

Landmarks Preservation Commission
April 15, 1997, Designation List 279
LP-1891

LOEW'S PARADISE THEATER, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, aka 2394-2408
Creston Avenue, Borough of the Bronx. Built 1928-29; John Eberson, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 3165, Lot 44.

On June 2, 1992, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Loew's Paradise Theater, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 7).¹ The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Five speakers testified in favor of the proposed designation; there were no speakers opposed to designation. The current owner is not opposed to this designation.

Summary

Located on the Grand Concourse south of Fordham Road, once a major theater center of the Bronx, the Loew's Paradise Theater is the borough's largest and most famous movie palace. Designed by theater architect John Eberson and opened in 1929, the 4000-seat Paradise was one of five so-called "Wonder Theaters" built for the New York-based Loew's chain of movie theaters to serve the major metropolitan population centers outside midtown Manhattan. John Eberson, who created the "atmospheric theater" type, was one of



Loew's Paradise Theater c. 1997

America's most prolific and influential theater designers, and the Paradise was among his most important commissions. With its Italian Baroque-inspired facade, typical of the romantic fantasies of the great movie palaces of the period, the Paradise delighted and served the people of the Bronx for over sixty years. Though alterations have been made, particularly to the storefronts, the Paradise exterior survives largely intact.

¹The Commission has held a separate public hearing on the proposed designation of the interior spaces of the Loew's Paradise Theater as an Interior Landmark (LP-1922). The public hearing was held on July 19, 1994, continued to October 19, 1995. The Commission has not taken any action on this item.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The American Movie Industry¹

The first showing of a film of moving images to a paying theater audience took place in April of 1896, when Koster & Bial's vaudeville theater in New York City included the short film "Thomas A. Edison's Latest Marvel, The Vitascope" among its productions.² Such films soon became a regular part of vaudeville programs. By 1905 "nickelodeons" (so-called because of the five-cent admission charges) showing silent movies began to open in converted storefronts, and over the next decade the movies became a popular and inexpensive form of entertainment.

During World War I, America emerged as the dominant force in the motion picture industry, witnessing the formation of the Hollywood studios which became MGM, RKO, Warner Brothers, Universal and Twentieth Century Fox, and the production of such film extravaganzas as Cecil B. deMille's *Ten Commandments*, James Cruze's *Covered Wagon* (the first epic western), and in 1925, *Ben Hur*, the greatest worldwide success that the industry had ever produced. A major breakthrough came in 1927 with *The Jazz Singer*, starring Al Jolson in the first sound track movie. The slightly later introduction of Technicolor catapulted motion pictures into their golden age. Sumptuous movie palaces and countless more modest neighborhood movie theaters were built and numerous legitimate theaters were converted for viewing of the more than 500 films produced annually in America. Flourishing throughout the Depression and war years, the reign of the motion picture industry faltered only in the early 1950s when it was undermined by the increasingly popular medium of television.

The American Movie Palace

The American movie theater developed as an architectural type over the first four decades of this century. From the nickelodeons of the turn of the century, the theaters grew in size and lavishness during the 1910s, and emerged during the 1920s as movie palaces, a unique national institution. Designed to look like Parisian boudoirs, old Spanish towns, or Indian, Chinese, or Egyptian temples, the theaters often seated several thousand people, and offered vaudeville, organ recitals, orchestras, comedians, magicians, and a full-length

feature film -- all for twenty-five cents. Almost every town in the country had at least one movie theater; larger cities had large theaters downtown and smaller neighborhood houses scattered around the city. In New York, all the boroughs had major theaters as well as smaller neighborhood houses.

The movie palaces were built by a small group of people. Loew, Keith, Albee, Fox, Balaban & Katz, all started as small-time exhibitors, and gradually emerged as entrepreneurs controlling hundreds of theaters each, in national circuits.³ Most movie palaces were designed by architects who specialized in the type including John Ebersson, Rapp & Rapp, C. Howard Crane, Thomas Lamb, Walter Ahlschlager, B. Marcus Priteca, and G. Albert Lansburgh. Theaters called "The Rialto," "The Tivoli," "The Granada," "The Oriental," "The Paradise," and similarly suggestive names, were designed in styles reminiscent of Baroque Spain, ancient Egypt, Hindu India, the Far East, southern Italy, and occasionally Colonial New England.

The grand eclectic designs of the 1920s movie theaters and palaces gradually gave way in the 1930s to the modernistic motifs of the Art Deco and Art Moderne. Some were as large as the earlier palaces, including the grandest of them all, New York's Radio City Music Hall of 1932, designed by the Associated Architects with Donald Deskey. During the 1930s, however, smaller theaters became the norm. The great age of movie palace building came to an end.

Loew's Inc.⁴

Loew's Inc., founded by Marcus Loew early in the century, became the premiere movie theater chain in New York City and the Northeast, and one of the country's largest, with theaters all across the country and, eventually, around the world.

Marcus Loew (1870-1927), like many of the pioneers of the cinema and movie theater world, was born on New York's Lower East Side, the son of an immigrant Austrian Jewish restaurant waiter and his wife. Working from the age of six selling newspapers on the street, he became a furrier at age twelve. With his friend Adolf Zukor and rising young actor David Warfield, Loew moved into the business of penny arcades in 1904, and opened his own arcade in 1905 on West 23rd Street, which he

converted into a nickelodeon, following the success of a similar venture in Cincinnati.

In 1908, Loew converted a Brooklyn burlesque house into the Royal Theater, whose programs of vaudeville combined with a film commanded ticket prices of 10 cents. Moving quickly into the movie theater business, he took over the management of two Shubert theaters, the Yorkville and the Lincoln Square, the following year, and ran them with a similar policy of showing vaudeville and film. In 1910, with Zukor and the brothers Nicholas and Joseph Schenck as partners, and with the Shubert brothers as investors, he formed Loew's Consolidated Enterprises, and opened the National Theater in the Bronx as the company "flagship." In 1911, he purchased the William Morris circuit of vaudeville theaters, including the very prominent American Music Hall on 42nd Street, and reorganized his company as Loew's Theatrical Enterprises.

By 1919, Loew controlled one of the country's major chains, with film and vaudeville theaters in Atlanta, Boston, Memphis, Baltimore, New Orleans, Birmingham, Montreal, and Hamilton (Ont.), Canada. Expanding his holdings with new acquisitions in Cleveland and along the West Coast, he formed Loew's, Inc. In 1921, he built the Loew's State (demolished) in Times Square, a 3200-seat movie palace in a sixteen-story office building.

In 1920, Loew had acquired his own film studio, "Metro," which had been formed by Louis B. Mayer. In 1924, Loew's, Inc. took over the Goldwyn studio, forming Metro-Goldwyn Pictures Corporation, while Louis B. Mayer directed production operations, hence the name Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, or M-G-M. By 1925, with the release of *Ben Hur*, M-G-M had become one of the nation's premier movie production companies. Loew's Inc. remained its parent company. Loew, however, continued to concentrate on expanding his movie theater chain. In 1924 he had just 100 houses under his control; by 1927 the number had grown to 144.⁵

In 1925 Loew's former partner Zukor had helped arrange the merger of his Famous Players-Lasky company with the giant Chicago movie palace empire of Balaban & Katz, with 500 theaters under its control. The new company, renamed Paramount-Publix, constructed the Paramount Building on Times Square. The competition

apparently worried Loew, because he reached an accord with Zukor stating that any future theaters built in the outlying areas of New York would be jointly owned by the two companies. Paramount built no theaters in New York besides the Times Square Paramount and the Brooklyn Paramount, and Loew built no theaters in Chicago, home base of the Paramount-Publix chain.

Loew's, Inc. remained the premier power in New York. According to a contemporary account in *Motion Picture World*, "The supply of movies is assured and standardized. The vaudeville acts are routed uniformly, the strength of each is known and the proper balance of a bill is fixed. The public knows what it will get for its money, week after week. Thus the Loew line is held."⁶

At the height of his success Marcus Loew became ill and died in 1927. He was succeeded as president of Loew's, Inc. by his partner Nicholas Schenck, who remained with the company until his retirement in 1957. It was Schenck who oversaw Loew's move into sound pictures, and Schenck was in command when Loew's built, among others, the Paradise on the Grand Concourse, designed by theater architect John Ebersson.

John Ebersson

John Ebersson (1875-1954) was one of the most prominent theater designers in the country. From the turn of the century until the 1980s, Ebersson and his son Drew designed over 1200 theaters across the country.

Born in Austria, and trained as an electrical engineer, Ebersson left Vienna in 1901 and settled in St. Louis, where he joined the Johnston architecture firm building opera houses in the Midwest.⁷ In 1904 he started his own practice, and in 1910 moved to Chicago. During his first twenty years in practice he designed theaters and opera houses throughout the Midwest and Southwest, all in classically inspired styles. Many of these were for the Hoblitzelle chain in Texas, including the Austin Majestic (1915) and the Dallas Majestic (1921).

Ebersson made his great contribution to the American theater when he designed his first "atmospheric" theater, the Hoblitzelle Majestic in Houston (1923, demolished). In place of a domed classical ceiling surmounting the auditorium, he created a blue plaster "sky," with electric light-bulbs simulating stars, and arranged for a hidden

machine to project “clouds” moving across the ceiling in an effect similar to that of a planetarium. The walls of the auditorium were designed to simulate a stage-set suggesting an Italian garden, and the total effect was of being outside, in the evening, in a garden, watching a show.⁸ As recalled by Eberson’s son, Drew, who joined his father’s practice in 1926, Eberson felt “that the ornate [movie] palaces were gradually being overdone and had become static in design, as they were copies of European opera houses and were repetitious in the ornamental treatment.” He then “had the idea of atmospheric theatres in which he could use the colors of the Mediterranean and the excitement of the inner courtyards of the romantic periods of architecture.”⁹

Atmospheric theaters soon became extremely popular, and as a type were easily recognizable: each included the simulation of an open, lit evening sky with stars and clouds; each had walls designed like a stage set suggesting a foreign setting; and each was asymmetrically designed. In John Eberson’s words, “We visualize and dream a magnificent amphitheater, an Italian garden, a Persian Court, a Spanish patio, or a mystic Egyptian templeyard, all canopied by a soft moonlit sky.”¹⁰ Over the next six years Eberson designed some of the country’s most extraordinary atmospheric theaters.¹¹

Creating atmospheric theaters required skilled artisans. According to Drew Eberson:

Inasmuch as the atmospheric theatre was a specialty, [Eberson] found it difficult to find in each town the skills required to polychrome the plaster and to get the exact sky effect that he wished. He, therefore, assembled a crew of skilled decorators and specialists under the banner of his company, known as Michael Angelo Studios, who accomplished the complete decorating job as to the trees, birds, furniture, etc. William Hartman headed the “colorists.”¹²

Eberson designed his last atmospheric theaters in 1929. His design for the Loew’s Paradise was based on an extraordinary array of Italian Renaissance and Baroque motifs. His Valencia Theater in Queens was another Spanish-inspired design. (It survives today as a church.) In Texas, Eberson produced one final Spanish/Moorish fantasy for the San Antonio Majestic, whose

interiors were specially adorned with “Alamo bells” in honor of that city’s history.

Although the Depression brought with it the demise of the great movie palace, Eberson continued to be active in theater design throughout the 1930s. During those years he turned to designs in the new modernistic styles, and produced a body of work less well known than his atmospheric, but of much interest, including the Warner Beverly Theater in Washington, D.C., the Nostrand and the College (both on the Century Circuit) in Brooklyn (both demolished), the Warner State Theater in Chester, Pa., the Newsreel Theater at Rockefeller Center (today operated as the Guild Theater), and the Lane in Staten Island.¹³

John Eberson continued designing theaters through the World War II period, during which time his commissions included theaters on military bases, and also the Lewisohn Bandshell (demolished) in New York. After the War he designed theaters in shopping centers and drive-in theaters, continuing this work until his death in 1954.¹⁴ His son Drew continued the practice until his retirement in the mid-1980s. The Eberson legacy, however, is most notable in the grand era of pre-World War II theater design.

The Loew’s Paradise

Plans for a grand movie palace on the site of the Paradise date at least to late 1925 when the Hewitt Place Realty Corporation bought a small lot planned to become a theater that would bring “Broadway to the Bronx.”¹⁵ By 1927, a large property assemblage was purchased by the Concourse Realty Corp., which planned to build a movie and vaudeville palace to lease to the Paramount-Public circuit.

The theater was one of four planned by Paramount for four major residential centers outside Midtown Manhattan. The plan included the Kings on Flatbush Avenue in the geographic center of Brooklyn, the Valencia on Jamaica Avenue in Jamaica, Queens, and the Jersey in Jersey City. When Paramount-Public looked for a central location for its Bronx theater, the logical choice was the vicinity of the intersection of the Grand Concourse with Fordham Road, the major commercial hub of the northwest Bronx, and already the location of a number of theaters.¹⁶

According to Paramount-Public’s initial plans, Rapp & Rapp were to design the Kings and the

Jersey, while John Eberson was to design the Valencia and the Paradise. Both firms had designed many theaters for Paramount-Publix and its predecessor, Balaban & Katz.

As a result of the 1925 agreement that kept Paramount from building more theaters in New York and Loew's from entering the Chicago market, the four Paramount theater projects passed to Loew's. Paramount, however, appears to have maintained an interest in the theaters, using them as New York outlets for Paramount pictures. Loew's also added a fifth theater, the 175th Street, to be designed by the company's favorite theater architect, Thomas Lamb. Each of the theaters included a Morton "Wonder" organ, apparently the origin of the name "Wonder Theaters" that has since been applied collectively to the five houses. The five theaters, all of which still survive in varying states of repair, were among the most lavish movie palaces ever built in New York City and environs.

Eberson was initially contracted to design a 4000-seat theater, to be called the "Venetian." A design for the Venetian published in September 1927 shows a facade modeled on Venetian Gothic. Its description noted:

*The accompanying drawing of the proposed Venetian Theater, a \$1,800,000 motion picture playhouse planned for the west side of the Concourse, near 184th St., reveals the exterior appearance of what authorities on theater architecture say will be one of the handsomest amusement structures in the country. . . . Details of the interior decorations planned for the Venetian have not been made public, although it is said they will rival in splendor anything to be found in the newest Manhattan theaters or the huge motion picture theaters in the Pacific Coast cities, where fine film playhouses have long existed.*¹⁷

Ground was broken for the Venetian Theatre in April 1928; it opened for business on Saturday, September 7, 1929, as the Loew's Paradise, but with a different design than that originally proposed.

The Paradise was designed as a large, commercial building combining a movie palace with a block of storefronts, running through the block from its main facade on the Grand Concourse to its rear on Creston Avenue. For the Grand Concourse facade of the Paradise, Eberson created a fantasy,

using elements from Italian palaces and churches of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Windows framed by oversize columns, segmental arches and balustrades, and parapets with urns, surround a central area of baroque curves framing the name of the theater, all in glazed terra cotta. This area was the original identifying sign of the theater, necessary because projecting marquees on movie theaters were not permitted on the Concourse, a residential area. At the top of the facade, above the clock-face over the theater sign, sat an elaborate pergola in which a statue of St. George once slew the statue of a dragon as the clock chimed the hour (the dragon is gone, but St. George and the bells survive).¹⁸

To the south of the theater facade is a two-story commercial wing of six storefronts with offices above. This combination of theater entrance and stores was very common in the 1920s, making economic use of expensive commercial frontage while pushing the bulk of the theater into the interior of the block. The decorative brick upper walls of the auditorium, visible above and behind the commercial frontage, are adorned with terra-cotta urns and balustrades.

The Paradise as Bronx Icon

The Paradise, in the words of its inaugural program, was "operated in conjunction with the vast chain of Loew's Theatres extending from coast to coast." From its opening day, the Paradise ran a full program, changed weekly, of vaudeville acts and a first-run feature sound film. The inaugural program of Saturday September 7, 1929, opened with the singing of the "Star Spangled Banner," followed by two musical numbers including an organ solo with Harold Ramsay presiding over the Morton organ, three short films, a stage presentation, and climaxed by the showing of the feature sound film, *The Mysterious Dr. FU MANCHU*. The following week the Paradise featured a new stage show, and a new movie, *The Broadway Melody*.¹⁹

Prices for the Paradise ranged from 25 cents for orchestra and balcony seats and 50 cents for loge seats on weekday mornings, to 75 cents for orchestra and balcony seats and \$1.00 for loges on Saturday, Sunday, and holiday evenings. Four years later, in the depths of the Depression, prices dropped to a high of 75 cents.²⁰ Although vaudeville died out, the Paradise continued in use

as a movie theater, remaining largely intact until 1973.

Like movie palaces everywhere, the Paradise played a major role in the lives of its patrons. Among the tens or possibly hundreds of thousands of Bronx residents with memories of the Paradise, soprano Roberta Peters, in a *New York Post* interview in 1973, recalled:

*To me, the Paradise was Sunday afternoons. . . . We never were rich enough to live on the Concourse. We used to stroll on the Concourse -- everybody did. And although I used to go to the neighborhood movies, the Luxor, the Kent and the Zenith, Sunday was something else. First, we would all have Chinese food and then we would go to the Paradise. What else was there to do on Sunday? You know, I always wanted to sing on that stage.*²¹

The 4000-seat capacity of the Paradise made it a logical choice for large public gatherings, especially high school and college graduations.²² In 1973, when stage trouble kept the Metropolitan Opera from taking its summer park program to the New York Botanical Gardens, the performance was moved indoors, to the Paradise. Roberta Peters, Anna Moffo and Kitty Carlisle took *Die Fledermaus* to the stage of what the *New York Post* described as "one of the last truly splendid movie palaces in New York."²³

When in August of 1973 Loew's announced that the theater would be divided into two halves, Bronx cultural and civic organizations -- including the Bronx Chamber of Commerce, the West Bronx Federation, and the Bronx Council on the Arts -- expressed their dismay and sought to save the theater.²⁴ As reported in the *New York Times*:

Patrons of the lower theater would be denied an opportunity to view the Paradise's famous "heavenly" ceiling of moving clouds and stars, under which thousands of Bronx couples had their first taste of elegance and romance.... For many Bronx residents the Paradise is more than just another movie house. . . a now slightly tarnished reminder of the days when Fordham Road and the Concourse were, respectively, the Broadway and Park Avenue of the borough.

The Council received a \$25,000 grant for a study on possible reuse of the theater as a cultural and community center.

Despite the protests, the theater was twinned, and over the years subdivided still further, into a total of four theaters. Unlike any of the other four "Wonder Theaters," it continued to show films until 1994.

Description

The Loew's Paradise Theater building, located on the west side of the Grand Concourse south of East 188th Street, extends along the Concourse for 225 feet and through the block 174 feet to Creston Avenue. The two- and three-story steel-framed structure is organized into three sections: a three-story lobby wing set behind an elaborate terra-cotta faced frontispiece; a long two-story terra-cotta faced section containing storefronts below offices; and a three-story section containing the stage house and auditorium rising behind the store and office section and also fronting on Creston Avenue. This last section is faced in brick and trimmed in terra cotta. The visible north end wall of the lobby section is also faced in brick. None of the storefronts are original; exterior roll-down gates and oversized signs, as well as canopies and awnings, have been installed. (At the time of designation, most of the storefronts were vacant.) A roll-down gate has been installed at the entrance to the theater lobby below a large signboard for the names of movies playing at the theater. All window sash are aluminum replacements.

Grand Concourse facade

Lobby Wing: Base. The first story contains a wide entrance to the ticket lobby of the theater, shielded by a non-historic roll-down gate, flanked by non-historic storefronts at No. 2413 (vacant at time of designation) and No. 2419. Non-historic glass doors lead from a small open-air vestibule behind the roll-down gate. The ceiling of the vestibule is paneled and coffered, and the marbelized wall sections contain decorative bracketed and pedimented signboards for theater announcements. Similar signboards are placed on the outer wall sections adjacent to the lobby entrance. A wide non-historic sign band announcing the films to be shown rises above the roll-down gate and onto the base of the frontispiece.

Lobby Wing: Frontispiece. A Baroque frontispiece rises two stories above the base. Faced in cream-colored terra cotta with glazed terra-cotta accents in shades of blue and salmon, it has a large curvilinear central panel with a stylized broken pediment at its top and a swag motif at its base. This panel contains the name of the theater in neon letters: LOEW'S PARADISE THEATRE. It is flanked by shallow pavilions, each with engaged Corinthian pilasters enclosing a window openings set above a balustrade and surmounted by a segmental-arched pediment. Above each pediment is a cartouche supporting a flagpole mount with bracing. The balustrade at the northern pavilion is concealed behind the storefront sign of No. 2419. At the third story level, the frontispiece is spanned by a cornice supporting a balustraded urn-topped parapet which is interrupted by a clockface in a foliated frame and a pedimented pergola containing the figure of St. George and bells which rang the hour. (The dragon is no longer extant.) At the third-story level, the return on the south face of the lobby wing is of cream-colored terra cotta. Air-conditioning machinery and a large framework for signage are placed on the roof of this section.

Storefront and Office Section: Base. The first story contains six bays with non-historic infill (No. 2401 through No. 2411). The southernmost bay (No. 2401), which provides access to a firestair, has surviving corbel brackets at the upper corners of the opening. A temporary partition has been installed to block access to the firestair. A non-historic entrance in the third bays provides access to the second-story office space (in use as a daycare center at the time of designation). Decorative marble panels are visible on the wall above the opening in the first bay and partly visible in the third bay. Non-historic signs cover the other panels. Non-historic awnings or canopies have been installed above most of the storefronts. At the time of designation only No. 2403 was occupied.

Storefront and Office Section: Second Story. The cream-colored terra-cotta facade is organized into six bays, each with a tripartite window group framed in decorative terra cotta with glazed terra-cotta accents in blue and salmon. Stylized brackets adorned with swags and bellflowers and incorporating jester heads flank each window opening and support a continuous cornice trimmed with shells and swags. The central window of each

group is surmounted by a curved broken pediment with a central cartouche topped by a shell and crown motif. The window infill is non-historic aluminum sash. The second story is surmounted by a continuous denticulated cornice topped by a parapet. The bay divisions are marked by cartouches set below stylized curved pediments which rise to upward-projecting swag and shell motifs. Playground equipment and non-historic hatchway enclosures are visible on the roof.

Stage House and Auditorium Section: This section, set back from the office section, rises for another story and also continues behind the lobby wing. It is faced in brick in shades of buff and ocher, laid in Flemish bond, punctuated by terra-cotta blocks simulating quoins. A blind window opening with decorative terra-cotta detail and a large swag-trimmed cartouche further accent the wall. A terra-cotta cornice and urn-topped parapet, partially balustraded, span this facade.

Creston Avenue facade

Base: The first story is faced in banded brick in shades of buff and ocher to simulate rustication, interrupted by stagedoor openings. A wide terra-cotta bandcourse sets off the upper stories.

Upper stories: The long expanse of the brick facade in shades of buff and ocher is organized into five sections with three blind arches, trimmed in terra cotta and filled with brick in a diaperwork pattern, flanking overscaled brick panels. Marble rondels are set in the spandrels above the arches. The central brick panels are topped by terra-cotta swag-trimmed cartouches incorporating jester heads below crowns. A continuous denticulated terra-cotta bandcourse sets off the brick roof parapet. Stylized acroteria are placed above the middle and end bays.

Northern end wall

This wall, faced with brick in shades of red and ocher, is visible above the one-story commercial buildings to the north of the theater.

Report prepared by
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Notes

1. The two basic works on the history of the American movie palace, on which this account is largely based, are Ben M. Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats* (New York: Bramhall House, 1961), and David Naylor, *American Picture Palaces* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981). Charlotte Herzog, "The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of its Architectural Style," *Cinema Journal* 20 (Spring 1981), 15-37, discusses the influence of architectural antecedents such as vaudeville theaters and penny arcades on movie palace design. The quarterly issues of *Marquee*, the publication of the Theatre Historical Society since 1969, are another invaluable source.
2. Bosley Crowther, *The Lion's Share: The Story of an Entertainment Empire* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1957), 13.
3. For a typical history see Carrie Balaban, *Continuous Performance* (New York, 1964), the biography of A.J. Balaban, founder of Balaban & Katz. The only major figure in the industry who never built an enormous chain was Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel; however, his Roxy Theater (demolished), the 6000-seat "Cathedral of the Motion Picture" at 50th Street and Seventh Avenue, was the epitome of the type, and his greatest creation, Radio City Music Hall (a designated New York City Interior landmark), was the most famous movie theater in the country.
4. This account of Loew's Inc. is based on Crowther.
5. These included new theaters in New York City, and newly acquired ones in Cleveland, New Orleans, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Toronto, Syracuse, Buffalo, New Haven, New London, Chicago, Kalamazoo, Akron, Flint, Saginaw, Evansville (Ind.), and London, Ontario.
6. Cited in Crowther, 130. The date is identified only as the mid-1920s.
7. This and much of the information on Eberson that follows was provided by the late Jane Preddy, curator of the Eberson collection, who at the time of her death in 1994 was at work on a monograph about the architect.
8. Naylor, 67-68.
9. Drew Eberson, foreword to the Theatre Historical Society's 1975 *Annual* devoted to the Loew's Paradise (unpaginated).
10. Naylor, 68.
11. Many had Spanish or Moorish themes, including the Tampa (1926) in Tampa; the Olympia (1926, now Gusman Center) in Miami; the State Theater (1927) in Kalamazoo; the Loew's United Artists (1928) in Louisville; the Palace (1928) in Marion, Ohio; and the Loew's Akron (1929) in Akron. Eberson variants on the atmospheric theme included the Greek and "Pompeiiian" ornament of the Capitol (1925), the "Persian" of the Avalon (1927), and the extraordinary French Second Empire fantasy of the Balaban & Katz Paradise (1928), all in Chicago.
12. Eberson.
13. The Lane is a designated New York City Interior Landmark. For more on this period of Eberson's work, see Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Lane Theater, First Floor Interior, Designation Report* (LP-1696), report by Anthony W. Robins (New York: City of New York, 1988).
14. Preddy.
15. Michael Miller, historical essay in the Theatre Historical Society's 1975 *Annual*.
16. The Adam Wertheimer Department Store had already established itself at the northwest corner of the Concourse and East Fordham Road, automobile showrooms opened further down either side of the ridge, and several movie palaces -- the RKO Fordham, the Concourse, the Valentine, and the Windsor -- were constructed nearby. Alexander's opened a branch in the remodelled Wertheimer store. The Dollar

Bank for Savings established a branch first at 2480 Grand Concourse in 1932, then up the Boulevard at No. 2516. In the context of the commercial growth of the Concourse at Fordham Road, its choice by Paramount, and later Loew's, for the site of its major Bronx theater was logical. On the development of the Grand Concourse, see: Evelyn Gonzalez, "From Suburb To City: The Development of The Bronx, 1890-1940," in *Building A Borough: Architecture and Planning in the Bronx, 1890-1940* (New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1986); "Grand Concourse Historic District National Register Nomination," (1987); "Improvements on Grand Boulevard," *Real Estate Record & Builders Guide* 99(June 23, 1917), 887; Louis A. Risse, *History in Brief, of the Conception and Establishment of the Grand Boulevard and Concourse in the 23d and 24th Wards* (n.d.); Risse, *The True History of the Conception and Planning of the Grand Concourse and Boulevard in the Bronx* (1902); Stan Fischler, *Uptown, Downtown* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1976); Benedict Fitzpatrick, *The Bronx & Its People, A History, 1609-1927* (New York: The Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1927); Martha Golden, "The Grand Concourse, Tides of Change," unpublished typescript, New York Landmarks Preservation Commission Scholars Program, 1976; Stephen Jenkins, *The Story of the Bronx* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1912); John McNamara, *History in Asphalt* (Bronx, N.Y.: The Bronx Historical Society, 1984); Lloyd Ultan, *The Beautiful Bronx, 1920-1950* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, Publishers, 1979); Lloyd Ultan and Gary Hermalyn, *The Bronx in the Innocent Years, 1890-1925* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

17. Reprinted in the Theatre Historical Society 1975 *Annual*; the clipping is not identified except by the date September 1927.
18. Drew Eberson, who worked on the Paradise wrote, "An important feature of the Paradise was the marvelous clock which father obtained, I do not know where, portraying St. George and the dragon, and at the strike of the hour, St. George would move out around the clock in combat with the dragon."
19. *Loew's Paradise Inaugural Program*, September 7, 1929: "Loew's Paradise" clippings file, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York Public Library Research Libraries.
20. *New York Sun*, 1/11/33: "At Paradise Theater." "Loew's Paradise" clippings file.
21. Arthur Greenspan, "It's Paradise for Roberta," *New York Post*, Friday, July 6, 1973, p.22. Loew's Paradise clippings file.
22. One such graduation, from Bronx Community College in May 1973, made its way onto the front cover of the *New York Times Magazine* (May 27, 1973, color photo). On the Paradise marquee: "Bronx Community College Commencement Today 9 AM."
23. Greenspan, 3, 22.
24. As filed at the Buildings Department, August 13, 1973; the lower portion was to be 1890 seats, the upper to be 970, and the cost put at \$150,000. See *New York Times*, Thursday, 8/30/73: "Bronx Faces Loss of Its Paradise" (no page number), by George Gent.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Loew's Paradise Theater has a special character and special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Loew's Paradise Theater survives as one of the few remaining grand movie palaces in the Bronx and New York City; that it was one of five major New York metropolitan area regional theaters built by the Loew's corporation in 1929-30, meant to serve a large population outside the Times Square-Midtown Manhattan theater district; that it is one of the finest "atmospheric" designs by John Eberson, creator of that type of theater design; that it has long been a prominent building in the Bronx, located south of the major commercial intersection of Fordham Road and the Grand Concourse; that its ornate glazed terra-cotta facade was inspired by Italian palaces and churches of the Renaissance and Baroque periods; that its detail includes oversized pilasters, segmental arched pediments, balustrades, parapets with urns, and an elaborate pergola atop the facade with a clock and statue of St. George, all of which make its facade a highly visible and distinct element of the streetscape of the Grand Concourse; that while in theater use until 1994, for decades the Paradise also served an important civic function, hosting Bronx high-school and college graduations and other community events; and that the Paradise Theater, though no longer in use as a movie palace, remains a major landmark of the Bronx.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, aka 2394-2408 Creston Avenue, Borough of the Bronx, and designates Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 3165, Lot 44, as its Landmark Site.



Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, The Bronx
View of Grand Concourse facade looking to the southwest

Photo: Carl Forster



Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, The Bronx
View of Grand Concourse facade looking to the northwest

Photo: Carl Forster



Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, The Bronx
Detail of Lobby Wing: Frontispiece

Photo: Carl Forster



Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, The Bronx
Detail of Lobby Wing: Clockface and pedimented pergola

Photo: Carl Forster



Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, The Bronx
Detail of Lobby Wing: Cartouche below balustraded parapet

Photo: Carl Forster



Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, The Bronx
Detail of Lobby Wing: Open-air vestibule leading to ticket lobby
Photo: Carl Forster



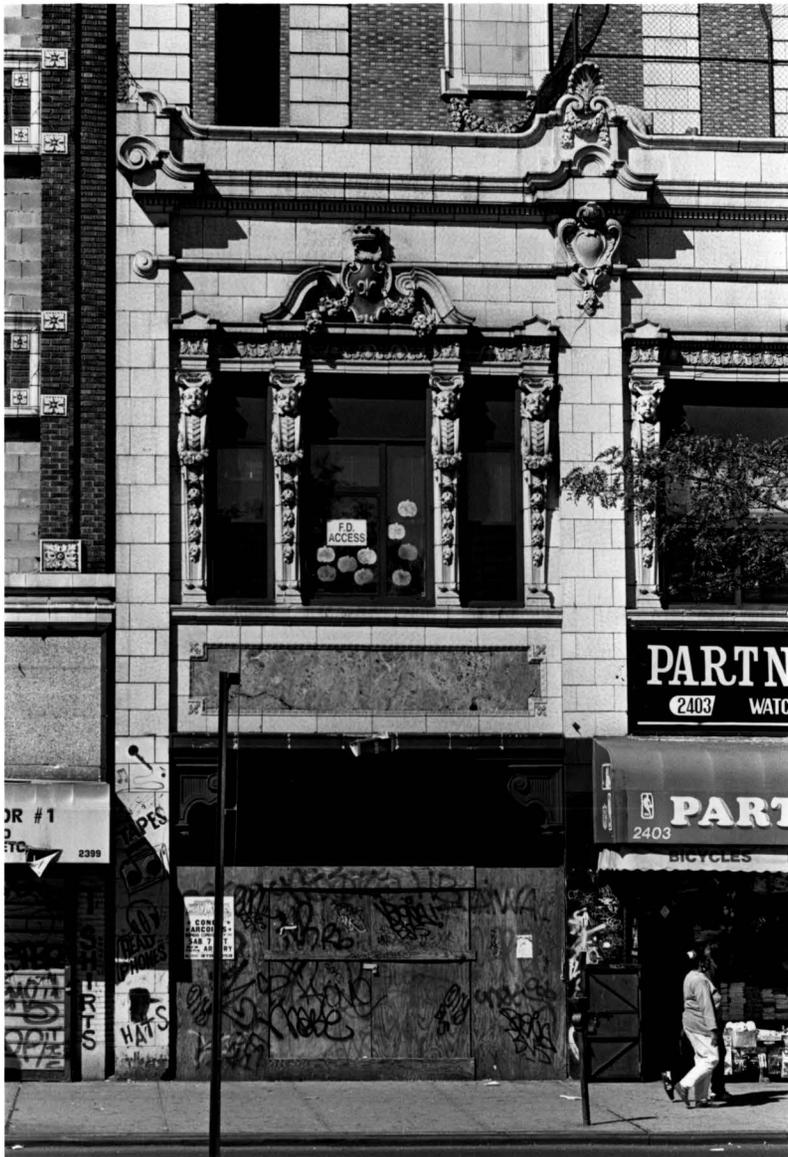
Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, The Bronx
Detail of Office Section: Window bay at second story

Photo: Carl Forster



Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, The Bronx
Detail of Stage House Section: Cartouche below cornice and roof parapet

Photo: Carl Forster



Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, The Bronx
Detail of Office and Storefront section: First bay at south
Photo: Carl Forster



Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, The Bronx
Detail of Stage House Section: Pedimented blind window opening
Photo: Carl Forster



Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, The Bronx
Creston Avenue facade looking to the southeast

Photo: Carl Forster



Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, The Bronx
Detail of Creston Avenue facade: Cartouche with jester head

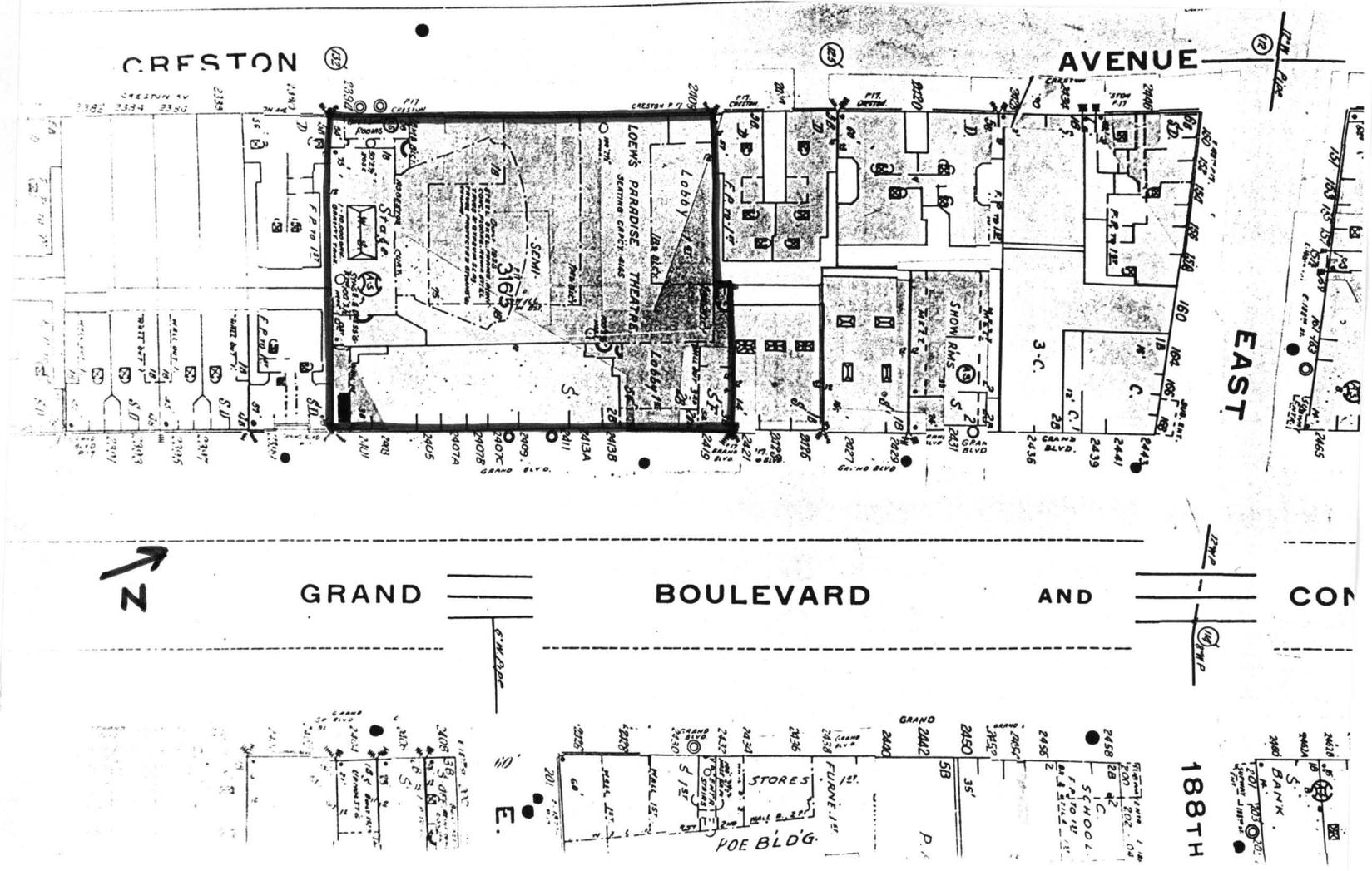
Photo: Carl Forster



Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, The Bronx
Detail of northern end wall

Photo: Carl Forster

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Loew's Paradise Theater, 2401-2419 Grand Concourse, aka 2394-2408 Creston Avenue, The Bronx
 Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 3165, Lot 44
 Source: *Insurance Maps of New York*, vol. 14, plate 17 (New York: Sanborn Map Co., updated 1996)