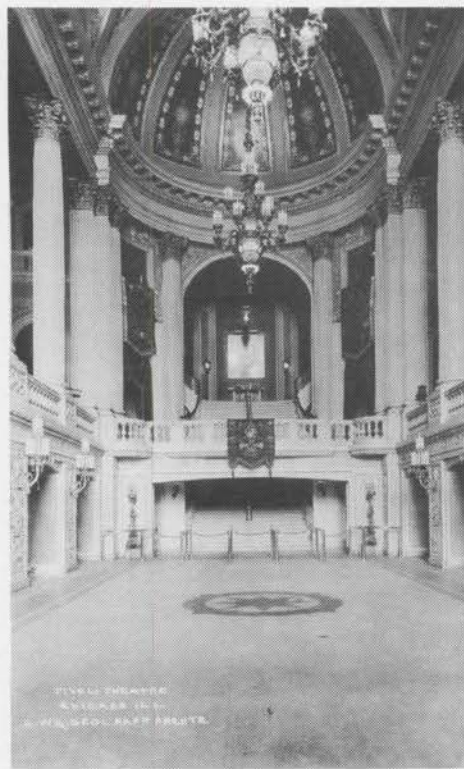
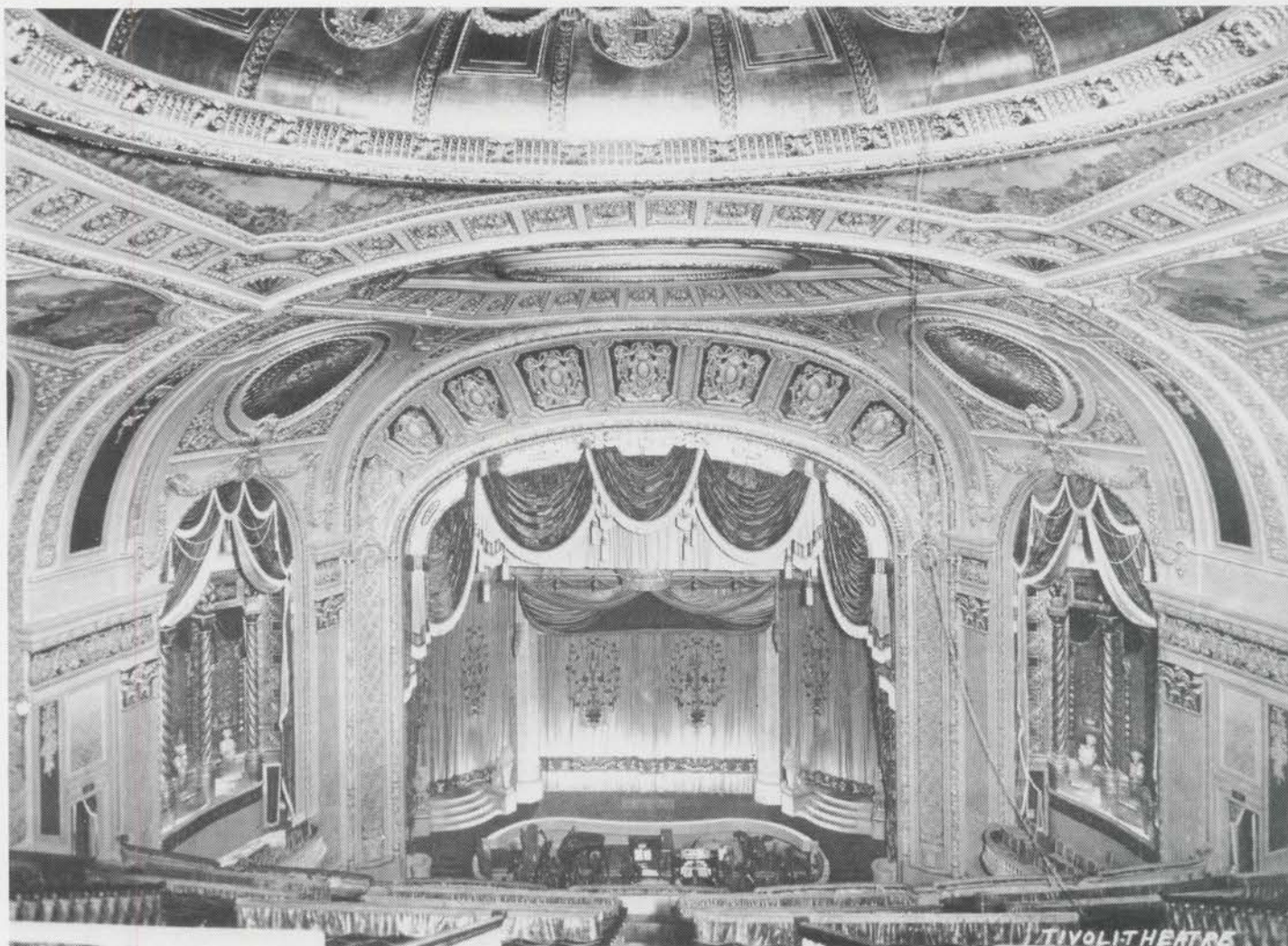


“An Acre of Seats in a Palace of Splendor”



TIVOLI THEATRE, Chicago

Capacity 3414 / Opened: February 16, 1921

Architect: C.W. & George L. Rapp

Organ: Wurlitzer 3/16 Style 260

Speculation on what theatre deserves to be called the first movie palace is made difficult, if not pointless, by the universality of the phenomenon: it was happening everywhere at about the same time. Nevertheless, the importance of these two — summations of everything which had come before and standards for everything to follow — cannot be overstated.

The pair propelled Rapp & Rapp into the front rank of movie house architects, and their client, Balaban & Katz Theatres, to the top of Chicago exhibition. Impressed by the architects', Al Ringling Theatre in Baraboo, B & K engaged them to design the Central Park (1917) on Chicago's West Side and the Riviera (1919) on the North. The Tivoli, on the South Side, and the Chicago, in the Loop, filled out the pattern. Rapp & Rapp were responsible for many more B & K houses, most notably the Uptown (1925) and the Oriental (1926).

After the circuit became a major component of Publix Theatres in 1925, they designed most of the new Paramounts, starting with New York.

Often thought of as twins, the Tivoli and Chicago were in fact quite different in both layout and decor. The first truly “grand” lobby anywhere, the Tivoli's, freely modeled after the chapel at Versailles, sat beneath the balcony. The Chicago's smaller lobby is freestanding, with offices above. Both had tall arched windows above the doors and tiers of staircases at the far end. The Tivoli pioneered the use of ambulatories to separate incoming and outgoing traffic; this feature was repeated at the Chicago and in most subsequent Rapp & Rapp lobbies.

The Tivoli's smaller auditorium was the more conventional; the Chicago's, constrained by the site, is wider than it is deep. The Rapps' characteristic trio of

CHICAGO THEATRE, Chicago

Capacity 3880 / Opened: October 26, 1921

Architect: C.W. & George L. Rapp

Organ: Wurlitzer 4/25(?) Now 4/29

sidewall arches appeared in both, as did fixed stage sets and orchestra pits set into the stage. Overall, the ornament in the more graceful Tivoli was lighter than the Chicago's, particularly around the organ openings.

The Tivoli lasted until September 19, 1963. The Chicago, along with most of the other Loop houses, remained profitable a good deal longer. A long and complex battle in the early '80s saved it from the wrecker's ball. Following a so-so renovation, it reopened in September 1986. The going since has not been smooth, but the Chicago still stands.

For the Tivoli, Wurlitzer built the first Style 260, although the organ was larger, by a string, then what became the standard model. The Chicago organ appears to have been shipped with 25 ranks. Later additions by the builder included a Tibia and Vox in the Solo and a second Saxo-

phone, in the main, perhaps in place of the Salicional. To augment the Brass, a second Tuba Mirabilis and English Horn were later moved from the Uptown, bringing the organ to its present 29 ranks. After decades of neglect, the organ was brought back to life by Chicago Area Chapter in the early '70s.

The present console, the third, was installed in 1923, along with a slave conceived with Jesse Crawford's new bride, Helen Anderson, in mind. (Given their success at the Chicago, one wonders why the New York Paramount was not at first so equipped.) Although Crawford is more closely associated with the Chicago, he also opened the Tivoli and played there until the larger house opened. *Steve Levin*

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