

RECEIVED

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Exp. 10-31-84United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

JUN 14 1985

Historic Preservation NPS use only
ProgramNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Formreceived
date enteredSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic American Theater

and or common

2. Location

street & number 416 North Ninth Street not for publication

city, town St. Louis vicinity of

state Missouri code 29 county City of St. Louis code 510

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Southern Real Estate and Financial Co.

street & number 705 Olive Street

city, town St. Louis vicinity of state Missouri 63101

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. St. Louis City Hall

street & number Tucker Boulevard at Market Street

city, town St. Louis state Missouri 63103

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Landmark of the City of St. Louis has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ nodate September 1978 ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☒ local

depository for survey records Heritage & Urban Design Commission, Room 416 City Hall

city, town St. Louis state MO 63103

7. Description

Condition

☐ excellent
☒ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Located on the southeast corner of Ninth and St. Charles Streets in downtown St. Louis, the American Theater is a three-story steel and concrete theater building constructed in 1917. Designed by G. Albert Lansburgh, the building is faced with buff terra cotta articulated in a Beaux-Arts style.

The primary (west) elevation extends approximately 110 feet along Ninth Street and the north elevation extends approximately 125 feet on St. Charles. The east (rear) and south elevations front on alleys. Faced with buff terra cotta, the primary facade is divided into a three-part composition by a stringcourse between the first and second stories and a heavy ornamental cornice between the second and attic stories (Photo #1). The center bays are given emphasis through a slight projection of the wall plane. Pairs of male and female terra cotta figures holding masks flank the street level entrances; they once served as atlantes supporting a metal canopy (Photos #1, #2). The center bays of the second story are defined by terra cotta piers embellished with high and low relief ornament. Three transomed French doors, framed by arch orders, open to the mezzanine lobby; flanking the doors are identical figural sculpture groups in terra cotta (Photos #1, #3). The attic story is crowned with an ornamental cornice accented with grotesques. The formal articulation of the primary facade is continued one bay on the St. Charles Street (north) and the south elevations. A one-story balustraded loggia enriched with terra cotta ornament extends six bays along St. Charles Street (Photo #4). The east (rear) elevation is unarticulated and faced with a stucco-like material as are the side elevations. A comparison of Photos #1 and #4 with Photo #5 (circa 1917) reveals only minor exterior alterations. The original metal canopy has been replaced and the vertical marquee once installed on the northwest corner of the building has been removed. The center doorway on the primary facade is now closed-in and heavy metal lintels cap the ground floor windows flanking the doorways.

The first-floor lobby is entered directly from the street and features a vaulted ceiling faced with buff terra cotta, polychrome terra cotta ornament in the tympani and frieze and a polychrome mosaic floor (Photo #6). The mezzanine lobby is also enriched with a mosaic floor as well as plaster ornament fashioned into masks and other ornamental motifs (Photo #7). Stairways leading to the upper tiers are marble and brass railings. Consisting of a main floor, mezzanine, first and second balcony, the auditorium is articulated with circular and curvilinear motifs picked out in ornamental plaster relief moulding (Photos #8, #9). Original brass railing marks the divisions of the mezzanine and balconies. Richly ornamented bands of plaster moulding form the proscenium arch above which is a decorative plaster panel defined by atlantes and climaxing in an elaborate cartouche flanked by seated figures (Photo #10).

A comparison of historic photographs #11-15 with the theater today reveals only slight modifications and no disturbance to the architectural features. The original color scheme of the auditorium, described as "gray, set off by subdued reds and browns and a chaste effect in gilding," has been lightened to white accented with gilding. New seats and a new stage curtain have replaced the originals and a projection room has been installed in the upper balcony.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1917	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1917 Builder/Architect G. Albert Lansburgh

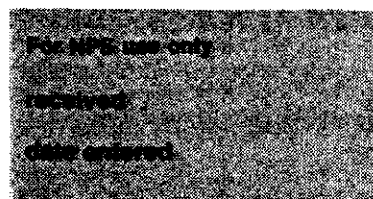
Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The American Theater is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C and is significant in the area of ARCHITECTURE: Built in 1917 as the Orpheum Theater, a vaudeville house, from plans drawn up by theater specialist G. Albert Lansburgh, the building is one of only two historic theaters surviving in St. Louis' Central Business District. One of the city's most outstanding examples of Beaux-Arts Classicism, the Theater is distinguished by an unusually fine terra cotta facade featuring monumental figural and decorative sculpture and a richly ornamented interior, both of which survive with only minor alterations.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, the center of St. Louis retail and office building district had shifted from its nineteenth century location on the riverfront to a corridor stretching westward from Seventh to Twelfth Streets. As early as 1915, steps were underway to establish a new hotel and theater district at the northern edge of downtown between Seventh and Ninth Streets where, within a little more than a decade, three major hotels, two movie palaces and a vaudeville theater were infusing new life in the city center.

The first lodging and entertainment facilities to appear were the Orpheum Theater, a vaudeville house, and the Statler Hotel, both completed in 1917 side by side on Ninth Street. The dominant force behind the theater project, St. Louisan Louis A. Cella, had broad experience in theatrical enterprises with financial interests in seven local theaters along with two vaudeville franchises. Cella's celebrated midas touch in the field of finance had earned him the youthful title of "Spade Kid" (because of his ability to "dig up" money) and later, a reputation as the city's "greatest single-handed money maker." At the time of his death in 1918, his entrepreneurial talents had built a fortune estimated between \$12 and \$15 million which extended from real estate to race-track operations, gambling casinos and theaters.¹

Under a lease agreement signed in June, 1915 by Cella, President of Southern Real Estate and Finance Co., and Martin Beck, President of the Orpheum Theater Co., provision was made for the construction of the Orpheum Theater by lessee Beck at a cost of not less than \$250,000. Cella, who had acquired the parcel in 1905, reserved rights as lessor to inspect all materials, plans and specifications at any time until the building was completed; he also held financial interest in the theater but no control in management. When the Orpheum opened Labor Day, 1917, the new \$500,000 vaudeville house joined more than two dozen theaters in the Orpheum Circuit, one of the country's oldest and largest vaudeville companies. Although previously, Orpheum acts had been shown in the Cella-controlled Columbia Theater (demolished), the new Orpheum was the first St. Louis theater devoted exclusively to Orpheum bookings and thus secured direct entry of the circuit into the city.²

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Continuation sheet American Theater

Item number 8

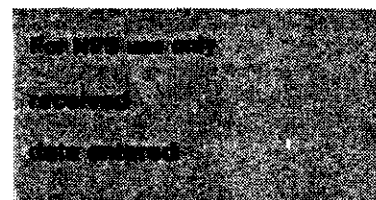
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The first new theater building to appear in the city in some years, the Orpheum received wide acclaim locally as an "event of importance in the theatrical history of St. Louis" and a "revelation in theatrical architecture."³ The building was designed by Gustave Albert Lansburgh, a San Francisco architect whose theater designs were gaining national attention at the time for their functional programs as well as artistic merits. After graduating from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1906, Lansburgh began independent practice in San Francisco in 1908. By 1910 he had completed his first Orpheum commission, a theater in Los Angeles.⁴ By 1916, Lansburgh had supplied plans for seven theaters in the Orpheum circuit including one in Kansas City, Missouri (demolished). According to the Architect and Engineer, Lansburgh's facility in theater planning and mastery of the functional aspects of design such as details of construction and equipment was attributable to his Beaux-Arts training. Among the utilitarian features cited as examples of special competency in problem-solving, the St. Louis Orpheum included a modern ventilating system that washed air, fine acoustics achieved through the architectural treatment of the ceiling as flat domes, and the most up-to-date electrical equipment which provided optimum direct and indirect lighting in the auditorium and on the stage.⁵ The structural features of the building received considerable attention in the St. Louis press which hailed the steel frame and concrete building as "indestructible," the "last word in playhouse construction." Rigid tests were applied to determine the load-bearing capacity of every part of the structure and it was reported that the center balcony seats rested on "as secure a foundation as those in the front rows of the parquet." In contrast to older theaters in the city, the Orpheum boasted a spacious auditorium with "95 feet of clear space from the curtain to the back of the front wall" where "not a post or a pillar interrupts the view from any location." Wide aisles and easy access to exits on every floor provided for the comfort as well as the safety of the audience. The Orpheum's canopied metal fire escape was a feature praised in other Lansburgh designs (Photo #4).⁶

Lansburgh's years in France were also credited for his "Parisian touch" in the treatment of facades and interiors such as the St. Louis Orpheum, described as "strongly French in character" with its formal composition of "basement, an order and an attic" enriched with sculpture (Photo #1).⁷ The lavish program of ornament on the building was designed by Italian sculptor Leo Lentelli and executed in terra cotta by the Winkle Terra Cotta Co. of St. Louis. Born in Bologna, Lentelli worked in Rome before coming to New York in 1903 where he was assistant to a number of American sculptors. Commissioned to provide ornament for the Panama-Pacific Exposition, Lentelli subsequently taught at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco from 1913 to 1918. After returning to New York, he taught at the Arts Students' League while continuing private practice. His major work includes sculpture for public libraries, the International Building (Rockefeller Center), the Straus Bank Buildings in Chicago and New York, the Sixteenth Street Bridge, Pittsburgh and statues of Robert E. Lee, Charlottesville, Virginia and Cardinal Gibbons, Washington, D. C..⁸ Representative of Lentelli's monumental figural work, the large, expressive figures on the Orpheum facade may relate to the Orpheus theme carried out in low relief lyres; these, together with the extensive use of masks and grotesques appropriately express the building's purpose of public entertainment (Photos #1, #2, #3).

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Lansburgh's skillful articulation of the auditorium with circular and curved forms climaxed in the "floating ceiling," a shallow dome illuminated with concealed lights and once embellished with painted stars (Photo #8). Richly fitted with high and low relief sculpture which continued the motifs introduced on the facade, the interior was described as having "generally French detail along approved Parisian lines." The lobby was found by one critic to be a highly successful example of Lansburgh's work, well adapted to terra cotta with its "groined and annular vaulting and shell shaped tympani" (Photo #6).⁹ A polychrome mosaic floor further enriched the lobby.

The construction of the Orpheum marked the closing chapter of the vaudeville era in St. Louis. During the 1920s two luxury movie palaces, Loew's State (only part of the lobby remains) and the Ambassador (listed in the National Register) completed the new theater district and by the end of the decade, the Mayfair and Lennox hotels (both listed in the National Register) supplied additional lodging. As the growth of motion pictures in audience appeal eventually supplanted the demand for vaudeville, the Orpheum was leased to Warner Brothers as a movie theater in the mid 1930s and later to Loew's Inc. Completely refurbished in 1960, the Orpheum reopened as the American Theater,¹⁰ which has continued to operate as downtown St. Louis' only legitimate theater. Still owned by descendants of the theater's original projector, Louis Cella, the American has been well maintained over the years and its impressive Beaux-Arts facade and interior remain a showpiece of the Central Business District.

FOOTNOTES

¹St. Louis Globe Democrat 30 April 1918; 4 May 1918.

²St. Louis Globe Democrat 2 September 1917.

³St. Louis Globe Democrat 2 September 1917.

⁴Press Reference Library Western Edition, (New York: International News Service c. 1915), p. 536.

⁵Harris Allen, "Recent Theaters Designed by G. Albert Lansburgh, Architect." The Architect and Engineer, 71 (November, 1922), pp. 26-69.

⁶St. Louis Globe Democrat 2 September 1917.

⁷Harris Allen, "Recent Theaters," p. 57.

⁸Brookgreen Gardens: Sculpture by Leo Lentelli. (Brookgreen Gardens: Brookgreen Gardens, South Carolina); Glenn B. Opitz, ed., Dictionary of American Sculptors: 18th Century to the Present, (Poughkeepsie, NY: Apollo, 1984), p. 237.

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date entered

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⁹Harris Allen, "Recent Theaters," p. 64.

¹⁰St. Louis Post Dispatch 18 September 1960.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acres of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Granite City, IL/MO

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 15 744360 4279260
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification The American Theater is located in City Block 194 and fronts approximately 109 feet along the east side of north Ninth Street and 127 feet on the south side of St. Charles Street.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By © 1985, Landmarks Association of St. Louis, Inc.

name/title Mary M. Stiritz, Research Associate

organization Landmarks Association of St. Louis, Inc. date January 9, 1985

street & number 721 Olive - Room 1113 telephone (314) 421-6474

city or town St. Louis state MO 63101

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☒ national ☐ state ☐ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Director & Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Division of Parks and Historic Preservation

date 2/11/85

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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received
date entered

Continuation sheet American Theater

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Allen, Harris. "Recent Theaters Designed by G. Albert Lansburgh, Architect."
The Architect and Engineer, 71 (November 1922): 46-69.

Brookgreen Gardens: Sculpture by Leo Lentelli. Brookgreen Gardens, South Carolina:
Brookfield Gardens, 1937.

Gilbert, Douglas. American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times. New York: McGraw Hill,
1940.

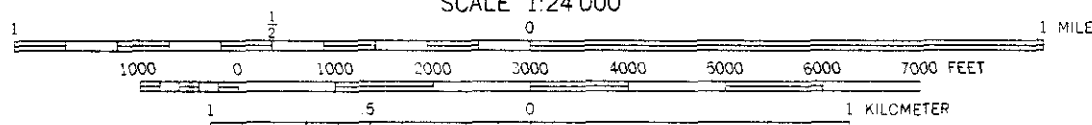
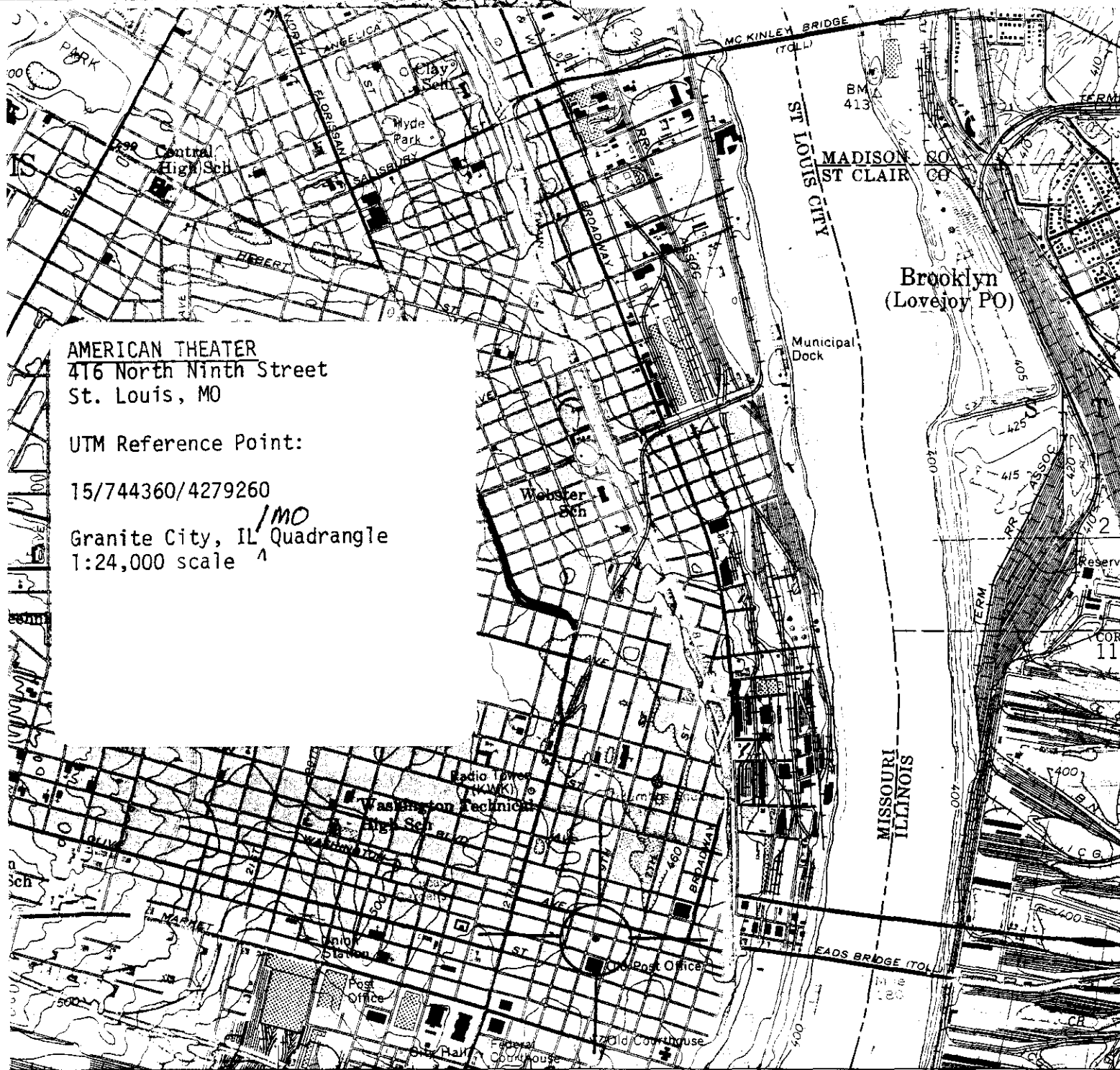
Opitz, Glenn B., ed. Dictionary of American Sculptors: 18th Century to the Present.
Poughkeepsie, N. Y. Apollo, 1984.

Press Reference Library (Western Edition). New York: International News Service,
circa 1915.

St. Louis Globe Democrat 2 September 1917; 4 May 1918; 30 April 1918.

St. Louis Post Dispatch 18 September 1960.

Who's Who in California 1928/1929. San Francisco: Who's Who Publishing Co., circa 1929.



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
DASHED LINES REPRESENT 5-FOOT CONTOURS
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

UTM GRID AND 1982 MAGNETIC NORTH
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092,
STATE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, URBANA, ILLINOIS 61801,
AND THE DIVISION OF GEOLOGY AND LAND SURVEY
MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, ROLLA, MISSOURI 65401
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

There may be private inholdings within
the boundaries of the National or
state reservations shown on this map

Revised
from
1962
Pamphlet

American Theater
416 N. Ninth Street
St. Louis, MO

#1 of 15 Primary (west) elevation

Photographer: Mary M. Stiritz
Date: January 1985
Negative: Landmarks Association
of St. Louis, Inc.

Camera facing southeast



American Theater
416 N. Ninth Street
St.Louis, Missouri

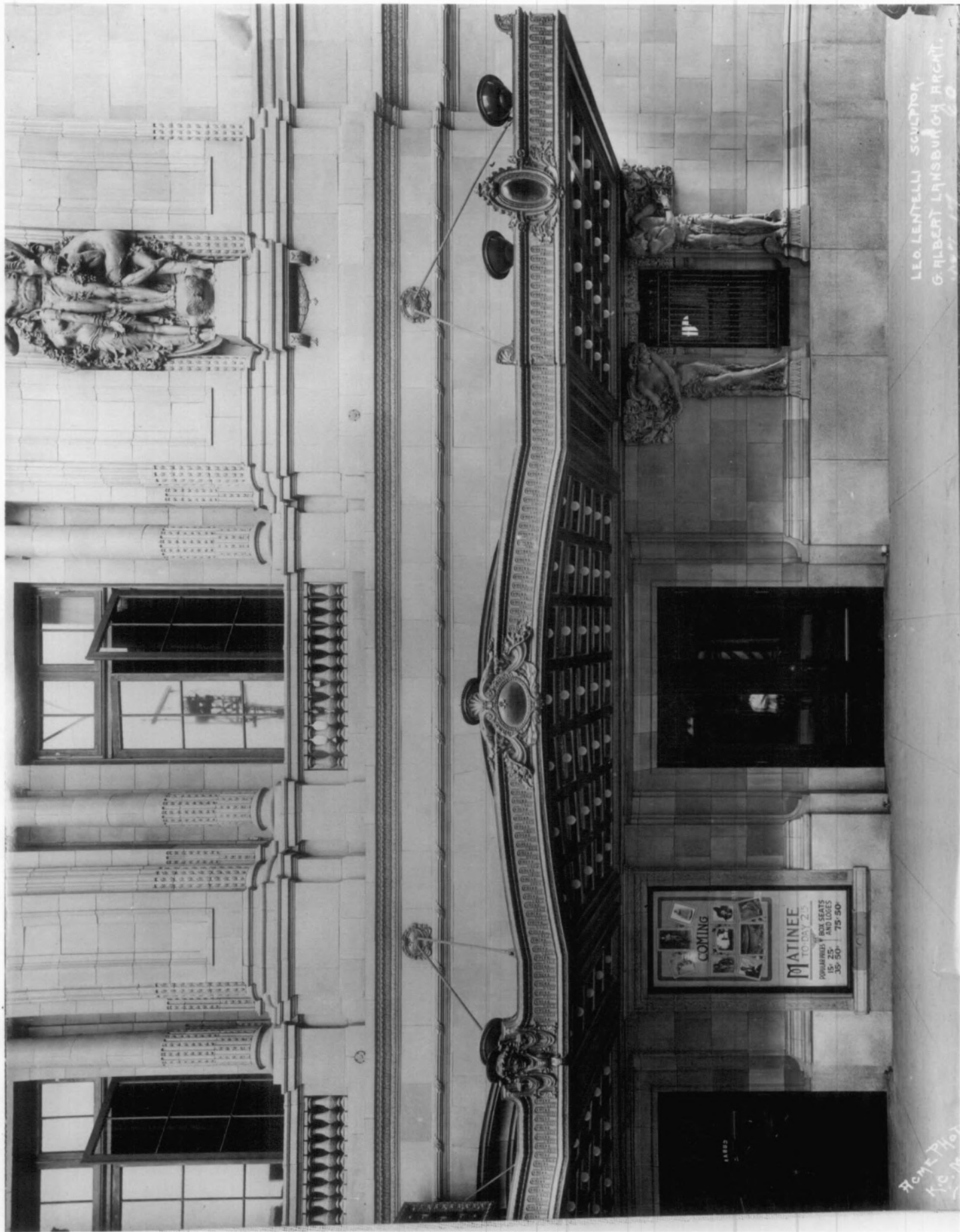
#2 of 15 Detail of primary
(west) elevation

Photographer: Acme Photo
Kansas City, MO

Date: Circa 1917

Negative: Landmarks ASsociation
of St.Louis, Inc.

Camera facing east.



LEO LENTELLI SCULPTOR.
G. ALBERT LANSBURY ARCHT.
1906

HOME THEATRE
K.C.M.

American Theater
416 N. Ninth Street
St. Louis, Missouri

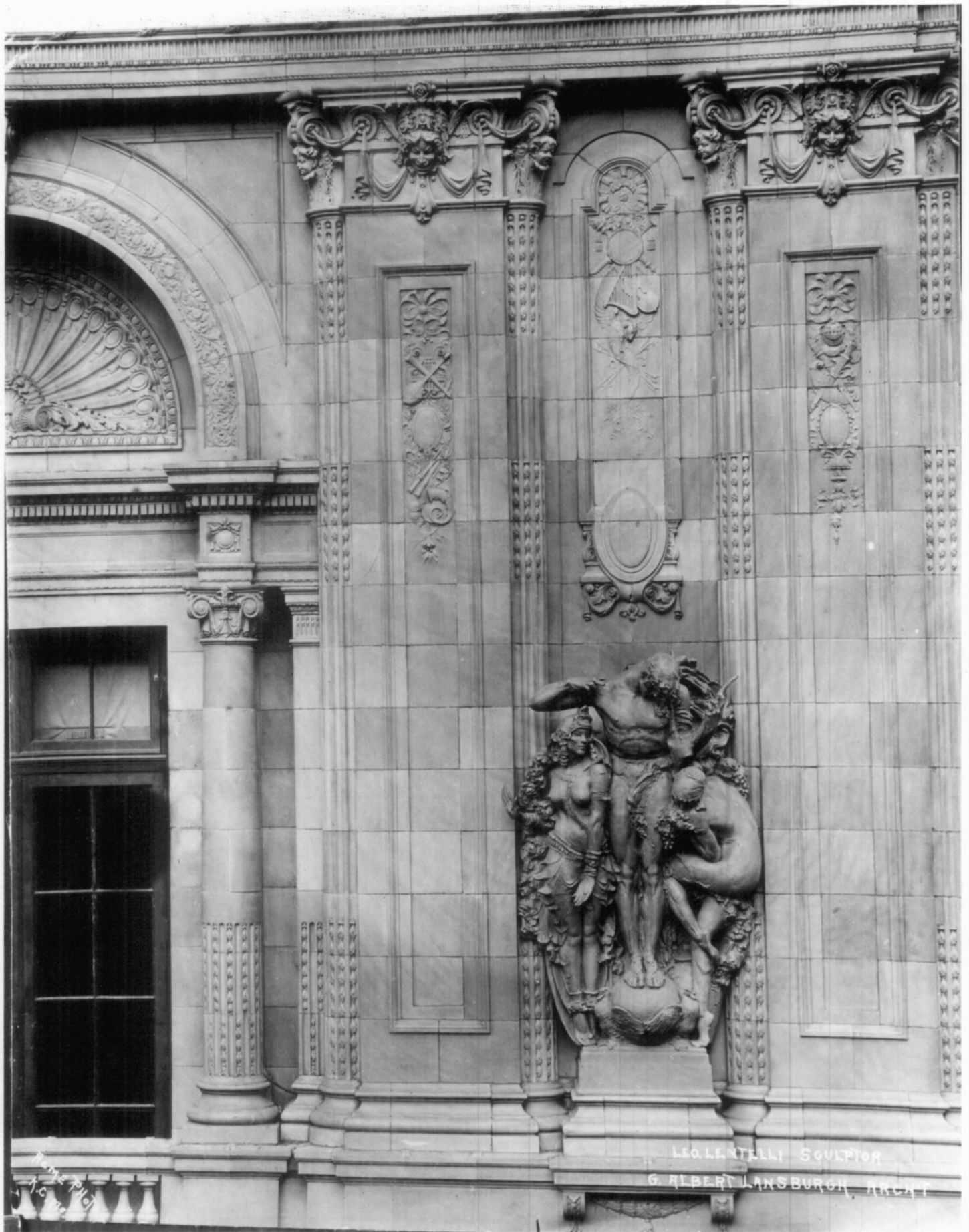
#3 of 15 Detail of primary
(west) elevation

Photographer: Acme Photo
Kansas City, MO

Date: Circa 1917

Negative: Landmarks Association
of St. Louis, Inc.

Camera facing east.



American Theater
416 N. Ninth Street
St. Louis, Missouri

#4 of 15 St. Charles St.(North)
and primary (west) elevations
Photographer: Mary M. Stiritz
Date: January 1985
Negative: Landmarks Association
of St. Louis, Inc.

Camera facing southeast.

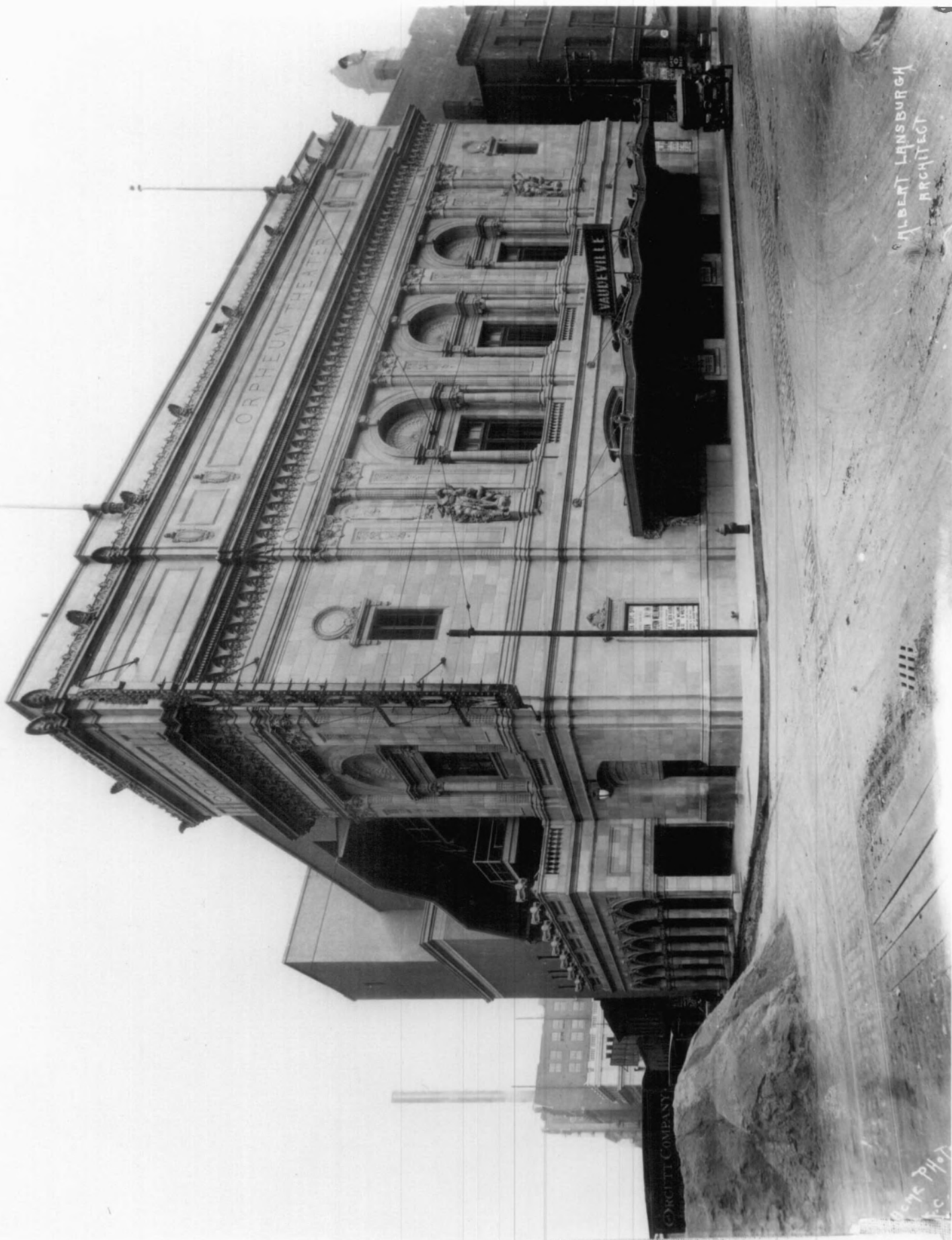


American Theater
416 N. Ninth Street
St. Louis, Missouri

#5 of 15 Primary (west) and
St. Charles St. (north)
elevations

Photographer: Acme Photo,
Kansas City, MO
Date: Circa 1917
Negative: Landmarks Association
of St. Louis, Inc.

Camera facing southeast



ALBERT LANSBURGH
ARCHITECT

ORCUTT COMPANY

Wm. H. P. Co.
P.C.

12/3/85
American Theater
416 N. Ninth Street
St. Louis, MO

#6 of 15 Interior, Ground
Floor Lobby

Photographer: Mary M. Stiritz

Date: January 1985

Negative: Landmarks Association
of St. Louis, Inc.

Camera facing north.



American Theater
416 N. Ninth Street
St. Louis, MO

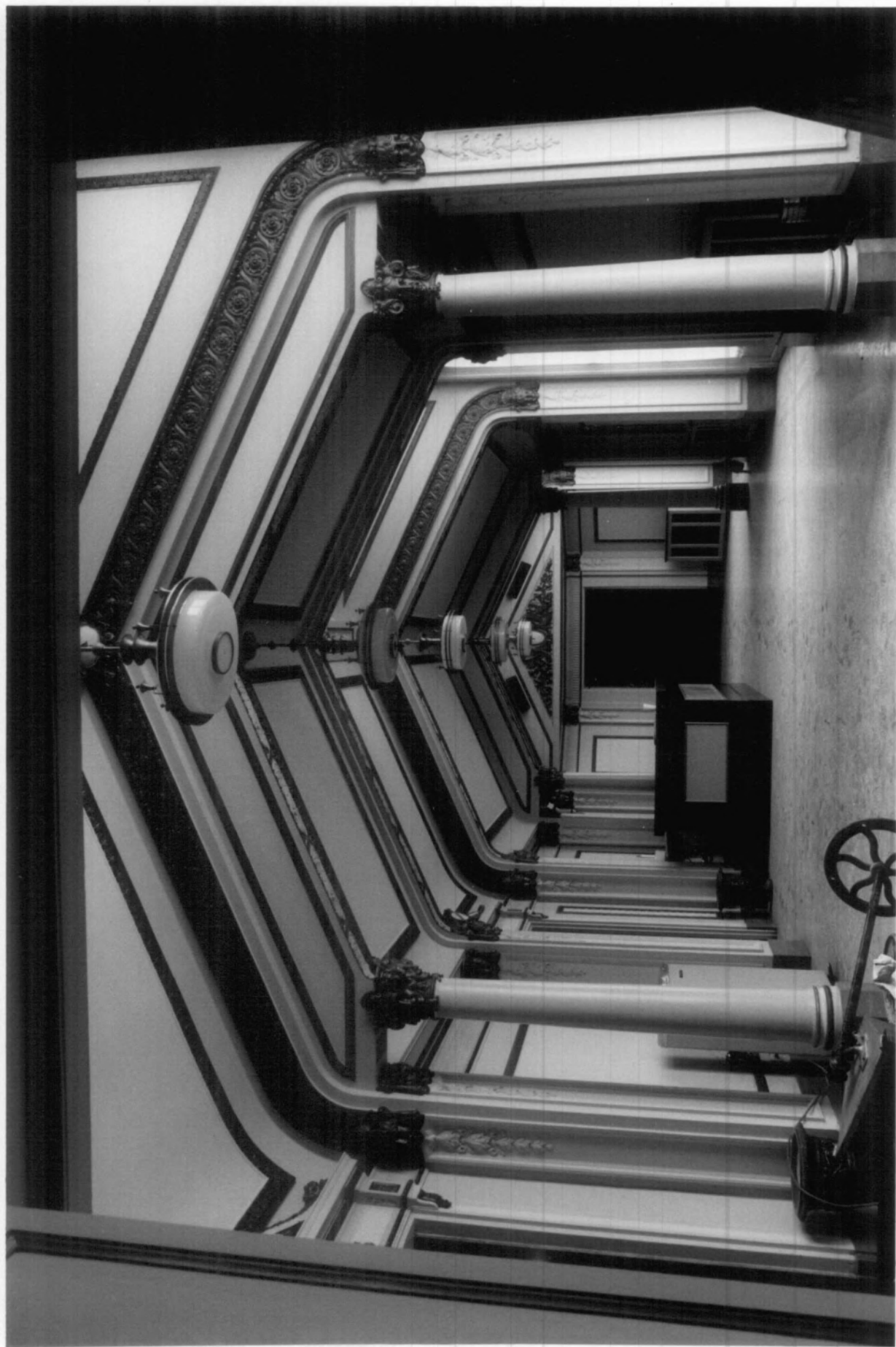
#7 of 15 Interior, Mezzanine
Lobby

Photographer: Mary M. Stiritz

Date: January 1985

Negative: Landmarks Association
of St. Louis, Inc.

Camera facing south



American Theater
416 N. Ninth Street
St. Louis, MO

#8 of 15 Interior, auditorium
Photographer: Mary M. Stirtz
Date: January 1985
Negative: Landmarks Association
of St. Louis, Inc.

Camera facing west



American Theater
416 N. Ninth Street
St. Louis, MO

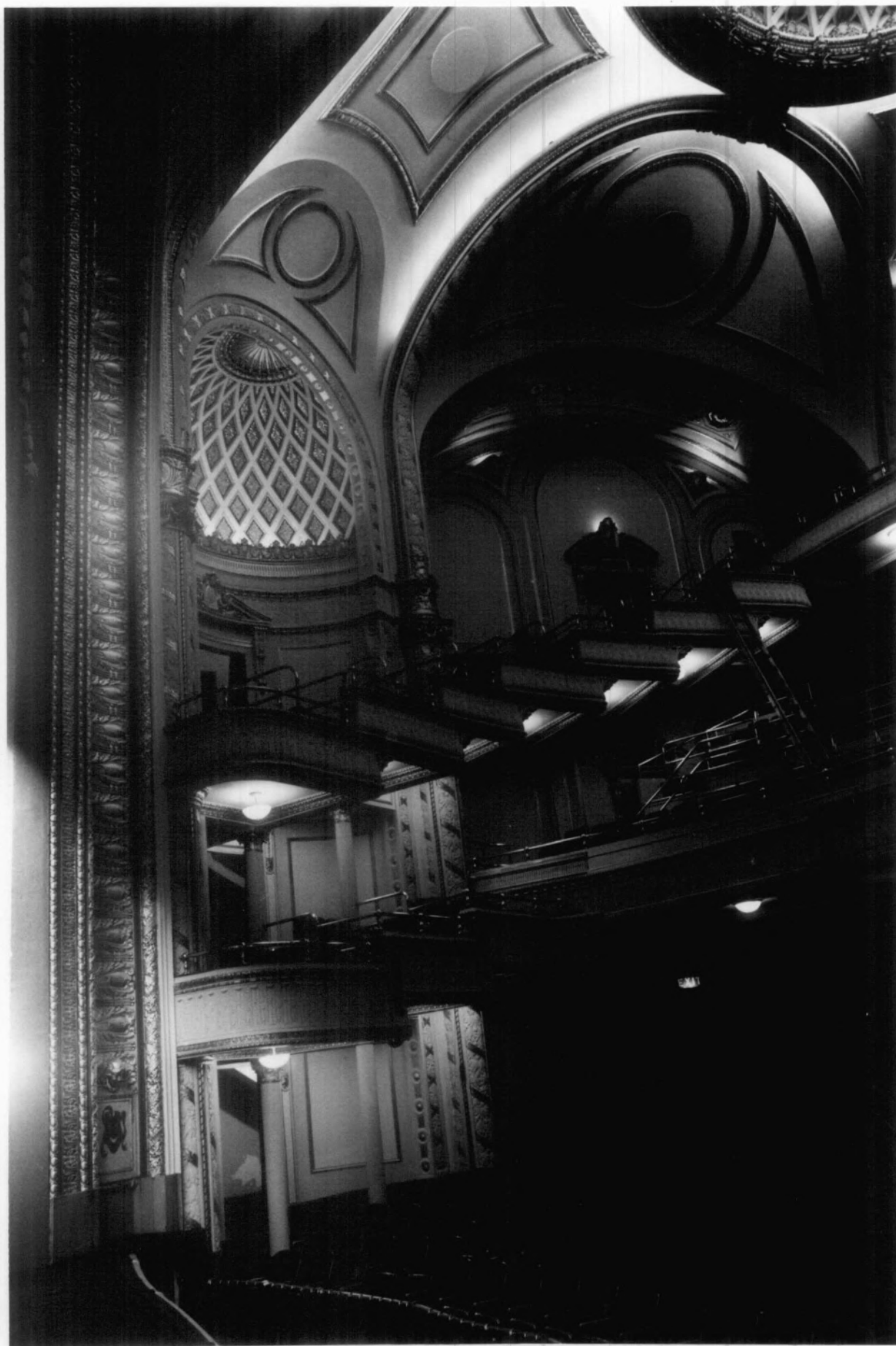
#9 of 15 Interior, detail of
auditorium

Photographer: Mary M. Stiritz

Date: January 1985

Negative: Landmarks Association
of St. Louis, Inc.

Camera facing south



American Theater
416 N. Ninth Street
St. Louis, MO

#10 of 15 Interior, auditorium
and stage

Photographer: Mary M. Stirtz

Date: January 1985

Negative: Landmarks Association
of St. Louis, Inc.

Camera facing east



American Theater
416 N.Ninth Street
St.Louis, Missouri

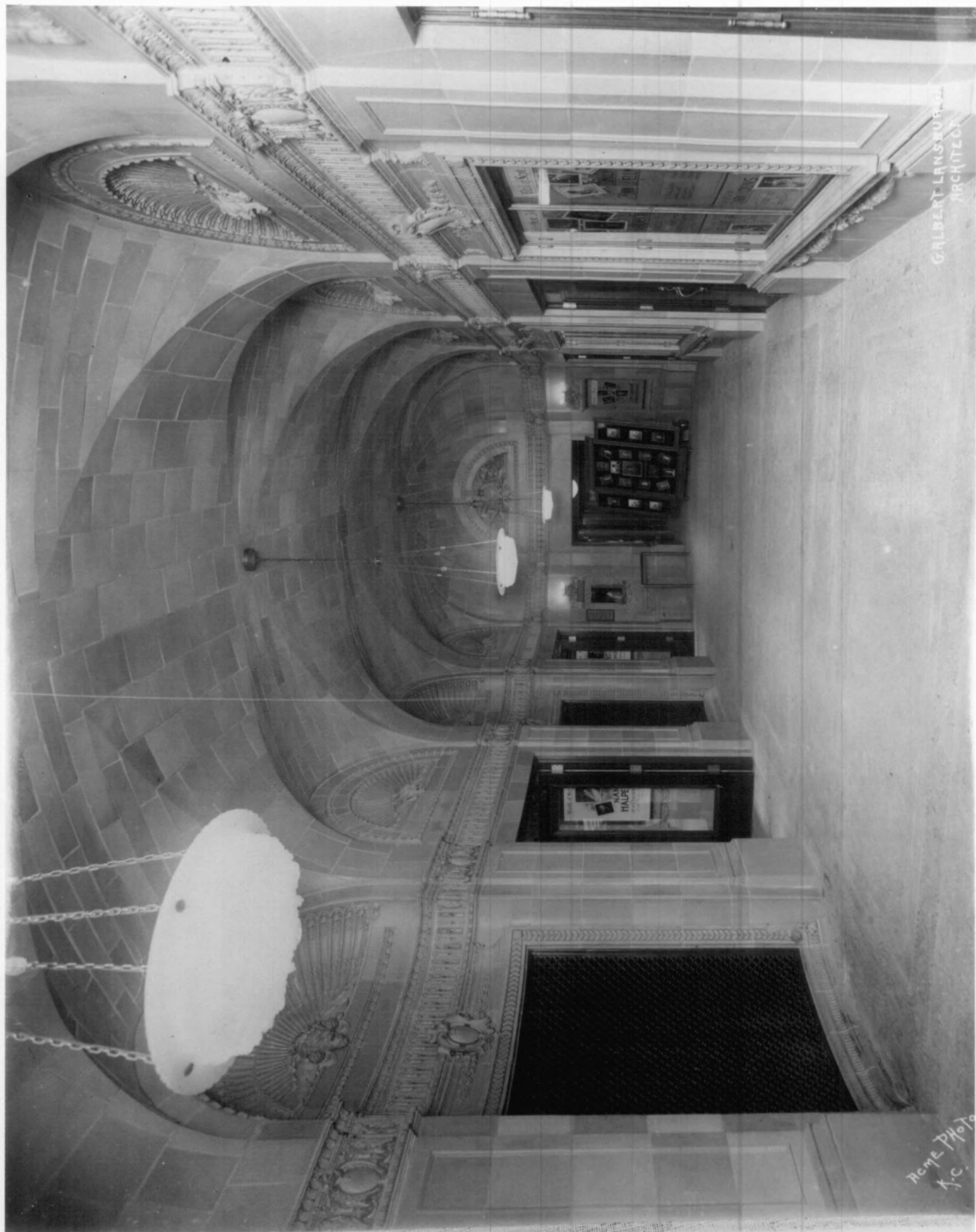
#11 of 15 Ground floor lobby

Photographer: Acme Photo
Kansas City, MO

Date: Circa 1917

Negative: Landmarks Association
of St.Louis, Inc.

Camera facing north



GILBERT LANSBURGH
ARCHTCT

HOME PHOTO
K.C.

American Theater
416 N. Ninth Street
St. Louis, Missouri

#12 of 15 Interior, Mezzanine
Lobby

Photographer: Acme Photo
Kansas City, MO
Date: Circa 1917
Negative: Landmarks Association
of St. Louis, Inc.

Camera facing south



American Theater
416 N.Ninth Street
St.Louis, Missouri

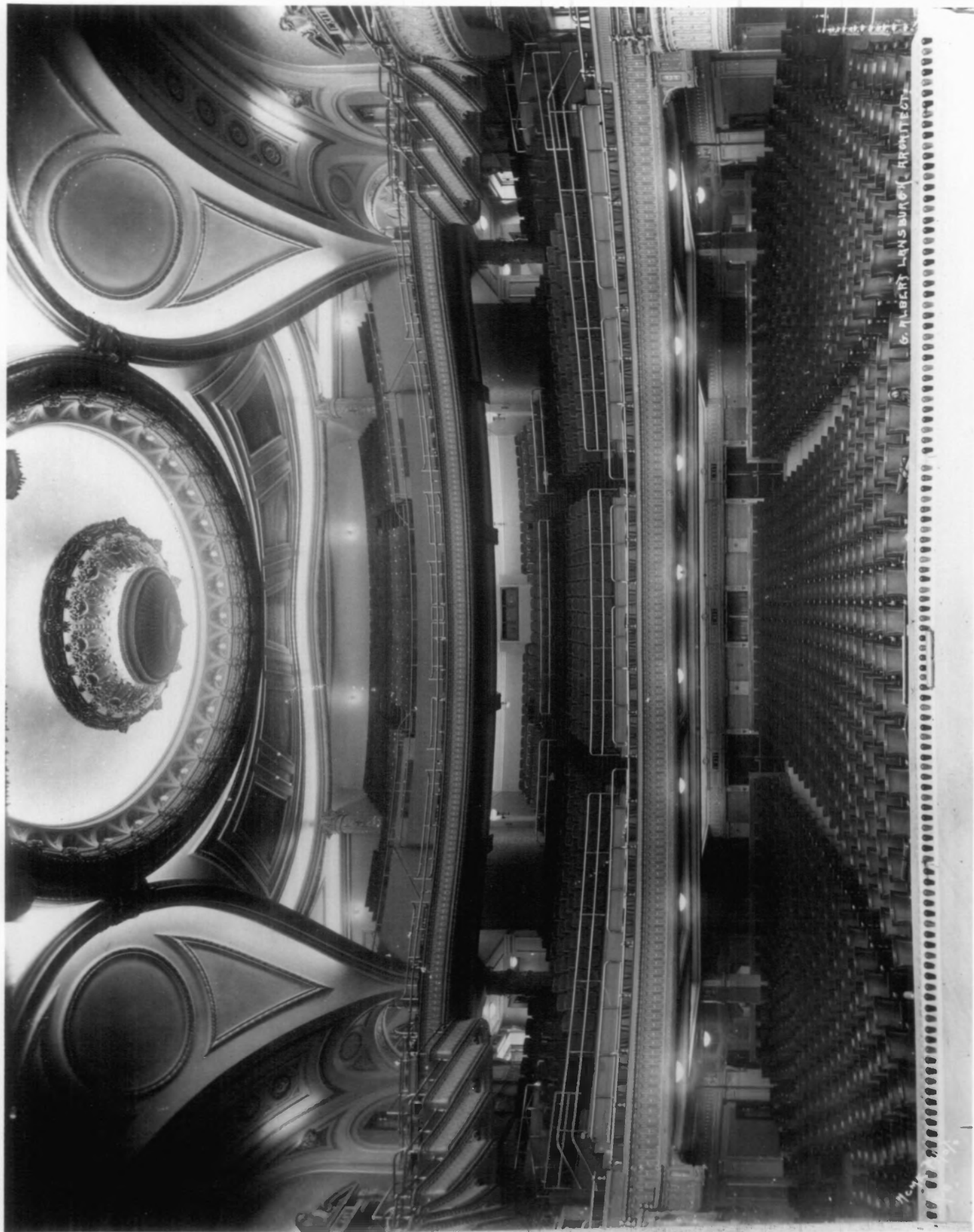
#13 of 15 Interior, auditorium

Photographer: Acme Photo
Kansas City, MO

Date: Circa 1917

Negative: Landmarks Association
of ST.Louis, Inc.

Camera facing west.



G. F. LANSBURY ARCHT.

American Theater
416 N. Ninth Street
St. Louis, Missouri

#14 of 15 Interior detail of
auditorium

Photographer: Acme Photo
Kansas City, MO
Date: Circa 1917
Negative: Landmarks Association
of St. Louis, Inc.

Camera facing south



HOME PHOTO
↑c.

G. ALBERT LANSBURG
ARCHITECT.

American Theater
416 N. Ninth Street
St. Louis, Missouri

#15 of 15 Interior, auditorium
and stage

Photographer: Acme Photo
Kansas City, MO
Date: Circa 1917
Negative: Landmarks Association
of St. Louis, Inc.

Camera facing east



G ALBERT LANSAURGH
ARCHITECT