

Don't sink The Admiral



RALPH RADFORD, WEST SEATTLE HERALD

Right — The January 1942 opening night of West Seattle's Admiral Theatre, at Southwest Admiral Way and California Avenue Southwest, attracted a crowd of 1,000 to a program that included a tour of the theater.

Upper right — On another January night, 47 years later, West Seattle citizens protest the sudden closing of the Admiral.



COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND INDUSTRY AND THE SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

The theater is a noted West Seattle fixture

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Depending on your view of things, you could say the exterior of West Seattle's Admiral Theatre resembles a ship.

And that's the way its architect, B. Marcus Priteca, intended. So, in this scene of its grand opening Jan. 22, 1942, the marquee, with its neon anchors, breaks over the sidewalk like a ship's bow. Above it, portholes, guardrails, nautical flags and a mast (the crow's nest is out of the frame) playfully elaborate the nautical fantasy.

Priteca launched his movie palace career in Seattle with Alexander Pantages. Designing theaters nation-wide for Pantages' chain, his Seattle creations included the Pantages/Palomar, the

Orpheum and his lone downtown survivor, the Coliseum. For a neighborhood theater, Priteca's Admiral, a name its owner John Danz let West Seattleites choose by contest, was sumptuous.

In anticipation of the theater's inaugural night, the West Seattle Herald exclaimed, "It transcends every preconceived idea of motion picture theaters, and will amaze everyone with its new beauties, its new revelations in comfort, sight and sound."

The nautical excitements continued inside with florescent murals of underwater scenes, a wall painting of Capt. George Vancouver's 1792 landing on Puget Sound, a ceiling sparkling with a lantern projection of the signs of the zodiac, and usherettes shipshape in naval uniforms.

Forty-seven years later the Admiral struck bottom, when, without warning or comment, the

Toronto-based theater chain, Cineplex Odeon, closed it. An 11th-hour leak of their intent brought out the pickets in a protest for the preservation of West Seattle's unique example of the art of motion-picture theater design. The preservationists found the last night's bill, "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels," appropriate.

In its attempt to save the Admiral, the Southwest Seattle Historical Society is trying to have the building designated a landmark. April 5 at 3:30 p.m. on the second floor of the Arctic Building at Third Avenue and Cherry Street the city's Landmarks Board will hold a public hearing on nominating the Admiral for landmark status. Concerned citizens who have gone to sea with the Admiral are invited to attend and help save the ship.