

Loew's Theatre (United Artists / Penthouse Theatre)  
625 S. Fourth Street  
Louisville  
Jefferson County  
Kentucky

HABS No. KY-134

HABS,  
KY,  
56-LOUVI,  
17-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Architectural and Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOEW'S THEATRE  
(United Artists Theatre and Penthouse Theatre)

HABS No. KY-134

Location: 625 South Fourth Street, Louisville, Jefferson County, Kentucky.

Present Owner: United Artists Theatre Circuit, Inc.

Present Occupants: United Artists Theatre and Penthouse Theatre.

Present Use: Theatres

Significance: The first John Ebersson atmospheric theatre in the state or region, Loew's Theatre is a lavish and perfectly preserved movie palace of the late 1920s. It is an excellent example of Churrigueresque architecture. John Ebersson was one of the three greatest theatre architects of the period of the 1920s.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1928. The theatre formally opened on September 1, 1928.
2. Architect: John Ebersson. John Ebersson was a noted theatre designer of the 1920s who designed many of the "picture palaces" of the Loew's theatre chain. His bust is set in one of the coffers of the vestibule ceiling among the busts of other, more famous men. The original lease stipulated that the architect work with Leon Fleishmann, who was to receive a maximum commission of \$10,000.
3. Original and subsequent owners:  
  
Loew's Theatre is located on lot number 129 of block 13-K in the City of Louisville. The following references to the title of the lot are found in the Jefferson County, Kentucky Deed Books:  
  
1927 Deed, March 12, 1927, recorded in Deed Book 1280, page 1. Lawrence Jones and Mamie P. Jones, Henning Chambers and Mina B. Chambers, Samuel C. Miller and May L. Miller, William H. Veeneman and Edna M. Veeneman, and Fidelity and Columbia Trust Company entered into a 25 year lease with the Marcus Loew Booking Agency for the construction of a theatre. Written in form similar to a building contract, specifications are set forth such as the capacity, which was to be at least 3,000 and preferably 3,300 and the cost, which was not to exceed \$750,000.



- B. Historical Context: From its opening on September 1, 1928 which featured the movie, "Excess Baggage," to the present Loew's has shown motion pictures, including one world premier, to audiences composed of stars and those from every conceivable walk of life. From an opening account at its opening comes this quote: "When one fancies the historian of some distant future reconstructing our day, it is not an idle fancy to suppose that he will lay particular stress on the motion picture palaces that are scattered across America and in doing so he will find something expressive of the character of these times we know as modern."

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### General description:

The basic construction material of the theatre is concrete and steel. The 40' x 200' theatre has a four-story facade, a two-story foyer, an inner lobby and a large rear ell.

Ornate terra-cotta Churrigueresque frontispiece resembles a retablo with a prominent forward marquise tower at the center, instead of a traditional niche. Tile relief surface is rich and varied. Cartouches, acanthus leaves, urns and coats-of-arms enliven the facade and numerous finials mark the skyline.

Interior includes predominantly Churrigueresque styling of exterior. Surface texture has aggregation of ornament. Jewel-tone, polychrome finish is used on plaster walls. A plaster retablo at the inner entrance wall is surmounted by a cast of Donatello's "David". Side staircase in the lobby has a baldachino landing. Floors have geometric tile pattern; the ceilings are vaulted and coffered, with portrait heads, including the architect Eberson's. The auditorium ceiling has unusual atmospheric "sky, clouds and stars."

## PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: Original plans of the theatre by John Eberson are in possession of the architect's son, Drew Eberson, AIA, Stamford, Connecticut.
- B. Bibliography:
1. Primary and unpublished sources:  
  
Deed Books located in the County Clerk's Office, Jefferson County Courthouse, Louisville, Kentucky.  
  
National Register Nomination Form on the theatre, for further description of the interior, April 1977.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Newspaper clippings:

"Governor and Mayor Praise New Theatre." The Herald-Post,  
September 2, 1928.

Advertisements, Courier-Journal, September 1, 1928

"Loew's State to Open Its Doors Today," Herald-Post, September  
1, 1928.

"On the Screen - Loew's," Courier-Journal, September 2, 1928

"Loew's \$2,500,000 Cinema Palace Opens," Herald-Post, September  
2, 1928.

"Louisville's New \$2,000,000 Theatre," Herald-Post, Rotogravure  
Section, September 2, 1928.

"Loew's Theatre Is Sold to Eastern Corporation,"  
Courier-Journal, April 25, 1948.

"Loew's and Kentucky Are Installing Wide Screens," Courier-  
Journal, August 30, 1953.

"Loew's Theater Changes Ownership," Courier-Journal, October 24,  
1954.

U.S. Court Ordered Change In Ownership of Theater Here,"  
Courier-Journal, October 26, 1954.

"Loew's to be Renamed Here," Courier-Journal, December 22, 1954.

"Loew's Theater Name The United Artists," Courier-Journal,  
February 19, 1958.

"...take the Grand Staircase to the left..." Courier-Journal,  
December 17, 1961.

"Penthouse Theatre Symbolizes Revitalized Downtown District, by  
Sherwood Kohn, Louisville Times, February 18, 1963.

"Penthouse Theater Praised as Downtown Attraction,"  
Courier-Journal, April 12, 1963.

"Graveyard Shift Fixes Organ," by Floyd Edwards, Louisville  
Times, August 24, 1964.

"Back When...Loew's Theater Was Built," Courier-Journal,  
October 26, 1967.

"Nude, Er, Ah, Statue Stolen from Theater," Courier-Journal,  
December 2, 1962.

"A Retiring George Hunt Remembers in Film Titles," by Jean  
Dietrich, Courier-Journal, December 26, 1971.

"Nostalgic Notes," by Mike King, Courier-Journal, May 25, 1972.

Langsam, Walter E. Metropolitan Preservation Plan. Louisville:  
Falls of the Ohio Metropolitan Council of Governments, 1973.

Quenroe, Elroy. "John Ebersson in Richmond, Virginia: Architect  
for the Twenties." Master's Thesis. University of  
Virginia, March 1975.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Preservation Alliance of Louisville and Jefferson County, Inc. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, chief of HABS, the project was completed during the summer of 1974 at the HABS Field Office in Louisville by Prof. John Haggard, (Syracuse University), Project Supervisor; David Arbogast (Columbia University), Project Historian; Mary Oehrlein, Project Foreman; Bayer Lee (City College of New York), Architect; and Mary M. Herd (University of Tennessee) and Charles Raith (University of Cincinnati), student assistant architects. Lucy Pope Wheeler, a HABS writer and editor, did the initial editing of the written data. Susan McCown, a HABS historian, completed the editing in the spring of 1981, for transmittal to the Library of Congress. HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher took the photographs of the structures in 1979.

ADDENDUM TO:  
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(Penthouse Theatre)  
625 South Fourth Street  
Louisville  
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*HABS KY,56-LOUVI,17-*

COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001