

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED SEP 7 1976

DATE ENTERED SEP 30 1976

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Orpheum Theatre

(Capitol Theatre)

AND/OR COMMON

Capitol Theatre

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

46 West 2nd South

CITY, TOWN

Salt Lake City

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2

STATE

Utah

CODE  
049

COUNTY

Salt Lake

CODE  
035

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Salt Lake Redevelopment Agency

STREET & NUMBER

1271 West 500 North

CITY, TOWN

Salt Lake City

VICINITY OF

STATE

Utah

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

City and County Building

STREET & NUMBER

451 Washington Square

CITY, TOWN

Salt Lake City

STATE

Utah

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Utah Historic Sites Survey

DATE

September 1975

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Utah State Historical Society

CITY, TOWN

Salt Lake City

STATE

Utah

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

### Present Appearance:

The building now known as the Capitol Theatre is a brick structure, three stories in height with a highly decorative facade consisting of tapestry brick and polychrome terra cotta. The symmetrical front facade is five bays wide with large Roman arches over each bay on the street level and sets of Palladian windows situated directly above each lower bay. Until recently, the arches were concealed by metal siding which covered the entire clerestory portion of the street level facade. Other modifications of the facade include the rearrangement of spaces and masses between the columns at the street level. Undisturbed, however, is the ornate facade from the first story cornice up. The Palladian windows display round columns with composite capitals, and classically molded entablatures or lintels complete with cartouches, foliated bands, cherubs and stereotyped classicist heads, all done in terra cotta. The frieze is also a repetitious band of cherubs and musical instruments. The bracketed cornice is crowned with a band of drama masks.

Much of the theatre's interior is intact. The building is rectangular in shape and features the main lobby, ticket rooms, offices, a set of grand staircases, elevators, men's and women's parlors and restrooms, a large balcony, theatre, orchestra pit, stage control and mechanical rooms. Much of the original interior decor is intact although some changes were made as a result of the remodeling in 1927. The restoration in progress intends to restore as many of the original features as possible.

### Original Appearance:

Newspaper accounts of the opening, August 1, 1913, give an idea of the original appearance of the theatre. Some of the features mentioned include the lobby which was "paved with marble flags, domed by a striking groined ceiling in Caen stone and flanked by supporting pillars." The staircases to the balconies were marble. The original color scheme was French gray and gold, "the gold being subdued with French lacquers in blue and mulberry which go well with the gold orsini velvet draperies, in turn relieved by mulberry and rose colored silk underdrapes." The theatre balcony and proscenium arch were heavily molded with classical motifs. Descriptions of the building's original appearance are extremely detailed and lengthy, but, in short, the entire theatre was extravagantly finished, both inside and out.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1912-13

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Albert G. Lansburgh

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Orpheum Theatre (now Capitol Theatre), the second theatre built in Salt Lake City for the Orpheum Theatre chain, is significant for introducing innovative architectural features in theatre construction to the Intermountain West. Built in 1912-13, the Orpheum Theatre utilized the most modern mechanical contrivances of its time bringing advancements in safety and comfort through carefully manipulating the interior environment of its public spaces. The building of the theatre also marked an important event in the importation of out-of-state architects and foreign design styles to provide alternatives to the more conventional American and Utah vernacular styles which dominated the majority of commercial and public architecture. The introduction of new building materials--tapestry brick and terra cotta, and a highly decorative new style--Italian Renaissance, along with the "water-curtain," "Plenum System" air-conditioning and "totally fireproof" construction made the Orpheum Theatre a significant building in the development of architecture in Utah. Of the several theatres built nationally by San Francisco architect G. Albert Lansburgh, the Salt Lake Orpheum was considered one of the most successful.

With such an outstanding facility, the Orpheum Theatre was capable of attracting the best-known performers of the day. The theatre was significant as a major center of vaudeville in Salt Lake City.

## History:

After having built a theatre on South Main Street in 1905, the L. L. Orpheum Realty Company took out a permit for a new theatre on May 27, 1912. Architect for the theatre was G. Albert Lansburgh of San Francisco. Thirty-six years of age at the time, Lansburgh had graduated from the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and was awarded Le Diplome d'Architect de Government Francais and a gold medal from the Society of French Artists at the Grand Salon of the Champs Elysses in 1906. After spending seven more years studying ancient and modern architecture in Europe, Lansburgh returned to San Francisco, his boyhood home, and began practice. Among the more important buildings which he designed were the Orpheums in San Francisco and Los Angeles, the Manx Hotel, Newman and Levism Building, Concordia Club, Sacks Building, E. and M. A. Gunst Buildings, and Lamberman's Buildings. Lansburgh was also involved with restoration architecture, having done the restoration of the Temple Emanuel in San Francisco.

Lansburgh's training in classicism was brought to bear in the design of the Orpheum Theatre in Salt Lake City. Designed in what described at the time as the "Italian Renaissance Style," the building displays a profusion of classical revival detailing. The exquisite terra cotta figurines, moldings and brackets, were unknown in the city, with the exception of the Hotel Utah which was built at the same time and used terra cotta decoration from the same California manufacturer.



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The theatre housed from 1,800 to 2,000 and was built at a cost of \$250,000. Capitalization for the project came from the Walker Estate in Salt Lake City as well as M. Meyerfeld of the Orpheum circuit.

Amenities included were a mezzanine floor lounge for female patrons, marble floors and staircases, removable seats in the front of the auditorium to allow for enlargement of the orchestra pit, 26 box seats, among them a central "royal" box. No posts hindered the view of spectators. Perhaps the most impressive features, however, were those intended to bring extra comfort and safety.

The Orpheum Theatre was considered architecturally advanced during its time. Constructed of concrete, steel and brick, this fireproof construction was aided by a "Water Curtain" which was a series of sprays in front of an asbestos curtain which automatically activated when the temperature reached a designated height. According to one report, "Water spouts from the sides and descends from above, forming a complete screen of water through which fire or smoke could not penetrate."

A mechanical ventilation system known as the "Plenum system" was also provided. Precursor to present forced air conditioning systems, it worked thusly: "Automatically the air is expelled through gratings beneath the seats at a rate of three feet per second. It rises to be drawn out through the ventilators in the ceiling and dome without any perceptible draught." It was claimed that "on the hottest day 'n summer it is possible to keep the atmosphere at 60 degrees while, when the mercury is below zero in winter, patrons can be warm and snug...and breathe absolutely pure air."

An added safety feature was the exit system with 30 exits from all sides of the building, "the doors of which are fitted with patent contrivances that cause them to fly open on the least pressure from the inside. A special structural system made the building "earthquake-proof." The boiler was placed in a separate building to eliminate the dangers of possible explosions.

The total absence of posts, concealed lights and mirrored reflectors, special accoustical treatments were among other new elements which attracted large crowds of theatre-goers. Catering to the vaudeville type of productions, weekly offerings of such artists as Will Rogers, Sophie Tucker, Trixie Friganza and Joe Frisco played to Salt Lake audiences. The theatre offered such fare under the Orpheum Chain until 1923 when the Ackerman-Harris vaudeville Chain purchased the building. In 1927, the Orpheum was purchased by the Louis Marcus Chain, which also owned theatres in Provo, Ogden, and Boise, as well as others in Salt Lake, for \$300,000.

Major remodelling over a three-month period transformed the structure into a Louis XVI-style theatre, a notable feature being a sunburst set in the center of the ceiling. Interior design was by R. E. Powers, and Co., considered a prominent national designer of the era.

Called the "city's leading motion picture palace," by reviewers, the seating capacity was enlarged to 2,260, and included a new Wurlitzer organ, billed as second in the city only to the Tabernacle Organ, and featured Tabernacle Organist Alexander Schreiner as organist.

It apparently catered to a wide spectrum of society, with prices in 1917 ranging from 10 to 75 cents, depending on seating and show-time. The theatre changed with the times, being transformed from live theatre to "talking shows" in 1929.

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The Orpheum or Capitol Theatre as it was later called has continued to show motion pictures to the present time, although parts of the building have been turned over to small commercial businesses. In early 1976 the Salt Lake City Redevelopment Agency purchased the building and are currently having the building restored for use as a much needed performing arts center. The restoration is intended to return the Orpheum to much of its original appearance.