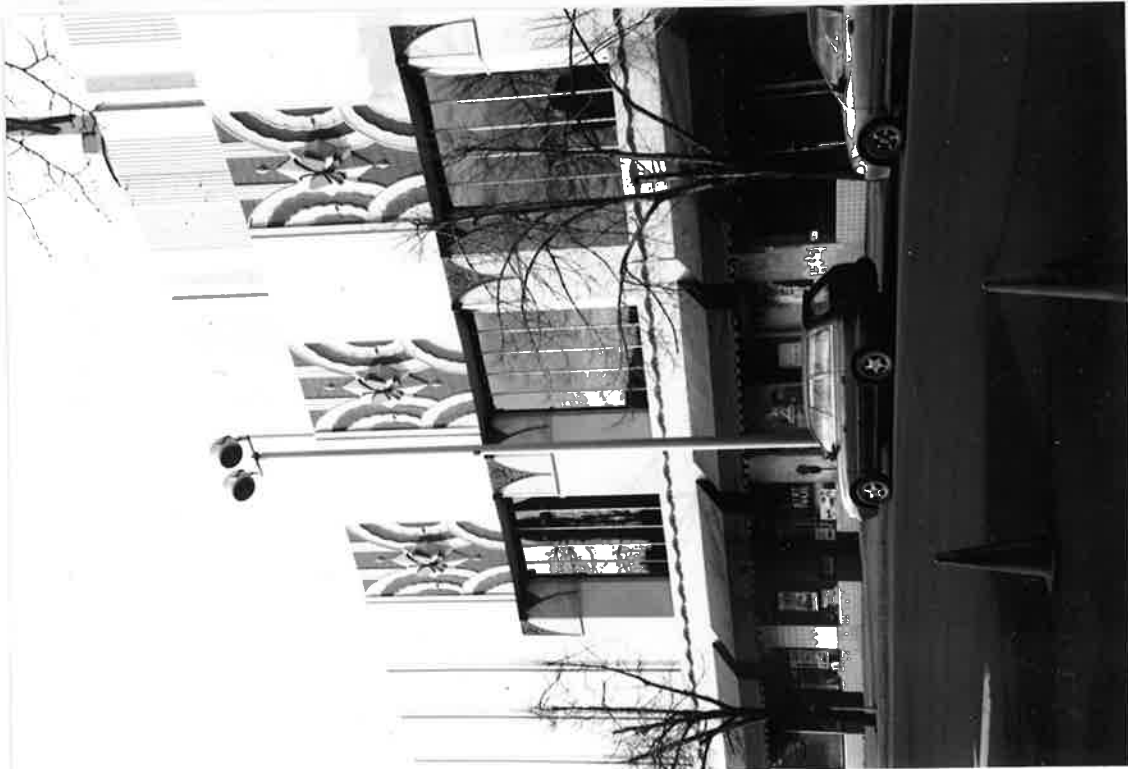
FOX THEATRE
West Sprague Avenue
North elevation



FOX THEATRE
West First Avenue
(south elevation)



FOX THEATRE
Monroe Street
(east elevation)



FOX THEATRE
East facade decoration

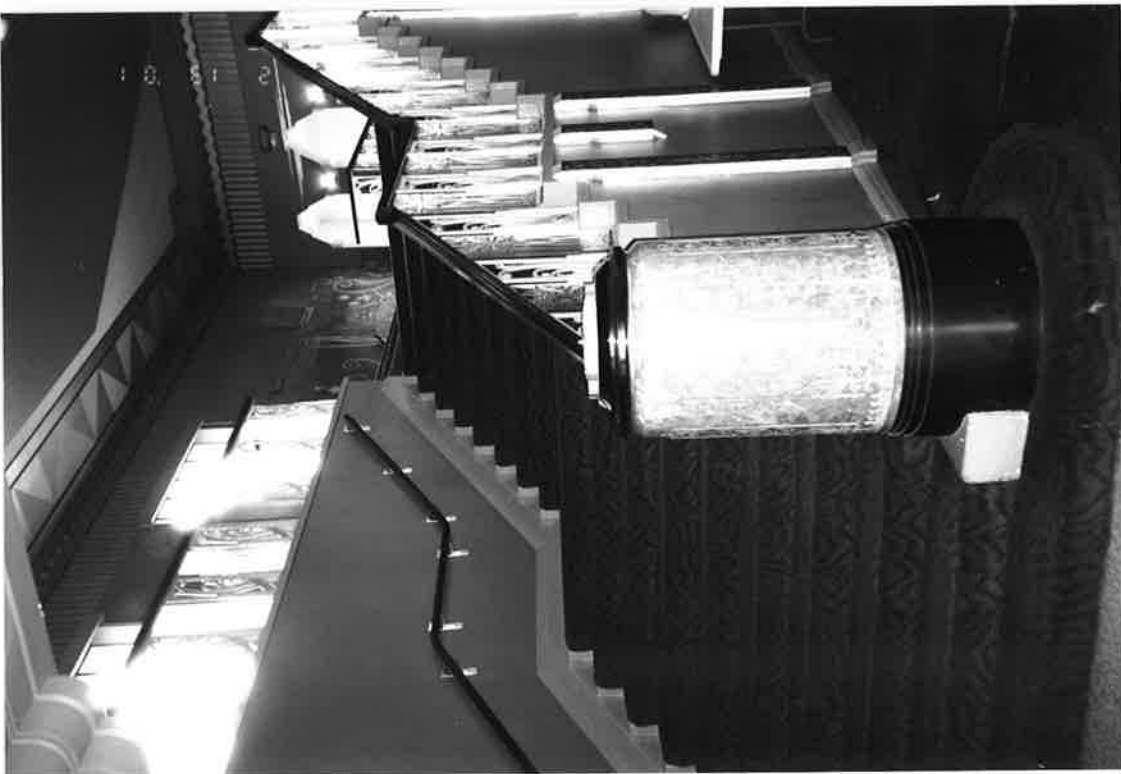


FOX THEATRE
Storefronts with tile





FOX THEATRE
Lobby and mezzanine
View to northwest



FOX THEATRE
Stair to mezzanine
View to south



FOX THEATRE
Aluminum and glass balusters
Grand staircase



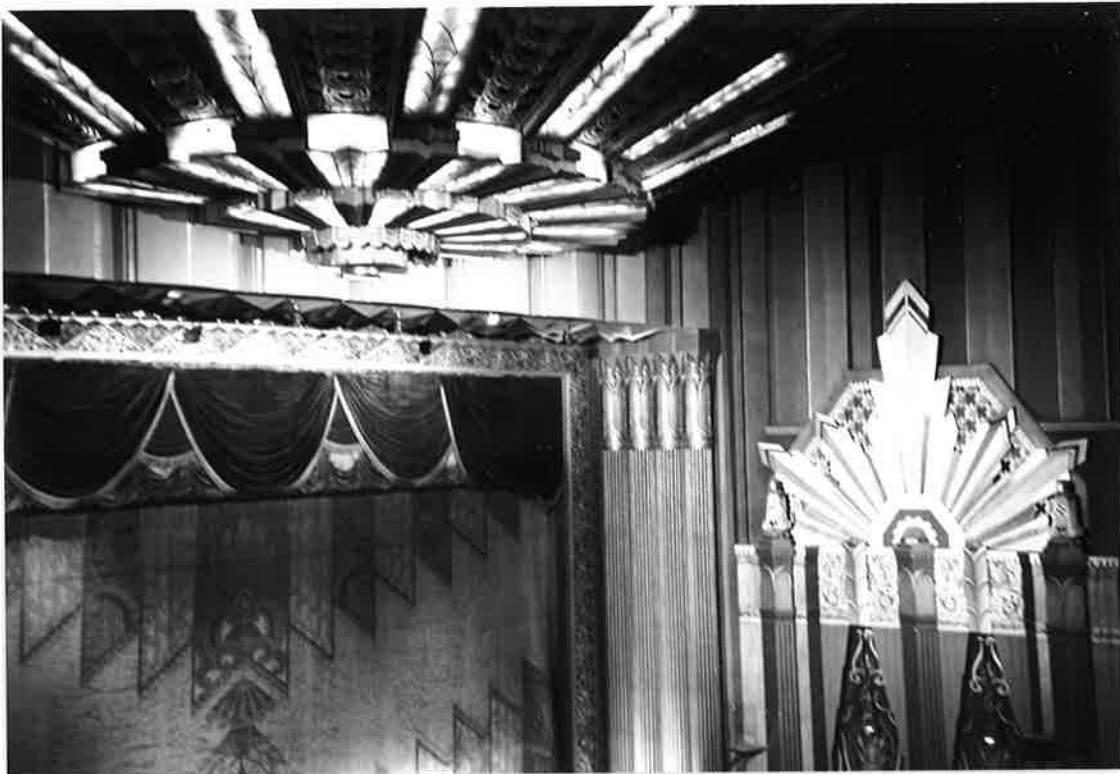
FOX THEATRE
View from mezzanine to west
wall sunburst



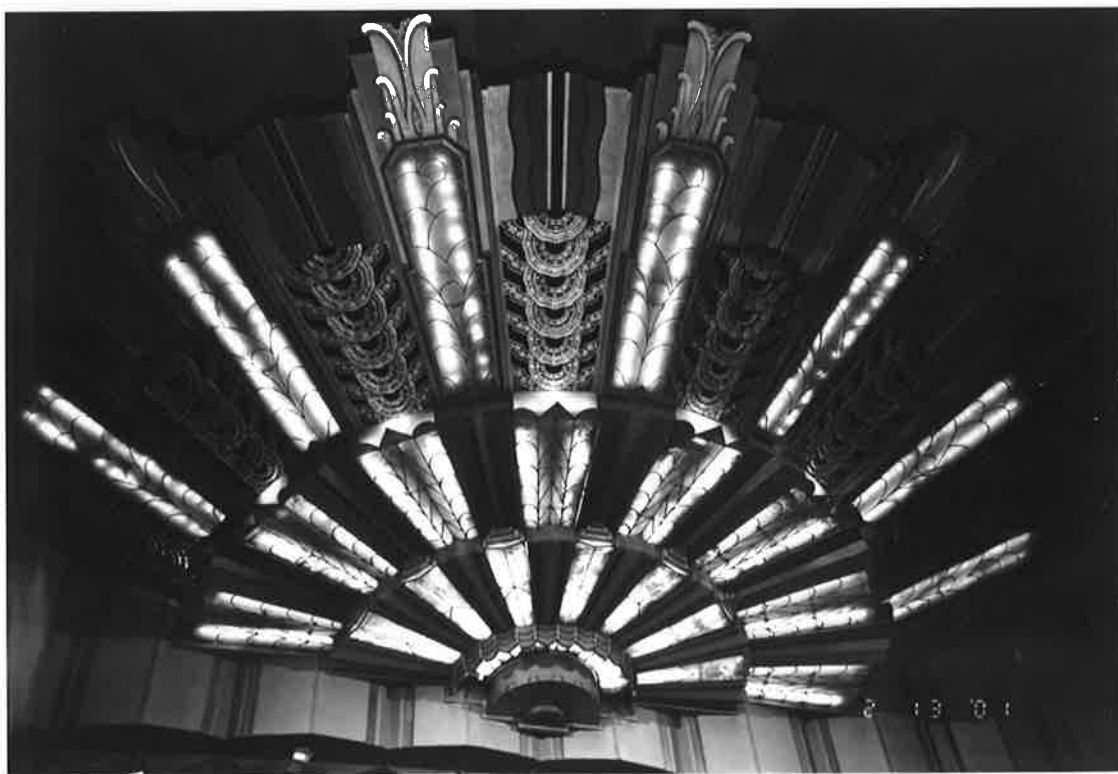
FOX THEATRE
Mural by A. Heinsbergen
Mezzanine

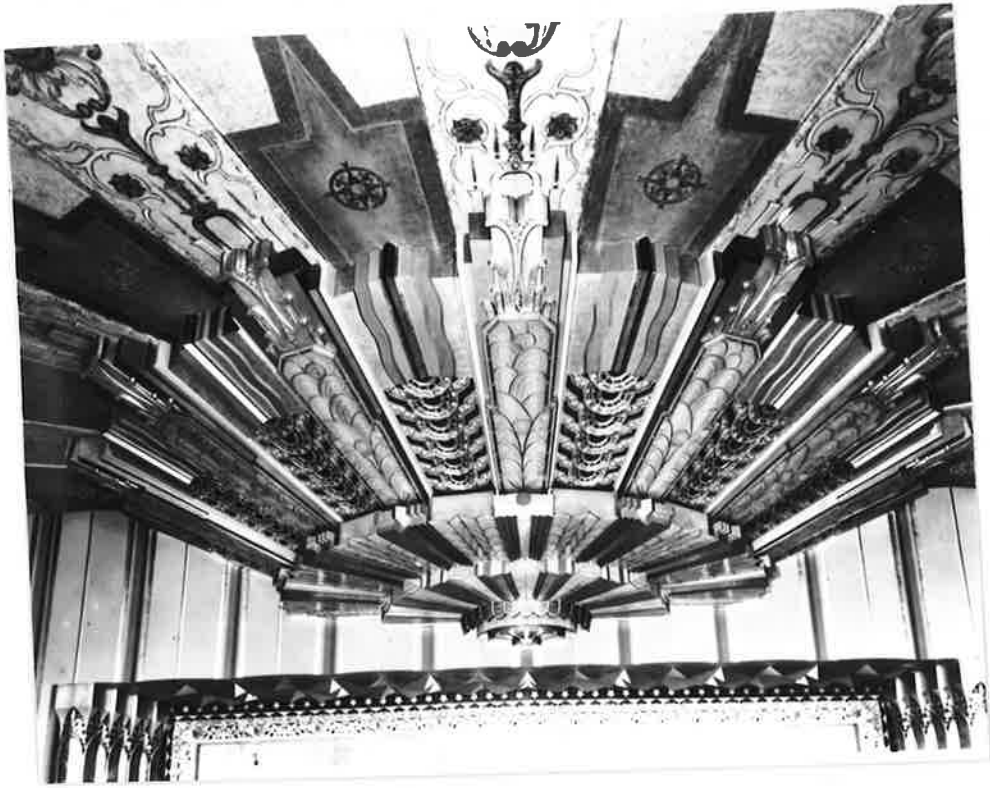


FOX THEATRE
Auditorium organ grille



FOX THEATRE
Auditorium proscenium
and safety curtain



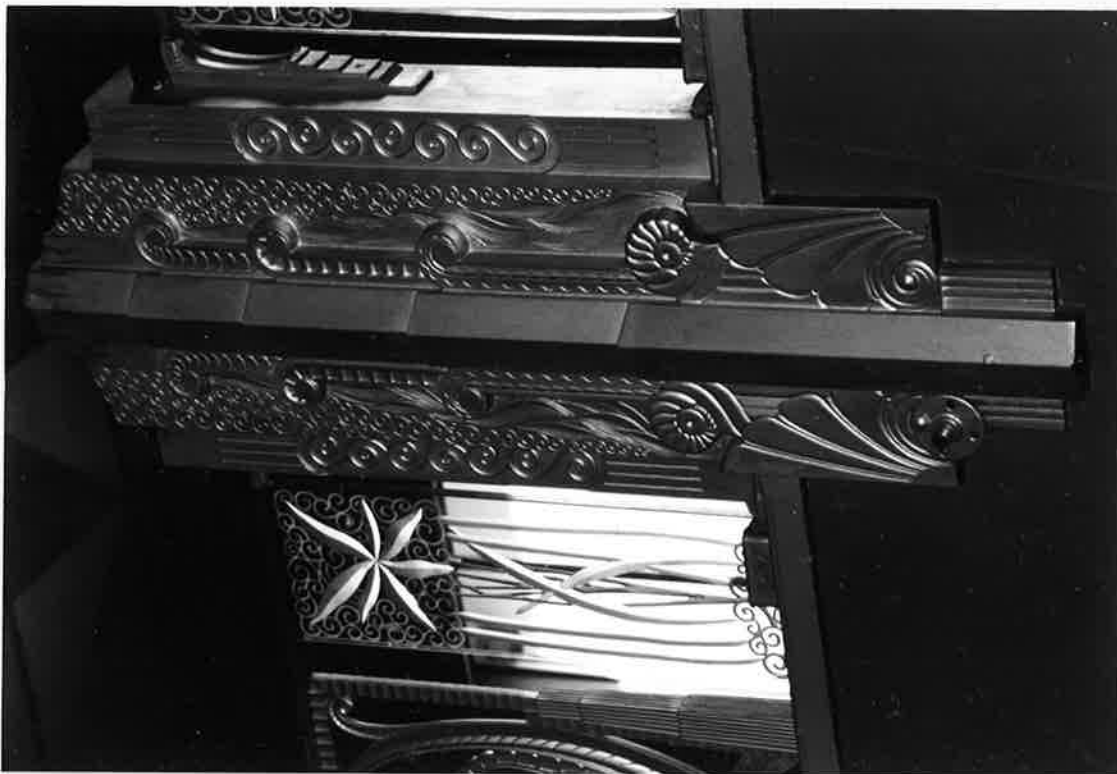




FOX THEATRE
Lighting fixture
Main floor rear



FOX THEATRE
Lighting fixture
Main floor rear



FOX THEATRE
Aluminum ornament
Grand foyer



FOX THEATRE
Marble stalls and tile floor
Women's rest room



FOX THEATRE
West First Avenue
(South elevation)



FOX THEATRE
West Sprague Avenue
(North elevation)



FOX THEATRE
Monroe Street
(east elevation)



FOX THEATRE
West Sprague facade



FOX THEATRE
W. First Avenue vestibule
Painted doors & bas reliefs



FOX THEATRE
W. First Avenue vestibule
Incised marble display cab.



FOX THEATRE
Grand foyer with murals
View to south entrance



FOX THEATRE
Starburst lighting fixture
South entrance lobby



FOX THEATRE
Grand foyer from mezzanine
View to southwest



FOX THEATRE
Aluminum & glass balusters
and auditorium wall murals



FOX THEATRE
Aluminum & Glass balusters
and auditorium wall murals



FOX THEATRE
Etched aluminum auditorium
doors and chevron crown



FOX THEATRE
Murals by Anthony Heinsbergen
Mezzanine south wall



FOX THEATRE
Chandelier and mural
Mezzanine level



FOX THEATRE
Auditorium



FOX THEATRE
Safety curtain and drapery
Auditorium



FOX THEATRE
Sunburst lighting fixture
above proscenium



FOX THEATRE
Sunburst plasterwork and
decorative painting



FOX THEATRE
Auditorium side wall
decorative painting



FOX THEATRE
Proscenium: Columns and
bas relief frame