
Hippodrome Theatre
727 Ohio Street
d. 1915

Owner: Terre Haute Scottish Rite
Building Corporation
727 Ohio Street
Terre Haute, IN 47807

Description:

Photo #4, Bldg. #54

The Hippodrome Theatre, located at the intersection of Eighth and Ohio Streets in downtown Terre Haute, was designed by noted theatre architect, John Ebersson, in 1915. The building is rectangular in plan and features a flat roof and reinforced concrete construction. Red brick laid up in common bond forms the exterior walls, and a green facade roof appears on the north and east elevations. Stylistically, the building borrows heavily from German Renaissance architecture, and features extensive pressed metal and terra cotta ornamentation.

The ground floor level of the main (north) facade has been altered, with window and doorway modifications arranged to satisfy the needs of subsequent tenants. A terra cotta cornice separates this level from the symmetrically-designed upper two stories. These floors are dominated by two large pavilions, one near either end of the facade, extending from the second floor level through the cornice and terminating in shaped parapets projecting out from the facade roof. Each of these pavilions is enriched with terra cotta detailing and contains a paired window unit on the second floor level. Each window unit features a hood mold comprised of a shallow canopy supported by brackets. Over the center of these window units is a roundel bearing a lion's head grotesque. A similar but larger roundel, cast in concrete, appears at the top of each parapet. Terra cotta bands are used to outline the pavilion's perimeters. On the second floor, the area between the pavilions contains three identical rectangular windows, embellished with terra cotta banding and each surmounted by a bracketed terra cotta canopy. The third floor level of this area has no openings, but instead features infill of grayish-brown brick outlined with narrow terra cotta bands. A heavy, pressed metal cornice with paired console brackets is used just below the facade roof. Grayish-brown brick infill is also used in the narrow bays beside the pavilions, as is the heavy metal cornice. Similar design features are also used on the Eighth Street facade.

Significance:

The Hippodrome is significant as an example of the work of John Ebersson, well-known architect and theatre designer. Historically, it is also important for its role in providing cultural entertainment for the citizens of Terre Haute in the early 20th century. Now owned by the local Scottish Rite organization, the building has suffered relatively little modification and still retains sufficient massing, detailing, and style to convey its early history.

John Ebersson was born in Austria in 1875, and studied in Dresden and Vienna. He immigrated to America in 1901 and settled in St. Louis, where he worked as an electrical contractor. In 1904, he opened his own architectural firm, specializing in theatre design. He soon became one of the nation's foremost designers of theatres and movie palaces, winning commissions in New York,

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Building #54, Continued

Chicago, and Houston. In his design for the Hippodrome, Eberson used heavy massing, polychromy, and sculptural ornamentation in a manner reminiscent of the German Renaissance style.

The Hippodrome was built in 1915 as a vaudeville house, and as such featured some of the most famous popular entertainers of the era. During the summer months, a varied fare of plays was provided, with traveling stock companies presenting different productions each week. In 1929, with the decline of vaudeville's popularity, the Hippodrome closed its doors. It was reopened as a cinema and operated under the name "Wabash Theatre" from 1949 to 1955. In 1955, the Scottish Rite purchased and occupied the building, and has maintained the building with few modifications since that time.

Geographical Data

Acreage: Less than one acre

UTM Reference: 16/465090/4368290

Boundary: Map #1806-22, Block 355, Parcel 005