

**CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

**HPC
PR/PH/ BUSINESS
9-18-01
#4**

FILE NAME: 708 Hennepin Avenue
DATE OF APPLICATION: August 22, 2001
APPLICANT: Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA)
DATE OF HEARING: September 18, 2001
HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Pantages Theater (Individual Designation of interior (auditorium) only)
CATEGORY: Contributing
CLASSIFICATION: Certificate of Appropriateness
STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Amy Lucas
DATE: September 7, 2001

A. SITE DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND:

The Pantages Theater is located within the storefront (Stimson Buildingm 700-710 Hennepin Avenue) building situated on the corner of Hennepin Avenue and 7th Street North. The Pantages Theater (commonly referred to as the Mann Theater) was constructed in 1916 for Alexander Pantages as a vaudeville theater. The Seattle architect, Marcus Priteca, designed the auditorium and lobby space. The lobby underwent a complete renovation in 1961 and is not part of the designated space. Through the years, the auditorium space has undergone renovations including the removal of the seats, proscenium arch, and parts of the side box seats. Much of the original lighting and stage equipment was removed and the theater was adapted into a movie theater in the 1960s. A mezzanine under the balcony was infilled. The seating arrangement and individual chairs for the theater changed many times. The original stage floor and orchestra pit arrangement were altered. All decorative painting was covered through the years. The theater was vacated in 1984 and left to deteriorate further.

The theater is significant for its association with Alexander Pantages who owned and operated over 500 theaters between 1906-1936. The theater is also significant for its association with the notable architect, Marcus Priteca, who designed the majority of the Pantages theaters and developed a style referred to as the "Pantages Greek." The theater is also valuable as an example of an architectural type. It is the last of four historic downtown theaters in Minneapolis and retains much of its architectural details. When the theater was constructed in 1916, there were 25 theaters in downtown Minneapolis.

The auditorium space was designated a local landmark in 1997.

The City eventually took ownership of the theater and the Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA) issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Stimson Building renovation (including theater) in June of 2000. At the time of the RFP the City Council decided that it was not a public goal to restore the theater to its original appearance. The RFP asked that the proposers contemplate renovation that would include repair of existing plaster work and decoration but renovate to modern standards. Planning Department staff participated in the interview process for the rehabilitation. The architecture firm, HGA, was chosen ~~to renovate~~ the Stimson Building and Pantages Theater with direction to complete architectural services, construction management and sub contracting for the theater light and sound systems. *for the Pantages/Stimson renovation*

same form, design, and overall visual appearance as the historic feature; and, at a minimum, be equal to its loadbearing capabilities.

Alterations/Additions for the New Use

- Limiting any new excavations adjacent to historic foundations to avoid undermining the structural stability of the building or adjacent historic buildings.
- Correcting structural deficiencies in preparation for the new use in a manner that preserves the structural system and individual character-defining features.
- Designing and installing new mechanical or electrical systems when required for the new use which minimize the number of cutouts or holes in structural members.
- Adding a new floor when required for the new use if such an alteration does not damage or destroy the structural system or obscure, damage, or destroy character-defining spaces, features, or finishes.
- Creating an atrium or a light well to provide natural light when required for the new use in a manner that assures the preservation of the structural system as well as character-defining interior spaces, features, and finishes.

Interior: Spaces, Features, and Finishes

- Identifying, retaining, and preserving a floor plan or interior spaces that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building. This includes the size, configuration, proportion, and relationship of rooms and corridors; the relationship of features to spaces; and the spaces themselves such as lobbies, reception halls, entrance halls, double parlors, theaters, auditoriums, and important industrial or commercial use spaces.
- Identifying, retaining, and preserving interior features and finishes that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building, including columns, cornices, baseboards, fireplaces and mantles, paneling, light fixtures, hardware, and flooring; and wallpaper, plaster, paint, and finishes such as stenciling, marbling, and graining; and other decorative materials that accent interior features and provide color, texture, and patterning to walls, floors, and ceilings.
- Protecting and maintaining masonry, wood, and architectural metals which comprise interior features through appropriate surface treatments such as cleaning, rust removal, limited paint removal, and re-application of protective coatings systems.
- Protecting interior features and finishes against arson and vandalism before project work begins, erecting protective fencing, boarding-up windows, and installing fire alarm systems that are keyed to local protection agencies.
- Protecting interior features such as a staircase, mantel, or decorative finishes and wall coverings against damage during project work by covering them with heavy canvas or plastic sheets.
- Installing protective coverings in areas of heavy pedestrian traffic to protect historic features such as wall coverings, parquet flooring and paneling.
- Removing damaged or deteriorated paints and finishes to the next sound layer using the gentlest method possible, then repainting or refinishing using compatible paint or other coating systems.

-Adding a new floor if required for the new use in a manner that preserves character-defining structural features, and interior spaces, features, and finishes.

Mechanical Systems: Heating, Air Conditioning, Electrical, and Plumbing

-Identifying, retaining, and preserving visible features of early mechanical systems that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building, such as radiators, vents, fans, grilles, plumbing fixtures, switchplates, and lights.

-Protecting and maintaining mechanical, plumbing, and electrical systems and their features through cyclical cleaning and other appropriate measures.

-Preventing accelerated deterioration of mechanical systems by providing adequate ventilation of attics, crawlspaces, and cellars so moisture problems are avoided.

-Repairing mechanical systems by augmenting or upgrading system parts, such as installing new pipes and ducts; rewiring; or adding new compressors or boilers.

-Replacing in kind-or with compatible substitute material-those visible features of mechanical systems that are either extensively deteriorated or are missing when there are surviving prototypes such as ceiling fans, switchplates, radiators, grilles, or plumbing fixtures.

Alterations/Additions for the New Use

-Installing a completely new mechanical system if required for the new use so that it causes the least alteration possible to the building's floor plan, the exterior elevations, and the least damage to historic building material.

-Installing the vertical runs of ducts, pipes, and cables in closets, service rooms, and wall cavities.

-Installing air conditioning units if required by the new use in such a manner that the historic materials and features are not damaged or obscured.

-Installing heating/air conditioning units in the window frames in such a manner that the sash and frames are protected. Window installations should be considered only when all other viable heating/cooling systems would result in significant damage to historic materials.

D. FINDINGS:

- 1 The auditorium of the Pantages Theater is locally designated.
2. The proposed work meets *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*.

E. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the HPC adopt staff findings and approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work, subject to the following conditions:

1. Staff approval is required for the final seat style, carpet selection and decorative paint scheme.

City of Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Pantages Theater

Other Name/Site Number: RKO-Pan, Mann Theater

2. Location of Property

Street and Number: 708 Hennepin Avenue

located on original site not for publication ()

moved/date:()

3. Ownership

Owner's Name: Hollywood Theatre Company (attn: Ted Mann)

Street and Number: 704 Hennepin Avenue Room 202

City: Minneapolis

State: MN

Zip: 55403

4. Classification

Ownership of property: private
 public
 both

Category of property: building
 site
 district
 structure
 object

Number of resources within property:

Contributing

 1

Non-contributing

 0 buildings

 sites

 structures

 objects

 1

 0 Total

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places

Date:

5. Function or Use

Historic: theater

Current: vacant

6. Description

Architectural classification (style): Exterior-Art Moderne
Theater Auditorium Interior-Beaux Arts
Theater Lobby Interior-Modern

Materials: foundation: concrete

roof:

walls: granite, brick

other:

Describe present and historic physical appearance. See continuation sheets.

7. Statement of Significance

Applicable local designation criteria: Gp-1, Gp-3

Related local context(s): "Culture, Fine and Applied Arts, 1883-Present"

Areas of significance: Performing Arts, Architecture

Period(s) of significance: 1916-1932

Significant dates: 1916

Significant person(s): Alexander Pantages

Cultural affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: builder-Splady, Allee and Smith
auditorium architect-Marcus Priteca

8. Major Bibliographic References

- Edgar, Randolph. "Early Minneapolis Theaters." Minnesota History, vol. 9, March 1928.
- Granger, Susan. National Register of Historic Places nomination form on the Sam S. Shubert Theatre.
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- Hill, Lawrence James. A History of Variety-Vaudeville in Minneapolis, MN from its Beginning to 1900. Vol I, II. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1979.
- Kane, Lucile and John Dougherty. "Movie Debut: Films in the Twin Cities, 1894-1909." Minnesota History, Vol. 54, Winter 1995.
- Lufkin, George. "Intermission." in Marquee: the Journal of the Theatre Historical Society, 1973 vol.5, n. 4, p. 25.
- Mesbur, David. "Pantages Theatre, Toronto." In Canadian Architect, October 1989, vol. 34, no. 10. p. 57-61
- Millet, Larry. Lost Twin Cities. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1992.
- Naylor, David. American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1981.
- Poggi, Jack. Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces 1870-1967. Ithaca, New York: Colonial Press Inc., 1968.
- Sherman, John K. "Music and Theater in Minnesota History." In A History of the Arts in Minnesota. Ed. William Van O'Connor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1958.
- Whiting, Frank M. Minnesota Theater: From old Fort Snelling to the Guthrie. St. Paul: Pogo Press, 1988.
- Utting, Gerald. "Orpheum Theatre, Vancouver." In Canadian Architect, November 1977, vol. 22, n. 11, p. 24-29.
- Zalusky, J. W. "Early Theater...or the History of Entertainment in Minneapolis." Hennepin County History, Fall, 1960.

9. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

PIN number: 22-029-24-43-0062 (for 700-710 Hennepin Avenue)

Legal Description: Block 004 of Hoag and Bells Addition

10. Form prepared by:

Name/Title: Amy Lucas, Preservation Planner

Organization: City of Minneapolis Planning Department

Street and number: 350 S. 5th St.

Telephone: 673-2422

City: Minneapolis

State:MN

Zip: 55413

11. Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Comments

Date submitted to Minneapolis HPC: 3-19-96

Date of Minneapolis HPC comment:

12. Description of City Council

Designation of property pursuant to:

Date of action:

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6. PROPERTY DESCRIPTION:

The Pantages Theater is located at 708 Hennepin Avenue in downtown Minneapolis within an office/retail office building located at 700-712 Hennepin Avenue. The office building stands on the block bounded by Hennepin Avenue, First Avenue North, Seventh Street North, and Eighth Street North. The office building sits on the corner of Hennepin and Eighth and is surrounded by a parking lot to the west and a bus depot (1936) to the north. Across the street to the south is the Skyway Theater which replaced the Lyric Theater in 1971. The Pantages Theater is currently vacant.

Streetcar tracks ran along Hennepin Avenue when the theater was built and the avenue was already established as a theater district. The Hennepin Avenue Theater (1887, later the Harris, Lyceum, and Lyric) was located to the west at 718 Hennepin Avenue and was demolished between 1919 and 1925. The Jefferson Public School was located to the north and is now the site of the bus depot. A 1914 map of the block indicates that there were still a few wood frame dwellings remaining on the block, but the area was growing in retail/theater uses. (Sanborn 1914)

The Pantages Theater is incorporated into an office building called the Pantages Theater Building, also referred to as the Stimson Building, and is designed in a simplified Art Moderne style. The modest design was built in 1916 at a cost of approximately \$15,000. (*Tribune* Oct. 28, 1916) Alex Pantages originally chose the Minneapolis firm of Kees and Colburn to design a twelve story building, but the finished product remained a simplified two story base of the original design. The contracting firm, Speady, Albee and Smith, only constructed the base of the original twelve story design. The theater is situated within the L-shaped two story office building and is separated by a narrow alley. This siting allows for all stores and offices to have street or window access. The building faces 136 feet on Hennepin Avenue and 165 feet on Seventh Avenue. The roof steps up three times in the back of the building denoting the theater use. The exterior is faced with a smooth gray granite veneer and the sides of the theater walls are cream-colored common brick.

The twelve story building was originally designed as a Beaux Arts style building with a simple base. The two story structure that was eventually built is a simplified Art Moderne Style box. The first floor contains a variety of retail uses and a variety of storefront designs. The original design of the first floor storefronts has been altered throughout the years. The second floor remains intact with seven bays of three part windows facing Hennepin and eight bays of three part windows facing Eighth Avenue. A simple, continuous strip of matching gray granite wraps the building at the cornice. Four windows on Hennepin are slightly raised to allow for the theater marquee which has been removed. All windows were replaced in 1961 with aluminum frames. The theater is entered off-center on Hennepin Avenue with four sets of glass doors with bronze frames; these doors survive from the 1961 renovation. This entrance was renovated in 1926 and again in 1946 which included a built-in box office and a new facade of red St. Cloud granite.

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The original signage incorporated an ornate canopy and a vertical sign which read "PANTAGES". In 1926, the vertical sign was updated and the canopy was removed and replaced with a lit marquee. In 1946, the vertical sign was removed and the marquee was widened to read "RKO-PAN". A new vertical sign was attached above the marquee in 1961 which read "MANN" and the lettering on the marquee was removed.

While the exterior of the Pantages Theater Building was simple in design, the interior of the theater was originally quite extravagant in its Beaux Arts features. The interior of the theater has undergone a number of changes. The original lobby was renovated in 1926 at a cost of \$50,000 which included a new exterior front, enlarged lobby and foyer and a separate mezzanine was created. (*Tribune* Sept. 18, 1926) The lobby was renovated again in 1946 with bird's eye maple woodwork and indirect lighting through a ceiling that resembled "metal lace." (*Tribune* April 10, 1946) This metal grill system was painted green "to harmonize with the green-white-gold wallpaper" and the tan and brown carpet. (*Theatre Catalogue*, 97) The Minneapolis architects, Abbott and Angelikis, were retained to design this renovation which included changes to the surrounding office/retail building at a cost of \$90,000. A national theater interior designer, Sebco, Inc., was hired to renovate the lobby. (*Theatre Catalogue*, 49) The 1961 lobby renovation by the Minneapolis architecture firm, Liebenberg, Kaplan and Associates survives today. The lobby space was widened to take in the adjoining fruit store and appliance store. (*Star* Mar. 5, 1961) The existing stairs to the mezzanine, balcony and basement were pushed to the outer walls and the cantilevered steps present a floating effect. The screen walls by the stairs are Yucatan stone sculptured panels with Aztec designs. The purple and gold carpet that was woven specifically for this theater remains. The mezzanine was cut away and is an open space to allow for an open view of the lobby below.

Unlike the lobby, the original design of the auditorium remains largely intact. The auditorium of the Pantages was designed by Marcus Priteca and features a curved auditorium which measures 73 feet wide. The auditorium has one balcony with two levels; both levels have side aisles and two center aisles. The ceiling retains a rectangular plaster skylight which has been painted and an extremely ornate plaster coves. Most of the ornate plasterwork on the walls, ceiling and balcony railings remains. The auditorium originally accommodated 1600 people, but the seating was rearranged in 1946 to accommodate 1400 people and again in 1961 to seat 1100. The original seats were replaced with red padded metal rocker seats in 1961. These seats were removed after the theater's closing, but many still remain stacked in the auditorium. The floors are constructed of reinforced concrete.

The balcony railings exhibit ornate plaster faces and garlands. The balconies are entered via several stairways located in the lobby and along the side walls. Originally the balconies were entered through the center of the mezzanine level, but this entrance has been filled. The side staircases lead to added restrooms that fill the original mezzanine level entrance. Four fire exit doors remain along the side stairs.

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Between the balconies and the proscenium on each side wall were two tiers of singularly placed viewing boxes. The boxes were designed with arched plaster surrounds, but were removed as part of the 1961 renovation. The plaster detailing that does remain features large panels of musical instruments and square plaster columns with egg and dart detailing. The staircase to the boxes are situated directly below the boxes and still exist today with plaster surrounds. The same stairs lead to the basement below the stage, the boxes and the balconies. The railings are ornate designs of cast metal.

A proscenium, which measures 36 feet wide and approximately 30 feet tall, enframes the performance area. The plaster work of the proscenium was classical in design and featured a cartouche over the center of the arch and classical columns along the side. The proscenium plasterwork was removed in 1961. The curved stage-footlight area remains and was electrified. The sunken orchestra pit was filled in 1961 but can still be reached under the stage through the dressing rooms. The stage entrance and stairs to the dressing rooms are located along the western side. The stage is 32 feet deep and 73 feet wide and is covered with oak flooring. Much of the original rigging is still in place, but has been dropped to the floor. At the top of the stage house is the gridiron which supports the rigging and along the side walls are the two fly galleries. There are ten rooms below the stage which were used as offices and dressing rooms; two more rooms house the mechanical equipment.

The basement below the lobby is reached only through the lobby and contains restrooms and a lounge area with a ceiling height of 12 feet. The 1961 renovation is intact. A mechanical room reached through a closet is situated under the sidewalk on the Hennepin Avenue.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Pantages Theater is eligible for local nomination under criteria Gp-1 which states that "structures considered for preservation shall exemplify the broad trends of cultural, political, economic or social history." The theater is historically significant for its associations with the history of vaudeville in Minneapolis. It is also eligible for nomination under criteria Gp-3 which states that "structures considered for preservation may display the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for study of a style or method of construction." The interior of the theater is architecturally significant as an intact example of its property type. The Pantages Theater is significant with the City of Minneapolis' historic context entitled "Culture, Fine, and Applied Arts, 1883-Present."

Vaudeville in Minneapolis

Vaudeville theater developed in New York City during the 1860s and was comprised of music, singing, dancing, or comedy performed in a series of short, independent acts. Vaudeville differs from "legitimate theater" which concentrated on theatrical performances and from "burlesque" which presented a more risqué performances like can-can dancing.

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Vaudeville theater was designed to attract a broad, family audience and tickets were cheaper than those of legitimate theater. At the turn of the century, vaudeville gained tremendous attention and traveling shows grew in numbers requiring more theaters. The theaters were grand and designed to impress the audiences with their dramatic architecture. (Granger, 9) Hennepin Avenue acted as a showplace for these theaters.

The era between the 1870s and the 1920s was defined as the golden age of theater in Minnesota in which a large amount of theaters concentrated along Hennepin Avenue. Theaters built along Hennepin Avenue included the Hennepin Avenue Theater (1887), the People's Theater (1887) and its successor on the same site-the Bijou Opera House (1890) between Hennepin and First Avenues, and the Metropolitan Opera House (1894) at Hennepin and Seventh Street. (Granger, 12) In the 20th century, Hennepin's playhouses included the Crystal (1909) at 305 Hennepin, the Pantages (1916) at 708 Hennepin, the New Place (1917) at 414 Hennepin, the State (1921) at 805 Hennepin, and the Hennepin (1921) at 805 Hennepin. (Granger, 12) Many theaters gathered around Seventh and Hennepin including the Metropolitan Opera house Seventh Street Orpheum, (1904), the Garrick (1907), the Sam S. Shubert (1910) and the Strand (1915). (Granger, 12) When the Pantages was built in 1916 there were at least 25 theaters in downtown Minneapolis. (Millet, 247) Of these theaters, only the State (vaudeville), the Hennepin (vaudeville), the Shubert (legitimate) and the Pantages (vaudeville) still remain.

With the increasing popularity of theater use came a rise in monopolies trying to book and produce shows that would travel across the country. These monopolies began to build theaters for their own circuits. Booking circuits in Minneapolis included Morris Meyerfield's Orpheum Theatre circuit and the Shubert brothers circuit. Alex Pantages from Seattle came in 1916 to try his hand in the Minneapolis theater district.

Minneapolis Pantages

Alexander Pantages (b. 1851), a Greek emigrant, opened his first Pantages theater in Seattle in 1906 with \$4000 and before his death in 1936 he had built a theater circuit of 500 theaters. Pantages theaters concentrated on the west coast and can be found in Seattle, Calgary, Spokane, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Victoria, Tacoma, Portland, San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, San Diego and Salt Lake City. (*Star* Dec. 1915) The Minneapolis theater market was already strongly developed on Hennepin Avenue when Pantages began his venture. The Minneapolis "Pan" house was situated on a heavily trafficked corner next door to the Lyceum Theatre which relocated across the street soon after construction. It was Alex Pantages' 26th theater and would serve as the starting point for vaudeville acts before they performed on the west coast.

Opening day, October 27, 1916, at the Minneapolis Pantages was a grand event which began with an opening speech by Alexander Pantages and a ribbon cutting by Minneapolis Mayor Nye. Pantages described the "high class bill" for the opening week which included "seven acts, including a two-reel installment of a film serial, Winston's Water Lions, an aquatic act in which sea lions and water nymphs disport themselves for fully 20 minutes,

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and an adequate supply of comedy. (*Star* Oct. 28, 1916) The other acts were described in a later review, "Stirling and Marguerite are a clever pair who unite vocal to gymnastic achievements; the La Scala Sextet presents familiar excerpts from grand opera with moderate artistic skill; Joe Roberts is something of a wizard upon his chosen instrument, the banjo; Sibler and North are a bit labored and forced in their fun-making; and Lemaire and Dawson are hardly more than mediocre comedians." (*Star* Oct. 30, 1916) One of the most popular features on the Pantages circuit in the early 1920s was Anna Eva Fay the psychical dame who was heavily promoted by Pantages and was reportedly paid \$1000 a week. (*Tribune*, Mar. 15, 1961)

In 1929, Alexander Pantages sold fifteen vaudeville theaters, including the Minneapolis Pantages, to the Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO) corporation for \$14,000,000. Pantages had just finished a \$50,000 renovation of the Minneapolis theater building which included a new lobby and exterior changes. At this time, vaudeville had lost most of its audience to the movie screen and the Pantages followed the market.

In July of 1945, a Minneapolitan, Edmond R. Ruben, purchased the Pantages for \$285,000 and leased the theater to RKO Radio Pictures to show first-run movies. At this time, the office building surrounding the theater is referred to as the Stimson Building which is said to have received the name after the late Secretary of War under President Roosevelt, Henry Stimson. (*Tribune* Jan. 17, 1959) Ruben's company, Welworth Theaters, Inc., was located in the offices of the Stimson Building. Ruben put \$90,000 worth of improvements into the new RKO-Pan which included a lounge renovation, auditorium seating reduction, new exterior frontage, lobby renovation and new lighting. Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey cut the ribbon on April 14, 1946 and the opening movie was "Gilda" starring Rita Hayworth and Glenn Ford.

Edmond Ruben held the Stimson Building and the theater until January of 1961 when he sold it to Ted Mann, president of the Mann Theaters Corporation for \$550,000; a rental agreement had been arranged two years earlier. At the same time, Mann also purchased the RKO Orpheum on Hennepin Avenue and the RKO Orpheum in St. Paul. In 1961, Mann was listed as the owner of other Minneapolis theaters including the Academy, World, Suburban World, Lyceum and Strand. He was president of Duluth Outdoor Theater Company and Minnesota Entertainment Enterprises. The Pantages Theater received a complete renovation in 1961 which included the lobby renovation, reduced seating and mezzanine removal. The Minneapolis architecture firm of Liebenberg & Kaplan was chosen to design the \$300,000 renovation. The firm was well-connected to theater design and designed three other Minneapolis landmarks which include the Hollywood Theater (1935), the Uptown Theater (1916) and the Suburban World (1927). The fully updated Mann Theater opened on March 15, 1961 with the movie "Spartacus." Mann later leased the theater to General Cinemas. The Mann Theater (Pantages) closed in 1984 and has remained vacant.

Architectural Significance

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The auditorium of the Pantages Theater, built in 1916, is an ornate and basically intact example of the large vaudeville houses which were constructed in major U.S. cities between 1900 and the 1920s. The auditorium typifies the extravagance with which vaudeville theaters were designed. The theater was not the grandest on Hennepin Avenue, but now exists as one of the three last remaining vaudeville houses on Hennepin Avenue.

The Pantages Theater was designed by the Minneapolis architecture firm of Kees and Colburn. Frederick Kees and Sirenus Colburn were former members of the architectural firm of Long and Kees whose notable works include the Masonic Temple, the Lumber Exchange and Minneapolis City Hall. Kees and Colburn created a prominent architectural firm at the turn of the century whose designs include the Northern Implement Company Building at 616 Third Street South and the Advance Thresher Building at 700 Third Street South.

Kees and Colburn had much grander plans for the Pantages Theater Building which was originally designed as a twelve story building in the Beaux Arts style. The built design presented a modest two story building devoid of all classical Beaux Arts detailing which resembles a Art Moderne box. The reasons for the design change are unknown. The original building permit lists Kees and Colburn with the contracting firm of Speady, Albee and Haagenon. This matching occurred again on Nicollet Avenue with the Loring Theater (Cricket Theater) in 1920. The exterior of the Pantages Theater Building has lost most of its historical integrity due to renovations.

The interior of the theater auditorium most probably was designed by the Seattle architect, B. Marcus Priteca (1890-1971). Priteca designed most of Alexander Pantages' theaters in the United States and the interior of the Minneapolis Pantages closely resembles the Priteca ornate, Beaux Arts style, commonly referred to as the "Pantages Greek" style. Priteca's theaters employ ornate plaster ceiling coves, columns along the proscenium and sophisticated heating and ventilating systems. (Naylor, 66) The Minneapolis Pantages interior closely resembles that of the Los Angeles Pantages (1921). Priteca's other theaters include the San Francisco Pantages (1911, razed), San Diego Pantages (1924, razed), Tacoma Pantages, Toronto Pantages (1933), Vancouver Pantages (1927), and the Capitol Theatre (1920) in Yakima, Washington.

The Pantages is not only one of the few extant vaudeville theaters on Hennepin Avenue, but is also the only theater Alexander Pantages brought beyond the West Coast. The Pantages vaudeville circuit created a showplace for its performances which remains today as an extant example of ornate theater interiors.