

# Air Conditioning American Movie Theatres 1917-Present Day

## Theatres Restored

LOEW'S STATE, NY & KINGS BROOKLYN



Loew's Kings Theatre, Brooklyn, New York

*Most of the time, there is nothing remarkable about a movie theatre today; but that wasn't always the case. When the great American movie palaces began opening in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were some of the most lavish, stunning buildings ever seen. However, they wouldn't last- with the advent of in-home television, theatre companies found it harder and harder to keep them open.*

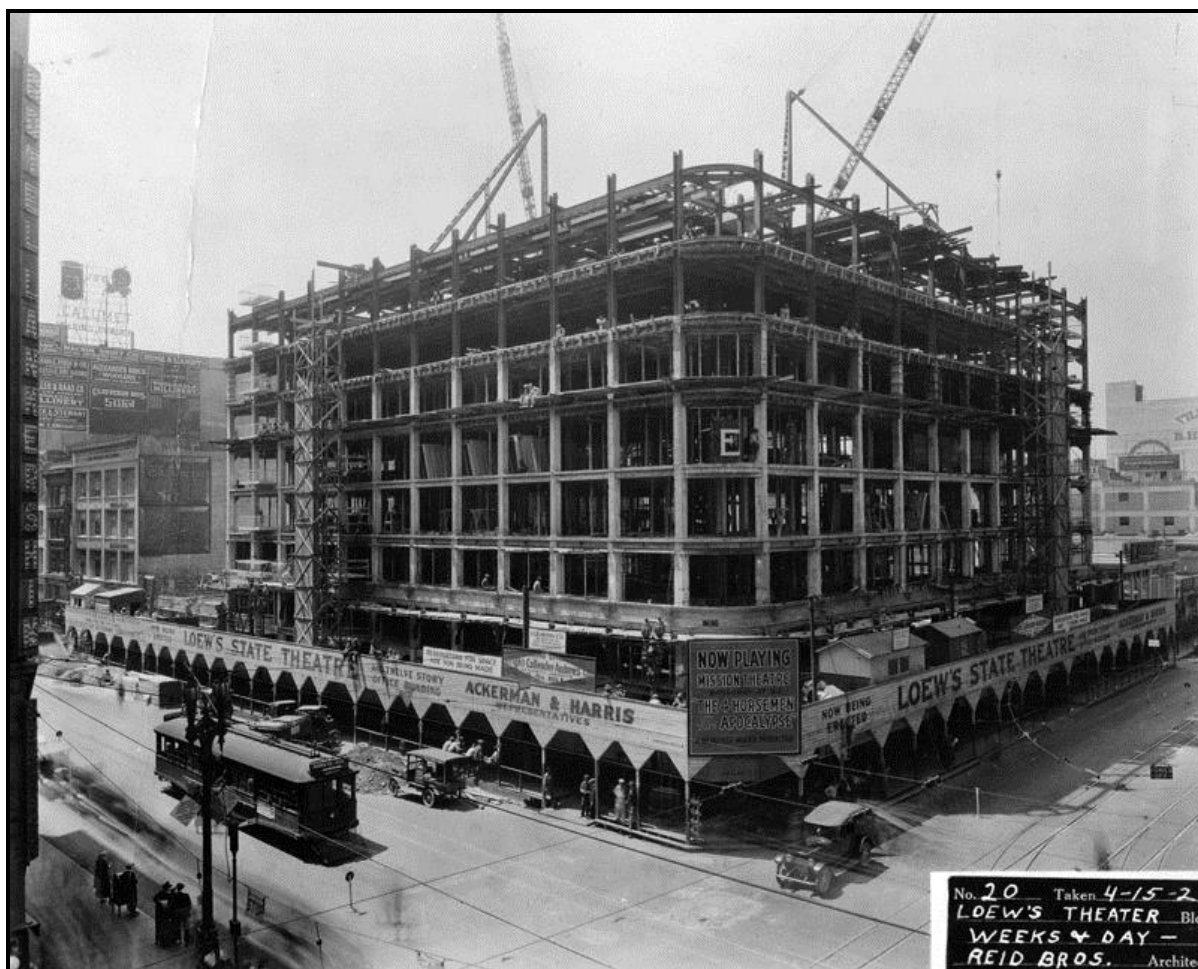
*Some were demolished, some were converted, and some remain empty to this day.*

After the Final Curtain  
The Fall of the American Movie Theatre  
Matt Lambros (Photographer), 2016

**Air Conditioning American Movie Theatres  
1917-Present Day**

# *Loew's State Theatre*

**SYRACUSE, NEW YORK**



**Date Opened: 1928**

**Seating Capacity: 3300**

**Owner: Loew's (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer)**

**Architect: Thomas W Lamb**

**Date Saved: 1977 by citizens becoming the Syracuse Area  
Landmark Theatre, known as the Landmark Theatre**



## Air Conditioning & Refrigeration (if any)

The name of possible manufacturers or installers has, to date, not been discovered.

This may seem strange because Syracuse, at this time (1927), was the home of the Carrier Engineering Corporation, the leading provider of air conditioning and refrigerating systems for “movie palaces.” Being a 3300 seat theatre the cooling load would probably be about 300 TR, ideal for the Carrier centrifugal water chiller, cooling being provided typically by 2 x 150 TR machines. Loew’s State Theatre in Syracuse appears not to be listed in the Carrier advertisements of the period.

However, the records show that a number of Loew’s Theatres were equipped with York Ice Machinery CO<sub>2</sub> refrigeration plant including those in Easton, Hartford, Newark, Pittsburgh and Sioux Falls. So maybe Lowe’s standardised on York equipment, but their Syracuse Theatre has not been found in York advertisements.

Another possibility is that “theatre cooling” and/or “refrigeration” was provided by Brunswick-Kroeschell CO<sub>2</sub> equipment as they list Loew’s State Theatre in St Louis, Missouri as one of their installations

While it may seem unlikely that the theatre was not air conditioned, advertisements found for the theatre make no mention of cooling or air conditioning.

A 1997 leaflet, the *Landmark Legend Newsletter*, contains a schedule of money spent on restoration but lists *Improved Air Conditioning* as only \$7000.

**What follows is the story of the theatre itself:**



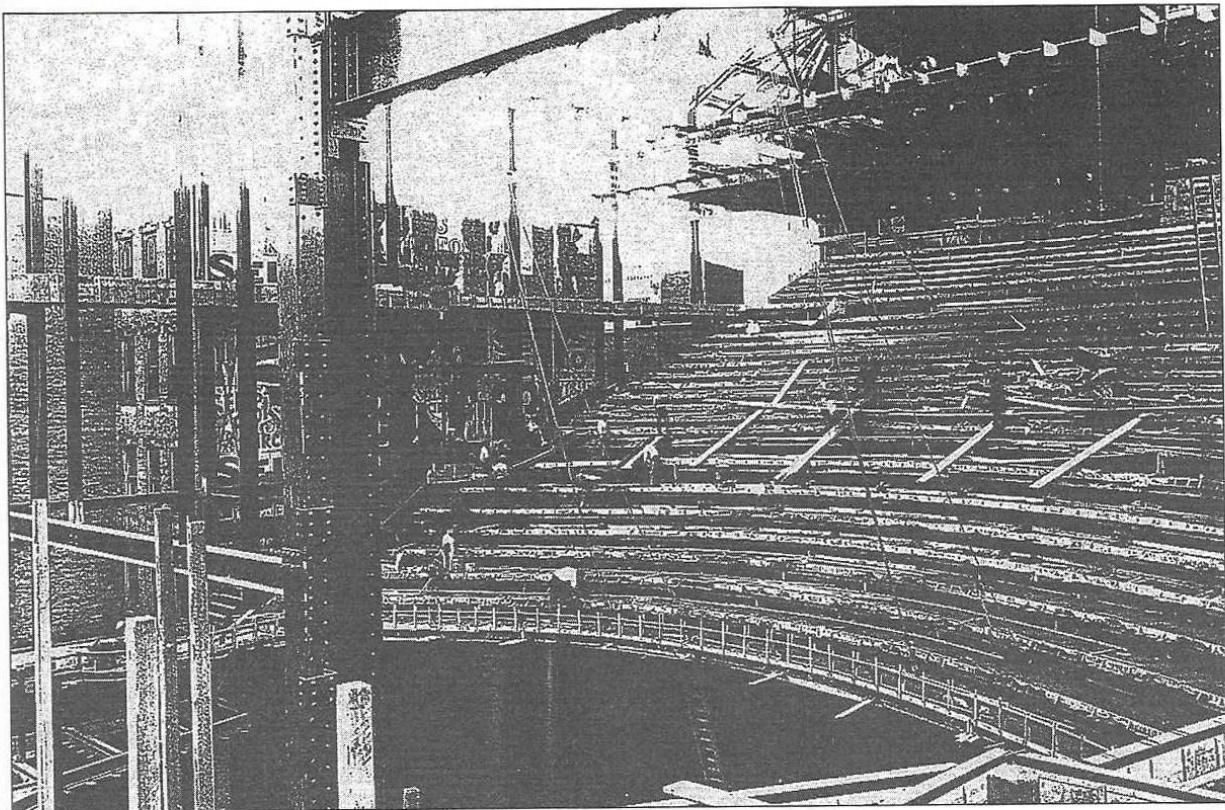
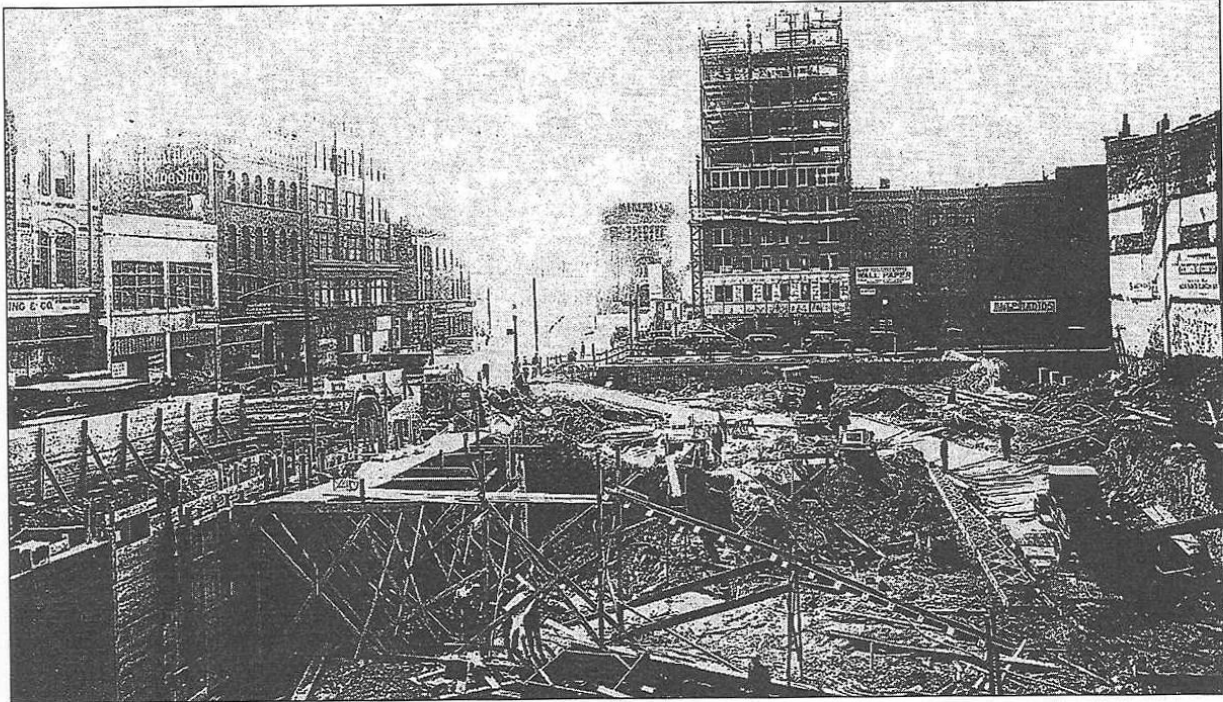


## Constructing a Masterpiece

After site-clearing, ground was broken on March 25, 1927. Construction, costing some \$2 million, took eleven months. Loew, however, never lived to see the result. In frail health, he died of heart failure on Sept. 5, 1927. On the day of his funeral most theaters in the U. S. and Canada closed briefly, then reopened with an orchestral or organ tribute.

Construction-monitoring photos, for Lamb's New York office.

*Landmark Theatre Archive.*



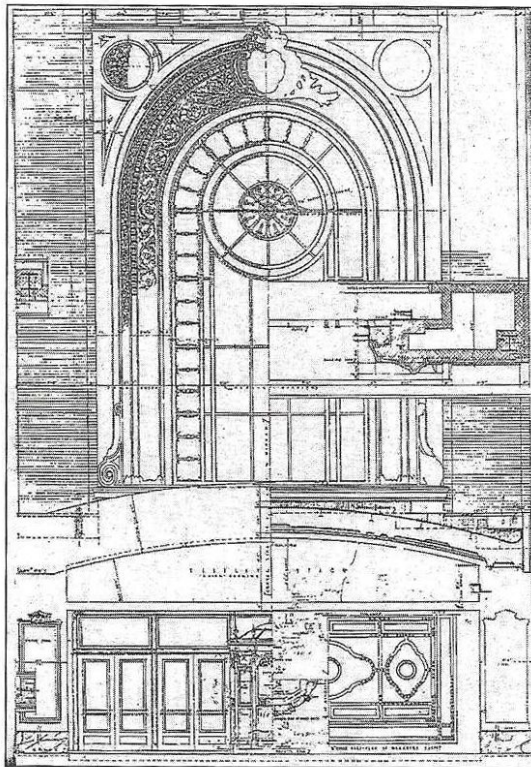
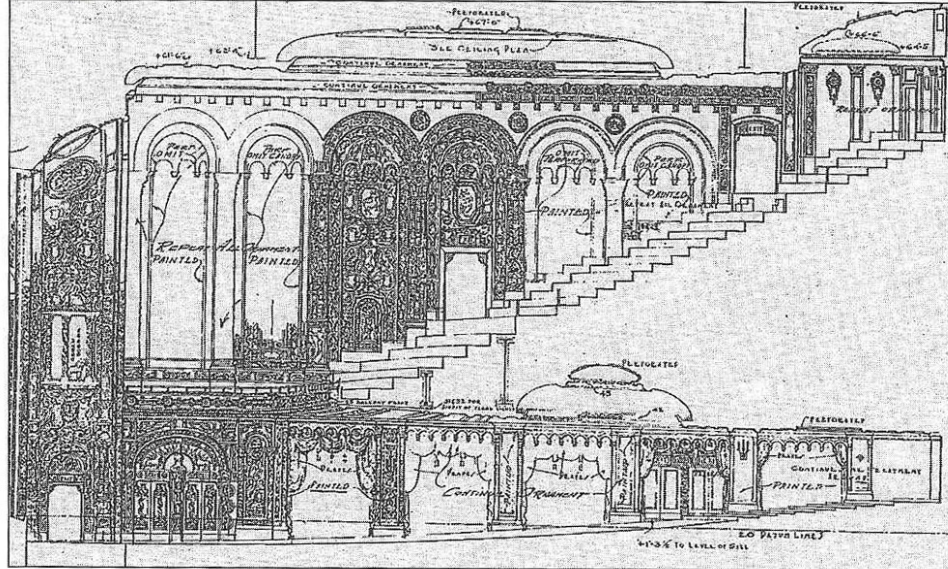


## Blueprinting a Masterpiece

Given virtually a blank check by Loew, Lamb designed the city's largest and grandest movie palace, a meld of Hindu, Persian, and Oriental influences. Its 2,900-seat auditorium, with a sweeping curvilinear balcony, matched the height of the building's eight-story office wing. Its four-story, L-shaped lobby was framed by an overhead "Musicians Gallery," elephantine mural, massive mirrors, carved plaster pillars, diverse enclaves for lighting, and a "Grand Staircase" ascending in chandelier-lit splendor to the mezzanine "Grand Promenade." Heightening the opulence would be furnishings from two mansions, one that of the legendary Commodore Vanderbilt in Manhattan.

Samples (reduced) of Lamb construction drawings.

Landmark Theatre Archive.



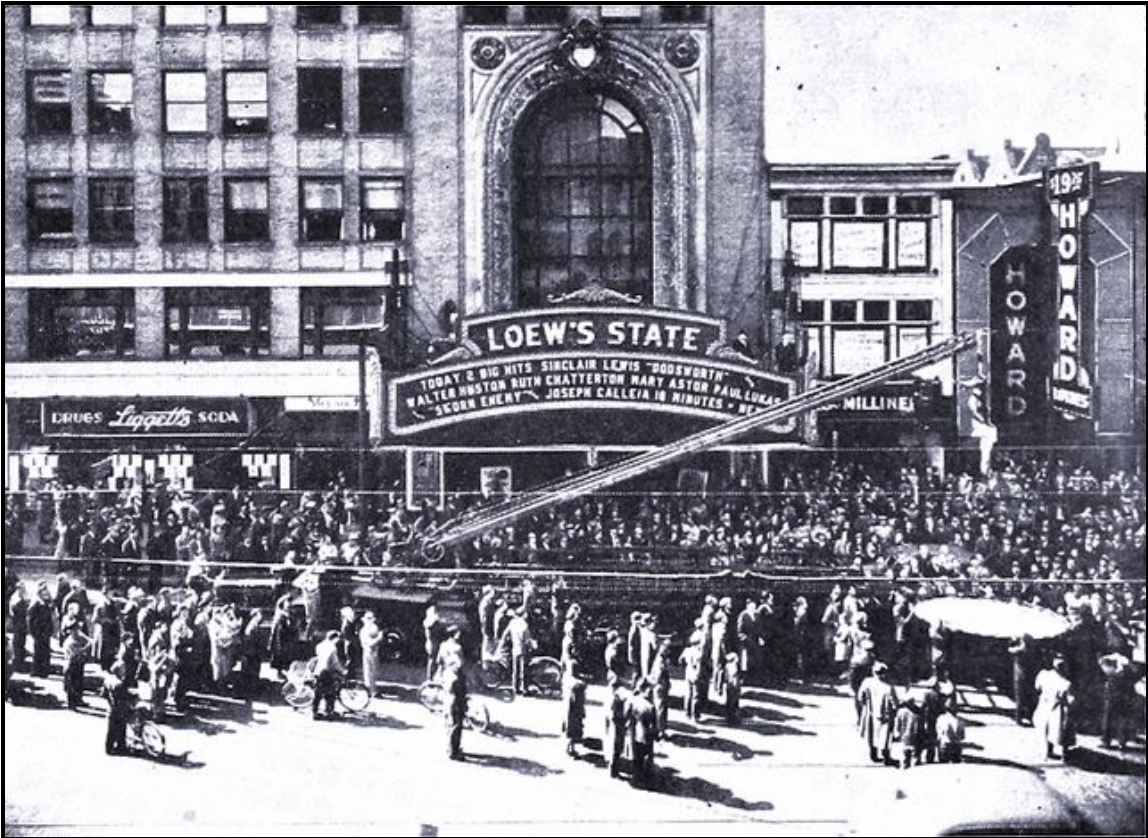














# Restoration

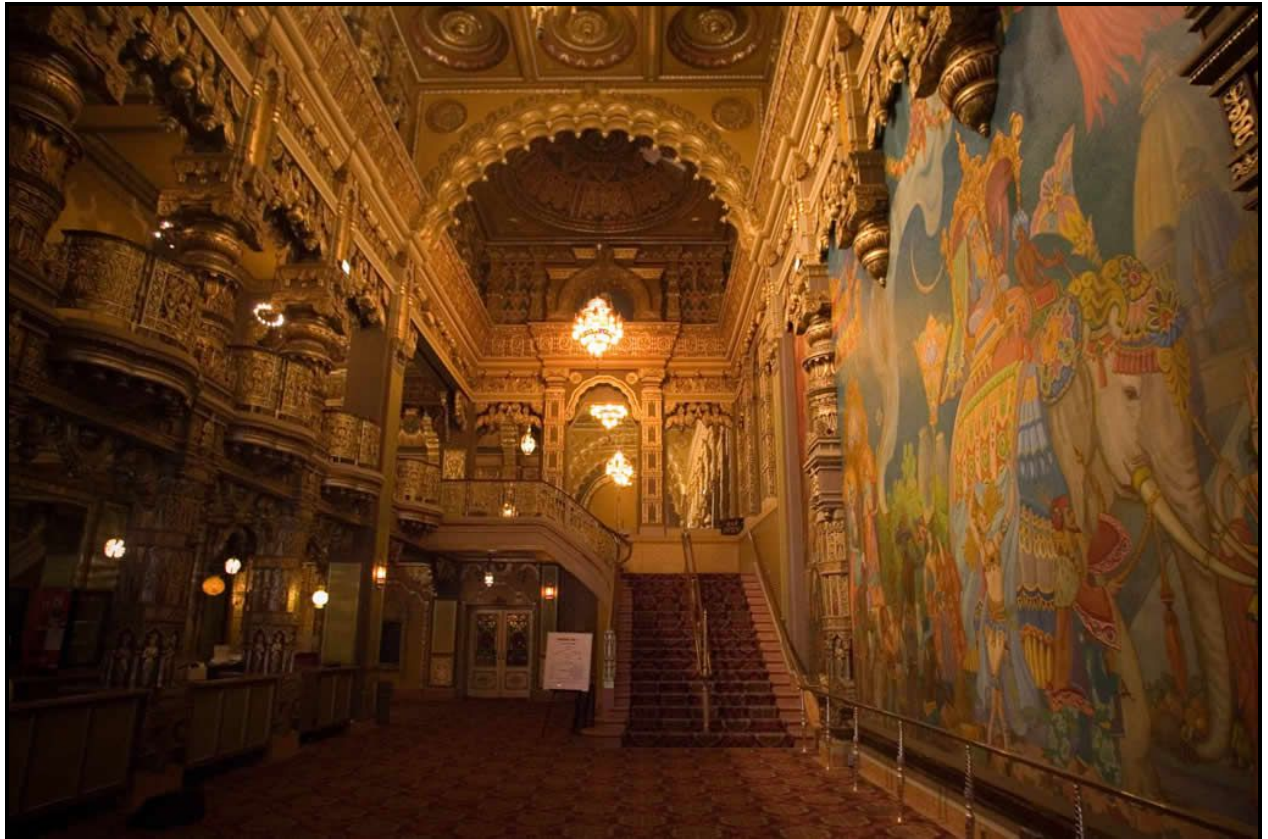


## *Movie Palace Masterpiece*

SAVING SYRACUSE'S LOEW'S STATE / LANDMARK THEATRE

ALFRED BALK, EDITOR







## Photographing a Masterpiece

Photos on ensuing pages, including views of rare Vanderbilt furnishings removed in the Seventies, suggest the visual riches and esthetic perfection of what Lamb wrought.



Kerry Thurston

Lobby-mezzanine Grand Staircase.

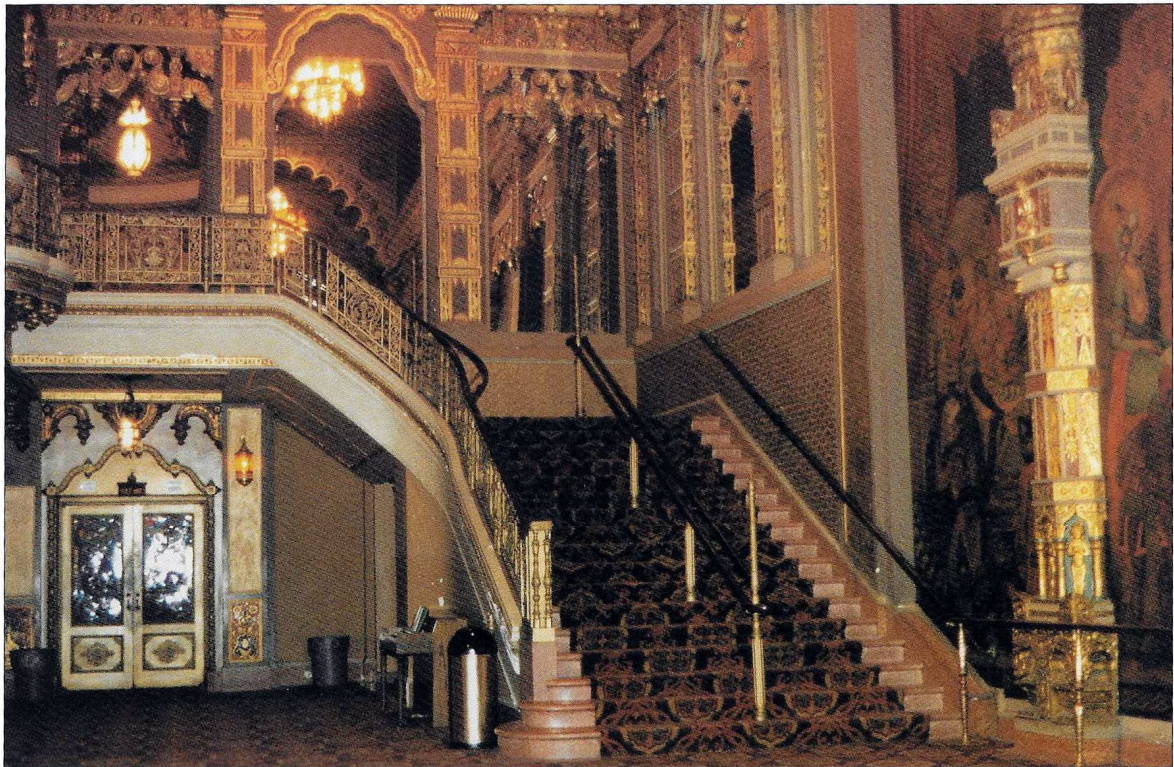




Grand Promenade Today

James Scherzi

16



Lobby-mezzanine Grand Staircase.

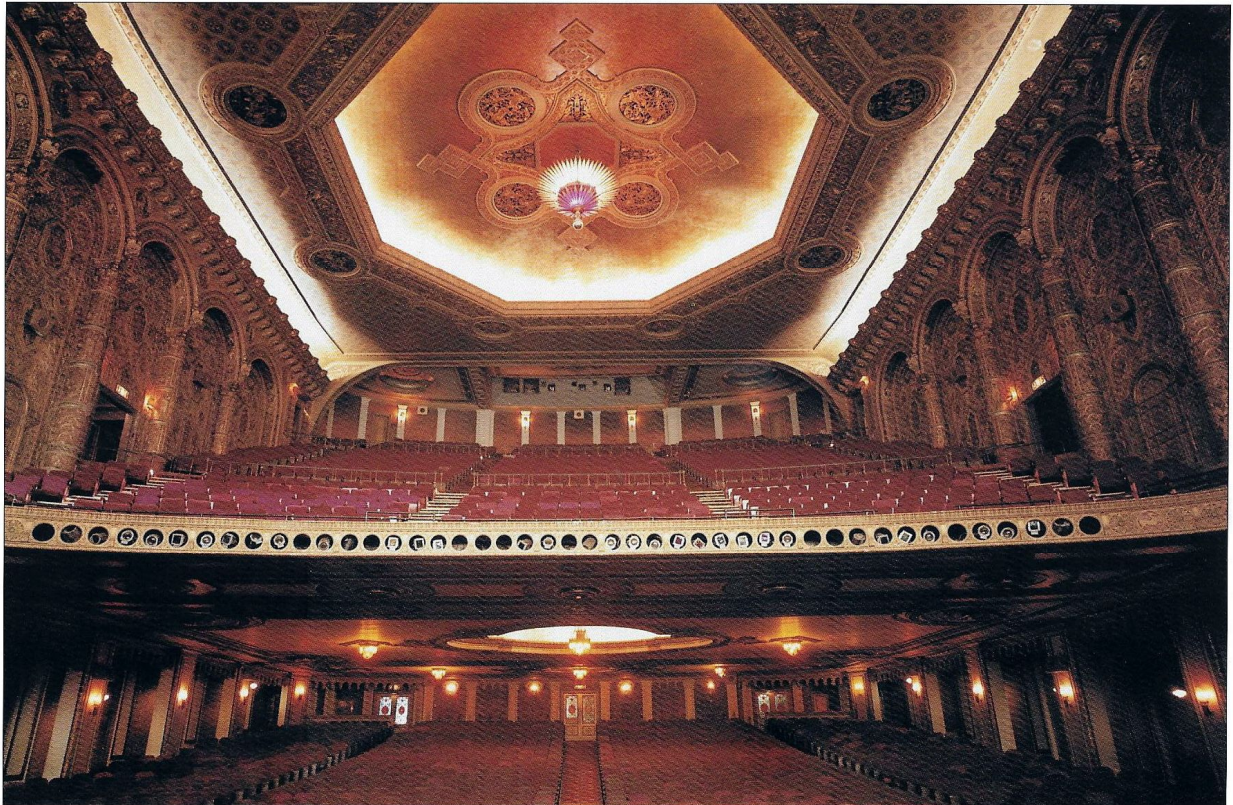
Marie Ryan





Orchestra and Proscenium.

James Scherzi



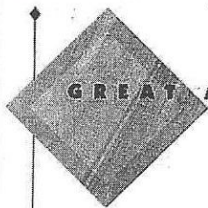
Auditorium from stage.

James Scherzi



## The Landmark's Fame

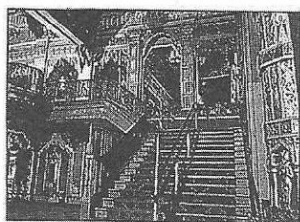
One measure of the theater's significance is coverage in books, magazines, movies, videos, and museum exhibitions about movie palaces. A sampling:



GREAT AMERICAN CINEMAS

### THE SYRACUSE AREA LANDMARK THEATRE

*Syracuse, New York*



The Syracuse Area Landmark Theatre in Syracuse, New York, provides a forum as magnificent as the films it was meant to showcase. The theater's opulent interior transported Depression-era patrons from their work-a-day world to the glitter and glamour of Hollywood, and today, continues its tradition of grand entertainment in a grand setting.

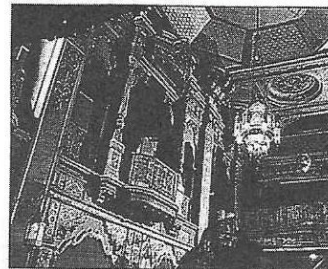
The theater was designed by architect Thomas W. Lamb and was christened Loew's State Theatre on February 18, 1928. Built at the close of the Roaring Twenties, Loew's State offered freewheeling audiences double bills of famous stage acts and first-run moving pictures. When the stock market crashed a year later, patrons continued to flock to the theater, where grandeur replaced despair.

The theater provided the ultimate escape. Often labeled Indo-Persian, architect Lamb further described the theater as "European, Byzantine, Romanesque — which is the Orient as it came to us through the merchants of Venice."

Audiences were ushered into Lamb's exotic world through the main lobby, which boasted a chandelier designed by Louis Tiffany for Cornelius Vanderbilt's mansion, and the grandest of the theater's several huge murals. The Musician's Gallery, located over the front doors, featured quartet serenades as intermission entertainment during the '30s. Patrons who ascended the grand staircase reached the promenade lobby, where they delighted in find-

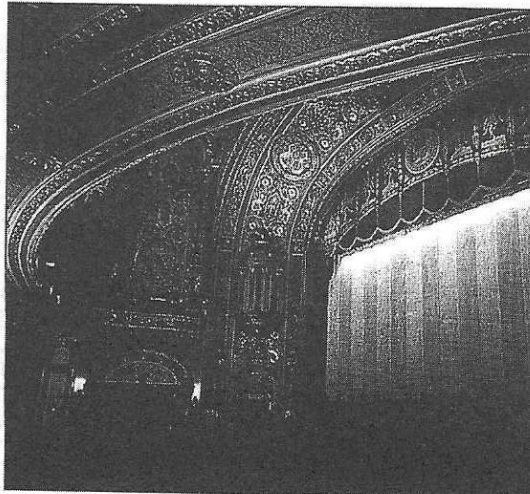
ing a fish pond with a Japanese pagoda fountain. The main auditorium, which houses 1,832 of the theater's 3,300 seats, was decorated in rich reds and golds and accented with wall ornaments throughout. The 1,400-pipe Wurlitzer organ offered its own exotic flavor, treating patrons to such sounds as a glockenspiel, marimba, bird whistles, hoof beats and surf sounds.

Crowds flocked to Loew's State throughout the Depression and World War II and yet, like so many other great movie palaces (including six razed in Syracuse), the theater's attendance began dropping steadily in the '50s. By 1975, it seemed that the



pride of Syracuse would fall prey to the wrecker's ball to allow for a parking/shopping complex. However, in 1977, a group of concerned citizens banded together to form the Syracuse Area Landmark Theatre, or SALT. SALT had the local landmark placed on the National Register of Historic Places, opening the door to government funding.

By the end of 1977, the group had acquired the theater and begun restoring its original splendor. Impressed with the dedication of the SALT volunteers and staff, New York State's Parks Commission began offering ongoing funding, as have Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse. Today, the theater continues its restoration and fund-raising efforts, while offering the Syracuse area a full schedule of live performances by the Syracuse Symphony, touring Broadway shows and a wide variety of renowned musicians. *PHOTO*  
—B.A.R.



AMERICAN MOVIE CLASSICS MAGAZINE

American Movie Classics Magazine, March, 1991.

**Air Conditioning American Movie Theatres  
1917-Present Day**

***Kings Theatre***

**BROOKLYN, NEW YORK**



1929

**Date Built: 1929**

**Seating Capacity: 3398**

**Owner: Loews Inc**

**Architect: Rapp & Rapp**

**Air Conditioning: York Ice Machinery Corporation**

**Refrigeration: York CO<sub>2</sub> system**







ALL FLATBUSH HAILS WITH ENTHUSIASTIC ACCLAIM

**LOEW'S KINGS**  
*Flatbush at Tilden Ave*

BROOKLYN'S  
FINEST  
THEATRE

**OPENS TODAY**

WITH BEAUTIFUL  
**DOLORIS  
DEL RIO**  
IN **PERSON**

AT EVERY SHOWING OF HER  
SCREEN TRIUMPH

**"EVANGELINE"**

*A Picturization of Longfellow's  
Immortal Poem*  
and

**"FRILLS and FANCIES"**

Scintillating Musical Revue

**STAGE SHOW**

FROM CAPITOL THEATRE  
NEW YORK



HEAR  
HER  
SING!

**WESLEY EDDY**

Master of Ceremonies  
AND HIS KINGS OF SYNCOPATION and  
Nina Oginska  
Premier Ballerina

with  
**CHESTER HALE GIRLS**

**DAVID PESETZKI**  
CONDUCTING GRAND ORCHESTRA









Colour photos which follow by Matt Lambros

The Loew's Kings Theatre opened its doors to Flatbush Avenue on September 7, 1929 with Dolores del Rio in "Evangeline" (part talkie), plus on stage 'Frills and Fancies' a revue, Wesley Eddy & his Kings of Syncopation, and the Chester Hales Girls. Dolores del Rio appeared 'in-person' at every one of the performances of her movie at the Loew's Kings Theatre. It was the 2nd/3rd of the five 'Wonder Theatres' built by Loew's Inc. in New York City, opening the same day as its sister theatre in the Bronx, the Loew's Paradise Theatre. The Loew's Kings Theatre was the 25th largest movie theatre built in the U.S.A.

Loew's Inc. dominated the market in Brooklyn, and this was their flagship in the very grandest French Renaissance style designed by the prestigious architectural firm of Rapp and Rapp of Chicago and architect Edwin C.A. Bullock working out of the New York office of the company.

The theatre occupies a massive site built diagonally across an odd assortment of lots and had an original seating capacity of 3,676. The main façade is arched and is faced with richly decorated terra cotta. There is a vast entrance lobby that opens onto an even more spacious inner lobby and then on to a foyer at the rear of the orchestra level. An unusual feature of the auditorium is the majority of the seating is in the orchestra level. There is no balcony but instead a shallow mezzanine seating 878, that is entered by stairs off the inner lobby.

The mezzanine level lounges overlook the entrance lobby. The paneling in the lobby areas is real mahogany and throughout instead of crystal chandeliers there are massive stylized Art Deco style light fittings with elaborate etched glass and tassels.

The sumptuous interior decoration was the work of the Harold Rambusch Studios of New York under the supervision of Ann Dornin of Loew's Inc. The mezzanine seating area is set way back in the very high auditorium creating a luxurious and spacious feel, even though it is crammed with detail and lavish velvet draperies. There are Corinthian columns and magnificent murals in alcoves on the side-walls depicting scenes from the Royal Court of the



3/31/2018

Kings Theatre in Brooklyn, NY - Cinema Treasures

Bourbons. The proscenium opening is 60 feet wide and the stage has full facilities. The Robert Morton 'wonder' organ had 4Manuals/23Ranks. Loew's Kings Theatre boasted it was the first movie theatre to be opened in America that was specifically designed for 'talkies'. Originally presenting stage shows with the feature film, this programming disappeared in the Depression and the theatre remained film only for the rest of its life. The Loew's Kings Theatre had a gymnasium and basketball court located in the basement, which were provided for the use of the theatre staff. In the 1950's a young local girl Barbra Streisand worked in the Loew's Kings Theatre as an usher.

The Loew's Kings Theatre had a steady decline from the 1950's onwards and managed to last into the mid-1970's before it was forced to close due to poor attendances. The Robert Morton 'wonder' organ was last played in January 1974 by organist Lee Erwin, and it was removed from the building, donated by Loew's to New York University. The theatre was never divided and remained virtually unchanged throughout its history. Loew's Inc. relinquished the theatre on April 25, 1977 and basically locked the theatre and left it. The final film was George C. Scott in "Islands In the Stream". However it was sold to an independent operator and reopened in early-June 1977 as the Kings Theatre with Leslie Nielsen in "Day of the Animals". The theatre was not paying its way, and it was closed just six weeks later on August 29, 1977 with "Bruce Lee: The Man, The Myth".

Over the years this most stately monument just sat and deteriorated quietly on Flatbush Avenue. There were controversial plans to convert the building into community use, a shopping mall and even demolition. In March 1999 it was announced the building would undergo a \$30M restoration to convert it into a 12-screen multiplex for Magic Johnson Theatres to open in 2001. This scheme was dropped in late-2000 due to financial difficulties. The marquee remained over the entrance but the huge vertical sign on the façade was removed in the late-1990's for safety reasons. Taken over by the Flatbush Redevelopment Corporation, the building had waited over 30 years for a revitalization. Its interior was still majestic despite the ravages time, vandals and water damage.

In January 2010, plans were announced to renovate the Kings Theatre as a live performance theatre by the Houston based ACE Theatrical Group. The \$94M renovation/restoration work began on January 23, 2013, and was completed on January 27, 2015 when a preview event was due to be held featuring Brooklyn Ballet, Brooklyn Youth Chorus, TriBeCaStan and the Casym Steel Orchestra, unfortunately the was cancelled due to heavy snowfall. On February 3, 2015, a concert by Diana Ross officially reopened the Kings Theatre.

Contributed by Porter Faulkner, William Gabel



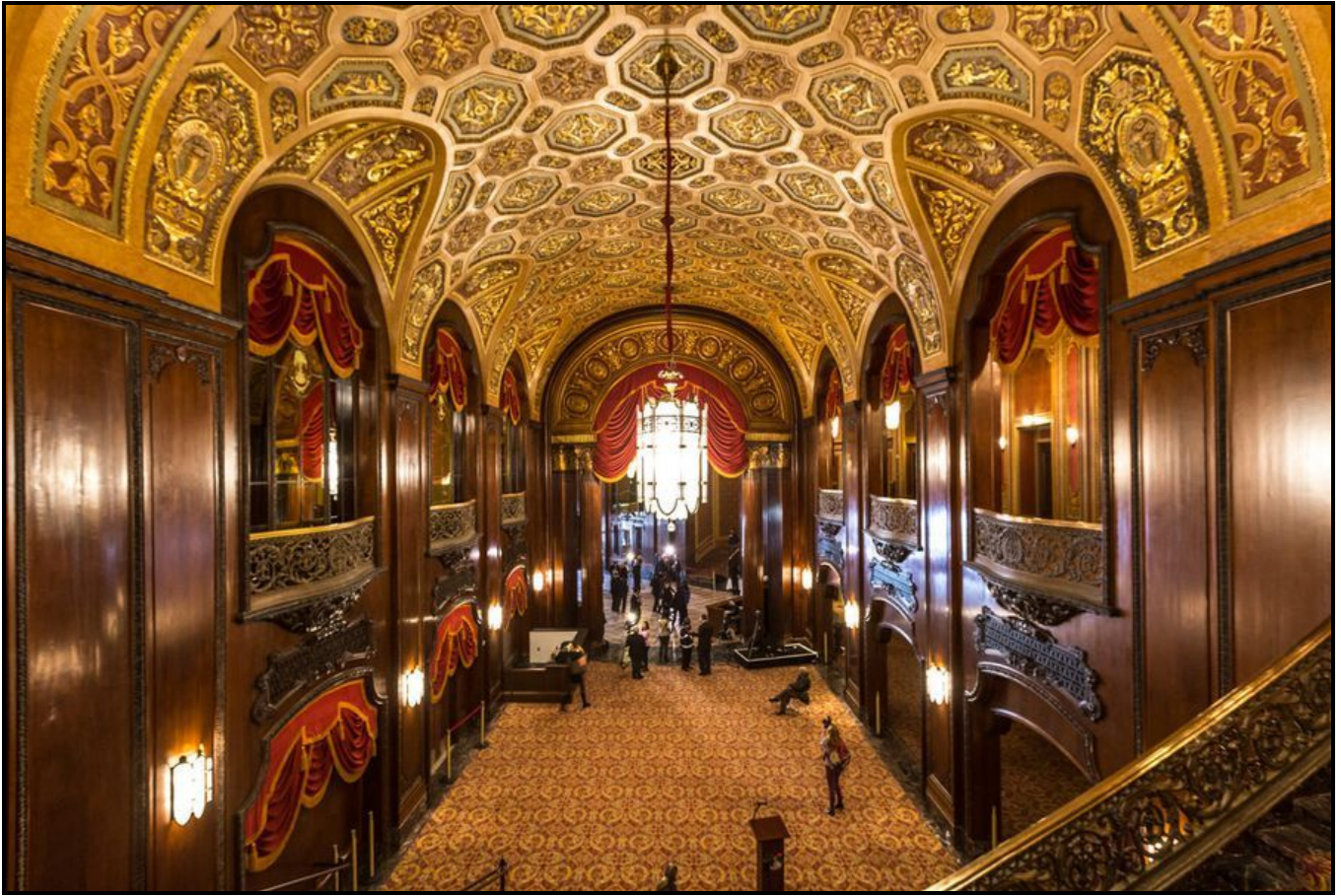




# Restoration









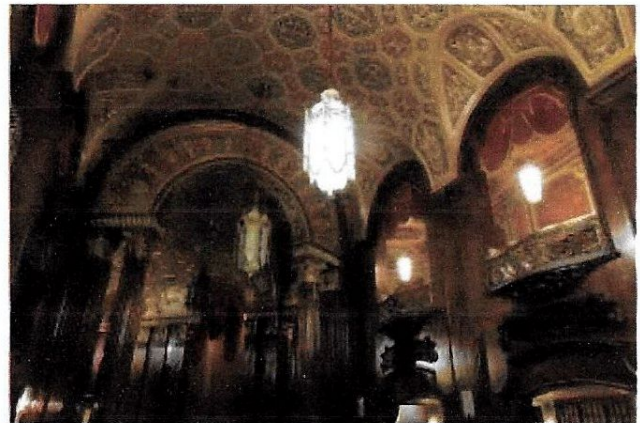
# Air Conditioning & Refrigeration

## Trystate Mechanical completes HVAC retrofit as part of restoration of historic Kings Theatre in Brooklyn

26 JAN 2015

by Trystate Mechanical, Inc. in News

Leading New York metro-area mechanical construction, service and energy services firm Trystate Mechanical is pleased to announce the completion of new cooling and heating systems for the restored Kings Theatre in Brooklyn, NY. Trystate's HVAC design and installation contract was awarded by the project's general construction manager, Gilbane. Trystate has also been retained by ACE Theatrical Group, which operates the Theatre, to provide ongoing HVAC maintenance service.



Detail of renovated Kings Theatre in Brooklyn.

Photo by Matt Lambros.

The \$95-million public-private project broke ground in January 2013, and the herculean task of its thorough restoration was recently completed. An icon of the golden age of New York City architecture that had been shuttered and neglected for nearly 40 years, the theater will hold its grand re-opening concert featuring Diana



Ross on February 3.

## Design-assist HVAC construction

Kings Theatre is a great example of Trystate's approach to HVAC design-build / design-assist project delivery. Shortly after the developer was selected by the City of New York for the historic restoration and modernization of the theater, and more than 24 months before construction started, Trystate completed surveying of the existing building's HVAC systems and worked with the owner, construction manager, and design team on HVAC system design, equipment selection, and energy efficiency. Trystate's pre-construction services proved to be a strong financial investment, with its recommendations leading to the construction of an energy-efficient HVAC system that matches the operational needs of the theater with the comfort requirements of its visitors.

"We could not be more pleased to have been part of this exciting and challenging project," said Trystate president Michael Liberta. "And we were very pleased to be able to assign individuals from the surrounding community, both Brooklyn-based subcontractors and Brooklyn-based workers," said Liberta.

## 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.