

# Saxon Theatre

## Boston Landmarks Commission Study Report



Petition # 88, 219-221 Tremont Street, Boston

# Saxon Theatre



Boston Landmarks Commission

Report of the Boston Landmarks Commission  
on the Potential Designation of the  
SAXON THEATRE  
as a  
Landmark Under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975

Approved: *Marcia Meyer* **OCT. 04 1983**  
(Executive Director) (Date)

Approved: *Pauline Hanson* **OCT. 04 1983**  
(Chairman) (Date)

## CONTENTS

- 1.0 Location
- 2.0 Description
- 3.0 Significance
- 4.0 Economic Status
- 5.0 Planning Context
- 6.0 Alternative Approaches
- 7.0 Recommendations
- 8.0 General Standards and Criteria
- 9.0 Specific Standards and Criteria
- 10.0 Bibliography and Footnotes

## 1.0 LOCATION OF THE PROPERTY

### 1.1 Address and Assessor's Parcel Number:

The address of the Saxon Theatre is 219-221 Tremont Street. It is in Ward 5, Precinct 1. The assessor's parcel number is 2.

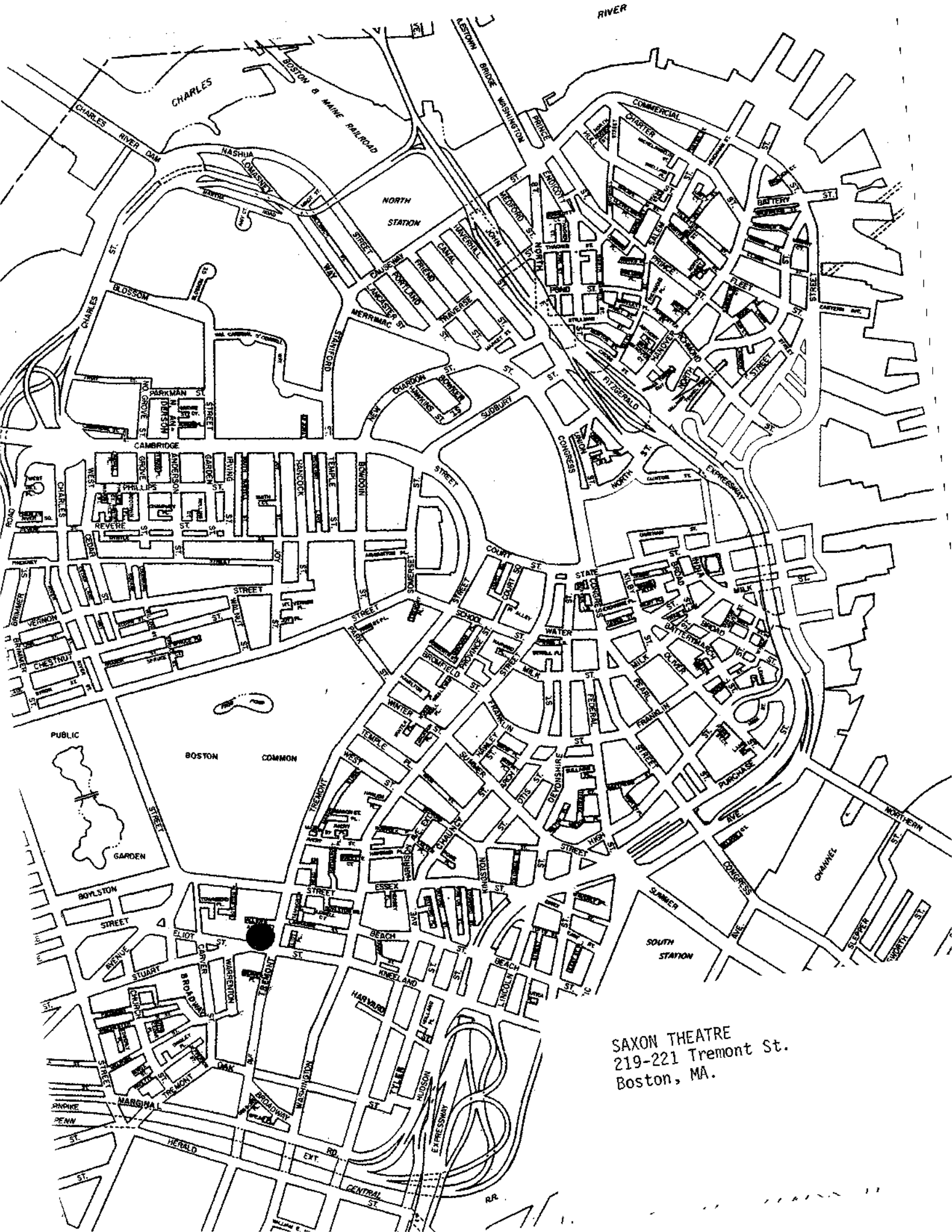
### 1.2 Area in Which the Property is Located:

The Saxon is located at the corner of Tremont Street and Allen's Alley, one block from the intersection of Boylston and Tremont Streets at the corner of the Boston Common. The area is considered the Theatre District of downtown Boston and lies between the retail district, Chinatown and the Adult Entertainment area, the South End and Park Plaza.

The theatre is presently freestanding because buildings abutting the west and south walls were demolished to make way for the seven-story State Transportation Building, constructed adjacent to the theatre on a massive L-shaped site along Stuart and Charles Streets.

The immediate area is characterized by a wide variety of architectural styles and building types interspersed with several large vacant parcels. The architectural potpourri includes early 20th century ten-story hotel and office buildings in the Renaissance Revival, Gothic Revival and Jacobethan styles, four-to-six-story late 19th century commercial buildings, and theatres. Buildings are constructed in a variety of materials including granite, brick and cast stone.

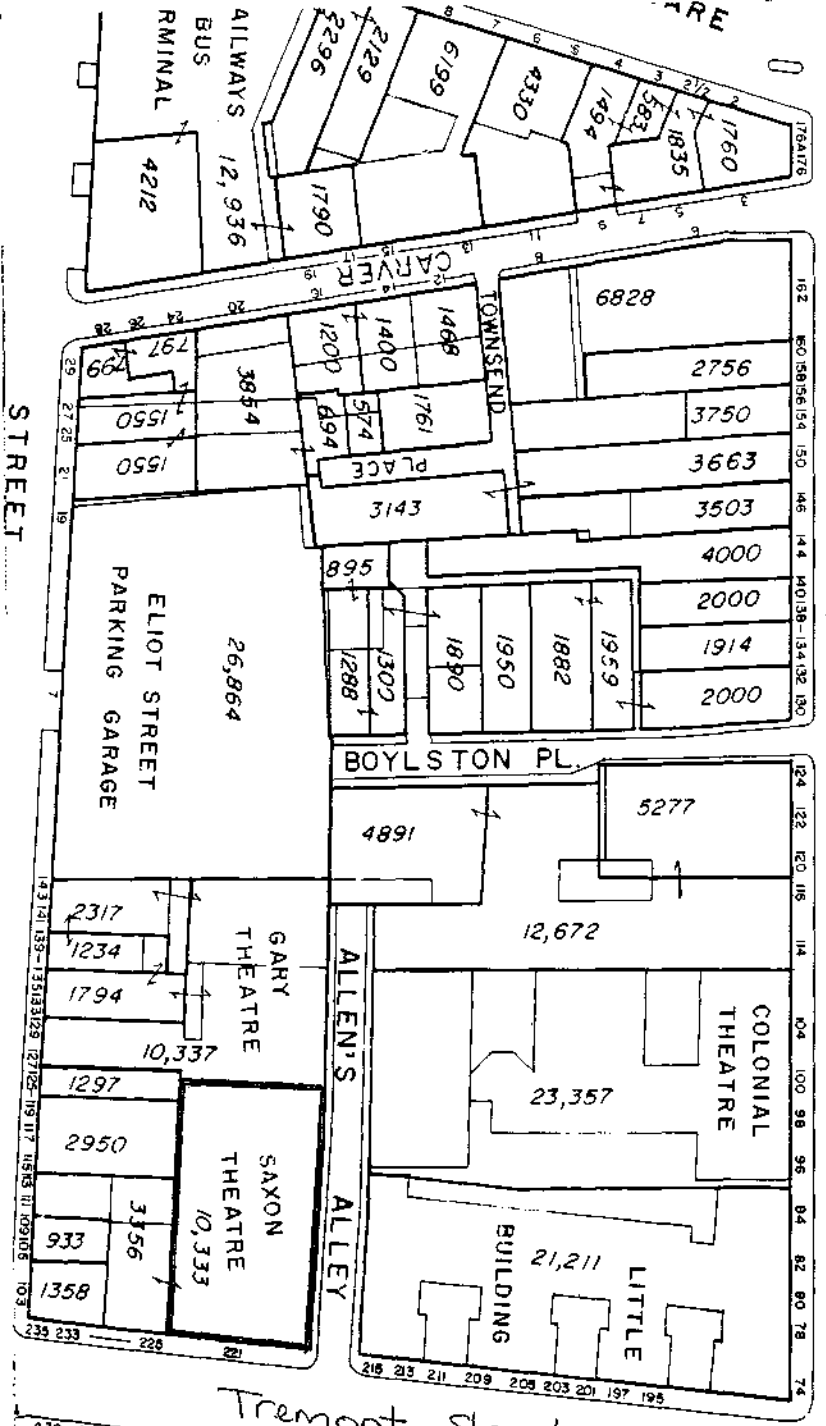
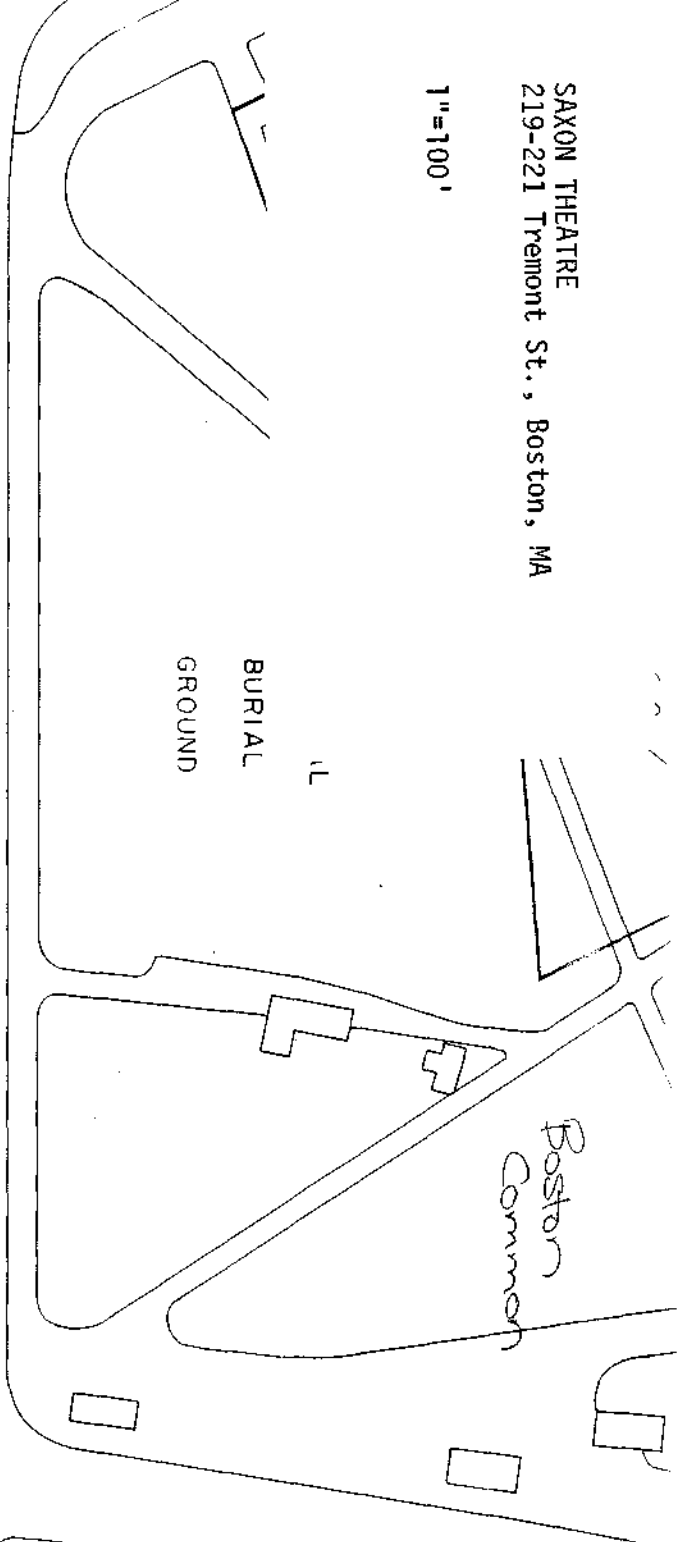
### 1.3 Map Showing Location: attached



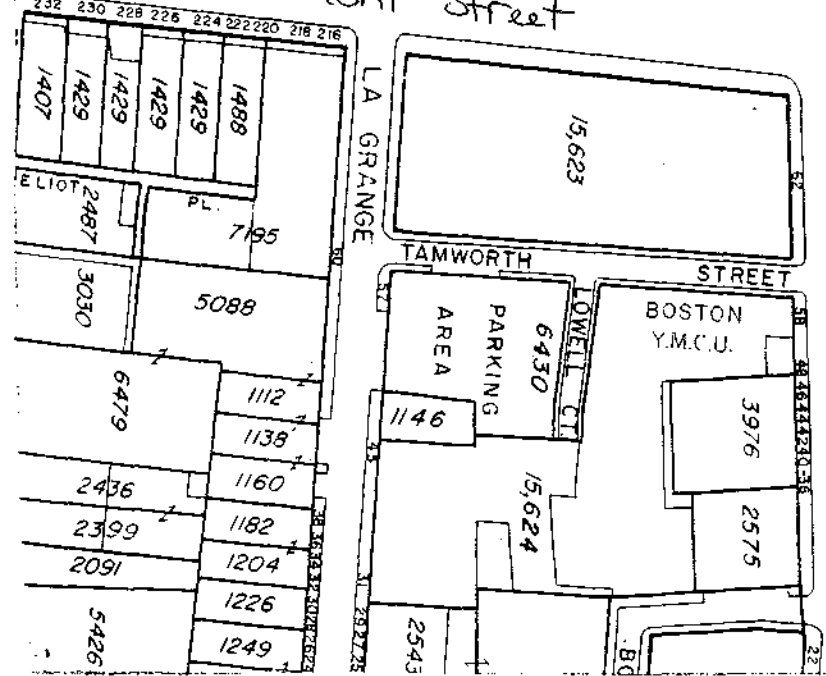
SAXON THEATRE  
219-221 Tremont St.  
Boston, MA.

SAXON THEATRE  
219-221 Tremont St., Boston, MA

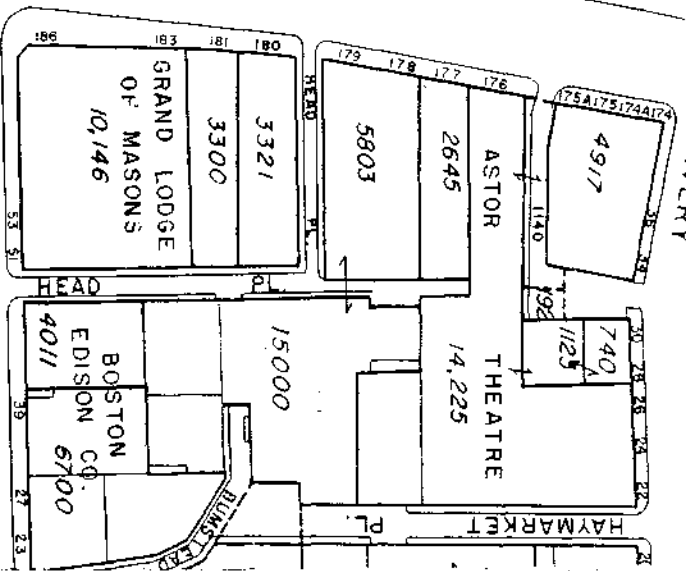
1"=100'



Boylston Street



Street



Avery

## 2.0 DESCRIPTION

### 2.1 Type and Use:

The Saxon is a theatre originally constructed for live dramatic performances and presently used for movies.

### 2.2 Physical Description

The Saxon, originally the Majestic Theatre, was constructed in 1903 in the Beaux Arts style. The two-story theatre is presently freestanding on all sides but originally abutted other buildings along the south and west (rear) walls. The flat-roofed, steel-frame structure is rectangular in plan and entirely covers the 10,333 square foot lot. The three-bay principal elevation on Tremont Street is 77 feet wide and 88 feet high and is faced with buff colored terra cotta. Other walls are of tan brick. The exterior is in fair to good condition and is generally intact except at ground level, where it has been covered by modern materials. In 1903, the theatre was reported to seat 1700. The theatre presently seats 900 in the orchestra and first balcony, while the second balcony is closed because of building code regulations.

Early photographs of the theatre show the original three semi-circular arched entrance portals, with an iron and glass marquee over the door at offset right. The wide ground floor side piers are emphasized by banded rustication of the terra cotta blocks. Much of this original ground floor treatment may remain intact beneath the present contemporary sheathing, which appears to project out far enough to cover the terra cotta surface and probably did not require removal of original elements except for the marquee and perhaps the oversize keystones above each door.

A Greek wave band and simple cornice molding is used to separate the ground floor from the still-intact second story. Here design emphasis is on the three nearly identical bays, which are flanked by smooth, wide terra cotta side piers which form a pleasing contrast with the heavily articulated bay treatment. The slightly-recessed bays are separated by massive half-round fluted Roman Ionic columns equivalent in height to three stories, set in antis between the terra cotta piers. Each bay features a stilted segmental-arched window set within a semi-circular arch. The windows have a stained glass border surrounding painted glass panes. Above the segmental head is an ornamental terra cotta cap of fruits festooned along the head and upper portion of the jambs. The tympanum of the arch contains an oculus ornamented in the center with a lyre and surrounded by terra cotta theatre masks and lyres. At the keystone position of each arch are large theatres masks. The three masks differ in their facial features, which express happiness, sadness, and anger. Below each of the painted glass windows is a small rectangular opening with a terra cotta surround. A balustrade stands in front of each of these openings, with the base of the large columns acting as the principal pedestals of the balustrade. A neon upright sign, not original to the building, is located on the right second story pier.



The Roman Ionic columns support a simple architrave, pulvinated frieze with palmettes marking bay divisions, rope molding, and modillion block cornice. The building is surmounted by a balustrade with terra cotta pedestals and copper balusters.

The alley side of the theatre is of tan brick with minimal adornment. The fenestration at ground level is irregular. Level two is four bays long, with bays slightly recessed and accented by single oculus windows.

### Interior Description

The auditorium of the Saxon remains largely intact and features a flamboyant Beaux Arts interpretation of the baroque style. The few other public spaces are small in scale and have been largely modernized.

The theatre is entered through a one-story lobby of modest depth which extends the entire width of the building. Modern acoustical tiles cover the ceiling, plywood paneling is used on wall surfaces, and the floor is carpeted. It appears likely that the original walls, ceiling and floors have simply been covered rather than altered. A 1903 article in American Architect and Building News describes the lobby as having marble walls, a richly ornamented entablature, and a barrel-vaulted ceiling with painted lunettes. Photographs show what appears to be a mosaic tile floor. Much or all of this rich decoration may be intact beneath the present sheathing.

The auditorium has been described as having a megaphone shape and follows the two-balcony plan. The stage is approximately 25-30 feet deep. Plaster ornamentation is based on classical forms imaginatively reinterpreted in the Beaux Arts style. The architectural elements are exaggerated in size and have a high relief, sculptural quality. The color scheme of white and gold is accented by plush crimson velvet fabrics. Seats in the orchestra and first balcony are modern, and the rear wall has been stripped of ornament, but otherwise this magnificent space has remained intact.

The proscenium arch is framed by a heavy palmette molding. Along the soffit of the arch are coffers, each with a large plaster rosette in the center. At each side of the stage, a series of four half-round proscenium boxes, two per bay, are stepped successively higher from the floor. The boxes have gilded plaster sides and red velvet-covered railings. Beneath each box is an arched entrance to orchestra level boxes, which are set off from other orchestra seats by a velvet-covered railing. At the keystone of the entrance arches is a female face set in a cartouche flanked by festoons of flowers. Above each pair of proscenium boxes is a large single arch which springs from the capitals of the wide pilasters which flank each pair of boxes. Above each of these pilasters is a cartouche of exaggerated size. The pilasters themselves are ornamented with a twisted guilloche pattern, and the capitals are of free-classical design not conforming to the traditional orders.

Also springing from the side pilasters are a series of ribs which extend across the ceiling. Each of the six ribs is decorated with a molding of free classical design. The bays between ribs are covered by a cross

hatch diaper pattern with rosettes within each square. The center of the ceiling at each bay is marked by a round medallion, also cross-hatched. The effect of the ceiling is of an arbor of lattice covered by flowers.

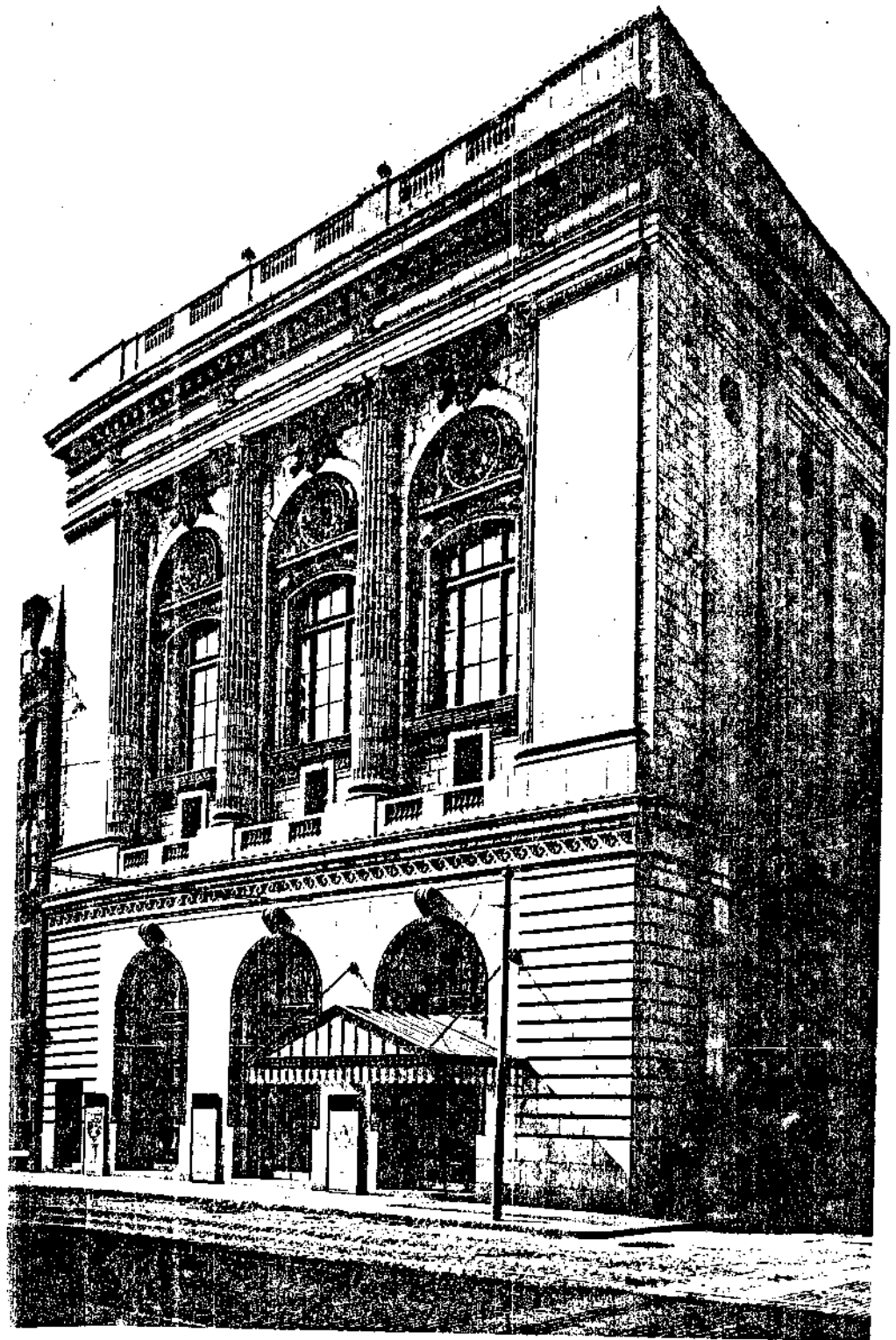
The treatment of the upper walls of the auditorium is highlighted by a frieze above the first balcony in which a series of nude female carytid figures, one per bay, appear to be supporting the second balcony. The outer sides of each of the balconies are ornamented by gilded leafy plaster work like that along the proscenium boxes. There are no visible support columns under the balconies.

The use of recessed lighting to illuminate this large space adds to its dramatic quality. Most of the lights are not visible. Lighting fixtures on the soffits of the boxes and balconies are not original.

Two staircases to the first balcony are symmetrically placed along the west wall of the lobby. The red marble stairs with brass railings lead to a small first balcony promenade area. Here decorative cast metal railings frame the stairwell. A second set of stairs leads from the promenade to small ladies and mens lounges, both of which have been modernized. Another set of stairs with cast metal railings leads to the first balcony itself. Stairs to the second balcony are located along the north and south walls of the lobby.

A second set of ladies and mens rooms, including anterooms and bathrooms, is located in the basement. These have been completely modernized.

2.3 Photographs: attached

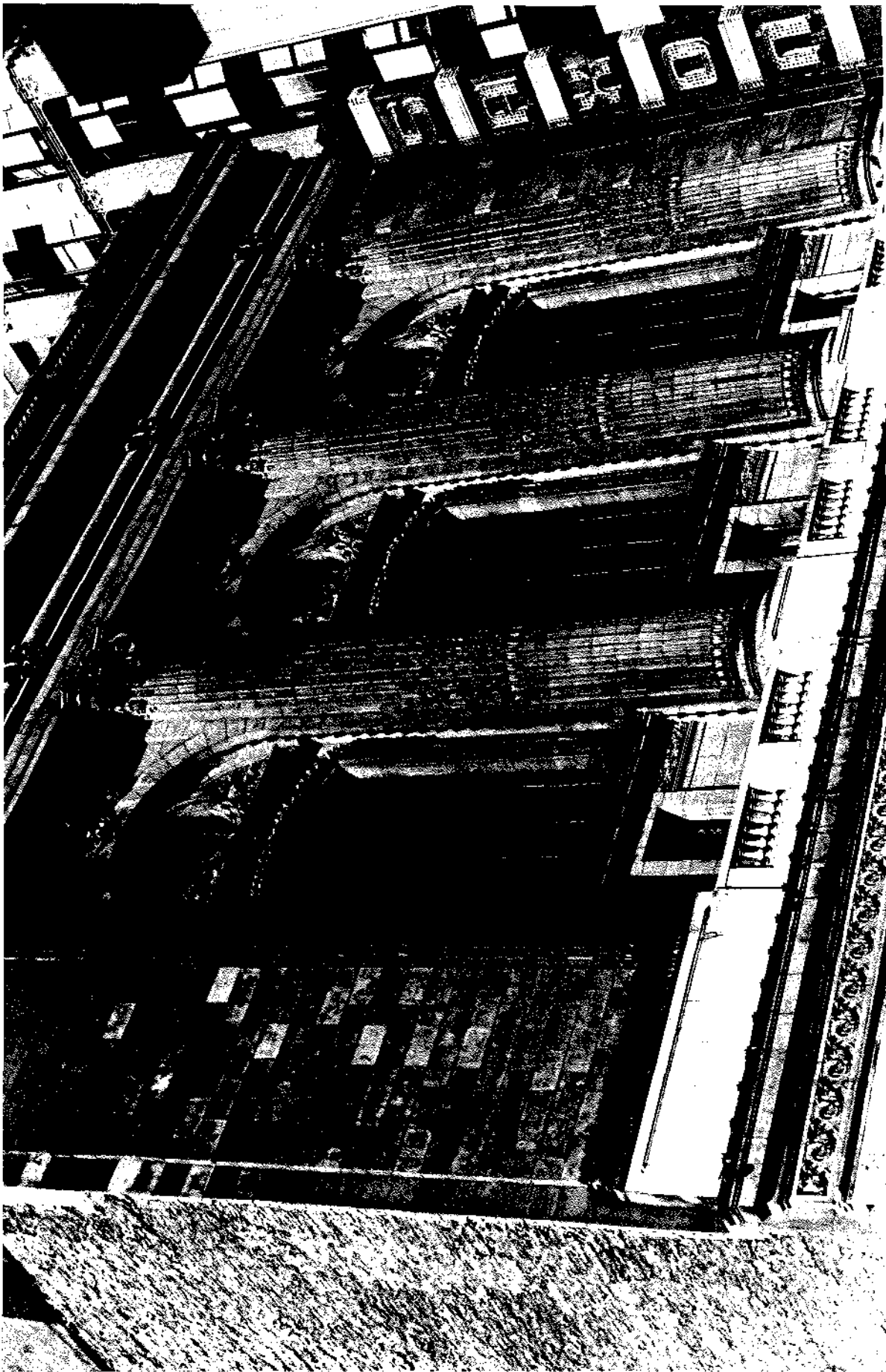


COPYRIGHT, 1903, BY THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT AND BUILDING NEWS CO.

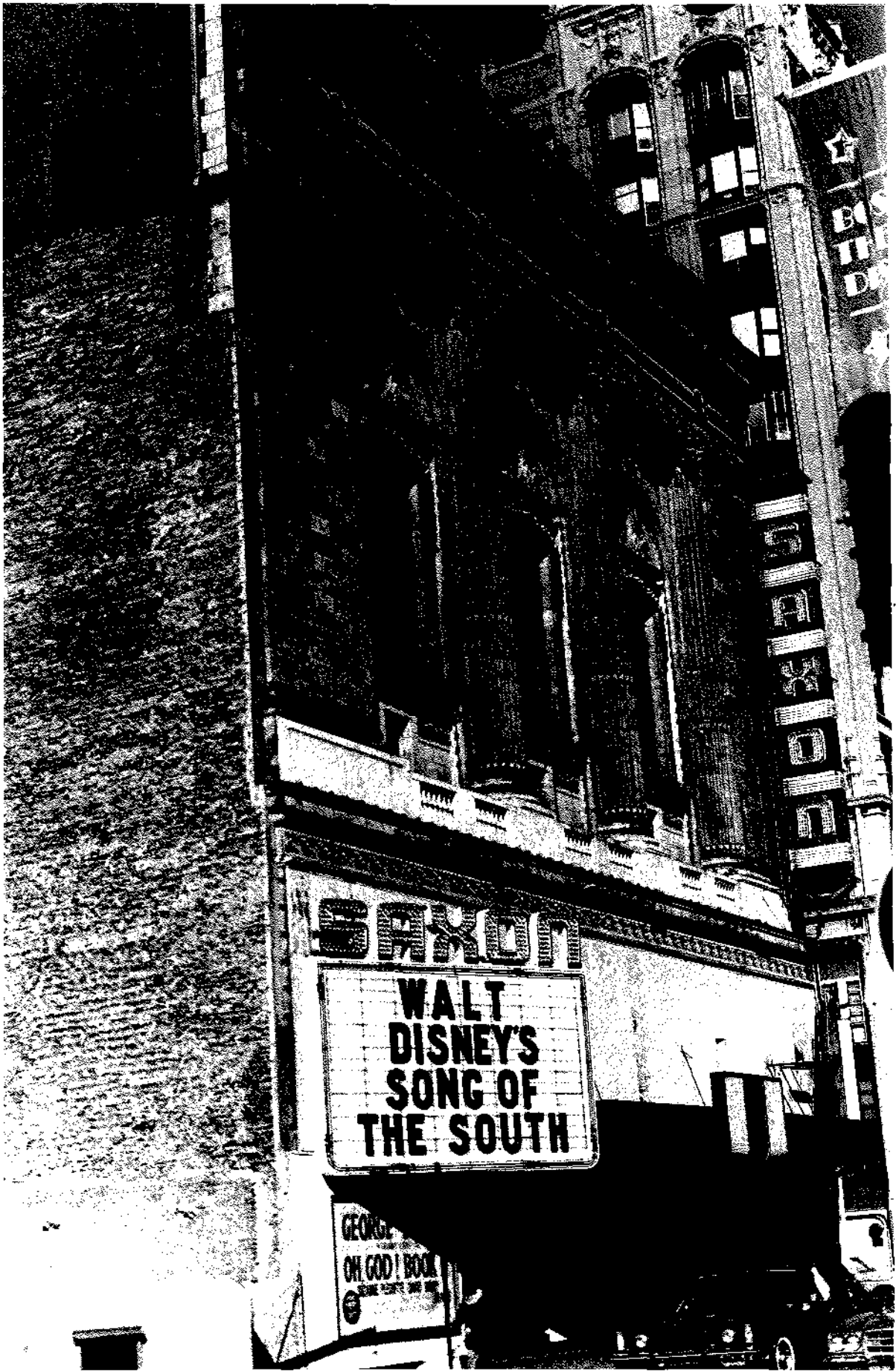
HELIOTYPE CO., BOSTON.

THE MAJESTIC THEATRE, TREMONT ST., BOSTON, MASS.  
MR. JOHN GALEN HOWARD, ARCHITECT.

*The American Architect*  
April 18, 1903.  
No. 1425.





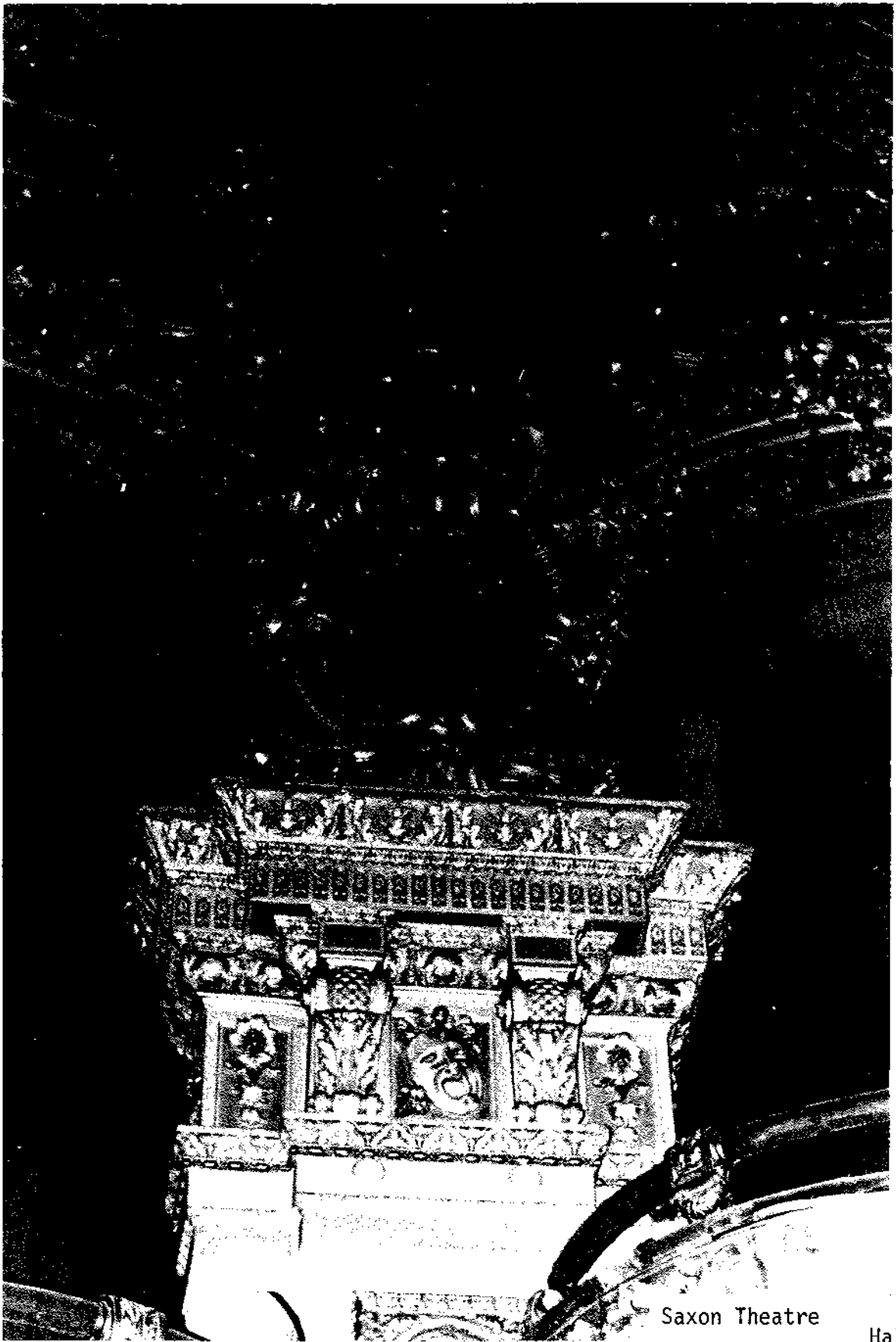


**SARATON**

**WALT  
DISNEY'S  
SONG OF  
THE SOUTH**

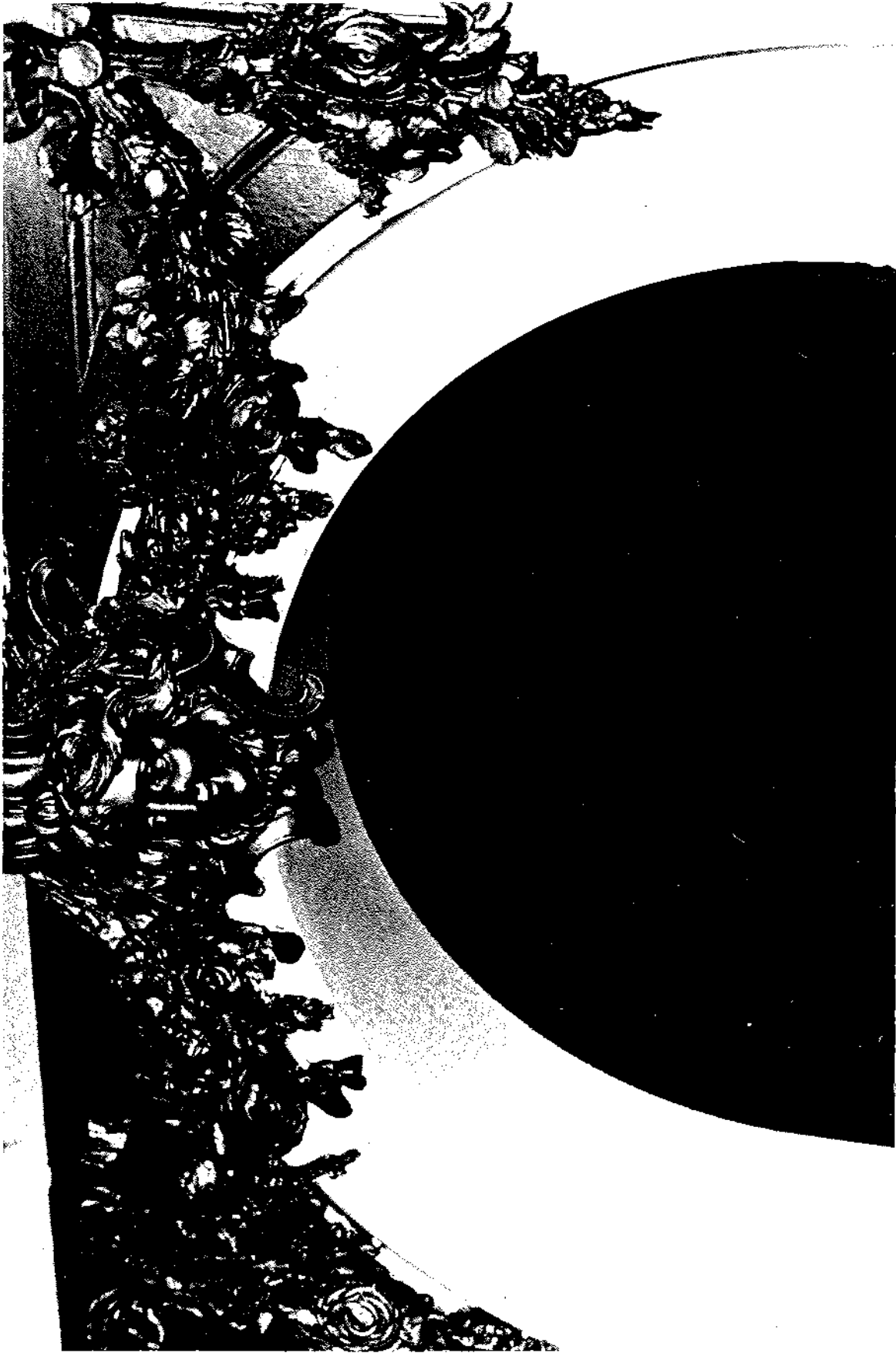
**GEORGE...  
OH, GOD! BOOK...  
COME TO THE SHOW**

**BISHOP**



Saxon Theatre

Half round  
proscenium boxes are located  
on either side of the stage.



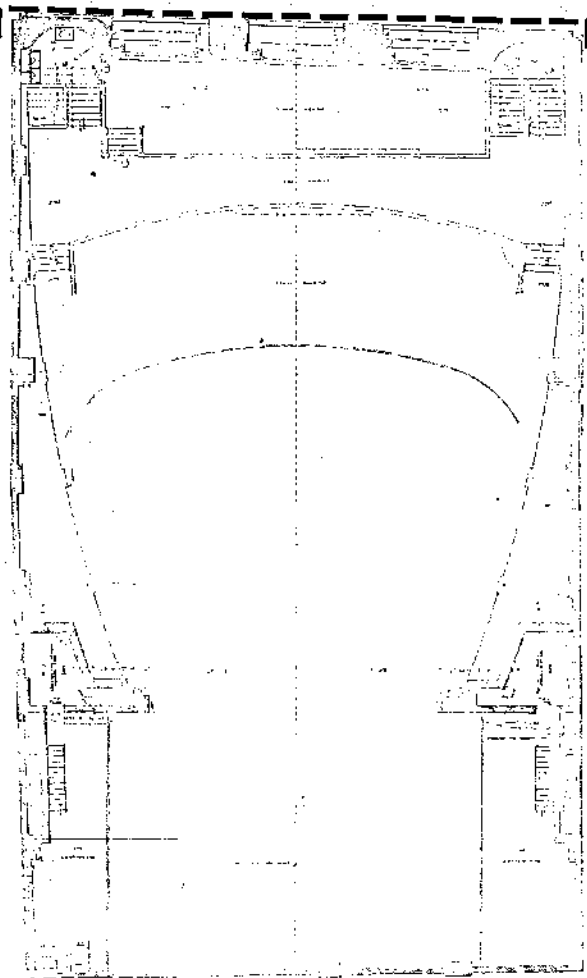
At the keystone of the entrance arch to the orchestra box is a female face set in a cartouche flanked by festoons of flowers.



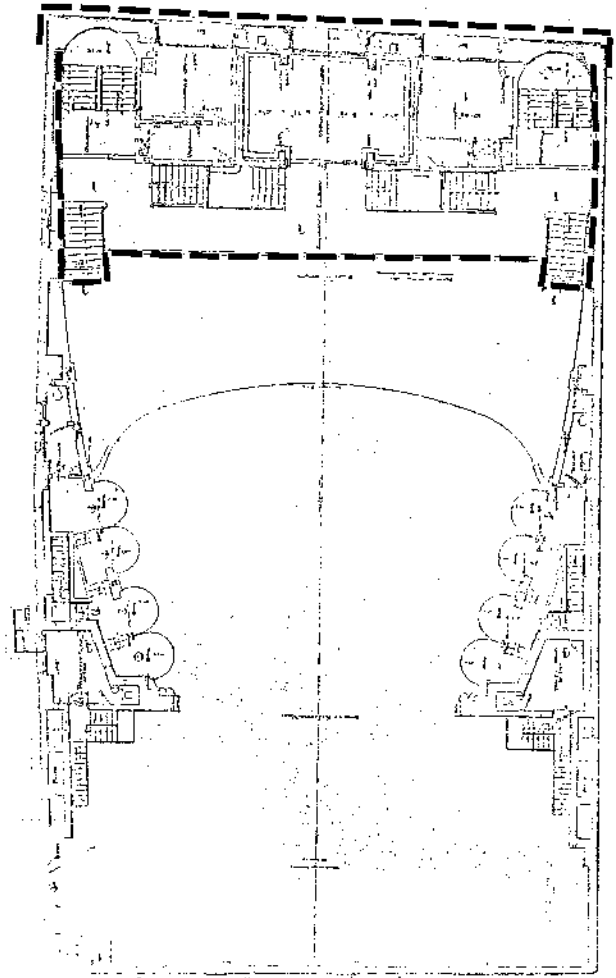


Saxon Theatre

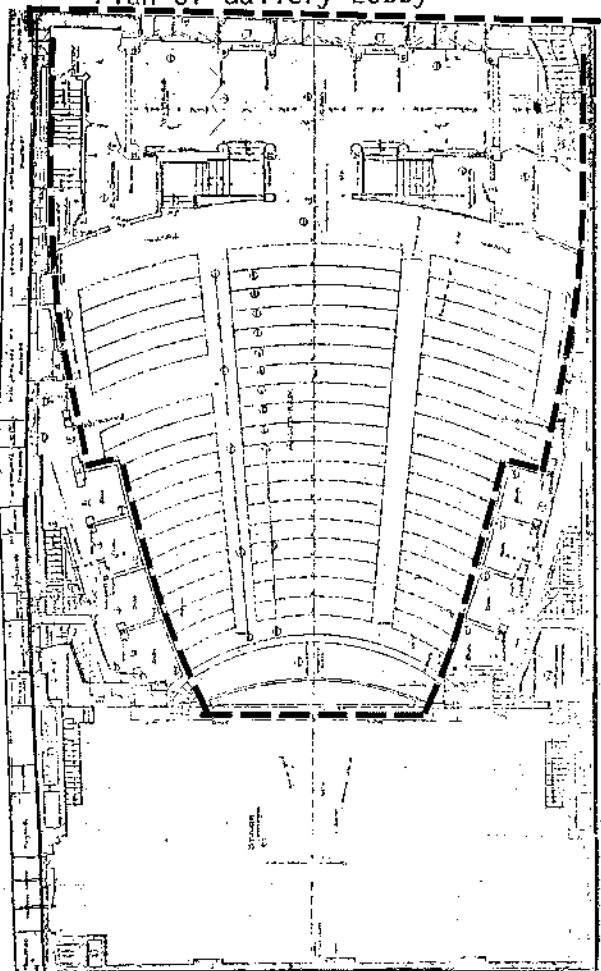
Large  
single arches spring from the  
capitals of the pilasters  
flanking the proscenium boxes.



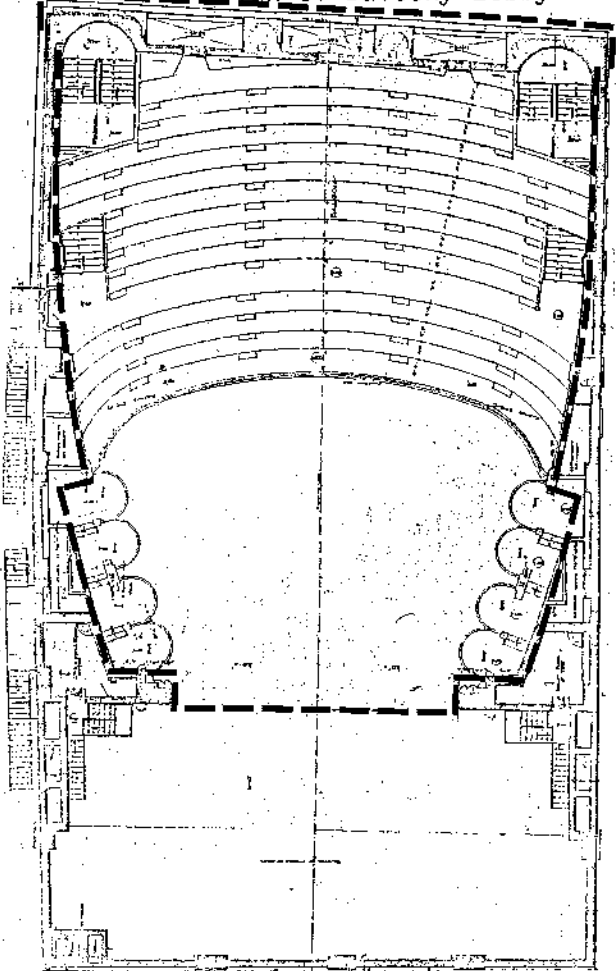
Plan of Gallery Lobby



Plan of Balcony Lobby



First Story Plan



Plan of Balcony

### 3.0 SIGNIFICANCE

#### 3.1 Historical Associations:

The Saxon (originally the Majestic) is of historical interest as one of three theatres erected for the city by one of its leading citizens, merchant and music patron Eben Dyer Jordan (1857-1916). Jordan's father was the founder of the Boston dry goods firm of Jordan, Marsh & Company, where young Jordan began his career in the packing department and after several years experience was admitted to partnership in 1880. As president of the company after his father's death in 1895, he continued to expand the business, which was to become the foremost unit of a major 20th century department store chain.

Jordan's natural talents and public spirited nature led him to become involved with the city's musical institutions. As a young man, he was instructed in singing and was reputed to be good enough to sing professionally. After his father's death, he took the elder Jordan's place as a member of the Board of the New England Conservatory of Music, where he aided materially in the school's move from Franklin Square to its present location near Symphony Hall. There he made possible the construction of a fine concert auditorium, which was named Jordan Hall in his honor.

Jordan was particularly fond of vocal music. In 1907 he funded the winter season of the San Carlo Opera under the direction of Henry Russell.<sup>2</sup> Performances were held at the Majestic, which had been constructed by Jordan in 1901-3. In a history of the Boston Opera Company, the 1907 opening of the San Carlo Opera at the Majestic has been described as "magnificent by all accounts," an event which<sup>3</sup> "foreshadowed the elegance of the Boston Opera Company's opening." Jordan was instrumental in the founding two years later of the Boston Opera Company under Henry Russell. He contributed much of the cost of constructing his third Boston theatre, the Boston Opera House, erected in 1909 at a cost of about one million dollars. (It was razed in 1959.)

The early history of Jordan's Majestic Theatre is characterized by vicissitudes in entertainment policies and management. The first managers were Stair and Wilbur, directors of a large chain which at that time included some 200 United States theatres. The Majestic opened with a musical fantasy called "The Storcks," and newspapers reported that the theatre would be used for this type of light musical fare. In January 1904, the management announced that, because of its small stage, the Majestic<sup>4</sup> was to be ranked a "Dollar House" and put on the popular circuit. "First class" attractions on the Stair and Wilbur circuit were henceforth to be booked into the new Globe Theatre on Washington Street, which had a larger stage.

In March, 1906, the Shubert brothers bought out Stair's interest in the Majestic and again began booking first class dramatic and musical attractions into the Majestic.<sup>5</sup> The theatre remained in use for live theatre as part of the large Shubert chain until 1956. That year the Shuberts, in

part because of anti-trust pressure from the Department of Justice, proceeded to divest themselves of six of their seven major Boston theatres, all of which they had controlled for at least two decades. Two former Shubert theatres, the Colonial and Wilbur, remained in use for dramatic productions. One, Jordan's Boston Opera House, was demolished shortly thereafter. Three other former Shubert theatres, the Majestic, Copley and Plymouth, became movie houses. As part of the Sack chain, the Majestic was renamed the Saxon.

### 3.2 Architectural Significance

The Majestic Theatre is an outstanding example of Beaux Arts classicism notable both for its monumental terra cotta exterior and its richly ornamented interior. Also significant is the fact that the Majestic is the only known Boston work by the nationally-renowned architect John Galen Howard.

Beaux Arts is not a common style among Boston's turn-of-the-century buildings. Local architects much preferred the more conservative Renaissance Revival, which was more practical and suitable for general commercial use. The Majestic, constructed during the height of popularity of Beaux Arts classicism in the United States, is among the city's finest remaining examples.

The Beaux Arts style takes its name from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, which during the late 19th and early 20th century was unrivaled in reputation among schools of architecture. The first two Americans to attend, Richard Morris Hunt and Henry Hobson Richardson, set the example for succeeding generations of architects, particularly in the period from 1890 to 1930. By the turn of the century, the profession was dominated by men who had trained at the Ecole. Among them was John Galen Howard, whose work in this style is often cited by architectural historians. Of particular note was Howard's design for the Electric Tower at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901. In his book American Architecture Since 1780, Marcus Whiffen singles out the Electric Tower as one of the four best examples of Beaux Arts classicism used in the design of a plaster building for an exhibition, adding that it was in exhibition architecture that the style really came into its own.

Training at the Ecole emphasized the traditional and monumental. As explained by architectural historian William Jordy, the aim of Beaux Arts composition was to achieve "a stable harmony dependent on an emphasis on mass."<sup>8</sup> Plans were typically symmetrical, and masses were generally bounded along the ground level, sides and cornice of a structure. The Beaux Arts aesthetic emphasized the use of traditional forms. According to Jordy, the Ecole taught that "the past provided vocabularies of form and compositional themes from which the present should learn;" in other words that "current design should be evolutionary rather than revolutionary."<sup>9</sup>

The Majestic exterior exemplifies a number of important Beaux Art characteristics. The theatre has a commanding presence which asserts itself on the streetscape. Basic design elements are derived from Greek and

Roman sources, but the shape of these elements is freely interpreted rather than imitated. Ornamentation is cast in high relief, and advancing and receding planes are used to create contrasts of light and shadow.

The Majestic is also among the city's best examples of the use of architectural terra cotta, a kiln-fired clay building material which came into use in the United States after the Civil War. The popularity of terra cotta can be attributed in part to its fireproof nature, durability and aesthetic potential. It allowed architects to incorporate intricate sculptural detailing at a fraction of the cost of carved stone. Glazed terra cotta of the type used at the Majestic reached the height of its popularity during the period from about 1890 to 1915, after which it was gradually replaced by cast stone and cast metal. Those terra cotta buildings which remain, particularly fine examples such as the Majestic, are testimony to the interdependence of design, craftsmanship and building technology.

The interior of the Majestic ranks among the top four Boston theatres in overall impact and sumptuousness and is unique among them in originality of ornamentation. As with the exterior, the architect has taken familiar elements--in this case from the European Baroque tradition--and reinterpreted them in the Beaux Arts style. The design vocabulary is classical in spirit but elements depart from the usual form and are generally exaggerated in size and executed in high relief. Contemporary newspaper accounts noted this originality, saying that "it is greatly to Mr. Howard's credit that no European building has been copied or adapted for this theatre."<sup>10</sup> The resulting space has an exuberance and monumentality which made the original name, the Majestic, a most appropriate one.

Technically, the design of the Majestic has a number of unique features which result in excellent sight lines and acoustical quality. The theatre was the first in Boston to be constructed without balcony supporting columns. Several contemporary accounts also noted the distinctive shape of the auditorium, which was likened to an inverted bowl. One curve unites the ceiling and floor from side to side and a second begins at the bottom of the stage and sweeps to the balcony. A 1903 article in the Boston Herald called this shape "entirely new in architectural design."<sup>11</sup> The Saxon was also the first to freely exploit the possibilities of electricity. Architectural historian Douglass Tucci notes that rather than simulating older forms of illumination such as the candelabra, the electric fixtures are integrated into the architectural fabric.<sup>12</sup> The use of recessed lighting intensifies the drama of the vast auditorium space.

The interior of the Majestic also demonstrates the high standards of turn-of-the-century craftsmanship. The architect did not leave construction details to chance. Contemporary accounts noted that "Not only is the plan of the interior original in every respect, but the vast amount of ornamental detail has been carefully designed and modelled under the personal supervision of the architect."<sup>13</sup> A nationally known New York artist, William de Leftwich Dodge, was commissioned to paint the lunettes in the lobby.<sup>14</sup> Dodge's best known murals are those at the Library of Congress. Plaster work was done by the Boston firm of Sleep, Elliot and King, whose other credits include work at the Keith's Boston and Providence theatres and the Hollis Theatre (all since demolished) and the

ceiling in the main foyer of the Colonial.<sup>15</sup> Marble work was done by L.M. Glover and brass work by W.P. Marble & Company, both of Boston.<sup>16</sup> The Artificial Marble Company, a New York firm, was employed for the lobby scagliola work,<sup>17</sup> a process where plaster was made to imitate stone. Interior decoration at the Majestic was by the firm of Pennell and Haberstroth, whose senior partner, H.B. Pennell, also worked on the Colonial and Wilbur theatres.

The architect, John Galen Howard (1864-1931) was born in Chelmsford, Massachusetts and studied architecture at M.I.T. and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.<sup>18</sup> He began his career in the office of the eminent 19th century architect Henry Hobson Richardson and, after Richardson's death in 1885, he continued for a time with the successor firm of Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge. In the early 1890's, Howard moved to New York City, where he worked for a time in the office of the renowned firm of McKim, Mead and White before beginning his own practice. He was associated for a time with S.M. Cauldwell in designing several notable New York City buildings and with James M. Wood of Boston in designing the Saxon/Majestic, his only known Boston work.

During the early 1900's, Howard relocated to California. Over the next twenty years he was Supervising Architect at the University of California at Berkeley, where he developed the campus plan and design for many monumental buildings. Two of Howard's University of California buildings, the Naval Architecture Building and Northgate (both 1906), were mentioned in the Bicentennial issue of the Journal of the American Institute of Architecture as among "the proudest achievements of American architecture over the last 200 years."<sup>19</sup>

With partner J.D. Galloway he served as Architect-in-Chief for the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, held in Seattle in 1909. Howard was also a member of the preliminary commission for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition at San Francisco. He served as Chairman of the Advisory Board of the San Francisco Civic Center Project and was largely responsible for the location and layout of the area and for the competition to choose architects for the City Hall and Auditorium. From 1923 to 1927, under the firm name John G. Howard and Associates, he executed two of his most important commissions, the First Congregational Church of Oakland and LeConte School in San Francisco.

Howard was one of the founders of the University of California School of Architecture, where his first class enrolled in 1903. He continued to teach there for some 28 years<sup>20</sup> and also served for many years as head of the School of Architecture.

### 3.3 Relationship to the Criteria for Landmark Designation:

The Saxon Theatre clearly meets the criteria for landmark designation as established by Section 4 of Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975 in that it is of distinguished architectural design, embodying distinctive characteristics of construction, of a style which makes it inherently valuable for study, and as a notable work by a nationally-recognized architect.

4.0 ECONOMIC STATUS (1985)

4.1 Current Assessed Value:

\$610,900.

4.2 Current Ownership, Occupancy and Status:

In 1983 the Saxon Theatre was sold to Emerson College of Boston, MA.

## 5.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

### 5.1 Background

During the Colonial period, the present Theatre District was a marshy, sparsely settled area outside the original town center and close to the "neck," that slender stem of land connecting the Shawmut peninsula to Roxbury and the mainland. Washington Street and Frogg Lane (now Boylston Street) were the principal public ways, and important landmarks included the Common, the Common Burying Ground (originally the South Burying Ground), established in 1754, and the Hollis Street Meeting House of 1732.

Because of its strategic location on the neck, the area's commercial importance increased during the early 19th century. The Bulfinch-designed Boylston Market was constructed in 1810 at the corner of Boylston and Washington Streets to serve farmers bringing produce to market. The coming of the railroads during the 1830's and 1840's increased traffic in the Park Square area, where the Boston and Providence terminal was located, and in the newly-filled South Cove area, location of the Boston and Worcester and Old Colony terminals. By mid-century the edge of the Common was becoming a favored location for large residential, commercial and institutional structures such as the first Boston Public Library (1855), the Masonic Temple (1864) and the Hotel Pelham (1857), Boston's first "French flat" or apartment house.

The streets just east took on a different character, as the expansion and displacement of businesses following the Fire of 1872 forced a southward shift in the more marginal wholesale and light industrial uses such as sweatshops, shoe stitcheries and wholesale clothing stores. Many of these moved to the upper floors of buildings in the lower Washington Street area, forming the present Garment District.

By the turn of the century, the area south of the Common had begun to develop as a theatre district. The third building of the Hollis Street Meeting House had been converted to a theatre in 1885. This was followed by the construction of the Tremont Theatre in 1889, the Colonial in 1900, the Majestic in 1903, the Shubert in 1910, the Wilbur in 1914 and the Metropolitan in 1925. The area has continued throughout the century to be characterized by a mix of small-scale retail and entertainment uses on the street level, with office, residential, wholesale and light manufacturing uses above -- a diversity of uses which has its origins in the somewhat haphazard growth of the 19th century city.

To this mix has recently been added an influx of adult entertainment establishments which moved here after the razing of Scollay Square in the early 1960's. In an attempt to restrict the spread and upgrade the quality of these uses, the City of Boston enacted a special Zoning Code amendment which allowed X-rated adult entertainment uses only within a special zone located along the two blocks of Washington Street between Boylston/Essex and Stuart.



## 5.2 Current Planning Issues (1985)

Much of the theatre area has been declining economically since the late 1960's due, in part, to changing entertainment patterns and the blighting influence of nearby adult entertainment uses. Current planning efforts involve the coordination of a number of planned and proposed development projects and the encouraging of additional investment in order to reverse the decline. Major planning issues relate to the desired location, scale and uses of new development and the manner in which this development is integrated with the area's uses and structures.

Two developments certain to have an impact on traffic volume and land values are the State Transportation Building, an element in the Park Plaza Urban Renewal Plan, and the privately-sponsored renovation of the former Music Hall. The State Transportation Building, an L-shaped, 600,000 square foot mid-rise office building with a walk-through street level shopping arcade and enclosed parking for 350 cars, occupies a site fronting along the new line of Charles Street along Stuart Street to the corner of Tremont Street. A number of public and pedestrian improvements are underway in conjunction with the new building, including the straightening of Charles Street, sidewalk repaving and tree planting along Charles and Stuart Streets, and a pedestrian artery along Boylston Place through the atrium of the State Transportation Building to Warrenton Street to Eliot Norton Park.

The Wang Center ( formerly the Metropolitan ), built in 1925 as a lavish "movie palace", was taken over in 1980 by the non-profit Metropolitan Center, Inc., which has thus far expended some \$7.5 million on the interior including restoration work and construction of an expanded stage and dressing rooms. The theatre, which reopened in December, 1980, has been booking Broadway musicals, dance, opera and other attractions, and its regeneration is seen as an important catalyst for the renewed vitality of the theatre area as a whole.

Development of subsidized Section 8 housing on the site between the Bradford Hotel and Eliot Norton Park has been completed. The project has produced some 79 units of housing for the elderly Chinese community. The neighboring Bradford Hotel continues in use as a tourist class hotel.

Two new buildings are now completed just east of the Wilbur in the Chinatown area. A 96-bed replacement for the Boston Floating Hospital for Infants and Children of the Tufts-New England Medical Center has been constructed over Washington Street. The MBTA has constructed a special hospital stop on the Orange Line. Also completed is the U.S Department of Agriculture's 15-story Human Nutrition Center at the corner of Washington and Stuart Streets.

The BRA is currently developing a concept model for Parcel 31, the area bounded by Boylston, Tremont, Stuart and Washington Streets, involving a mixed use development combining rehabilitation and new construction. Suggested uses include a combination of offices, restaurants, general commercial uses and a media center.

Long-range BRA plans for Parcel P-7, the vacant lot adjacent to the Wilbur Theatre to be developed as a commercial property, possibly in conjunction with the Wilbur, have undergone tentative developer selection. Preliminary concept plans for Parcel C-4, the large parking lot at the corner of Stuart and Tremont Streets, have been completed. The proposed 40,000 square foot, 10 level, building for that site includes ground and lower level retail activity and upper level office use.

Two major development projects which will also have an impact on the area are the Park Plaza Project and Lafayette Place. The revised version of the Park Plaza Project has resulted in the nearly completed 400 room Four Seasons Hotel on Boylston Street and a soon to be constructed residential and retail development from Hadassah Way to Arlington Street. When completed, Park Plaza will upgrade and stabilize a long-declining area and increase traffic and development pressure in the nearby theatre area. In the meantime, the uncertainty surrounding the project is prompting property owners to defer investment decisions, thus accelerating the area's decline.

Lafayette Place, a Mondev development which includes a hotel, 200,000 square feet of retail space and an underground city-owned parking garage, serves as a major element in the BRA's Downtown Crossing Economic Strategy plan. The plan has sought to upgrade retail space and improve pedestrian and vehicular circulation as steps toward reinforcing the area as the region's retail center.

In addition, Phase I construction of Avenue de Lafayette, a major vehicle link between Dewey Square and Washington Street, has been completed.

## 6.0 ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

### 6.1 Alternatives:

The Saxon Theatre is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the "Piano Row" District which was submitted in the fall of 1980 as part of the Theatre Area Multiple Resource nomination. National Register status provides a limited degree of protection as well as tax incentives for rehabilitation.

The language of the Boston Landmarks Commission enabling statute, which precludes all but Landmark Designation in the central city, limits the possible designation category to that of Landmark.

The Commission also retains the option of not designating the building and its selected interior spaces as a Landmark.

### 6.2 Impact of Alternatives:

Landmarks designation under Chapter 772 would require the review of physical changes to the building interior and exterior in accordance with standards and criteria adopted as part of the designation.

The building is within the Piano Row District listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Protection from federal, federally-licensed or federally assisted actions is provided by the inclusion of the building in this National Register District and is undertaken by the Section 106 Review process. National Register listing also provides various federal income tax incentives for rehabilitation under the provisions of the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981. Properties within a National Register Historic District are eligible to take advantage of these provisions once it is determined that a) the rehabilitation can be certified according to the Tax Act and b) that the building contributes to the historic character of the district.

Similar protection from state-sponsored activities is achieved by the concurrent listings of all National Register properties in the recently created State Register of Historic Places under Chapter 152, General Laws.

Failure to designate the building as a Landmark would mean the City could offer no protection or guidance to present or future owners.

## 7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The staff of the Boston Landmarks Commission recommends that the Saxon Theatre, including both the exterior and selected interior spaces, be designated a Landmark under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975. The specific interior spaces recommended for designation are the lobby, auditorium, and balcony promenade.

The standards and criteria recommended for administering the regulatory functions provided for in Chapter 772 are attached.

## 8.0 BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION - STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

### 8.1 Introductory Statement on Standards and Criteria to be Used in Evaluating Applications for Certificates

Per Sections 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the enabling statute (Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975 of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts) Standards and Criteria must be adopted for each Landmark Designation which shall be applied by the Commission in evaluating proposed changes to the property. Before a Certificate of Design Approval or Certificate of the Exemption can be issued for such changes, the changes must be reviewed by the Commission with regard to their conformance to the purposes of the statute.

The Standards and Criteria established thus note those features which must be conserved and/or enhanced to maintain the viability of the Landmark Designation. The intent of these guidelines is to help local officials, designers, and individual property owners to identify the characteristics that have led to designation, and thus to identify the limitation to the changes that can be made to them. It should be emphasized that conformance to the Standards and Criteria alone does not necessarily insure approval, nor are they absolute, but any request for variance from them must demonstrate the reasons for, and advantages gained by, such variance. The Commission's Certificate of Design Approval is only granted after careful review of each application and public hearing, in accordance with the statute.

As intended by the statute a wide variety of buildings and features are included within the area open to Landmark Designation, and an equally wide range exists in the latitude allowed for change. Some properties of truly exceptional architectural and/or historical value will permit only the most minor modifications, while for some others the Commission encourages changes and additions with a contemporary approach, consistent with the properties' existing features and changed uses.

In general, the intent of the Standards and Criteria is to preserve existing qualities that cause designation of a property; however, in some cases they have been so structured as to encourage the removal of additions that have lessened the integrity of the property.

4/5/78

Introductory Statement on Standards and Criteria  
page two

It is recognized that changes will be required in designated properties for a wide variety of reasons, not all of which are under the complete control of the Commission or the owners. Primary examples are:

- a) Building code conformance and safety requirements.
- b) Changes necessitated by the introduction of modern mechanical and electrical systems.
- c) Changes due to proposed new uses of a property.

The response to these requirements may, in some cases, present conflicts with the Standards and Criteria for a particular property. The Commission's evaluation of an application will be based upon the degree to which such changes are in harmony with the character of the property.

In some cases, priorities have been assigned within the Standards and Criteria as an aid to property owners in identifying the most critical design features.

The Standards and Criteria have been divided into two levels: (1) those general ones that are common to almost all landmark designations (with three different categories for buildings, building interiors and landscape features); and (2) those specific ones that apply to each particular property that is designated. In every case the Specific Standard and Criteria for a particular property shall take precedence over the General ones if there is a conflict.

## BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION

8.2 General Standards and Criteria

## A. APPROACH

1. The design approach to the property should begin with the premise that the features of historical and architectural significance described within the Study Report must be preserved. In general this will minimize the exterior alterations that will be allowed.
2. Changes and additions to the property and its environment which have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have developed significance in their own right, and this significance should be recognized and respected. ("Later integral features" shall be the term used to convey this concept.)
3. Deteriorated material or architectural features, whenever possible, should be repaired rather than replaced or removed.
4. When replacement of architectural features is necessary it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of original or later integral features.
5. New materials should, whenever possible, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color, texture and other visual qualities. The use of imitation replacement materials is generally discouraged.
6. New additions or alterations should not disrupt the essential form and integrity of the property and should be compatible with the size, scale, color, material and character of the property and its environment.
7. Contemporary design is encouraged for new additions; thus, they must not necessarily be imitative of an earlier style or period.

General Standards and Criteria  
Page two

8. New additions or alterations should be done in such a way that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property would be unimpaired.
9. Priority shall be given to those portions of the property which are visible from public ways or which it can be reasonably inferred may be in the future.
10. Color will be considered as part of specific standards and criteria that apply to a particular property.

B. EXTERIOR WALLS

1. MASONRY

1. Retain whenever possible, original masonry and mortar.
2. Duplicate original mortar in composition, color, texture, joint size, joint profile and method of application.
3. Repair and replace deteriorated masonry with material which matches as closely as possible.
4. When necessary to clean masonry, use gentlest method possible. Do not sandblast. Doing so changes the visual quality of the material and accelerates deterioration. Test patches should always be carried out well in advance of cleaning (including exposure to all seasons if possible).
5. Avoid applying waterproofing or water repellent coating to masonry, unless required to solve a specific problem. Such coatings can accelerate deterioration.
6. In general, do not paint masonry surfaces. Painting masonry surfaces will be considered only when there is documentary evidence that this treatment was used at some point in the history of the property.



General Standards and Criteria  
page three

II NON-MASONRY

1. Retain and repair original or later integral material whenever possible.
2. Retain and repair, when necessary, deteriorated material with material that matches.

C. ROOFS

1. Preserve the integrity of the original or later integral roof shape.
2. Retain original roof covering whenever possible.
3. Whenever possible, replace deteriorated roof covering with material which matches the old in composition, size shape, color, texture, and installation detail.
4. Preserve architectural features which give the roof its character, such as cornices, gutters, iron filigree, cupolas, dormers, brackets.

D. WINDOWS AND DOORS

1. Retain original and later integral door and window openings where they exist. Do not enlarge or reduce door and window openings for the purpose of fitting stock window sash or doors, or air conditioners.
2. Whenever possible, repair and retain original or later integral window elements such as sash, lintels, sills, architraves, glass, shutters and other decorations and hardware. When replacement of materials or elements is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
3. On some properties consideration will be given to changing from the original window details to other expressions such as to a minimal anonymous treatment by the use of a single light, when consideration of cost, energy conservation or appropriateness override the desire for historical accuracy. In such cases, consideration must be given to the resulting effect on the interior as well as the exterior of the building.

General Standards and Criteria  
page four

E. PORCHES, STEPS AND EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

1. Retain and repair porches and steps that are original or later integral features including such items as railings, balusters, columns, posts, brackets, roofs, ironwork, benches, fountains, statues and decorative items.

F. SIGNS, MARQUEES AND AWNINGS

1. Signs, marquees and awnings integral to the building ornamentation or architectural detailing shall be retained and repaired where necessary.
2. New signs, marquees and awnings shall not detract from the essential form of the building nor obscure its architectural features.
3. New signs, marquees and awnings shall be of a size and material compatible with the building and its current use.
4. Signs, marquees and awnings applied to the building shall be applied in such a way that they could be removed without damaging the building.
5. All signs added to the building shall be part of one system of design, or reflect a design concept appropriate to the communication intent.
6. Lettering forms or typeface will be evaluated for the specific use intended, but generally shall either be contemporary or relate to the period of the building or its later integral features.
7. Lighting of signs will be evaluated for the specific use intended, but generally illumination of a sign shall not dominate illumination of the building.
8. The foregoing notwithstanding, signs are viewed as the most appropriate vehicle for imaginative and creative expression, especially in structures being reused for purposes different from the original, and it is not the Commission's intent to stifle a creative approach to signage.

General Standards and Criteria  
page five

G PENTHOUSES

1. The objective of preserving the integrity of the original or later integral roof shape shall provide the basic criteria in judging whether a penthouse can be added to a roof. Height of a building, prominence of roof form, and visibility shall govern whether a penthouse will be approved.
2. Minimizing or eliminating the visual impact of the penthouse is the general objective and the following guidelines shall be followed:
  - a) Location shall be selected where the penthouse is not visible from the street or adjacent buildings; set-backs shall be utilized.
  - b) Overall height or other dimensions shall be kept to a point where the penthouse is not seen from the street or adjacent buildings.
  - c) Exterior treatment shall relate to the materials, color and texture of the building or to other materials integral to the period and character of the building, typically used for appendages.
  - d) Openings in a penthouse shall relate to the building in proportion, type and size of opening, wherever visually apparent.

H LANDSCAPE FEATURES

1. The general intent is to preserve the existing or later integral landscape features that enhance the landmark property.
2. It is recognized that often the environment surrounding the property has a character, scale and street pattern quite different from that existing when the building was constructed. Thus, changes must frequently be made to accommodate the new condition, and the landscape treatment can be seen as a transition feature between the landmark and its newer surroundings.

General Standards and Criteria  
page six

3. The existing landforms of the site shall not be altered unless shown to be necessary for maintenance of the landmark or site. Additional landforms will only be considered if they will not obscure the exterior of the landmark.
4. Original layout and materials of the walks, steps, and paved areas should be maintained. Consideration will be given to alterations if it can be shown that better site circulation is necessary and that the alterations will improve this without altering the integrity of the landmark.
5. Existing healthy plant materials should be maintained as long as possible. New plant materials should be added on a schedule that will assure a continuity in the original landscape design and its later adaptations.
6. Maintenance of, removal of, and additions to plant materials should consider maintaining existing vistas of the landmark.

I EXTERIOR LIGHTING

1. There are three aspects of lighting related to the exterior of the building:
  - a) Lighting fixtures as appurtenances to the building or elements of architectural ornamentation.
  - b) Quality of illumination on building exterior.
  - c) Interior lighting as seen from the exterior.
2. Wherever integral to the building, original lighting fixtures shall be retained. Supplementary illumination may be added where appropriate to the current use of the building.
3. New lighting shall conform to any of the following approaches as appropriate to the building and to the current or projected use:
  - a) Accurate representation of the original period, based on physical or documentary evidence.
  - b) Retention or restoration of fixtures which date from an interim installation and which are considered to be appropriate to the building and use.

General Standards and Criteria  
page seven

- c) New lighting fixtures which are contemporary in design and which illuminate the exterior of the building in a way which renders it visible at night and compatible with its environment.
- 4. If a fixture is to be replaced, the new exterior lighting shall be located where intended in the original design. If supplementary lighting is added, the new location shall fulfill the functional intent of the current use without obscuring the building form or architectural detailing.
- 5. Interior lighting shall only be reviewed when its character has a significant effect on the exterior of the building; that is, when the view of the illuminated fixtures themselves, or the quality and color of the light they produce, is clearly visible through the exterior fenestration.

J. REMOVAL OF LATER ADDITIONS AND ALTERATIONS

- 1. Each property will be separately studied to determine if later additions and alterations can, or should, be removed. It is not possible to provide one general guideline.
- 2. Factors that will be considered include:
  - a) Compatibility with the original property's integrity in scale, materials and character.
  - b) Historic association with the property.
  - c) Quality in the design and execution of the addition.
  - d) Functional usefulness.

adopted 8/12/86

July 29, 1986

Proposed Amendments to Saxon Theatre Study Report  
9.0 Specific Standards and Criteria  
Boston Landmarks Commission

9.B.Exterior

Other Facades and Roof

3.1. Routine maintenance and any alterations not visible from a public way may be made on these surfaces without the specific review of the Commission.

Interior.

1.1 No change will be allowed to the volume and arrangement of this space without prior approval.

## 9.0 Specific Standards and Criteria

### SAXON

#### A. General

There is consensus that virtually all the exterior material, excepting the marquee and the forms and finishes of the lobby, exist beneath the modern finishes. The Commission urges the careful removal of the modern marquee and panelling to allow the full facade restoration of this building. The modern interior finishes should be removed and all original finishes restored. Since only cosmetic alterations appear to have been made, it is hoped that restoration will be a real possibility in the near future.

#### B. EXTERIOR

##### 1. Front Facade

1. All existing masonry surfaces will be retained and restored.
2. No existing openings will be closed without specific written approval. If approval is given, it will be for a design that clearly distinguishes the alteration from the original fabric.
3. No new openings will be allowed in the front facade. Openings and alterations may be made to the other facades without specific review and approval. The commission encourages alterations consistent with and supportive of the original design and appearance of the building.

##### 2. Windows and Doors

1. Existing windows should be retained or replaced to match the original design. Replacement windows may be in a material different from the original provided the appearance of the window is not altered.
2. The existing modern doors should be removed, and doors that closely match the original be installed. The material of these doors may be other than original provided the appearance is authentic.

##### 3. Other Facades and Roof

1. Routine maintenance and any necessary alterations may be made on these surfaces without the specific review of the commission.
2. The commission encourages the design and execution of any alterations be done in a way to reinforce the original design.

#### 4. Architectural Details

##### 1. Marquee.

1. The existing marquee obstructs the fine Beaux Arts facade and will be removed as soon as possible; resultant scars in the masonry will be repaired in such a way that they are not visible.
2. A metal and glass marquee, similar in design to that documented in photographs, may be installed over the offset right doorway, provided plans are reviewed and approved.
3. Marquees over the three bays may be considered provided they are designed to integrate into the facade and plans are reviewed and approved.

##### 2. Signs.

The large vertical illuminated sign will be removed as soon as possible: resultant scars will be repaired in such a way that they are not visible. No permanent signs will be affixed to the facade. No permanent signs may be integral with the marquee(s).

##### 3. Exterior lighting.

1. General lighting of the facade may be installed, with approval, provided lighting devices are shielded from view and the color and pattern of the lighting compliments the design of the facade.
2. Special lighting should be integrated into the display and marquee designs.

##### 4. Display Systems.

The advertising and publicity displays were traditionally limited to cases applied to the planar portions of the facade at ground level.

1. Illuminated cases may be applied to the planar portions of the facade below the "wave" cornice, with approval, provided the method of attachment causes minimal damage and no architectural detail or features is obscured or damaged.
2. Temporary signs and banners may be installed against or parallel to the large planar pilasters flanking the arches. Any assembly affixed to the facade may be approved provided it is designed to be minimally visible and cause no harm to or removal of architectural detail.



## INTERIOR

The interior spaces of the lobby, the balcony promenade and the auditorium will be subject to review and approval. Routine maintenance and repair may be done without review, provided no original finish, material or detail is removed, damaged, or concealed in the process. All alterations and additions must be reviewed and approved. The commission encourages restoration of the interior to the maximum extent possible and recognizes the need to make sympathetic change.

### 1. Volume.

The full unobstructed volume of the interior spaces subject to review will be maintained unless written approval for alteration is given prior to any work being done.

1. Lobby: No change will be allowed to the volume and arrangement of this space.
2. Balcony promenade: No change will be allowed to the volume and arrangement of this space without prior approval.
3. Auditorium: No change will be allowed to the volume and arrangement of this space without prior approval. The entire second balcony may be enclosed and altered provided the design of the enclosure clearly respects the design integrity of the whole volume and no architectural feature is destroyed. Any proposed change must be reviewed and approved by the Commission. Acoustic compatibility will be reviewed.
4. Backstage and service spaces: No review of changes in these areas will be made.

### 2. Finishes.

All materials and finishes within the designated areas are subject to review.

1. No original finish or material will be altered, covered or removed without prior written approval. This includes wall, floors and ceiling surfaces, railings, grilles, etc.
2. Original material (wood, metal, stucco and plaster work, paints, etc.) will be restored to the greatest extent possible. Retention in current condition is usually preferred to replacement or covering.
3. When replacement materials are allowed, they will match the original as closely as possible in appearance. Carpeting and wall covering should match or evoke the design of the original or period.
4. All materials and finishes which were intended to be left natural, wood and metals particularly, will be restored or repaired in kind. No finished wood or metals will be painted.
5. Painted surfaces, plain or decorative, will be restored or redone to match exactly the original. Gilded surfaces will be restored or regilded. Paint colors must be based on analysis or accurate documentation and must be approved by the commission.

3. Fittings and Furniture (including lighting devices).

All remaining items which are original to the building should be retained.

1. All items which are removed will be thoroughly documented by photographs filed with the commission with details of their disposition.
2. Replacement items should be selected to reinforce the Beaux Arts design aesthetic of the building. Whenever possible, the items should match the original in design and location.

4. Lighting.

Because the interior lighting was described as remarkable, special care should be exercised to recreate the sophisticated, indirect lighting effects of the original. In those cases where specific designs exist or are documented, the commission encourages repair or replacement to match. In any event, all permanent visible lighting devices (excluding stage lighting) must be approved.

5. Theater Equipment.

Equipment which is integral to the function of the theater and does not damage the interior may be installed without review. Items which are more related to the image and perception of the theater will be reviewed and approved by the commission. These latter items include:

1. Fire screen. The design of the fire screen must closely match the original.
2. Curtain. The front curtain which is perceived as part of the house must match the original.
3. House seats. The design and placement of seats should resemble the original as closely as possible, especially on the orchestra level.

6. Theater Operations.

The Commission has no desire to interfere in any way with ongoing theater operations. As a result, none of the standards and criteria contained herein are intended to interfere with the continual mounting and striking of temporary alterations associated with production needs and requirements. Such temporary alterations are therefore exempt from prior Commission review and approval.

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