

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

Ser. No. _____
HABS _____ HAER _____ NR 3 SHL _____ Loc X
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C _____ D _____

IDENTIFICATION

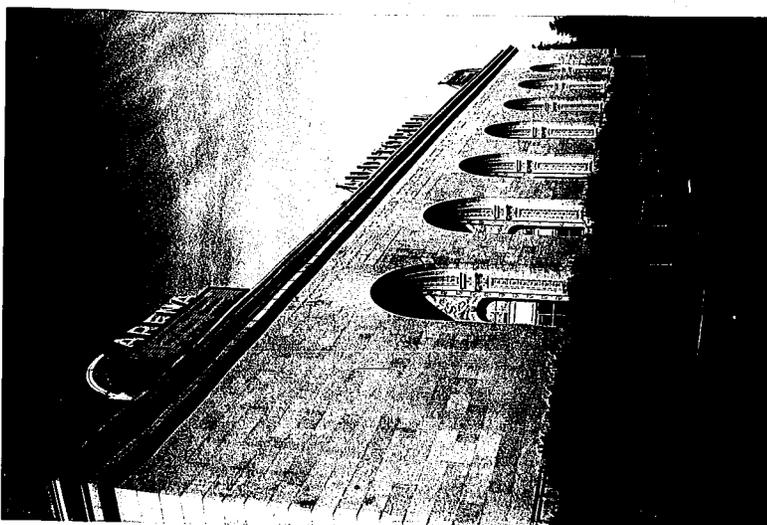
1. Common name: Henry J. Kaiser Convention Center
2. Historic name: Oakland Auditorium
3. Street or rural address: 10 10th Street
City Oakland Zip 94607 County Alameda
4. Parcel number: 0-450-1
5. Present Owner: City of Oakland Address: 1421 Washington Street,
Room 409
City Oakland Zip 94612 Ownership is: Public X Private _____
6. Present Use: Theater and indoor arena Original use: Theater indoor arena and art museum

DESCRIPTION

- 7a. Architectural style: Beaux Arts derivative with Renaissance/Baroque ornament
- 7b. Briefly describe the present *physical description* of the site or structure and describe any major alterations from its original condition:

The Oakland Auditorium is a large, rectangular gable roofed structure located on filled land facing Lake Merritt near downtown Oakland, California. The siting of the building is related to an original idea that it be the centerpiece of a civic group including a library and a museum in a u-shaped ensemble which would be visible across Lake Merritt. The simple orderliness of the exterior belies a complex internal organization of varied spaces accommodating a variety of functions. Classical massing and ornamental detail contributes to the simple unity of the design and to the monumental public image demanded by the site and the place in the proposed civic group

The building is of steel frame and reinforced concrete construction with a specially designed system of roof trusses that lighten the amount of steel required. The building is clad in granite on its principal north facade (facing Lake Merritt) with terra cotta trim, most notably in seven monumental circular arch niches. The other facades are clad in stucco. Lamps, sconces, and marquees at the east and west entrances to (see continuation page 3)



8. Construction date:
Estimated _____ Factual 1913-15
9. Architect John J. Donovan;
H.F. Hornbostel, (arch.);
M.C. Couchot (cons.eng.)
10. Builder E.A. Zeitfuchs
(superintendent of construction)
11. Approx. property size (in feet)
Frontage 400 Depth 200
or approx. acreage _____
12. Date(s) of enclosed photograph(s)
1982

266-1

10 10th St.; Oakland
Auditorium: (North Elevation)

- 13. Condition: Excellent Good _____ Fair _____ Deteriorated _____ No longer in existence _____
- 14. Alterations: Wheelchair ramps at east and west entries; new signs
- 15. Surroundings: (Check more than one if necessary) Open land _____ Scattered buildings _____ Densely built-up
Residential _____ Industrial _____ Commercial _____ Other: Laney College, Oakland Museum, Lake Merritt and Peralta Park
- 16. Threats to site: None known _____ Private development _____ Zoning _____ Vandalism _____
Public Works project _____ Other: _____
- 17. Is the structure: On its original site? Moved? _____ Unknown? _____
- 18. Related features: None

SIGNIFICANCE

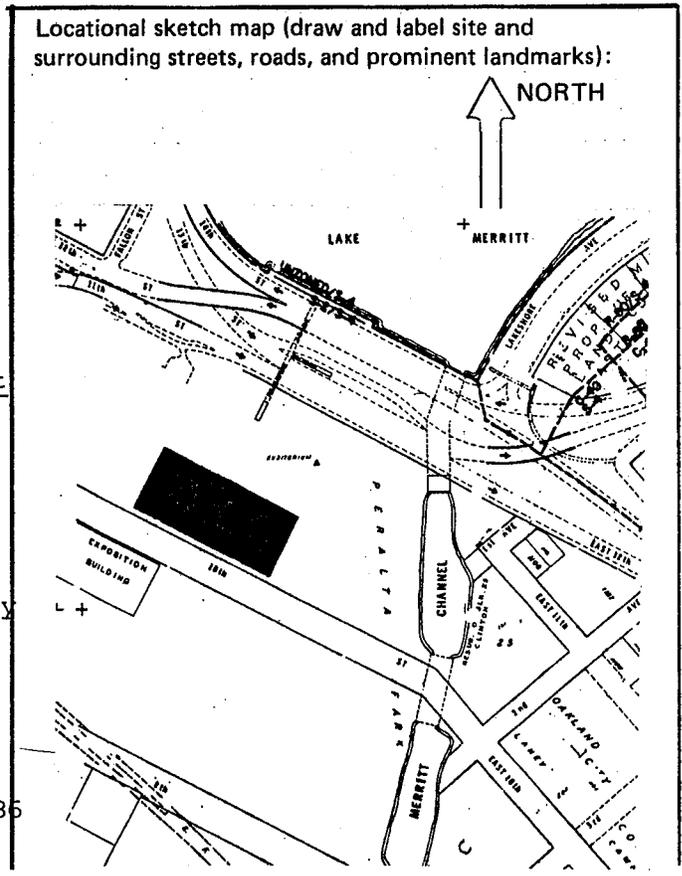
19. Briefly state historical and/or architectural importance (include dates, events, and persons associated with the site.)
 The Oakland Auditorium is significant as a fine example of Beaux Arts civic architecture, and as a major work of one of northern California's leading early 20th century architects, John J. Donovan, who at the time of the Auditorium's construction was supervising architect of the 1911-14 City Hall. It is distinguished by its clear organization of a complex interior, by its terra cotta ornament and use of materials, and by its interior spaces, notably the theater. The planning of large and diverse functions within a single shell articulated in a strong, clear, uncomplicated manner is extremely skillful. The quality of the terra cotta reliefs in the niches of the north facade is exceptional. The designs are important as the work of noted sculptor Alexander Stirling Calder. The contrast between the rich glazed terra cotta of the niches and the surrounding smooth expanses of granite wall heightens the strength of each in a manner that recalls the Oakland City Hall (see SHRI form) and the Fine Arts Building at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburg, both designed by Henry Hornbostel consulting architect for the Auditorium, and Donovan's employer at the time of the Oakland City Hall design. The theater, by virtue of the richness of its ornament (see continuation page 6)

- 20. Main theme of the historic resource: (If more than one is checked, number in order of importance.)
 Architecture 1 Arts & Leisure 2
 Economic/Industrial _____ Exploration/Settlement _____
 Government 4 Military _____
 Religion _____ Social/Education 3

- 21. Sources (List books, documents, surveys, personal interviews and their dates).
"The Oakland Auditorium Scheme", Architect and Engineer, XXX, 1 (August, 1912) 51-5.
O.P. Shelley, "Municipal Auditorium for the City of Oakland", Architect and Engineer, XXXI, 3 (April, 1914) 79-86.
- 22. Date form prepared April 30, 1983
 By (name) Staff and Consultants
 Organization Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey
 Address: City Planning Dept., City Hall
 City Oakland Zip 94612
 Phone: (415) 273-3941
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- 21. (Cont'd.)
Engineer, (XXXXI,3), April, 1914, 79-86
"Donovan Deposed; Mathews Gets Job", San Francisco Chronicle, 12/9/13.

(See continuation page 9)



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7b. Physical Description (continued from page 1)

the building are shown on the plans to be iron, but some appear to be bronze.

Ornamental details are sparse except in the richly decorated and individually designed niches, each of which contains in the upper portion, a terra cotta relief of human figures, collectively entitled "Riches of the Earth" (Hayes). The individual groups are titled "The Joy of Effort", "Wisdom of the Earth", "Gifts of the Air", "Wealth of the Sea", "Consolation of Arts", "The Duties of Life" and "The Wealth of the Mind".

Elaborate cast iron cresting, now removed, originally ran along the roof ridge. The cresting and the niches were designed for a dramatic nighttime effect through illumination.

The plan of the building is evolved from the location of the 10,000 seat arena of the east end and the 3,000 seat theater at the west end with secondary, service, and circulation spaces arranged where they would fit. The arena and theater are back-to-back with the theater stage capable of being opened at the rear end and the stage floor lowered to create a single 13,000 seat convention space running the length of the building. It is from this possibility that the arched north facade is derived expressing the essential unity of the interior. This unity is also expressed by the nearly identical east and west gable ends of the building, which are the principal entrances to the arena and the theater respectively. These elevations are composed of central arcaded bays above the entrance marquees, with clerestory windows lighting the arena on the east elevation and lighting the theater's upper level lobby on the west elevation.

The arena and theater are largely encircled by corridors at the ground level, some of which are intended to function as exhibit space as well. Upstairs at the theater end are the former Municipal Art Gallery (now a reception room) and a large ballroom and various meeting rooms. At both ends of the building, upper levels are reached by ramps rather than stairs, as well as by elevators. The building also houses executive offices, rest rooms, changing rooms, and showers.

The interior spaces are treated, as explained in The Architect and Engineer (August, 1912 p. 51-55) "according to the character of the room". Thus, "The arena will have concrete slopes, wooden floor, exposed ornamental roof trusses, panel walls", and a skylit roof designed to be openable to create an open air space. At the same time the theater, art gallery, second level meeting room, and second level lobby are finished in ornamental plaster work. Most notably, the roughly square two level theater contains a rectangular proscenium with enriched pulvinated border, flanked by canted wall sections containing arched and screened upper level organ pipes framed by giant fluted Corinthian pilasters. An elaborate entablature with modillioned cornice and garlanded frieze extends along the tops of the walls. The elaborately ornamented ceiling is divided by heavy beams into a large center section and smaller border sections. A large gilt-framed bowl-type amber glass chandelier hangs from the middle section; four smaller cylindrical chandeliers with circular bases hang from the corners. A U-shaped balcony with richly decorated pulvinated railing extends along the sides and rear.

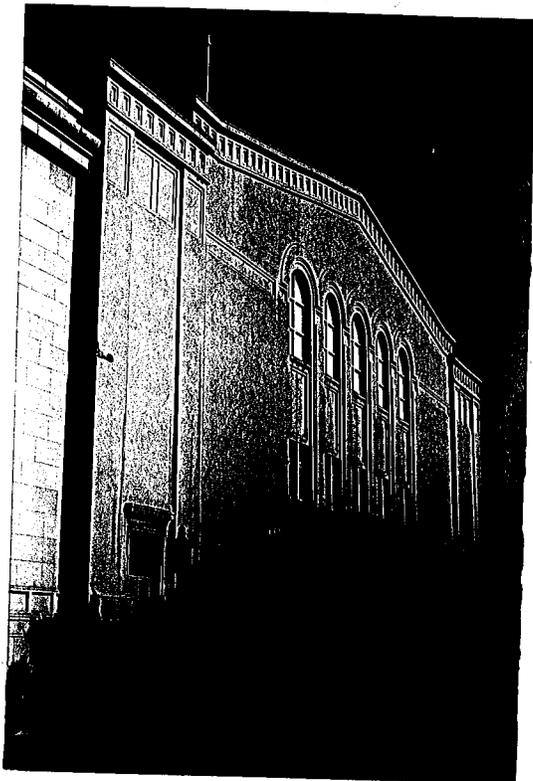
As the site exists today, the projected mall to the lake is developed with a parking lot and a divided roadway across the top of the 12th Street Dam on the north.

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7b. Physical Description (continued from page 3)

Trees within the parking lot partially obstruct views of the main elevation from across the lake. To the west is the Oakland Museum, built in 1969, and to the east is the Lake Merritt Channel and Peralta Park. The building is bordered by 10th Street on the south.



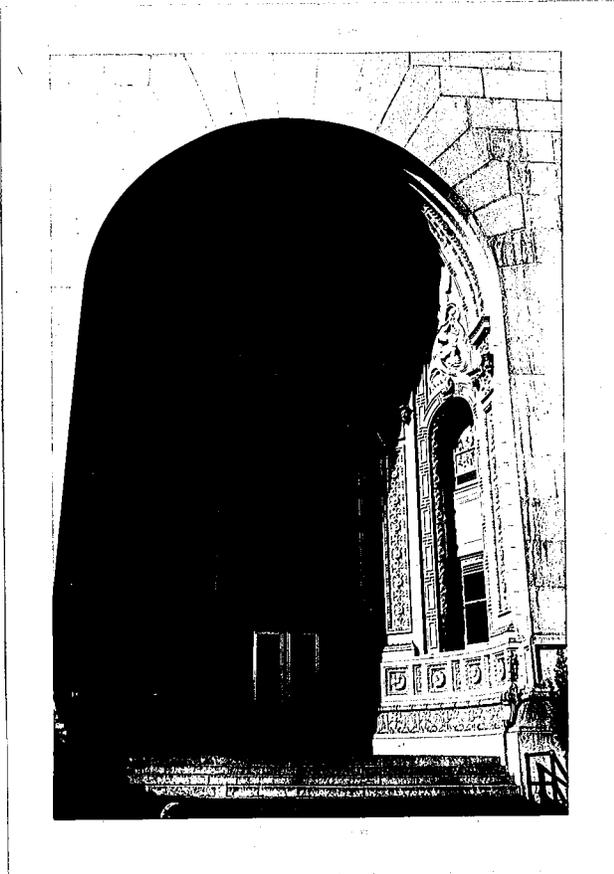
257-4 10-10th St.;
Oakland Auditorium:
(West elevation)



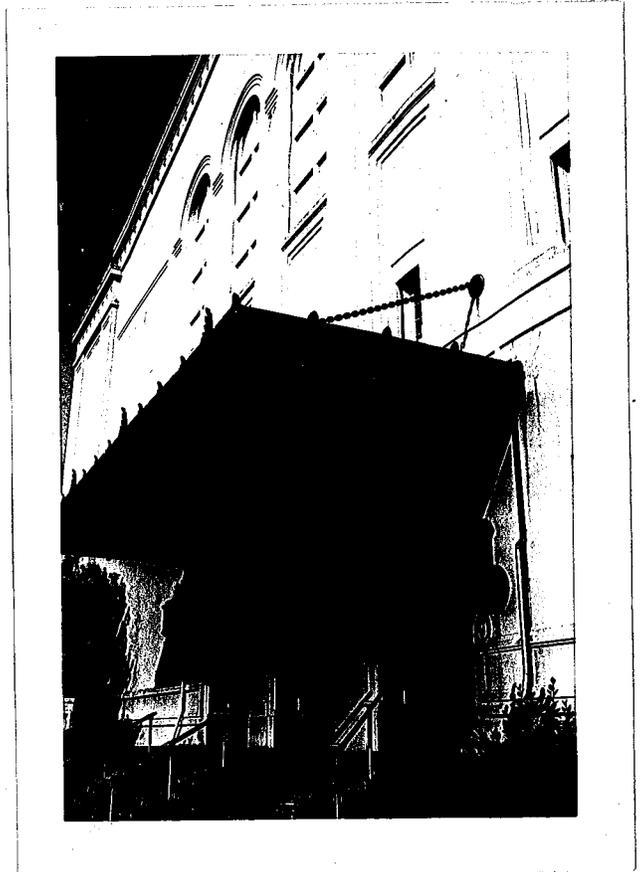
266-2 10-10th St.; Oakland Auditorium:
(E. elevation)

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266-4 10-10th St.; Oakland Auditorium (N. elevation; far-left niche)



266-9 10-10th St; Oakland Auditorium:
(East elevation entrance)

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19. Historical and/or Architectural Importance (continued from page 2)

and the monumental quality of its high square space is one of the most dramatic theater interiors of its era still standing in the Bay Area.

The Auditorium is also significant as one of Oakland's major long-established public facilities, serving as the scene for numerous important public events during its many years of operation. Its use as a major activity center, its massive scale, its distinctive north facade, and its highly prominent location as the principal focal point at the south end of Lake Merritt have given it a familiarity closely associated with the City itself. In its monumental Beaux Arts design and projected inclusion within a grandiose civic center, the Auditorium is Oakland's most prominent reflection of the early 20th century City Beautiful Movement and of the movement's impact on the thinking of architects and civic leaders. The Auditorium was a major element of the ambitious civic improvement program of Mayor Frank Mott (1905-15), which also included the new City Hall, Lakeside and numerous other parks, and the early development of the Port of Oakland.

According to Hegemann, work began on the auditorium in 1913. The date shown on the original plans is September 1, 1913. The plans also show John J. Donovan, as architect, and Henry F. Hornbostel, as consulting architect. The auditorium was initially conceived as primarily a convention center and was a major element in an ambitious scheme of public and private projects promoted by Oakland's business community following the 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco. The San Francisco disaster caused much of that city's commerce to be drawn to Oakland and stimulated one of Oakland's major periods of rapid growth, including most of downtown Oakland's existing skyscrapers. The Oakland business community sought to capitalize on the situation, sensing the possibility that Oakland might become a serious rival to San Francisco as the Bay Area's leading city. Attracting big conventions through provision of the Auditorium was considered essential to accomplish this objective. A companion facility to the Auditorium was the nearby 1910-12 Hotel Oakland, (see National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form) at the time, one of the largest and most sumptuous hotels on the west coast, built in part to accommodate the anticipated flood of convention goers (Oakland Hotel Company Brochure).

A \$500,000 bond issue for the Auditorium was voted in 1912 (Shelley) and John J. Donovan was selected as architect with Maurice C. Couchot as consulting engineer. The final report of the Auditorium Commission Finance Committee identifies N. Clark & Son as the terra cotta supplier for the niches and Alexander Stirling Calder as the sculptor. After approval of the bonds, the original convention hall concept was expanded at the urging of civic organizations to include the theater, art gallery, ballroom and other spaces, but without an increase in the available funds. The inevitable cost overruns in the construction led to a crisis, resulting on December 9, 1913 in the City Council's replacement of Donovan as supervising architect with Walter J. Mathews. Donovan's dismissal had been urged by a Chamber of Commerce committee, which had earlier been among the leading promoters of the expanded facility (San Francisco Chronicle, December 9, 1913). In accepting the position, Mathews attempted to disassociate himself from the controversy and to give Donovan all possible credit for the design, adding that "as an auditorium plan, I consider it a good one". In an attempt to reduce the costs, the City Council awarded the concrete contract with the provision that the main north facade be "imitation cement stone" rather than the originally proposed limestone or granite, but reversed itself after receiving a telegram

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from Hornbostel, which stated that "The public.... will never forgive the execution of its monumental facade in imitation material". (Oakland Enquirer, 3/16/14). A second \$500,000 bond issue was eventually voted in 1914 to allow completion of the project, the final cost of which was \$978,052 (Finance Committee Report).

The building's innovative features and the controversy surrounding the costs were the topics of a series of articles in the influential architectural periodical, Architect and Engineer. In the April, 1914 issue, civil engineer O.P. Shelley notes the Auditorium's role as the centerpiece of the Lake Merritt civic complex and calls special attention to the "fine character" of the niches. The article describes the common stage of the arena and theater as "a decidedly novel feature" along with the use of ramps rather than stairs, and notes the ability of the openable skylight over the arena to turn the room "almost into an open-air amphitheater". A thin "Self-Sentering" roof was used over the theater and arena, reducing costs by allowing the use of a lighter steel frame, including "three-hinged trusses" specially designed for the arena by engineer Maurice C. Couchot.

Although obtaining considerable recognition for his work on the Auditorium and on Oakland City Hall, John J. Donovan eventually became best-known as an expert on school architecture, having designed many of Oakland's early 20th century school structures (another component of Mott's improvement program, of which Oakland Technical High School (1914) at 4351 Broadway is among the best. His book "School Architecture", became a widely used reference work.

The works of sculptor Alexander Stirling Calder, who studied with Chapu and Falguiers in Paris, are widely spread across the country and include the well-known statue "Washington in Peace" on New York City's Washington Square Arch. According to his daughter, Mrs. Margaret Calder Hayes, he lived in the Bay Area from 1913 to 1915 to serve as Acting Chief of Sculpture for the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition, and was commissioned to execute the niches during his stay. Hayes' future husband posed as a model for one of the music group figures in the Auditorium niches.

Engineer Maurice C. Couchot, a native of France, was described as "internationally famous" in a June 30, 1933 San Francisco Chronicle obituary and was an early advocate of reinforced concrete construction. He was later a member of the architecture and engineering firm of Couchot, Rosenwald and Roeth.

The auditorium opened April 30, 1915 with a three day celebration, "Dance of a Thousand Colors". Special efforts were made to expedite the opening so that the auditorium could accommodate the many conventions attracted to the Bay Area by the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition. (San Francisco Examiner, November 20, 1912).

Until the 1960's, the auditorium served as Oakland's principal public facility for conventions and a wide range of large-scale indoor events. Entertainments which have appeared there over the years included Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, vaudevilleans Gallagher and Shean, circuses, and numerous major sporting events. Musical performers included Sergei Rachmaninoff, Feodor Chaliapin, Pablo Casals, Ernestine Schumann-Heink, Paul Whitman and his orchestra and Al Jolson (Sturm). In recent years the Grateful Dead have frequently performed in the facility. In the 1960's, the auditorium was supplemented by the Oakland Coliseum and Arena for sporting events and exhibitions,

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in the 1970's by the reopening of the 1931 Paramount Theater as a municipal performing arts center (see SHRI form for 2025 Broadway) and in 1983 by the George P. Scotlan Convention Center at 10th and Broadway. Prior to its relocation to the Paramount, the Oakland Symphony Orchestra performed at the Auditorium theater.

After 68 years of heavy use and considerable wear, the Auditorium temporarily closed at the end of 1982 for major rehabilitation. It will reopen as the Henry J. Kaiser Convention Center, in tribute to the well-known Oakland industrialist, and serve as an annex to the Scotlan Convention Center. The rehabilitation was funded by an important innovative scheme involving sale of the Auditorium and adjacent Oakland Museum to private investors as a tax shelter and leaseback of the facilities by the city with an eventual repurchase option financed from the surplus, with interest, from the sale.



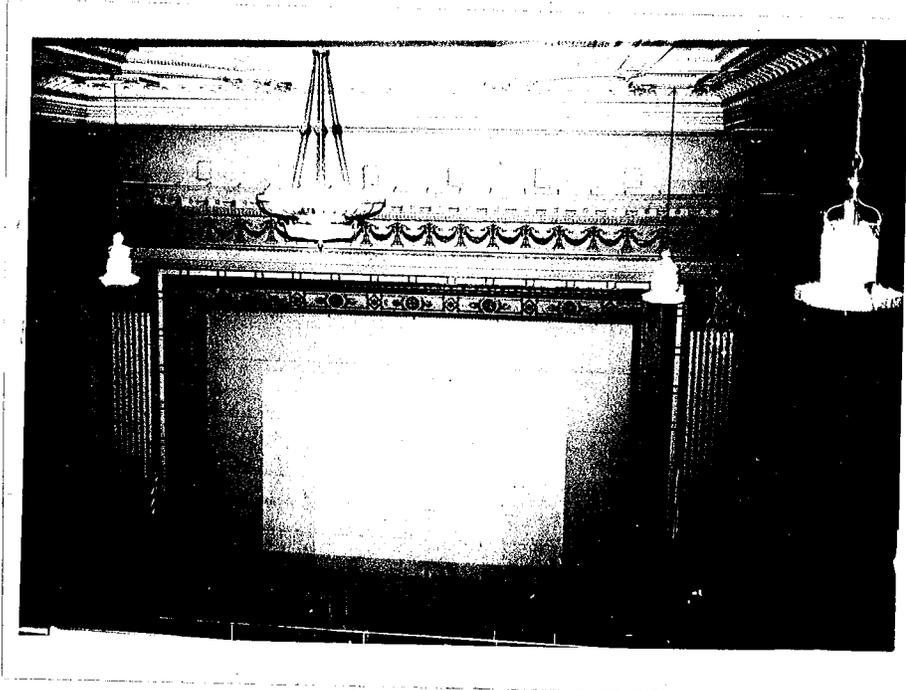
281-15A 10 10th St.; Oakland
Auditorium: (detail:
Theater Interior

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21. Sources (continued from page 2)

- "Commissioner Anderson and the Auditorium", (editorial),
Oakland Tribune, 11/10/13
- "Telegram Comes Late; to be Limestone", Oakland Enquirer,
3/16/14
- R.S. Kitchener, The Oakland Civic Auditorium and Opera House...
(brochure), c. 1916 (n.d.)
- William Sturm, "The Oakland Auditorium, A History, Oakland Heritage
Alliance News, March-April, 1982, 5.
- Oakland Hotel Company, "In interest of sale of twenty-five hundred
shares of the preferred capital stock of the Oakland Hotel Company..."
(prospectus), c. 1911 (n.d.)
- Report to City Council by Finance Committee, Auditorium Commission
June 7, 1915 (from files of City Architect).
- "Auditorium for the City of Oakland" (Plans and Specifications), J.J.
Donovan, Architect; Oakland, California; 9/1/13, revised 6/22/14.
New York Times, 3/20/49, 76
- Norval White and Elliot Willensky, AIA Guide to New York City, Revised
Edition, New York, 1978 65-66.
- American Federation of the Arts, American Art Annual, XXX (1933), 454.
- Interview with Mrs. Margaret Calder Hayes, 1983.
- "Work on Auditorium Will Be Expedited", San Francisco Examiner,
11/20/13



281-18A 10 10th St.; Oakland Auditorium: (Theater Interior)