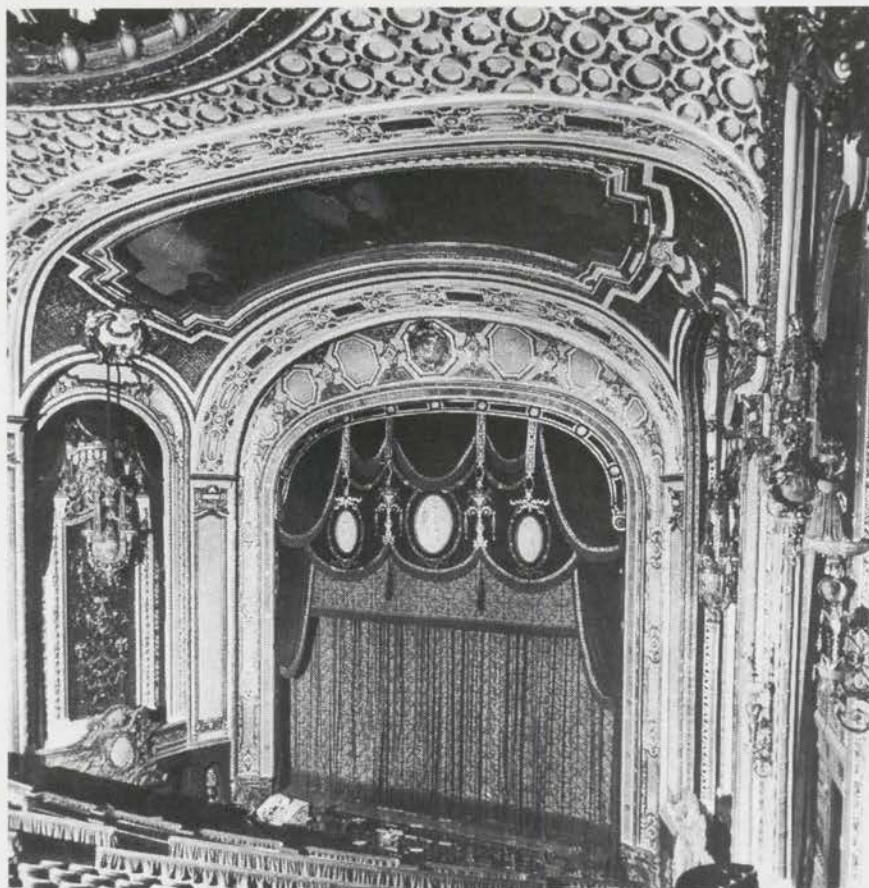


“An Acre of Seats in a Palace of Splendor”



PARAMOUNT THEATRE

Times Square, New York

by Steven Levin

Architects: C.W. & George L. Rapp

Opened: November 19, 1926

Closed:
August 4, 1964
(last regular performance)

Organ: Wurlitzer 4/36 Opus 1458

Jesse Crawford and “Indians.” (at right) The Poet of the Organ was at the top of his profession, if not his humor, when he endured this publicity shot for a Paramount stage show. The Paramount console (below), near the end of its career clearly mirrors nearly four decades of faithful service.

The 1925 merger of Balaban & Katz Theatres with Paramount Pictures brought into the Zukor empire not just the midwest’s mightiest theatre chain, but also much of the talent which had made it so great. Among the starring players was the firm of Rapp & Rapp, more responsible than any other for defining and perfecting the movie palace style. This, their first new “Paramount,” was erected at West 43rd Street and Broadway in a 44-story office tower which served as Paramount’s business headquarters. For as long as that meant something, the New York Paramount was the firm’s flagship house. The theatre gave New York filmgoers their first grand lobby, and, amazingly, their first large Wurlitzer. Jesse Crawford, another B&K asset, influenced the design, essentially a larger and more unified interpretation of the Style 285, until then the largest standard model. Many regarded the Paramount as Wurlitzer’s greatest installation. Its roaring success in the hands of Jesse and Helen Crawford inspired four later copies for the new Fox Theatres in Detroit, Brooklyn, St. Louis and San Francisco.

Following the Crawford’s six-year tenure, the Paramount featured Reginald Foort, Don Baker and George Wright as full-time staffers, then Bill Floyd and Bob Mack as needed. Removed in 1964, the organ ultimately found a new home in the Century II complex in Wichita, Kansas, after plans to install it in a Los Angeles theatre fell through. A new Balcom & Vaughan replica console replaced the original, destroyed in a fire. The Paramount Theatre hung on for a couple of years with occasional rentals before being gutted for offices. The Paramount Building is still there, and the sharp-eyed can spot where the theatre was, but nothing remains save memories.



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