

LEVY, RAM & OLSON LLP
ATTORNEYS

June 30, 2008

HAND DELIVERED

Mr. Bill Wycko
Planning Department
City & County of San Francisco
1650 Mission Street
Suite 400
San Francisco, California 94103

Re: **Appeal re Mitigated Negative Declaration and Initial Study
The Harding Theater
616 Divisadero Street
Case No. 2005.0911E**

Dear Mr. Wycko:

The Friends of 1800 submit this letter to appeal the Planning Department's recommendation of a Mitigated Negative Declaration for this Project, its Initial Study, and its proposed finding that the Project could not have a significant effect on the environment. The Friends request that an Environmental Impact Report be prepared for the Project.

The Friends of 1800 is a grassroots, nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving significant historical buildings, landmarks and the architectural heritage of San Francisco with a special interest in the identification and recognition of issues and sites important to GLBT history and culture. The Friends' advocacy has included preservation support for 70 Douglass Street, the buildings of the U.C. Extension, 557 Ashbury Street, the Harding Theater, Sacred Heart Parish, New Mission Theater, and the Fallon Building.

A check in the amount of \$400.00 to file this appeal is enclosed. The Friends request that this fee be waived and refunded in light of the Friends' organizational status.

The Friends request special and timely prior written notice, care of the undersigned, of all further environmental determinations relating to this Project and all hearings conducted on this Project, including but not limited to all future hearings before the Planning Commission and/or the Board of Supervisors.

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PROJECT HISTORY

In 2003, the project proponent, Divisadero Hayes LLC, submitted a plan to demolish the entire Harding Theater and build 16 condominium units (Planning Department Case No. 2003.0807CEK). On October 16, 2004, the Planning Department proposed a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the 16-unit project (Case No. 2003.0807E). On December 9, 2004, the Planning Commission approved the project and adopted the Mitigated Negative Declaration.

David Tornheim appealed the Mitigated Negative Declaration to the Board of Supervisors on the ground that the project would have a significant adverse impact on a historical resource, the Harding Theater. At the hearing before the Board of Supervisors on April 19, 2005, the Planning Department declined to defend the Mitigated Negative Declaration. The Board of Supervisors accordingly did not adopt it, and the Project returned to the Planning Department.

In September 2005, the proponent submitted another project for the Harding Theater site to the Planning Department, proposing a nine-unit condominium building at the rear of the lot, and calling for demolition of the rear wall and the back 25 feet of the Harding Theater. The demolition would include the proscenium arch, stage, orchestra pit, stage fly, stage wings of the theater, and a further portion of the auditorium (Planning Department Case No. 2005.0911CEK).

The project was referred for environmental review (Case No. 2005.0911E).

On October 23, 2006, N. Moses Corrette, Preservation Technical Specialist, issued an Historic Resource Evaluation Report on the Harding Theater. (Attachment 2.) Mr. Corrette concluded that the Harding Theater is an historical resource.

On November 20, 2006, on behalf of the Friends, I provided a comment letter to Mr. Corrette. (Attachment 3.) This comment later pointed out some significant omissions in the Historic Resource Evaluation Report:

- “The Property Description and Character-Defining Features sections of your report do not discuss the significance of the stage and stage fly tower. The stage and its fly tower are defining features of the historic character of the theater. Their demolition would compromise the historical integrity of the Harding. The demolition of the stage and its fly tower would alone therefore have a significant adverse impact on the Harding as an historical resource.”

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- “[T]he report indicates that the proscenium will be demolished and rebuilt, that the organ grilles and other plasterwork features will be removed and replaced as part of the project, and that alterations to the entry way, decorative terrazzo surface, lobby, and staircases are contemplated. While we are doubtful that these impacts could be mitigated to less than significance, there are no mitigation measures proposed that attempt to do so. At least in the absence of viable mitigation measures, these aspects of the project would also have a significant adverse impact on the resource.”
- “[T]here is no indication what commitment, if any, the project proponent has made to safeguard the integrity of the character-defining features that the project admittedly jeopardizes, such as the proscenium, organ grilles, floor, staircases, lobby, entryway, or the terrazzo entry surface.... The proponent does not appear to have retained an experienced preservation architect to consult regarding these alterations, nor are we aware of any written program submitted in support of this project to ensure compliance with Secretary of the Interior Standards.”
- “[T]he plan for underground parking calls for the removal of all seats and the demolition of the floor of the theater. Since the seats and floor are characteristic elements of the integrity of the auditorium, this aspect of the plan would clearly have an adverse impact on the Harding as an historical resource – quite apart from the obvious structural issues.”

On December 4, 2007, the Planning Department first circulated the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration and Initial Study for this Project, reflecting a reduction in the number of condominium units from nine to eight. The Initial Study did not address the Friends’ comments in my November 2006 letter, submitted over a year earlier. No mitigation measures are proposed for impacts on the historical character of the theater.

The December version of the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration and Initial Study did not indicate any intent to submit the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration to the Planning Commission for approval. On June 14, 2008, the Planning Department again circulated the Mitigated Negative Declaration and Initial Study, this time requesting comments and appeals by July 7, 2008.

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This letter is submitted in response to the June 14 document as an appeal of the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration, an objection to the Initial Study, and a request that an Environmental Impact Report be prepared.

WHY AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT IS REQUIRED

The Project proposes drastic alterations to the Harding Theater. These alterations would radically change the character and features of the building, most of which date to the 1920s and all of which have remained substantially intact since 1970, the conclusion of the building's period of significance. The Project would demolish a significant part of the theater, eliminate its stage and live performance potential, demolish the floor, remove the seating, change the size, scale, and sight lines of the auditorium, reconfigure the lobby and retail spaces, and eliminate egress through the side stairways out to Hayes Street. This transformation of the Harding would work a material alteration of the historic theater so that its significance as a historical resource would be impaired.

The controlling legal standard is well established: a negative declaration cannot be adopted when there is any substantial evidence supporting a fair argument that the project may have a significant unmitigated adverse environmental effect. The attached letters of architectural historian Christopher VerPlanck (Attachment 4) and theater historian Gary Parks (Attachment 5), together with the Corrette Report and the Initial Study itself, contain substantial evidence supporting a fair argument that the Project would have an substantial unmitigated adverse effect on the Harding Theater. The proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration would therefore be illegal, and an Environmental Impact Report must be prepared.

The Project Would Have Multiple Significant Adverse Unmitigated Impacts on an Historical Resource — the Harding Theater.

A project that may cause a “substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource” is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment. (CEQA Guideline § 15064.5(b).) “Substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource means physical demolition, destruction, relocation, or *alteration of the resource or its immediate surroundings such that the significance of an historical resource would be materially impaired.*” (*Id.* § 15064.5(b)(1).) The significance of an historical resource is materially impaired when a project “materially alters in an adverse manner those physical characteristics of an historical resource that convey its historical

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significance and that justify its inclusion in, or eligibility for, inclusion in the California Register of Historical Resources.” (*Id.* § 15064.5(b)(2)(A).)

The Harding Theater is an historical resource because it is indisputably eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. Both the Corrette Report and the Initial Study agree that the Harding Theater is an historical resource, being eligible for listing on the California Register based on the Event, Persons, and Architecture criteria of Guideline section 15064.5(a).

The Harding was built 80 years ago as a neighborhood silent movie and vaudeville house. It remains by far the most intact example of the Reid Brothers’ movie theater work in San Francisco. It is also the most intact example of a neighborhood silent movie theater/vaudeville house in the City, and its integrity is extraordinary for a theater of its vintage statewide.

The Corrette Report and the Initial Study confirm the accompanying opinions of Christopher VerPlanck and Gary Parks that the Harding’s integrity is exceptional. The interior of the Harding retains the essence of the Reid Brothers’ 1926 design, including the stage, stage fly, fire curtain, proscenium arch, orchestra pit, stage wings, organ grilles, auditorium floor, walls, and ceiling, projection room, and balcony. The stage and its fly tower were integral to the theater’s original design and use for live entertainment, and these features continued in use for many years, by The Lamplighters for their Gilbert & Sullivan productions and as a venue for concerts by leading rock bands in the 1960s.

The Project Would Demolish Character-Defining Elements of the Harding Theater, Including the Stage, Orchestra Pit, Fly Tower, Stage Wings, and Proscenium Arch.

The Corrette Report found that the Harding’s period of significance is from 1926 to 1970, notably including the theater’s first years as a vaudeville house and its use during the 1960s as a live performance venue for the Lamplighters and rock groups such as the Grateful Dead.

The Harding’s vaudeville stage and associated features are character-defining attributes of the theater as a 1920s combination vaudeville and silent movie house, and later as a live performance venue in the 1960s. (Attachment 1-A, 1-B; VerPlanck Report (Attachment 4).) Because the Project would demolish the original live performance features of the building — the intact proscenium arch, stage, fire curtain, orchestra pit, stage fly, and wings — the Project would have a significant adverse impact on defining

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characteristics of the Harding that render it worthy of listing on the California Register. Loss of these features would destroy the combination of features that define the live performance history of the original theater. The enduring integrity of the Harding's dual purpose as a movie and vaudeville theater remains a prime historic characteristic of the building that sets it apart among the diminishing number of survivors from the silent movie era.

The Initial Study completely fails to address the contribution of the stage and associated live performance features of the Harding Theater, and their integrity with the auditorium as a whole, to the historical significance of the building.

The Project Would or Could Likely Demolish or Materially Alter Even The Acknowledged Character-Defining Elements of the Theater That Are Proposed to be Maintained.

These include:

- the auditorium itself (Attachment 1-C, E & F);
- the proscenium wall (Attachment 1-B & -D);
- the organ grills (Attachment 1-G);
- the ornate ceiling (Attachment 1-H); and
- the fire curtain (Attachment 1-B).

The proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration and the Initial Study identify no mitigation measures to protect these features, which the document and the Corrette Report concede contribute to the historical significance of the Harding Theater and are central to its integrity. The document specifies no measures to guarantee that any of these features will be preserved, protected, or replaced. There are no measures to protect the building itself and these features against accidental or intentional demolition, damage, or loss during the demolition of the rear wall, stage, proscenium wall, orchestra pit and wings, excavation of the proposed new parking garage, and the reconstruction process. No demolition controls, structural or shoring requirements, are required. No oversight and supervision by qualified preservation architecture and engineering professionals is required. The demolition, excavation, and reconstruction aspects of the Project threaten

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to demolish or at least materially alter in an adverse manner even those features that the Initial Study assumes might be preserved.

The excavation of a new underground parking garage would require removal of the seats and demolition of the original floor of the auditorium. (Attachment 1-C, -E, -F.) Loss of the original floor and the historic seating dating to the period of significance is a material adverse change to the resource.

The acknowledged changes discussed under “Building Plan” to elements that are concededly significant — to the entry, lobby, retail spaces, mezzanine stairs, landings, *etc.* — are undefined and not subject to any stated standard or measures to ensure that these elements are not materially altered or destroyed.

The Initial Study’s reliance on the Secretary of the Interior Standards and Preservation Brief No. 18 fails to address the significant loss of the stage, stage fly, orchestra pit, stage wings, fire curtain, floor, and seating. The extensive alterations to virtually every part of the building in fact conflict with those standards. Further, citation to the standards is no substitute for affirmative, legally enforceable conditions to protect the integrity of the building as a whole during demolition, and the proscenium wall, the organ grills, and the ceiling, against irreparable damage or loss. Standing alone and without any clearly defined plans and conditions that can be evaluated for consistency and compliance with the standards, mere citation to the standards is too vague and generalized to eliminate the substantial adverse impacts.

The Corrette Report and the Initial Study recognize that the integrity of the Harding interior rests at least in part on the sense of space in the auditorium — that “the feeling of the theater” remains intact. The Project proposes to materially alter the original sense of space by changing the dimensions and sight lines of the auditorium, and its relationship to the ground floor and balcony seating.

The Project Would Have a Significant Cumulative Impact, and the Effects of the Project are Cumulatively Considerable, on the Loss of Historic Movie Theaters.

An effect is “cumulatively considerable” when “the incremental effects of an individual project are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.” (Guideline § 15064(h).) The Parks Report (Attachment 5) establishes that there are few remaining Reid Brothers’ theaters sharing the Harding’s level of integrity. Prior projects

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have resulted in the demolition or significant alteration of the other Reid Brothers' theaters in San Francisco. The incremental effect of this Project in connection with prior and ongoing theater demolition and conversion projects would have a substantial adverse environmental impact on the heritage of silent movie theaters in general, and the Reid Brothers' legacy in particular. The Initial Study fails to include any analysis of cumulative impacts on historical resources.

The Project Would Conflict With Local Land Use Plans, Policies, and Regulations and Have a Significant Adverse Environmental Impact on Land Use and Recreational Resources.

The demolition of a large and historically part of the Harding Theater would conflict with the Urban Design Element of the San Francisco General Plan, and particularly with Objective 2 ("Conservation Of Resources Which Provide A Sense Of Nature, Continuity With The Past, And Freedom From Overcrowding"). Associated Policy 4 requires that the City "[p]reserve notable landmarks and areas of historic, architectural or aesthetic value, and promote the preservation of other buildings and features that provide continuity with past development."

The Project is inconsistent with the City's policies and ordinances requiring preservation of movie theaters.

The Project would conflict with local land use plans and policies regarding recreational resources and have a significant adverse environmental effect on recreational resources. Health and Safety Policy 4.8 of the Urban Design Element of the General Plan requires that the City [p]rovide convenient access to a variety of recreation opportunities." Specifically: "*All possible means of providing recreation facilities should be explored. Some historic buildings and their sites have such a potential.*"

The Project seriously compromises the reuse of the Harding Theater as a movie theater and essentially destroys its use as a live performance space. As noted, the north and south stairways would be demolished. Secondary egress via these stairs out the sides of the building to Hayes Street would be eliminated. These alterations would permanently render the Harding unusable for performances of any kind, and very probably even as an assembly space.

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The Project Would Result In Significant Adverse Environmental Impacts on Traffic Flows, Traffic Safety, and Parking.

The Initial Study suggests that the contemplated use of the remaining auditorium (Tenant Space "C") is for "assembly." However, a conditional use permit is proposed to be issued to allow commercial use of the entire building. Space "C" could be leased to a commercial or retail tenant separately or in combination with the street-front retail spaces. Even if the use of Space "C" were restricted to "assembly," commercial or retail use of the entire building is a clearly foreseeable use, regardless of what uses might technically be permitted for Space "C."

As noted, the elimination of the north and south stairs and existing secondary access from the auditorium to Hayes Street render it highly questionable whether the auditorium could safely, lawfully, and practically be used for the unspecified "assembly" purposes. The 18-space underground parking garage and the leveling of the auditorium floor further confirm that future commercial or retail use is not only foreseeable, but probable for Space "C."

Noteworthy retail uses of Reid Brothers theaters include the Apollo on Geneva Avenue near Mission Street and the Coliseum on Clement Street. At the Apollo, new residential construction at the rear of the lot, in a configuration somewhat similar to this Project, was combined with a Walgreen's store in the auditorium space. A Walgreen's is combined with residential in the Coliseum in a different configuration.

The Initial Study estimates the total daily person trips generated by the project with an assumed "assembly" use at 530 to 680. This increase would have a substantial impact on traffic at least at the Divisadero and Hayes intersection. However, if the proponent leased the building to Walgreen's, a similar commercial tenant, or a fitness center, the number of trips will be much higher than if the use is for "assembly." The Initial Study fails to analyze the impact of traffic, safety, and parking caused by a foreseeable intensive retail or commercial use of the entire building.

Intensive retail or commercial use of all of the remaining theater would substantially increase traffic along Divisadero and Hayes Streets, and acutely at their intersection. Cars turning to enter or exit the underground garage or to seek on-street parking would increase hazards and result in substantial safety risks.

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For these same reasons, intensive retail or commercial use will likely result in inadequate parking that would not be accommodated by the 18 underground spaces.

* * * * *

For these reasons, among others, the Mitigated Negative Declaration cannot be adopted. The Initial Study is deficient. An Environmental Impact Report for this Project must be prepared and duly certified.

The Friends reserve the right to provide further evidence and information and raise other points and issues relating to the environmental review of this Project and any land use approvals and other entitlements that may be required for this Project.

Very truly yours,



Arthur D. Levy

Attachments
ADL:amw

cc: James A. Reuben (w/att.)
Honorable Ross Mirkarimi (w/att.)
Friends of 1800 (w/att.)

ATTACHMENT "1"



PHOTO "A"



PHOTO "B"

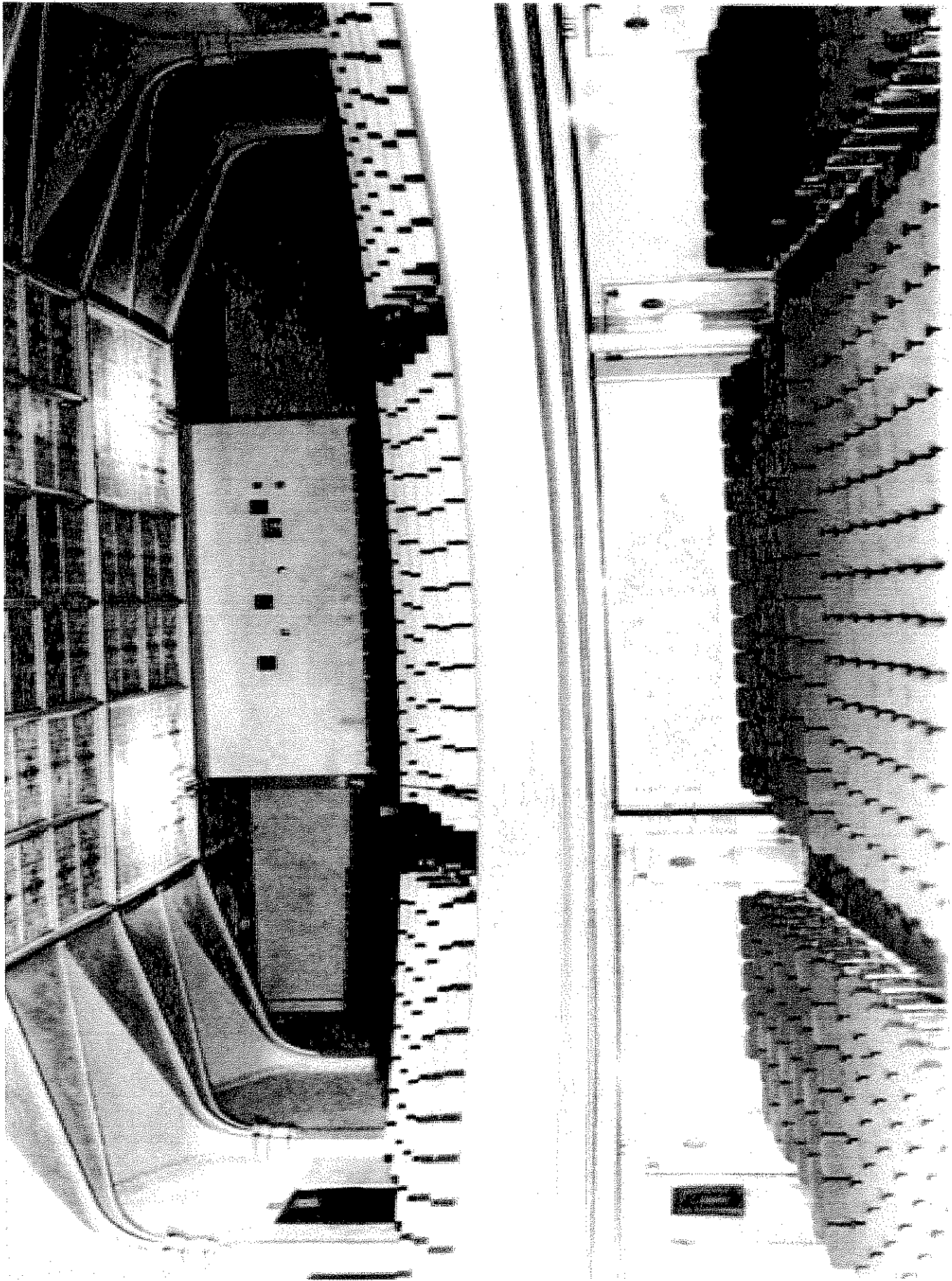


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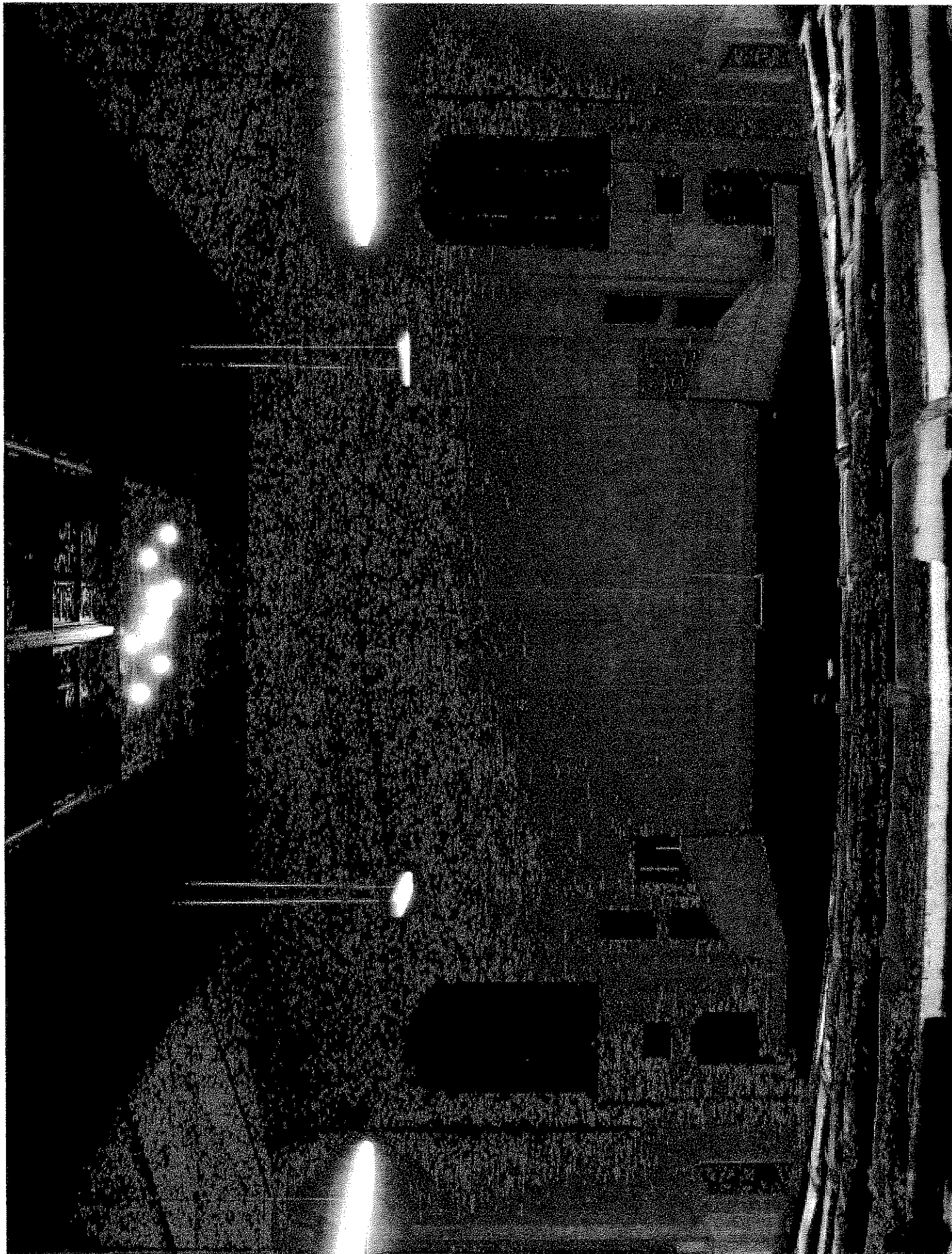


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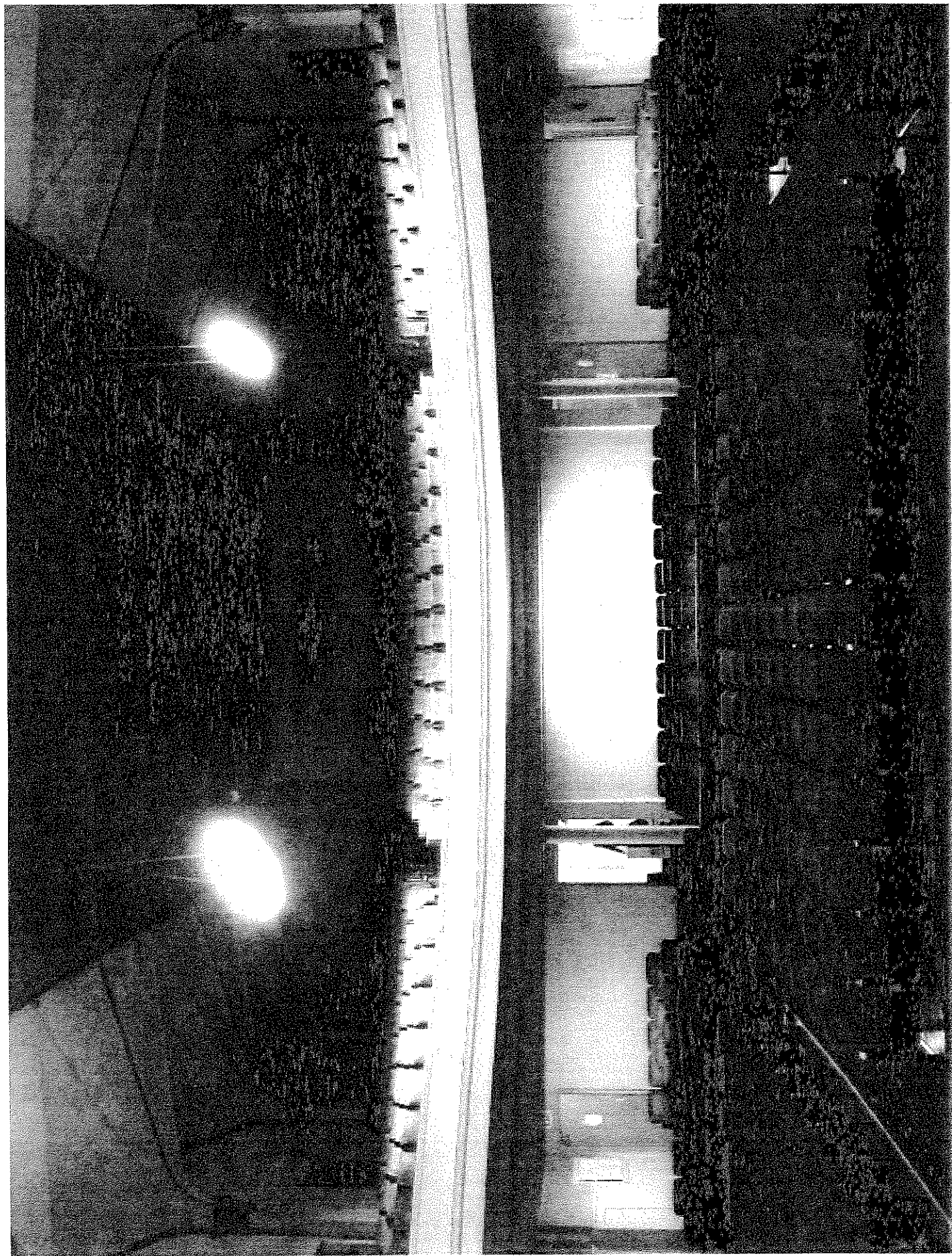


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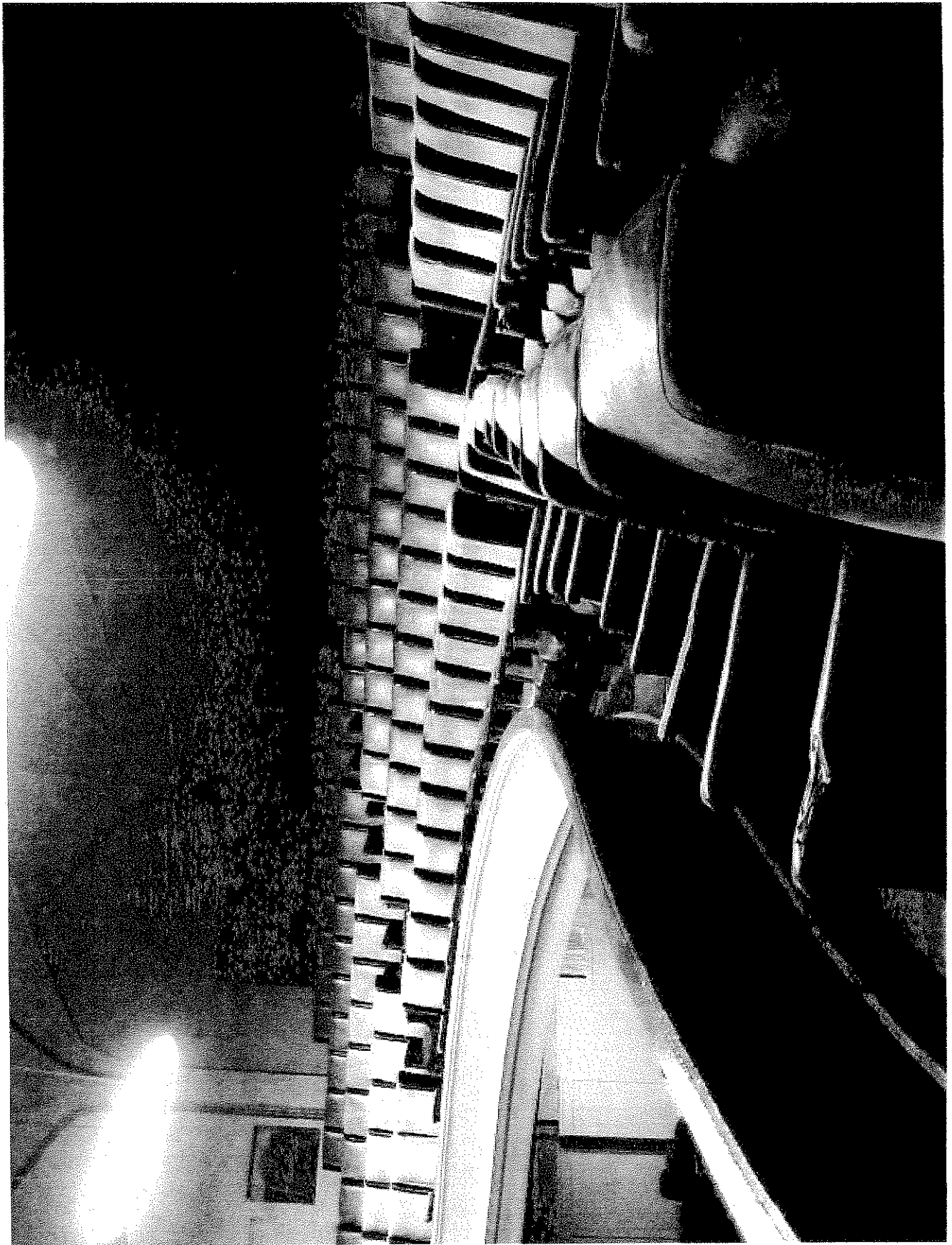


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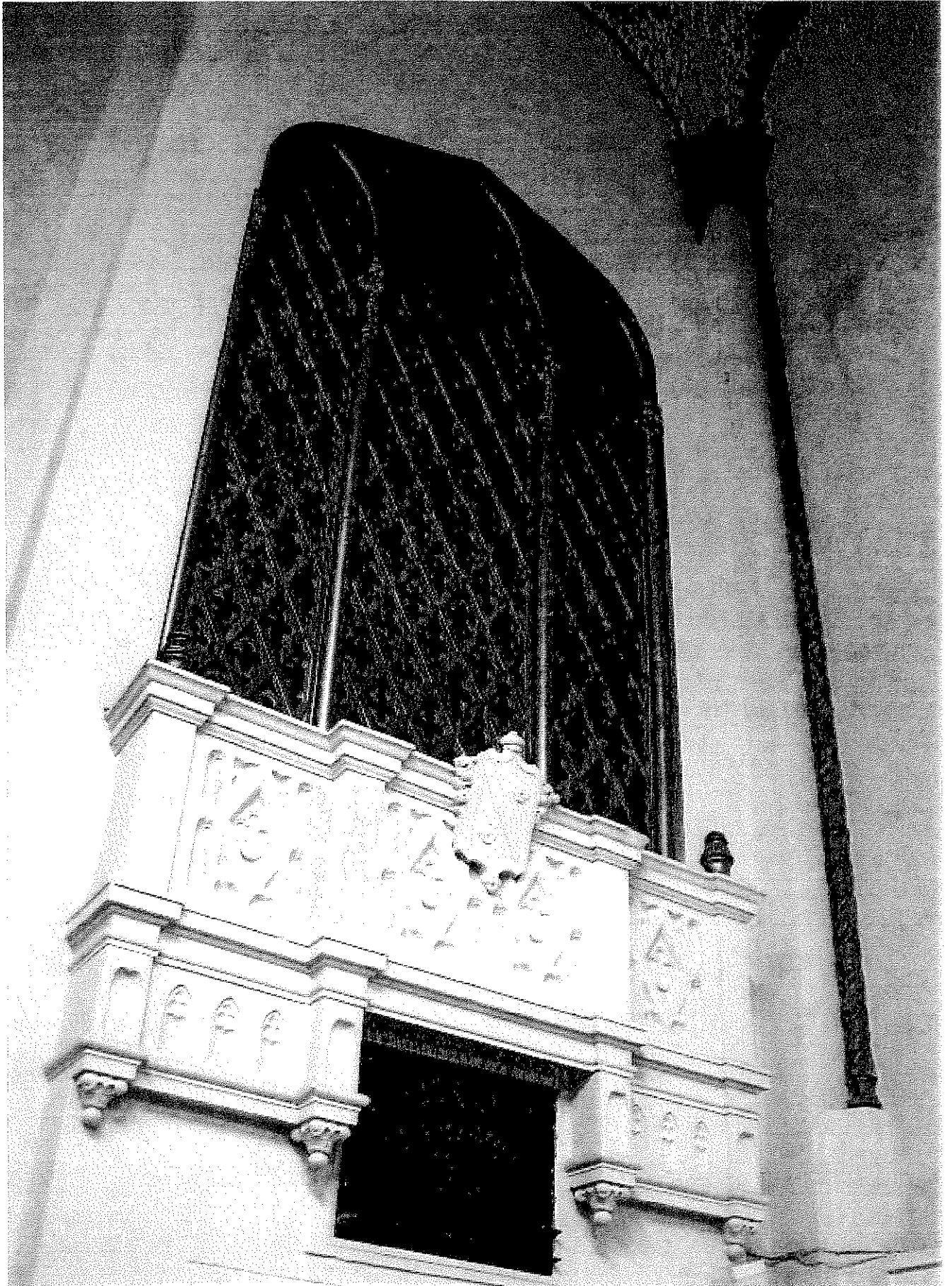


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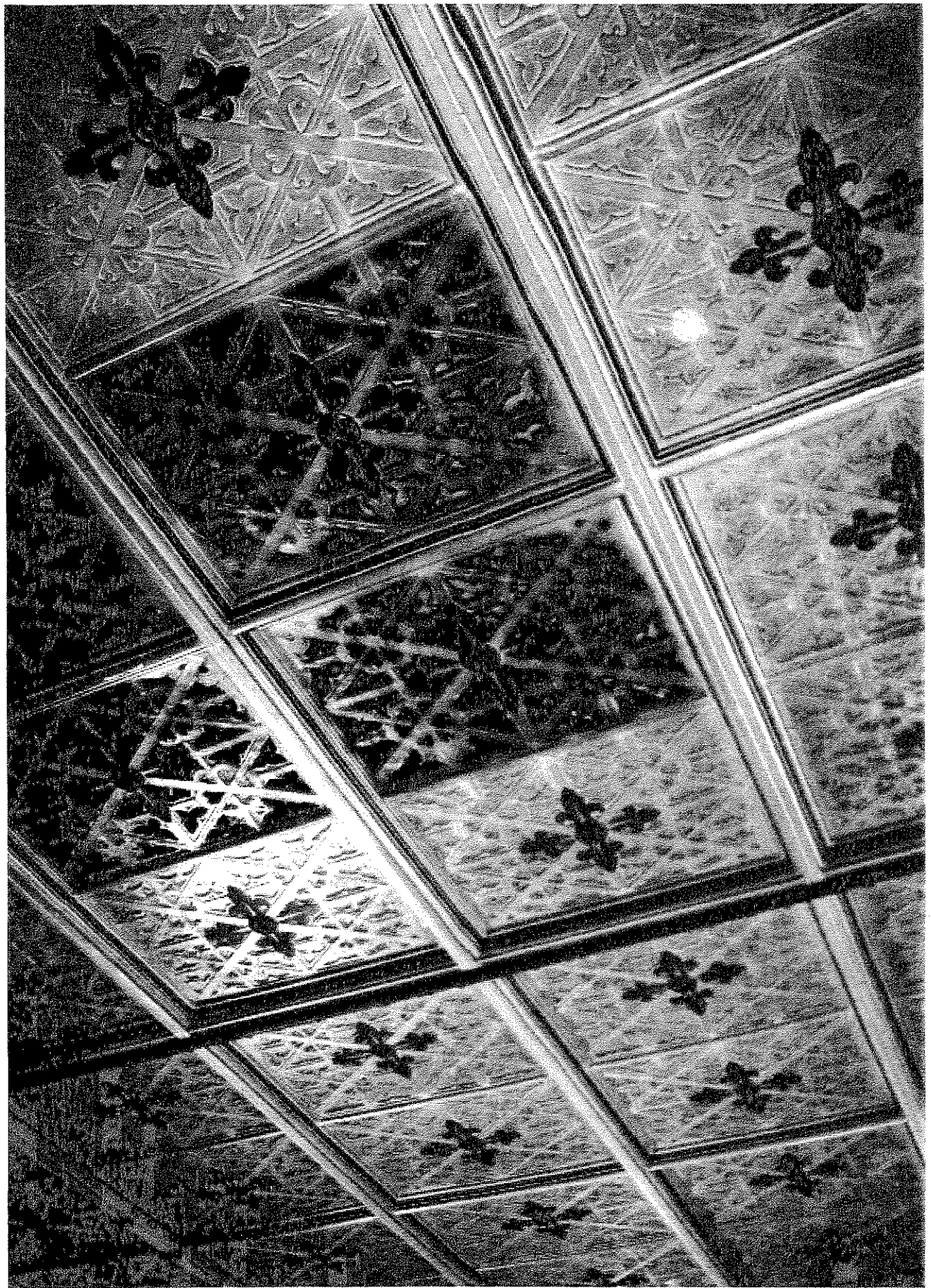


PHOTO "H"

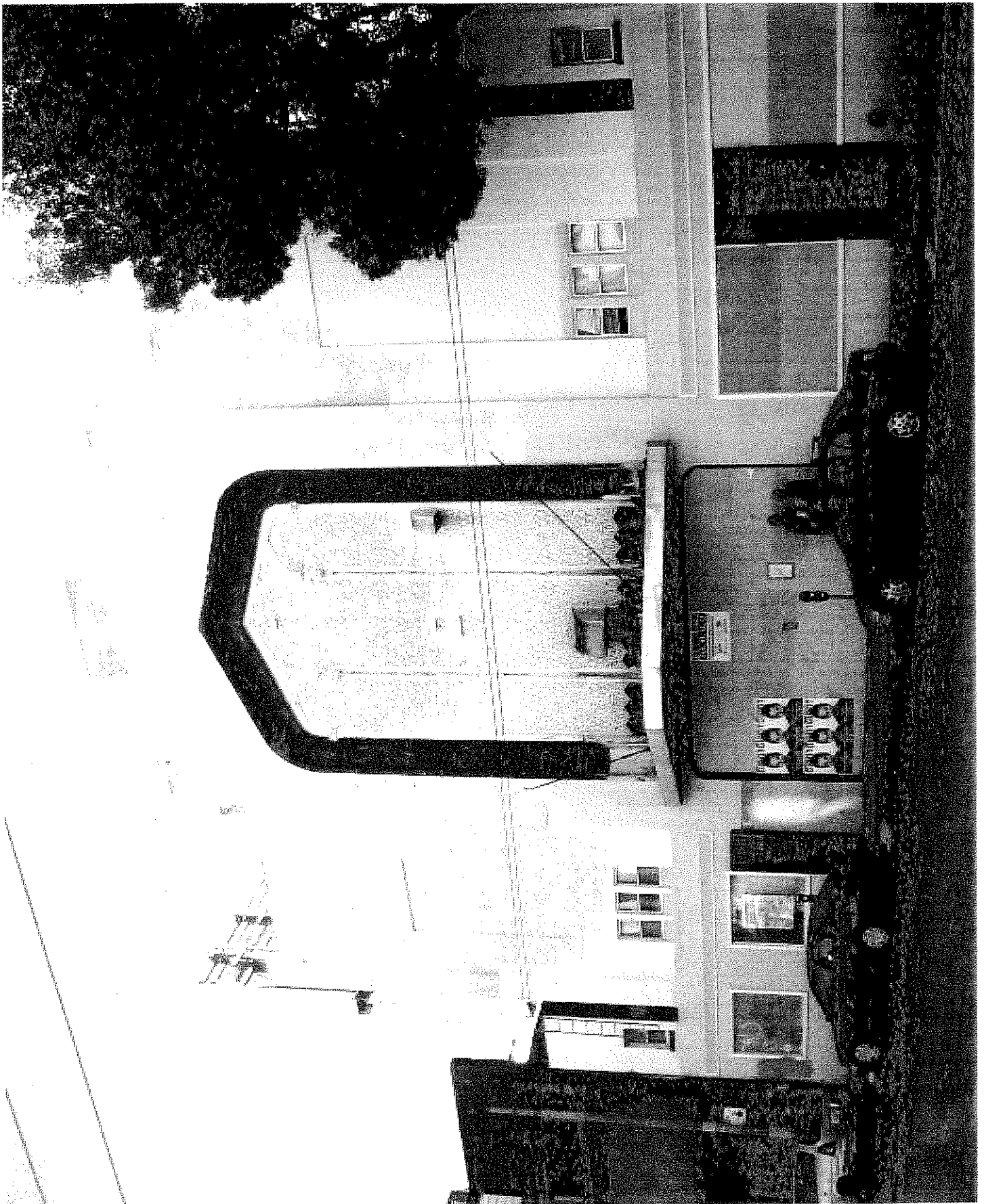


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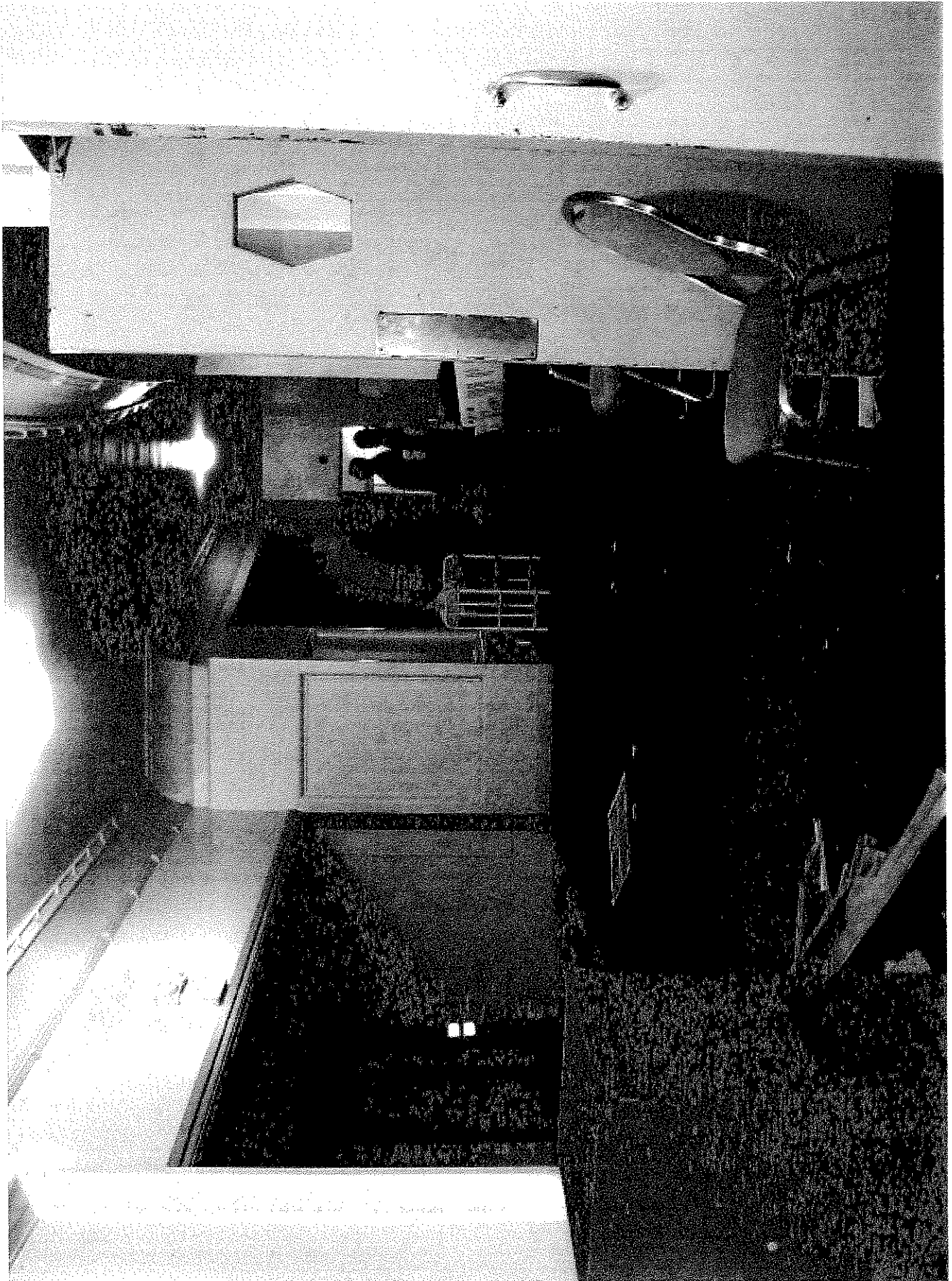


PHOTO "J"

ATTACHMENT "2"



PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Tammy Chan, Major Environmental Analysis Unit

CC: S. Banks, Recording Secretary, Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board
V. Byrd / Historic Resource Impact Review File

FROM: N. Moses Corrette, Preservation Technical Specialist 

REVIEWED BY: Mark Luellen, Preservation Coordinator

DATE: October 23, 2006

RE: Address 616 Divisadero Street
Block: 1202 Lot: 2J
Case No.: 2003.0807E
Historic Resource Evaluation Response

PROPOSED PROJECT

1. Project Description

The project entails the subdivision of the existing lot into 1278 Hayes and 606-624 Divisadero, and retention of most of the existing building, including the entire auditorium space, formerly occupied by the Harding Theater, to reuse the space for entertainment or commercial use along Divisadero. The existing fly loft would be removed. The project also entails new construction of nine residential units with nine parking spaces on newly created parcel along Hayes Street. (Also refer to case # 2003.0807E) An underground parking garage may be constructed below the level of the existing sloped floor, allowing for it to be reconstructed once a tenant is identified for the auditorium space.

In 2003, a proposal included the demolition of the existing 12,000 square foot building located at 606-624 Divisadero Street, formerly known as the Harding Theater, and construction of two residential buildings in its place, together with construction of a new residential building at 1278 Hayes Street. Divisadero Hayes LLC withdrew the demolition and submitted the following new project description for 606-624 Divisadero Street and 1278 Hayes Street:

- I. The project includes subdivision of the Property in order to separate the Harding Theater parcel from the residential development parcel that will front on Hayes Street.
- II. In order to accommodate the existing building located at 606-624 Divisadero Street, formally known as the Harding Theater, the building will not be demolished, and instead, the foremost 113 feet will be retained including the proscenium and full

depth of the auditorium space, subject only to the following alteration in phase one: removal of the rearmost 24' 10" portion of the building limited to the fly loft. A new rear wall will be constructed of reinforced concrete incorporating recommendations from a sound engineer.

- III. Front elevation restoration in keeping with the theater property type will be made to the former Harding Theater building to encourage leasing activities, including a reconstructed marquee, and potentially a vertical blade sign, based on documented evidence. (Sketch attached.) The existing billboard on the side of the building on Divisadero Street will remain, and the billboard on the Hayes Street side of the lot will be removed.
- IV. Phase two consists of a parking add- option under the floor of the existing auditorium space, but depressed below the surface so as to allow for the reconstruction of a raked floor should a new use of the auditorium require it. Access to this parking area will be from Hayes Street. (See drawings)
- V. A new structure on the lot at 1278 Hayes Street will contain nine residential units with nine independently accessible off-street parking spaces, accessible from Hayes Street in accordance with the attached sketch. The height of the building proposed is 50 feet – about the same height as the present fly loft; however a taller building to the height limit of 65 feet could be built. An emergency exit will connect the south exit court of the former Harding Theater building to Hayes Street through a dedicated right-of-way.

2. **Property Description**

Built in 1926 of steel reinforced concrete, the building known as the Harding Theater, at 616 Divisadero Street follows a standard plan for a neighborhood theater building with a tripartite façade containing storefronts flanking a central entry under a projecting marquee. The building is approximately 35 feet to the roof, and 40 feet to the top of the parapet. The façade now features a stripped triangular-shaped marquee without signage or ornament: all the result of a 1936 alteration. The original four small storefronts have been infilled. The central open, recessed lobby has been blocked from the street by a temporary security wall of plywood. The sidewalk and floor of the recessed lobby and entrance vestibule feature an ornamental terrazzo floor installed in 1937. The upper façade features a large (about 20 feet wide X 30 feet tall) centrally located tracery window. The window is made of a cement plaster and sits within a tripartite Gothic arch. The tracery itself draws inspiration from Islamic stone windows. Flanking this main decorative element are two recessed vertical panels, each contains three small windows in their lower edge. There are articulated pilasters that rise the full four-story height on the sides of the main façade. To either side of the main façade are smaller two-story recessed wings, each with a single window at the second story. There is a shaped parapet above the central portion of the main façade.

The interior is accessed through the recessed open lobby (11 feet deep; the freestanding ticket booth is no longer extant) through five pairs of wooden sash doors at the vestibule (6 feet deep) into the entrance foyer (17 feet deep), each with a high ceiling and decorative plasterwork. From this point, one may enter the main theater through doors leading to the aisles, or to the balcony by one of the two staircases. Inside the auditorium, the balcony is

drawn on a 32-foot radius, and is supported by two concrete and steel columns. The main volume of the theater auditorium features a wooden floor that slopes down to the raised stage, and a deflected vaulted ceiling that slopes down about six feet for ¼ of the width of the span. The ceiling is suspended from the structural steel Warren trusses (with vertical members). The ceiling panels are cast plaster akin to that found in the exterior's tracery window, and form a primary interior embellishment. The interior finishes on the walls are decorative plaster, both pre-cast and continuous cast. The side walls are divided into sections at the intersections of the vaulted ceiling and divided by articulated pilasters. The proscenium features a Gothic arch currently infilled, flanked by organ lofts with cast plaster tracery similar to that found on the ceiling and the façade. The seats within the auditorium are of three varieties and date from before 1946. Both the stage and projection room (less the machinery) remain in their historic condition, excepting for the infilling of the orchestra pit.

3. Historic Rating/Survey

There are no prior surveys or ratings on the subject building. Several historians have produced reports with differing conclusions as to the eligibility of the Harding for listing in the California Register. This response draws from historic resource evaluation reports authored by Jonathan Pearlman, Gary Lee Parks, Christopher VerPlanck and Katherine Petrin. Letters from several other parties have also been consulted.

4. Historic District/Neighborhood Context

The block on which the building is situated is the former location of the Pacific Hebrew Orphan Asylum & Home Society Orphanage. That building and its various outbuildings occupied the entire block bound by Divisadero, Grove, Scott and Hayes Streets. (601 Scott Street may be the lone exception) The Orphanage was demolished circa 1920, and the block was opened for development.

BACKGROUND/CEQA CONSIDERATIONS

The evaluation of properties for potential impacts to "historical resources" under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is a two-step process; the first step is to determine whether the property is an "historical resource" as defined in Section 15064.5(a) (3) of CEQA, and if it is an "historical resource," the second is to evaluate whether the action or project proposed by the sponsor would cause a "substantial adverse change" to the "historical resource." The responses to these questions will have a bearing not only on the type of environmental documentation that will be necessary but also how the property will be analyzed.

The first step for an environmental evaluation is to determine whether the potential property fits the definition of an "historic resource" as defined in the CEQA Statutes and Guidelines. To answer the first step, the Planning Department in its document titled CEQA Review Procedures for Historic Resources defines four categories for classifying properties based on their evaluation and inclusion in specified registers or surveys.

The Major Environmental Analysis unit planner has determined that this property falls into **Category B, Properties Requiring Further Consultation and Review**. (Properties which do not meet the criteria for listing in A, but for which the City has information indicating that further consultation and review will be required for evaluation whether a property is an historical resource for purposes of CEQA.)

Under CEQA, the lead agency may make a determination that the property is historically significant, if the resource meets the criteria for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources under one of the four following criteria:

1. **Event:** It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of California or the United States; or
2. **Persons:** It is associated with the lives of person important to local, California, or national history; or
3. **Architecture:** It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic values; or
4. **Information Potential:** It has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California, or the nation.

A building must also have integrity to be eligible for the California Register. Specifically, historical resources must meet one of the criteria of significance described above and retain enough of their historic character or appearance to be recognizable as historical resources and to convey the reason for their significance.

EVALUATION / ANALYSIS

1. History

The Harding Theater was erected in 1926 from plans by the Reid Brothers, for their client, Samuel H. Levin, one of three movie house developers in San Francisco in the first half of the 20th Century. The building operated as a venue for movies, live theater and retail from the commercial storefronts. By the 1960s, the venue was also used by theater troupes such as The Lamplighters, and as a live concert venue for musical performances. From the mid 1970s to 2004, the Harding was home to a Baptist congregation. Further detailed history of the Harding Theater is found on pages 2 & 3 of the Pearlman report and on pages 6 & 7 of the Parks report, and lastly within the VerPlanck and Petrin letters (all attached w/o appendices).

2. Period of Significance

As the work of a master architect, the building's period of significance is limited to the date of construction, 1926. Changes to the building that have gained significance occurred in 1937, with the decorative terrazzo sidewalk and entry floor. As an example of a neighborhood theater that remained in business of showing films, the period of significance is related to the period it was operated as a theater, 1926- c.1970.

3. Character-Defining Features

The character defining features of a theater building are enumerated above in "Property Description"

4. Integrity

The subject property has retained or lacks integrity from the period of significance noted above, as follows:

location,	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Retains	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacks	slightly diminished on exterior
design,	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Retains	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacks	
materials,	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Retains	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacks	
workmanship,	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Retains	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacks	
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feeling,	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Retains	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacks	
association.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Retains	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacks	

The integrity of the building is relatively high. Changes to the façade that removed ornament have occurred within a period of significance while the building was still operating as a theater. Integrity of design is diminished as the marquee and other signage has been removed, and the alteration of the four storefronts and elimination of the ticket booth. Cumulatively, the effect is less than significant.

DETERMINATION

1. Whether the property is an "historical resource" for purposes of CEQA. If more information is needed to make such a determination please specify what information is needed.

- **Event:** or Yes No Unable to determine
- **Persons:** or Yes No Unable to determine
- **Architecture:** or Yes No Unable to determine
- **Information Potential:** Yes No Unable to determine

Events:

1925 - c.1970 – movie and theater venue
 Chain of events – Use as a single-screen movie theater possibly significant period of significance 1925-c.1970 Evaluation of integrity encompasses all changes to the building that occurred as the building changed while the use was still the same. Interior and exterior seem to retain sufficient integrity, as changed occurred primarily c.1938-1946 in attempts to shift the building into a more moderne style.
 1960s-1970s – venue for theater and music (no known significance)
 1970s-2004 – Baptist church (no known significance)

Person

Samuel H. Levin – client who had the building erected, owned and operated neighborhood theaters in San Francisco. Person associated must be significant, and have a close link to the building. Then assess if there are better examples of buildings with better associations. Levin was a developer of theaters in the area, but research has not been conducted to demonstrate his significance or lack thereof.

Architecture

Work of a master architect **YES**, Reid Brothers (Victor H. Poss, Consulting engineer)
 Period of significance is limited to the date it was finally executed to the plans by the master architect, in this case, 1925. As a publicly accessible interior, both the interior and exterior

of the building are considered in assessing the work of a master architect. Changes that have occurred over time will diminish integrity.

The building at 616 Divisadero Street is not the Reid Brothers best work, nor is it the best theater they made, but it is an unusual application of Gothic Revival style used in a theater building, and the work of master architects. California Register eligibility does not require a property to be the best, first, or most preserved work of a master architect. The bar is lower than that of the National Register. For the California Register, it must be able to convey the elements that associate it as a work of a master. Cumulatively, the exterior changes do reduce the integrity of design, but the integrity of the interior is much higher, resulting in a less than significant effect.

Information Potential

Unable to determine (consult Randall Dean, MEA staff)

2. **If the property appears to be an historical resource, whether the proposed project is consistent with the Secretary of Interior's Standards or if any proposed modifications would materially impair the resource (i.e. alter in an adverse manner those physical characteristics which justify the property's inclusion in any registry to which it belongs).**

As a theater building property type (not legal use), the building consists of character-defining features on both the exterior and interior. Review of proposed alterations is based on both the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, as well as Preservation Brief No. 18: Rehabilitating Interiors in Historic Buildings, Identifying and Preserving Character-Defining Elements¹.

Character-defining features of the former Harding Theater building, as a theater property type include: the building's plan (sequence of spaces and circulation patterns), the building's spaces (theater auditorium and volumes), individual architectural features, and the various finishes and materials that make up the walls, floors, and ceilings.

Phase one of the development consists of the removal of the rear 24' 10" of the building, erection of a new rear wall, and façade restoration, as described above in sections I, II, and III.

Secretary of Interior's Standards & Responses

1. *A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.*
 - a. Phase one does not propose a new use for the former Harding Theater building. New use proposals are assessed below beginning on page 8.
2. *The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.*

¹ <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief18.htm>

- a. The exterior of the theater will be altered by the removal of the rear portions of the building, visible only from the presently vacant portion of the lot facing Hayes Street. On the interior, there will be an alteration to the historic spatial relationship and proportions of the auditorium as well as the removal and reconstruction of the proscenium.
 - b. In this first phase, possible alterations to the entry, vestibule, north and south staircases will not occur until tenant improvements are made, and such alterations will undergo independent CEQA assessments as needed.
 - c. It is hoped that the spatial relationship of the recessed entry and decorative terrazzo floor will remain intact through the tenant improvements.
3. *Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.*
- a. As seen from the primary elevation on Divisadero Street, the former Harding Theater building will undergo a restoration to its 1926 appearance based on archival materials.
4. *Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.*
- a. Changes to the building over time have largely involved the removal of ornament from the primary façade.
 - b. One change to the building that has gained significance over time is the ramped terrazzo floor connecting the sidewalk with the lobby. It will be retained.
5. *Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.*
- a. The theater's interior contains several cast panels, which are unique and demonstrate a high level of craftsmanship. Most will remain *in-situ*, and those that may need to be relocated (based on the physical requirements of constructing a new rear building wall) will first be documented with high-quality photographs to HABS standards, so that in the event they are damaged or destroyed, they may be repaired or reconstructed. (See also Section 3G below)
 - b. Several distinctive cast metal theater seat ends are found in the building. Examples of each distinctive type will be retained on site.
6. *Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.*
- a. This directive will guide the repairs to the Divisadero Street façade, which will use historic photographs, and original plans as a basis for the reconstruction.
7. *Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.*
- a. This directive will guide the repairs to the Divisadero Street façade.
 - b. Sandblasting will not occur.

8. *Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.*
 - a. *This section to be addressed as necessary by MEA.*

9. *New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.*
 - a. *The building's main public façade on Divisadero Street will be retained and restored. Exterior alterations related to the new construction will only be seen from the Hayes Street side, separated by the existing corner building, and will not normally be seen together.*

10. *New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*
 - a. *While a reduction of the building will occur, the essential form of the building and its environment will be unimpaired.*

Phase two consists of a parking add under the floor of the auditorium, as follows (described in detail on attached sheets provided by the architects): "The rear wall of 616 Divisadero Street will be rebuilt at the proposed new location and a new garage level will be excavated and built below street level and contain approximately sixteen [16] parking spaces. There will be no car access from the Divisadero Street frontage and the only driveway access to this new garage will be through the adjacent new nine unit residential structure located at 1242 Hayes Street."

Preservation Brief No. 18: Rehabilitating Interiors in Historic Buildings & Responses

1. *Retain and preserve floor plans and interior spaces that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building. This includes the size, configuration, proportion, and relationship of rooms and corridors; the relationship of features to spaces; and the spaces themselves such as lobbies, reception halls, entrance halls, double parlors, theaters, auditoriums, and important industrial or commercial use spaces.*
 - a. *This Phase two option proposes no further alteration of the floor plan or interior spaces beyond what occurs in Phase one.*

2. *Avoid subdividing spaces that are characteristic of a building type or style or that are directly associated with specific persons or patterns of events. Space may be subdivided both vertically through the insertion of new partitions or horizontally through insertion of new floors or mezzanines. The insertion of new additional floors should be considered only when they will not damage or destroy the structural system or obscure, damage, or destroy character-defining spaces, features, or finishes.*
 - a. *This Phase two alternative proposes no further alteration of the floor plan or interior spaces beyond what occurs in Phase one.*
 - b. *Possible intrusions into the open recessed lobby should they occur will receive independent CEQA analysis.*

- c. While the floor of the auditorium is under construction, the existing plywood paneling will remain in place to provide protection to the interior walls.
3. *Avoid making new cuts in floors and ceilings where such cuts would change character-defining spaces and the historic configuration of such spaces.*
 - a. This Phase two alternative proposes no further alteration of the floor plan or interior spaces beyond what occurs in Phase one.
 - b. Removal of the seats, wooden floor, stage, and concrete sub floor in order to allow for the construction of an underground parking structure are reversible, as the depth of the garage below grade allows for the sloped floor to be reconstructed as necessary for the new occupant of the space.
4. *Avoid installing dropped ceilings below ornamental ceilings or in rooms where high ceilings are part of the building's character. In addition to obscuring or destroying significant details, such treatments will also change the space's proportions.*
 - a. No dropped ceilings are proposed.
5. *Retain and preserve interior features and finishes that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building. This might include columns, doors, cornices, baseboards, fireplaces and mantels, paneling, light fixtures, elevator cabs, hardware, and flooring; and wallpaper, plaster, paint, and finishes such as stenciling, marbleizing, and graining; and other decorative materials that accent interior features and provide color, texture, and patterning to walls, floors, and ceilings.*
 - a. Interior features and finishes will be retained and restored.
6. *Retain stairs in their historic configuration and to location. If a second means of egress is required, consider constructing new stairs in secondary spaces.*
 - a. Existing stairs will be retained in their current historic configuration. Possible removal of one or both stairs, should they occur, will receive independent CEQA analysis.
 - b. Second means of egress will be made by a right-of-way onto the new Hayes Street building.
7. *Retain and preserve visible features of early mechanical systems that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building, such as radiators, vents, fans, grilles, plumbing fixtures, switchplates, and lights. If new heating, air conditioning, lighting and plumbing systems are installed, they should be done in a way that does not destroy character-defining spaces, features and finishes.*
 - a. Above mentioned visible features will be retained and preserved.
8. *Avoid "furring out" perimeter walls for insulation purposes.*
 - a. Perimeter walls will not be "furred out".
9. *Avoid removing paint and plaster from traditionally finished surfaces, to expose masonry and wood. Repairing deteriorated plasterwork is encouraged.*
 - a. Deteriorated plaster work will be retained and repaired.

10. *Avoid using destructive methods--propane and butane torches or sandblasting--to remove paint or other coatings from historic features.*

- a. No destructive methods are proposed to remove paint or other coatings.

NOTE: In addition to the above Recommended Approaches for Rehabilitating Historic Interiors, the plans meet the Secretary of the Interior's Rehabilitation Standards.

The Second proposed project described in section V above: Nine residential units will be built on the lot at 1278 Hayes Street, with nine independently accessible off-street parking spaces, accessible from Hayes Street in accordance with the attached sketch. An emergency exit will connect the south exit court of the former Harding Theater building to Hayes Street through a dedicated right-of-way. **It is essential that the project incorporates legal life-safety exiting for the remaining volume of the former Harding Theater building for it to retain legal occupancy. Should another City Agency find that the remaining portions of the building cannot meet safety codes; the reuse plan(s) would be untenable, and the project(s) as a whole would create an unavoidable significant impact on an historic resource.**

3. **If material impairments are noted, what character-defining features of the building or district could be retained or respected in order to avoid a significant adverse effect by the project, presently or cumulatively, as modifications to the project to reduce or avoid impacts. Please recommend conditions of approval that may be desirable but do not mitigate the project's adverse effects.**

Character-defining features that should be retained include: the façade, the upper portions of which will be restored, based on the original plans to the original design. The storefronts have been altered, and no longer retain integrity may be changed with a greater ease. The decorative terrazzo floor from the sidewalk to the buildings entry is a character-defining feature and should be preserved to the greatest extent feasible. The open recessed lobby likewise is an important feature. The main interior auditorium volume and ornamental plasterwork should be preserved.

- A. The Harding theater building will be used as it was historically, or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
- B. Exterior character-defining features that should be retained include: the façade, which is to be restored, based on the original plans to the original design to avoid a cumulative impact of phase one, the removal of the rear 24 feet, 10 inches, including fly loft. The storefronts have been altered, and no longer retain integrity may be changed with a greater ease.
- C. Signage that complies with the Planning Code as well as awnings and marquee reconstruction will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
- D. The central recessed arcade (Lobby) entry will be reopened to the street by the removal of the temporary plywood security wall.
- E. The sidewalk and floor of the recessed arcade feature an ornamental terrazzo floor installed in 1937 will remain. The slope of this floor meets the State Historical Building Code.

- F. Before an alteration permit is issued that removes portions of the Harding Theater, the project sponsor will create a catalog of the significant interior features that will include a medium-format photograph, and written description to include materials and dimensions of such features (Plaster ornamentation on walls and ceiling, sections of the proscenium, fixtures and furnishings). One copy of this catalog will be given to the San Francisco History Center at the Main Public Library, and a second will be given to the Planning Department.
- G. If there is a gross failure in the attempt to move the historic materials, reconstruction as needed of damaged or destroyed materials will be based on the documentation prepared as condition (G) above.
- H. At present, the portion of the lot facing Hayes Street serves as a path of exit for emergencies. When a new building is erected on this site, this path of travel will no longer be able to be used. Project sponsor has planned for a right-of-way exit path through the new Hayes Street building. Should this prove insufficient for exiting of any of the five alternative schemes for the remaining portions of the Harding Theater to maintain occupancy, new alternatives will need to be presented. The construction of a Hayes Street building shall not leave the Harding Theater unable to be occupied.

4. **Whether the proposed project may have an adverse effect on off-site historical resources, such as adjacent historic properties.**

Yes No Unable to determine

Two buildings, 639-641 Divisadero and 635-637 Divisadero, directly across the street from the subject building were surveyed as part of the 1976 Architectural Survey. Both buildings were erected in the nineteenth century, and are of a different context from the subject building's blockface. There will be no adverse affects on off-site resources by either the removal of the rear portions of the existing building, or the new construction on the Hayes Street lot.

Conclusion: The proposed project incorporates several elements to restore the façade and general public experience of the former Harding Theater, while making alterations to the rear and to a limited, and mostly reversible extent, the interior. The restoration efforts enhance the building's exterior, respect the design, replace missing elements, and avoids a cumulative a negative impact. Future tenant improvements to the historic portions of the building, should they occur, will receive independent CEQA analysis.

ATTACHMENT "3"

November 20, 2006

By Facsimile & Mail

Mr. N. Moses Corrette
Preservation Technical Specialist
Planning Department
City & County of San Francisco
1660 Mission Street
Suite 500
San Francisco, California 94103-2414

Re: The Harding Theater
616 Divisadero Street
Case No. "2003.0807E"

Dear Mr. Corrette:

Thank you for sending me your Historic Evaluation Response Memorandum regarding the Harding Theater. I represent the Friends of 1800 with regard to the Harding and am responding on the Friends' behalf.

It is gratifying that the Planning Department now recognizes the Harding as an historic resource and is considering measures for its protection. We appreciate the effort that went into your review and assessment of the historic dimensions of the Harding.

The new project application is reduced from the original 2003 plan. It calls for only nine condominium units, instead of the 16 proposed under the original plan, as well as retention of the façade, entryway, lobby and auditorium. However, the 2006 plan still calls for demolition of the vaudeville stage and stage fly tower to make way for the condominiums. Loss of the stage and its fly tower will have a significant unavoidable adverse impact on this historic resource. Further, demolition of the stage and fly tower will jeopardize reuse options for the theater, and could spell its eventual demolition and for further condominium development if the proponent fails to locate a commercial tenant willing to fund required improvements.¹

The Harding must be given a genuine opportunity for reuse, preferably as a performance center, but at least in some fashion as a hall open for some form of assembly

¹ . It is still not clear whether the proponent has committed to fund the beneficial improvements noted in your report, such as the renovation of the façade and the blade sign. If the proponent intends to rely on a tenant-to-be to fund the cost of these improvements, there is no assurance that they will ever materialize.

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or civic use. The Friends request that the Planning Department and the Planning Commission study the full range of reuses for the theater. In particular, demolition of the stage and stage fly tower ought not to be approved until reuse options that incorporate these features have been fully investigated.

Your report does not include a recommendation whether the Planning Commission should adopt a mitigated negative declaration, nor does it include a list of definitive mitigation measures crafted to support such a determination. As more fully discussed below, the Friends maintain that an EIR is required for the Harding in light of the demolition of the stage and its fly tower and the potential damage to various character-defining features identified in your report. Nevertheless, the Friends are prepared to consider and comment in advance on any mitigation analysis prepared by your department if a mitigated negative declaration is being considered or to be recommended to the Planning Commission.

An Independent and Bona Fide Reuse Study is Needed for the Harding

This project review appears to be narrowly focused on the construction of nine condominiums, with the theater conceived as an afterthought, if not an impediment. The primary focus of this project review should be the reuse of the Harding as a community asset, with condominium development as a secondary consideration. No demolition should be approved unless there has been a thoroughgoing reuse study for the theater. The Friends are willing to support and cooperate in securing such an independent study.

The Harding stands at the heart of the Divisadero commercial corridor in the Western Addition. The Harding was built 80 years ago as a neighborhood silent movie and vaudeville house. It remains the most intact example of the Reid Brothers' movie theater work in San Francisco. It is also the most intact example of a neighborhood silent movie theater/vaudeville house in the City. It retains most of the original elements of the 1926 design, including the stage, fly tower, fire curtain, proscenium, orchestra pit, organ grilles, auditorium floor, walls, and ceiling, projection room, and balcony. The stage and its fly tower were integral to the theater's original design and use for live entertainment, and these features continued in use for many years, by The Lamplighters for their Gilbert & Sullivan productions and for 25 years by the church that was the last occupant of the building.

Further, even though the theater was modernized in the 1930s, several features of the theater dating to that period now contribute to the historic significance of the building. In addition to the distinctive architectural features of the auditorium noted in the report, the report notes other features that bear on the integrity of the Harding, such as

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the seats, projection room, lobby, entryway, staircases, and decorative terrazzo entry surface.

Your report mentions secondary access as a key issue. The Friends agree; allowing the condominiums to eliminate or compromise necessary access corridors could doom any reuse of the auditorium, even as the fitness center or chain drug store that appear to be the most likely tenant even in the most optimistic scenario for the project as proposed.

However, there are issues other than access that will determine the reuse of the Harding. These include rehabilitation financing. It is simply not the case that tenant financing is the only source of funding for reusing the building. The Harding may be eligible for rehabilitation tax credits, new market tax credits, and the benefit of the State Historic Building Code. Allowing the historic integrity of the building to be weakened through demolition and alterations, such as those now proposed, jeopardizes these and other financing opportunities that may support reuse of the Harding for the revitalization of the Western Addition.

CEQA Compliance Comments

Until there is an in-depth reuse study of the beneficial reuse of the Harding, the Friends will urge the City to comply with its obligations under CEQA and municipal law. The following are the Friends' comments on the CEQA issues that the project and your report appear to raise. Since your report was intended to address historic resource issues and not Planning Code compliance generally, this letter will be similarly limited. However, the Friends believe that the new project raises some serious Planning Code compliance issues and reserve the right to raise those in any future hearings on this project.

The Harding qualifies as an historic resource not only as the work of master architects, but also as an embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region or method of construction, namely a neighborhood silent movie theater and vaudeville venue. The Property Description and Character-Defining Features sections of your report do not discuss the significance of the stage and stage fly tower. The stage and its fly tower are defining features of the historic character of the theater. Their demolition would compromise the historical integrity of the Harding. The demolition of the stage and its fly tower would alone therefore have a significant adverse impact on the Harding as an historic resource.

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Further, the report indicates that the proscenium will be demolished and rebuilt, that the organ grilles and other plasterwork features will be removed and replaced as part of the project, and that alterations to the entry way, decorative terrazzo surface, lobby, and staircases are contemplated. While we are doubtful that these impacts could be mitigated to less than significance, there are no mitigation measures proposed that attempt to do so. At least in the absence of viable mitigation measures, these aspects of the project would also have a significant adverse impact on the resource.

Likewise, the plan for underground parking calls for the removal of all seats and the demolition of the floor of the theater. Since the seats and floor are characteristic elements of the integrity of the auditorium, this aspect of the plan would clearly have an adverse impact on the Harding as an historical resource – quite apart from the obvious structural issues.

The construction of the nine condominiums at the rear of the property eliminates secondary access from the auditorium behind the theater and onto Hayes Street. This would almost certainly preclude reuse of the Harding as a performance venue or assembly place. This proposed blockage of access necessary to the historical uses of the theater is contrary to the Secretary of Interior Standards. Further, as noted in the report, there is no showing that access for any commercial use would be viable without the current egress along the sides of and behind the building. Without viable access to the auditorium after construction of the condominiums, the surviving portion of the building would not support the entertainment or commercial uses contemplated for it under the plan. Thus, the absence of proven viable future access to the auditorium is a significant adverse impact under CEQA. As you note, it has not been shown that this impact is avoidable.

The proposed reuse is not consistent with Secretary of Interior Standards or with Preservation Brief No. 18. Contrary to the Standards, the project does not necessarily contemplate the continued historical use of the auditorium as a movie theater, live performance venue, or assembly hall. The loss of the stage and its fly tower would compromise the use of the building at least for its historical uses for live performances or as an assembly hall. The removal of the seats and floor destroy materials and features that characterize the theater.

Likewise, there is no indication what commitment, if any, the project proponent has made to safeguard the integrity of the character-defining features that the project admittedly jeopardizes, such as the proscenium, organ grilles, floor, staircases, lobby, entryway, or the terrazzo entry surface. As noted above, it remains unclear whether and to what standard the proponent might rehabilitate the façade and the marquee and install a

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vertical blade sign. The proponent does not appear to have retained an experienced preservation architect to consult regarding these alterations, nor are we aware of any written program submitted in support of this project to ensure compliance with Secretary of the Interior Standards.

* * * * *

The Friends greatly appreciate this opportunity to comment. We are prepared to meet with you, your department, and the proponent for further discussion of the Harding and of the issues raised by this letter. As I have previously requested in writing, please provide me with timely notice of any Planning Department determinations on this project so that the Friends may take the necessary steps to present these issues to the Planning Commission, if required.

Very truly yours,



Arthur D. Levy

ADL:cfp

cc: Friends of 1800
James A. Reuben
Kendall Goh

ATTACHMENT "4"

KELLEY & VERPLANCK

HISTORICAL RESOURCES CONSULTING

June 17, 2008

Christopher VerPlanck
Kelley & VerPlanck
Historical Resources Consulting
2912 Diamond Street, #330
San Francisco, California 94131
415.337.5824
chris@kvpconsulting.com

TO: SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT
RE: HARDING THEATER (616 DIVISADERO ST.)
PROPOSED MITIGATED DECLARATION (CASE NO. 2005.911E)

My name is Christopher VerPlanck. I am an Architectural Historian and co-founder of Kelly & VerPlanck Historical Consulting, a preservation architecture firm in San Francisco. My resume is attached.

I am writing to urge you to reject the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Harding Theater and to consider an alternate course of action that would promote the retention and ultimate preservation of the Harding Theater. The current project proposes to demolish the stage, stage fly, orchestra pit, and a portion of the remainder of the auditorium of the Harding and to build condominiums at the rear of the lot. This project would demolish some of the most historically significant aspects of the theater, namely its Vaudeville stage and closely associated features, and prevent potential reuse as live performance venue.

The purpose of my letter is to shed some light on the significance of the Harding Theater. Built in 1926 on Divisadero Street, the busy commercial thoroughfare of the Western Addition, the Harding was commissioned by San Francisco theater impresario Samuel Levin, who along with the Nasser family and Greenfield & Kahn, was one of the great theater developers in San Francisco during the first half of the twentieth century. Other extant theaters owned by Levin in San Francisco include the Balboa and the Metro.

The Harding thrived as a Vaudeville house and neighborhood movie palace throughout much of the twentieth century, serving the diverse Western Addition until 1970 when it closed. As a former Vaudeville venue, the Harding was well-suited for use as a live-performance venue and during the early 1970s, various local bands, including the Grateful Dead and Big Brother and the Holding Company, played there. From the mid-1970s to 2004, the Harding served as a neighborhood church, a common use for historic neighborhood movie theaters, and particularly appropriate in the case of the Harding, given its unique Gothic Revival ornament.

The Harding Theater is significant on several levels. Although the façade has been unsympathetically altered, based on recent photographs, the interior appears to be remarkably intact. Used for the past quarter century as a public assembly space, the churches who occupied the building probably saw no reason to alter what is an admittedly majestic space. Although altered, the façade retains enough to facilitate restoration.

The Harding Theater is also significant as a work of the Reid Brothers, one of San Francisco's premier theater designers during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Architects of such well-known landmarks as the Hotel Coronado near San Diego and the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, the Reid Brothers were very active designing theaters throughout Northern California. Some of their theaters in San Francisco include the New Mission Theater on Mission Street (remodeled by Timothy Pflueger in 1932 — now closed), the Metro Theater on Union Street (also remodeled by Pflueger), the Alexandria Theater on Geary Boulevard (remodeled and converted into a multiplex—now closed), the Balboa Theater on Balboa Street in the Outer Richmond (also

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HISTORICAL RESOURCES CONSULTING

remodeled), the Avenue Theater on San Bruno Avenue (also converted into a church) and many others.

Based on the photographs I have seen, coupled with my knowledge of other Reid Brothers theaters in San Francisco, it is my judgment that the Harding has the best preserved interior of a Reid Brothers theater in the City, rivaled only by the auditorium of the New Mission. It is also, to my knowledge, the only surviving theater in San Francisco designed in the Gothic Revival mode.

Because the Harding, and particularly its interior, is such an intact example of a combination silent movie theater and Vaudeville house, the project proposal to demolish the stage fly, stage, and orchestra pit would have a significant adverse impact on defining characteristics of the Harding. Loss of these features would eliminate the life performance aspect of the original theater. The enduring integrity of the Harding's dual purpose as a movie and Vaudeville theater remains a prime historic characteristic of the building that sets it apart among the diminishing number of survivors from the silent movie era. Demolition of the stage and fly tower would also jeopardize reuse options for the theater, including as a community center or for live performances.

The project might simply be a step in piecemeal demolition of the entire building for further condominium development if the proponent were unable to locate a commercial tenant willing to fund the required improvements for the portion of the theater that would not be demolished under the current project proposal.

Even projects like this one that propose to "save" historic theaters leave hardly any trace of the building's historic character. Another Reid Brothers theater, the Apollo Theater on Geneva Avenue near Mission was, in a project similar to that now proposed for the Harding, converted into a Walgreen's drug store with housing at the rear of the lot. The Coliseum, also a Reid Brothers design, has likewise been converted into a Walgreen's store with condominium units on top. While both the Apollo and the Coliseum reuse projects maintained portions of the original theater buildings, neither leaves any historic fabric to speak of.

As most of you are keenly aware, historic single-screen movie theaters are an increasingly endangered species in San Francisco and elsewhere, and our historic theater heritage is being threatened by cumulative demolitions and conversions. Recent years have witnessed the closing of many in San Francisco alone, including the Alhambra, Metro, Royal, St. Francis, New Mission, Coliseum, and the Alexandria. Several others have been demolished and the few that are left are in danger of experiencing a similar fate.

Several factors are at work, including but not limited to, unequal film distribution practices, lack of parking and the proclivity of some to watch movies at home. However, more recently two factors have dealt a one-two punch to the remaining single-screen theaters in San Francisco, pushing several profitable theaters into the red. The first is the high cost of complying with the City's unreinforced masonry building ordinance; large assembly spaces are notoriously expensive to seismically retrofit. The second is the dramatically rising cost of real estate in the City. Faced with growing challenges, owners of single-screen theaters are often faced with closing them or selling them to developers who usually tear them down for market rate housing.

If nothing is done, San Francisco will most likely lose the majority of its historic theaters as well as other cultural and recreational facilities, such as music venues and bowling alleys, in the next decade. While economic realities are tough to fight, San Francisco runs a real risk of being reduced from the dynamic and creative city that it is today to a high-end bedroom community.

Despite the challenges that face the Harding Theater and other neighborhood theaters, we are fortunate in some ways that it is in San Francisco, a theater going town, where people are less likely to camp out in front of the television with a movie from Blockbuster. Equipped with a backstage and a flytower, the Harding could also be used for live theater productions and live

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music as it was in the 1970s. In addition to its architectural significance, the Harding is valuable as a potential cultural amenity for the neighborhood and the City at large. I urge you to support the retention and preservation of the Harding Theater.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris VerPlanck", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Christopher VerPlanck
Founder and Partner

KELLEY & VERPLANCK

HISTORICAL RESOURCES CONSULTING

CURRICULUM VITAE
CHRISTOPHER PATRICK VERPLANCK

CONTACT INFORMATION:

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Historical Resources Consulting
2912 Diamond Street #330
San Francisco, California 94131
415.337.5824 (Office)
415.606.0920 (Cellular)
chris@kvpconsulting.com

EDUCATION:

1997

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia
Graduate School of Architecture
M. ArchH Architectural History & Historic Preservation Certificate

1992

Bates College, Lewiston, Maine
BA History; Minor Studio Art

1989

University of St. Andrews, St. Andrews, Scotland
Course work completed in Mediaeval and Modern History

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

KELLEY & VERPLANCK HISTORICAL RESOURCES CONSULTING, LLC Founding Partner, 2007-2008
Co-founded successful cultural resources management firm with former San Francisco Landmarks Board President Tim Kelley. Since the firm was founded in February 2007, KVP has completed four major surveys, several historic context statements, and several dozen individual historic resource evaluations. Selected completed projects include the following:

Surveys:

Transit Center Area Plan, San Francisco, CA	Showplace Square, San Francisco, CA
India Basin Survey, San Francisco, CA	Downtown Martinez, Martinez, CA

Context Statements

Charleston Preservation Plan, Charleston, SC	South of Market, San Francisco, CA
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Historic Resource Evaluations

3414 Washington Street, San Francisco, CA	1864 Green Street, San Francisco, CA
Greenwood Estate Building, San Francisco, CA	Koib Ranch, Pleasanton, CA
91 Mizpah Street, San Francisco, CA	Swedish Tabernacle Church, San Francisco, CA

PAGE & TURNBULL, INC.

Historian. 1999-2006

Served as principal historian and established "Cultural Resources Studio," a department of historians, planners, and preservationists charged with completing a variety of projects throughout the Western United States. Beginning with one member in 1999, I expanded the studio to six members and two interns by the end of 2006. Selected completed projects include the following:

Historic Structure Reports:

Bright Angel Lodge & Cabins, Grand Canyon, AZ	Desert Watchtower and Lookout Studio, Grand Canyon, AZ
Will Rogers State Historic Park, Pacific Palisades, CA	Pond Farm Studio, Guerneville, CA
Blue Wing Inn, Sonoma, CA	Berkeley Old City Hall Council Chambers, Berkeley, CA
Davis/Shorb House, Berkeley, CA	

Historic Resource Evaluation Reports:

Muni "E" Line, San Francisco, CA	Salk Institute for Biological Studies, La Jolla, CA
California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, CA	O'Shaughnessy Dam, Yosemite National Park, CA

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Golden Gate Concourse, San Francisco, CA	Shinn Historic Park, Fremont, CA
Mutual Savings Bank Building, San Francisco, CA	Sarnuel Gompers Trade School, San Francisco, CA
Spreckels Sugar Refinery, Spreckels, CA	Schlage Lock Factory, San Francisco, CA
UC Printing Plant, Berkeley, CA	Union Oil Company Building, San Francisco, CA
Jenkins House, Woodside, CA	Crocker Bank Building, San Francisco, CA
<i>Section 106 Documentation:</i>	
Third Church of Christ Scientist, San Francisco, CA	Folsom/Dore Housing, San Francisco, CA
Eighth & Howard Street Housing, San Francisco, CA	VA Medical Center, Ft. Miley, San Francisco, CA
<i>HABS/HAER/HALS Documentation:</i>	
Pond Farm Studio Complex, Guerneville, CA	Walters & Co. Building, San Francisco, CA
Young Men's Institute, San Francisco, CA	IBM Building 025, San José, CA
<i>Design Guidelines:</i>	
Downtown Historic District, San José, CA	St. James Park, San José, CA
Donlon Way Area, Dublin, CA	
<i>National Register Nominations:</i>	
1000 Van Ness Street, San Francisco, CA	New Mission Theater, San Francisco, CA
<i>Cultural Resource Surveys:</i>	
Los Angeles Civic Center, Los Angeles, CA	Market/Octavia Planning Area, San Francisco, CA
Dogpatch Survey, San Francisco, CA	St. Helena Cultural Resources Inventory, St. Helena, CA
<i>Miscellaneous Planning Studies:</i>	
Woodside Preservation Element, Woodside, CA	Alameda Naval Air Station Re-use Plan, Alameda, CA

GOUCHER COLLEGE Baltimore, MD: 2001-
Adjunct Faculty in Graduate Program of Historic Preservation. Taught introductory course in American Architectural History for two years. Continue to serve on independent study and thesis committees.

SAN FRANCISCO ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE San Francisco: 1997-1999
Assisted executive director with research, writing, outreach, and advocacy. Completed survey of Northeast Waterfront district in San Francisco. Initiated Dogpatch Cultural Resources Survey.

FELLOWSHIPS:

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE Washington, D.C.: 1997
Won Sally Kress Tompkins Fellowship in 1997 after graduating from UVA and worked for one summer recording textile mill housing in Alabama and Georgia for the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER). Among other accomplishments, I prepared a context statement for textile mill housing in the United States and an illustrated typology of southern textile mill housing.

THOMAS JEFFERSON'S MONTICELLO Charlottesville, VA: 1996
Assisted architectural conservator in restoration of historic mahogany triple-sash windows on the home of Thomas Jefferson.

PUBLICATIONS/BOOKS:

I have been very active in the preservation communities of San Francisco and California as a whole. In addition to advocacy efforts, I have authored numerous articles on San Francisco's social and architectural history for a variety of publications, including *Vernacular Architecture Forum*, *San Francisco Heritage News*, *San Francisco Apartment Magazine*, *the New Fillmore News* and other local publications. I have also co-authored an essay in Ray McDevitt's *Courthouses of California*, published in 2000 by Heyday Books and the California Historical Society. A complete list of publications is available upon request.

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PRESENTATIONS:

I have presented academic papers and other research topics to a variety of organizations in the Bay Area, including the California Preservation Foundation, San Francisco Historical Society, San Francisco Architectural Heritage, the Alameda Historical Society, and the San Francisco Art Institute. I also offer walking tours of the Dogpatch Historic District in San Francisco. These tours are regularly scheduled at the request of national preservation and planning conferences that come to San Francisco, including the 2004 California Preservation Foundation Conference and the 2005 American Planning Association Convention. I also led a tour of historic resources along the South Rim of the Grand Canyon for the American Institute of Architects 2005 Conference in Las Vegas.

AWARDS:

My Dogpatch Survey won a San Francisco Beautiful Award in 2001 and a California Preservation Foundation Award in 2005. My Blue Wing Inn Historic Structure Report was similarly honored with an award from the California Preservation Foundation in 2002.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS:

I have served on the board of directors of the Northern California Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians, Documentation and Conservation of the Modern Movement (DoCoMoMo), and Recent Past Preservation Network (RPPN). Other professional affiliations include the Society of Architectural Historians, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the California Preservation Foundation, the California Historical Society, the Society for Commercial Archaeology, San Francisco Architectural Heritage, the Peninsula Open Space Trust, the Western Neighborhoods Project, and the San Mateo County Historical Society.

CIVIC INVOLVEMENT:

Currently I serve on the San Francisco Planning Department's Survey Advisors Committee. I have also been heavily involved in efforts to preserve and restore a 1906 Earthquake refugee shack, which was temporarily installed on Market Street to commemorate the Centennial of the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. I am also involved in ongoing efforts to find new uses for two now-defunct neighborhood movie palaces in San Francisco: the Harding Theater on Divisadero Street and the New Mission Theater on Mission Street.

SKILLS/INTERESTS:

I am proficient in the use of most Microsoft Office products, including Word, Excel, and Powerpoint. I am also skilled in the use of Adobe Photoshop, Acrobat, and Pagemaker. I am approaching verbal and written fluency in Spanish. I can read French and am now studying Norwegian. My hobbies include vintage automobile restoration, gardening, hiking, cooking, surfing, lawn bowling, drawing and painting, writing and advocacy, and calf roping.

References are available upon request.

ATTACHMENT "5"

The Harding Theatre

Submitted by Gary Lee Parks, movie theatre architecture historian

Gary Lee Parks--background:

Father, Ed Parks was animator for Disney, Paramount, and Hanna Barbera Studios (see Internet Movie Database, www.imdb.com, "Ed Parks")

Gary earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Illustration--California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland/San Francisco.

Began involvement with historic movie theatres in 1981 initially as a photography hobby, joined the Theatre Historical Society of America and the Preservation Action Council of San Jose (past member Board of Directors of latter organization).

Has been involved with the preservation of the following theatres (in chronological order):

- Fox, Watsonville (1984)
- (Fox) California, San Jose (1989-'95)
- Golden State, Monterey (1991-present)
- Jose, San Jose (1991-1994)
- Varsity, Palo Alto (1994-'96)

Numerous other theatres in a correspondent/consultant capacity.

Employed as Senior Designer for Visual Impact Architectural Glass, Mountain View.

Professional historic theatre projects via Visual Impact:

- Del Mar, Santa Cruz
- Golden State, Monterey
- Park, Menlo Park
- Regency, Monterey
- Sunnyvale (Forum nightclub/restaurant), Sunnyvale

The Golden State Theatre in Monterey is by far the theatre with which I have had the most involvement, both as a professional (etched glass restoration, decorative painting restoration) and as a volunteer (additional decorative paint restoration, historical research, community advocacy, silent film/organ presentation). The Golden State Theatre is

one of the best preserved theatres designed by the Reid Bros., and therefore, the work of the Reids is of great interest to me.

The early work of James and Merrit Reid is well documented in early issues of *The Architect and Engineer*. From such articles it has been learned that their career began in the Midwest, and included many civic buildings, including libraries financed by Andrew Carnegie.

Their West Coast career achieved momentum with their design of the famous Hotel Del Coronado in San Diego. After this, they established an office in San Francisco. Subsequently, the Fairmont Hotel was born on their drawing boards. Around the same time, the Bell Theatre was also designed. Both buildings were gutted by fire in the 1906 Earthquake, but were renewed. While the Fairmont Hotel remains today, the Bell Theatre (renamed the American Theatre following its rebuild, and for most of its life functioning as the Embassy Theatre) succumbed to the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake, and was subsequently demolished.

Other San Francisco landmarks designed by the Reids include the Call Building (still extant but heavily remodeled--the tall domed skyscraper which shows up in so many Downtown photos of the '06 conflagration), First Congregational Church, behind the Hotel St. Francis, still preserved, the third (present) Cliff House, recently restored, and the Music Pavilion (bandshell) in Golden Gate Park, on the Concourse between the Academy of Sciences and the DeYoung Museum.

Following the Earthquake and Fire, the Reids hit their stride as designers of vaudeville and motion picture theatres, ultimately becoming the most prolific designers of such structures in the Greater Bay Area. Most of their creations can be categorized as being a blend of Beaux-Arts and Spanish Colonial style, but their work included Moorish, Craftsman, and in at least one case, Pharaonic Egyptian as well.

Remarkably, the Reids produced their plans themselves, without a staff. Considering their vast output, particularly in the mid-to-late 1920s, this is astonishing. Detail work was let out to various specialty contractors, but the concepts--structurally and aesthetically--were the work of the brothers themselves, working together in a single office.

Merrit Reid died in 1932, and James closed the office. Their last theatre, the Sebastiani in Sonoma, was built the following year and opened in 1934. James Reid lived into the 1940s. Merrit Reid is buried in the Catacombs mausoleum at Cypress Lawn in Colma. James Reid's place of interment is unknown to this writer.

The Harding Theatre and its Context Amid Surviving Examples of the Reid Bros.' Theatre Designs Today

The Harding Theatre was designed and built when the Reids' theatrical design output was at its peak in the late 1920s. It is only one of two surviving theatres of theirs to exhibit an overall Gothic style in its detailing and visual theme. The other example is the Sequoia (now Fox) in Redwood City--long since heavily remodeled in the interior. The Harding alone preserves the Gothic elements intact in its auditorium. It should be noted that the facade of the Harding borrows as well from Islamic motifs. The false grille pattern of the central bay of the facade, the curvature and arrangement of arches, and slender engaged columns suggest detailing found on mosques and screened windows throughout the Middle East. The interior of the Harding resorts purely to Gothic style, although a few elements of ornamental plaster were employed which can be found in other theatres the Reids designed, regardless of style.

As prolific as the Reids were, and though many of their theatres still stand--used for a myriad of functions--only a scant few have survived relatively unscathed by severe subsequent remodeling. The Harding is one of these few. Indeed, it is one of only a few historic movie theatre buildings by any of the era's architects to remain with an auditorium preserved largely as originally conceived.

The Harding has seen its share of alteration, however. The facade lost many of its ornamental elements and was given signage and a marquee in the Streamline Moderne style in the 1930s. The ceiling which was installed beneath this second marquee resulted, however, in the preservation of the original vaulted ceiling of the entrance foyer which opens onto the street. The ceiling was uncovered during the Berean Christian Fellowship's tenure in the building. When first uncovered, the original stenciled and painted finishes were still intact, though damaged in a few spots. As of this writing, I do not know the current state of this

ceiling.

The main lobby was heavily remodeled in the 1930s and later. However, if the entrance foyer is any indication, an original ceiling, and possibly other 1920s decorative elements, may still exist behind and above the later walls and ceilings. This is a common occurrence in such theatres. For instance, large portions of the auditorium of the Metro Theatre still exist intact behind later (1941) walls.

The auditorium of the Harding, while not pristine, is largely intact, and highly restorable. The richly ornamented ceiling still bears gold and patinated finishes which, if merely cleaned, would regain their original lustre. On the angled, side portions of the ceiling, rampant gryphons still hide beneath a later layer of white paint applied during the theatre's church years (presumably because such images were deemed inappropriate for a church). There are many restoration companies that could quite easily resurrect these gryphon motifs. Some original finishes exist on cornice moldings and other elements of the sidewalls, but largely the walls have been repainted over the years. Layers of acoustical paneling added after the advent of sound movies likely hide the original colors and patterns of the walls. The Gothic proscenium arch was painted white, but beneath this layer of paint are hidden circular painted medallions with busts of (presumably) historical or theatrical characters. These could easily be revealed by skilled craftspeople. The proscenium is flanked by Gothic-arched organ grilles, behind which are long-since-empty chambers which once housed the theatre's pipe organ, a product of the Robert-Morton organ company, one of the main competitors to the more well-known Wurlitzer company. These chambers could easily house a vintage theatre pipe organ once again, should future use of the theatre merit it.

The underside of the balcony, though repainted, is ornamentally in its original condition, being comprised of various moldings and decorative borders, with circular domed coves--originally lit indirectly--in each of its rear corners.

Much of the seating in the auditorium is either original or a product of the 1930s. In the Main Floor Loge section, under the balcony, the seating features cast iron aisle standards with sculpted maidens. This pattern was also used in the seating of the long-lost Fox Theatre on Market Street.

The theatre is equipped with a backstage area, complete with a basement designed to house dressing room space, and above, a stagehouse with modest but adequate wing space (one must bear in mind that this was a neighborhood theatre, not one of the large Downtown palaces, therefore one should not judge the backstage facilities by Downtown standards). Above, there stands a tall fly tower for raising or "flying" scenery, curtains, and even the movie screen when it was not in use.

In order to further illustrate the relatively intact nature of the Harding, and therefore its importance as a prime example of a surviving San Francisco neighborhood theatre of the "classic" era, a listing of other San Francisco theatres designed by the Reid Bros. and their degree of interior preservation is in order. If a given theatre had more than one name in its history, I shall list other names in parentheses:

ALEXANDRIA

Interior completely remodeled in 1940s. Closed circa 2003. Total renovation of interior into multiple uses scheduled.

AMAZON (APOLLO)

Recently gutted. Converted to apartments and retail in 2004.

AVENUE

Interior largely remodeled in 1940s. Remodeled further upon conversion to church in 1990s.

BALBOA

Lobby remodeled circa 1930s. Auditorium completely gutted and twinned in 1970s. Operating as two-screen movie theatre.

YORK (ROOSEVELT, YORK 24, BRAVA WOMEN'S THEATRE ARTS)

Outer lobby partially preserved. Main lobby completely remodeled in 1940s. Auditorium partially remodeled, *but many original elements extant and recently restored in 1990s*. Operating as live theatre/concert venue.

COLISEUM

Gutted. Converted to apartments and retail in 1990s.

EMBASSY (BELL, AMERICAN, RIALTO, WARNER)

Closed following Loma Prieta Earthquake and demolished in 1995 following fire caused by squatters.

HARDING

Lobby remodeled circa 1930s. *Auditorium largely intact according to original design.* Closed.

LYCEUM (NEW LYCEUM)

Demolished circa 1960s.

METRO (METROPOLITAN)

Lobby and auditorium extensively remodeled in 1941. Operating as single screen movie theatre.

MIDTOWN (RIVIERA)

Gutted for apartments in 1998.

NEW MISSION

Interior extensively remodeled in 1930s. Many original elements remain in auditorium and inner lobby. Closed.

ROYAL

Demolished in 2004.

The list of new uses for old movie theatres is far too extensive to approach in any great detail here. The Harding was utilized for some of these following its end as a commercial movie theatre. Its use as a legitimate musical theatre by the Lamplighters is well-known, and its subsequent use as a concert venue, showcasing acts including Aretha Franklin, James Brown, and the Grateful Dead, is also documented. Clearly, it has a stage structure which was once very usable, and could be made so again. Movie theatres have been put to such alternate uses from coast to coast.

Not all theatres that have been retained as architectural landmarks have remained in theatrical use. One example is the conversion of old theatres

to bookstores and cafes, a sympathetic adaptive reuse which works best when many of the theatre's original exterior and interior decorative elements are retained to delight the eyes of customers. Examples include the Book Star chain outlets in the Loma Theatre, San Diego; the Studio City Theatre, Studio City; and the Borders Books, Music, and Cafe in the Varsity Theatre (a Reid Bros. structure) in Palo Alto. In all cases, the exteriors of these theatres have remained completely intact--including the marquees and signage, and most of the interior appearance has been retained--resulting in environments superior and far more endearing to the public than any contemporary piece of architecture could likely be. Other theatre conversion projects exist, such as the State Theatre in South San Francisco (Reid Bros. again), which has been partly converted to a rentable multipurpose public assembly facility, while other portions of the building have been converted to retail use. Again, many original features remain. This creates a pleasing environment which helps the structure retain a positive image in the minds of those who utilize it, and therefore markets itself via such imagery.

Few historians of movie theatres or even casual enthusiasts would believe that every old theatre should be saved. These theatres were built to make money, and for no other reason. Make money they did, once upon a time. In the process, however, they became fixtures--institutions in their neighborhoods. Some have, or should be, restored to their original condition, and a use found for them similar to their original function--entertainment, or the arts. Still others can find new types of public use while retaining enough of their original design and ambience to give the public an idea of what they once were, and the important place they held in our culture.

Finally, this writer has seen far too many projects emerge from the drawing boards of developers that have not been sensitive to classic theatres. In every case, whether the campaign to save a theatre has been successful or not, the image of the developer remains permanently tarnished, and this results in tremendous stress and financial burden to the developer. With this in mind, it still astonishes this writer to see how many projects take no thought for the preservation of existing structures (theatres or any existing structure of historic and/or aesthetic merit). It seems that the image of "The Developer" in the general public consciousness is primarily a negative one. This does not have to be.

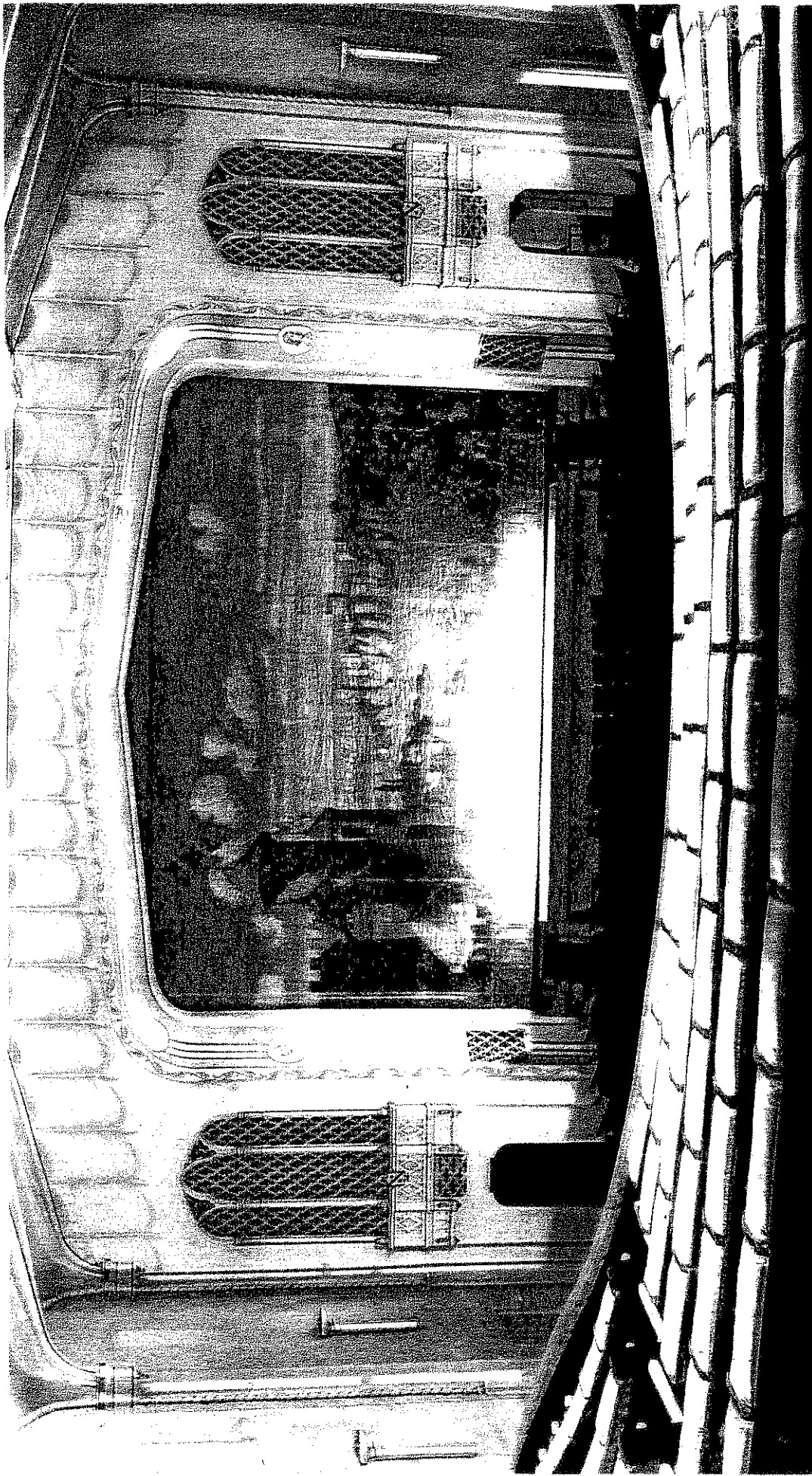
Increased sensitivity to history, good design--new or old--and the needs of both business and culture to move forward hand-in-hand, will result in a better urban environment for everyone.

Respectfully submitted--

Gary Lee Parks
Sunnyvale, CA, February 4, 2005
Ptahhotep1@aol.com

While much of the preceeding information has been gained via my own research and observations, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the following:

The Architect and Engineer magazine
Steve Levin
Mark Santa Maria
Martin A. Schmidt
The Theatre Historical Society of America
Jack Tillmany



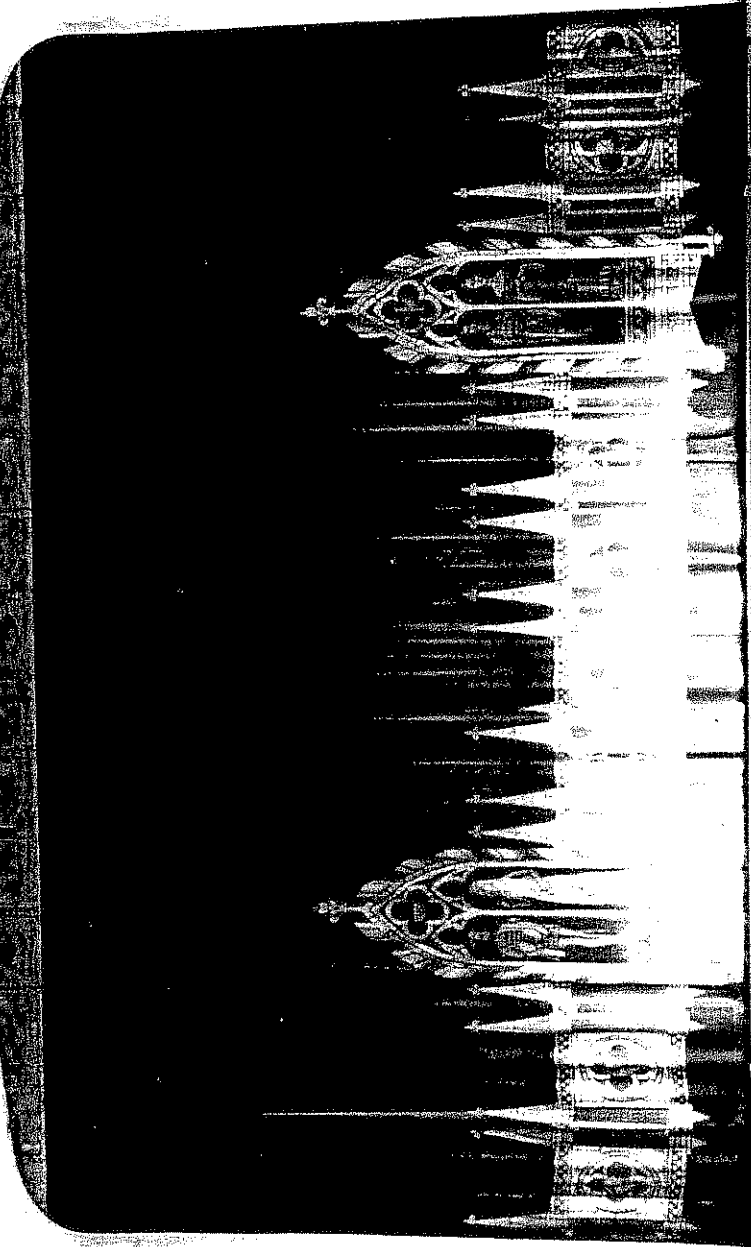
1940s photo
HARDING THEATRE
San Francisco
by Theodore
Newman

From Steve Levin
Collection

HARDING

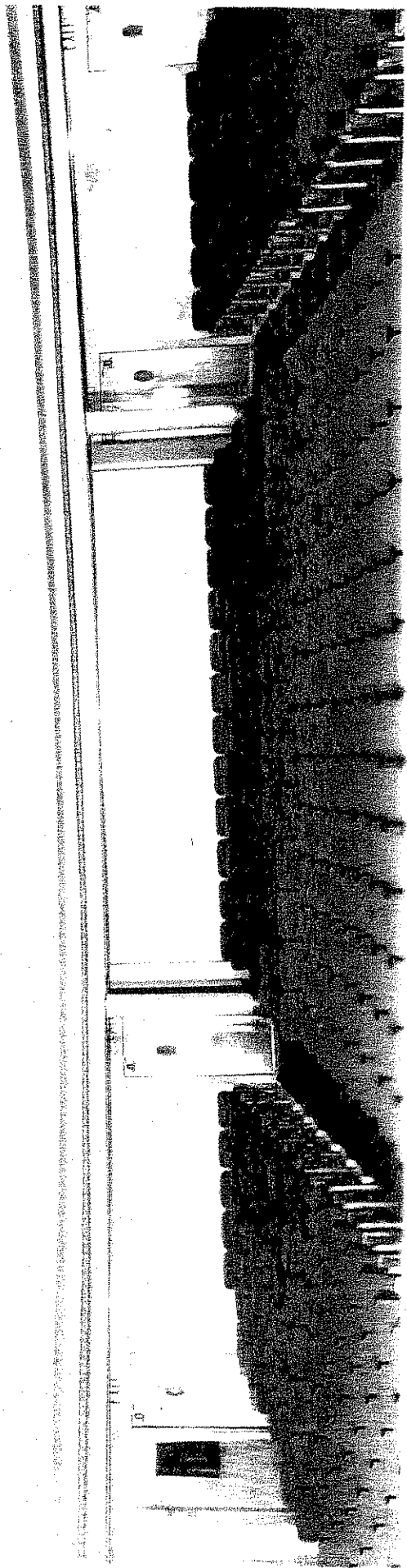
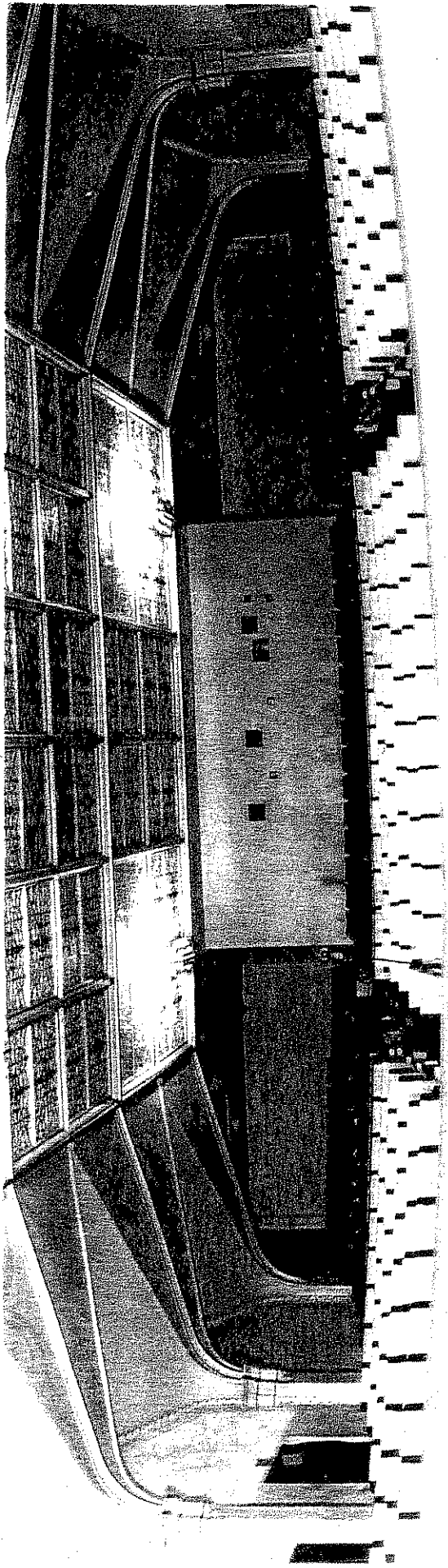
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THEATRE,
San Francisco
by Theodore
Newman

From Steve
Levin
Collection



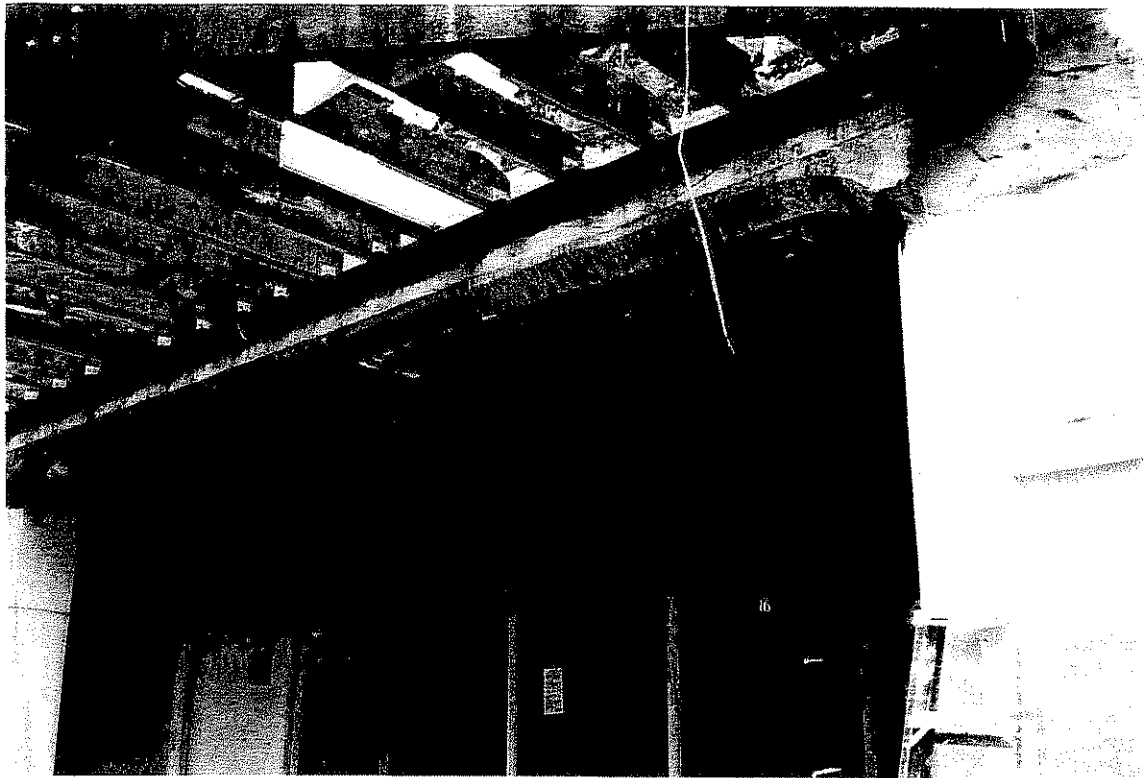
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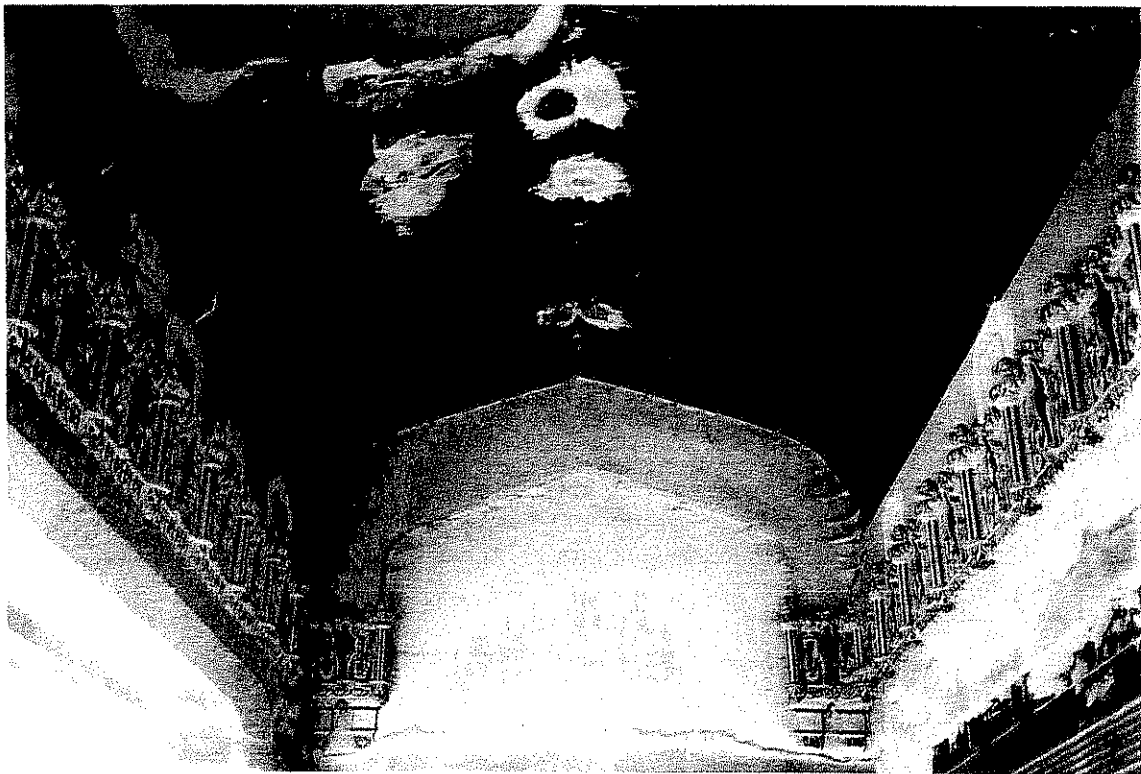


1940s photo
HARDING THEATRE
San Francisco
by Theodore
Newman
From Steve
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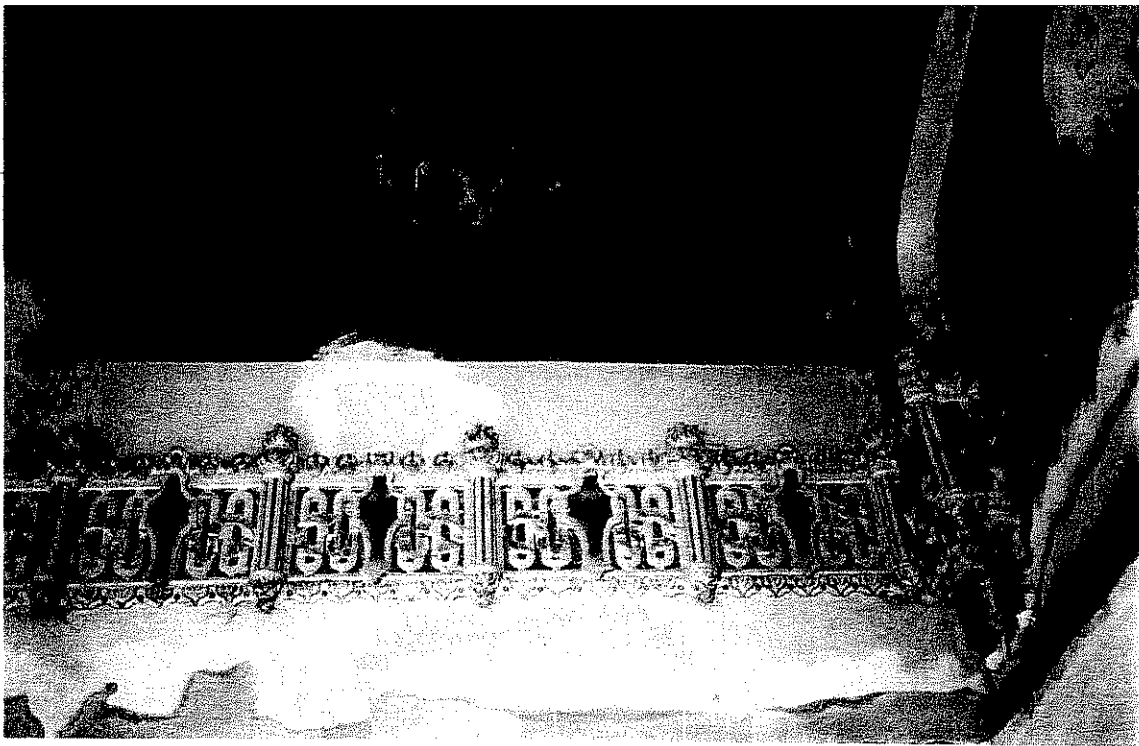
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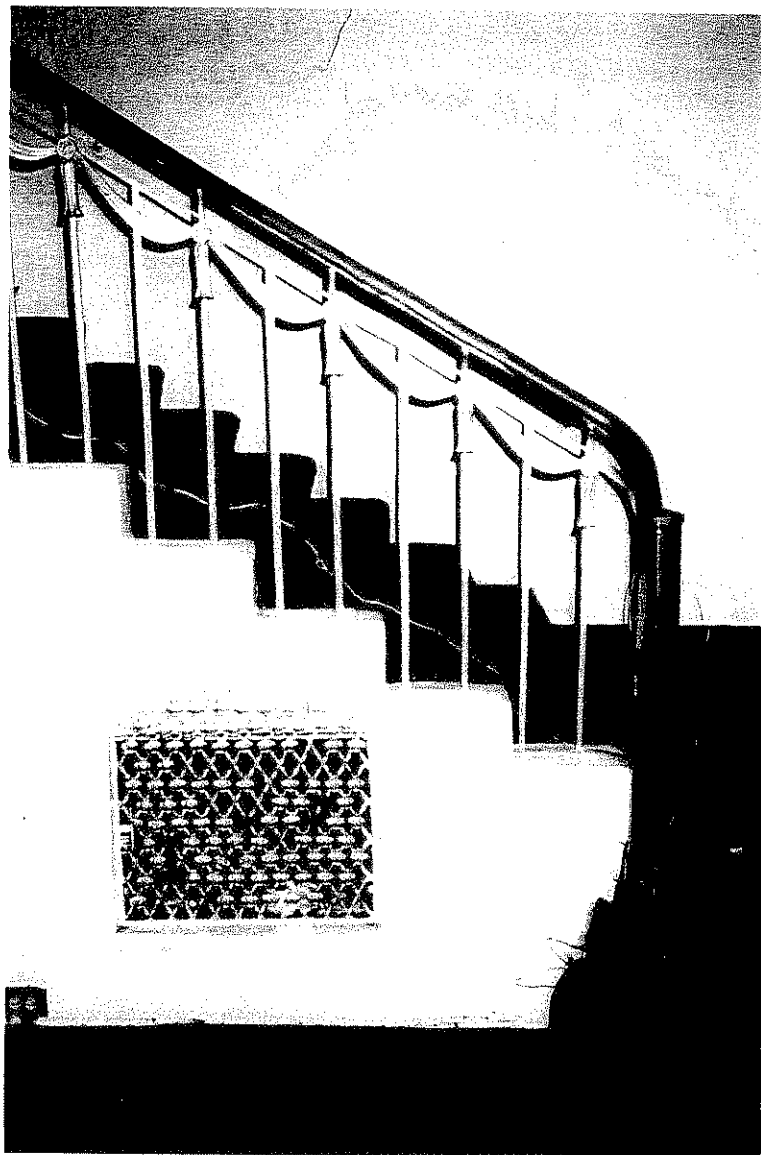
THEATRE ENTRANCE AFTER 1930S MARQUEE HAD BEEN REMOVED BY BEREAN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP. DOORS ARE 1920S ORIGINALS.



ENTRANCE FOYER/TICKET LOBBY'S ORIGINAL CEILING REVEALED UPON REMOVAL OF 1930S MARQUEE SOFFIT AND DROPPED CEILING.



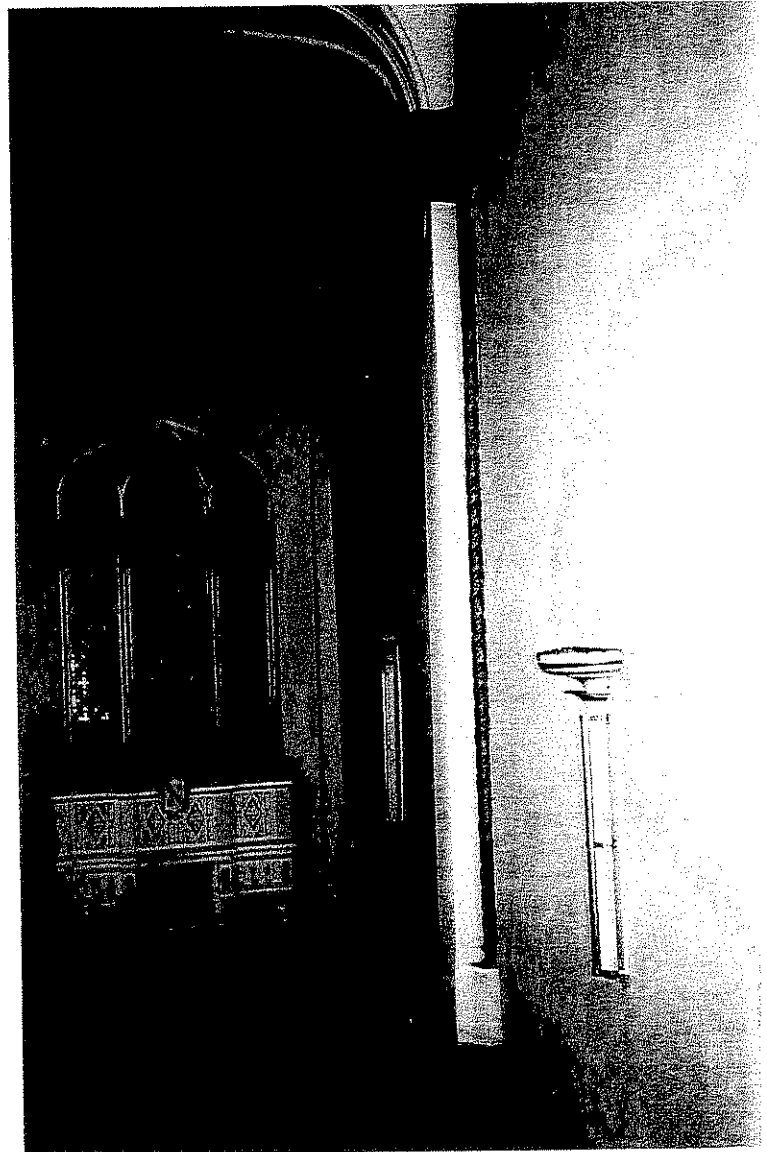
DETAIL
OF
ORIGINAL
CEILING
IN
ENTRANCE
FOYER/
TICKET
LOBBY



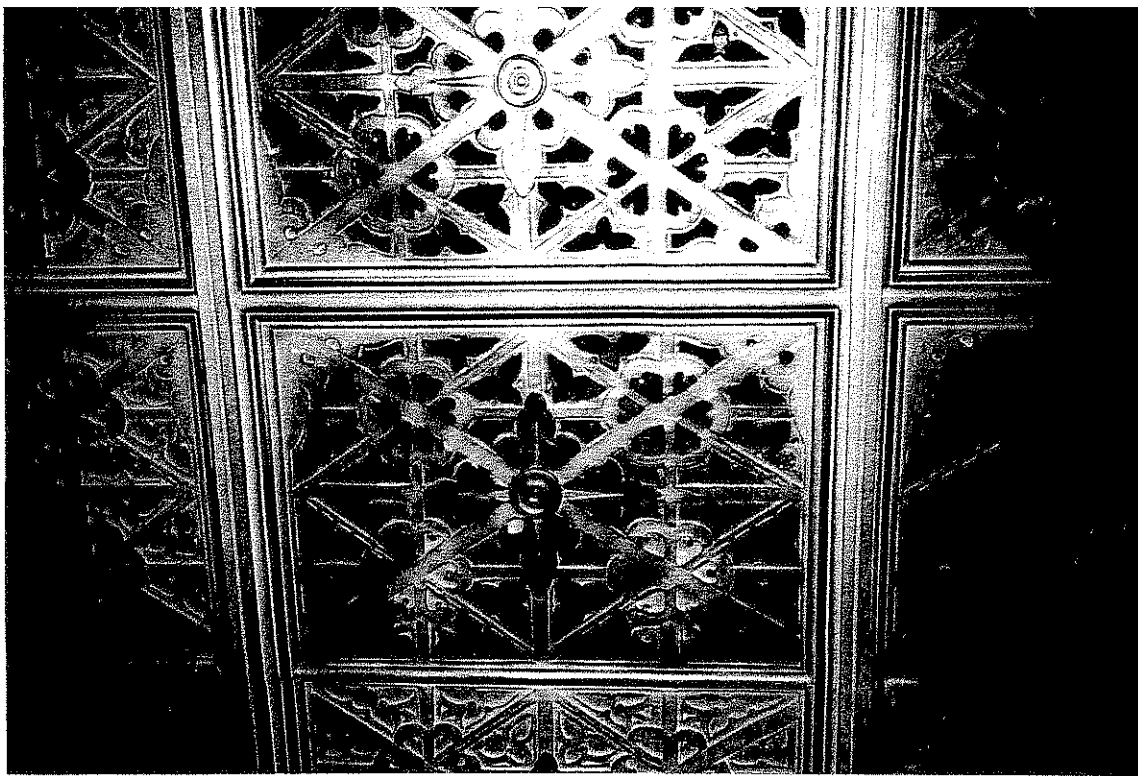
1930s STAIR
RAILING IN MAIN
LOBBY



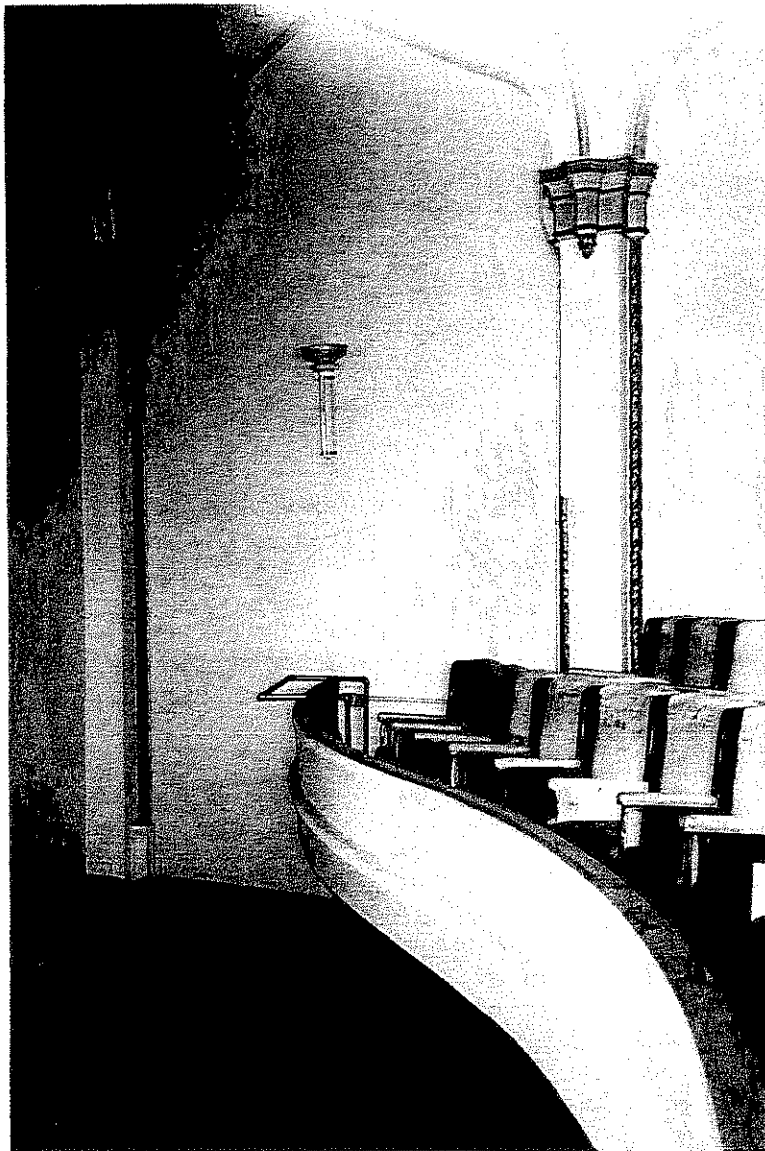
LEFT ORGAN GRILLE



RIGHT ORGAN GRILLE VIEWED
FROM BALCONY



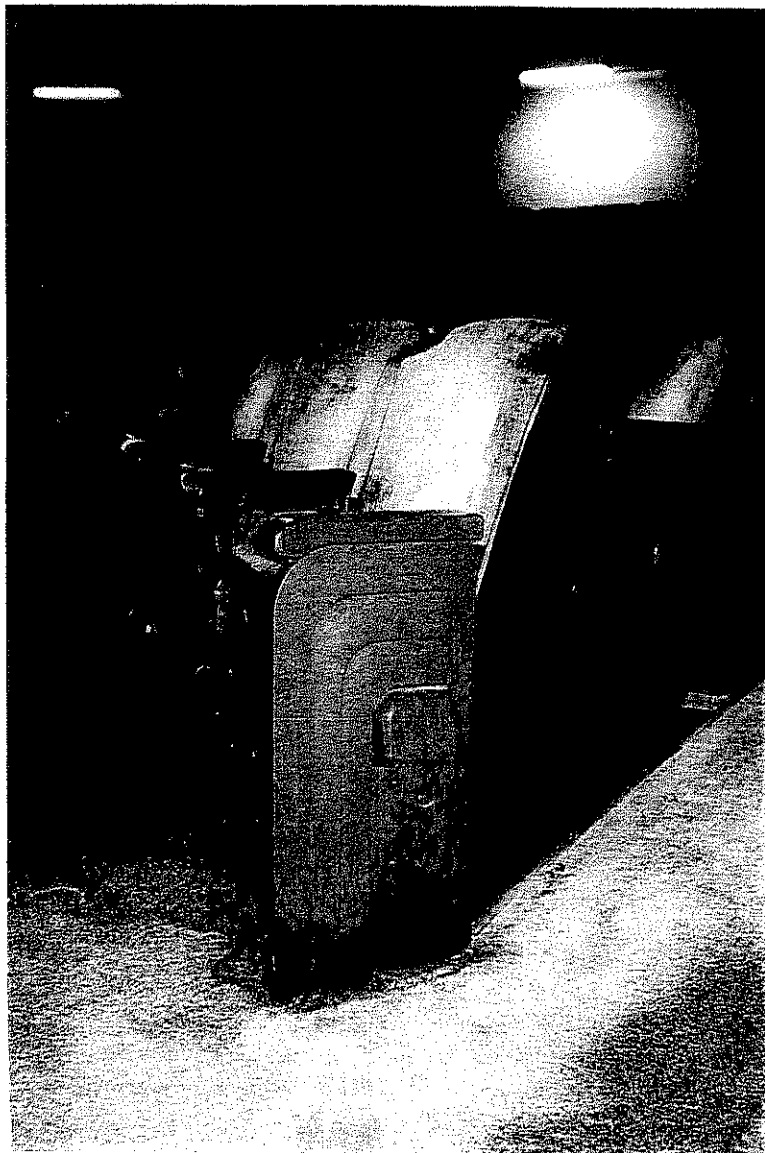
AUDITORIUM
CEILING
DETAIL



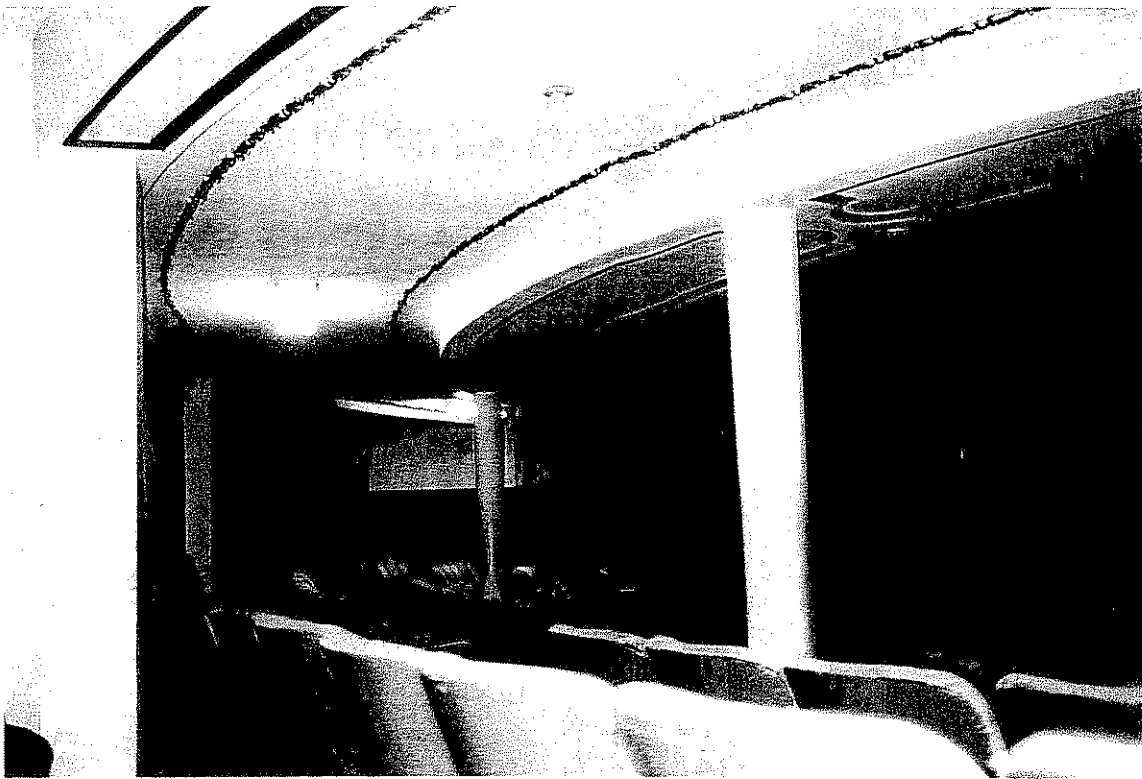
RIGHT
AUDITORIUM
SIDEWALL
FROM BALCONY
LOGE SECTION



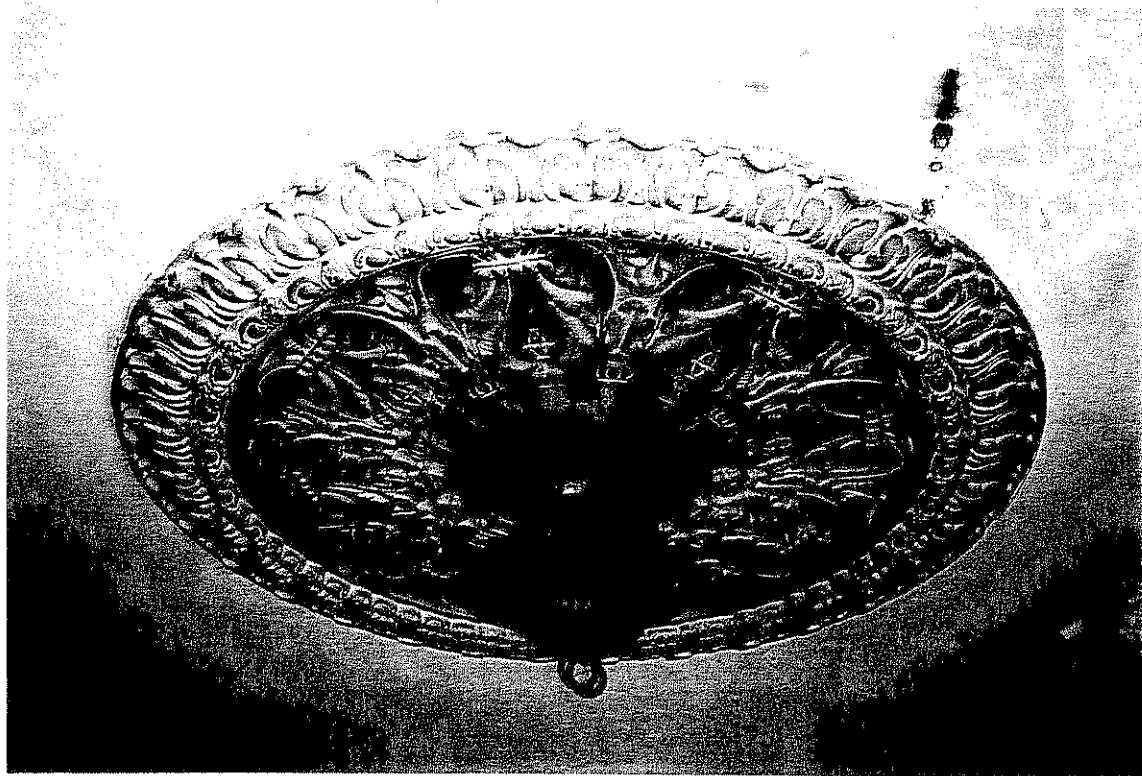
AUDITORIUM
FROM REAR
OF BALCONY



MAIN FLOOR
SEATING —
1930s DECORATIVE
AISLE STANDARD

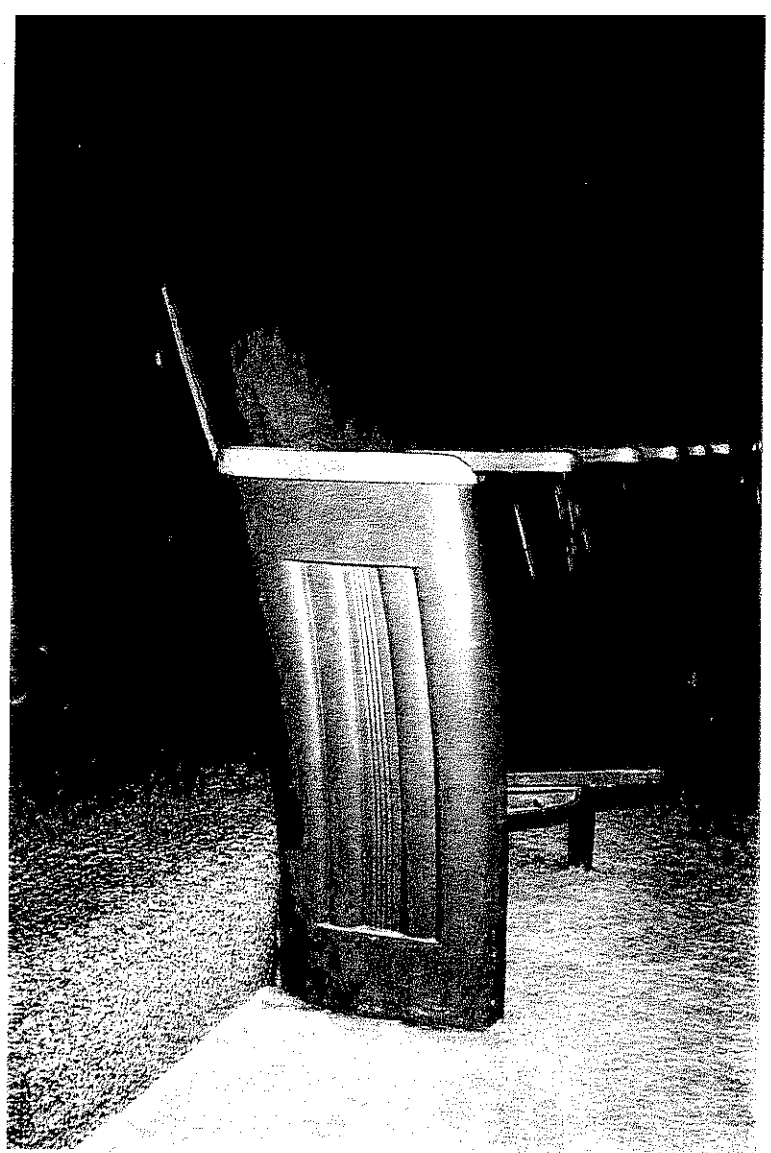
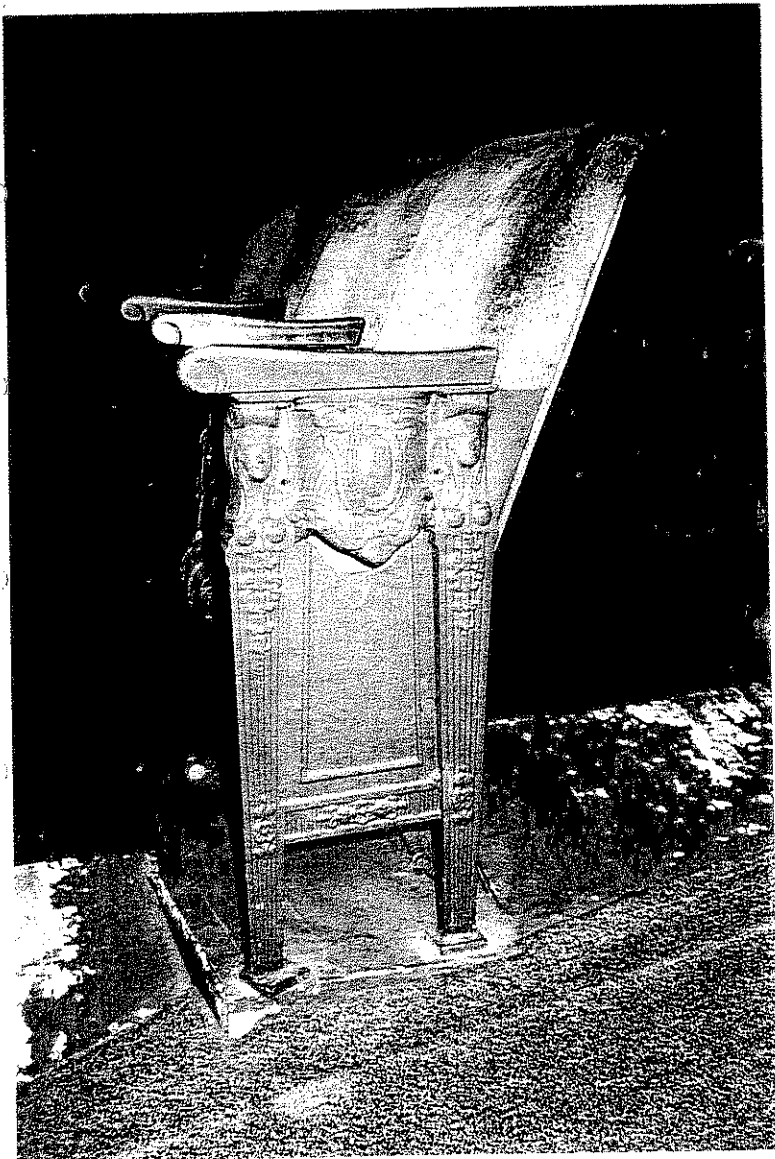


SEATING UNDER BALCONY



CEILING ROSETTE OVER
REAR OF BALCONY

1930s OR
1940s
DECORATIVE
AISLE
STANDARD



MAIN FLOOR SEATING -
LOBBY SECTION IN
REAR. 1920s DECORATIVE
AISLE STANDARD.
SAME DESIGN AS USED
IN SAN FRANCISCO FOX
THEATRE.