

but the project was unsuccessful.

The Lathrop family spent the spring of 1903 in Cold Bay, where Lathrop drilled unsuccessfully for oil. He took the first standard oil rig in the Territory to prospect for oil in the interest of the Costello Oil Land Company. He attempted to make a comfortable home for his wife and stepdaughter in the small oil boom settlement, but the Alaska Peninsula did not suit the socially active Miss Cleo, who persuaded her mother to relocate to Seattle. He returned to the Alaska Peninsula in the summers of 1904 and 1905 to drill near Lake Becharof without success. He finally returned to Valdez in late August. By this time Lathrop had sold the *L.J Perry*. He became a teamster again, with a contract to haul and lay ties for the new Copper River and Northwestern Railway in 1906.¹⁹

Developing Cordova

Lathrop visited California in the winter of 1906-1907, promoting a copper mining project on the Kotsina River, a tributary of the Copper River. Although there were promising finds, this project did not seem to gather much traction. By 1908, he was a partner, and then full owner, in the Alaska Transfer Company, a freight business in Cordova, Alaska, which was developing as the terminus for the Copper River and Northwestern Railway. In February 1910, he learned of his wife's death from a lingering illness in a house he had built for her, where she had been provided with round-the-clock professional care.²⁰

Lathrop gradually expanded his interests to become one of the most prominent businessmen in Cordova. He started the Alaska Transfer Company and enjoyed a monopoly in the coal and transfer business. He followed the business practice of paying the freight bills of his customers when hauling their merchandise from the dock to their stores, collecting both the drayage and the freight on the monthly statement. He became a major stockholder and director in Sam Blum's First National Bank of Cordova. He also represented the Olympia Brewing Company and the Pacific Alaska Navigation Company. Other interests were a movie theater, lumber yard, ice house, and a fish saltery. In 1917, he built a large apartment house.²¹

Cordova Coal Party (May 4, 1911)

In 1911, Lathrop was elected as mayor of Cordova. He served only one term, although he remained on the city council through 1914. The salient event of Lathrop's tenure as mayor was the "Cordova Coal Party" or anticonservation protest based on the Boston Tea Party against the federal closure of Alaskan coal lands to development, which required Alaskans to buy expensive Canadian coal. Several years earlier, President Theodore Roosevelt feared that Alaska's immense coal reserves would be used to benefit only a few corporations. He prohibited additional coal mining on public lands in Alaska. Coal imported to Alaska cost \$15 per ton while the cost to mine local coal was \$3 per ton.

On May 4, 1911, three hundred Cordova businessmen and citizens boarded a ship moored dockside with coal from British Columbia and shoveled almost a ton of coal into the harbor.²² Local citizens compared their actions to the Boston Tea Party, a political protest when angry colonial citizens dressed as Indians dumped tea overboard to protest British taxes, and called the affair the Cordova Coal Party.²³ After demands were made to disband or be charged with rioting, the group broke up. Mayor Lathrop contacted Territorial Governor

Walter E. Clark, who was in Washington, D.C., to request assistance. In the days following the Coal Party, there was great fear of further demonstrations. The federal government, however, did not change its coal policies. In nearby Katalla, the former chief of the U.S. Forest Service, Gilford Pinchot, was reportedly burned in effigy by an angry mob.²⁴

Early Anchorage Interests

In 1915, Lathrop extended his Alaska Transfer Company to Anchorage to handle the business created by the construction of the Alaska Railroad. He located his office in the Lathrop Building (4th Avenue and H Street). After a second story was completed on the building about year later, he lived in one of the apartments. He became a director of the Bank of Anchorage, which later merged with the Bank of Alaska, later the National Bank of Alaska. He was a director of the Anchorage-Willow Creek Mining and Development Company. Interestingly, it was through his efforts that the Alaska Labor Union was able to build their Labor Temple on 4th Avenue.²⁵

***The Chechahcos* (1923)**

In the summer of 1922, Lathrop formed Alaska Motion Picture Corporation and, as president, oversaw the 1923 production of *The Chechahcos*.²⁶ His plan was to produce a motion picture for national distribution to tell the true story of the Alaska gold rush. By November, a 7,000 square foot studio was being built at the end of Third Avenue in Anchorage. The arrival of the actors on March 8, 1923 was the excuse for a town-wide party. Many of the scenes were filmed in Mount McKinley National Park and in Girdwood. Interior and other scenes were shot in Anchorage. When released in Alaska late in 1923, it played to packed houses throughout the Territory.²⁷ The film was shown nationally but was not a commercial success in its stateside showings. Predictions at the time about its unpronounceable title and criticisms about its “hokey” plot to outside audiences proved to be correct. It remains one of the most impressive examples of regional filmmaking and was the first feature-length movie to be made entirely in Alaska. Lathrop was never again involved with producing motion pictures.²⁸

Other Business Interests

Lathrop developed a chain of movie theaters in the early 1910s. The motion picture was an eagerly devoured form of entertainment, and provided a social outlet. Starting with the Empress at Cordova in 1911²⁹, he built Anchorage’s Empress (1916) and Fourth Avenue (1941-1947)³⁰, and the Empress³¹ (1927) and Lacy Street³² (1939) in Fairbanks.³³

In addition to the Empress Theatre (Cap always used the British spelling) in Fairbanks, he built a hundred-room hotel and an apartment building. In 1929 he added the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* to his business interests, and then a decade later, radio station, KFAR. He started the second radio station in Anchorage, KENI, which went on the air on May 2, 1948.³⁴ Both radio stations were managed under the Midnight Sun Broadcasting Company, with Lathrop as president.

With the opening of federal lands in Alaska to coal mining, the rich coal fields on the northern edge of the Alaska Range, near Healy, were ready for development. Lathrop became involved with the Healy River Coal Mines Corporation, becoming president in 1924. The Healy River mine at Suntrana, 112 miles south of Fairbanks, was the largest in state. Much of its product went to Fairbanks and, to a lesser extent, Anchorage.³⁵

University of Alaska Board of Regents (1932-1950)

Lathrop served on the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines (renamed the University of Alaska in 1935) Board of Regents for eighteen years (1932-1950). He was vice president of the board at the time of his death in 1950. After its new fireproof library opened in 1935, he donated a large Sydney Laurence painting of Mount McKinley for the sixty-by-eighty-foot reading room. He was one of the guiding forces behind the destiny of the Territory's institution of higher education, and was active in the financial dealings of the university. In 1948, when a freeze on territorial appropriations left the university with virtually no operating funds and facing closure, he led the effort to solicit a total of \$200,000 in interest-free loans.³⁶

Cordova

The decline in copper mining in the Copper River area led Lathrop to focus his attention on his business interests in Cordova in 1932. Lathrop, the principal stockholder in the First Bank of Cordova, saw the bank through the Depression, becoming bank president in 1933. While many Cordovans still hoped that the Kennecott mines would again work at full capacity, Lathrop realized that fishing would be the future industry in Cordova and that airplane transportation would be the link to the rest of Alaska. When an airfield was built at Cordova in 1934, Lathrop's alertness to business opportunities was displayed again when he constructed a large airplane hangar and shop to meet the need for aircraft repair and maintenance. He built a new cannery and offices for the Glacier Packing Company's cannery in 1935, which operated until 1937, when labor difficulties stopped the operations; he sold the enterprise in 1940.³⁷

Opposition to Alaska Statehood Movement

World War II led to more demand for coal from Lathrop's mines by the U.S. military in Alaska, at the same time that Lathrop had difficulty finding and keeping a labor force. Construction projects, like Anchorage's Fourth Avenue Theatre, were halted until after the war.

The overriding issue in the postwar period was Alaska statehood. Lathrop was not opposed to statehood someday—far from it—but, as historian Terrence Cole stated, “to do so would have been akin to opposing motherhood.”³⁸ Lathrop and the others in the “statehood not now” crowd argued that Alaska's narrow economic base was evidence of the need to delay statehood.³⁹ He was among many established Alaska businessmen who sought to keep the status quo to their profit by keeping the territorial government and the tax structure at a minimum.⁴⁰ He opposed the financial burden that he thought a new state government would impose on Alaska's small population.⁴¹ Heavy state taxes could dampen economic expansion. Former Territorial Governor Ernest Gruening and Robert Atwood of the *Anchorage Daily Times* were among the leading proponents for statehood. Gruening lashed back by lumping Lathrop with absentee-owned mining

and fishing corporations who earned enormous sums in the territory, paid little or no taxes, and shipped their profits to the Lower 48.⁴² Lathrop was caricatured in Edna Ferber's *Ice Palace*, a pro-statehood novel, as "Czar" Kennedy. The novel helped sway national opinion in favor of statehood.

A staunch Republican, Lathrop served in the Alaska House of Representatives (1921-1923) representing the Third Division. He was a representative on the Republican National Committee (1928-1932 and 1949-1950). His political philosophy was tempered by his bitter experiences in resource development and the consequent land use withdrawals.⁴³

Legacy

On July 26, 1950, Lathrop died at the age of eighty-four, after falling beneath the wheels of a loaded railroad coal car at his Healy River coal mine.⁴⁴ Although a rich man, Lathrop often did not act like one. His far-flung business enterprises, as well as the need to meet with investors in the Lower 48 meant that he traveled constantly. Being unmarried for most of his life, he did little to establish a home anywhere in Alaska. He was devoted to his employees, although ill-tempered at times. Lathrop's will left generous bequests to many of his employees, hospitals in Anchorage and Fairbanks, and Catholic and Protestant churches throughout the Territory.

Austin Eugene "Cap" Lathrop was buried in the family plot in the Forest Lawn Cemetery in Seattle, Washington.⁴⁵ He was survived by his stepdaughter, Cleo McDowell Boyce of Seattle, and two nephews and two nieces.

In honor of territorial Alaska's most prominent businessman, several buildings were later named in his honor. In 1955, the Austin E. Lathrop High School was built in Fairbanks and named in his honor. In 1962, the University of Alaska Board of Regents named the largest dormitory on the University of Alaska campus the Austin E. Lathrop Residence Hall. In 1988, the *Alaska Business Monthly* nominated Lathrop to the Alaska Business Hall of Fame.

Click an image to see more

Endnotes

1. Evangeline Atwood, *Anchorage: All-America City* (Portland, OR: Binford & Mort, 1957), 52; Alison K. Hoagland, *Buildings of Alaska* (New York: Oxford University Press 1993), 85; and "A Fairbanks 50: Remembering a few who helped build a frontier town," *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, May 28, 2000, <https://www.alaska.edu/files/uajourney/A%20Fairbanks%2050.pdf> (accessed October 8, 2015).
2. " 'Cap' Lathrop was Pioneer," *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, 17th Golden Days Edition, July 1969, A-24; and Elizabeth A. Tower, *Alaska's First Homegrown Millionaire: Life and Times of Cap Lathrop* (Anchorage: Publications Consultants 2006), 5.
3. Elizabeth A. Tower, *Alaska's First Homegrown Millionaire: Life and Times of Cap Lathrop*, 6.
4. *Ibid.*, 8.

5. Biography of Austin Lathrop, *UA Journey*, University of Alaska, <https://www.alaska.edu/uajourney/notable-people/fairbanks/austin-lathrop> (accessed February 4, 2015); and “A Fairbanks 50: Remembering a few who helped build a frontier town,” *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, May 28, 2000, <https://www.alaska.edu/files/uajourney/A%20Fairbanks%2050.pdf> (accessed February 4, 2015).
6. “The Great Fire of Seattle,” *HistoryLink: The Free Online Encyclopedia of Washington*, HistoryLink.org, http://www.historylink.org/_content/printer_friendly/pf_output.cfm?file_id=10743 (accessed October 8, 2015).
7. “Panic of 1893 sends King County and Puget Sound region into a four-year depression on May 5, 1893,” *HistoryLink: The Free Online Encyclopedia of Washington*, http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=1972 (accessed October 7, 2015).
8. Ed Ferrell, compiler and editor, *Biographies of Alaska-Yukon Pioneers, 1850-1950, Volume 3* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 1997), 185-186.
9. Elizabeth A. Tower, *Alaska's First Homegrown Millionaire: Life and Times of Cap Lathrop*, 9.
10. Elizabeth A. Tower, *Alaska's First Homegrown Millionaire: Life and Times of Cap Lathrop*, 8-10; Ed Ferrell, compiler and editor, *Biographies of Alaska-Yukon Pioneers, 1850-1950, Volume 3*, 185-186; and Georg Nelson Myers, “Austin Lathrop Constructs Anacortes Railroad in 1898 [1893],” *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, July 28, 1950, 1 and 3.
11. “Panic of 1893: Seattle's First Great Depression,” *HistoryLink: The Free Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History*, http://www.historylink.org/_content/printer_friendly/pf_output.cfm?file_id=2030 (accessed October 7, 2015).
12. Elizabeth A. Tower, *Alaska's First Homegrown Millionaire: Life and Times of Cap Lathrop*, 10.
13. Michael Carberry and Donna Lane, *Patterns of the Past: An Inventory of Anchorage's Historic Resources* (Anchorage: Community Planning Department, Municipality of Anchorage, 1986), 95.
14. Elizabeth A. Tower, *Alaska's First Homegrown Millionaire: Life and Times of Cap Lathrop*, 11.
15. Terrence Cole and Elmer E. Rasmuson, *Banking on Alaska: The Story of the National Bank of Alaska, Volume I: A History of NBA* (Anchorage: National Bank of Alaska, 2000), 50.
16. Elizabeth A. Tower, *Alaska's First Homegrown Millionaire: Life and Times of Cap Lathrop*, 11-15; and Ed Ferrell, compiler and editor, *Biographies of Alaska-Yukon Pioneers, 1850-1950, Volume 3*, 186.
17. Walter R. Borneman, *Alaska: Saga of a Bold Land* (New York: Harper Collins, Publishers, 2003), 202-203; and. “The army seeks as all-American route to the Yukon,” Chapter 4-2: Overland Exploration; *Alaska History & Cultural Studies*, <http://www.akhistorycourse.org/articles/article.php?artID=167> (accessed October 8, 2015).
18. Ed Ferrell, compiler and editor, *Biographies of Alaska-Yukon Pioneers, 1850-1950, Volume 3*, 186-187.
19. Elizabeth A. Tower, *Alaska's First Homegrown Millionaire: Life and Times of Cap Lathrop*, 16-25.
20. *Ibid.*, 29.
21. Terrence Cole and Elmer E. Rasmuson, *Banking on Alaska: The Story of the National Bank of Alaska, Volume I: A History of NBA*, 50; Biography of Austin Lathrop, *UA Journey*, University of Alaska; and Elizabeth A. Tower, *Alaska's First Homegrown Millionaire: Life and Times of Cap Lathrop*, 18.
22. Lone E. Janson, *The Copper Spike* (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publishing Company, 1975), 124-127.
23. “Alaska's Coal Fields are Closed by Political Controversy,” Chapter 4-15: Mining, *Alaska History &*

- Cultural Studies*; <http://www.akhistorycourse.org/articles/article.php?artID=180> (accessed October 8, 2015).
24. "Angry Alaskans Dump Canadian Coal in Bay," *Winnipeg Tribune* (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada), May 5, 1911, 1, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed October 8, 2015).
 25. Michael Carberry and Donna Lane, *Patterns of the Past: An Inventory of Anchorage's Historic Resources*, 95; Elizabeth A. Tower, *Alaska's First Homegrown Millionaire: Life and Times of Cap Lathrop*, 46-47.
 26. The titles of this early motion picture vary. The title used here is the one used by the holder of the original print, the Alaska Film Archives at Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, AK (<http://library.uaf.edu/film-archives>).
 27. Terrence Cole, "Alaska Film Making," *Alaska Historical Society*, <http://alaskahistoricalandsociety.org/discover-alaska/glimpses-of-the-past/alaska-film-making> (accessed October 8, 2015).
 28. Elizabeth A. Tower, *Alaska's First Homegrown Millionaire: Life and Times of Cap Lathrop*, 50-62.
 29. *Ibid.*, 36-38.
 30. Barbara Snyder Berry, "A Movie Palace by Default," *Alaska Journal: A 1981 Collection*, ed. Virginia McKinney (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publishing Company, 1981): 1-7.
 31. Alison K. Hoagland, *Buildings of Alaska* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 217-218.
 32. *Ibid.*, 218.
 33. Michael Carberry and Donna Lane, *Patterns of the Past: An Inventory of Anchorage's Historic Resources*, 95.
 34. "New Alaska Station KENI, Starts May 2," *Broadcasting: The Newsweekly of Radio and Television Telecasting*, April 26, 1948, 41, <http://americanradiohistory.com/Archive-BC/BC-1948/1948-04-26-BC.pdf> (accessed October 8, 2015); Alison K. Hoagland, *Buildings of Alaska* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 101-102; and "KENI Radio Building," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, AHRS Site No. ANC-361, February 29, 1988, National Register of Historic Places, <http://focus.nps.gov/pdfhost/docs/nrhp/text/88000380.pdf> (accessed October 8, 2015),
 35. Terrence Cole, *Fighting for the Forty-Ninth Star: C.W. Snedden and the Crusade for Alaska Statehood* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Foundation, 2010), 49.
 36. Terrence Cole, *The Cornerstone on College Hill: An Illustrated History of the University of Alaska Fairbanks* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1994), 92 and 141.
 37. Ed Ferrell, compiler and editor, *Biographies of Alaska-Yukon Pioneers, 1850-1950, Volume 3*, 187; and Elizabeth A. Tower, *Alaska's First Homegrown Millionaire: Life and Times of Cap Lathrop*, 71-76.
 38. Terrence Cole, *Fighting for the Forty-Ninth Star: C.W. Snedden and the Crusade for Alaska Statehood*, 49.
 39. *Ibid.*
 40. Claus-M. Naske, *49 at Last! The Battle for Alaska Statehood*, Third Edition (Fairbanks: Epicenter Press, 2009), 125.
 41. Walter R. Borneman, *Alaska: Saga of a Bold Land*, 397.
 42. Terrence Cole, *Fighting for the Forty-Ninth Star: C.W. Snedden and the Crusade for Alaska Statehood*, 43-44.
 43. Michael Carberry and Donna Lane, *Patterns of the Past: An Inventory of Anchorage's Historic Resources*, 95.

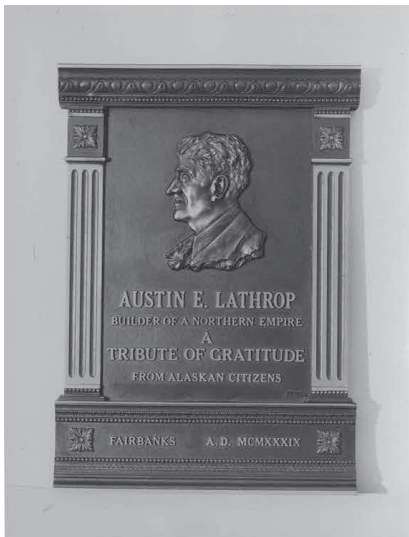
44. " 'Cap' Lathrop, Killed at the Healy Mine, to be Buried in Seattle," *Anchorage Daily Times*, July 27, 1950, 1; and "Alaska Mourns Lathrop," *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, July 27, 1950, 1 and 3.
45. "Lathrop Rites to be Sunday," *Anchorage Daily Times*, July 28, 1950, 1.
-

Sources

This entry for Austin E. "Cap" Lathrop originally appeared in *John Bagoy's Legends & Legacies, Anchorage, 1910-1935* (Anchorage: Publications Consultants, 2001), 18-20. See also the Austin Eugene Lathrop file, Bagoy Family Pioneer Files (2004.11), Atwood Resource Center, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage, AK. Note: Revised, edited, and updated by Bruce Parham and Walter Van Horn, October 15, 2015.

Preferred citation: Bruce Parham and Walter Van Horn, "Lathrop, Austin E. 'Cap'," *Cook Inlet Historical Society, Legends & Legacies, Anchorage, 1910-1940*, <http://www.alaskahistory.org>.

Major support for *Legends & Legacies, Anchorage, 1910-1940*, provided by: Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Atwood Foundation, Cook Inlet Historical Society, and the Rasmuson Foundation. This educational resource is provided by the Cook Inlet Historical Society, a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt association. Contact us at the Cook Inlet Historical Society, by mail at Cook Inlet Historical Society, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, 625 C Street, Anchorage, AK 99501 or through the Cook Inlet Historical Society website, www.cookinlethistory.org.



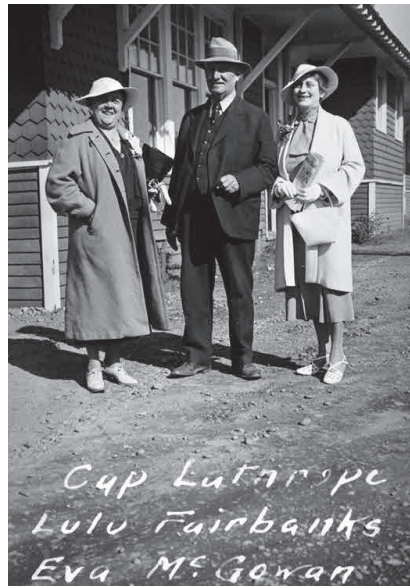
Bust of Austin E. "Cap" Lathrop. From front, the inscription reads: "Austin E. Lathrop, builder of a northern empire. A tribute to gratitude from Alaskan citizens. Fairbanks A.D. MCMXXXIX." 1939. The bust was modeled by Pietro Vigno, a Fairbanks artist, from a photograph. The plaque was placed in the studio of radio station KFAR, Fairbanks, and unveiled during dedication ceremonies held on October 2, 1939.



An ornately decorated 1919 Labor Day parade float passes by the Lathrop Building in downtown Anchorage. The first floor of the building was built in 1915; the second floor was added in 1916-1917. The first floor was designed to hold five businesses; the second floor included apartments and professional offices. From time to time Austin E. "Cap" Lathrop lived in one of the apartments.

B1965.4.37, Whittington Photographs, Atwood Resource Center, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage, AK.

B1974.005.68, Edward Coke Hill Collection, Atwood Resource Center, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage, AK.



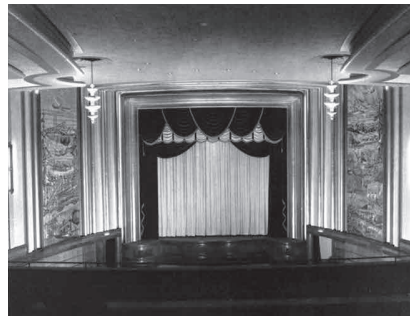
Austin E. "Cap" Lathrop with Lulu Fairbanks and Eva McGowan in 1930.

B1989.11.2, Donald V. Johnson Collection, Atwood Resource Center, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage, AK.



The 4th Avenue Theatre on the day it opened in 1947, with a line of people waiting to enter the building. The first movie shown was "The Jolson Story."

B1996.17.2 FIC Collection, Atwood Resource Center, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage, AK.



The 4th Avenue Theatre (630 West Fourth Avenue), the largest of the chain of theaters Austin E. "Cap" Lathrop built in Alaska, was begun in 1941, but construction was halted because of World War II; the building was completed in 1947. Besides its size, the theater was known for its elaborate murals that flanked the stage and screen, representing Alaska life and industry. He preferred to use the British spelling of "theatre" in officially naming these venues.

B1996.17.6 FIC Collection, Atwood Resource Center, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage, AK.



The Suntrana coal mine at Healy (115 miles south of Fairbanks), 1936. On July 26, 1950, Austin E. "Cap" Lathrop was accidentally killed when he fell beneath the wheels of a railroad car at the mine. This was one of the largest coal mines in Alaska, if not the largest, and is still operated by the Usibelli family as Usibelli Coal Mine, Inc.

Hmc-0600-17a, American Museum of Natural History, Alaska-Yukon Photograph Album, 1936, Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage, Anchorage, AK.



Austin E. "Cap" Lathrop with Miriam Dickey, his close business associate and the secretary-treasurer of the Midnight Sun Broadcasting Corporation, which he owned. Photograph, ca. 1945-1950.

B1999.14.1211, Hilscher Collection, Atwood Resource Center, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage, AK.



Austin E. "Cap" Lathrop outside a construction project. He was known for being sometimes irascible, but also for being fair and generous with his employees, who were very loyal to him.

B1999.14.1210D, Hilscher Collection, Atwood Resource Center, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage, AK.



The Empress Theatre, Austin E. "Cap" Lathrop's first theater in Anchorage, opened on July 1, 1916, was one of the town's first concrete buildings. It boasted a stage for live performances, a movie screen, and both a piano and an organ for accompaniment. The first movie shown was "Peggy," starring actress Billie Burke.

AEC-g531, P. S. Hunt, photographer, Alaska Railroad Collection, Atwood Resource Center, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage, AK.



The lobby area of the 4th Avenue Theatre at the time that it opened in 1947. Anchorage was awed by the grandeur of its new theater.

B1996.17.1 FIC Collection, Atwood Resource Center, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage, Alaska



Austin E. "Cap" Lathrop, the builder and owner of the Midnight Sun Broadcasting Company's broadcasting station KFAR in Fairbanks. He is shown at the company's transmission tower, holding blueprints. This photograph was probably taken around the time KFAR's new 5,000-watt transmitter first went into action on September 26, 1942. KFAR became the most powerful radio station in the territory and its signal covered nearly all of Alaska.

B1999.14.1209, Hilscher Collection, Atwood Resource Center, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage, AK.





AUSTIN E. LATHROP
BUILDER OF A NORTHERN EMPIRE
A
TRIBUTE OF GRATITUDE
FROM ALASKAN CITIZENS

FAIRBANKS A. D. MCMXXXIX

TAB 5

Priteca, B. Marcus (1889-1971)

By Eric L. Flom
Posted 12/12/2008
HistoryLink.org Essay 8815

Scottish-born B. Marcus Priteca (1889-1971) arrived in Seattle around the time of the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. An architect specializing in classical design, a chance encounter with vaudeville magnate Alexander Pantages (1876-1936) led to his first major project, a Pantages venue in San Francisco. It was the beginning of a fruitful partnership -- one that lasted almost two decades and firmly established Priteca as America's foremost theater architect. In addition to theatre designs such as Seattle's Coliseum, Orpheum, Paramount, and Admiral theaters, Priteca also lent his design expertise to the Congregation Bikur Cholim Synagogue, the Jewish House Educational Center, Longacres Racetrack, and the 1962 conversion of the Civic Auditorium into the Seattle Center Opera House. Priteca was named a fellow by the American Institute of Architects in 1951, and continued his design work in Seattle up to his death in 1971, outlasting many of the magnificent structures for which he was responsible.

Early Years

B. Marcus Priteca was born in Glasgow, Scotland, on December 23, 1889, the son of Charles and Diana Priteca. Charles, a successful lawyer, provided his children with a privileged upbringing in Edinburgh, where the family eventually settled. Much of Priteca's early schooling was done privately, with studies that emphasized a classical education and the arts.

By 1904 Priteca, already inspired by the buildings around him, was completing coursework at George Watson College and beginning a five-year apprenticeship under noted architect Robert McFarlane Cameron (1860-1920). He continued his studies while under Cameron, graduating from the University of Edinburgh in 1907 and the Royal College of Fine Arts in 1909 (Bagley, 443).

Priteca combined his architectural studies with an interest in the properties of sound; he was particularly fascinated by the acoustical research then being done by Wallace Sabine (1868-1919) of Harvard University. It was this interest in sound that would play a pivotal role in Priteca's architectural career.

Coming to Seattle

Just how, when, and why B. Marcus Priteca uprooted himself from Scotland is a confusing maze of stories. For example, a 1915 article in *Town Crier* (one of the first Northwest papers to feature him) notes that he

arrived in Seattle through "patronage of the Crown," having been selected to study architecture abroad. It was after hearing the opinions of fellow students that Priteca and his family decided to travel there -- glowing reports that observed that Seattle was ripe for the construction of a monumental building (*Town Crier*). It's tempting to give credence to this version, given that it came only six years after Priteca's known arrival, but the *Town Crier* article is so flamboyantly written that its truthfulness must be called into question. The article also appeared near the completion of the Priteca-designed Coliseum Theater (1916), at 5th Avenue and Pike in Seattle, leaving one to believe that the writer may have been wearing a promotional hat when penning the account.

Another version, and by far the most popular story associated with Priteca's arrival, was his abiding interest in visiting the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific (A-Y-P) Exposition, the world's fair held in Seattle during the summer of 1909. Historian Clarence Bagley (1843-1932), writing in 1929, went as far as to provide the exact date: July 6, 1909, about five weeks after the exposition opened. According to this version, the A-Y-P, coupled with his ailing father's need for a warmer climate, prompted the family move from Scotland. If true, Priteca couldn't have embraced the city immediately: He was fond of recounting how he was arrested within hours of his arrival for violating a prohibition against smoking on a public street. And despite the fact that it was July, one wonders how Seattle's climate would have been such a vast improvement over Edinburgh's.

The variations in the story continued over the years. In 1965, Priteca told John J. Reddin of *The Seattle Times* that the trip started with a 1909 office discussion about a city named "Seetle," where the A-Y-P Exposition was to open later that year. A disagreement rose when Priteca's boss, Robert MacFarlane Cameron, argued that Seetle was up along the Yukon River, which Priteca knew wasn't true. An atlas was produced to settle the Seetle argument, but no one could locate the city -- someplace called Tacoma appeared on the map where Priteca thought Seetle was supposed to be. Confident of his geography, Priteca made a quick trip to a local steamship office where he was given a more detailed map, as well as some travel brochures (perhaps A-Y-P related?) showing "Seetle" and some of its newer buildings, such as St. James Cathedral and the White Building. "I made up my mind that I would visit 'Seetle' and also see the results of the recent [1906] San Francisco earthquake," Priteca recalled (Reddin).

Priteca's colleagues teased him about his interest in such a rural city -- after all, the pictures clearly showed that "Seetle" still had overhead wiring. (This became a running joke for Priteca over the years: For as much as his architectural work changed Seattle's downtown, the offensive overhead wires were still there 60 years later.) The architect visited, and although Priteca had not intended to stay, he was immediately struck by the city. "I fell in love with [Seattle]," he recalled in 1965, "especially the excellence of the brick work and architecture, some of which still can be seen in older parts of the town" (Reddin).

Yet another story has Priteca first settling in Montreal before coming to the Pacific Northwest. And not even Priteca's death could put an end to the proliferation of stories -- one 1971 obituary claimed that Priteca lived in Vancouver before relocating farther south.

A Fateful Encounter

Once Priteca did arrive in Seattle, however, the facts of his life begin to fall into place. A friendship with local attorney Philip Tworoger led to Priteca's first job, as a draftsman for architect E. W. Houghton (1856-1927), who designed the Moore Theatre (1907) among other buildings. He didn't stay long; Priteca eventually left Houghton and joined a firm headed by W. Marbury Somervell (1872-1939), who had offices in the White Building.

It was likely that while in Somervell's employment, sometime in 1911, Priteca had an encounter with local vaudeville magnate Alexander Pantages -- a meeting that would change the young man's life forever. Priteca would spend the next two decades as Pantages's personal architect, expanding his own practice as Pantages expanded his circuit of popularly priced vaudeville houses throughout North America.

Six months before his death, Priteca recounted that Alexander Pantages was having acoustical trouble at his Portland venue, and summoned Priteca on the recommendation of others who knew of the architect's interest in acoustical properties. And here again, a possible discrepancy -- Jackie McDermott, writing in 1973, related a story in which Priteca had a chance encounter with Pantages while delivering some drawings to a Seattle architectural firm. In this version, the vaudeville manager was struck by the classical features in Priteca's work, which appealed to Pantages' own Greek heritage.

Regardless of how this first meeting actually occurred, by mid-1911 the 21-year-old Priteca had been hired to design his first house for the Pantages Vaudeville Circuit -- the Pantages in San Francisco, which opened on December 30, 1911. This was followed by a smaller Pantages venue (actually a scaled-back version of the San Francisco design) in nearby Oakland, which opened in August 1912. It was the beginning of a fruitful partnership, and many other projects followed over the years, taking Priteca as far east as Memphis and as far north as Winnipeg.

When designing houses for Alexander Pantages, Priteca often drew on classical and Renaissance architecture, building theaters into larger office complexes. The exteriors of these buildings were often done in brick or terra cotta, a building material that lent itself to various types of ornamentation. The interior details of the theaters were lavish, consistent with Alexander Pantages's desire to pull audiences out of their everyday lives and into a place of wealth and splendor.

The basic Pantages theater consisted of Roman columns on the sides of the proscenium arch, ivory and gold color schemes (these were Pantages' favorite colors), heavy drapes, and an ornamental drop curtain. The size could vary, but seating of 1,200 to 1,600 was typical, with side boxes and loge seating toward the front of the house; Priteca himself often planned the seating arrangement to maintain optimal sightlines throughout the house. ("Seeing is hearing," he once remarked to an interviewer. "Of course, a good ear doesn't hurt" [Duncan].) The auditorium itself often had contoured walls and ceilings, providing architectural detail and improving the venue's acoustics, and frequently employed ornamental domes as a centerpiece of the ceiling decoration. Pantages himself did not prefer formal lobbies, but Priteca incorporated them because rival vaudeville circuits put so much emphasis in this area. Stage lighting was often state-of-the-art in a Pantages house, but in other areas Priteca's designs were more practical. "Actors are harder on things than any other

breed of man," he told a reporter in 1971, "so I always made dressing rooms 'actor proof,' with lots of sheet metal" (Duncan).

The theaters growing out of Priteca's designs certainly looked impressive, but that isn't to say that Alexander Pantages's spent a fortune on them. Priteca adopted a Pantages's quote as his own personal mantra: "Any darn fool can build a million-dollar theater with a million dollars. But it takes a good one to build [a theater] that looks like a million and costs half that amount" (Duncan, Kreisman [p. 25], and McDermott [p. 11]).

And to this end, Alexander Pantages had a plan: He stressed that Priteca should design shallow stages and small orchestra pits, both of which allowed the venue to hire fewer musicians and stagehands. Alexander Pantages also had his houses designed to practice Jim Crow seating policies -- but only, Priteca insisted, because that's what business demanded. (Priteca maintained that Alexander Pantages was not racist and often settled lawsuits on his seating policies under very generous terms -- very uncharacteristic for a businessman with such a tight-fisted reputation.)

Although he built numerous impressive theaters over his lifetime, Priteca was particularly fond of the Seattle Pantages at 3rd Avenue and University Street, and not simply because the building housed Priteca's own offices from 1915 to 1965. That venue was, in Priteca's estimation, the one that most closely fit the times in which it was built and conformed to Alexander Pantages's view of what the perfect theater should be like.

Priteca oversaw the construction details of each new Pantages house, and frequently worked with same contractors on each project -- A. B. Heinsbergen of Seattle, for example, was the interior decorator for most Pantages houses erected between 1916 and 1931. But no one individual had more input on a house under construction than did Alexander Pantages, who remained closely involved with Priteca on every step. The Priteca Papers at the University of Washington, in fact (consisting mostly of business papers and correspondence from the early to mid-1920s), are littered with memos, notes, and correspondence from the vaudeville showman, who would sometimes engage Priteca on such tiny details as elevator service in his new houses.

However proud Priteca was of his Seattle Pantages, his efforts were topped by the Vancouver Pantages (1917), designed in French Renaissance fashion, and the Tacoma Pantages (1918), the earliest of his theaters to remain standing today (in 2008). But it was his work on the Hollywood Pantages (1930) for which he is most remembered, a radical departure in style in that he employed an Art Deco design. At the opening ceremonies for the Hollywood Pantages, Priteca himself remarked that the theater would "best exemplify America of the moment. Effort centered upon motifs that were modern -- never futuristic -- yet based on time-tested classicism [sic] of enduring good taste and beauty" (McDermott, p. 7 and Sutermeister, p. 182). Longtime home of the Academy Award ceremonies, it may be the most significant of Priteca's work and holds the distinction of being the last movie house of its kind to open in Hollywood.

Outside the Pantages Circuit

Priteca's work with the Pantages circuit had become his calling card in the industry. "Mr. Priteca has back of him the ideals of old world architecture and possesses the resourcefulness and initiative which enable him to meet the demands of the new world," remarked Clarence Bagley in a 1929 profile. "A scholar in his craft, he is thoroughly acquainted with the various styles and distinctive periods of architecture and shows an unusual power of modifying and combining the qualities composing them ... [Priteca] excels in that branch of the profession and his work has attracted much favorable attention" (Bagley, 443-444). But that isn't to say he was a one-trick pony with the Pantages folks.

When his theatrical designs were in the most demand, during the 1920s, Priteca's offices expanded along the West Coast, perhaps not-so-coincidentally in areas where the Pantages vaudeville circuit was also the most active. At one time or another Priteca had branch offices in Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, though he always called Seattle home -- unlike Alexander Pantages himself, who eventually relocated to California. Priteca was in such demand as a theater architect, in fact, that he had to remove the phone from his own conference room so he wouldn't be interrupted by calls from one theater chain while meeting with another (Duncan). During his lifetime, Priteca worked not only with the Pantages and Orpheum vaudeville circuits, but also with Warner Bros. and the locally owned Sterling Theaters.

Priteca's influence was felt all over the West Coast, in Seattle in particular: In addition to theaters spanning from Alaska to California, he personally designed the Admiral Theatre (1942) in West Seattle and the Magnolia Theatre (1948) in Magnolia, the Orpheum (1927) at 5th Avenue and Westlake, the Capitol Theatre (1920) in Yakima, and contributed to the design of Seattle's Paramount Theatre (which opened as the Seattle Theatre in 1928), working alongside the Chicago firm of Rapp & Rapp. Another collaboration took place in 1962, when Priteca worked with James J. Chiarelli to turn the existing Civic Auditorium (1928) into the Seattle Opera House. (The Opera House project wasn't one that Priteca was very enthusiastic about, given the amount of work required and the miniscule \$2.3 million dollar budget. When it opened, however, as part of the 1962 Seattle World's Fair, he and Chiarelli won huge raves for their work.)

Even so, Priteca's work went beyond theaters, even from the beginning of his career. He designed Seattle's Crystal Pool (1914) at 2nd Avenue and Lenora, a neoclassical terra cotta building said to be a direct influence when he was hired by Joseph Gottstein (1891-1971) to build the Coliseum Theatre in 1916. His work on Congregation Bikur Cholim Synagogue (1915, later the Langston Hughes Cultural Center) and the Jewish House Educational Center (1916) reflected Priteca's own heritage as an Eastern European Jew. (Priteca, along with another firm, would later work on the design for the Temple de Hirsch Sinai [1960].) He also was involved with the design of Seattle's Public Safety Building (1950) at 3rd Avenue and Cherry Street, a less-than-memorable building that was demolished in 2005.

Easily Priteca's most incredible feat, however, was his design of Longacres Racetrack (1933), built for Joseph Gottstein in a mere 28 days with a construction crew that worked around the clock (Becker). (Gottstein was eager to capitalize on the state of Washington's recent legalization of horse racing following a quarter-century ban.) He picked the right man: Priteca, an avid sports fan, was known to frequent Longacres over the years in order to play the ponies -- and was probably tickled that a special "Priteca Handicap" was run at the track for many years.

Priteca's designs weren't limited to buildings. He once submitted plans for the Locomobile auto, as well as a grille and windshield design for the Paige automobile, forerunner of the Graham-Paige. These may have been a stretch for America's foremost theatrical designer, but were undertaken only partly for the professional experience. Years later Priteca admitted that he took on these challenges primarily because he was interested in the woman who asked him to submit the designs (Duncan). Apparently it didn't work -- Priteca remained a lifelong bachelor.

Honors

Although his designs had been earning raves for decades, it wasn't until 1951 that B. Marcus Priteca was formally recognized by his peers: In that year he was elected a fellow by the American Institute of Architects, the only theater architect in his lifetime to be so honored by the group. Priteca was long held as the "dean" of theatrical architects in America, and the honors continued to come in through the years. Even after his death, in fact, Priteca was extended an honorary membership in the Theatre Historical Society, which lauded him as "the last of the giants" (Sutermeister, p. 184). Later, in 1986, he was recognized by the University of Washington as one of eight original members in a new "architectural hall of fame."

But, despite all his accomplishments, Priteca ("Bennie," to his friends) wasn't a pretentious man and never liked to call attention to himself. A Scottish Rite Mason and member of the Arctic Club, he was -- in his own eyes -- not all that notable. His only claims to fame, he once told a reporter, was that he was one of few Pritecas in the United States, that he smoked in upwards of 20 cigars a day, and that he was one of only a handful of Jews entitled to wear a Scottish kilt (Reddin). He frequently brushed off his professional reputation by calling himself "just an old vaudeville architect," and was always dissatisfied with his building projects. "I don't think I'm a good architect," he told John J. Reddin in 1964. "In fact, I would like to start [every job] all over again" (Reddin).

Last Days

Although the Great Depression brought an end to the era of lavish theaters, Priteca maintained a busy schedule well into the 1960s, when time eventually caught up with the architect -- and many of the structures he helped design. For half a century Priteca's Seattle offices were on the 5th floor of the Pantages Building (eventually, in the 1930s, renamed the Palomar), but in 1965 the building was demolished for the construction of a parking garage. (The site remains a parking garage in 2008. Like overhead wiring, these things don't go easily.)

The demolition of the Palomar marked a bittersweet end for a longstanding Seattle monument, but was one of many Priteca designs to come down during his lifetime. The Crystal Pool had been gutted years before, the Pantages/Palomar demolished in 1965, followed by the Orpheum in 1967. Other once-spectacular venues, such as the Coliseum and Paramount theaters, continued to operate but were hardly the glamorous venues they had once been.

Priteca often claimed that he would retire after the Palomar came down, but in reality he couldn't leave the trade behind, often serving as a consulting architect on projects. ("I've been retiring for 20 years, [but] they

won't let me," he frequently exclaimed [Duncan].) Priteca continued to work (and smoke his 20 cigars) almost right up to his death.

Cancer claimed B. Marcus Priteca on October 1, 1971. He was survived by sisters Fannie Green and Esther Priteca, both of Seattle. Memorials were left with Children's Orthopedic Hospital and the American Cancer Society.

Following his passing, many people lauded Priteca's architectural work, but those who knew him intimately mourned instead the passing of a good friend. James Chiarelli, who worked with Priteca on the Seattle Opera House project in 1962, praised not only his professional accomplishments, but also his personal warmth and willingness to teach others. "To [Priteca]," Chiarelli noted, "contentment was a cigar, friends and talk" (Evans).

It was perhaps a sentiment that B. Marcus Priteca himself would have agreed with. "For some, life has been work," he told Don Duncan shortly before his death. "[F]or me, it has been a happy time. It has been nice" (Duncan).

This essay made possible by:
Washington State Department of Community, Trade & Economic Development



B. Marcus Priteca (1889-1971), 1961

Photo by Josef Scaylea, Courtesy Richard F. McCann Collection



B. Marcus Priteca in on-site office at Coliseum Theatre, Seattle, 1916

Courtesy MOHAI (Neg. SHS 19,111)



Coliseum Theatre (B. Marcus Priteca, 1916), Pike Street and 5th Avenue, Seattle, 1920s

Postcard



Crystal Pool natatorium (B. Marcus Priteca, 1913), 2nd Avenue and Lenora Street, Seattle, n.d.

Courtesy Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society



Pantages Theatre (B. Marcus Priteca, 1911), 3rd Avenue and University Street, Seattle, ca. 1915

Courtesy Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society



Pantages Theatre (B. Marcus Priteca, 1918), Tacoma, ca. 1929

Courtesy Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society



Postcard of Capitol Theater (B. Marcus Priteca, 1920), Yakima, ca. early 1920s

Courtesy Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society



Longacres racetrack clubhouse and grandstand, Renton, 1935

Courtesy MOHAI (Neg. No. P-I 1986.5.5318.2)



B. Marcus Priteca, closing ceremonies for Orpheum Theatre (Priteca, 1927), Seattle, 1967

Courtesy Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society



Orpheum Theatre (B. Marcus Priteca, 1927), Seattle, October 1927

Courtesy MOHAI (PEMCO W & S)



Orpheum Theatre (B. Marcus Priteca, 1927), ca. 1953

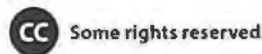
Photo by Tom Moore, courtesy Dale Toussaint

Sources: B. Marcus Priteca Papers, Special Collections, University of Washington; B. Marcus Priteca Files, Chris Skullerud Collection, Museum of History and Industry; Richard C. Berner and Richard McCann, "Interview with Bernard Marcus Priteca (April 23, 1971)," B. Marcus Priteca Papers, Special Collections, University of Washington; Bruce Rogers, "Architect and Artist," *The Town Crier*, July 24, 1915, p. 7; John J. Reddin, "'Benny Priteca' About to Lose Happy Home," *The Seattle Times*, September 27, 1964, p. 33; Sally Dunstan, "Either Palomar or Pantages, She Was a Jewel," *Ibid.*, Magazine Section, May 23, 1965, p. s 10-11; Don Duncan, "Meet Mr. Architect," *Seattle Times, Charmed Land Magazine*, January 24, 1971, p. 4; "B. Marcus Priteca, Noted Architect," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, October 3, 1971, p. E-17; "Movie Palace' Designer, B. Marcus Priteca, Dies at 82," *The Seattle Times*, October 3, 1971, p. F-8; Walter Evans, "'Mr. Architect' B. Marcus Priteca, Theater Designer,"

Seattle Post-Intelligencer, October 5, 1971, p. C-14; Jackie McDermott, "Priteca," from *Intermission: Featuring Original Drawings of B. Marcus Priteca*, program for The Architectural Secretaries Association Annual Fundraiser, November 29, 1973; "New Architectural Hall of Fame Honors Eight Who Developed Regional Style," *The Seattle Times*, November 2, 1986, p. B-11; Lawrence Kreisman, "Curtain Up," *The Seattle Times*, *Pacific Magazine*, May 6, 1990, pp. 24-29; Clarence Bagley, "B. Marcus Priteca," in *The History of King County Washington*, Vol. 2 (Seattle/Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1929), pp. 443-444; Victor Steinbrueck, *Seattle Architecture 1850-1953* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Company, 1953); Mariam Sutermeister, "B. Marcus Priteca," in *Shaping Seattle Architecture: A Historical Guide to the Architects* ed. by Jeffrey Karl Ochsner (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), p. 180-185; "B. Marcus Priteca (1889-1971)," Puget Sound Pipeline Online (Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society) website accessed June 20, 2008 (www.postos.org); HistoryLink.org, The Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History, "Longacres Racetrack," (by Paula Becker) www.historylink.org/ (accessed September 12, 2008).

Related Topics: [Biographies](#) | [Jews in Washington](#)

Licensing: This essay is licensed under a Creative Commons license that encourages reproduction with attribution. Credit should be given to both HistoryLink.org and to the author, and sources must be included with any reproduction. Click the icon for more info. Please note that this Creative Commons license applies to text only, and not to images. For more information regarding individual photos or images, please contact the source noted in the image credit.



Major Support for HistoryLink.org Provided By: The State of Washington | Patsy Bullitt Collins | Paul G. Allen Family Foundation | Museum Of History & Industry | 4Culture (King County Lodging Tax Revenue) | City of Seattle | City of Bellevue | City of Tacoma | King County | The Peach Foundation | Microsoft Corporation, Other Public and Private Sponsors and Visitors Like You

B. Marcus Priteca

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Benjamin Marcus Priteca (December 23, 1889 – October 1, 1971) was born in Glasgow, Scotland of Jewish heritage.^[1] A theater architect, he is best known for his work for Alexander Pantages.

Contents

- 1 Education and career
- 2 Gallery
- 3 Notes
- 4 References
- 5 External links

Education and career

Priteca graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 1907 and later attended the Royal College of Art. He served a brief apprenticeship under architect Robert MacFarlane Cameron, in Edinburgh, before emigrating to the United States, where he settled in Seattle, Washington, in 1909.

Priteca met Seattle vaudeville theatre owner Alexander Pantages in 1910 and won from him a commission to design the San Francisco Pantages Theater (1911), the first of many so-named vaudeville and motion picture houses in what would become one of the largest theater chains in North America.

In all, Priteca designed 22 theaters for Pantages and another 128 for other theater owners. Notable theaters include the Coliseum (1915) in Seattle; the Pantages (1918) in Tacoma, Washington; the Pantages (1920) in Los Angeles (downtown); the Pantages in San Diego (1924); the Pantages (1928) in Fresno, California; the Paramount (1929) in Seattle; the Pantages (1929) in Hollywood (the last and largest of the Pantages theaters); the Warner on Pacific Boulevard in Huntington Park (1930); and the Admiral (1938) in West Seattle, and the Orpheum^{[2][3]} in Vancouver, Canada.

Pantages is said to have liked Priteca as a theater architect for his ability to create the appearance of opulence within a less-than-opulent budget. "Any damn fool," Pantages is quoted as saying, "Can make a place look like a million dollars by spending a million dollars, but it's not everybody who can do the same thing with half a million."

Priteca's apprentices included Gregory Ain, who went on to success as a modernist architect (practicing in a very different manner). Ain worked with Priteca for a short time in the late 1920s and helped draw the Los Angeles Pantages.^[4]

Benjamin Marcus Priteca

Born	December 23, 1889 Glasgow, Scotland.
Died	October 1, 1971 Seattle, Washington
Nationality	Scottish
Alma mater	University of Edinburgh in 1907
Occupation	Architect
Practice	Robert MacFarlane Cameron,
Buildings	Pantages
Projects	theatre architect



The Orpheum Theatre with advertising for the movie *Lady Luck*, circa 1946. Priteca's Orpheum on Granville Street, Vancouver, Canada.

Benjamin Marcus Priteca remained active as an architect well into his eighties, working as a consultant in the design of the Seattle Opera House (1962) and the Portland, Oregon, Civic Auditorium (1968).

He died in Seattle on October 1, 1971.

Gallery



Terracotta Green man,
Coliseum Theatre,
Seattle



Terracotta Griffins,
Crystal Pool, Seattle



The Alhadeff
Sanctuary of Seattle's
Temple De Hirsch
Sinai, a late Priteca
project.



Priteca's Pantages Theater in
Hollywood.



Civic Auditorium (now
Keller Auditorium) in
Portland



Detail of Priteca's Chevra Bikur
Cholim synagogue (1912), now
Langston Hughes Performing Art
Center, Seattle.

Notes

1. Normand, Eugene. "A Tale of Two Cities' Jewish Architects: Emile Weil of New Orleans and B. Marcus Priteca of Seattle". academia.edu. Retrieved 2015-09-09.
2. <http://www.vancouverhistory.ca/orpheum2.htm>
3. Orpheum (Vancouver)
4. Denzer, Anthony (2008). *Gregory Ain: The Modern Home as Social Commentary*. Rizzoli Publications. ISBN 0-8478-3062-4.

References

- Cinema Treasures list of theatres designed by B. Marcus Priteca (<http://cinematreasures.org/architect/93/>)
- Biographical sketch of B. Marcus Priteca (with photographs) at Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society (<http://www.pstos.org/history/priteca.htm>)

TAB 6

Artwork of A. B. Heinsbergen

BMCA#81.55.185

Oil on Canvas, 10" x 12"

BMCA#F75.2.4

Watercolor and ink on paper, detail of image

[\[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_BAcueiOjGFs/RcC0PoVEOCI/AAAAAAAAAFM/ulU4OS9nOQq/s1600-h/heisbergen+forblog.jpg\]](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_BAcueiOjGFs/RcC0PoVEOCI/AAAAAAAAAFM/ulU4OS9nOQq/s1600-h/heisbergen+forblog.jpg)

At the age of 13 A. B. Heinsbergen came to the United States from Holland. Already skilled in classic painting and art restoration he immediately (his second day in the U.S.!) began as an apprentice working with a theatre decorator where he quickly developed skills in mural and scenic art painting. At the age of 19 he was employed by a prominent theatre designer to paint the interiors of both the Orpheum and Pantages theatres and by the age of 22 Heinsbergen had inherited a business with several commissions lined up to design and paint some of the most famous theatres throughout the U.S., Canada and Mexico. His unique and opulent style is best described as a blend of Art Deco and Spanish Renaissance Revival styles. By the time he retired Heinsbergen had decorated over 750 buildings, most of which were theatres but also renowned hotels like the Biltmore, private mansions and other high profile businesses. In addition to his well known painting style Heinsbergen is also recognized for his incised metal techniques and also as one of the first people to work with specialized paints that glow under the earliest developed black light.



The Smithsonian Museum recognized Heinsbergen's prolific work and in 1975 staged a traveling exhibit of his work titled "Movie Palace Modern." Bowers Museum was one venue for the exhibit and after the show Heinsbergen graciously donated 6 framed works of small renderings and interior details he designed in the 1920's. Some of these were used to show clients potential schemes or options for beams and ceilings and others are specific to buildings such as the rendering shown here of a ceiling detail of the Pantages Theatre in Los Angeles.

[\[http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_BAcueiOjGFs/RcC0P4VEODI/AAAAAAAAAFU/0o3qP6J8vjE/s1600-h/8155185+for+blog.jpg\]](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_BAcueiOjGFs/RcC0P4VEODI/AAAAAAAAAFU/0o3qP6J8vjE/s1600-h/8155185+for+blog.jpg)

Not widely known is that in his personal time Heinsbergen was just as prolific an artist as in his professional work. He painted regularly as a form of relaxation and described his style as an "impressionistic realism." In contrast to his professional work he painted mostly outdoors emphasizing movement and color. His personal paintings almost always show wide open expanses and many are painted from a perspective that gives the viewer a bird's eye view. The Bowers Museum has over 300 of Heinsbergen's paintings that were made in his private time and a selection of these will be shown along with his professional design work in "The Lifework and Private Paintings of A. B.



Heinsbergen: Artworks from the Collection of Bowers Museum." This exhibition is the first in a series that will be displayed at Chapman University's Henley Galleria as part of a newly formed partnership between the institutions. Exhibition runs February 6, through March 31, and is free to the public.

All images and text under copyright. Please contact Collection Department for permission to use. Information subject to change with further research.

Posted 31st January 2007 by [Collection Department](#)

RE: Historical and cultural importance of the work of Antoon “Anthony” Heinsbergen

Excerpt of a 1982 opinion by the California Court of Appeals

The Orinda Theatre was designed by Alexander Aimwell Cantin (1877–1964). One of California's first registered architects, he was involved in designing several important buildings in San Francisco.² It was originally constructed in 1941; the adjoining Bank Building, built in 1947 by the same architect and in the same “Art Deco” or “Moderne” style, forms a unified architectural unit with the Theatre. The tower on the Theatre forms an identifying landmark clearly visible from the Highway 24 freeway. The Theatre is 40 feet high in the front and 45 feet high in the rear; its sign tower is 75 feet in height. With 750 seats, it is the last large, old-style theatre in Contra Costa County.

The interior of the theatre is decorated in both the foyer and the auditorium with wall and ceiling murals by Anthony T. Heinsbergen (1895–1981), one of the leading decorative artists of the period. Heinsbergen designed interiors and painted murals for such buildings as the Paramount Theatre in Oakland; the Interstate Commerce and Labor Department Buildings in Washington D.C.; the Los Angeles City Hall; the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles; the Sir Francis Drake Hotel in San Francisco; and the Fox-Wilshire and Pantages Theatres in Hollywood. His work was the subject of an exhibit by the Smithsonian Institution which toured the United States in 1972–74.

On August 13, 1982, acting on a nomination by Friends and BAHA, the California State Historical Resources Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the Theatre and Bank Building be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The State Office of Historic Preservation found that the Theatre was “an outstanding example of its genre,” with a “remarkable” interior of “high artistic value” and “exceptional quality,” and that although the two buildings were less than 50 years old, they were both of “exceptional importance.” The properties were subsequently certified by the Department of the Interior as eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

Orinda Assn v. Bd. of Supervisors, 182 Cal. App. 3d 1145, 1152–53, 227 Cal. Rptr. 688, 692 (Cal. App. 1986)

A Guide to Historic Architecture in Fresno, California

- [Home](#)
- [National Register](#)
- [Local Register](#)
- [Districts](#)
- [Tours](#)
- [Biographies](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

Biographies of Architects, Designers, and Builders

Anthony B. Heinsbergen (1894-1981)

Anthony (Antoon) B. Heinsbergen, nationally acclaimed Dutch-born muralist, was born in Holland on December 13, 1894. He began his craft as an apprentice in Holland before emigrating to Los Angeles in 1906. Heinsbergen continued his art education in Los Angeles while working five years in the trades and studying at the Chouinard Art Institute.

In 1922, after traveling and working throughout the U.S. and Canada to gain practical experience, Heinsbergen founded the A.B. Heinsbergen Decorating Company in Los Angeles. Over the next six years, he captured an impressive catalogue of commissions including architectural ornamentation and mural contracts for Elks Clubs in Los Angeles and San Francisco; the Pacific Coast Club, Long Beach; Gables Club, Santa Monica; Union Trust & Savings Bank, Los Angeles; Tower Theatre, Los Angeles; Roosevelt Hotel, Hollywood; the Beverly-Wilshire Hotel and, most notably, the soaring new Los Angeles City Hall in 1928.

That same year Heinsbergen undertook designing the interior decor for the new Hotel Tioga in Merced, California. For dramatic effect, he drew upon such diverse sources as Native American, Spanish and Italian design traditions. Borrowing from the indigenous designs of hand-woven baskets, he created boldly-patterned geometric borders richly painted in authentic hues of red, blue, black, yellow and white. Portraits of King Ferdinand V, Vasco Nuñez de Balboa and Hernando de Soto he rendered in the heroic Spanish tradition. His Italian-inspired beams, panels and mouldings were lavishly trimmed in gold leaf, then hand-detailed using Tiffany-derived coloration in elephant-hide grey, purple and green. Other surfaces were adorned with Italian ribbon motifs polychromed in red, blue, gray, green and gold. Heinsbergen's keen sense of color and vivid palette, along with his innate ability to combine distinctively different architectural vocabularies into a visually cohesive mixed idiom, were handsomely illustrated in the Hotel Tioga. During this period of tremendous artistic output, Heinsbergen's firm often employed a work force of more than one hundred artists and artisans.

Throughout his career Heinsbergen collaborated with the most prominent architects of his day on buildings of all types, but his artistic reputation is indelibly linked to theater decors. Legendary impresario Alexander Pantages presented the 30-year-old artist with his first theater commission in 1924, and Heinsbergen went on to decorate over 750 theaters nationwide during America's golden age of theater construction. He was most proud of his classically-inspired murals for the Orpheum Theater in Vancouver, B.C., but is largely remembered for his "delightful mish-mash of byzantine sumptuousness, Art Deco cubism and pure kitsch, perfect for the timeless and vulgar opulence of movie-going." Notable among his major Art Deco-inspired commissions in Los Angeles was his work for the Wiltern Theatre in the serpentine-towered Zigzag-Moderne Pellissier Building of 1930-31.



Heinsbergen also created the highly-stylized "Leda and Swan" wall murals and the gracefully curvilinear "Leaf and Vine" ceiling motifs for Fresno's [Tower Theatre](#) of 1939 (on left).

Heinsbergen's mature work, though customarily admired by the general public and the architectural press alike, occasionally became the focus of civic controversy and anxiety. One particularly contentious debate took place in Sacramento during 1937, when a group of community-minded citizens publicly condemned his newly-painted murals in the bar of the Senator Hotel. Adapting the genre of lifelike portraits within a colorful montage of graphic shapes, patterns and objects symbolic of the British monarchy, the artist depicted the romance of former King

Edward VIII--later proclaimed Duke of Windsor--and American divorcée Mrs. Wallis Warfield Simpson. Entitled "Choice of an Empire," the central panel measured an imposing 8x9 feet in scale and included, in addition to the royal subjects, representations of several deck-of-cards court characters, the clergy and a frolicking but "mocking" cupid. What ensued in the press was a lively debate over the subject of art vs. bad taste. Heinsbergen responded straight away: "Bad taste? That's far fetched," he snorted. "Those murals are history, just history--a fine romance cleverly done. It's not meant to be satire and we weren't trying to be funny." Two years later in Fresno, fearing the possibility of a similar public outcry, theater representatives ordered the Tower Theatre murals cleverly repainted shortly before opening night to make six female figures appear more modest.

In addition to the mythical but scantily-clad Leda he depicted in his suite of six tondos for the Tower Theatre, Heinsbergen also completed a significant collection of less provocative commissions in Fresno, including an elaborately ornamented coffered ceiling for the [Pacific Southwest Building](#), commonly called the Security Bank Building; wall medallions for the PWA Moderne [Memorial Auditorium](#) (on right); and ceiling murals for the main reading room of [Fresno State College Library](#), now Fresno City College Library. The deeply-coffered ceiling spanning the old baronial banking hall in Fresno's reigning skyscraper has been newly uncovered after being obscured from view by a false ceiling for many decades. Murals and medallions in the Memorial Auditorium, images once believed to have been irreparably destroyed when the building was repainted, have also been recently revealed and meticulously restored. Heinsbergen's classically-derived ceiling panels in the college library's lofty reading room have survived impressively intact for well over half a century. Composed of portraits of influential educators set against representations of great historical epochs, the reading room murals are considered among the finest examples of Anthony Heinsbergen's preferred painting style, the personal idiom for which Heinsbergen hoped to be most remembered.



Although it has been said that Heinsbergen did not favor the type of stylized characteristics evident in his Tower Theatre murals, he masterfully adapted to a succession of radical changes in architectural fashion, ornamentation and technology that dictated the use of such motifs during the 1930s. In fact, innovations in the design of mercury-vapor lamps made it possible for the Tower Theatre murals to represent a very early use of fluorescent paints and ultraviolet (black) light. Architect [S. Charles Lee](#) had first experimented with this novel lighting device in his Academy Theatre in Inglewood. Shortly thereafter, the Tower Theatre became the second theater in the nation to use such illuminated decoration. The blacklight was designed and engineered for the project by R. H. McCullough and Walter Bantau. Heinsbergen assistants, brothers Tom and Frank Bouman, were largely responsible for the final installation of the Tower Theatre murals, and completed painting them at night by blacklight to assure that they would achieve the proper fluorescent effects.

Reflecting on his career and commenting on the demise of grand movie theater design, Heinsbergen said, "They stopped building them in the 1940s, when there was a depression in the movie business. There were no good pictures coming out and television was just coming in. But you know what really killed them? No parking. People started going to the suburban theaters so they could park their cars. It's as simple as that." Nevertheless, Heinsbergen still completed theater commissions in the 1940s, including the Lorenzo Theater in San Lorenzo, California.

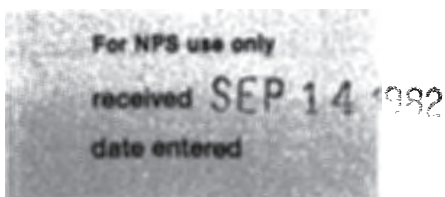
During the latter years of his career, Heinsbergen participated in the restoration of a number of fine theaters, including the Oakland Paramount during the early 1970s. Anthony Heinsbergen died on June 14, 1981, at age eighty-six. His son subsequently assumed management of the firm as A. T. Heinsbergen & Company, specializing in the restoration of historic buildings and, quite fittingly, historic theaters. The junior Heinsbergen coordinated the restoration of his father's Fresno Tower Theatre murals in 1989-1990. The firm also completed restoration of the historic Orinda Theater in 1989.

©1996 John Edward Powell. All rights reserved.

Photo of Tower Theatre lobby ©1992 Russell Abraham.

Copyright © 2010 Historicfresno.org. All Rights Reserved.

TAB 7



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Fourth Avenue Theatre (AHRS SITE NO. ANC-284)

and/or common The Lathrop Building; Lathrop's Showhouse

2. Location

street & number 630 West Fourth Avenue not for publication

city, town Anchorage vicinity of ~~Congressional district~~

state Alaska code 02 county Anchorage Division code 020

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> NA	<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 Wometco Lathrop Building ATTN: Hugh McCauley (907) 277-8659
Executive Vice President

street & number P.O. Box 012440 911 W. 4th Ave.
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

city, town Miami vicinity of state Florida

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. District Recording Office (907) 264-6770

street & number 911 West 4th Avenue

city, town Anchorage state Alaska 99501

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Patterns of the Past: An Inventory of
title Anchorage's Heritage Resources (1979) has this property been determined eligible? yes no

Alaska Heritage Resources Survey, OHA, State Div.
date of Parks, 619 Warehouse, Anchorage, AK99501(1981) federal state county local

depository for survey records Michael Carberry, Municipality of Anchorage, Planning Dept., Hill Bldg
or State Div. of Parks, 619 Warehouse Ave., Anchorage, AK (907)264-4676

city, town Anchorage state Alaska

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

The 4th Avenue Theatre is a prominent Art Deco Style landmark in the heart of Anchorage's central business district. In fact, the significant Art Deco building takes its name from Anchorage's "Main Street" -- Fourth Avenue. It is the most important edifice in Alaska to honor the noted public figure, Austin E. "Cap" Lathrop (1865-1950), a transportation, mining, and theater tycoon -- and one of the earliest multimillionaires in Alaskan history.

Construction of the theatre was the culmination of a 25-year dream for the eminent Austin E. Lathrop. (See significance statement.) "Cap," as the most prominent self-made Alaskan millionaire pioneer (19th and/early 20th century) was generally known, had the intention of leaving the 4th Avenue Theatre and Lathrop Building as "his legacy to the fine people of Alaska." To do so, Mr. Lathrop hired a prominent Seattle-based architectural firm, (Marcus) Priteca and (A.A.) Porreca, to design the building in the late 1930's. C. William Hufeisen was then selected as contractor for the construction -- which was one of the longest in the city's history. Not long after the 1941 groundbreaking, the World War II-induced supply-shortage resulted in a five year hiatus in Alaskan private and public construction. (The delay proved worthwhile; as it is told that Cap Lathrop gained renewed inspiration about this project.) During the interim of the war years he extended already ambitious plans, making this even moreso "The showplace of Alaska." It was not until 1947, therefore, that the theatre was fully completed. The resulting, high fashioned decor -- particularly the plush interior -- was, and continues to be, even more astonishing than was originally planned.

The overall dimensions of the attractive Lathrop Building, are 86'9" by 130'. The theatre itself is 61'8" wide and has a depth of 130' from lobby to the rear. The capacity of the theatre is 960 people. Downstairs seats 680 patrons, while the balcony holds an additional 280. At the time, Anchorage had only a small town population (about 5,000), so 4th Avenue Theatre was most capacious and lavish for the time and place.

The front facade is highlighted by a four-story high pylon, vertically displaying in Art Deco lettering, "4th Avenue." When a marquee was added beneath the pylon in the early 1950's, the entire sidewalk entrance to the theatre was then protected by a cast concrete projection. The ground floor is composed of rich finished ashlar-faced travertine; complemented by a floor-border base of serpentine. The travertine interior work is repeated in the entryway, in forming of the ticket booth, and in portions of the lobby that are not wood panelled, or with decorative art. The original doors to the theatre are walnut and etched glass. The predominant finish of the ground floor, and the balcony lobbies are both in dark walnut, repeated in curved, fluted panels and other details such as handrails and trim. Lighting fixtures, and the base of all lounge seating, is of clear plexiglass. Finished in Classic Art Deco styling, plexiglass features are relatively small in scale and unobtrusive. The original fine-quality carpeting in the lobby, and the theatre area, is yet under the present carpet, to add plush foot comfort. An exposed portion still covers the ticket booth floor, as an example of the quality and color of the original custom carpet material.

4th Avenue Theater is considered by experts to represent "the culmination of the Art Deco movement in the U.S." Skilled practitioners of the art, here "honed down the showy nature of the 1930-50 fad style into a gem-like distillation of highest quality -- beautifully integrated into regional motif and a creative, exciting individuality" -- unsurpassed by any other known example in the Pacific Coast region.

(Continued)

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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater (movie)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input checked="" 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 1941–47 **Builder/Architect** B. Marcus Priteca and A.A. Porreca, Architects; and C.W. Hufeisen, Builder.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The 4th Avenue Theatre is significant for two essential reasons: (1) its vital association with an outstanding 55-year long Alaskan business and industrial entrepreneur -- Austin "Cap" Lathrop; and (2) its exceptional, but uncommon Art Deco style of architecture, of which this is the best example in Alaska, and among the best in the nation still in existence, and use, as a motion picture theatre.

Cap Lathrop: The Man Behind this Theatre

4th Avenue Theatre (The Lathrop Building) stands in strong testimony to the builder; energetic and legendary "Cap" Lathrop. It is both a monument to him, as well as a monument made by him. Lathrop was uncommonly dynamic. His achievements in Alaskan transportation, broadcasting, politics, construction, and mining were significant steps which advanced the Territory from a frontier past toward a progressive future, and eventual Statehood.

Austin "Cap" Lathrop, son of a Michigan farmer, was born in 1865. He left school in the ninth grade, moving with his family to Wisconsin. In 1889, he went to Seattle to begin a pioneer contracting business in the wake of that city's most devastating fire. Lathrop continued to advance in the building trade. He profited also in construction of the Anacortes-Fidalgo City Railroad. His prosperity, however, was ruined by the depression of 1893. Consequently, Lathrop began looking for new opportunities; and the glitter of frontier Alaska seemed ideal to his dimensions.

The year 1895 proved to be especially important, since it marked the beginning of Cap Lathrop's 55-year Alaskan entrepreneurship. The spark that ignited Lathrop's interest in Arctic Alaska was said to be a brief conversation with Captain ("One Eye") Kelly, a salted, veteran skipper, and saloon acquaintance. Kelly told of the placer gold which had just been discovered in the Turnagain Arm section of the northern Kenai Peninsula. Lathrop became interested -- not by the lure of gold -- but in the opportunities that shipping and freighting, could bring to a gold rush scene. Through a loan from A.E. Barton of the Fry Meat Packing Co., Lathrop, Kelly, and John O'Neill jointly purchased the L.J. Perry, a small, but sturdy two-masted schooner. The initial voyage, laden with passengers and freight for the Cook Inlet gold fields, led to years of increasing success in a variety of enterprises.

In 1910, seeing the potential of the Copper River and North Western Railroad, and also the Richardson Highway, Lathrop started his Alaska Transfer Company, headquartered in Cordova, the new seaport terminus for the rich interior Kennecott copper mines. Like other Cordova citizens, Lathrop became embittered about the closing of the large Bering River coal fields. (Alaskans had been forced to import coal when more than enough of the low-price fuel was available nearby.) Their displeasure came to a head in 1911, when tons of imported coal were surreptitiously dumped in Cordova Bay. (Lathrop, reputedly, was a leader of this latter-day "Boston coal party.") The effort achieved a desired effect; within three years Alaskan coal lands were re-opened by the U.S. Government. Lathrop relocated his rapidly-growing Transfer Company to Anchorage in 1915 when the Alaska Railroad selected Ship Creek as the site

(Continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References

- Berry, Barbara "A Movie Palace by Default," Alaska Journal. Volume II, 1981, Annual Edition.
- Carberry, Michael E. Patterns Of The Past: An Inventory of Anchorage's Heritage Resources. Municipality of Anchorage, 1979. (Continued)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 0.3 acres
Quadrangle name Anchorage (A-8), Alaska

Quadrangle scale 1:63 360

UMT References

A

0	6	3	4	4	6	2	5	6	7	9	0	4	2	5
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

LOTS 3 and 4, BLOCK 41 Original Townsite

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

state N/A code county code

state N/A code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Michael E. Carberry, AICP, Senior Planner

Historic Landmarks Commission/

organization Municipality of Anchorage

date 11-9-81

street & number Pouch 6-650

telephone (907)264-4224

city or town Anchorage

state Alaska

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 State Historic Preservation Officer

date Sept 3, 1982

For NPS use only

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


Keeper of the National Register

date 10-5-82

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Fourth Avenue Theatre (AHRS SITE NO. ANC-284)

For NPS use only
received 9/1/82
date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 2 of 2

The interior of 4th Avenue Theatre is the spark that brings the building to dramatic effect. The murals -- a rich collection of prime Alaskan -- provide an uncommonly handsome lining to the heart of the theatre. There are four sets of murals: a huge, floor-to-ceiling pair, which depicts the commercial and industrial growth of Alaska -- helps to frame the stage. The third mural is a resplendent three-dimensional view of North America's tallest mountain, Mt. McKinley, brightening the spacious lobby. A fourth set of murals forms a panel of Alaskan wildlife scenes, above the curved carpeted stairway to the balcony. Each mural is different in the means by which it was executed (media being essentially plaster bas-relief); although the silver and gold metallic bas-relief color effect is common to all.

The lighting and seating of 4th Avenue Theatre are noteworthy. A casual look toward the ceiling brings into focus the familiar Big Dipper and North Star constellations, shining forth in a configuration of twinkling starlight. Additional lighting is provided by large colorful glass baubles. Those large red, orange, and yellow globes, hang about midway down each aisle. The seating is carefully structured in order to provide straight aisles and unobstructed sight lines for seated patrons; accomplished by providing love seats at the ends of alternating rows.

A.B. Heinsbergen and Frank Bouman, the final interior decorators whom Cap Lathrop hired from Los Angeles, were responsible for producing the murals, as well as the complementary and notable Art Deco decor designed by Priteca and Porreca. In Heinsbergen's words, Bouman "worked on the murals extensively. . . installed them and supervised the entire decorative scheme."

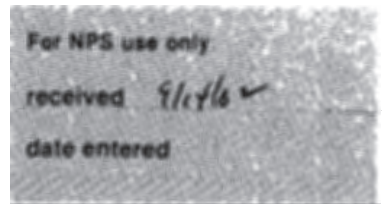
Although advertised as, and usually referred to as, "4th Avenue Theatre," the structure is, formally, named The Lathrop Building. The theatre represents a substantial portion of the total structure. Lathrop initially intended that the building would also contain his first Anchorage radio and later TV station, KENI. Thus, while the first floor and core of the building were devoted to cinema, the second and third floors were designed to serve a variety of radio-television station functions, including studios, control rooms, record storage, as well as other offices, at a time when all of this was a pioneering venture for Alaska, and the emerging metropolis of Anchorage.

Over the years, occupancy of the various floors has changed. KENI-TV now operates in the spacious, sound-proof concrete basement. The first floor and auditorium continue to serve Anchorage movie-goers. Al-can, a Japanese/American fish marketing concern, has an outlet -- "Pier II" -- on the ground level facing 4th Avenue. The second floor was converted to offices and apartments in the 1950's. (At present, this floor is, temporarily, vacant.) The third floor still houses the offices of the large (now Florida based) Alaska Wometco-Lathrop Corporation. The Anchorage Wometco staff currently manages the 4th Avenue Theatre, as well as four other Anchorage theatres, two in Fairbanks, and another in Cordova -- all successors to the first "movie house" built by Lathrop in old Cordova, about 1910.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Fourth Avenue Theatre (AHR SITE NO. ANC-284)



Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2 of 4

for the Territory's most massive construction project; and the only significant (Government) railroad ever built in Alaska.

During the first half of this century, Cap Lathrop was established as a leading public figure, ". . .Alaska's Principal Resident Tycoon" (Gruening, 1973: 130). Lathrop's political philosophy tempered during his bitter experiences in politically-motivated resource development, and consequent government resource withdrawals. When the statehood movement arose, he became a leading opponent, more comfortable with Alaska's independence and "free-wheeling" frontier stance. He did not, however, stand on the sidelines of politics. Eventually his representation included Newspaper publisher (Anchorage News, and Fairbanks News Miner, 1918-1950); election to the Territorial House of Representatives, 1920-1923; Republican National Committee, 1928-1932 and 1949-1950; and the University of Alaska Board of Regents, 1932-1950 (during a time of substantial growth).

His almost-exclusive chain of Alaskan theatres was formed by Lathrop in the years between 1910 and 1929. He considered motion pictures "the most eagerly-devoured form of family entertainment in the frigid northland." "Movies," he said, "provided a social outlet especially enjoyed by all." "Cap" delighted in bringing happiness to children in the isolated rustic Alaskan towns. On holidays, he frequently opened his theatres to "kids," for free movies. Starting with the Empress at Cordova (1910, and rebuilt in 1915), Lathrop developed his "entertainment" chain. Other theatres in addition to Cordova included Anchorage's Empress (1916); and the Lacey and Empress Theatres in Fairbanks (before 1929). Along with building "movie-houses," he also became involved in the "film industry." As president of the Alaska Motion Picture Corporation, Lathrop in 1923 produced "The Last of the Cheechakos," the first (and only) major film ever produced in Alaska.

Later years saw continued expansion of Cap Lathrop's economic domain. He added the Healy River Coal Mines, and then proceeded to pioneer development of the broadcasting industry. Radio stations KFAR in Fairbanks, and KENI were the forerunners of the Midnight Sun Broadcasting Company, Alaska's oldest and largest.

Cap Lathrop remained an active industrialist well into his eighties. In 1950, the year he died, he served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention, while still managing his multiple enterprises. At Suntrana Mine, on July 26, a railroad accident would take Austin Lathrop's life. The Alaskan press reported ". . .loss of a foremost, leading citizen -- one of the first of her self-made men who stayed to invest in her future." He was portrayed as "Alaska's best-known Millionaire" in Edna Ferber's best-selling novel, Ice Palace.

Opening of 4th Avenue Theatre, (Lathrop Building)

The 4th Avenue Theatre achieved instant acclaim on a spring day in 1947 when it opened its doors with "The Jolson Story" flashing across its large screen. "The theatre is a landmark in the transition of Anchorage from a frontier community to a city of permanence. It is a landmark in the development of a city in which families live, work, play, and die. . ." stated an Anchorage Daily Times editorial after the gala opening.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

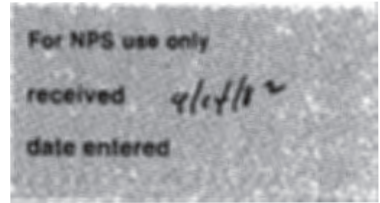
National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

Fourth Avenue Theatre (AHRS SITE NO. ANC-284)

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 3 of 4



As "the gem of Alaskan theatres," the quality edifice has maintained its stature as a dominant Anchorage business building. In consideration of its interior and exterior, this building represents the foremost; indeed one, of only two significant Art Deco buildings in all of Alaska. One who goes to a "downtown" movie here today -- during idle moments before the "feature" starts -- may observe the respect that the audience holds for this building. As eyes wander from mural to mural -- to the rich walnut woodwork and the Big Dipper ceiling lights -- it becomes apparent that this is a special place for Alaskans. An occasional, "They don't build them this way anymore," echoes the sentiment felt by many. On the opening night in 1947 one observer commented: "Touring the theatre's ultra-gorgeous interior, is like walking through a kaleidoscope."

The original interior color scheme: rose, chartreuse and light blue, is still intact. The only change has been the carpeting. The interior work of Los Angeles-based A.B. Heinsbergen, Bouman, and Porreca assisted by architect "Mark" Priteca, FAIA, remains noteworthy.

Of Dutch descent, Heinsbergen started working while in his teens, creating murals, and carrying out interior theatre decoration. He became known as the leading decorator for Pantages Theatres. By his own account, Heinsbergen decorated 741 theatres. He also "did" state capitols, city halls, hotels, restaurants, and churches. What makes his murals so endearing to Anchorage's movie-goers is their Alaskan motif -- which vividly captures the spirit of land and history in distinctive gold-leaf and silver tones.

B. Marcus Priteca, F.A.I.A. (who worked closely with A.A. Porreca and Heinsbergen, in creating the theatre interior) was respected as "dean of American theatre design." He was born in Glasgow, Scotland, (ca. 1889) and received his architectural education at University of Edinburgh. Priteca emigrated in 1909, and soon established himself as a prominent Seattle architect. By 1913 he had met Alexander Pantages (who started in the Arctic gold rush) to begin a long professional relationship, resulting in memorable "Pantages Theatre Designs." (As a complement to his Jewish faith -- he designed a number of stylish synagogues.) Priteca's theatre designs include: Seattle's The Coliseum (1916; listed in the National Register), The Paramount (Seattle), The Magnolia (Seattle), The Ortheum (Vancouver, B.C.), and Hollywood Pantages (1927). The Hollywood edifice represents the country's first important use of Art Deco style in U.S. theatre design. Priteca was the first theatre designer awarded a fellowship by the American Institute of Architects. His association with A.B. Heinsbergen was extensive. (In fact, it is "difficult to decipher where Priteca's thoughts and interior design work end, and Heinsbergen's begin.") Priteca was a noted illustrator as well as a draftsman. The 4th Avenue mural concepts are attributed to him. He designed a wide variety of creative architectural motifs over many years; and although he operated primarily out of Seattle after 1929, Priteca also worked extensively in Los Angeles during his fruitful career. The 4th Avenue Theatre's "late Art Deco" characterized his most creative work during the late 1930's and 1940's; and is considered an important architectural contribution of this highly prolific man.

Cap Lathrop called the opening of the theatre "the happiest day of my life." His dedication