

Other Reasons the Fourth Avenue Theatre Is Historically Important to Alaska

The Fourth Avenue Theatre is reportedly the first venue where the Supreme Court of Alaska heard oral arguments after Alaska became a state.²⁵ That is a testament to the common perception that the building was of such dignity and grandeur that it was appropriate to serve as the hearing room for oral arguments before the highest court of the state.

Cap Lathrop made the opening of the Fourth Avenue Theatre more than simply the first time a new movie theatre showed a movie. He made it a truly grand opening—a celebratory event for the State of Alaska that Cap called a “dedication.” As he explained in the dedication brochure he handed out at the event:

This theatre was built especially for Alaskans ... it is the culmination of a sincere wish to bring to the people of Anchorage and visitors from all parts of Alaska of Alaska, a theatre unexcelled on the American continent!²⁶

Political leaders and celebrities were invited, and the opening ceremonies included the Anchorage Community Chorus performing the “Alaska’s Flag” in a beautiful four-part vocal arrangement by Alaska pioneer Lorene Harrison.²⁷ At the dedication, Cap was presented with a portrait of him painted by renowned Alaska artist Eustace Ziegler. Cap referred to the opening of the Fourth Avenue Theatre as “the happiest day of my life.”²⁸

The Fourth Avenue Theatre is among the historical buildings profiled in Alison Hoagland’s Buildings of Alaska (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). This book was among the first of a multi-volume series, Buildings of the United States, commissioned by the Society of Architectural Historians as part of a nationwide effort to produce a publication about the country’s architectural heritage on a state-by-state basis. The foundation for selection of individual entries, such as the Fourth Avenue Theatre, was in the nominations and surveys undertaken by state historic preservation offices and the National Park Service for the National Register of Historic Places.²⁹

For decades, the Fourth Avenue Theatre has been iconic of downtown Anchorage, not only the subject of numerous well-known photographs but also the subject of a number of the late Byron Birdsall’s most famous paintings of Alaska. And, of course, Cap Lathrop’s beautiful Fourth Avenue Theatre withstood the devastating 1964 earthquake, a symbol of the strength and survival of the city and the people who built it.

The Society of Architectural Historians has recognized the importance of the Fourth Avenue Theatre in the history of American architecture and interior design and décor, describing in detail the building and the interior decorative work of A.B. Heinsbergen and Frank Bouman, calling it “fantastic.”³⁰

The fact that the Fourth Avenue Theatre also has its own substantial Wikipedia entry is itself significant. The information contained in that entry about the building, its principal architect and its Art Deco/Streamline Moderne architectural style—and the significance of those

styles in the movement to establish a truly American identity in architecture—speaks volumes of the building’s importance, not only to the culture of Anchorage and Alaska, but also to its place in the history of American architecture and interior design.

The Fourth Avenue Theatre is on the National Register of Historic Places of the United States. It has been on that register for over 30 years—since 1982. See the site inventory and [nomination form](#) to add the building to the National Register of Historic Places and the associated photographs of the interior and exterior of the building that are being submitted with this proposal. The inventory/site nomination contains much information about the history of the building and its cultural and architectural importance.

25 Reported by retired Alaska attorney Kermit E. Barker, January 10, 2017. In the 1970s, Barker and retired Alaska attorney David B. Ruskin had their law office in the building.

26 Carberry, op. cit. at p. 67. See Exhibit 8

27 See accompanying Exhibit 9, excerpted from, Diane Barske, Mostly Music: The Story of Lorene C. Harrison, Alaska’s Cultural Pioneer (Anchorage: Publication Consultants, 1999), p. 85, 86.

28 Quoted in Carberry, op. cit. at p. 67.

29 Alison K. Hoagland, Buildings of Alaska, v and viii.

30 <http://sah-archipedia.org/detail%2Fcontent%2Fentries%2FAK-01-SC004.xml?q=type%3Astations> (accessed February 27, 2017).

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