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**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street & number 630 West Fourth Avenue not for publication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 or State Div. of Parks, 619 Warehouse Ave., Anchorage, AK (907)264-4676

city, town Anchorage state Alaska

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

Check one

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

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

Acreage of nominated property 0.3 acres

Quadrangle name Anchorage (A-8), Alaska

Quadrangle scale 1:63 360

UMT References

A

0	6
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3	4	4	6	2	5
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6	7	9	0	4	2	5
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C

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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 *Tejally*

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date Sept 3, 1982

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

Linda McCluskey
Keeper of the National Register

date 10-5-82

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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

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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.

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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.

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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

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brochure adds a bit more of his saga:

"This theatre was built especially for Alaskans. . .It is the culmination of a sincere wish to bring to the people of Anchorage, and visitors from all parts of Alaska, a theatre unexcelled on the American continent. . ."

Of the thousands of people who have since been entertained at the 4th Avenue Theatre, most will agree that Lathrop succeeded well in fulfilling his devout wish. 4th Avenue Theatre is a monument to a very prominent Alaskan, and an exceptional example of the now-rare Architectural fad style known as "Art Deco." Cap Lathrop first dreamed of such a structure about 1916. He prepared to build in the 1930's, and most definitely, by 1941. Then, when World War II halted the plans, Lathrop still persevered until his dream became reality as "The Showplace of Alaska."

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Evans, Walter "Seattle's Mr. Architect," Seattle Post - Intelligencer, Portland, 1977, October 5, 1971, p. C-14.

Ferber, Edna Ice Palace, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, N.Y., 1958.

Greuning, Ernest Many Battles, Liveright, New York, 1973.

Heinsbergen, A.B. Personal Correspondence (January 6, 1978).

Ray, Joan "Cap Lathrop: Hard Work Made an Alaskan Millionaire," The Great Lander, Volume 7, Number 37 (August 20, 1975).