



LOEWS THEATRES

New York 1928-30

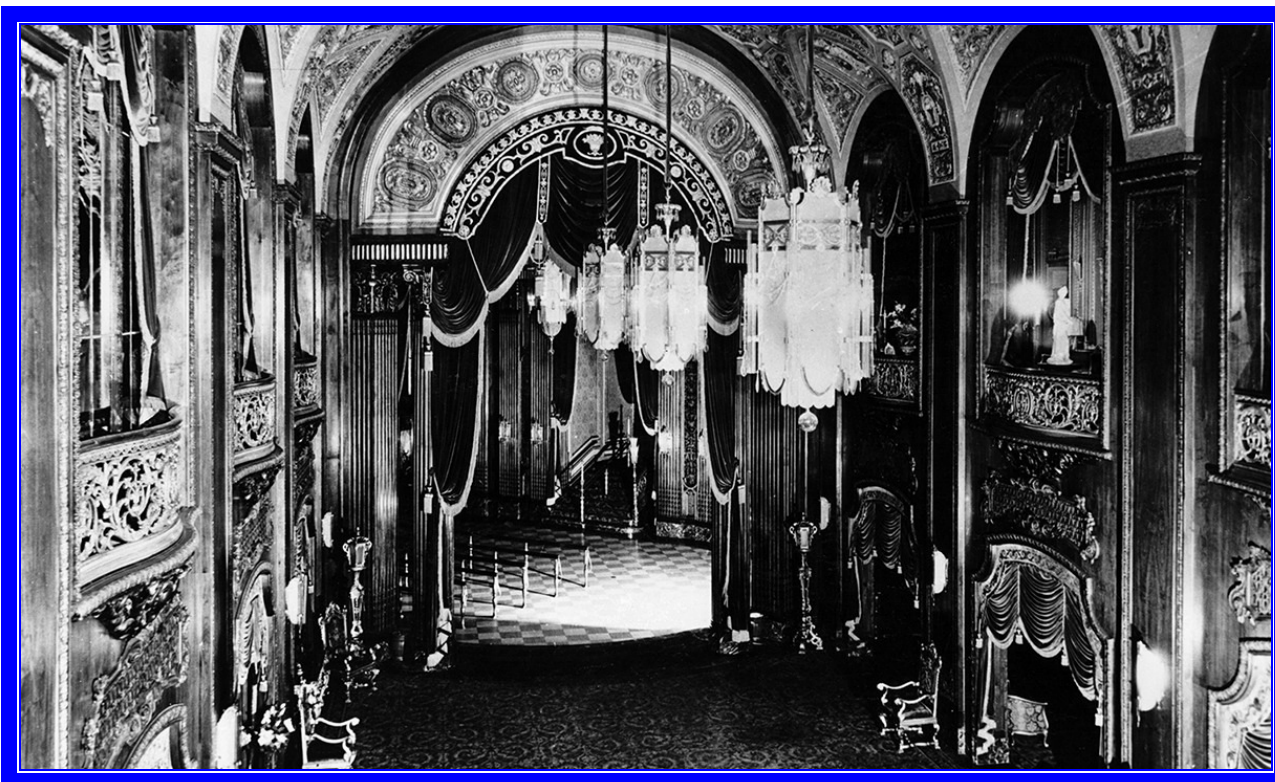
Part Two

KINGS Brooklyn

ENGINEERING SERVICES

Eur Ing BRIAN ROBERTS CEng Hon.FCIBSE
Life Member ASHRAE

CIBSE HERITAGE GROUP



STATE/KINGS Brooklyn

OPENED 1929

SEATING CAPACITY 3398

ORIGINAL OWNER Loews

PRESENT OWNER ACE Theatrical Group

ARCHITECT Rapp & Rapp

STATUS In use after restoration

**HVAC&R Air Conditioned
York Ice Machinery Corporation CO₂ system**

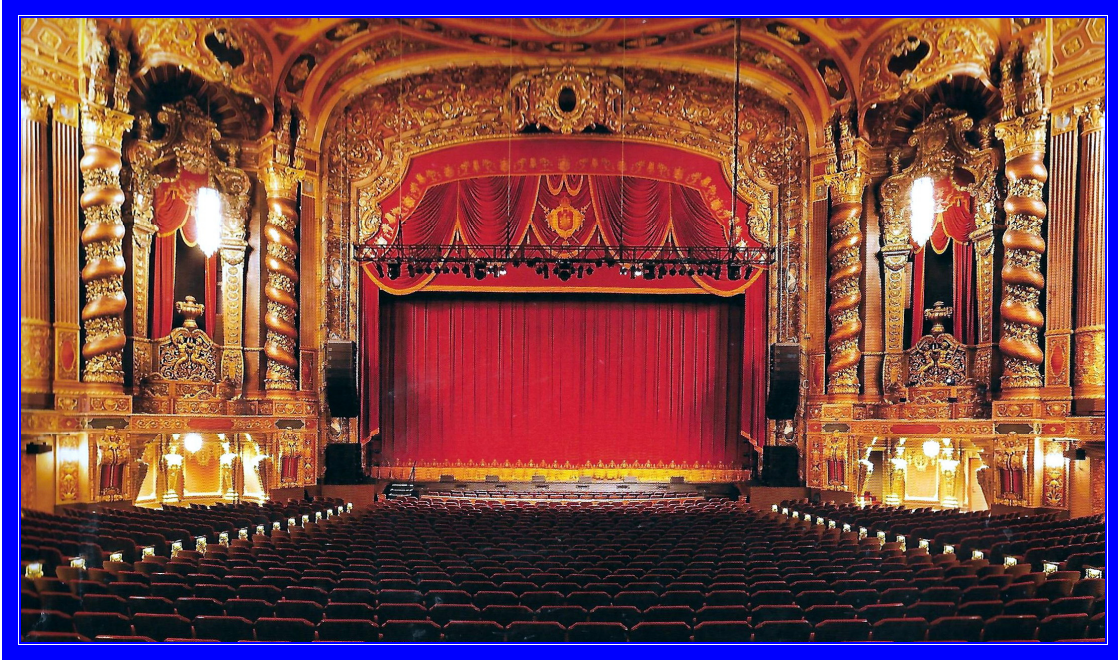
LIGHTING CONTROLS Westinghouse

KINGS Brooklyn



(Cinema Treasures)

KINGS Brooklyn



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THE PREHISTORY OF THE KINGS

NOTE

The story of the Kings Theatre in Brooklyn is given in Chapter "1 The Prehistory of Kings" in the book "Kings Theatre: The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of Brooklyn's Wonder Theatre," Matt Lambros, Theatre Historical Society of America, Pittsburgh, 2016. The main body of this publication contains a wealth of historic and modern photographs depicting the early days of the theatre, the damaged interior after closure and neglect, and the stunning restoration. A scanned summary of these opening pages is featured at the start of this E-Book. Any text or pictures that are reproduced are acknowledged by the note KTML or the original source. (The Lambros book runs to some 157 pages and is illustrated throughout).

KINGS Brooklyn

“One of the most spectacular movie palaces in America; a cathedral of the ornate, a magnificent hodgepodge of Art Deco, Renaissance, and ornate Baroque decoration.” These are just a few of the many glowing descriptions of Brooklyn’s magnificent Kings Theater. “Brooklyn’s finest theater,” “the Kings in Flatbush was the crème de la crème.” The Kings Theatre opened on September 7, 1929 on Flatbush Avenue, in Brooklyn, NY. It captured the hearts of thousands of moviegoers over the next 80 years, whether they visited the Kings in their youth, grew up in the neighborhood, or just looked at photographs of it. The Kings closed in 1977 and to all but a few dreamers it was considered lost, to be converted into a retail space, or worse - demolished. But the dreamers won this time. After a decades-long wait, the beautifully restored Kings Theater reopened in 2015. The splendid movie palace that illuminated Flatbush Avenue for half a century will brighten it into a new century. To understand how the theater came to be, you first have to understand the beginnings of the two companies directly responsible for its existence and Marcus Loew and Adolph Zukor, the men behind those companies.

Fur Salesmen to Theater Magnates

Marcus Loew was born on May 7, 1870 at Avenue B and Fifth Street in New York City. He lived in poverty on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, which had a large, thriving German and Jewish immigrant community known as Little Germany. Because of his family’s extreme poverty, he was forced to work starting at a very young age and was unable to get any formal education. He eventually got a job turning a crank on a fur-cutting machine and spent fifteen years working in the fur trade, eventually working his way up to a traveling fur salesman. On one sales trip to the Midwest, he was introduced to a man named Adolph Zukor.

Zukor, a Hungarian who had immigrated to the United States in 1889 at the age of 16, also started working in the fur trade in New York City before moving to Chicago a few years later. Once in Chicago, Zukor started his own business, Zukor’s Novelty Fur Company, which was quite successful. Loew and Zukor became fast friends, and when Zukor was considering a move back to New York, Loew helped him find an apartment in the city not far from his own. In 1903, Zukor invested in a peep show arcade and was so fascinated by the business that he opened his own. Loew invested in Zukor’s theater business, and after receiving a return on his initial investment, decided to strike out on his own. He rented a space on 23rd Street in Manhattan and opened a peep show in late 1904. He continued working as a fur salesman

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KINGS Brooklyn

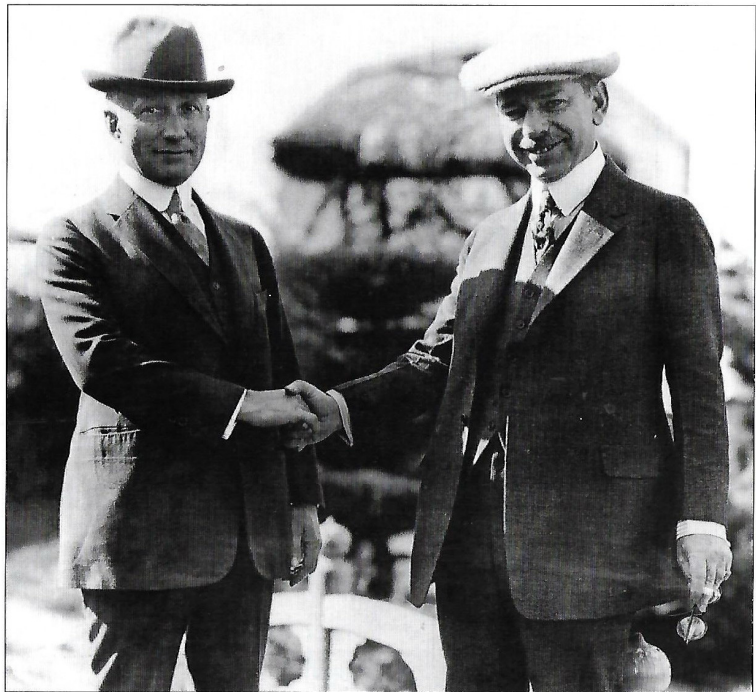
while the theater was starting out but quit as soon as it was evident that it was a success. Loew began renting spaces in unsavory neighborhoods to set up nickelodeons and used the profits from those to set up new ones in more desirable locations.

At this time, vaudeville was more popular than motion pictures, and Loew was concerned that films might be just a passing fad. So, when he set up his company, he chose a name that drew on that popularity - the People's Vaudeville Company. He began to pair his films with vaudeville acts, but he could not afford to pay as much as the larger vaudeville circuits (such as Keith, Orpheum, and Shubert) and was unable to compete with them directly. He would often book lower quality acts that did not make it on those circuits and then pair those acts with high quality films to make up for the lackluster vaudeville.

The People's Vaudeville Company expanded considerably in 1909 when the Shubert Organization, a New York-based vaudeville and theater company, invested in it. The following year, Loew reorganized the company into Loew's Consolidated Enterprises and took it public. He appointed himself president, with Zukor as treasurer and Nicholas Schenk as secretary. In 1911 the new company purchased the William Morris vaudeville circuit, which included around 100 theaters throughout the country. He began to expand and, less than a decade later, he had theaters in every major city on the East Coast as well as some on the West Coast.

During this time, Zukor also began to expand his theater interests. He decided that the best way to do so would be to produce his own films to show in his theaters and to partner with small neighborhood houses. To help achieve this, he partnered with Broadway producer Daniel Frohman in 1913 to form Famous Artists. They produced many film adaptations of famous Broadway plays featuring the actors who made the roles famous on the stage, including *An American Citizen* starring John

Adolph Zukor [left] shaking hands with Marcus Loew [right].



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Chicago Theatre opened in 1921 with 3,600 seats. It is currently a live performing arts venue. ©THS



Barrymore, Douglas Fairbanks, Lenore Ulric, and Ina Claire were some of the other actors who came from Broadway to Hollywood to work with Famous Artists. The company then merged with Lasky Feature Players and Paramount Pictures to form Famous Players-Lasky in 1916. Zukor used the profits from his films to purchase theaters across the country so he could produce, distribute, and show all of his films in spaces owned by Famous Players-Lasky and, by 1921, he owned over 300 theaters across the USA and in Canada.

Marcus Loew watched his friend's business decisions very carefully, and in 1920 he purchased the Metro Pictures Corporation for \$3.1 million so that he too could produce films for his theaters. Loew wasn't as interested in the movie making business as Zukor and is quoted as saying he was only doing it "for the money there is in it." The stress of running a theater company, vaudeville booking agency, and now a film studio began to affect his health, and in 1923 he had a heart attack.

After the heart attack, Loew's health continued to decline and he considered retiring. He started looking for people to replace him as the head of his various companies. At a friend's suggestion, he found Louis Mayer, head of Mayer Pictures, who he thought would be perfect to take over running Metro Pictures. At the same time, he also purchased Goldwyn Pictures (which had a number of actors under contract, a large production studio, and, most importantly, some affiliated theaters, including the Capitol Theatre in New York). Metro and Goldwyn merged in April 1924 to form Metro-Goldwyn Pictures. Mayer took over as production chief, had all of the movies credited to "Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer," and MGM was formed. In just a few years, MGM became one of the major studios in the country.

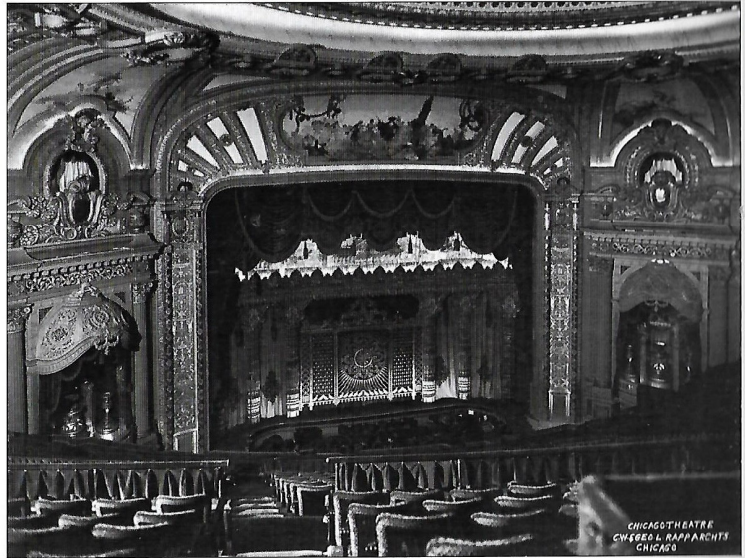
Loew and Zukor maintained a friendly rivalry of sorts, outbidding each other on the same theater or poaching actors from the other's company. They didn't let this sour their friendship and still played tennis together on a semi-regular basis. By the mid-1920s, Loew's had a larger theater presence on the East Coast of the United States and Zukor had more in the middle of the country. Instead of continuing to expand into the other's territory, they came to a mutual agreement. Loew would show Famous Players-Lasky films at his neighborhood theaters and Zukor would show MGM films at his. That way, neither one needed to expand into the other's territory beyond what theaters they already controlled. By 1924, Loew had around 144 theaters, and if you

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KINGS Brooklyn

went to see a motion picture in New Orleans, Pittsburgh, or Cleveland it was very likely that you saw it at a Loew's owned or controlled house. Around the same time, Zukor had around 200 theaters, but wasn't expanding as fast as Loew. In 1926, he purchased a controlling interest in Balaban and Katz Chicago. This gave Famous Players-Lasky control of over 500 theaters, which was well over twice the number that Loew's had. Balaban and Katz had developed a concept that they called the "wonder theater." The "wonder theater" was a large opulent theater with an imposing façade, a huge lobby, and a lavishly-decorated interior. The Chicago Theater opened by Balaban & Katz in 1918 on North State Street in Chicago is generally considered to be the first wonder theater.

Loew passed away in September 1927 at the age of 57. At the time of his death, he had turned over control of Loew's Inc. and MGM to his vice president, Nicholas M. Schenck. Loew's Inc. then began reducing the number of Famous Players-Lasky films shown in Loew's Theaters, so Zukor made plans to expand the "wonder theater" concept into Loew's territory including the New York Metropolitan area. He went to Schenck to work out a deal like the one he had with Loew, but was unable to come to an agreement. So, Paramount/Famous Players started looking for locations to build theaters of its own.



The interior of the Chicago Theatre. ©TMS

The Neighborhood

One area they selected was Flatbush, a neighborhood in central Brooklyn. Flatbush was originally settled in 1651 as a Dutch colony called Midwout. The English took over Flatbush and the rest of what is now Kings County from the Dutch in 1664. The name Flatbush is the English version of the Dutch term *Vlacke bos*, meaning flat woodland or wooded plain. The sleepy village became part of Brooklyn in 1894, and, four years later, part of New York City.

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Originally a carport for the Brooklyn Railroad Company, the site where the Kings was built had almost been the home of another theater ten years earlier. William Fox of the Fox Film Corporation purchased the property on November 1, 1919, and intended to build the biggest theater in Brooklyn on the site. The property had been owned by the railroad company since 1870 and was most recently used as a supply station for the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company. Fox hired well-known theater architect Thomas W. Lamb to design a 3500-seat theater for the property, but it was never built. Fox ended up building his Brooklyn Theatre at Boerum Hill on the other end of Flatbush Avenue. Fox liked to buy land in areas he thought would need a theater, often never building anything and just selling the land years later.

Building the Kings

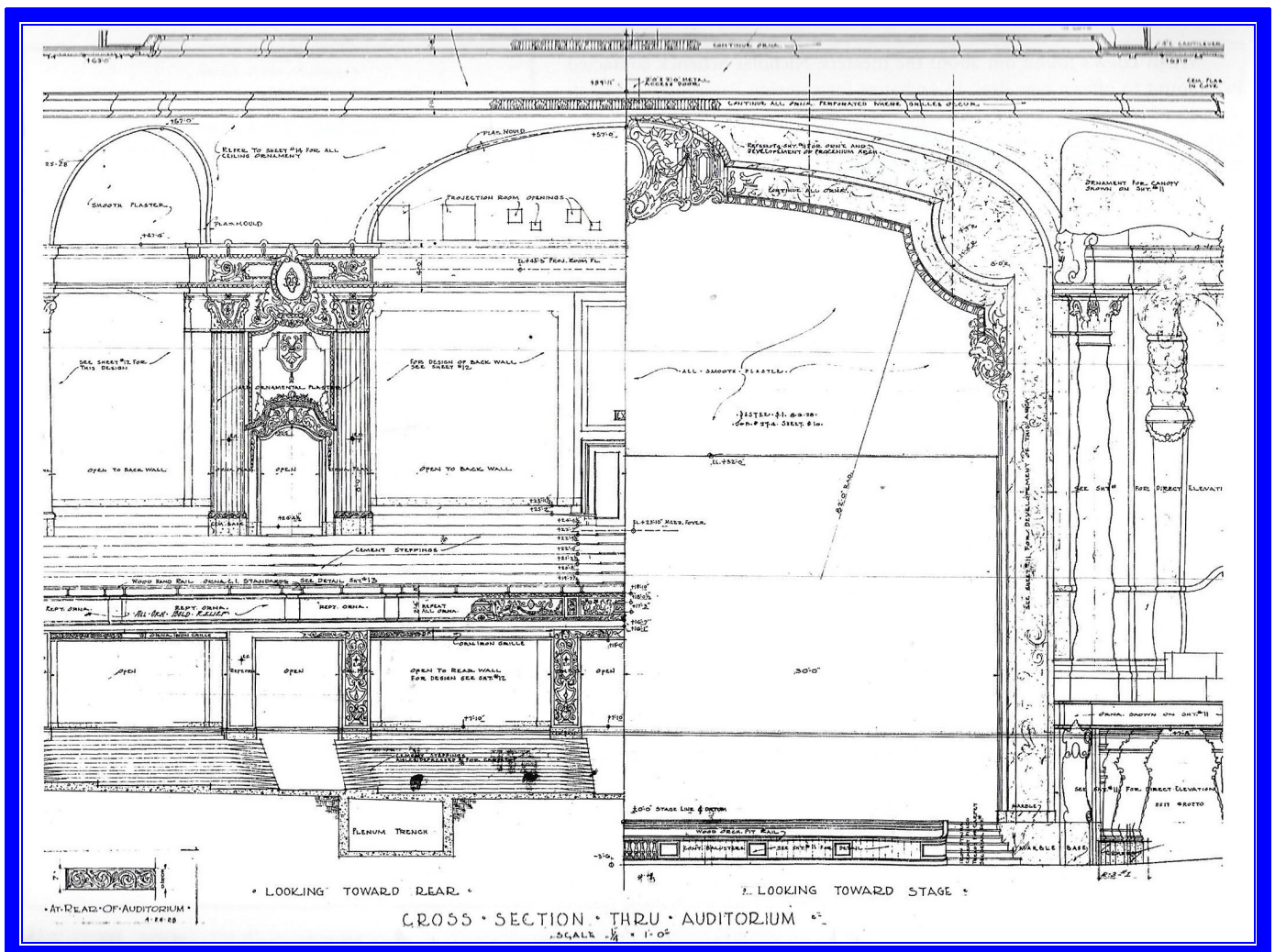
In 1927, Famous Players entered into an agreement with the Allied Owners Corporation, a subsidiary of New York Investors, Inc., to finance the construction of the theater. According to the agreement, the Allied Owners Corp. would hold the deed to the Flatbush Ave. property along with three others in New York and one in Birmingham, Alabama and finance the construction of the theaters. Upon completion, the theaters would be leased to the Paramount-Famous Players-Lasky Corporation to repay the bond. In October 1927, Allied Owners sold an issue of \$9,500,000 real estate bonds and used the profits to finance the building of the five theaters. These theaters were the Paramount, Kings, and Pitkin in Brooklyn, the Valencia in Jamaica, NY, and the Alabama Theatre in Birmingham.

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When Loew's found out about the theaters, Nicholas Schenck contacted Paramount to offer a new deal. In exchange for showing Paramount Films in over 40 of Loew's theaters, Paramount would sublease three of the four New York theaters over to Loew's, keeping the one located in downtown Brooklyn. When the agreement was finalized, the Pitkin, the Valencia, and the Kings opened as Loew's theaters. The theaters would be paid for in 181 monthly payments: \$20,983 a month for The Kings, \$18,873 for The Pitkin, and, \$18,228 a month for The Valencia.

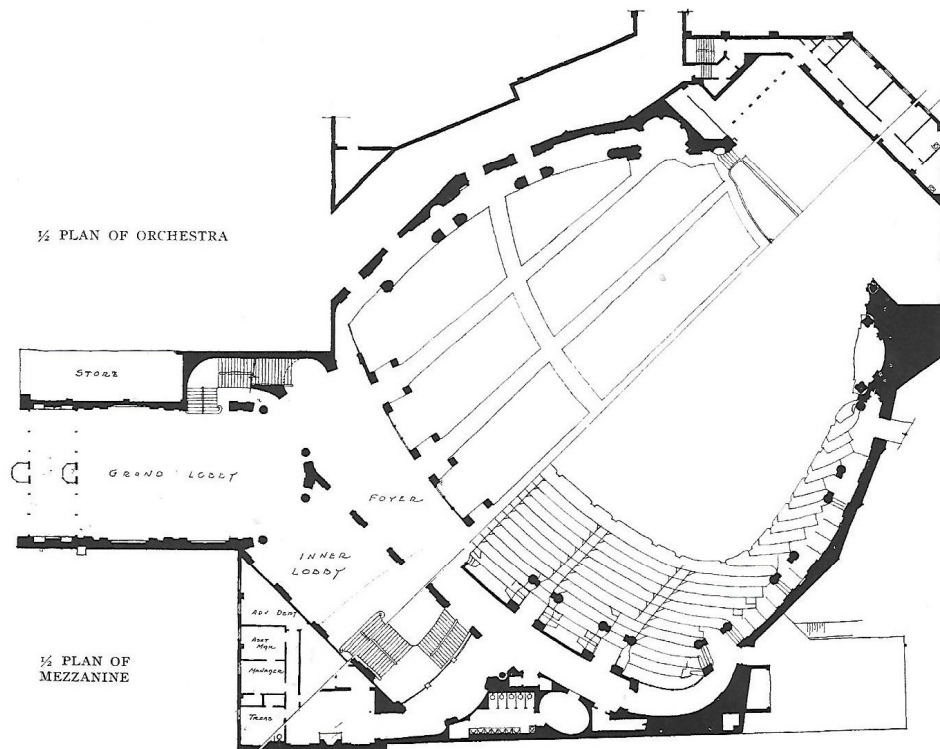
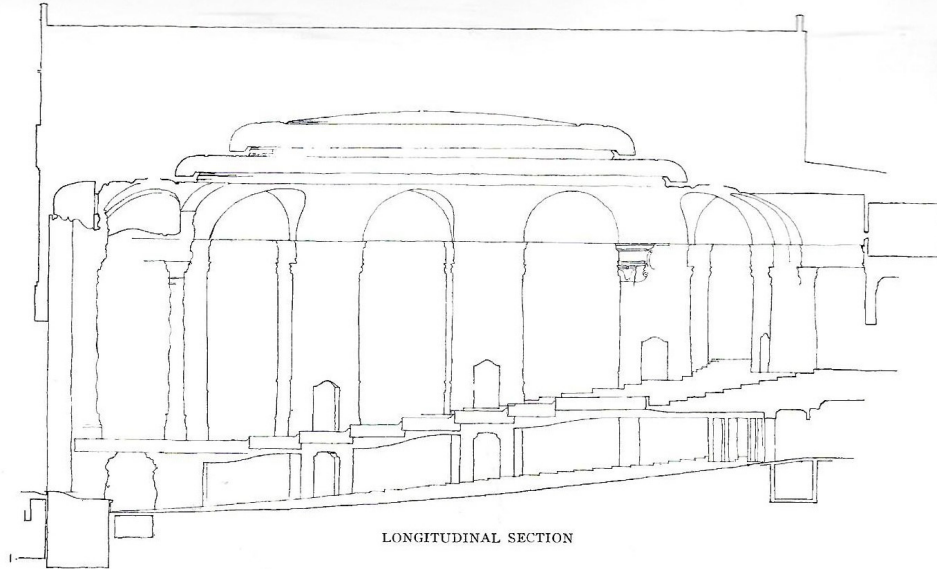
(KTML)



The left section shows a Plenum Trench beneath the basement floor for positive pressure supply air which was probably distributed through mushroom type outlets at floor level, working with high level extract/return. (Theatre Historical Society)

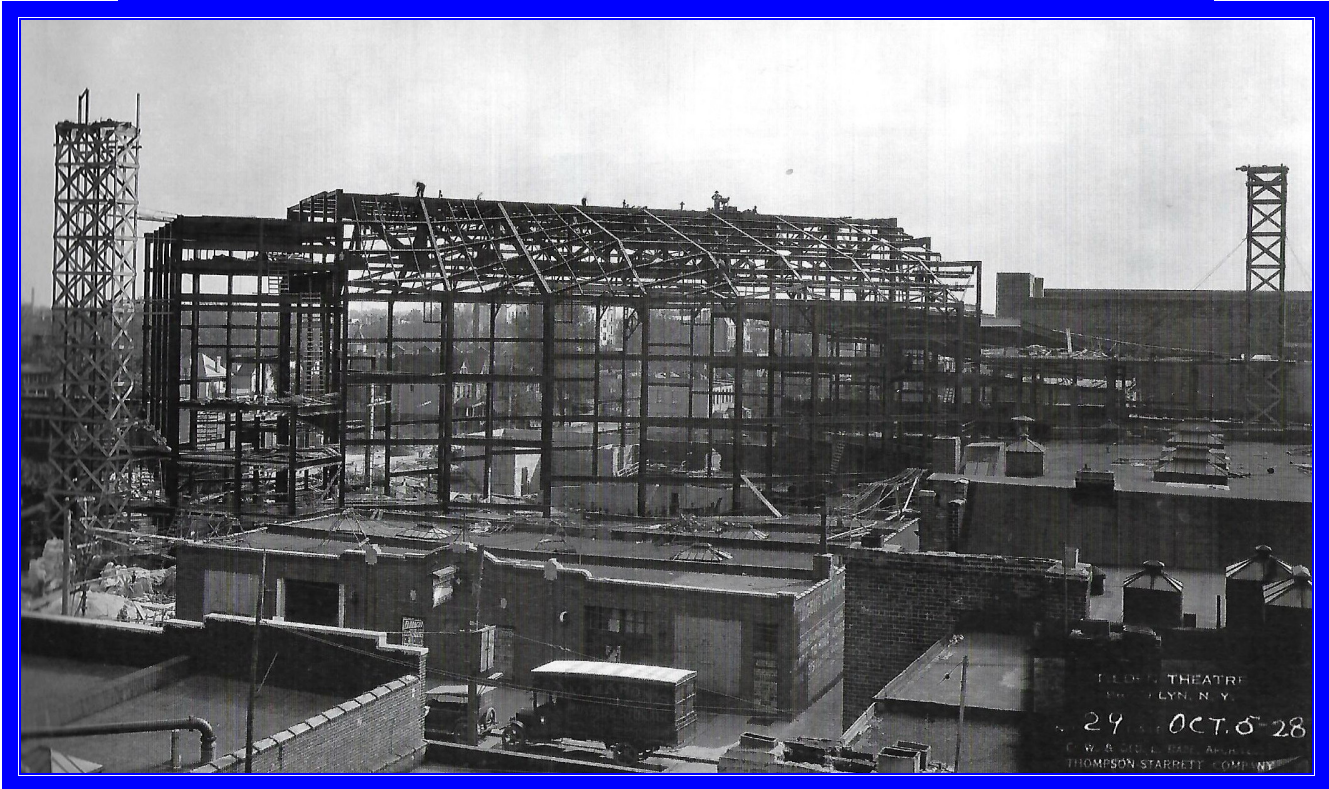
KINGS Brooklyn

AMERICAN THEATRES OF TODAY



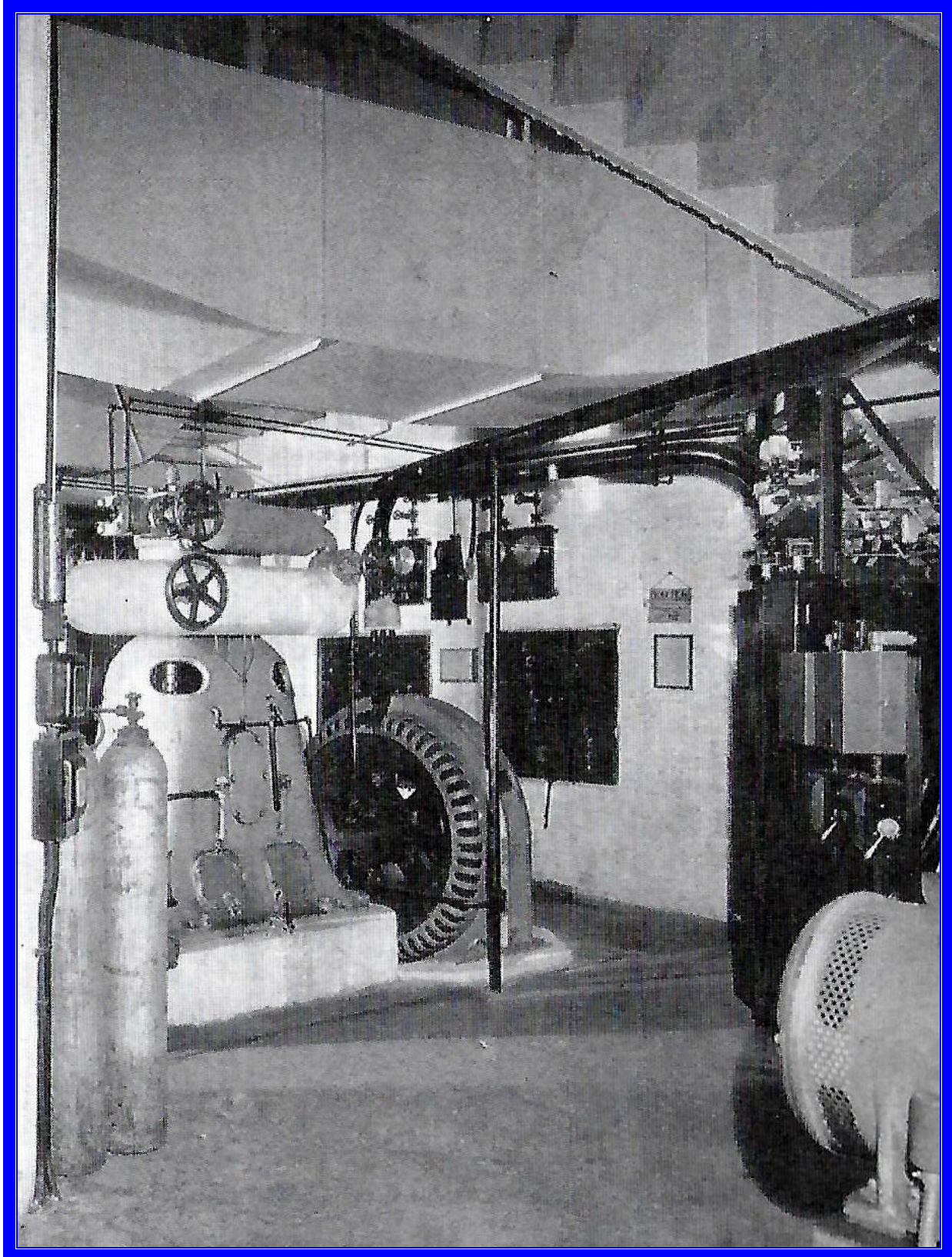
Kings Theatre, Brooklyn, New York
C. W. & Geo. L. Rapp, architects
The orchestra seats 2798 and the mezzanine 878 persons

KINGS Brooklyn



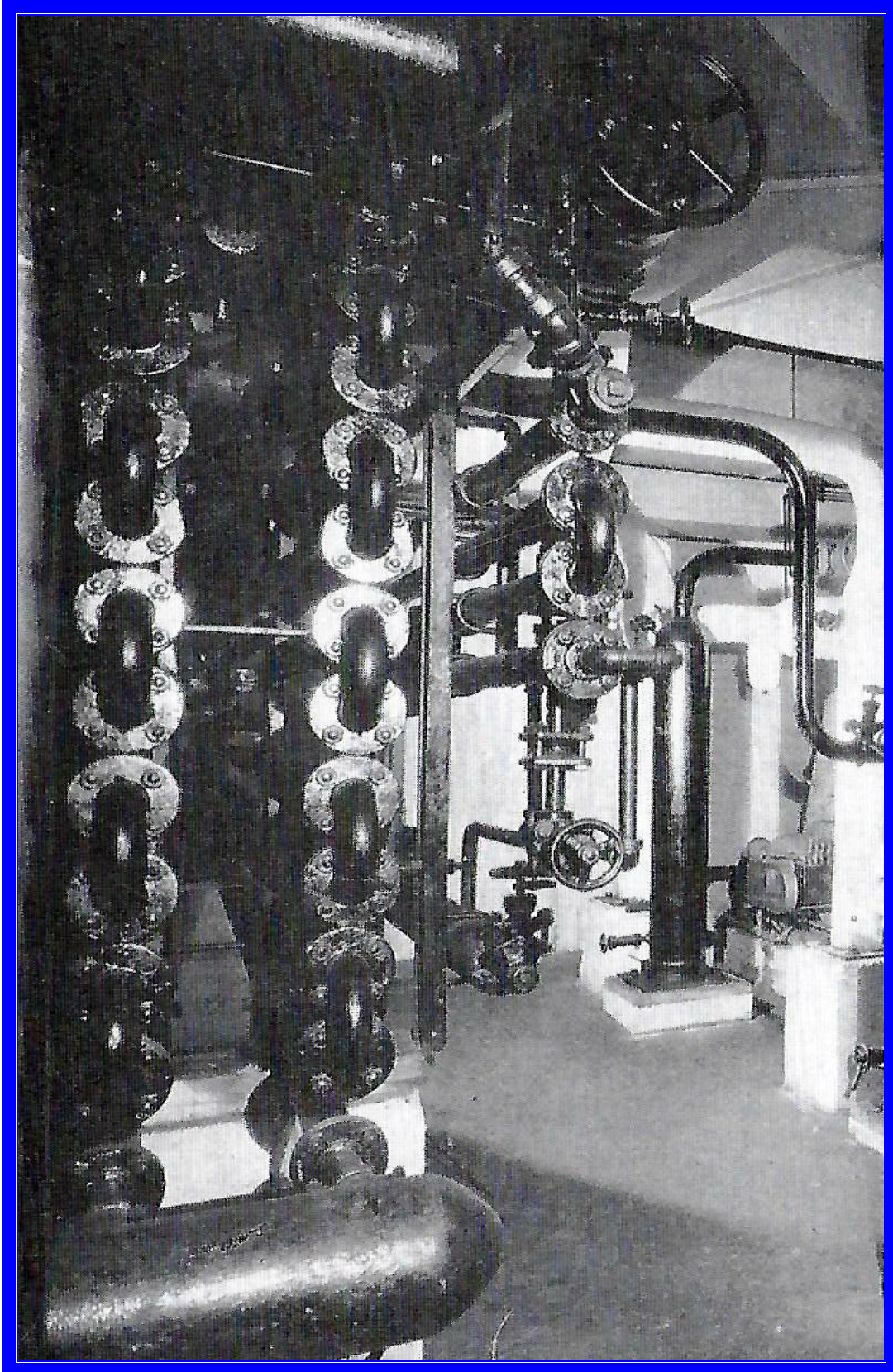
Kings Theatre under construction 1928 (Theatre Historical Society)

KINGS Brooklyn



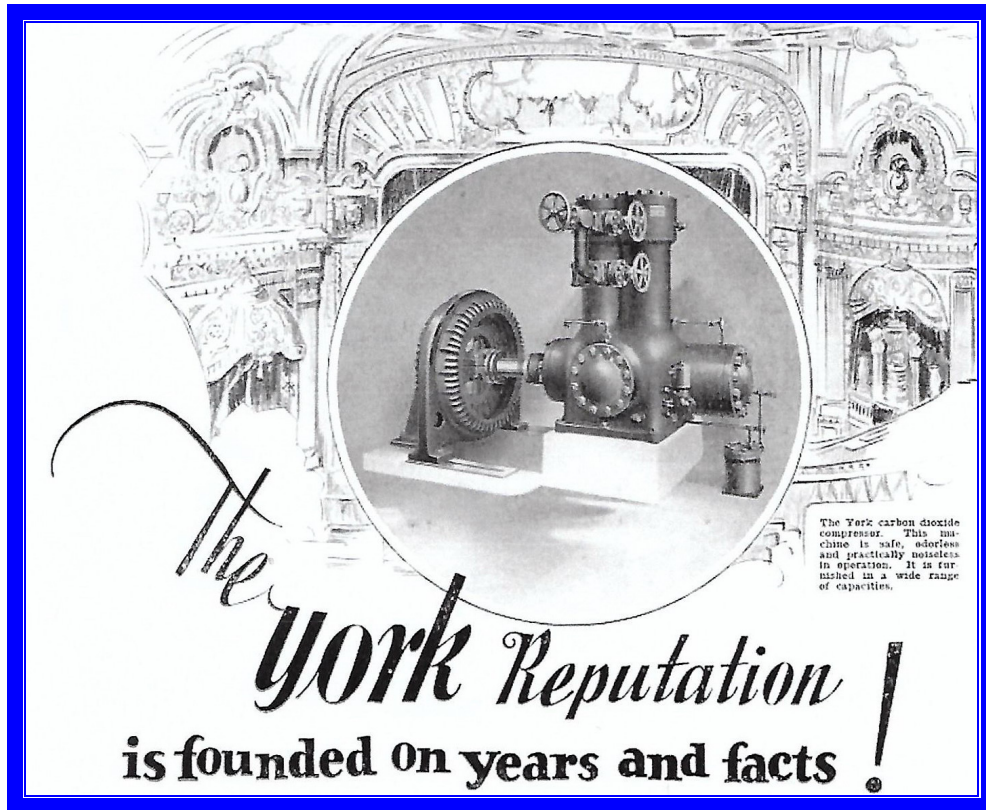
York CO2 Refrigeration Plant (American Theatres of Today)

KINGS Brooklyn



York CO₂ Refrigeration Plant (American Theatres of Today)

KINGS Brooklyn

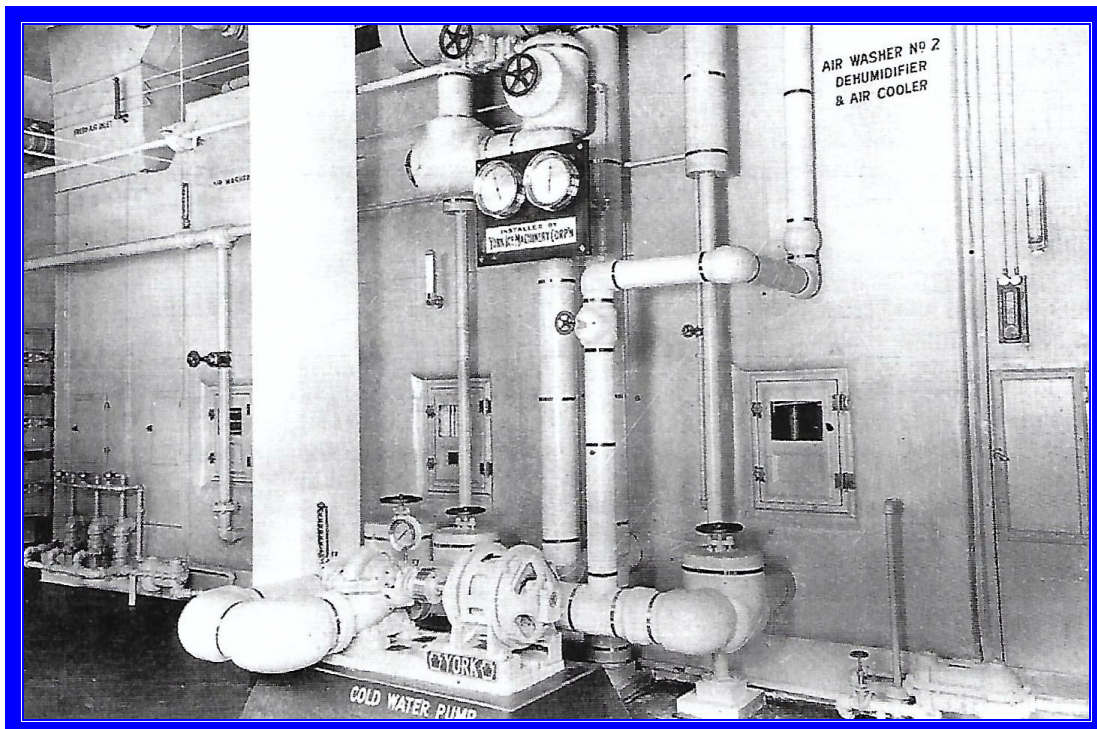


The York carbon dioxide compressor. This machine is safe, oilless and practically noiseless in operation. It is furnished in a wide range of capacities.

The
York Reputation!
is founded on years and facts!

This advertisement features a central circular inset showing a detailed view of a York carbon dioxide compressor. The compressor is a complex mechanical device with various pipes, valves, and a large flywheel. It is set against a background of an ornate, classical-style interior with arches and decorative elements. The text is arranged around the inset, with a small block of descriptive text to the right and a large, stylized headline below.

York advertisement featuring their CO2 refrigeration compressor



York air conditioning air washer c.1930 (The Legend of York International)

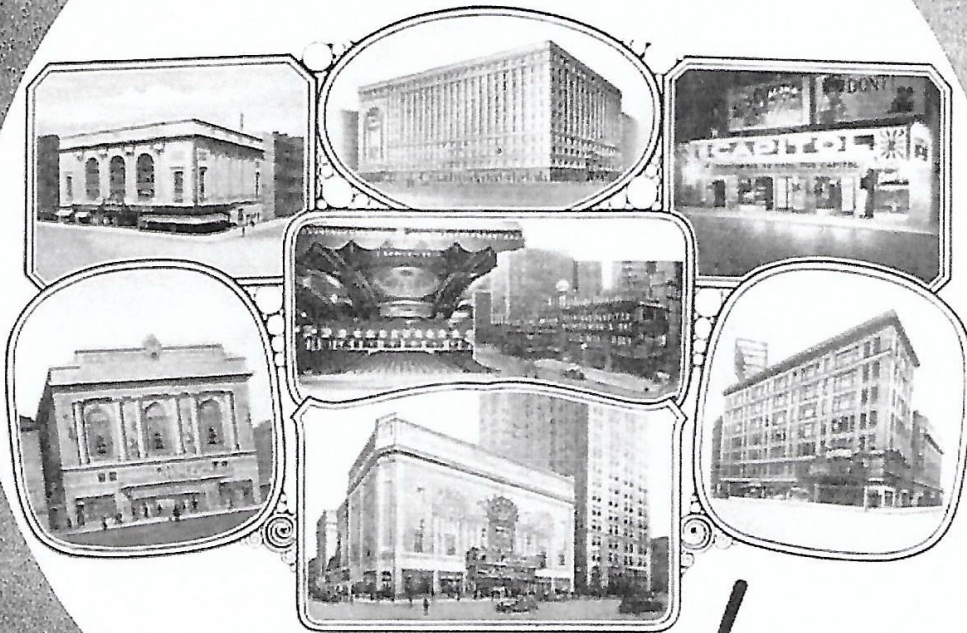
KINGS Brooklyn

June 24, 1927

MOTION PICTURE NEWS

YORK

Air Cooling for Theatres



Kills the Summer Slump.

*Old Man Summer Slump Has Seen His Day—At
Least In York Cooled Theatres*

Entertainment and comfort go hand in hand, and since you can't keep your theatre comfortable your box office suffers.

YORK AIR COOLING SYSTEMS have been installed in the theatres shown above: the World at Omaha, the Fox Grand Theatre in the National Press Club, Washington, the Capitol at Nashville, the Stanley at Madison, the Winter Garden, New York, the Earle at Philadelphia and the Stanley at Detroit.

In addition, plans are being formulated for **YORK COOLING SYSTEMS** in the Colonial at Allentown, the State at Easton, the Rose Marie, New York, Cameo, New York, Loew's State at Newark, Loew's Astor, New York and Loew's 53rd Street Theatre in Brooklyn.

Write for full information on the **YORK SYSTEM**.

YORK MFG. CO.
York, Pa.

Please send me full particulars on the
York System of Theatre Cooling.

Name _____

Address _____

KINGS Brooklyn

HVAC RETROFIT

During the restoration of Kings Theatre the HVAC systems were restored and reused where possible and new central equipment retrofitted.

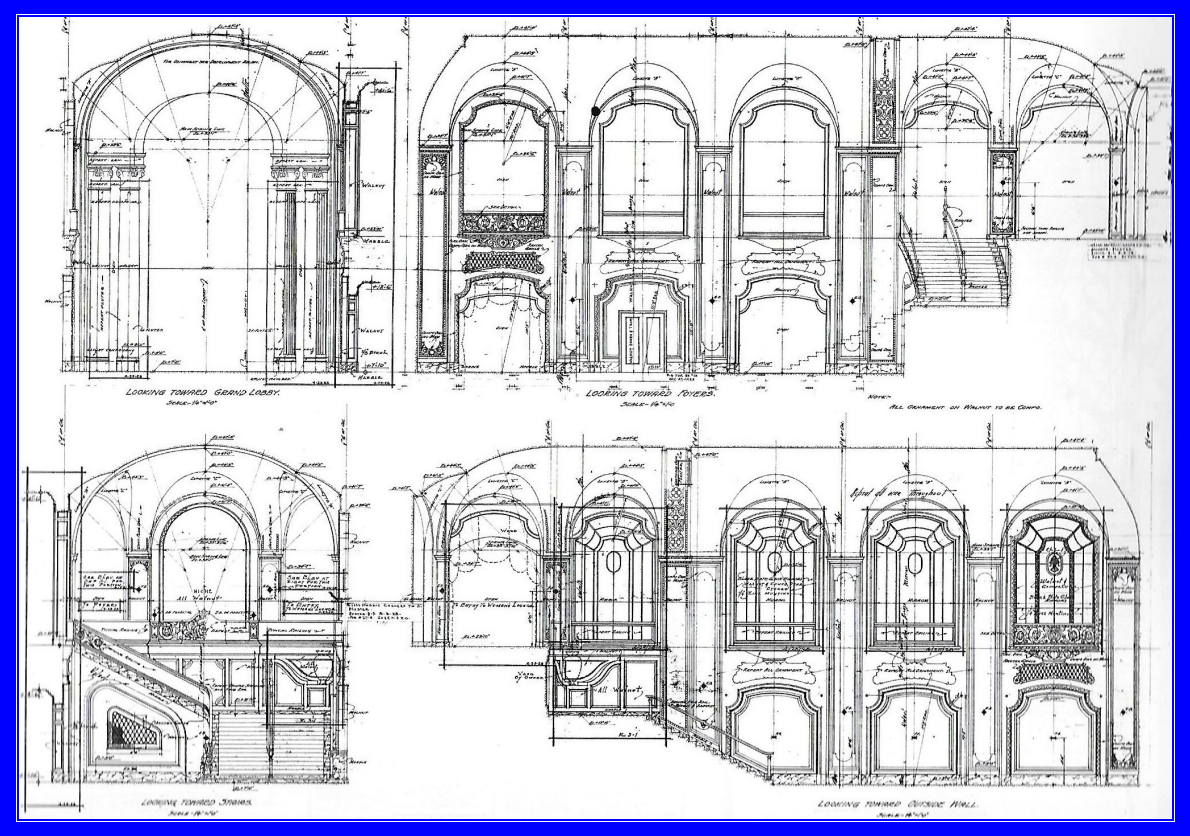
HVAC Contractor Trystate Mechanical

HVAC equipment and salvaged features

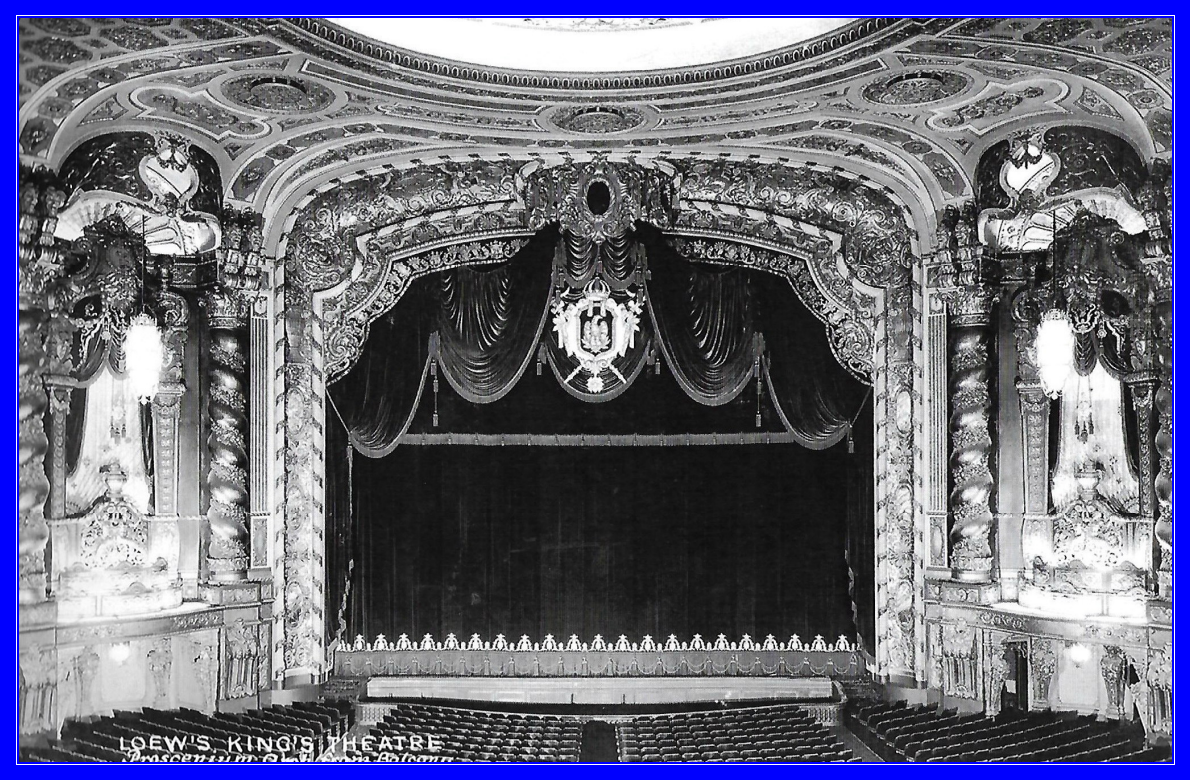
Trystate installed two air-cooled chillers in partnership with Trane, which provided controls systems, and four large packaged rooftop gas-fired units powered by natural gas. The chillers and boilers are connected to three air handling units controlled by advanced variable air volume (VAV) units. Refrigeration split systems were installed to provide spot cooling in critical high-heat areas such as projection booths.

Fortunately much of the original ductwork was able to be salvaged by Trystate, which worked with strategic partner TechClean to clean, repair, sanitize, and reline the existing ductwork. Additionally, a series of existing tunnels underneath the seating bowl was cleaned, sanitized, and coated so that they could serve as the return air system for the theater. These important steps reduced the need for demolition of the architectural ceilings, avoiding the associated cost, waste, and loss of important features.

KINGS Brooklyn

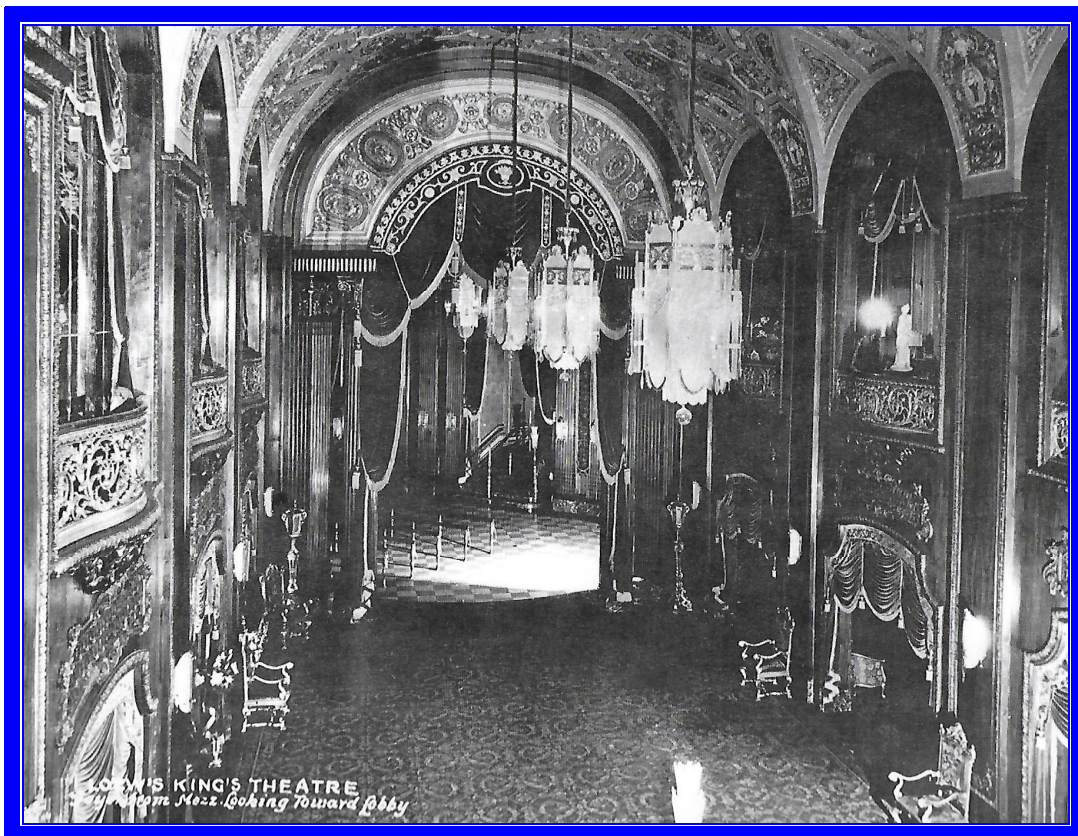


(Theatre Historical Society)



Proscenium arch (Theatre Historical Society)

KINGS Brooklyn



Chandelier lighting (Theatre Historical Society)

KINGS Brooklyn



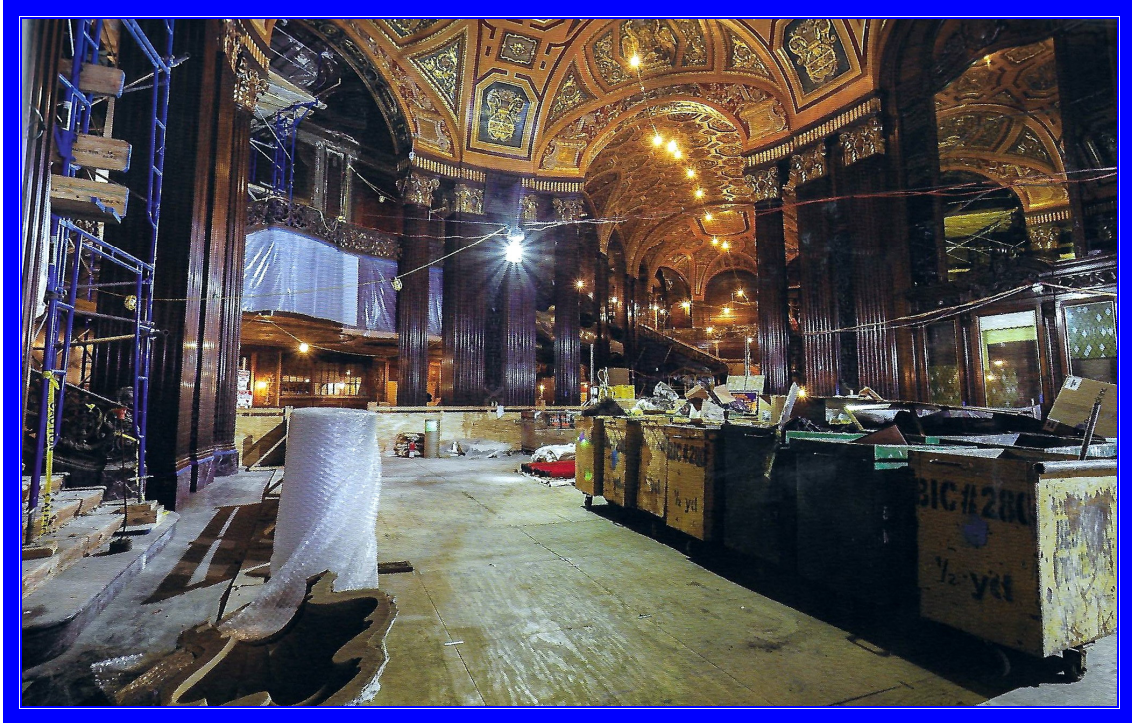
Chandelier detail (Theatre Historical Society)

KINGS Brooklyn



The auditorium damage before restoration (KTML)

KINGS Brooklyn

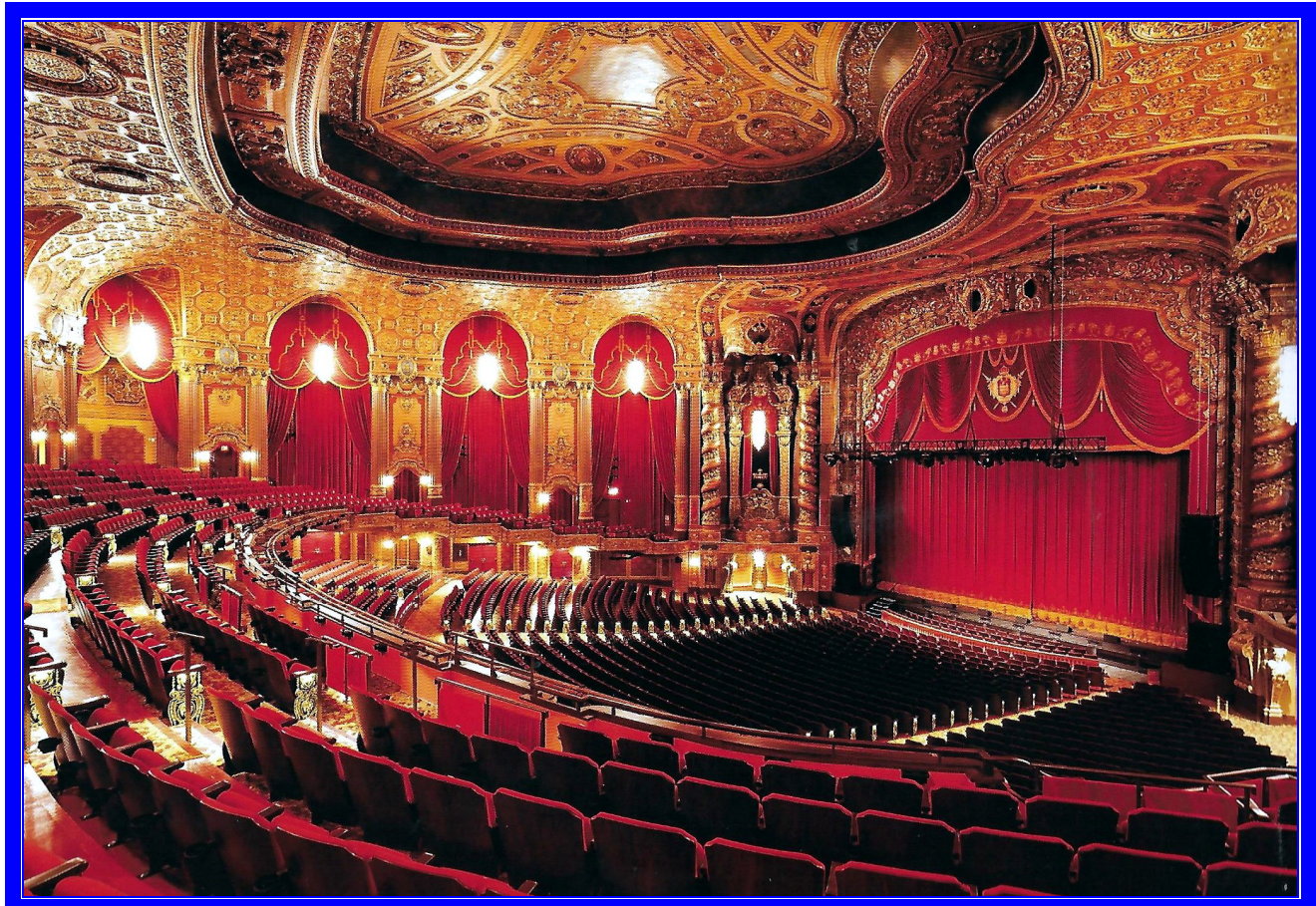
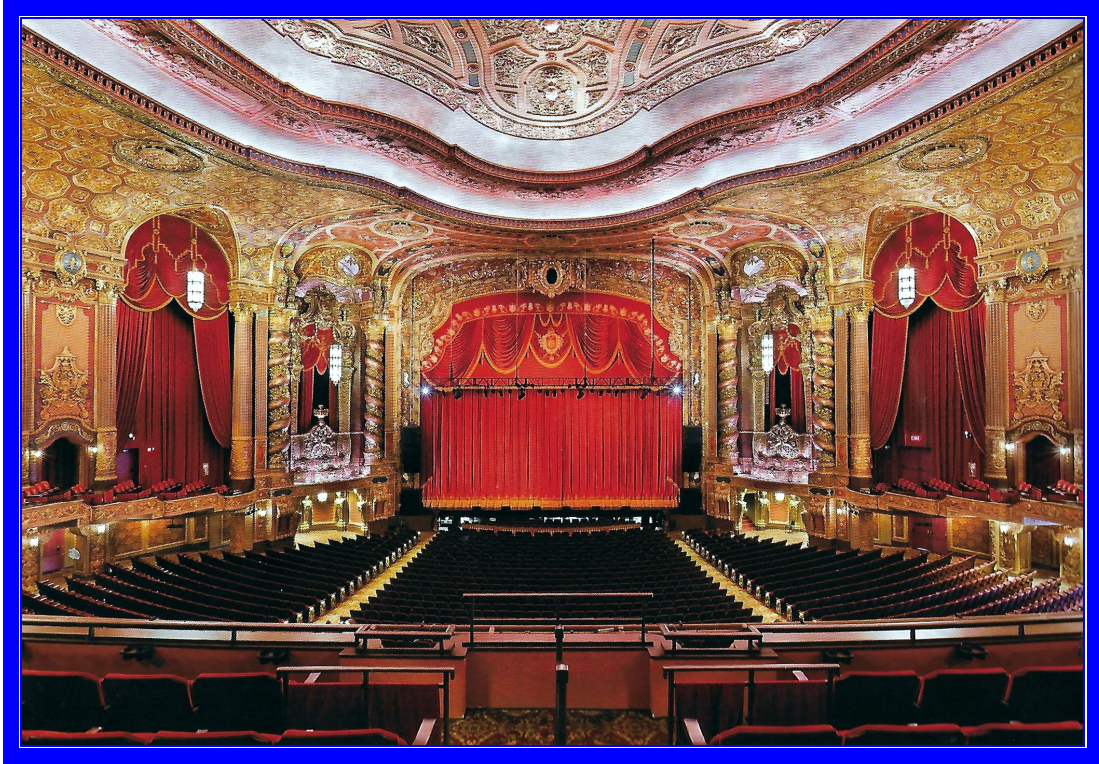


The Lobby nearing restoration 2013 (KTML)



The auditorium with restoration in progress (KTML)

KINGS Brooklyn



The auditorium restored and in use (KTML)

KINGS Brooklyn

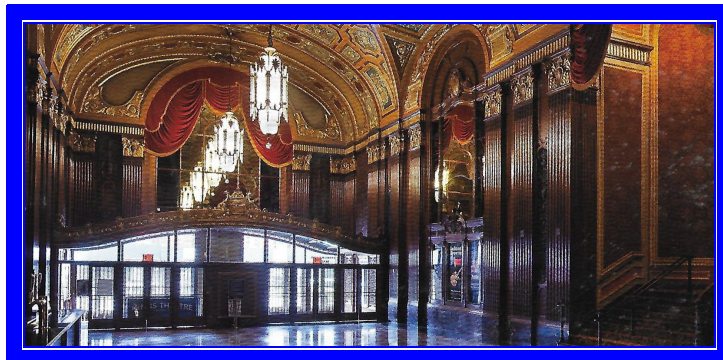
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Some Websites with Theatre and/or HVAC & R History

cinematreasures.org
hevac-heritage.org/e-books large
historictheatres.org





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