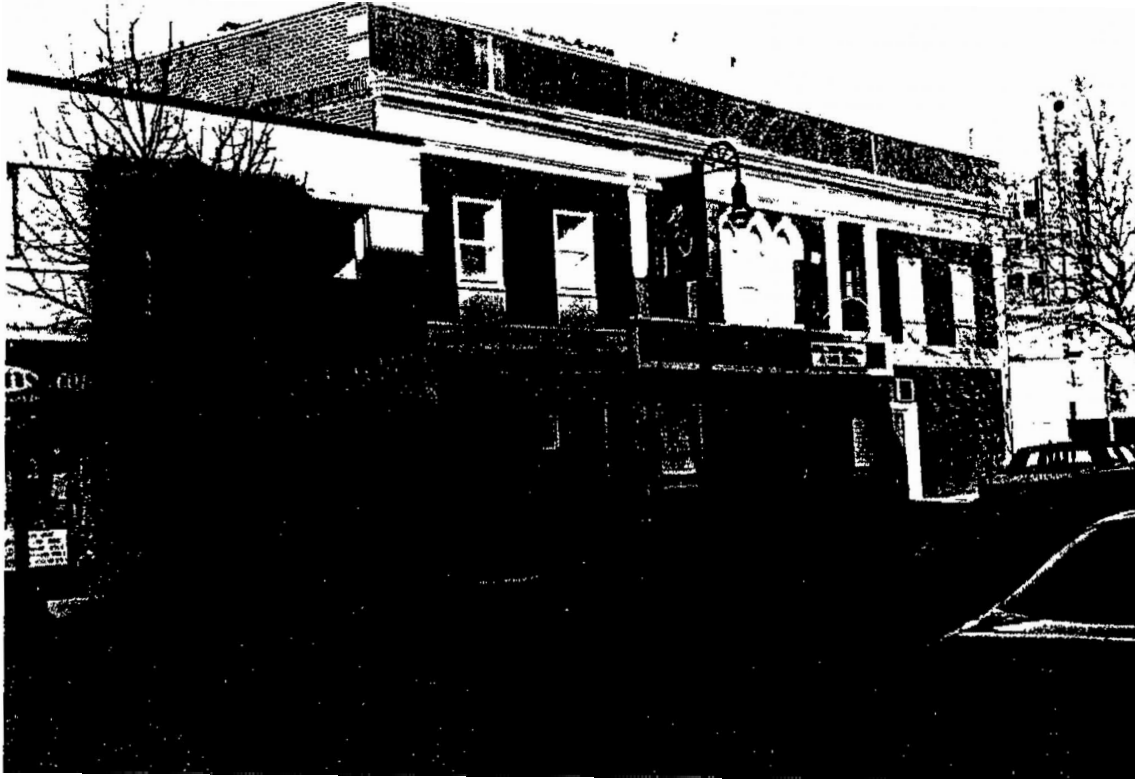


DESIGNATION PROPOSAL

OSHAWA REGENT THEATRE 46 - 50 King Street East



Prepared for Heritage Oshawa by:
Regan Hutcheson
based in part on research conducted
by Dan Grandovec and
Rose Mary Mason

Statement of Reasons for Designation

The Regent Theatre is recommended for designation pursuant to Part 4 of the Ontario Heritage Act due to its historical and architectural significance.

Historical Reasons for Designation

The construction of the Regent Theatre began in March 1919 and opening night was October 16, 1919. The opening performance was "**The Prince Chap**" starring Thomas Meighan and a Mack Sennett comedy entitled "**You Wouldn't Believe It!**" accompanied by a special orchestra which was personally directed by Jack Arthur. The building was designed by J. McNee Jeffrey, a famous Canadian theatre designer, and was officially opened by Oshawa Mayor John Stacey. In attendance were N.L. Nathanson Managing Director, H.M. Thomas General Manager and George Barrows secretary-treasurer of the Famous Players theatre chain which commissioned the theatre's construction. It was reported that a capacity audience attended and hundreds were turned away.

It was reported in 1927, that the annual attendance at the theatre during the past fiscal year had reached over half a million people. As part of the Canadian Famous Player's chain for most of its existence, the theatre obtained many of the best offerings of the film world. The Oshawa Daily Reformer in 1927 reported the following:

"Representing investment resources of half a million dollars, the Regent Theatre in Oshawa stands as a living memorial to its community spirit, and as one of the finest moving picture theatres in Canada. That it is the handsomest structures of its kind between Toronto and Montreal is witnessed by official statistics"

The theatre was constructed with many unique and innovative features for its time including an original air conditioning system which consisted of fans blowing air over blocks of ice placed in racks. This was replaced in the late 1920's with a system that had cold water pumped through the building to provide a cooler atmosphere in the summer. The Regent was also the first theatre in Oshawa to offer perfect vision to its 1,100 patrons. It was also reported that the theatre's acoustical properties were considered outstanding, and the lighting system provided an atmosphere to enhance the movies shown on the screen.

When initially constructed, the theatre building housed two retail outlets in either side of its main entrance. The business enterprise to the left of the theatre entrance was a barber shop beginning with Frank Carey as the proprietor in the early 1920's. It appears that this space was always occupied by a barber for almost 70 years. The store on the other side of the theatre entrance appears to have been occupied by a number of office uses over the years until it was covered over c.1940-50.

Throughout the years, the theatre building was altered and improved to meet the changing needs of its patrons and the fashion and style of the time.

In the 1940's, it is reported that the theatre gave away dishes every time a patron attended a performance. The dishes were maroon in colour with gold and white trim. It was not until the 1950's that a candy counter was added to the theatre.

In addition to the many movies and the vaudeville acts the theatre hosted, a number of local community shows were staged at the theatre over the years. For example, Mrs. Jean Gaskell of Oshawa remembers a Christmas pageant held during the early 1930's in which she performed a 'spanish dance' on the stage with her sister to the accompaniment of Maud Braeford on piano. Mr. Braeford was manager of the theatre during this period.

During almost 80 years of continuous operation, the Regent theatre was a main fixture in the City of Oshawa providing quality entertainment for patrons of all ages. The theatre was also a place of gathering for a substantial number of people in the community. Al Hartshawn, manager of the theatre in the 1960-70's is quoted as follows:

"It used to be in the old days you'd see such and such a person coming into the theatre and you know it was Tuesday night. You had lots of people like that for whom movies were a way of life. If it was Friday and such and such didn't come to the theatre that night, you knew he was either sick or out of town. People had formed a habit of coming to the theatre no matter what was showing."

As indicated above, the Regent Theatre has played a major role in Oshawa's social history since 1919.

Architectural Reasons for Designation

The Regent Theatre was constructed in 1919 by Norman McLeod Ltd, at a cost of \$100,000. The King Street facade of the theatre was modelled on Georgian architectural lines and as such the architectural features are very symmetrical. The building is one of the few remaining examples in Oshawa of this classically inspired architectural style.

As initially constructed, the building featured three main components on its front facade: the theatre entrance in the middle with a traditional commercial storefront on either side. The first Regent Theatre sign was vertical in design and was suspended from a bracket mechanism on the roof. Below the sign was a square canopy suspended from the front wall by chains (the wall hooks still remain). The original canopy and sign were replaced c.1950 by a substantial Famous Players movie theatre marquee that allowed films to be advertised using large metal letters. The marquee was removed in the 1990s. Originally, on either side of theatre entrance were round arched display windows used to advertise attractions (still in existence under current cladding). Located above each original storefront were two sets of elongated casement windows each with eight panes of glass and decorative bottom panel (these have since been replaced by 1/1 windows). The name "Regent Theatre" was inscribed in the frieze above the central arcade and still exists today.

The building's framing is built entirely of steel including the ceiling structure. The theatre also has a domed roof. The exterior of the building is clad in red brick which has been painted on the front facade. The exterior treatment of the lower portion of the front facade has been altered a number of times, but some original features still remain buried under the current treatment. The original brick gave way to a black tile with turquoise trim (1950-60s) which was removed and replaced by a stone/pebble treatment (c.d 1970s). Recently, the lower portion of the front facade has been parged and painted.

The upper portion of the front facade has many of its original details intact albeit under a coat of paint. There is a classically inspired frieze complete with egg and dart moulding, pilasters with

wreath decorations, a three part round arched arcade with Corinthian columns and decorative keystones. The brickwork has decorative banding and stone quoins at the corners. There is also interesting brickwork around the windows consisting of a flat arch of vertical stretchers and four headers at the corners which form squares. The arcade on the building is mirrored in the Alger Building(1928) located across the street at 35-37 King Street East).

At the rear of the building, a sign is painted on the wall advertising the theatre's parking lot. Although it is badly faded, it could be restored.

There are also a number of interior features of note. When the theatre was first built, the moving picture industry was in its infancy and the owners were concerned that the movies could be a fad. To prevent this from being a problem, the theatre was built with an extra heavy foundation to support a fly tower that still exists to accommodate props and a stage that measures 40 feet wide by 22 feet deep was installed along with an orchestra pit. The original movie screen that still exists can be electronically moved to the back of the stage when the venue called for live entertainment. The theatre also has a double basement for the installation of dressing rooms and prop storage area.

The auditorium is equipped with five decorative chandeliers. These unique fixtures resemble bowls with arms reaching up to hold candles. When the lights are down for a performance, the bowls are lit up with concealed lights that shine up to the ceiling with a bluish glow. When the lights go up, the candles are lit up. These fixtures also have the ability to be lowered electrically to facilitate maintenance and repair.

Another unique feature of the theatre is the ornate plaster detailing on the ceiling. This originally carried down into the walls and suited the layout of the auditorium. The plaster detailing consists of medallions representing mythological subjects and the ceiling conveys the feeling of a clouded night sky. The layout of the five chandeliers consists of four smaller chandeliers arranged in a circle following the curve of the building's roof around a fifth larger chandelier in the middle of the dome of the auditorium. All of the chandeliers are topped off with medallions that are linked

together and surrounded by a larger ring around the curve of the dome. The entire perimeter of the auditorium is decorated with a rope like moulding and the vents in each corner of the auditorium are detailed with similar plaster ornamentation that compliments the entire ceiling. The only original decorative element to survive on the walls is the columns and detailing at the top and base of the walls.

The exterior and interior of the Regent Theatre are well documented in archival postcards and photographs, as well as in a substantial number of professionally taken photographs detailing all aspects of the building (sponsored by the Oshawa Historical Society when the theatre ceased operations).

Sources

Grandovec, Dan, "Report on the Regent Theatre" (personal research report), March 27, 2000.

Mason, Rose Mary, "Architectural notes on the Regent Theatre", December 1999.

Oshawa Historical Society, "Historical Information Sheet-The Regent Theatre", April 28, 1998

Oshawa Times Newspaper, "Opening Recalled of Regent Theatre", December 16, 1969.

Oshawa Times Newspaper, "50 Years in City Marked by Regent", April 18, 1970.

Oshawa Times Newspaper, "Can Council Save the Regent", June 7, 1989.

Sutton Group Status Realty, "Open House Brochure", December 1991.

Thomas Buckley Collection, Article entitled "Regent Theatre Credit to City", The Oshawa Daily Reformer, June 30, 1927

Regent Theatre
48-50 King Street East
Oshawa

Owner: 870682 Ontario Limited
Aeolic Inc. (Property Manager)

Site Description

Construction Date:	1919
Builder/Designer:	J, McNee Jeffrey
Architectural Style:	Georgian
Original Use:	Theatre
Present Use:	Vacant (former use was night club)

General Description:

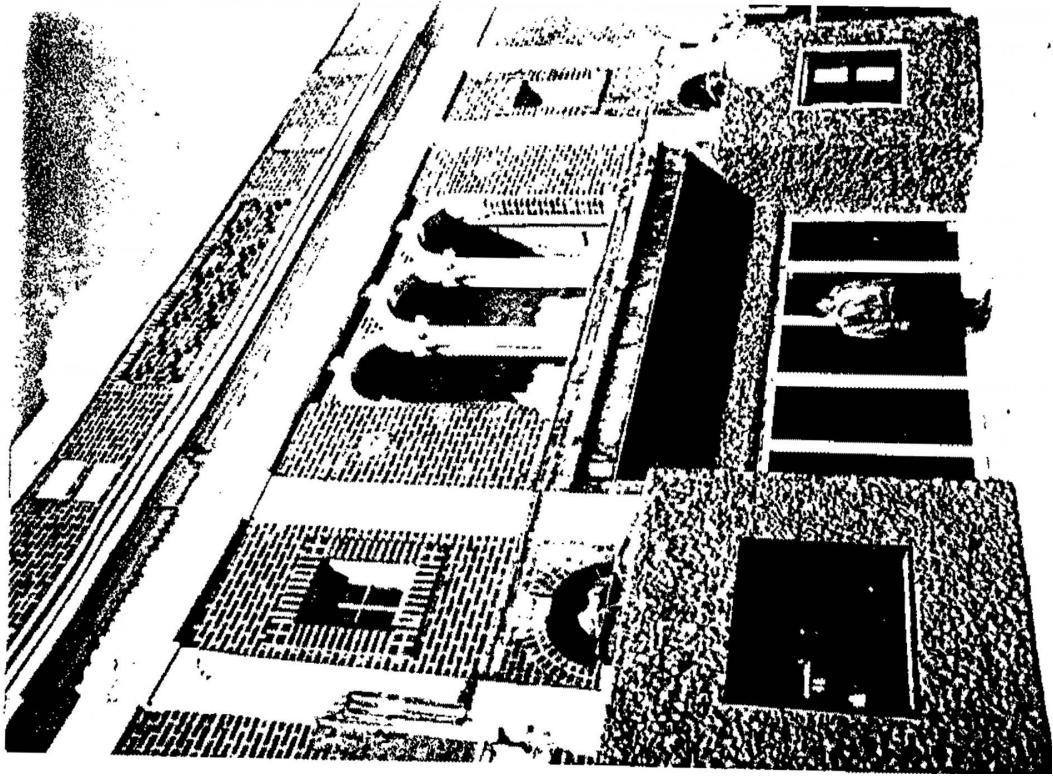
Plan:	Rectangle
Foundation:	Concrete
Exterior Wall	Brick
Windows:	1/1
Roof:	Domed



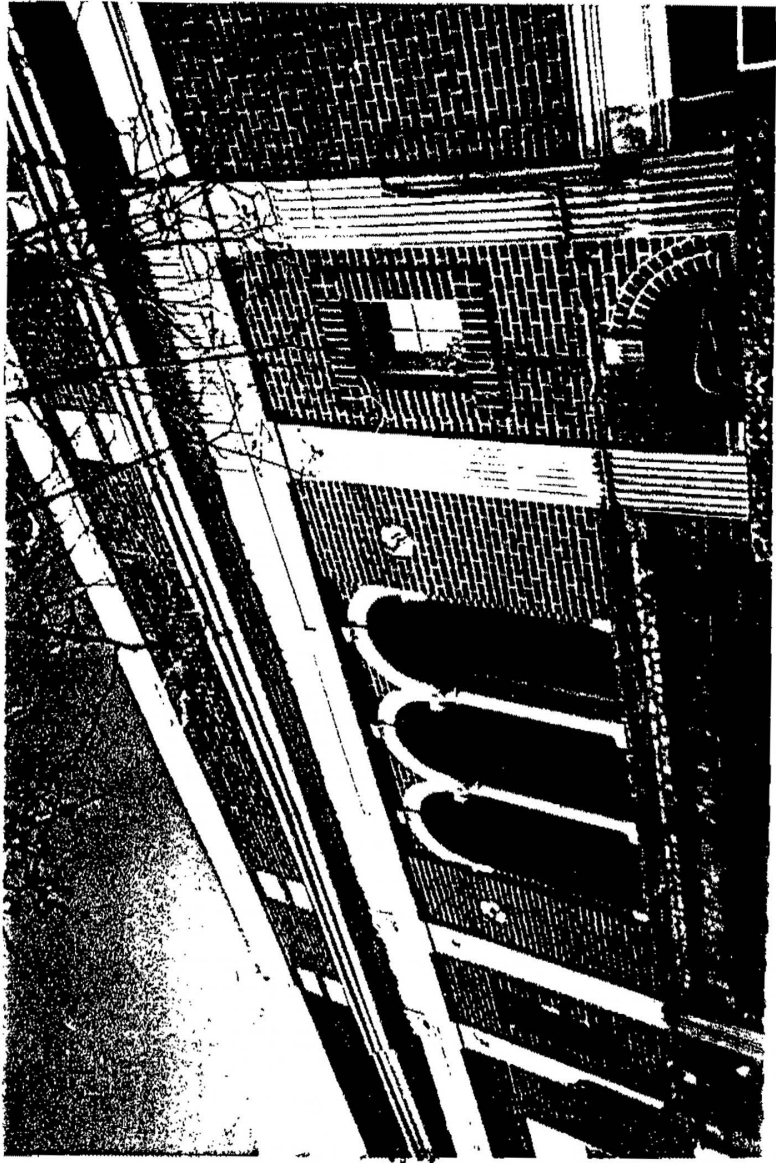
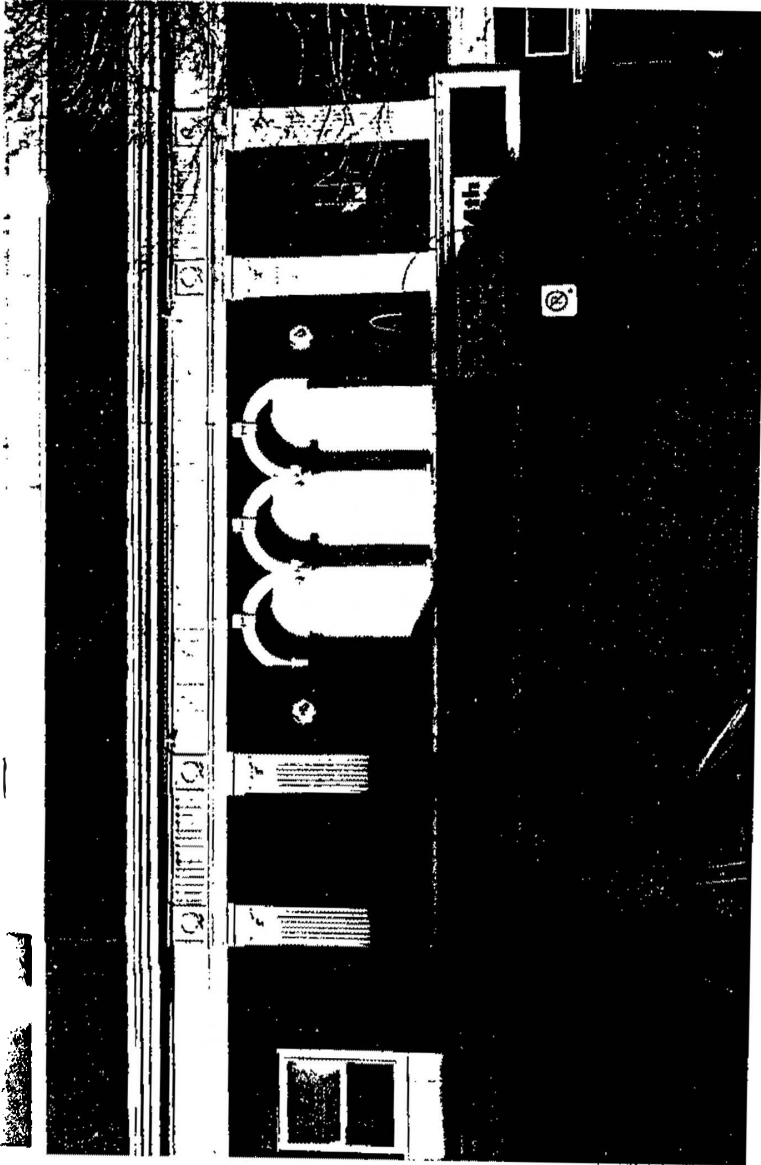
Regent Theatre, c.1920

SO H (FRONT) ELEVATION

Late 1990s

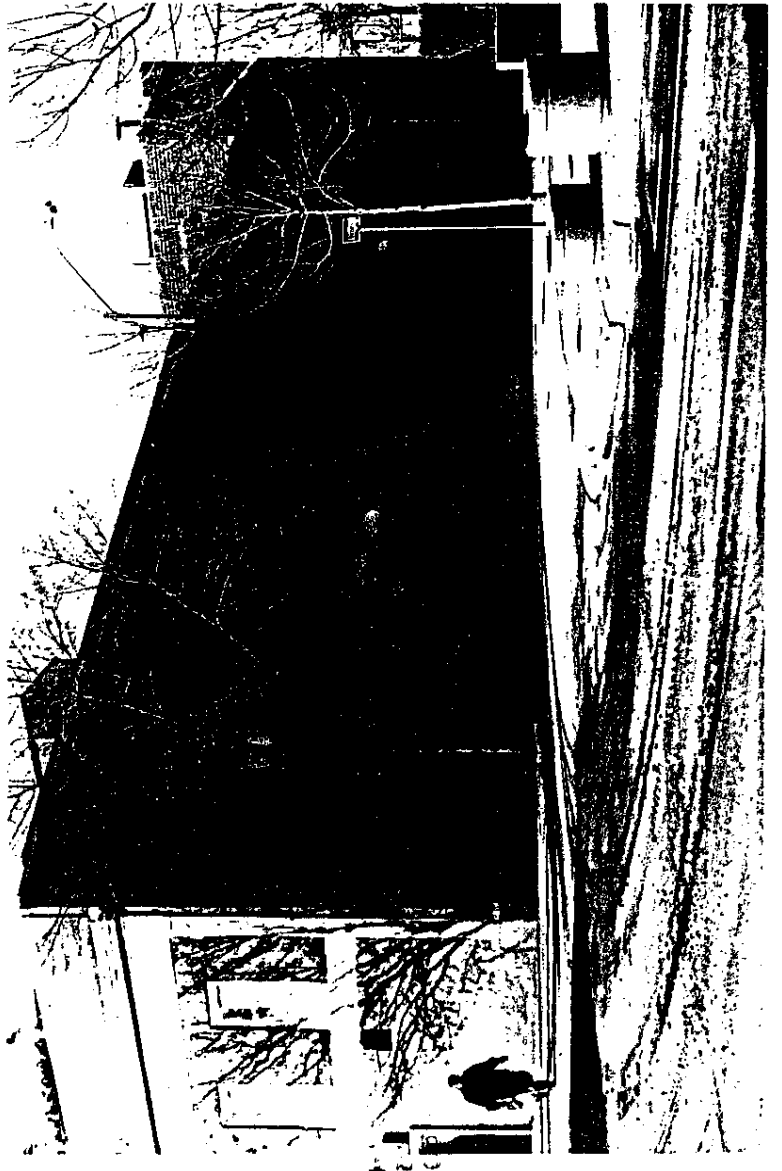
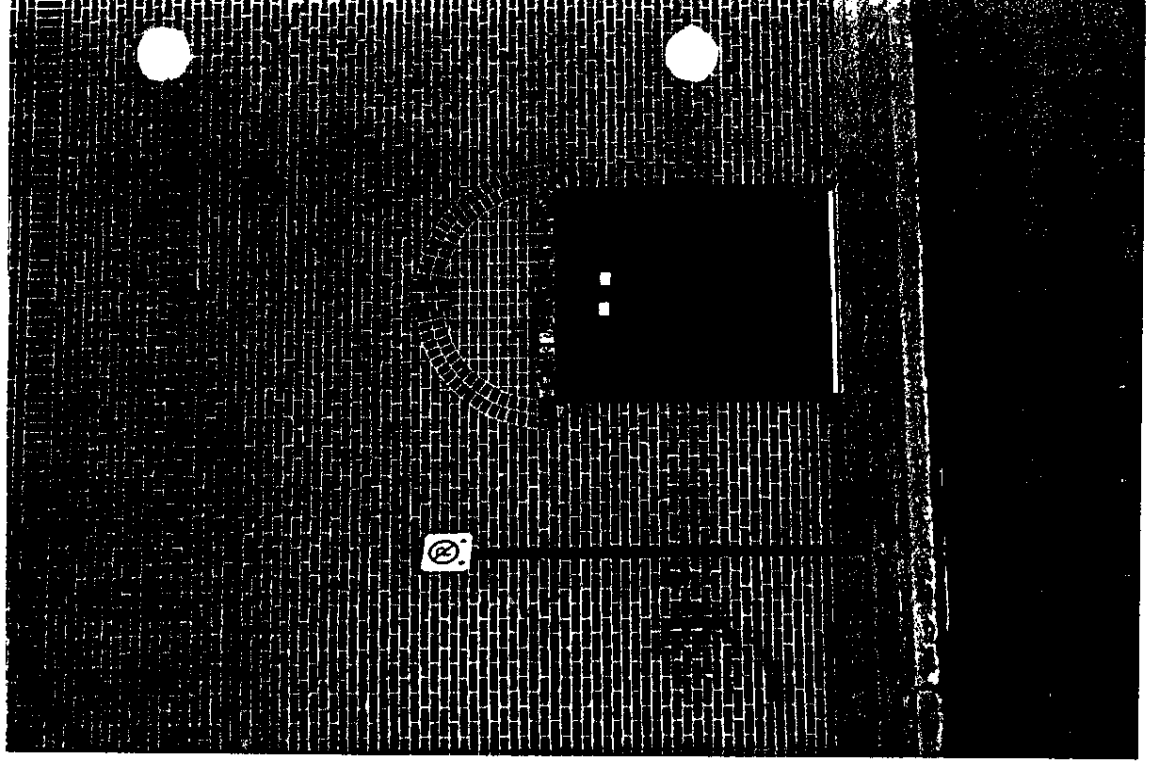


Early 1990s



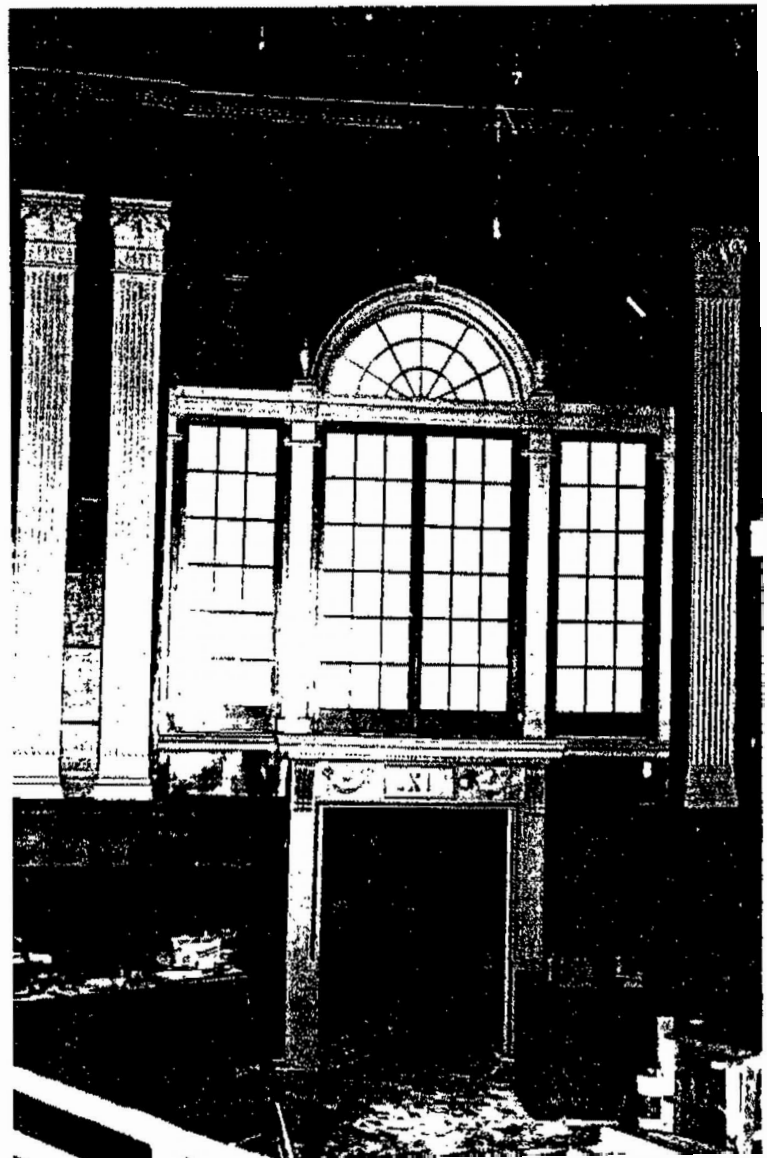
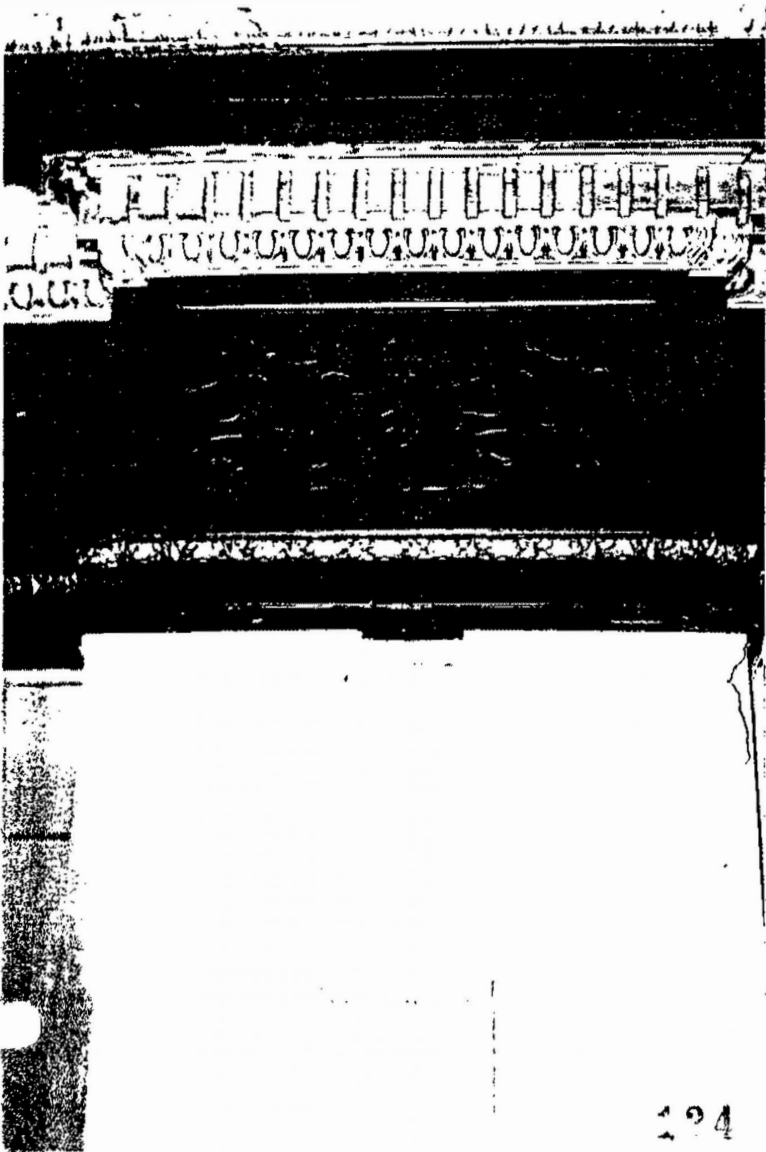
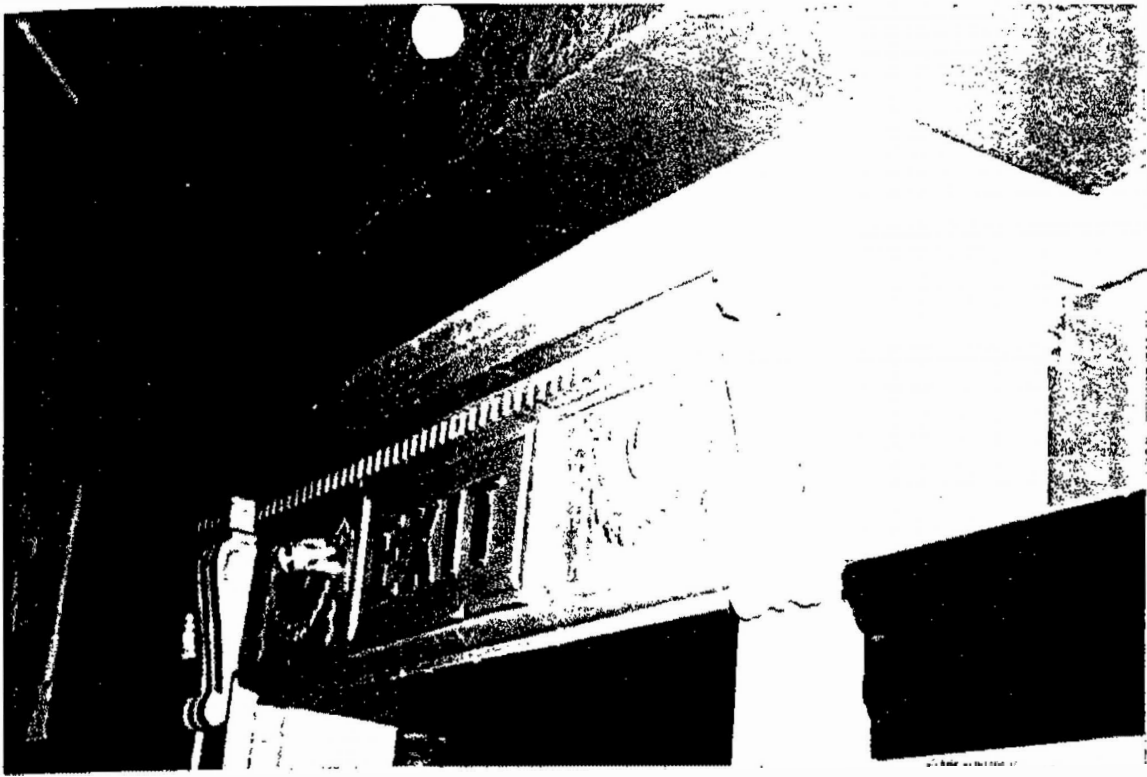
EAST ELEVATION

- brick banding
- decorative brick treatment above door



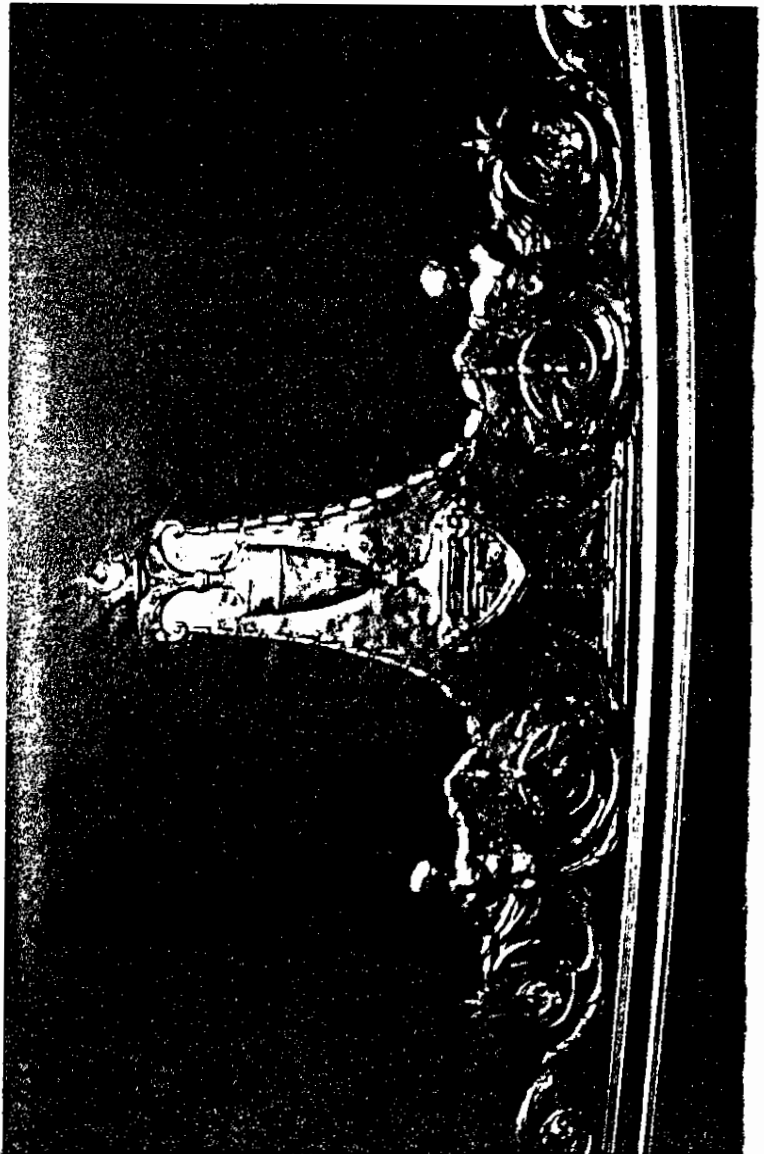
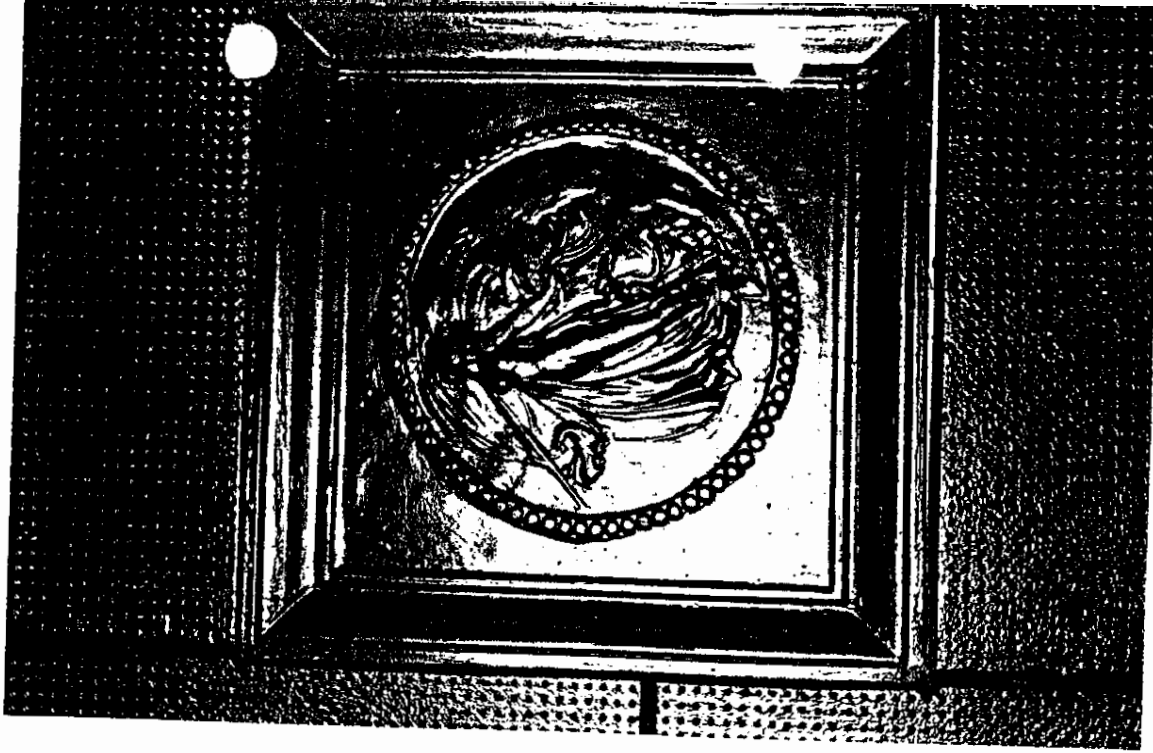
INTERIOR

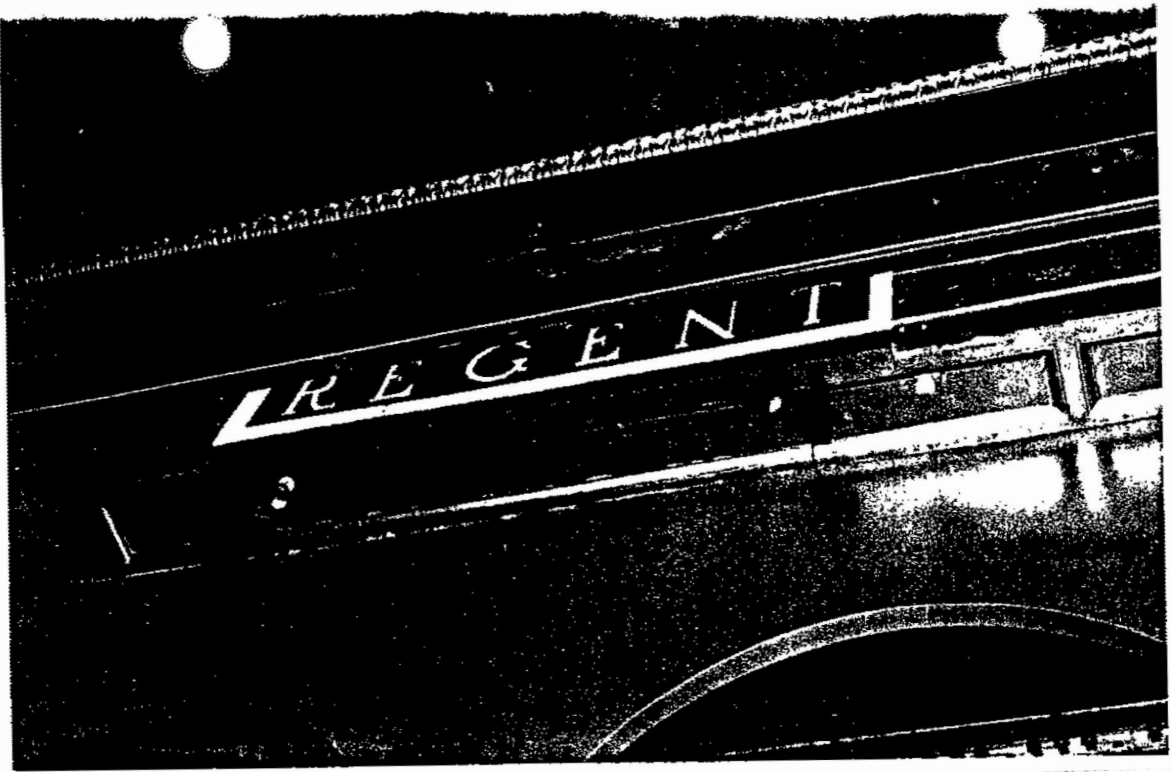
- Decorative
Features



INTERIOR

- Decorative Features





INTERIOR

_ Decorative Features

