

# Modern Tendencies in THEATRE DESIGN



DISCUSSING modern tendencies in theater design, a writer in one of the architectural magazines thinks that he is justified in saying that the design of a theater should be theatrical. This, however, would seem to be hardly an appropriate word to use, since architecture is real, while theatrical is commonly interpreted to mean an illusion. However, the word might be correctly applied to stage settings since there is a fine distinction between the stage and the theater itself.

The "movies" have revolutionized the theater. They have made it democratic. People of all classes who pay the same price of admission—a price which all can afford—sit side by side, see the same performance and all are made equally comfortable. An unusual condition has thus been brought about, which accounts in no small measure for the present tendency to create elaborate theater interiors—designs which often fairly ooze ornament, in which an undecorated surface is seldom seen, and luxury is suggested in every detail.

The audiences in these motion picture theaters are largely made up of the masses. These people revel in luxury and beauty which are beyond their means. They, therefore, patronize those theaters which appeal to them most in luxury and beauty. At the same time, these theaters satisfy the intelligentsia. To them, their ornateness is not a suggestion of luxury, but serves actually as a stimulant to their imagination. It thrills the one class and attracts the other.

The plan of a theater is largely a matter of seating. In the larger houses in the metropolitan districts, where land cost is high, it is necessary to include as many seats as possible in order to reduce the cost per seat. This necessitates mezzanine and balcony floors in addition to the orchestra. The actual layout of these several floors is governed to a very great extent by building

codes and fire laws enforced in the various cities. Projection and sight lines, too, must be properly considered. Based on these stipulations, the problem is to give the occupant of every seat in the house a clear and unobstructed view of the stage. Ten or fifteen years ago, it might have been necessary to permit of an unobstructed view of the screen only. But today the photoplay is only a part of the entertainment which the motion picture theater presents. It is often preceded by "jazz" and classical selections by a capable orchestra, and followed by solo or chorus numbers which are presented with elaborate stage settings. These, then, necessitate a clear view not only of the entire stage, but of the orchestra as well.

Modern engineering skill has come to the assistance of architects in the solution of this phase of theater design. The piers and columns which supported the balcony in the old-fashioned theater are now dispensed with, so that one seat is just as good as another, and apparatus may be installed by which the floor of the orchestra pit is raised so that during a feature number the musicians are in clear view of the audience, and when the picture goes on, they are again lowered out of sight.

The modern motion picture theater must allow for the presentation of numbers which require a full stage setting, as well as a screen. Acoustics, too, must be considered.

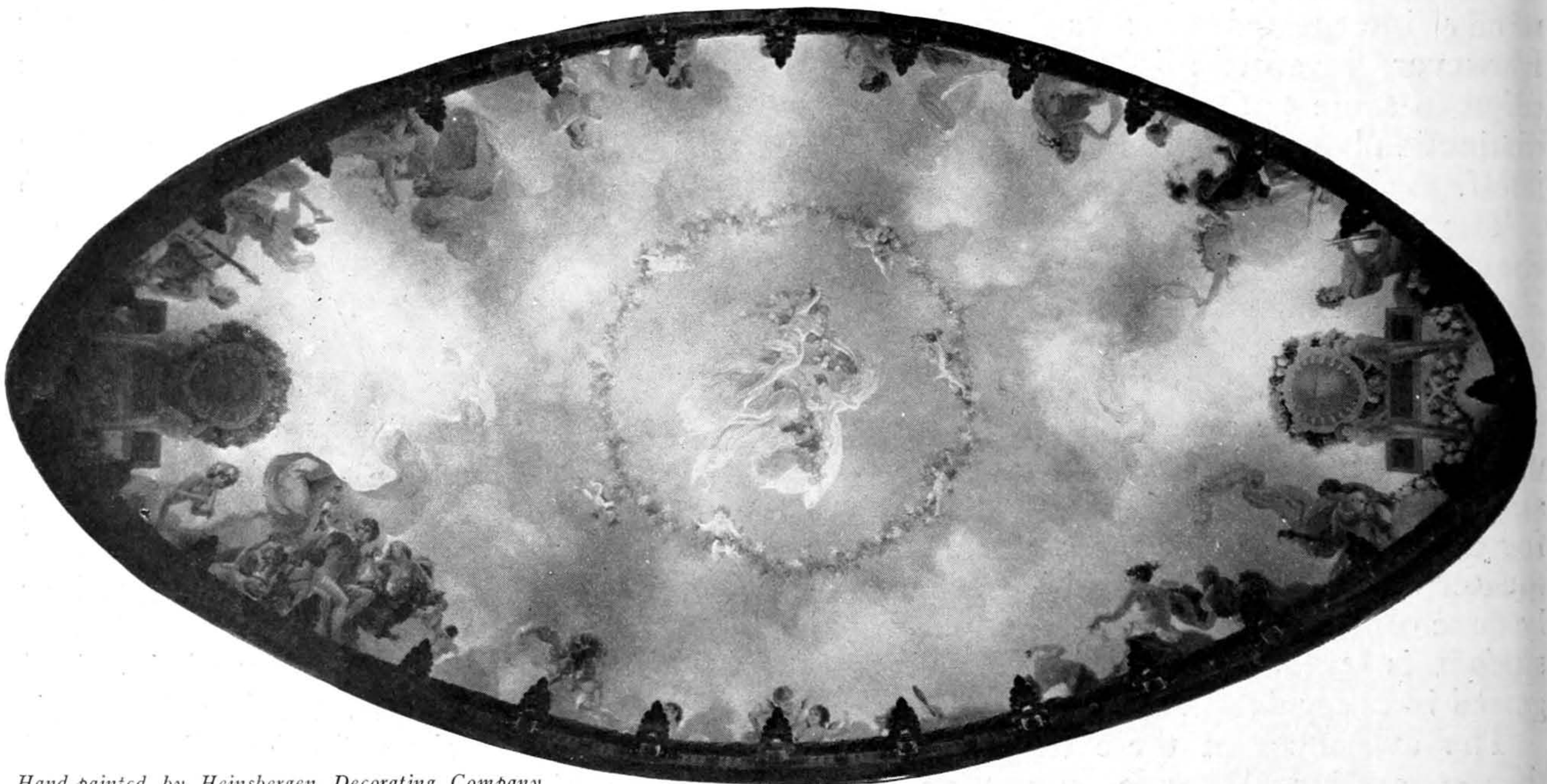
Concerning the design of the Tower Theater, featured in this article, the architect, S. Charles Lee, writes:

"The plan and design of the building is distinctly original. It represents the solution of a very difficult problem, due to the fact that the ground on which the owner desired to build his theater was extremely small, and also that tall buildings on all sides of this location made it imperative that this small amusement house assume at least an effect of height. A building with

offices overhead was eliminated from consideration as impractical, and the problem was to create a structure that would not be dwarfed by those surrounding it. Another problem was to achieve an effect of interior spaciousness, in spirit as well as in reality. The result has been gratifying, and on this 50x150-foot lot, formerly occupied by a 650-seat theater, there now stands a 900-seat theater.

"Small shops which line the two street fronts are proving a very satisfactory income feature, adding to, rather than detracting from the appearance of the build-

"The interior is also French Renaissance in theme. Bronze and marble (French Napoleon and Italian Bottecino) have been used in profusion, no effort or expense being spared to produce an effect of richness and lasting beauty. Walls and ceilings of auditorium are richly decorated with plaster mouldings of intricate design, and fine mural paintings. A high domed ceiling and an unusual balcony arrangement contribute much to an effect of spaciousness. Draperies, carpeting, and furnishings throughout are luxurious and in keeping with the architectural setting.



*Hand-painted by Heinsbergen Decorating Company*

DETAIL OF CEILING, TOWER THEATER, LOS ANGELES

S. Charles Lee, Architect

ing. These shops also serve to keep a flow of people past the theater doors.

"The type of architecture emphasized is a modified French Renaissance. The exterior finish is of buff colored terra cotta in a particularly attractive pattern. The canopy over the front entrance is of cast iron, bronze finish. Terra cotta sign frames above the roof of the building will be utilized by commercial advertisers for inoffensive advertising. They also serve the purpose of adding height and grace to the building. An unusual lighting effect, produced by means of tubalite and effective flood lighting, contribute to the beauty of the exterior.

"The basement contains a lounge room capable of accommodating at once half the capacity of the house, made inviting and restful by means of luxurious divans before a marble fireplace, oak paneled walls and beamed ceilings. This lounge room is equipped with microphone for transmission of music from the auditorium. There are also on the basement floor: men's and women's rest rooms, marble toilet rooms, children's play room, housing rooms for the heating and ventilating plant, and storage rooms for theater and shops.

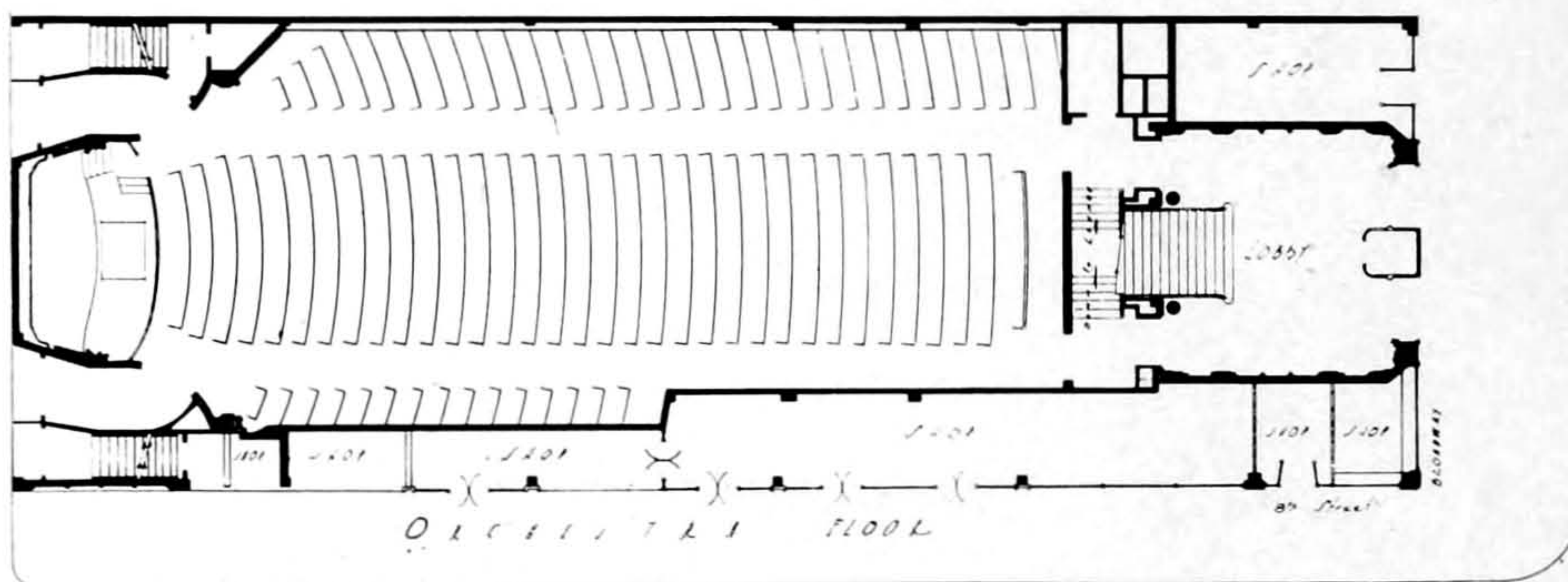
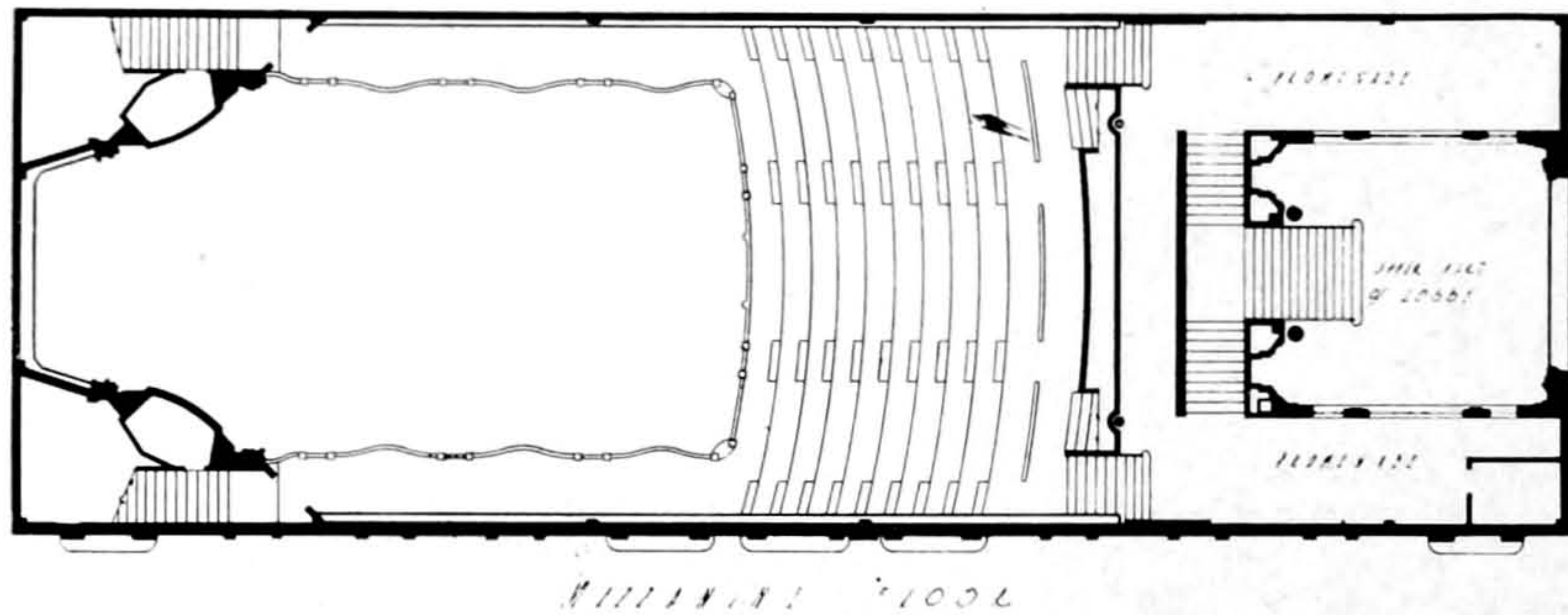
"Movietone and Vitaphone are included in the theater equipment."



*Terra Cotta by N. Clark & Sons*

TOWER THEATER, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

S. CHARLES LEE, ARCHITECT



PLANS, TOWER THEATER, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA  
S. CHARLES LEE, ARCHITECT

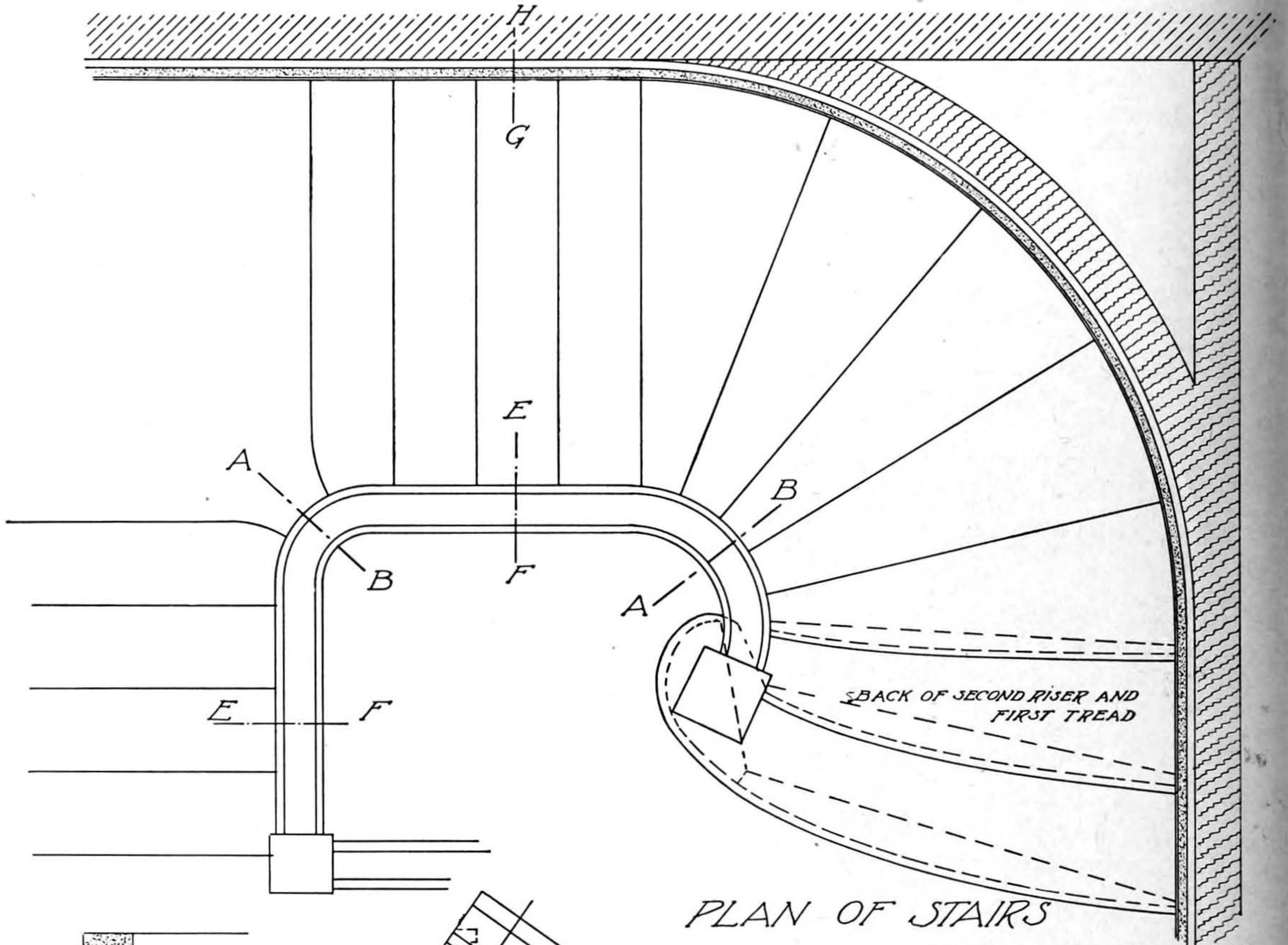


*Marble Columns and Wainscot, Vermont Marble Company*

TOWER THEATER, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

S. CHARLES LEE, ARCHITECT

# DETAILS OF CONSTRUCTION MARBLE TREADS, RISERS, BALUSTRADE STRING, WALL STRING, WAINSCOT ON CONCRETE FOUNDATION

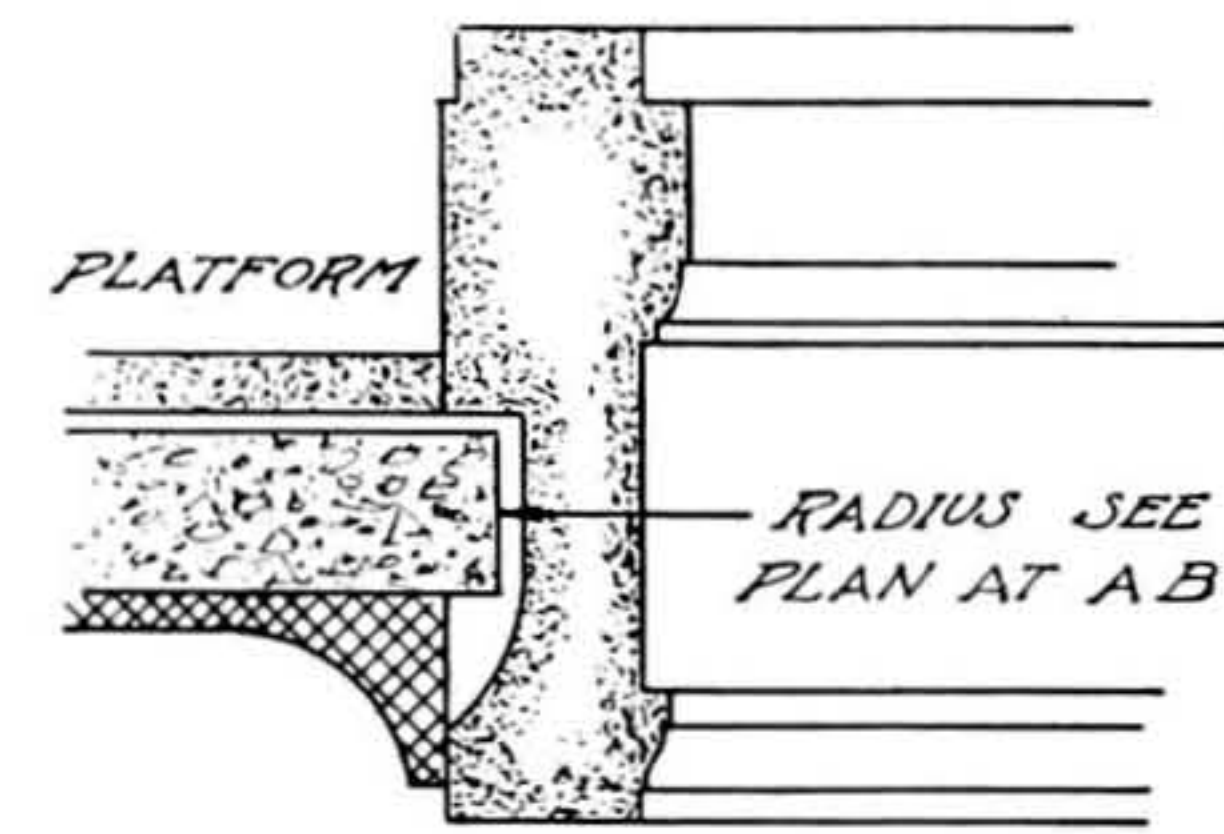


PLAN OF STAIRS

NOTE - THAT BY CONSTRUCTION HERE SHOWN MARBLE STRING CAN BE SET WITH STRAIGHT BOTTOM EDGE AND NEED NOT BE CHECKED OUT FOR TREADS AND RISERS.

WHERE CIRCULAR WORK OCCURS AS AT START OF STAIRS - OMIT WHEN POSSIBLE THE REGULAR STAIR CONSTRUCTION AND SUPPORT THE CIRCULAR TREADS AND RISERS ON TILE OR CONCRETE BUILT UP AS MARBLE IS SET.

CIRCULAR RISERS AND TREADS TO BE MADE STRAIGHT ON BACK



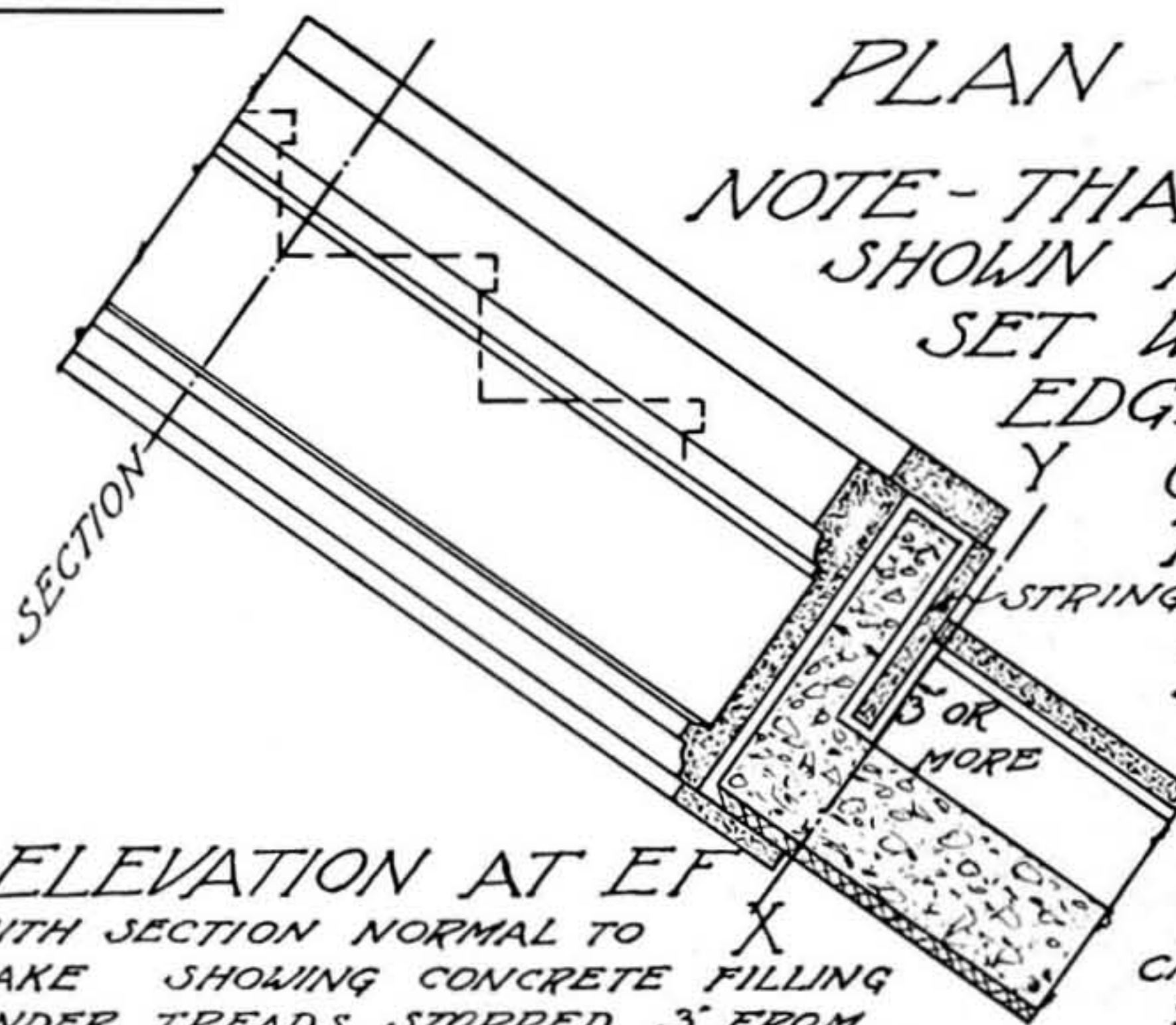
VERTICAL SECT AT AB

SHOWING STRING ON CURVE MADE SOLID



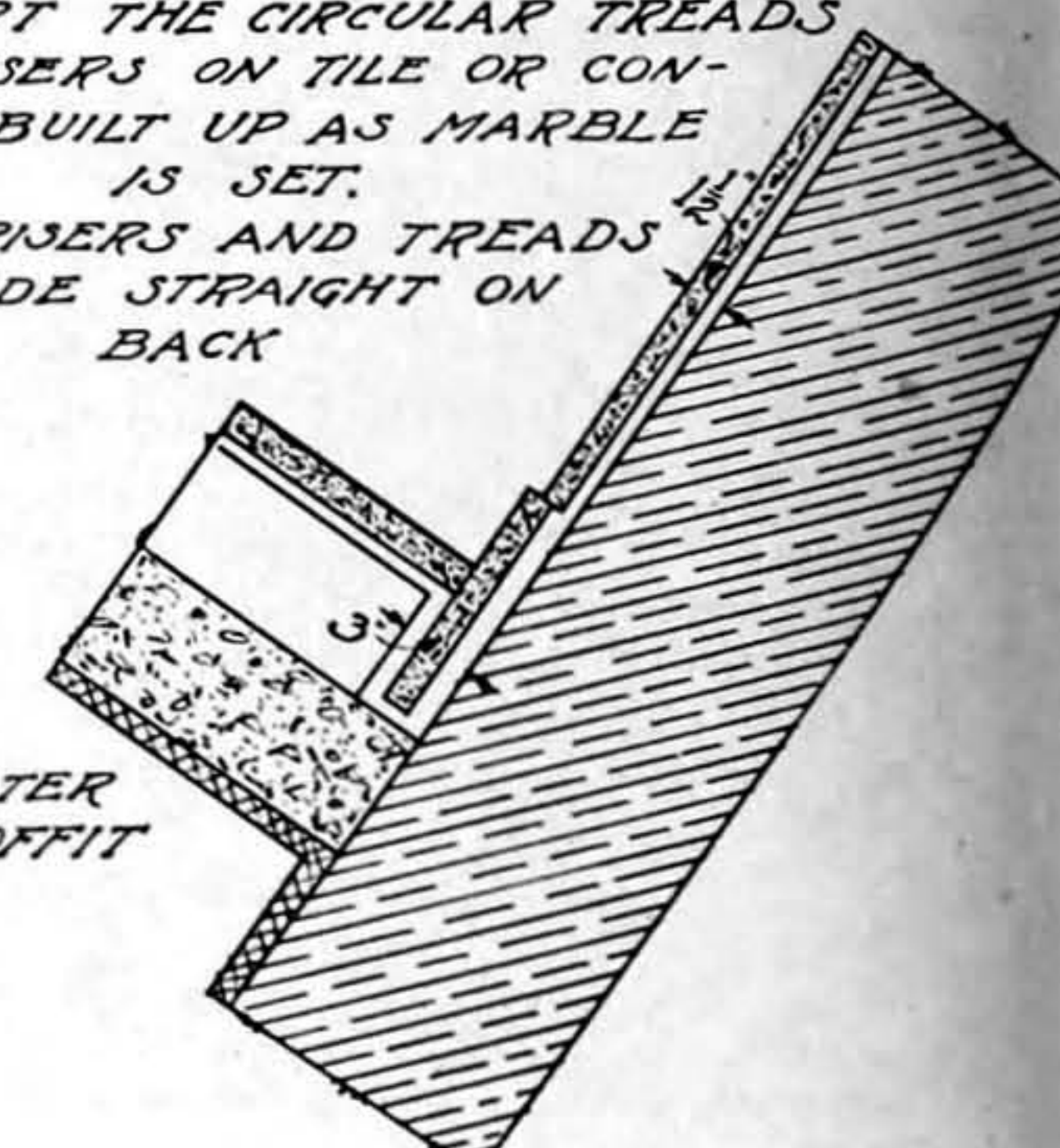
PLAN OF CONCRETE AT AB

CONCRETE OMITTED FOR SOLID STRING AS PER SECTION AB



ELEVATION AT EF

WITH SECTION NORMAL TO RAKE SHOWING CONCRETE FILLING UNDER TREADS STOPPED 3" FROM STRINGER SO AS TO ALLOW MARBLE TO RUN DOWN SEE ELEVATION XY

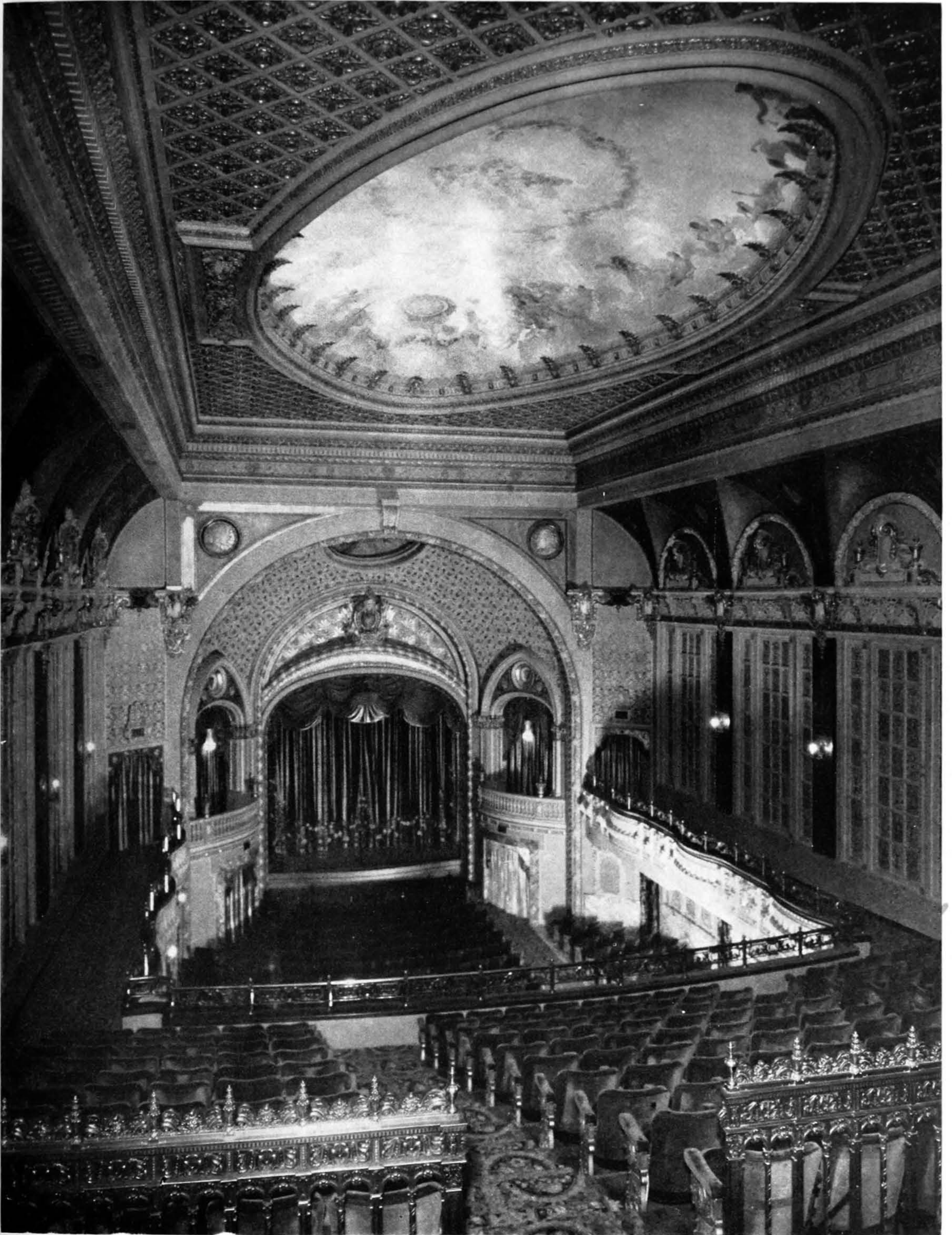


SECTION GH

NORMAL TO RAKE SHOWING CONSTRUCTION SIMILAR TO THAT AT ELEVATION EF AND SECTION XY

ELEVATION AT XY

SCALE: ONE HALF INCH EQUALS ONE FOOT



*Padilla Company Photo*

TOWER THEATER, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA  
S. CHARLES LEE, ARCHITECT