



Capitol Theatre

On October 18, 1919, a new \$700,000 building at Detroit and W. 65th street was first advertised in the Cleveland Enterprise. It was originally planned in

three phases, with the first unit being a 267' long, three story commercial structure on Detroit Avenue. The second unit was to be a model farmers market, and the third unit a moving picture and vaudeville theater seating 2,000-2,500. The building was advertised to “contain stores on the ground floor and offices and living suites of three rooms and a bath each. The store rooms will have entrances at the front and rear, opening in the rear to an arcade or promenade entrance to a community market house. A domed ceiling also will enhance the beauty and afford proper ventilation. The principal feature of the entire floor plan is that the three units, while separate and distinct, are connected by a series of broad arcades providing an entire community within itself.”

By 1920, the plan had changed a little bit. On July 3, 1920, the Gordon Square Co. placed a large ad in the Cleveland Enterprise newspaper, promoting the construction of the Gordon Square Building at West 65th Street and Detroit Avenue. Self-described as the “finest building of its kind in Cleveland, with over 50,000 sq. ft. of space fronting on Detroit Avenue with a 72-stall farmers market, and 27 stores; 50,000 sq. ft. of office space on the second floor; a modern, 40-room hotel on the top floor; and the finest movie and vaudeville theatre in Cleveland.”

Further, they go on to say “Listen—the entire proposition is already leased to high class and responsible tenants” and proclaim “Gordon Square will eventually be to Cleveland what Times Square is to New York City.”

According to one printed source, “In April 1921, when the arcade officially opened, it was the largest construction project of its kind on the West Side of town. One of the largest pool rooms in the state is in the basement. A restaurant, said to be the largest on the West Side, also is in the basement. With a brass band blaring in the street and an orchestra and a half dozen phonographs grinding out jazz in the upper arcade, the West Side last night danced a dedication to the Gordon Square Arcade and Community Building. There were flowers everywhere, from the bootblack stand in the basement to the foyer of the Capitol Theatre.”





The Capitol Theatre opened as a 1,334 seat vaudeville and silent film house with a Wurlitzer organ. It was first remodeled in the mid 1930's to accommodate sound pictures, and a slightly larger stage area. The theatre received another limited renovation in the 1950's with a remodeled vestibule and lobby, and another expansion of the stage, thereby reducing the seating capacity to roughly 1,250. The theatre has been closed since 1985 due to severe water damage from a leaky roof, as well as lack of any climate control system.

The Capitol was designed by the Pittsburgh-based architectural firm of Prack & Prack, and combines classical Adamesque details with bold medieval stenciling. The original color scheme of rich browns, subtle oranges, creamy tans and yellows, blush pinks, and complimentary blues has been covered over in most areas with a flat tan or pink paint.



A recent study suggests that a full restoration of the historic palette, recreation of the stenciled and hand-painted details, and decorative plaster molding would be feasible. "Restoration windows" revealed intricate panels of floral swags, bell garlands, and classic motifs in wide bands and in detailed sections of the plaster panels. Further, enough original architectural fabric and details are extant that would make it possible to restore the main auditorium, particularly the proscenium arch and the original main light fixture.

Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organization, as part of the Gordon Square Arts District, is currently working to restore the Capitol Theatre as a three-screen, art and independent film cinema. The grand re-opening of

this neighborhood landmark is anticipated in Spring, 2009. For more information on the Capitol Theatre project and the Gordon Square Arts District, please visit www.gordonsquare.org



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