

(Collection 006)

John Eberson, 1875-1954

A Finding Aid for
Architectural Drawings, 1925-1930,
in

The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Archival Description

Descriptive Summary

Title: Architectural Drawings, 1925-1930.

Coll. ID: 006

Creator: John Ebersson, 1875-1954, Architect

Extent: 100 architectural drawings.

Repository: The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Abstract: The collection comprises 100 original drawings documenting five of Ebersson's architectural projects during the later half of the 1920s.

Cataloging: Collection-level records for materials in the Architectural Archives may be found in RLIN Eureka, the union catalogue of members of the Research Libraries Group. The record number for this collection is PAUP00-A5.

Publications: Preddy, Jane. *Palaces of Dreams: The Movie Theatres of John Ebersson, Architect*. San Antonio, Texas: McNay Art Museum, 1989.

Stapleford, Richard and Jane Preddy. *Temples of Illusion: The Atmospheric Theaters of John Ebersson*. New York: Hunter College, 1988.

Duci Bella, Joseph R. *The Paradise Theater, Cranford near Washington, Chicago, Illinois, . . . Theatre Historical Society Annual 4* (1977). Alameda, CA: Theatre Historical Society, 1977.

Loew's and United Artists State Theatre, Louisville, Kentucky, John Ebersson, Architect. Intro., Thomas Wibbels. *Theatre Historical Society Annual 21* (1994).

Naylor, David. *Great American Movie Theaters: A National Trust Guide*. Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1987.

Biographical/Historical Sketch

John Ebersson, influential designer of American movie theaters, was born in Cernauti, Bukovina in Romania. He left this rural region to attend high school in Dresden, Germany and then moved to Vienna, Austria to study at the university in the vibrant period at the end of the nineteenth century when design innovation and fantastic theatricality were part of the city's culture. Ebersson emigrated to the United States in 1901 after an altercation with a superior officer of the Fourteenth Hussars of the Austrian Army, with whom Ebersson served.

After his emigration, Ebersson settled in St. Louis in a community of German immigrants and found work as a stage designer and painter, working for Karl Hoblitzelle, an early motion picture promoter. Ebersson's first independent design was for a theater in Hamilton, Ohio in 1909, where he also received a number of commissions for industrial and commercial buildings.

Ebersson moved to Chicago in 1910, and began to build a practice that would include projects throughout the world. In 1923, Ebersson designed his first "atmospheric" theater. The interiors of these buildings were grand, if not extravagant stage sets consisting of elaborate false architectural facades and structures in historicist styles set below illusionistic painted ceilings with small electric lights that mimicked stars. These fantastic buildings set the tone for movie theater design into the 1930s.

In 1926, Ebersson moved his office from Chicago to New York City, and two years later his son was made a full partner in John & Drew Ebersson, Architects. Their work declined significantly in the Depression, and they were forced to dissolve the firm for a period, but were able to re-establish the office in 1934. The elder Ebersson continued to design theaters until his death in 1954.

Scope and Content Note

The John Eberson Collection comprises 100 original drawings documenting five of Eberson's architectural projects during the latter half of the 1920s. Highlights include: 87 working drawings for four of the most significant "Atmospheric Theatres" designed by Eberson during the high point of the Theater extravaganza; a set of six rendered sections, signed J. Eberson, illustrating various designs for "Atmospheric, French Moderne and Italian Style" theaters. The collection contains one unusual group of drawings: seven sketches for the Golden Gate Bridge by Eberson, who may have acted as a design consultant to Joseph Strauss, Chief Engineer.

The collection is arranged in one series. The series is arranged in chronological order by project and associated with a job number assigned by Eberson's office, if available. A project for which the job number is unknown is indicated by "xxx." One appendix follows containing detailed project information.

Access Points for Indexing (Controlled Vocabulary)

Eberson, John, 1875-1954.

Architects -- Archives.

Architectural design -- History -- 20th century -- Sources.

Architectural drawing -- United States.

Architecture, Modern -- 20th century -- United States -- Designs and plans.

Motion picture theaters -- United States -- Designs and plans.

Motion picture theaters -- Illinois -- Chicago -- Designs and plans.

Golden Gate Bridge (San Francisco, Calif.) -- Designs and plans.

Form/Genre:

Architectural drawings American.

Administrative Information

Restrictions on access: This collection is available for research by appointment only.

Preferred collection citation: John Eberson Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania.

Acquisition: Gift of Drew Eberson, 1984.

Processing: The collection was processed and the finding aid prepared by William Whitaker, Emily Cooperman, Laura Stroffolino and Nancy Thorne, with the research assistance of Lisa Boettger. Work was substantially completed in 2000, with additions and corrections in 2003.

Container list**Series I. Architectural drawings**

Container #	Descriptive Title
006.1	Golden Gate Bridge, 7 drawings
006.1	Designs for "Atmospheric Theatres", 6 drawings
006.2	Loew's Theater, Akron, Ohio, 13 drawings
006.3	The Avalon Theatre, Chicago, Illinois, 17 drawings
006.4	The Paradise Theatre, Chicago, Illinois, 34 drawings
006.5	Loew's Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, 23 drawings

Appendix A

Chronological Project Index

Note: The numbers to the left indicate job numbers as assigned by Ebersson's office. A project for which the job number is unknown is indicated by "xxx."

- xxx Designs for "Atmospheric Movie Theatres"**
ca. 1925
note: A set of six sectional renderings featuring various design schemes for "Atmospheric Theatres," including theaters in the "Italian" and "French Moderne" styles.
holdings: 6 original presentation drawings
- 561 The Avalon Theatre** (National Theatre Corporation [Warner Brothers])
1641 East 79th Street (near Stony Island Avenue), Chicago, Illinois, 1925-1926
note: extant, now the New Regal Theater, designated a Chicago Landmark 6/17/1992
holdings: 17 original construction drawings
- 576 The Paradise Theatre** (Balaban & Katz, Corporation [Publix Theatres])
Maypole and North Crawford Avenues, Chicago, Illinois, 1925-1928
note: demolished, ca. 1956
holdings: 34 original construction drawings
- 607 Loew's Theatre** (Theatre Realty Corporation)
625 South Fourth Street (near Chestnut), Louisville, Kentucky, 1927
note: extant as of 1989, renamed the Palace Theater
holdings: 23 original construction drawings
- 613 Loew's Theatre** (Main Street Akron Amusement Corporation)
182 South Main Street, Akron, Ohio, 1928
note: extant
holdings: 13 original construction drawings
- xxx Golden Gate Bridge**
San Francisco, California, ca. 1930
note: Design consultant (?) to Joseph Strauss, Chief Engineer. Sketches illustrating designs for the San Francisco anchorage including a monumental plaza with a triumphal gateway.
holdings: 7 original preliminary drawings