

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JUN 13 1975
DATE ENTERED	JUL 7 1975

**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
Coliseum Theater
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Fifth Avenue and Pike Street

CITY, TOWN				--- NOT FOR PUBLICATION
Seattle				CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
STATE	--- VICINITY OF	#1 - Honorable Joel M. Pritchard		
Washington	CODE	COUNTY	CODE	
	53	King	033	

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Morris D. Alhadeff, Washington Jockey Club

STREET & NUMBER
Skinner Building, 1325 Fifth Avenue

CITY, TOWN
Seattle

STATE
Washington

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
King County Administration Building

STREET & NUMBER
Fourth Avenue and James Street

CITY, TOWN
Seattle

STATE
Washington

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
None

DATE

--- FEDERAL --- STATE --- COUNTY --- LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

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		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Coliseum Theater, designed by B. Marcus Priteca in the Second Renaissance Revival Style, has served as a first-run movie house since its opening early in 1916. Having had a high level of maintenance over the intervening sixty years, the building is in sound condition. A somewhat comprehensive renovation was carried out after an earthquake in 1949, but with the exception of the marquee, the exterior is unaltered. Also intact are several elements of the interior decorative scheme.

The theater is located in the SE 1/4, Section 31, T25N, R4E, of the Willamette Meridian. It is situated on the northeast corner of the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Pike Street, on lots 9 and 12, Block 18 of A. A. Denny's Third Addition to the Plat of Seattle. The setting is a busy section of Seattle's commercial core in which land use is divided between major department stores, motor hotels, theaters, and smaller business enterprises.

The building plan is nearly square, measuring 120 feet on Pike Street, and 110 feet on Fifth Avenue. The theater is oriented south to north, with the proscenium on the longer, north wall. The basement, which covers approximately 65% of the plan, measures 59 feet, 8 inches.

The building has a concrete foundation, and wall construction is of Class A reinforced concrete. Exterior facing is glazed, white terra cotta. The roof is a flat concrete slab covered with tar and gravel. The southwest corner of the building is truncated to provide entry to the theater. As many as nine ground-level shops are arranged at either side of the entrance along Fifth Avenue and Pike Street.

The south and west facades are formally organized into panels with blind arch heads. Window openings at the mezzanine lounge level have hooded lintels and balconettes carried by consoles and decorated with urns. Spandrels of the arches and borders between panels are filled with terra cotta floral ornament and garlands, including oak leaf and acorn motifs. On the south face the central four bays are slightly recessed and set off at east and west corners by similar panels without openings at the mezzanine level. All arch heads have decorated "Corinthian" keystones. Within the arches of the corner panels are circular niches in which urns are displayed on plinths and brackets. The entablature gives the impression of being somewhat attenuated for effect, and imaginative use of classical detail is made within it. A bold torus molding is used at the architrave. On both facades the frieze is decorated with wreaths setting off blank panels and the theater name, "Colisevm", in Roman letters. Heightening the drama of the theater at night in the early years were hundreds of electric light bulbs which illuminated the theater name incised in the frieze as well as the entire cornice. The light reflecting off the glazed surface of the terra cotta was a calculated effect which has not been enjoyed for many years since the bulbs have gradually burned out. While the sockets are still functional, maintenance of this elaborate exterior lighting was never found to be practical. The cyma recta, or final course of the cornice is decorated with an acanthus leaf motif at regular intervals.

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 1916 BUILDER/ARCHITECT B. Marcus Priteca, FAIA

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Coliseum Theater is significant primarily because it is representative of a considerable body of work in the field of theater design by B. Marcus Priteca, whose long and distinguished career and whose affability made him a valued institution among professionals and students of architecture in the Pacific Northwest. The Coliseum is a Second Renaissance Revival palazzo which makes imaginative use of much of the vocabulary of Roman ornament. The design was drawn in 1915, and the building was completed early in the following year. Among the dwindling number of examples of Priteca's extant work, it is both early and choice. It continues to fulfill its cultural role as a first-run movie theater. Not only an element of Seattle's historic theater district, the Coliseum is an anchor of good design on a busy corner of the city's commercial core.

It is reported that a 1931 issue of the Journal of the Royal Institute of Architects referred to Priteca's Coliseum Theater as "the first of the world's movie palaces." It is more accurate and fully sufficient to acknowledge that the Coliseum is among the early large-scale, luxuriously-appointed theaters to be designed specifically for the showing of motion pictures. The Coliseum was furnished with the most modern and up-to-date mechanical equipment. It was designed to accommodate a sizable orchestra, but it did not have a conventional stage. Its acoustical qualities are exceptional. In an advanced manner, its steep stadium balcony carried by a steel truss with an 111-foot span avoided the use of "hangers" or columns which would interrupt the view, and access to upper levels was achieved by inclines, or ramps and an elevator. It should be noted that as early as 1913, in New York City, Thomas W. Lamb designed the Regent Theater, which was considered that city's "first deluxe theater built expressly for showing movies;" and in 1914 the Strand, also by Lamb, was opened with architectural features which, like those of the Coliseum, were even more precisely suited to showing films. At the opening of the silent film era, many existing vaudeville theaters were simply fitted with projection equipment. Priteca's contribution to the development of a distinct movie house type and his adherence to first-rate composition and detail for the theater exterior are genuine achievements. In addition to the volume of his designs, the quality of Priteca's theaters as street architecture and the excellence of his buildings in terms of function make his work important on a national scale.

B. Marcus Priteca was born and educated in Scotland. He was graduated from Edinburgh University in 1907, and thereafter completed a two-year course at the Royal College of Art. During these five school years he served his apprenticeship with Robert MacFarlane Cameron. In 1909 he sailed with his parents and sisters to the United States,

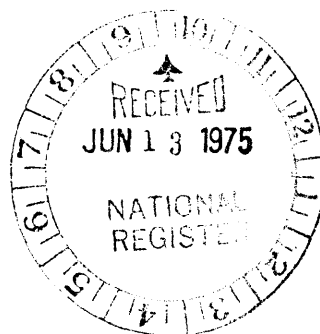
Above the entry, the space between the south face and a plane projecting from the west face is covered. Giving added impact to this concave corner was the original marquee which consisted of a cross section of a coffered dome (reminiscent of studies of the Pantheon) which was, in turn, surmounted by a plinth, drum and sheet metal and art glass dome with a finial encircled by a cluster of light globes, the whole of which extended approximately to the height of the architrave. This tour de force was eventually replaced by a conventional modern marquee surmounted by a revolving, neon-lighted shaft somewhat diminutive in proportion to the building.

In the interior, the nursery, smoking and cosmetic lounges were at the mezzanine level above the shop spaces on the south end. These highly decorated lounge areas have lately been partially converted to office space. The auditorium is noted for its seating capacity of 1,829 (originally 2,400), its acoustical efficiency and clear sight lines from all sections of the main floor, mezzanine balcony, or loges, and upper and lower levels of the balcony proper. The projection and control booth is located in the center forepart of the mezzanine. The projector is only 69 feet from the screen, and therefore provides an undistorted picture. Access to various levels above the main floor is provided by ramps, or inclines. New upholstered seats were added after the earthquake of 1949 when most of the "upgrading" of the interior was carried out. Original carpeting has been replaced. Paneled woodwork and cast iron railings with shaped oak top rails remain intact in the foyers, but the elaborate wall and ceiling treatments have been removed or covered over with plaster. The original decorative scheme was unabashedly eclectic, mixing classical and oriental motifs. There were brass fixtures, mosaic geometric patterns, painted scenes of Egyptian legend, and an infinite variety of composition ornament: torus moldings, rinceau and guilloche bands, and anthropomorphic cartouches, all painted in tones of brown, bluegreen and red with highlights of copper gilt. Lighting in the auditorium was subdued and indirect to heighten the atmosphere and avoid glare. The bulbs were amber, red and green, and could be controlled by a reostat when different effects and blending of colors were called for.

The remnants of the original decor in the auditorium are most apparent in the balcony, which has three square domes outlined by elaborately decorated beams. There is also a mask and cartouche centered on a torus molding overhead. On the faces of the two balcony railings, which measure about three feet in height, are the original plaster bas reliefs which are Renaissance male and female busts alternating between decorated piers. They were cast in six-foot sections and put into place. The soffit of the mezzanine balcony retains its ventilating grilles decorated with borders of composition ornament. Excepting those features which were in particularly high relief, much of the original plaster proscenium arch is intact under the draperies and white plaster frame added circa 1949, but the great medallion which framed an Egyptian Pharaoh tableau above it is gone. The theater's original mechanical equipment, which was advanced for its day, is still intact and operating. It includes a back-up power system, air-washer, steam radiators, blowers, ducting, and a built-in vacuum cleaning system. The orchestra has long since been filled in with steps leading up to the screen and narrow stage, and the theater's pipe organ has also been removed. An elevator which served balcony levels needs only to be converted from DC to AC current to be functional again.

Despite the loss of surface ornament which provided the theater's glitter and opulence, the auditorium is still grand in spatial terms.

arriving in Seattle in July at the height of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, which he attended. His architectural career began in Seattle the following year. At an early date he became the personal architect of vaudeville magnate Alexander Pantages and had a hand in designing or remodeling nearly all of the Pantages theaters in the western United States and Canada. At the peak of his career he maintained an office in Los Angeles as well as local headquarters in Seattle. Priteca also did work for other theater-chain clients over the years. He was a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and was recognized as one of the country's leading specialists in theater design. Before his death in 1971 at the age of 81, the design of some 60 major theaters and as many as 150 others of lesser rank had been attributed to him. In Seattle, both The Palomar -- originally The Pantages (1913), and The Orpheum (1927) have been torn down for new development in recent years. Perhaps his most famous theater was the opulent Hollywood Pantages at Hollywood and Vine, the scene of the Motion Picture Academy Awards ceremonies for many years. Among other projects on which Priteca collaborated or consulted are Seattle's Longacres racetrack, the Congregation Temple de Hirsch, and the Seattle Opera House, which was developed from the old Civic Auditorium in preparation for the World's Fair of 1962.



Hall, Ben M., The Best Remaining Seats... (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1961).

Interviews May 6, 1975: Walter T. Coy, Maintenance Engineer (first associated with property in 1918) and William Mallette, Coliseum Theater Manager.

Obits and feature articles: Seattle Times Magazine, January 24, 1971, 4; Seattle Post-Intelligencer, October 5, 1971, C14, October 3, 1971, E17; Seattle Times, October 3, 1971, F8.

