

Landmarks Preservation Board

Seattle Historic Building Data Sheet

1. Name (common or present and/or historic) COLISEUM THEATRE

2. Street and Number Fifth & Pike Block 18 Lots 9&12 Year Built 1916
Broadacres, Inc. A.A. Denny's 3rd Addition.

3. Present Owner (Morris Alhadeff) Present Use Movie Theatre

4. Interim Owner(s) - - Interim Use(s) _____

5. Original Owner C.D. Stimson Original Use Movie Theatre

6. Architect B. Marcus Priteca Builder _____

7. Assessed Value: Building _____ Land _____ Assessors File No. _____

8. Classification:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied	Open to Public:
<input type="checkbox"/> Site	<input type="checkbox"/> Private	<input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied	
<input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Object		<input type="checkbox"/> Threatened by demolition	Hours _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Other		<input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	

9. Neighborhood Information:

A. Compatibility With Neighborhood

Structure Yes x No _____

Use Yes x No _____

B. Importance to Neighborhood

Great x _____

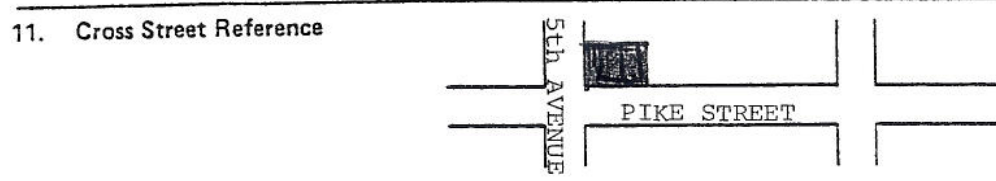
Moderate _____

Minor _____

C. Architecturally Strong Neighborhood

Comments _____

10. Special Research Sources (Be Specific, list name or item and where found)



12. Photos Attached & Photographer Photographer - ART HUPY

13. Physical Description

A. Style of Architecture

Beaux-Arts/Neo Classic

B. Construction Material

Exterior facing; white glazed terra cotta steel frame, w/reinforced concrete

C. No. of Stories

Lobby and proscenium w/ mezzanine and balcony.

D. Condition

Excellent _____
 Good _____ X
 Fair _____
 Poor _____

E. Exterior Deseccration of Original Design

None or little _____
 Moderate amount _____ X
 Considerable _____

F. Architectural worth at Example of Its Style

Exceptional _____
 Excellent _____ X
 Good _____
 Fair _____
 Poor _____

G. Notable Features: (Be specific, i.e., detailing, craftsmanship, proportions, materials, colors, interior, etc. Refer to Guidelines of Landmarks Preservation Board).

The Coliseum Theatre was designed by Seattle architect B. Marcus Priteca. It is located on the northeast corner at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Pike Street, and is the architectural focal point of this major downtown intersection. Its basic construction is of steel and reinforced concrete. Its facade is of glazed white terra cotta in an elaborate style which is predominately Italian Renaissance.

The entrance to the theatre is set into a broad recessed bay at the corner of the block, creating a spacious sidewalk area beneath the marquee. Above the marquee - which originally extended the length of the theatre on both sides and was illuminated by globe-shaped lights above and by smaller inset lights underneath - was a great coffered half-dome with octagon and star-shaped panels illuminated by perimeter lights and crowned by a glowing cupola of art glass. The cupola itself was adorned with a cluster of globe-shaped lights. The cupola was destroyed in the 1940's, and the half-dome and marquee were replaced in 1950 by the present "modern" marquee, which features a neon-lighted revolving cylinder. (This cylinder served as the pedestal for a golden replica of the "Oscar" statuette which was removed in 1966 because of weather damage to the finish.) The present marquee extends only over the entrance and ticket booth. The street facades on either side of the entrance bay are not symmetrical.

The Fifth Avenue facade is set back above a row of small shops fronting on the sidewalk. This one-story space was originally envisioned to become a glass-walled solarium, but has been occupied by shops ever since the theatre opened. The architecturally more elaborate Pike Street facade has not set-back - the row of shops on this side is set wholly within the main structure. Both facades of the theatre are decorated with tall rounded arches in shallow relief, each arch set within a panel of carned mouldings and crowned with a scrolled bracket and sprays of leaves. Between the four central arch panels

G. Notable Features (cont.):

on each side of the building, narrower vertical panels frame festoons of fruits, flowers and leaves. On the Pike Street facade, the four central arch panels are accentuated by casement windows and small balconies at the second-floor level. The balcony parapet corners are ornamented with small urns, and the window openings are shaded by deep cornices. The end arch panels on each side of the building rise above shallow porch-like projections from the main wall, each with a sculptured semi-arched cornice and a grotesque mask set above a wreathed oval frame.¹ The large arches in these end panels, differing from those in the central panels, contain decorated brackets supporting bronze urns. These urns are placed in front of shallow circular niches framed with floral garlands. Above the arch panels are several rows of decorative mouldings in classical geometric and floral motifs - one, for example, consists of garlands of fruits, flowers and ribbons looped between bullocks' heads, a motif which originated in the friezes of Roman temples where real fruits and flowers were hung between the heads of sacrificed animals. This visual allusion to the relationship between "religion" and "drama" in ancient times is an example of Priteca's mastery of classical architectural ornament. Halfway between the tops of the arch panels and the richly detailed cornice, the name of the theatre appears in Roman-style incised letters: COLISEVM. Originally these letters were filled with tiny white light bulbs. The cornice, which was also studded with hundreds of tiny lights, consists of many rows of beaded, carved, and dentilled mouldings, scaled larger toward the topmost projection.

The interior of the Coliseum incorporated several innovations in theatre architecture. It was the first theatre in the world to be designed especially for the showing of motion pictures - it was the first "stageless theatre."² It had an elevator and an elaborate lighting and electrical system, as well as such excellent acoustics that it was used for acoustical tests and demonstrations. Priteca was his own acoustical engineer, and he considered the acoustical effect of his ornate wall decorations in addition to their visual effect. He also made use of indirect lighting throughout the theatre, both to accentuate decorative elements and to avoid glare, for example, in the theatre auditorium, the aisle steps were lit at foot level by fixtures set into the carpeting, a feature that is now considered standard. One of Priteca's major innovations in his design of the Coliseum was his use of the mezzanine, a shallow balcony beneath the enormous upper balcony to fill an acoustical dead space. It was reached by ramps from the lobby. The main balcony, which held approximately half of the theatre's seats, had a slope of 30 degrees, providing excellent sight lines from every seat. Beneath the balcony, hung on a trellis, was a system of tiny star lights which twinkled during organ solos. (The theatre had a large organ, in addition to an orchestra, which accompanied the silent movies, but the organ pipes which originally decorated both sides of the proscenium arch were false ones.)

1. There is an extra end panel in the setback on the Fifth Avenue side of the building which creates visual balance of the design when the theatre is viewed from the rear.
2. Although the Coliseum was built without a conventional stage, it was designed with the thought of future development into an opera house, with expansion into the adjacent half-block to provide stage and loft space. This plan was never realized.

14. Significance

A. Major Significance

- Historical
- Architectural
- Engineering
- Cultural
- Geographical
- Archaeological

B. Level of Significance

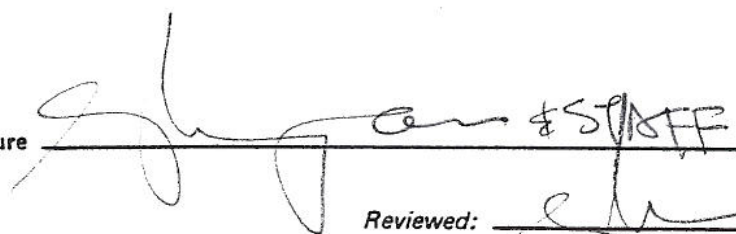
- National
- State
- Community

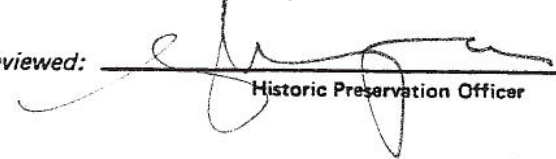
C. Statement of Significance (Be specific, history, personages, events, etc.)

Satisfies Ordinance (102229) criteria Section 6 (1), (5), (6) and (9).

B. Marcus Priteca began his architectural apprenticeship in Scotland when he was fourteen years old. At nineteen he was awarded a scholarship from the Royal Institute in Edinburgh which enabled him to travel to the United States. He came to Seattle because of his interest in the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, and was soon persuaded to stay by architect E.W. Houghton, who hired him as a draftsman. Within two years, however, young Priteca had opened his own office, and had been commissioned to design a theatre in San Francisco for Alexander Pantages, magnate of the great Pantages vaudeville circuit. From his first commission in 1911 until the dissolution of the circuit in 1929, Priteca was the sole architect for Pantages' theatres. In his lifetime Priteca designed sixty major theatres and over one hundred sixty minor theatres for Pantages and other clients. Throughout his career, which spanned more than sixty years, Priteca housed his architectural offices in Seattle - for fifty years, until the building was demolished for a parking garage, in his own Seattle Pantages Theatre, later known as the Palomar. Of the three theatres which Priteca designed for Seattle, the Pantages (Palomar) in 1913, the Coliseum in 1916, and the Orpheum in 1927, only the Coliseum remains standing.

The Coliseum Theatre, designed when Priteca was already a fairly prominent architect, was the first theatre in the world to be designed especially for the showing of motion pictures. The theatre's facilities were so far ahead of its time that even twenty years later it was described as among the most modern in Seattle. It had the largest theatre organ of its day, the first mezzanine, and the first orchestra to accompany the silent movies. During the theatre's early years the Coliseum Concert Orchestra had up to 35-50 members, and performed popular Sunday concerts to "invariably crowded houses," while fountains splashed on either side of the orchestra pit and thirty canaries sang along from cages in the upper foyer. On the theatre's opening night, January 8, 1916, the gala festivities were brightened not only by the presence of Wallace Reid, a matinee idol of the period who had come from

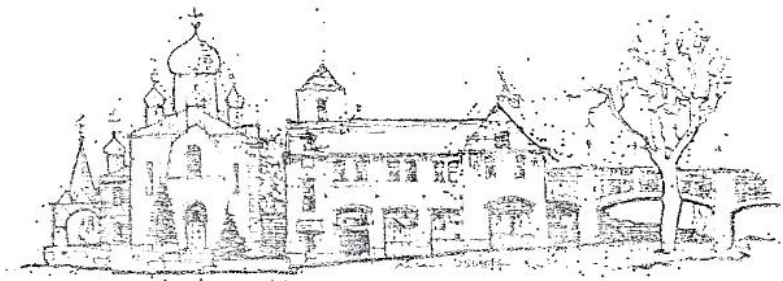
Surveyor Signature  Date 10-15-74

Reviewed:  Date 10-20-74

Historic Preservation Officer

C. Statement of Significance (cont.)

Hollywood for the occasion, but also by the hundreds of sparkling lights set in the theatre marquee and cornice. The opening of the Coliseum, its opulent style brilliantly executed with Priteca's mastery of the classic schools of architectural ornamentation, marked the beginning of the glamorous movie era. The architectural elegance and the ornate details of theatres such as the Coliseum enhanced the movie experience for the customers, and enabled them to experience luxury they were unlikely to find at home. They carried the working man through periods in our history when little else in his life was grand or exotic. (Seattle Times, July 14, 1968 and April 25, 1971). Priteca was the first, as well as "the last of the giants" of theatre architecture. As the only surviving example of his work in Seattle, the city where his career began and ended, the Coliseum Theatre has historic significance locally, nationally, and internationally. Its importance was noted by the Royal Institute of Architects in London in 1931, who referred to it as "the first of the deluxe picture palaces."



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

919 Arctic Building Seattle, Washington, 98104 • (206) 625-4301

LPB-117.1/77

REPORT ON DESIGNATION/REPEALER/120 DAY PROPERTIES

NAME OF PROPERTY: The Coliseum Theatre Building
5th Avenue & Pike Street

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Lots 9 & 12, Block 18, A.A. Denny's 3rd
Addition.

OWNER: *Broadacres, Inc.*
~~Morrie Alhadef~~
Washington Jockey Club
634 Skinner Building
Seattle, Washington 98101

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DESIGNATION:

On November 06, 1974, the Landmarks Preservation Board conducted a Public Hearing to consider the nomination of The Coliseum Theatre Building as a Seattle Landmark. After reviewing the nomination and hearing testimony (see also Seattle Historic Data Sheet, copy attached) the Board voted to recommend designation to the Seattle City Council based on satisfaction of the following criteria of Ordinance 102229:

Section 6(1) - has significant character, interest or value, as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, State or Nation; or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or

Section 6(4) - portrays the environment in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DESIGNATION (cont.)

- Section 6(5) - embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural-type by a distinctive architectural style; or
- Section 6(6) - is the work of a designer whose individual work has significantly influenced the development of Seattle; or
- Section 6(7) - contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or
- Section 6(9) - owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or city;

PROTECTIONS:

In recommending designation on the basis of the above enumerated criteria, the following specific features were recognized which would require Certificates of Approval prior to implementation of any proposed work or changes or issuance of a building permit:

The Coliseum Theatre Building -

-the exterior facade of the building and the marquee structure, including any major maintenance, such as painting or cleaning, of the 5th Avenue and Pike Street terra cotta facades.

Review of any changes or improvements to the above elements of the complex other than in-kind maintenance and repair would require review by the Board and either issuance of endorsements or Certificates of Approval prior to the granting of applicable permits by the City.

Earl D. Layman
Earl D. Layman
City Historic Preservation Officer

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