

211-303

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
November 1, 1988; Designation List 211  
LP-1696

LANE THEATER, first floor interior consisting of the inner lobby and the auditorium; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, doors, stair railings, signs, and attached decorative elements; 168 New Dorp Lane, Staten Island. Built 1937-38; architect, John Ebersson.

Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island, Tax Map Block 4210, Lot 36.

On September 6, 1988, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the Lane Theater, first floor interior consisting of the inner lobby and the auditorium; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, doors, stair railings, signs, and attached decorative elements; and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty witnesses spoke in favor of designation; four statements were read into the record in favor of designation. The owner and his representative spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has received many letters and other expressions of support for this designation, and several letters and statements in opposition.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

##### Summary

The Lane Theater interior is one of the last surviving pre-World War II movie theater interiors on Staten Island, and one of the few known largely intact examples of the Depression-era, Art Moderne style theater interior in New York City. Built on New Dorp Lane, the main street of the South Shore community of New Dorp, the Lane is typical of the neighborhood theaters that accompanied urbanization in the early decades of this century across New York and across the country. Designed by John Ebersson, among the most prominent American theater architects in the twentieth century, the Lane was built for Charles H. Moses, Staten Island's premier theater builder and film exhibitor. Opened in 1938, the Lane was both Moses's final theater project, and the last of the pre-War movie theaters built in Staten Island.

The Lane Theater interior is representative both of Ebersson's work of the 1930s and theater design in general of that period. Its small original seating capacity of just under 600 was typical of Depression-era theater projects. Its striking Art Moderne styling is equally typical of the period: small theaters by the dozens were put up in the '30s with simplified modernistic designs. The Lane's elliptically shaped auditorium with its horizontal banding, stepped ceiling banding, stylized ceiling murals, and period light fixtures, combined with the novel black-light murals on the side walls that have since been painted over, form a handsome, if modest, ensemble for New Dorp's neighborhood theater. In the 1920s, Ebersson had pioneered the so-called "atmospheric" theaters, whose interior

designs created the illusion of sitting in a romantic foreign setting under the stars. With its wall and ceiling murals suggestive of a view into the solar system, the Lane is a 1930s, modernistic version of the more familiar 1920s atmospheric type.

The Moderne-style movie houses of the 1930s were not built in great profusion in New York, and the Lane appears to be one of the last of its kind in the city. In Staten Island, where pre-War theaters never numbered much more than twenty, the Lane appears to be one of the last intact examples surviving today. Though some of its murals have been painted over, the Lane Theater interior survives as a remembrance of an era in which the local movie theater served a major function in neighborhoods across the country, and an example of the Art Moderne that once dominated American architectural design.

### The American Movie Theater

During World War I America emerged as the dominant force in the motion picture industry, witnessing the formation of the giant Hollywood studios of MGM, RKO, Warner Bros., Universal and Twentieth Century Fox. The spectacular growth of silent movies was temporarily threatened by radio in the early 1920s, but was reinvigorated with such film extravaganzas as Cecil B. deMille's "Ten Commandments," James Cruze's "Covered Wagon" (the first epic western), and in 1925, "Ben Hur," the greatest worldwide success that the industry had ever produced. The real breakthrough, however, came in 1927 with "The Jazz Singer," starring Al Jolson. It was the first sound track movie to be released. The slightly later introduction of Technicolor catapulted motion pictures into their golden age. Sumptuous movie palaces and countless more modest neighborhood movie theaters were built and numerous legitimate theaters were converted for viewing of the more than 500 films produced annually in America. Flourishing throughout the Depression and war years, the reign of the motion picture industry faltered only in the early 1950s when it was undermined by increasingly popular television.

The American movie theater developed as an architectural type over the first four decades of this century.<sup>1</sup> From the nickelodeons of the turn of the century, the theaters grew in size and lavishness during the 1910s, and emerged during the 1920s as movie palaces, a truly unique national institution. Designed to look like a Parisian boudoir, an old Spanish town, or an Indian, Chinese, or Egyptian temple, the theaters often seated several thousand people, and offered vaudeville, organ recitals, orchestras, comedians, magicians, and a full-length feature film -- all for twenty-five cents.

In the decades preceding television, the movie palace provided Americans with their major form of entertainment, and families returned every week to their neighborhood movie house to see the latest show. Almost every town in the country had at least one movie theater; larger cities had large theaters downtown and smaller neighborhood houses scattered around the city. In Chicago, the Balaban & Katz chain claimed to have six theaters for any patron, "five in the Loop and one near your home." In New York, the outer boroughs had major theaters as well as smaller neighborhood houses.

The movie palaces were built by a small group of people. Loew, Keith, Albee, Fox, Balaban & Katz, all started as small-time entertainers, and gradually emerged as entrepreneurs controlling hundreds of theaters each in national circuits.<sup>2</sup> The only major figure in the industry who never built an enormous chain was Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel; his Roxy Theater (demolished), however, the 6000-seat "Cathedral of the Motion Picture" at 50th Street and Seventh Avenue, was the epitome of the type, and his greatest creation, Radio City Music Hall (a designated New York City Landmark), was the most famous movie theater in the country.

The number of architects who designed movie theaters was also small. By far the greatest number of the palaces were designed by a handful of specialists including John Ebersson, Rapp & Rapp, C. Howard Crane, Thomas Lamb, Walter Ahlschlager, B. Marcus Priteca, and G. Albert Lansburgh. The theaters they designed during the 1920s were luxurious and fantastic. Theaters called "The Rialto," "The Rivoli," "Tivoli," "The Granada," "The Oriental," "The Paradise," and similarly suggestive names, were designed in styles reminiscent of Baroque Spain, ancient Egypt, Hindu India, the Far East, southern Italy, and occasionally Colonial New England.

The grand eclectic designs of the 1920s movie theaters and palaces gradually gave way in the 1930s to the modernistic motifs of the Art Deco and Art Moderne. Traces of such motifs in theaters can be found as early as 1926 in Dwight Gibbs's Cathay Circle (razed) in Los Angeles,<sup>3</sup> but full-blown Art Deco theater designs date from 1930. S. Charles Lee's Fox Wilshire in Los Angeles and his Fox Theater in Phoenix, both of that year, are lavish, modernistically designed movie palaces. Also in 1930, B. Marcus Priteca designed the fabulous Hollywood Pantages for West Coast exhibitor Alex Pantages.<sup>4</sup> Priteca's Washoe Theater in Anaconda was designed the following year (although not actually built until 1936). Back in Los Angeles, again in 1931, G. Albert Lansburgh designed the spectacular Art Deco Warner's Western Theater (later called the Wiltern). That same year, in the Bay area, Timothy L. Pflueger designed the Art Deco style Oakland Paramount. The grandest of them all, though, was built in 1932 in New York: Radio City Music Hall, designed by the Associated Architects with Donald Deskey.

Although the Art Deco palaces of 1930-32 were built after the stock market crash of October 1929, they were nevertheless still being designed on the extravagant multi-thousand seat movie palace model of the 1920s. In Los Angeles this may have still seemed economically feasible, as that city was the capital of the movie industry; in New York, Radio City Music Hall was part of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s Rockefeller Center project, which continued throughout the Depression when most other major building projects had to be scuttled.

As the '30s progressed, however, and the Depression deepened, such large theater projects became impractical. The huge palaces continued in operation, but new theaters tended to be small, generally between 500 and 1000 seats (as compared to the palaces with from 2000 to 6000 seats). At the same time, their designs moved in the direction of the streamline style, or Art Moderne. Initially developed by such architects as Norman Bel Geddes for residential use, the style evolved in industrial buildings, apartment houses, resort hotels, bus terminals, and movie theaters. Characterized by streamlined curves and abstract geometric forms, the style

was suggestive of speed, an efficient economy of design, and the technological advances that could lead to a brighter future. In the case of the movie theaters, among other building types, the economy of design was particularly appropriate to the modest budget and scale of Depression-era building projects.<sup>5</sup>

Commissions continued to go to the architects of the palaces. Thomas Lamb designed the small Art Deco Warner Theater (1931) in Torrington, Conn.; Rapp & Rapp's Warner Theater (1930) in West Chester, Pa.; their Erie Theater (1931) in Erie, Pa.; and their Paramount (1931) in Aurora, Ill., were also part of this trend.<sup>6</sup> John Ebersson designed many such theaters (see below). What these theaters had in common, besides a modernistic design, was a simplicity of material and ornament. Gone were all the ornate statuary, elaborate curtains and valances, gilded plaster and carved wood. In their stead were simple curved walls, streamlined banding, wallpaper, and futuristic murals. Theaters of this kind were built in neighborhoods in cities across the country. They marked the end of the forty-year history of movie theater building preceding the outbreak of World War II. When theater building began again after the War's end, architects turned to simple, utilitarian designs, and the era of the great movie palace was over.

#### Staten Island Theaters and the Moses Family

The Lane Theater was the last pre-War theater built on Staten Island, and the final building project of the Moses family, Staten Island's premier film exhibitors and theater builders. Charles, Elias and Lewis Moses dominated the theater business in Staten Island for the first half of this century, and singly or together they built or owned most of the Island's pre-World War II movie theaters.

Movies came to Staten Island as early as the 1890s; Edison's movies were exhibited at Prohibition Park<sup>7</sup> in 1897, others at the Eden Musee in Midland Beach in 1899.<sup>8</sup> In 1904, movies were being shown at Backman's Brewery, called "Rosebank," with dances following.<sup>9</sup> In 1912 movies were being shown at the German Club Rooms. In that same year, the Moses family entered the Staten Island theater industry when Charles Moses bought into the Bijou Theater on Canal Street in Stapleton.

Charles (1884/5-1965), Lewis (1898/9-1945), and Elias (1900/01-1971) Moses, born in Manhattan, grew up in Staten Island. When Charles bought the Bijou Theatre, it was one of only five theaters then in existence on the Island.<sup>10</sup> Among the first presentations at the Bijou was The Great Train Robbery, now considered a film classic. In 1917, in partnership with Irving D. Johnson, Moses leased the Richmond Theatre, also in Stapleton and then in use by a stock company.<sup>11</sup> Moses also acquired the Park Theater. That same year, also with Johnson, the Moses brothers built their first theater, the Liberty, on Beach St., Stapleton,<sup>12</sup> said to be the first combination movie and vaudeville house on Staten Island. They operated under the name of the "Isle Theatrical Corp."

The Moses brothers continued to build theaters in the 1920s, including the Ritz (1924) in Port Richmond, "then the largest and most up-to-date

theatre on the Island,"<sup>13</sup> and the Strand (1926) at Great Kills. Elias Moses later also managed the Victory Theater in Tompkinsville,<sup>14</sup> and Charles Moses later operated the St. George Playhouse in downtown Brooklyn.

The Moses family sold the interests in their theaters to Sol Brill in 1928,<sup>15</sup> but continued to be involved in certain theater matters. In New Dorp, they acquired the New Dorp Theater on New Dorp Lane sometime before 1933. In 1938, Charles Moses, as president of the Modor Corporation, undertook one last theater building project, the Lane Theater, constructed across the street from his New Dorp Theater. To design it Moses hired John Ebersson, one of the country's most prominent theater architects. The Lane was the Moseses' last venture in theater building, and remained the most recently built movie theater in Staten Island until at least the mid-1960s.<sup>16</sup>

#### The Architect: John Ebersson

John Ebersson (1875-1954) was one of the half-dozen most prominent theater designers in the country. From the turn of the century until the 1980s, Ebersson and his son Drew designed over 1200 theaters across the country.

Born in Austria, and trained as an electrical engineer, Ebersson left Vienna in 1901 and settled in St. Louis, where he joined the Johnston architectural firm doing opera houses in the Midwest.<sup>17</sup> In 1904 he started his own practice, and in 1910 moved to Chicago. During his first twenty years in practice he designed theaters and opera houses throughout the midwest and southwest, all in a more or less classical style. Many of these were for the Hoblitzelle chain in Texas, including the Austin Majestic (1915) and the Dallas Majestic (1921).

Ebersson's great contribution to the American theater came in 1923, when he designed his first "atmospheric" theater, the Hoblitzelle Majestic in Houston (1923, demolished). Capping the theater, instead of a domed classical ceiling, he created a blue plaster "sky," with electric light-bulbs simulating stars, and arranged for a hidden machine to project "clouds" moving across the ceiling in an effect not unlike that of a planetarium. The walls of the auditorium were built up as stage sets suggesting an Italian garden, and the total effect was of being outside, in the evening, in a garden, watching a show.<sup>18</sup>

Atmospheric theaters soon became extremely popular, and as a type were easily recognizable: each included an open, lit evening sky with stars and clouds; each had walls built up as stage sets suggesting a foreign setting; and each was asymmetrically designed. In Ebersson's words, "We visualize and dream a magnificent amphitheater, an Italian garden, a Persian Court, a Spanish patio, or a mystic Egyptian templeyard, all canopied by a soft moon-lit sky."<sup>19</sup> Over the next six years Ebersson designed some of the country's most extraordinary atmospheric theaters. Many of these were designed around Spanish or Moorish themes, including the Tampa (1926) in Tampa; the Olympia (1926, now Gusman Center) in Miami; the State Theater (1927) in Kalamazoo; the Loew's United Artists (1928) in Louisville, the Palace (1928) in Marion, Ohio; and the Loew's Akron (1929) in Akron.

Eberson variants on the atmospheric included the Greek and "Pompeian" ornament of the Capitol (1925), the "Persian" of the Avalon (1927), and the extraordinary French Second Empire fantasy of the Balaban & Katz Paradise (1928), all in Chicago.

Eberson's last atmospheric theaters were designed in 1929. By that year he had moved to New York, where he designed two of the five so-called Loew's Wonder Theaters in and around the metropolitan area. His design for the Loew's Paradise in the Bronx (still extant, but subdivided) was based on an extraordinary array of Italian Renaissance motifs, some apparently borrowed from Michelangelo's sculpture on the Medici tombs in Florence. His Valencia Theater in Queens was another Spanish-inspired design (it survives today as a church). Back in Texas, Eberson produced one last Spanish/Moorish fantasy for the San Antonio Majestic, with interiors were specially adorned with "Alamo bells" in honor of that city's history.

Although the Depression brought with it the demise of the great movie palace, Eberson continued to be active in theater design throughout the 1930s. During those years he turned to designs in the new modernistic styles, and produced a body of work less well known than his atmospheric, but of much interest. A number of these were published in The Exhibitor Catalogue of 1940,<sup>20</sup> including the Warner Beverly Theater in Washington, D.C., the Nostrand and the College (both on the Century Circuit) in Brooklyn, the Warner State Theater in Chester, Pa., and the Newsreel Theater at Rockefeller Center (today operated as the Guild Theater). The 1948 edition of the same catalogue included Schine's Oswego, in Oswego, New York, the Newsreel Theater in Newark, and the Lane in Staten Island. Other Eberson theaters from the period in New York City included the Earle in Jackson Heights and the Loew's American in Parkchester.<sup>21</sup>

Eberson's Beverly was described as "ultra modern in all of its appointments," and included so-called "horizontal speed lines" along the ceiling and murals of "galloping deer" flanking the proscenium.<sup>22</sup> At the Nostrand, "the modern motif has been handled in a dignified manner, thereby disposing of 'gingerbread' effects." The Nostrand included "floral murals," typically Moderne in spirit. Most interesting is the description of the "speed lines." The lines referred to are the typically streamlined horizontal stripes or ribbing running along the curving side walls, from the rear of the theater up to the proscenium arch:

The proscenium, as seen from the balcony, has been designed to aid the ocular comfort, with lines on the side walls directed toward it.<sup>23</sup>

The College Theater was notable for its curving side walls, and murals on a "submarine theme" (meaning underwater scenes). The State had a "futuristic decorative scheme," with murals flanking the proscenium and on the walls at the rear.<sup>24</sup> The Lane Theater, designed in 1937, falls directly within this group of Eberson's work. Also modernistic in style, its wall and ceiling murals suggest an Art Moderne version of an atmospheric design.

John Eberson continued designing theaters through the War period, during which time his commissions included theaters on military bases, and also the Lewisohn Bandshell in New York. After the War he designed the-

aters in shopping centers and drive-in theaters, continuing on until his death in 1954.<sup>25</sup> His son Drew continued the practice until his retirement in the mid-1980s. The Ebersson legacy, however, is to be found in the grand era of pre-War theater design.

### New Dorp and New Dorp Lane

The Lane Theater, designed for Charles H. Moses by John Ebersson, was built as a neighborhood house to serve the South Shore Staten Island community of New Dorp, a formerly rural area that developed during the 1910s and '20s.

New Dorp can be traced back to a seventeenth-century settlement, and New Dorp Lane existed at least as early as Revolutionary times.<sup>26</sup> The area was always sparsely settled, however, and until the last quarter of the nineteenth century the land on either side of New Dorp Lane, with the exception of the shorefront, remained largely undeveloped, concentrated in the hands of a few landowners. A small commercial cluster existed at the intersection with Richmond Road. Despite the existence of a New Dorp stop on the Staten Island Railroad from 1860, there was little development along New Dorp Lane.

Development first came to New Dorp in the 1880s. Several tracts of land were acquired by local developers James W. Hughes and William Ross. These included land on both sides of New Dorp Lane below Richmond Road and above the Staten Island Railroad tracks, and on the southwest side of the New Dorp Lane below the tracks; these tracts included what would become the site of the Lane Theater. Hughes and Ross planned a typical late nineteenth-century suburban development.<sup>27</sup>

By 1917 the area had filled in. There was a substantial commercial strip on the southwest side of New Dorp Lane facing the Staten Island Railroad tracks and station. On the site of the Lane was a police station dating from the late nineteenth century. Further development was yet to come, however, as large tracts on the northeast side of New Dorp Lane below the railroad tracks, and on the southeast side below 10th Street, were broken up, sold, and developed around the core of the earlier settlement. This new development accelerated the growth of the commercial center along New Dorp Lane.

The movies came to New Dorp in 1922, when Fernando Emil Victor Brandenburg built a theater on New Dorp Lane, across the street from the future site of the Lane Theater.<sup>28</sup> After operating it for several years he sold it to the Moseses' Isle Theatrical Corporation. They in turn operated it for several years as the New Dorp Theater.

### The Lane Theater: an Art Moderne neighborhood theater

After operating the New Dorp Theater for five or six years, Charles Moses determined to build a new theater across the street. As president of the Modor Realty Corporation, he filed plans in 1937 to build a theater with stores, to cost \$80,000. Work began in August of that year, and was completed in February of 1938.<sup>29</sup>

Moses's project was typical of theater complexes of the day. The marquee and narrow entrance were set on New Dorp Lane, with the street-frontage adjacent to them occupied by five stores, while the bulk of the theater itself sat well behind New Dorp Lane, and parallel to it.

Eberson designed a 588-seat theater on the stadium plan, in which the auditorium's rear section was set off from the front by a cross-over aisle, and raised to resemble a balcony. The stadium plan in itself was not an innovation, but the modernistic design of the theater was very much of the period. The auditorium is elliptical in shape, suggesting the influence of such modernistic theater designs as Joseph Urban's elliptically shaped auditorium at the New School for Social Research in Greenwich Village. The curving walls are also similar to other of Eberson's theaters of the 1930s, such as the College Theater in Brooklyn (see above).

Eberson further shaped the auditorium with a series of horizontal, vertical and curving bands, suggestive of modernistic streamlining and the "speed lines" of such other Eberson theaters as the Nostrand in Brooklyn and the Beverly in Washington (see above). Geometric bands stretching across the ceiling terminate in vertical bands which run down the side walls. The recessed banded areas flanking the proscenium originally contained murals, as did banded recesses on the side walls. These, together with the surviving murals on the ceiling, suggested an abstract astronomical theme, not at all uncommon for modernistic designs of the 1930s. The murals, indirectly lit from the banding, were later described as being among "the first fluorescent murals utilizing black light."<sup>30</sup>

The overall effect of the streamline curves and the indirectly lit astronomical wall and ceiling murals is of an auditorium opening to a fantasy of the night sky -- a 1930s modernistic evolution of Eberson's earlier eclectic atmospheric designs. That such was the intent can be further deduced from a series of names that were initially planned for the theater before it was finally named for its location on New Dorp Lane. A series of plans from Eberson's office show the theater named the "Globe," the "Astro," and the "Novo" -- "world," "star" and "new" all titles appropriate to the theme.<sup>31</sup> At the time that he was working on the Lane, Eberson also had in-house a project for the 1939 World's Fair in Flushing Meadows.<sup>32</sup> It seems plausible that his work for the great futuristic exposition had some impact on his theater designs.

Charles H. Moses opened the Lane Theater on February 10, 1938, with a "Premiere Performance" that began with "The Star Spangled Banner," followed by a "Greeting," "Lane Latest News Events," a first movie -- Fred Stone in "Hideaway," then the "Lane Feature Presentation" of the evening: "Deanna Durbin and Leopold Stokowski and Symphony Orchestra in '100 MEN and a GIRL!'" The evening was closed with an "Exit March." The program promised "Perfect Entertainment," "Perfect Ventilation," "Perfect Sound," and "Perfect Service."<sup>33</sup>

Moses's choice of the name Lane, over the thematically more appropriate possibilities, says much about the theater's place in the neighborhood. Located on New Dorp Lane, for two centuries the main thoroughfare of the community, the Lane Theater took the name that stood for the community (much as the New Dorp Theater had a decade earlier). In neighborhoods and

downtowns across the country during the early decades of this century, theater marquees with local names up in lights in many ways served to identify the community. Period photos of the Loop in Chicago are often dominated by the great marquee of the Chicago Theater. Similar photos of downtown Buffalo are clearly identified by the marquee of Shea's Buffalo Theater.<sup>34</sup> In the typically hyperbolic language of such opening night programs, Charles Moses made clear his intentions in that direction as he declared:

The inauguration of this edifice marks the Dawn of a new theatrical era for the people of NEW DORP and its environs as well as as potent chapter in the history of the already glorified name "LANE."<sup>35</sup>

Following the end of World War II, with changing theater economics and the rise of television, a wave of theater alterations and demolitions began to claim large numbers of movie theaters across the country. The larger theaters were particularly vulnerable, either to subdivision into smaller theaters with accompanying loss of interior ornament, or to demolition for reuse of their valuable large sites. In New York, most of the large Manhattan movie palaces disappeared, while those surviving in the other boroughs suffered either from subdivision or abandonment and subsequent vandalism.

In Staten Island, of the theaters built before the Second World War, the two largest, the St. George and the Paramount, have been greatly altered: the St. George was converted into a mini-shopping mall, the Paramount into a discotheque. Smaller theaters such as the Liberty, the Ritz, the Empire and the Tompkinsville have been altered or demolished.<sup>36</sup> The Lane Theater appears to be not only the last of the approximately twenty pre-War Staten Island theaters to have been built, but also among the last to survive largely intact. In the larger context of New York City, it appears to be one of the few surviving 1930s modernistic theater designs.<sup>37</sup>

### Description

#### Inner Lobby:

The inner lobby is subdivided into two spaces, the foyer and the lounge corridor.

The foyer is an irregularly-shaped space which is distinguished by its curving north wall. Two doorways with metal doors on the northeast wall lead into the space. The cement floor slopes up towards the entrance to the auditorium and is covered with carpet. The walls, of sand-finished plaster now covered with wall paper, are enlivened by slightly recessed panels. Each panel consists of overlapping vertical wood trim framing a centerpiece and rising from a fluted wood base. The panels on the curving north wall and the southeast wall originally contained murals which are no longer extant. These two walls also retain original bowl-shaped light fixtures. The panel on the southeast wall contains a mirror and a drinking fountain, as specified in the original drawings.<sup>38</sup> A narrow wood cornice

sets off the flat plaster ceiling. The ceiling is further accentuated by an original brass and mirrored chandelier. Steps at the eastern end of the southwest wall lead down to an opening to the lounge corridor. Two original railings of brass and lacquered iron are placed on the steps. Directional signs above the openings are flanked by brass and glass cylinders.

The lounge corridor is a rectangular space which is distinguished by its stepped-up plaster ceiling accented by two chandeliers which are like those in the foyer. The cement floor is covered with carpet. The sand-finished plaster walls are covered with wall paper. Doorways to the ladies' and men's lounges are topped by directional signs like those in the foyer.

#### The Auditorium:

The auditorium is an elliptically-shaped space arranged in a stadium plan with two levels separated by a crossover aisle. An attached original floor lamp of futuristic design is placed at each end of the crossover aisle. Standing rails placed along the crossover aisle shield the seats on these two levels. Two staircases, partially framed by low walls with railings, lead to the upper level. The sloping cement floor is carpeted.

The side walls, of sand-finished plaster, curve towards the proscenium which frames the screen rising above the platform. The proscenium is created by vertical plaster bands which step towards the screen. The curve of the walls is accentuated by curved and horizontal plaster bands. The horizontal bands span shallow curved recesses, two on each wall, above the exit openings, that were originally adorned with murals. Exit signs like those in the foyer are placed on the bands above the openings. The recesses aligned with the crossover aisle still contain the original circular light fixtures. According to the original drawings,<sup>39</sup> the bands adjacent to the proscenium contained concealed strip lighting. Between the recesses, curved and vertical plaster bands set off a corrugated metal shield, which is spanned at its base by a banded horizontal light trough.<sup>40</sup>

Stepped bands rise from the side walls and span the ceiling, dividing it into two sections. The ceiling is of sand-finished plaster and decoratively painted to represent a stylized sky with a blue background, rainbows, stars, and starbursts. Circular plaster plaques which conceal ventilation ducts are incorporated into the design.

Report prepared by  
Anthony W. Robins  
Director of Survey

The preparation of this report included research on Staten Island history by Shirley Zavín of the Survey Department. The description of the theater was written by Marjorie Pearson, Director of Research.

## Notes

1. The two basic works on the history of the American movie palace, on which this account is largely based, are Ben M. Hall, The Best Remaining Seats (New York, 1961), and David Naylor, American Picture Palaces (New York, 1981). Charlotte Herzog's "The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of its Architectural Style," Cinema Journal 20 (Spring 1981), 15-37, discusses the influence of architectural antecedents such as vaudeville theaters and penny arcades on movie palace design. The quarterly issues of Marquee, the publication of the Theatre Historical Society since 1969, are another invaluable source.
2. For a typical history see Carrie Balaban, Continuous Performance (New York, 1964), the biography of A.J. Balaban, founder of Balaban & Katz.
3. Naylor, 141.
4. Naylor, 162.
5. On the streamlined style see Richard Guy Wilson, Dianne H. Pilgrim, and Dickran Tashjian, The Machine Age in America (New York, 1986), 174 ff.
6. Naylor, 141.
7. Staten Island News Illustrated, Aug. 3, 1897 (Hugh Powell, Index to Staten Island newspapers, Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences).
8. Staten Island News Illustrated, March 18, 1899 (index, SIIAS).
9. "Bachman's Brewery Revealed As Birthplace of Island Theatres," Staten Island Advance, Jan. 3, 1931 (magazine section, n.p.).
10. "Charles H. Moses," Staten Island And Its People, vol. 5 (New York, 1933), 331.
11. "Irving D. Johnson," SIAIP, 292-93.
12. Charles H. Moses obituary, Staten Island Advance, Jan. 21, 1965.
13. "Charles H. Moses," SIAIP, vol. 5, 332.
14. Elias Moses obituary, SIA, Aug. 4, 1971.
15. Charles H. Moses obituary.
16. Ibid.
17. This and much of the information on Eberson that follows was provided by Jane Preddy, curator of the Eberson collection, and currently at work on a monograph about the architect.
18. Naylor, 67-68.

19. Naylor, 68.
20. The Exhibitor Catalogue of 1940 (Philadelphia, 1940).
21. Preddy.
22. Catalogue, 33.
23. Catalogue, 36.
24. Catalogue, 16.
25. Preddy.
26. Loring McMillan, composite map of Revolutionary War period maps of Staten Island (April, 1983); reproduction available at SIIAS.
27. James Butler's Map of Staten Island or Richmond County, New York, 1853. H.F. Walling's Map of Staten Island: Richmond County, New York, 1859. J.B. Beers' Atlas of Staten Island, Richmond County, New York, 1874 and 1887 (James W. Hughes and William Ross's proposed development appears on the 1887 atlas). Sanborn's Insurance Map of Staten Island, Richmond County, 1917, corrected to 1932.
28. "Fernando Emil Victor Brandenburg," SIAIP, vol. 5, 266-7.
29. NYC, Department of Buildings, Staten Island. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 4210, Lot 36. NB 228-1937.
30. Theatre Catalogue (Philadelphia, 1948) (alternate title of The Exhibitor Catalogue cited above).
31. Preddy.
32. Ibid.
33. "Lane Theatre: New Dorp Lane and Eighth Street, New Dorp, S.I., Premiere Performance, Thursday Evening, February 10th, 1938" (opening night brochure).
34. See photograph, "Buffalo at Night," in New York: A Guide to the Empire State (New York, 1940), plates following p. 248). In the case of the Lane, the name was not just illuminated on a marquee, but actually built into the exterior of the theater as part of the architecture -- four large neon letters wrapped in streamlined neon bands.
35. Opening night brochure.
36. Mitchell Grubler, Preservation League of Staten Island, Testimony given before the LPC at a public hearing, September 6, 1988, Item No. 1, (LP-1696).
37. Letter submitted to the LPC by Michael R. Miller, President, Theatre Historical Society of America, September 14, 1988.

38. John Ebersson, Theatre & Stores, 8th Street & New Dorp Lane, Staten Island, New York, for Modor Realty Corporation, Drawing No. 6, Section "G-G," April 7, 1937.
39. Ebersson, Drawing No. 5; Drawing No. 7, Detail "Z."
40. Ebersson, Drawing No. 5; Drawing No. 7, Detail of Light Trough at Side Wall of Auditorium.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this Interior, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Lane Theater, first floor interior consisting of the inner lobby and the auditorium; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, doors, stair railings, signs, and attached decorative elements; has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City, and the Interior or parts thereof are thirty years old or more, and that the Interior is one which is customarily open and accessible to the public, and to which the public is customarily invited.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Lane Theater Interior is one of the dwindling number of examples in New York of the important twentieth-century institution of the neighborhood movie theater, and a remembrance of an era in which the local movie theater served a major function in neighborhoods across the country; that it was designed by John Eberson, one of the most prominent American theater architects of this century, and is one of the few of his New York theaters still intact; that it was the last movie theater built in Staten Island before World War II, as well as the last built for Staten Island's premier theater entrepreneur, Charles H. Moses; that, designed in the Art Moderne style, its curving side walls, curving horizontal and vertical lines, and abstract ceiling murals form a modernistic version of the atmospheric palaces that Eberson pioneered in earlier years; that it is one of few 1930s movie houses of modernistic design existing in New York City today; and that it is among the last surviving virtually intact pre-World War II movie house interiors in the borough of Staten Island.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Interior Landmark the Lane Theater, first floor interior consisting of the inner lobby and the auditorium; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, doors, stair railings, signs, and attached decorative elements; 168 New Dorp Lane, Staten Island and designates Tax Map Block 4210, Lot 36 as its Landmark Site.

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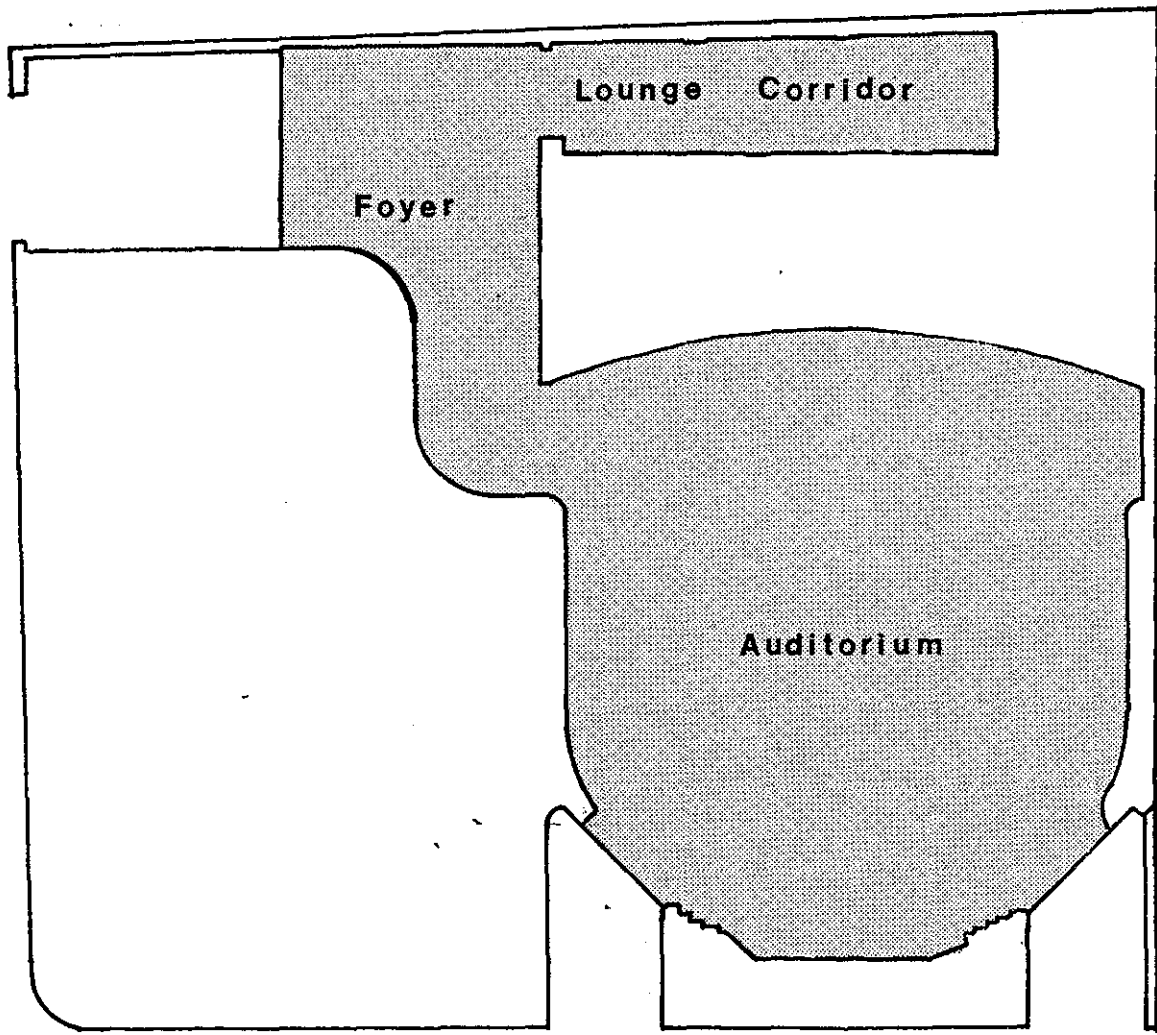
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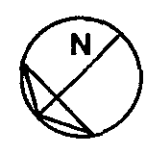
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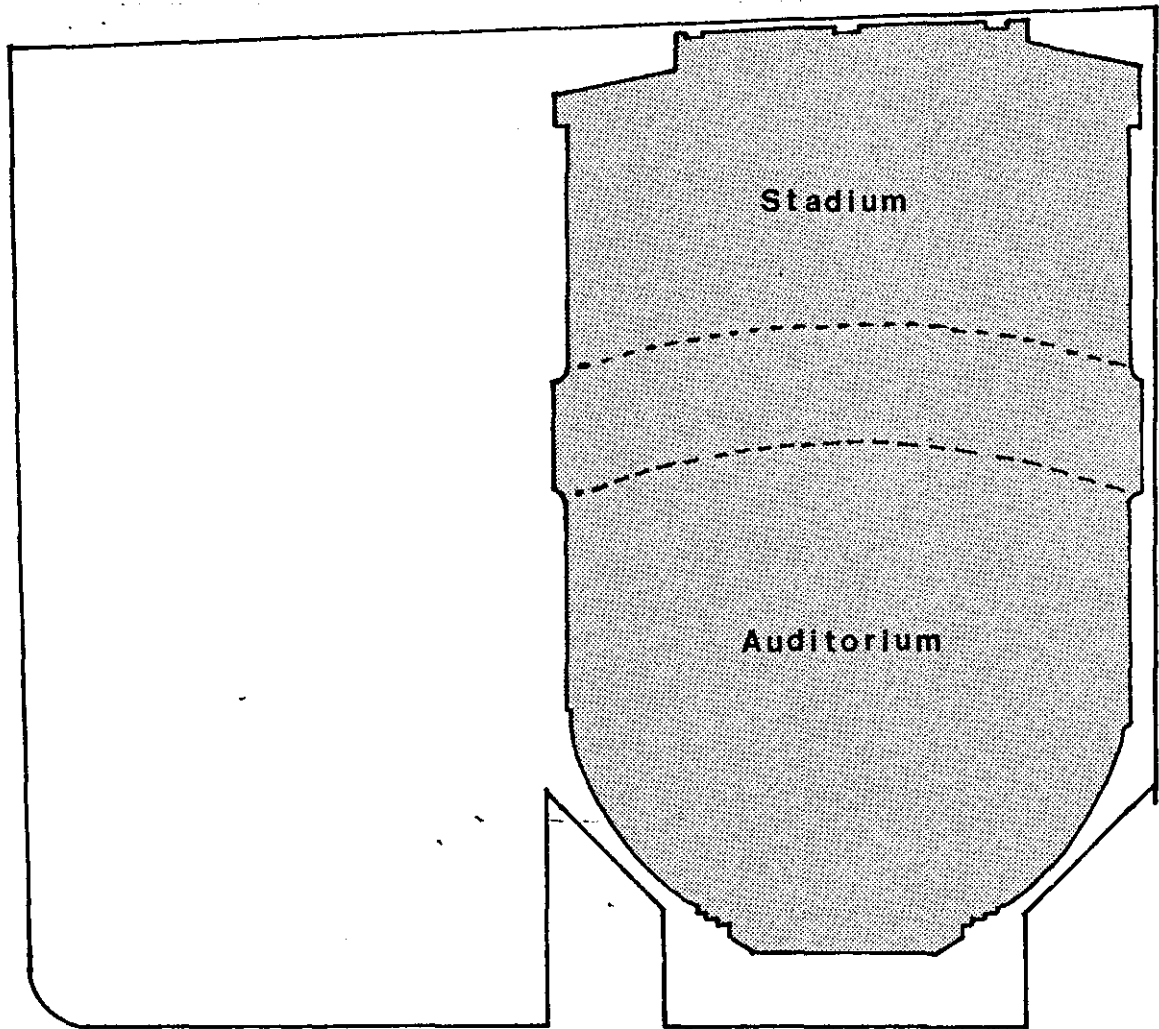


**First Floor**

**Lane Theater Interior**  
168 New Dorp Lane, Staten Island

Designated 1 November 1988  
Landmarks Preservation Commission



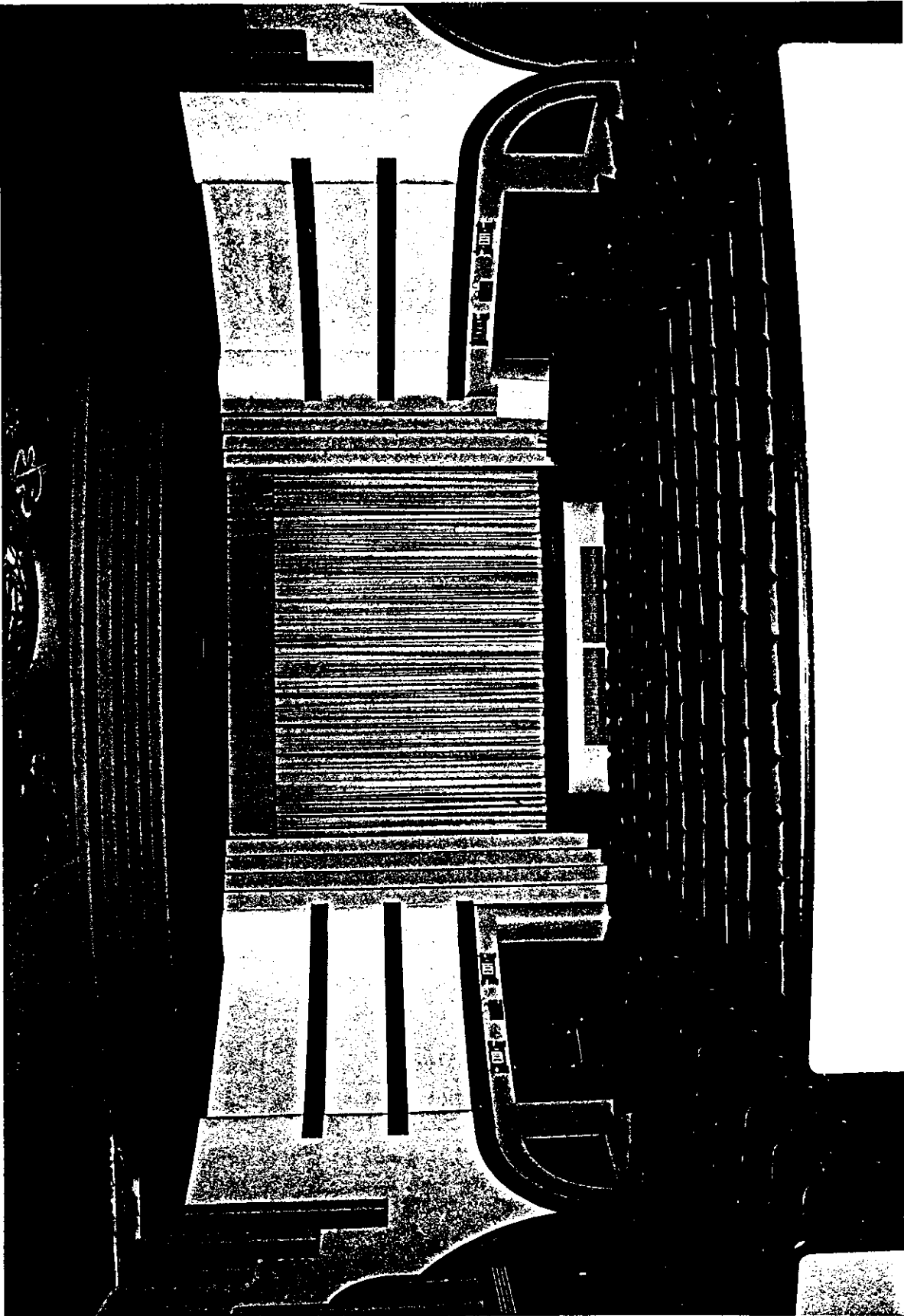


**Stadium Level**

**Lane Theater Interior**  
168 New Dorp Lane, Staten Island

**Designated 1 November 1988**  
**Landmarks Preservation Commission**



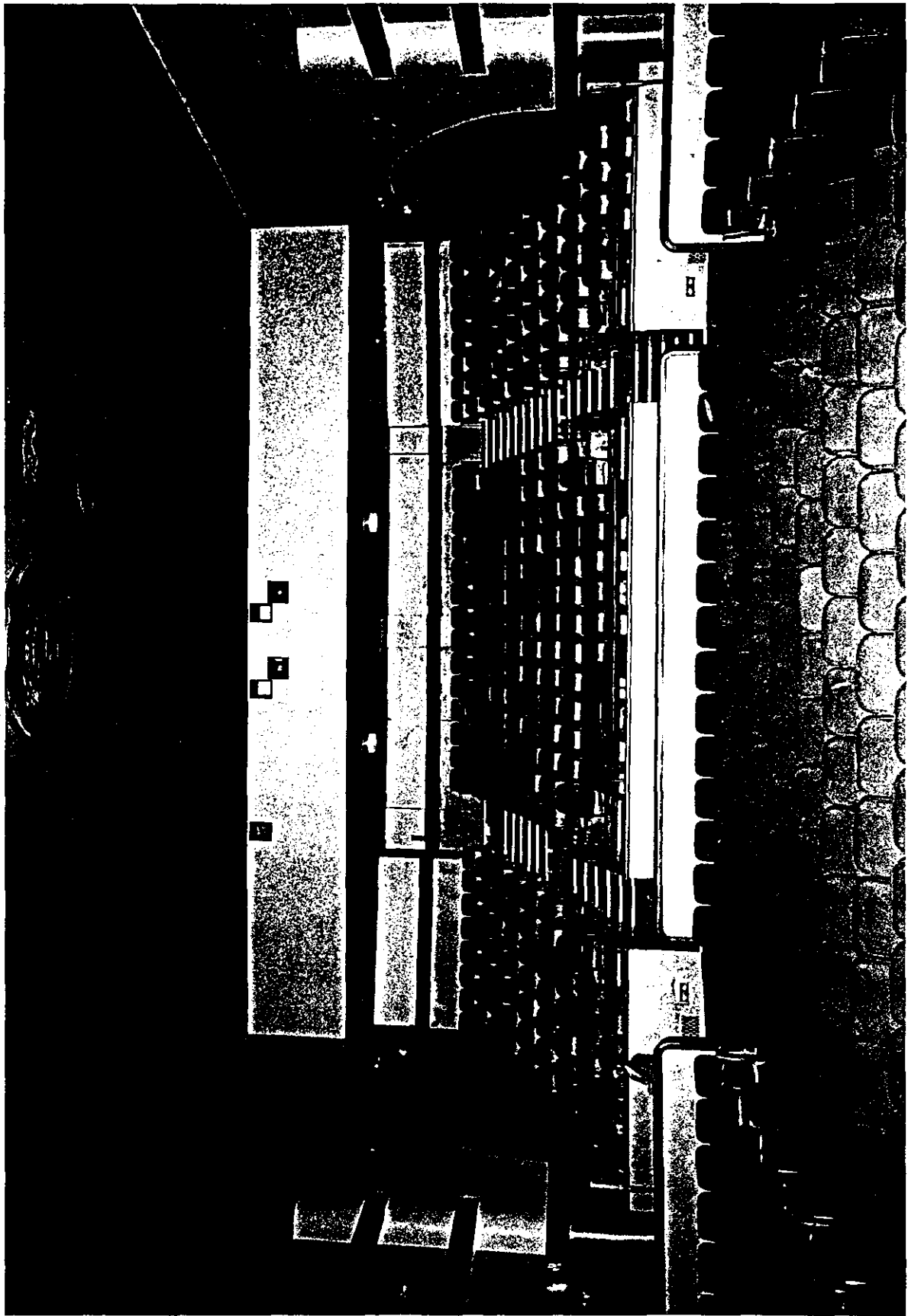


The Lane Theater Interior  
168 New Dorp Lane, Staten Island

Architect: John Eberson  
Built: 1937-38

Auditorium

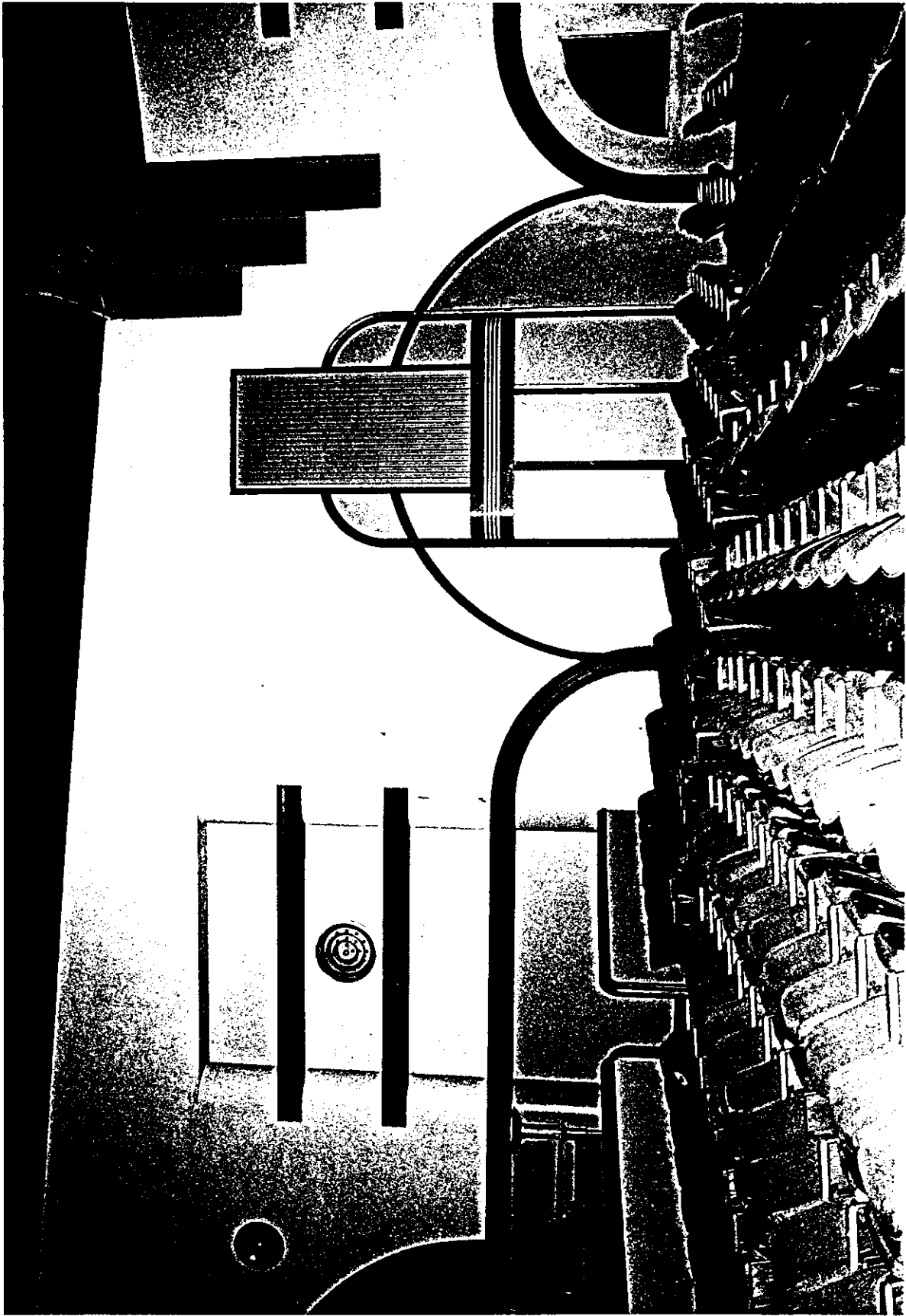
Photo credit: Carl Forster



The Lane Theater Interior

Photo credit: Carl Forster

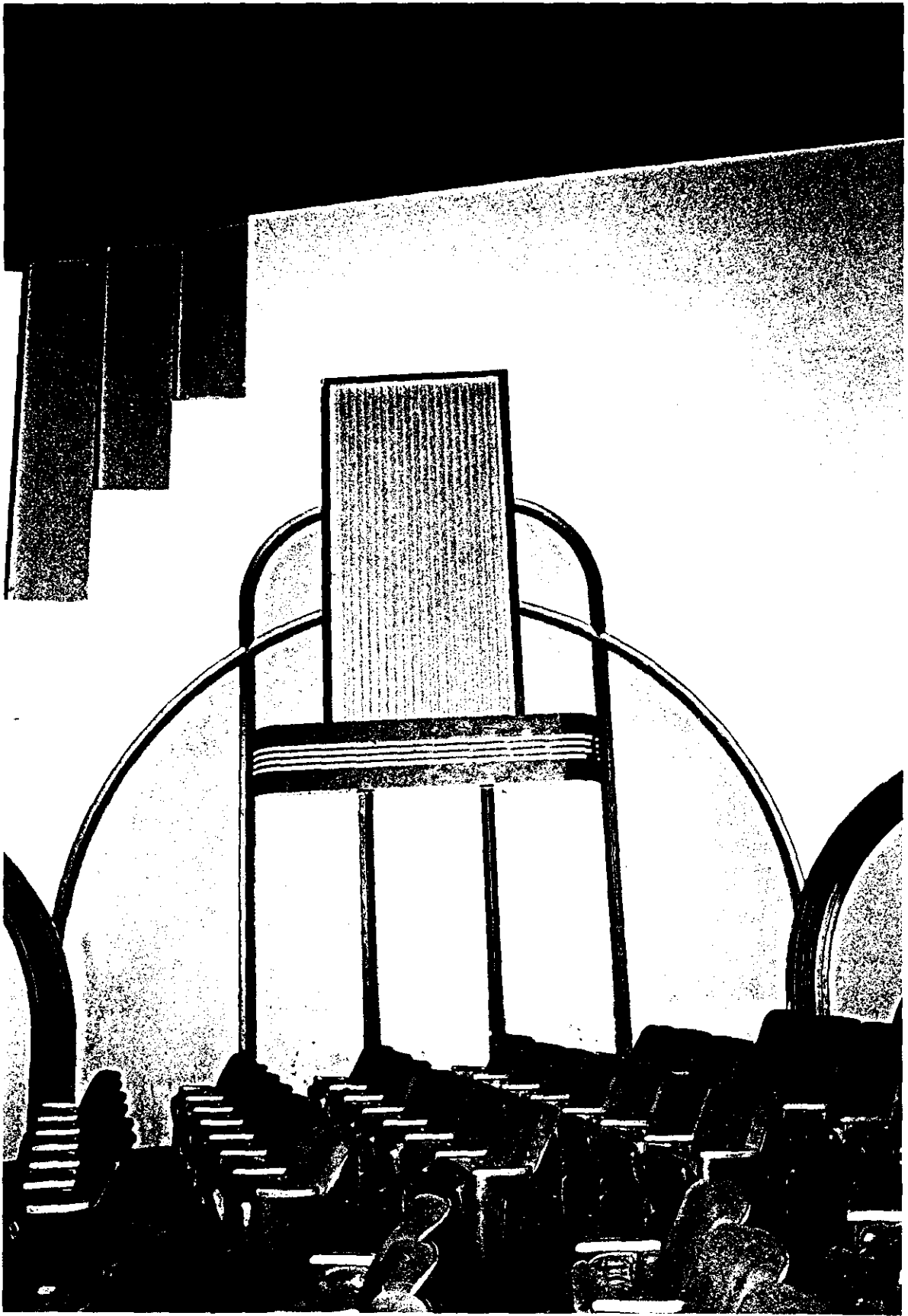
Auditorium



The Lane Theater Interior

Photo credit: Carl Forster

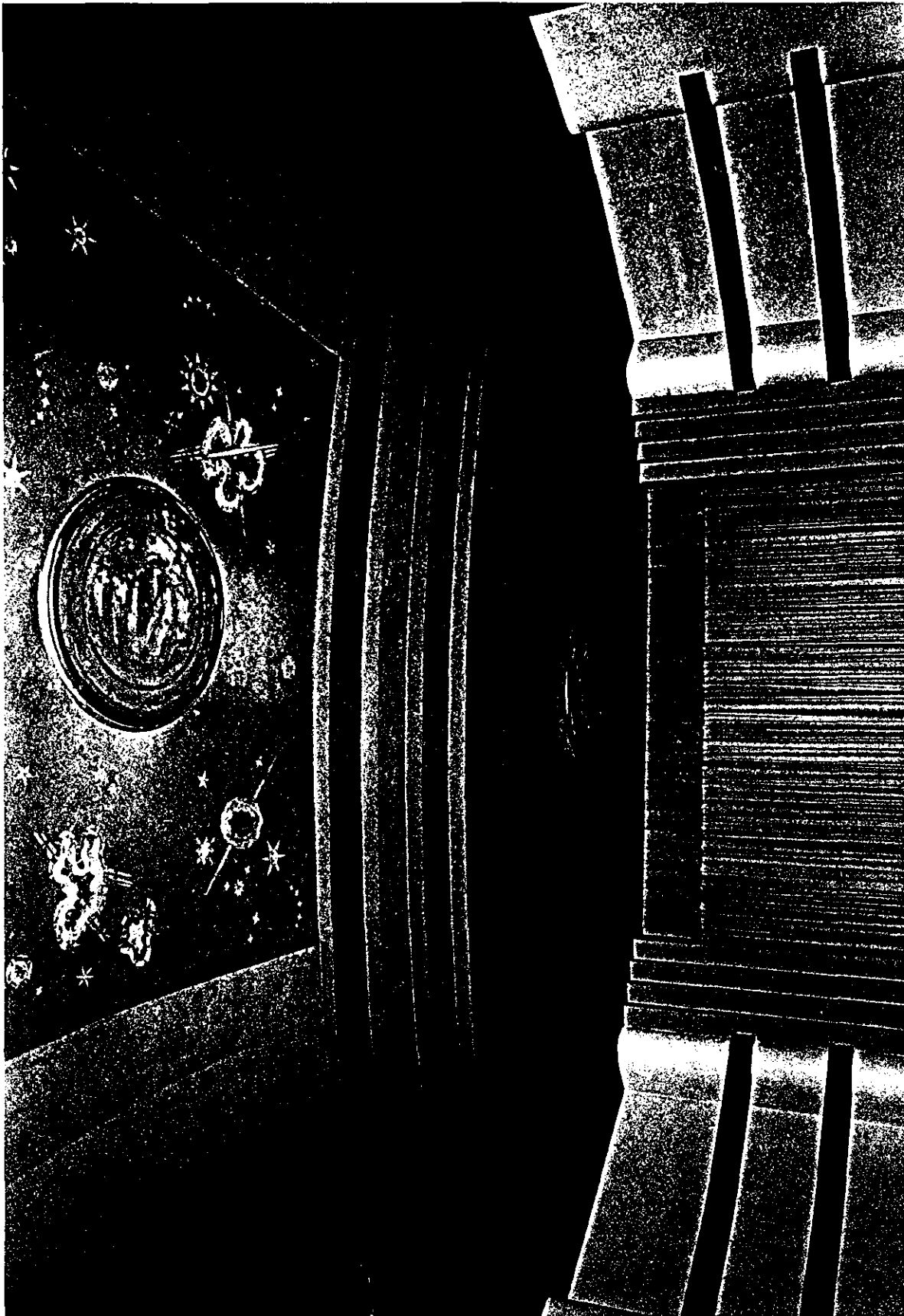
Auditorium



The Lane Theater Interior

Photo credit: Carl Forster

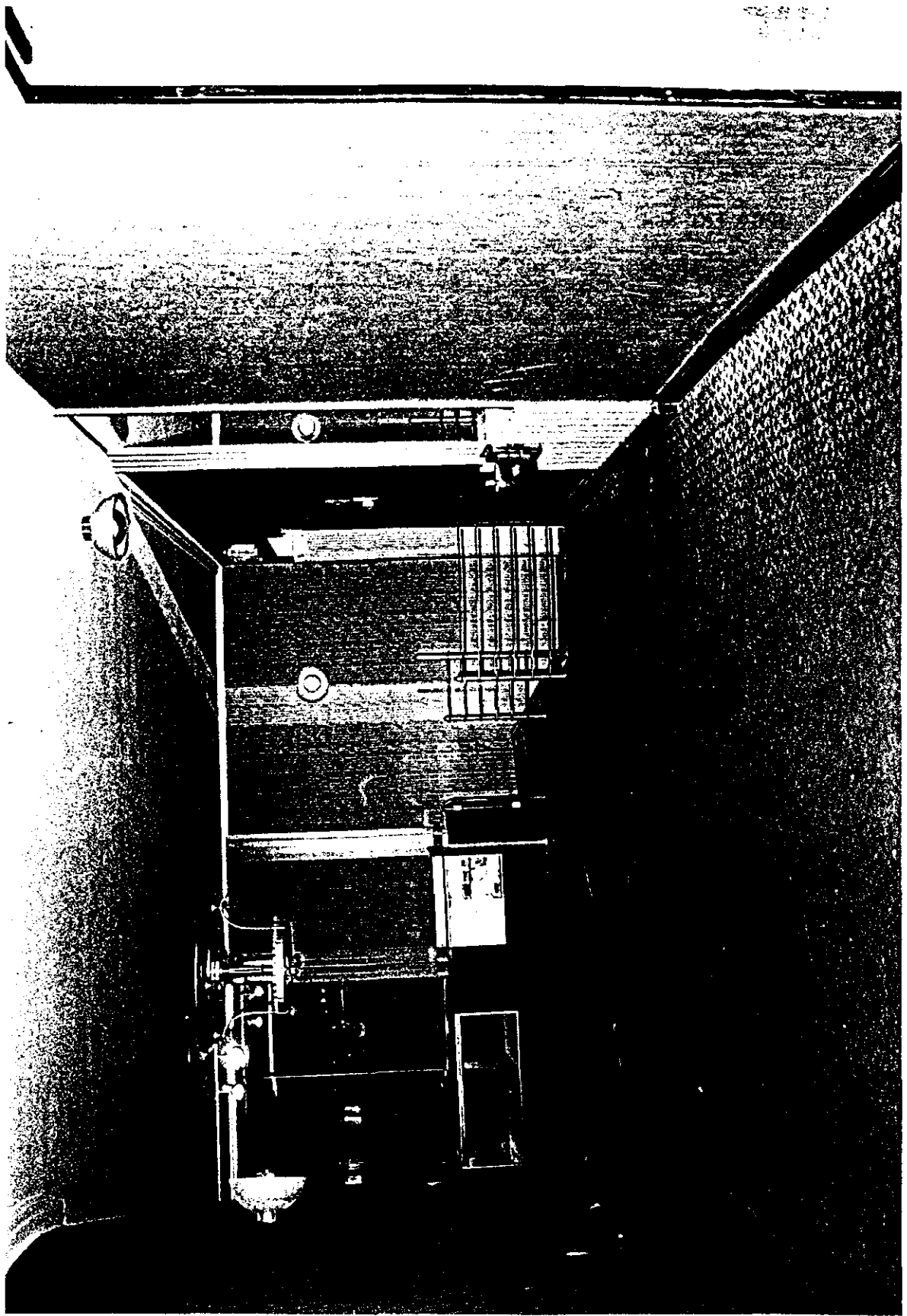
Auditorium



The Lane Theater Interior

Photo credit: Carl Forster

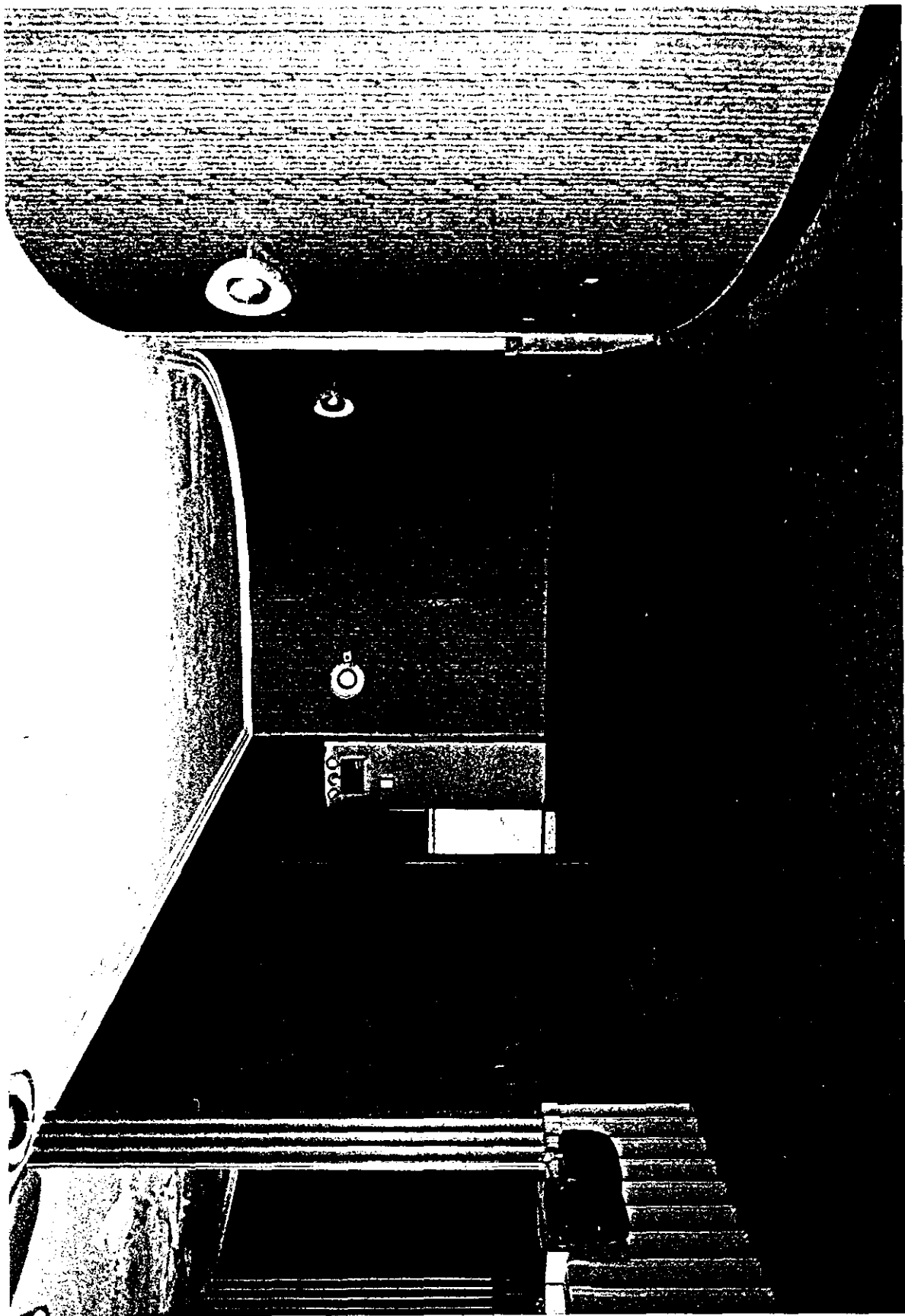
Auditorium



The Lane Theater Interior

Photo credit: Carl Forster

Inner lobby: foyer



The Lane Theater Interior

Photo credit: Carl Forster

Inner lobby: foyer



The Lane Theater Interior

Photo credit: Carl Forster

Inner lobby: lounge corridor