

4th Avenue Theatre

Anchorage

www.4thAvenueTheatre.org

The theatre was built by Cap Lathrop as his legacy to Alaska. It is the only art deco building of its kind in Alaska. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981.

The Fourth Avenue Theatre, also known as the Lathrop Building, has been described as Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, and Art Moderne in style. Built beginning in 1941, and completed in 1947, after a halt during World War II, somewhat after the heyday of these styles, it was a large 960-seat first-run theater until the 1980s. The resulting, high fashioned decor --particularly the plush interior --was, and continues to be, even more astonishing than was originally planned.

The theater was designed by B. Marcus Priteca, a prominent Seattle-based architectural firm and leading designer of themed cinemas in America, in association with Seattle architect A.A. Porreca (A.A.) in the late 1930's. C. William Hufeisen was then selected as contractor for the construction. C. William Hufeisen was then selected as contractor for the construction.

The theater's lobby featured a gold leaf mural of Mount McKinley, but originally omitted a concession stand, a feature Lathrop felt was inappropriate. The main house was decorated with silver and gold murals by Anthony Heinsbergen and Frank Bouman of Los Angeles, and a rendering of the Big Dipper (a symbol of Alaska) on the ceiling. The interior of 4th Avenue Theatre is the spark that brings the building to dramatic effect. The murals --a rich collection of prime Alaskan --provide an uncommonly handsome lining to the heart of the theatre. There are four sets of murals: a huge, floor-to-ceiling pair, which depicts the commercial and industrial growth of Alaska --helps to frame the stage.

The lighting and seating of 4th Avenue Theatre are noteworthy. A casual look toward the ceiling brings into focus the familiar Big Dipper and North Star constellations, shining forth in a configuration of twinkling starlight. Additional lighting is provided by large colorful glass baubles. Those large red, orange, and yellow globes, hang about midway down each aisle. The seating is carefully structured in order to provide straight aisles and unobstructed sight lines for seated patrons; accomplished by providing love seats at the ends of alternating rows.

As the Lathrop Building, the complex included facilities for Lathrop's radio and television stations, a restaurant, and a penthouse apartment added in 1959-1960.

Construction of the theatre was the culmination of a 25-year dream for the eminent Austin E. Lathrop. "Cap," as the most prominent self-made Alaskan millionaire pioneer (19th and/early 20th century) was generally known, had the intention of leaving the 4th Avenue Theatre and Lathrop Building as his legacy to the fine people of Alaska.

4th Avenue Theater is considered by experts to represent "the culmination of the Art Deco movement in the U.S. " Skilled practitioners of the art, here "honed down the showy nature of the 1930-50 fad style into a gem-like distillation of highest quality --beautifully integrated into regional motif and a creative, exciting individuality" -- unsurpassed by any other known example in the Pacific Coast region.

Why is property endangered?

The theatre has been closed for some time and is in need of restoration. It is owned by Peach Investments, Inc. There is no word from the owners exactly what their intentions are for the future of the theatre. Preservation Alaska first listed the property on the annual list in 1991 and continues to list this property on the annual list because the organization feels it is vitally important that the entire building be restored and once again welcomes the local community.



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.