



Office of the City Manager

INFORMATION CALENDAR

July 26, 2022

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager

Submitted by: Jordan Klein, Director, Planning and Development Department

Subject: LPO NOD: 2113 Kittredge Street/#LMIN2022-0001

INTRODUCTION

The attached Notice of Decision (NOD) for the Landmarks Designation is presented to the Mayor and City Council pursuant to Berkeley Municipal Code/Landmarks Preservation Ordinance (BMC/LPO) Section 3.24.160, which requires that “a copy of the Notice of Decision shall be filed with the City Clerk and the City Clerk shall present said copy to the City Council at its next regular meeting.”

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The Landmark Preservation Commission (LPO/Commission) has designated the subject property as a City Landmark. This action is subject to a 15-day appeal period, which began on July 11, 2022.

BACKGROUND

BMC/LPO Section 3.24.190 allows the Council to review any action of the Commission in granting or denying Landmark, Structure of Merit or Historic District status. In order for Council to review the decision on its merits, Council must appeal the NOD. To do so, a Councilmember must move this Information Item to Action and then move to “certify” the decision. Such action must be taken within 15 days from the mailing of the NOD, or by July 26, 2022. Such certification to Council shall stay all proceedings in the same manner as the filing of an appeal.

If the Council chooses to appeal the action of the Commission, then a public hearing will be set within 25 days pursuant to BMC/LPO Section 3.24.300. The Council must then rule on the designation within 30 days from the date that the public hearing is opened or the decision of the Commission is automatically deemed affirmed.

Unless the Council wishes to review the determination of the Commission and make its own decision, the attached NOD is deemed received and filed.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY & CLIMATE IMPACTS

Landmark designation provides opportunities for the adaptive re-use and rehabilitation of historic resources within the City. The rehabilitation of these resources, rather than

their removal, achieves construction and demolition waste diversion, and promotes investment in existing urban centers.

POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

The Council may choose to certify or appeal the decision to grant designation status, setting the matter for public hearing at a future date.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

There are no known fiscal impacts associated with this designation action.

CONTACT PERSON

Fatema Crane, Senior Planner, Planning and Development Department, 510-981-7410

Attachments:

1: Notice of Decision – #LMIN2022-0001 for 2113 Kittredge Street



L A N D M A R K S
P R E S E R V A T I O N
C O M M I S S I O N
NOTICE OF DECISION

DATE OF COMMISSION DECISION: May 5, 2022
DATE NOTICE MAILED: July 11, 2022
APPEAL PERIOD EXPIRATION: July 26, 2022
EFFECTIVE DATE OF DECISION (Barring Appeal or Certification): June 27, 2022¹

2113 Kittredge Street

City Landmark application (#LMIN2022-0001) for designation of the California Theater as a City of Berkeley Landmark

The Landmarks Preservation Commission of the City of Berkeley, after conducting a public hearing, **APPROVED** the following designation:

DESIGNATION: City of Berkeley Landmark

APPLICANT: Art Deco Society of California, P. O. Box 5539, Berkeley, CA

ZONING DISTRICT: C-D/MU, Commercial Downtown-Mixed Use

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW STATUS: The designation qualifies for a Categorical Exemption under Section 15061 of the Public Resources Code, Guidelines for Implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The application materials for this project are available online at:

<http://www.cityofberkeley.info/zoningapplications>

FINDINGS AND APPROVED APPLICATION ARE ATTACHED TO THIS NOTICE

¹ Pursuant to BMC Section 1.04.070, if the close of the appeal period falls on a weekend or holiday, then the appeal period expires the following business day. Pursuant to BMC Section 3.24.190, the City Council may “certify” any decision of the LPC for review, within fifteen days from the mailing of the NOD. Such certification shall stay all proceedings in the same manner as the filing of a notice of appeal.

LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION
NOTICE OF DECISION
#LMIN 2022-0001
2113 Kittredge Street
July 11, 2022
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COMMISSION VOTE: 7-0-0-1 (one vacancy)

YES: ADAMS, CRANDALL, ENCHILL, FINACOM, LEUSCHNER, SCHWARTZ, TWU
NO: [NONE]
ABSTAIN: [NONE]
ABSENT: MONTGOMERY

TO APPEAL THIS DECISION (see Section 3.24.300 of the Berkeley Municipal Code):

To appeal a decision of the Landmarks Preservation Commission to the City Council you must:

1. Submit a letter clearly and concisely setting forth the grounds for the appeal to the City Clerk, located at 2180 Milvia Street, 1st Floor, Berkeley; or by facsimile to (510) 981-6901. The City Clerk's telephone number is (510) 981-6900.
2. The appeal must be received prior to 5:00 p.m. on the "APPEAL PERIOD EXPIRATION" date shown above (if the close of the appeal period falls on a weekend or holiday, then the appeal period expires the following business day).
3. Submit the required fee (checks and money orders must be payable to 'City of Berkeley'):
 - a. The basic fee for persons other than the applicant is \$500. This fee may be reduced to \$100 if the appeal is signed by persons who lease or own at least 50 percent of the parcels or dwelling units within 300 feet of the project site, or at least 25 such persons (not including dependent children), whichever is less.
 - b. The fee for appeals of affordable housing projects (defined as projects which provide 50 percent or more affordable units for households earning 80% or less of Area Median Income) is \$500, which may not be reduced.
 - c. The fee for all appeals by Applicants is \$2500.

If no appeal is received, the landmark designation will be final on the first business day following expiration of the appeal period.

NOTICE CONCERNING YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS:

If you object to this decision, the following requirements and restrictions apply:

1. If you challenge this decision in court, you may be limited to raising only those issues you or someone else raised at the public hearing described in this notice, or in written correspondence delivered to the Landmarks Preservation Commission at, or prior to, the public hearing.
2. You must appeal to the City Council within fifteen (15) days after the Notice of Decision of the action of the Landmarks Preservation Commission is mailed. It is your obligation to notify the Land Use Planning Division in writing of your desire to receive a Notice of Decision when it is completed.

LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

NOTICE OF DECISION

#LMIN 2022-0001

2113 Kittredge Street

July 11, 2022

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3. Pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure Section 1094.6(b) and Government Code Section 65009(c)(1), no lawsuit challenging a City Council decision, as defined by Code of Civil Procedure Section 1094.6(e), regarding a use permit, variance or other permit may be filed more than ninety (90) days after the date the decision becomes final, as defined in Code of Civil Procedure Section 1094.6(b). Any lawsuit not filed within that ninety (90) day period will be barred.
4. Pursuant to Government Code Section 66020(d)(1), notice is hereby given to the applicant that the 90-day protest period for any fees, dedications, reservations, or other exactions included in any permit approval begins upon final action by the City, and that any challenge must be filed within this 90-day period.
5. If you believe that this decision or any condition attached to it denies you any reasonable economic use of the subject property, was not sufficiently related to a legitimate public purpose, was not sufficiently proportional to any impact of the project, or for any other reason constitutes a "taking" of property for public use without just compensation under the California or United States Constitutions, your appeal of this decision must including the following information:
 - A. That this belief is a basis of your appeal.
 - B. Why you believe that the decision or condition constitutes a "taking" of property as set forth above.
 - C. All evidence and argument in support of your belief that the decision or condition constitutes a "taking" as set forth above.

If you do not do so, you will waive any legal right to claim that your property has been taken, both before the City Council and in court.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Communications to Berkeley boards, commissions or committees are public record and will become part of the City's electronic records, which are accessible through the City's website. **Please note: e-mail addresses, names, addresses, and other contact information are not required, but if included in any communication to a City board, commission or committee, will become part of the public record.** If you do not want your e-mail address or any other contact information to be made public, you may deliver communications via U.S. Postal Service or in person to the secretary of the relevant board, commission or committee. If you do not want your contact information included in the public record, please do not include that information in your communication. Please contact the secretary to the relevant board, commission or committee for further information.

LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION
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2113 Kittredge Street
July 11, 2022
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FURTHER INFORMATION:

Questions about the project should be directed to the project planner, Fatema Crane, at (510) 981-7410 or Fcrane@cityofberkeley.info. All project application materials, including full-size plans, may be viewed at the Permit Service Center (Zoning counter), 2120 Milvia Street, between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Findings
2. Landmark Application, received **JANUARY 10, 2022**

ATTEST: 

Fatema Crane, Senior Planner
Secretary to the Landmarks Preservation Commission

cc: City Clerk
Applicant: Art Deco Society of California
P. O. Box 5539
Berkeley, CA
Property Owner: Mary J Ferrogiaro & Addington L. Wise, Jr
3434 Tice Creek Drive, #2
Walnut Creek, CA

FINDINGS FOR DESIGNATION

MAY 5, 2022

2113 Kittredge Street – California Theater

Landmark application #LMIN2022-0001 for the consideration of City Landmark or Structure of Merit designation status for a theater completed in 1914 – APN 057-2020-009-00

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

City Landmark designation of the property at 2113 Kittredge Street – California Theater

CEQA FINDINGS

1. The project is found to be exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA, Public Resources Code §21000, et seq.) pursuant to Section 15061.b.3 of the CEQA Guidelines (activities that can be seen with certainty to have no significant effect on the environment).

LANDMARK PRESERVATION ORDINANCE FINDINGS

2. Pursuant to Berkeley Municipal Code (BMC) Section 3.24.110.A.1.b of the Landmarks Preservation Ordinance (LPO), the Landmarks Preservation Commission of the City of Berkeley (Commission) finds that the subject building exhibits architectural merit as an example of Art Deco architectural design in Berkeley's Downtown. The extant building was constructed in 1914 and then renovated during the Art Deco period. It retains many of its character-defining features of this style, including: simplified overall building form; linear massing and appearance; stepped outline; smooth wall surface; stylized, often geometric, ornamentation and detailing; fluting details; and low-relief decorative elements. The building is in good condition and retains all necessary aspects of design integrity.
3. Pursuant to BMC Section 3.24.110.A.1.c, the Commission finds that the subject property is an architectural example that is worthy of preservation for the exceptional value it adds as part of the Downtown Berkeley neighborhood fabric. The City's 2015 intensive survey evaluation of this property concluded that the California Theater is an important primary Contributor to the establishment of a historic district in the greater Shattuck Avenue area.
4. Pursuant to BMC Section 3.24.110.A.4, the Commission finds that the subject property expresses and embodies the history of Berkeley through its direct associations with the development of Downtown Berkeley as a center of commerce and transportation. The Shattuck Avenue Commercial Corridor Historic Context and Survey (2015) determined that this building, in its extant condition, continues to represent commercial forms and materials that were prominent in the Downtown during the period of historical significance.

FEATURES TO BE PRESERVED

This designation shall apply to the subject property and the following distinguishing features of the main building shall be preserved, and missing features shall be restored to the extent possible:

- Overall height and composition of the primary building facade
- Stucco facade
- Art Deco-style facade with five vertical piers & six ornamental bays
- Art Deco stepped design pattern of facade and roof parapets
- Four stepped roof parapets
- Main central bay and two flanking bays on upper 3/4th of street facade
- Angled fluted upper string course and Art Deco curved coping
- Zigzag saw-tooth pattern under the coping
- Banding trim divided into four strips above the entrance that visually separates the base and the upper part of the building
- Two slightly coved niches located on the widest, outer architectural bays
- Projecting corbels and zigzag ornaments
- Plaster *bas-reliefs* (frozen fountains motif)
- Two rectangular neon signs on a projecting prow with stylized lettering that each spell out CALIFORNIA
- Projecting prow/angled marquee, surrounded in neon tubing
- Lyre shaped center metal piece covered in neon tubing
- Leaf-patterned ceiling/soffit beneath the projecting marquee
- Recessed entry
- Stucco-and-glass box office
- Glass-and-aluminum entry doors

CITY OF BERKELEY
Ordinance #4694 N.S.
LANDMARK APPLICATION

California Theatre
2113 Kittredge Street
Berkeley, CA 94704

Land Use Planning
Received
January 11, 2022



Figure 1. California Theatre, November 2021. Photo: Anthony Bruce.



Figure 2. California Theatre, circa 1930, Jack Tillmany Collection (courtesy Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association)

1. **Street Address:** 2113 Kittredge Street
County: Alameda **City:** Berkeley **ZIP:** 94704

2. **Assessor's Parcel Number:** 57-2020-9 (Blake Tract No. 3, Lots 7 & 8)
Dimensions: 100 feet x 135 feet
Cross Streets: Shattuck Avenue & Fulton Street

3. **Is property on the State Historic Resource Inventory?** Yes
Is property on the Berkeley Urban Conservation Survey? Yes
Form #: 21286

4. **Application for Landmark Includes:**
 - a. **Building(s):** Yes **Garden:** **Other Feature(s):** Neon sign
 - b. **Landscape or Open Space:**
 - c. **Historic Site:** No
 - d. **District:** No
 - e. **Other:** Entire property

5. **Historic Names:** T&D Theatre; Fox California Theatre
Commonly Known Name: California Theatre, The Cal

6. **Date of Construction:** 1913-14 **Factual:** Yes
Source of Information: Building Permit #3418, December 15, 1913

7. **Architect:** A. W. Cornelius (1913); Balch & Stanbery (1929-30)

8. **Builder:** Kidder & McCullough (1913); A.J. Lane (1929-1930)

9. **Style:** Art Deco

10. **Original Owners:** John Muldoon & Frank M. Wilson

Original Use: Cinema

11. **Present Owner:** Ann Belcher et al

Present Occupant: Vacant

12. **Present Use:** Movie Theatre until Oct 2021
Current Zoning: CD-MU Core
Adjacent Property Zoning: CD-MU Core

13. Present Condition of Property:

Exterior: Good Interior: Good Grounds: N/A

Has the property's exterior been altered? Yes in 1929–30 and again in 1952

Executive Summary

The California Theatre in central downtown Berkeley on Kittredge Street is a rare extant movie theatre in the Art Deco style that is also beloved by the community.

The California Theatre was initially completed in 1914 as an early motion picture theatre for Turner & Dahnken, also known as the T&D Circuit, a large operator of movie theatres in the then-nascent film industry. The theatre was altered and modernized in 1929-1930 by its new operator, Fox West Coast Theatres, in the Moderne style, which is today referred to as Art Deco. Even though the breathless newspaper copy announcing the theatre's reopening¹ was lifted straight from the advertising, the description of the theatre as a "Symphony in Modernism" was an apt one.

Although it has undergone some remodeling and a seismic upgrade, the theatre remains a striking example of Art Deco in downtown Berkeley, completing a trio of buildings in the style within a two-block radius: the Berkeley Public Library (Berkeley City Landmark #56) at 2090 Kittredge Street, completed in 1930 by architect James W. Plachek, and the U.A. Theatre at 2274 Shattuck, completed in 1932, and in which the 1929 architect of the Cal was also involved.

The California is also one of the last 12 surviving movie theatres in the Art Deco style in the San Francisco Bay Area, many of which are either local and/or national landmarks. The California's 107-year history is interwoven with the history of movies and with the students and the faculty of its neighbor, the University of California at Berkeley, just blocks away.

14. Description

The California Theatre is a two-story, brick-framed, rectangular building, situated on two lots, with a façade about 60' high. Initially designed for showing movies and live performances during the early days of motion pictures, the theatre stands on the north side of Kittredge Street in downtown Berkeley, just off Shattuck Avenue, and is a contributing structure in the proposed Shattuck Avenue Commercial Corridor historic district.²

¹ "Modernism is keynote of new theater building," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, Oct. 9, 1930.

² Shattuck Avenue Commercial Corridor, Historic Context and Survey, for the City of Berkeley, 2015. [https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Planning_\(new_site_map_walk-through\)/Level_3_-_General/ShattuckContextFINAL%20r091515.pdf](https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Planning_(new_site_map_walk-through)/Level_3_-_General/ShattuckContextFINAL%20r091515.pdf) accessed Nov. 2021.

It dominates the block, where it sits between the Beaux-Arts-style Brooks Apartments on the western corner of Kittredge and Shattuck and the late 19th-century A.H. Broad House and Storefronts, completed in 1894, to the east. Across the street, at 2124–2126 Kittredge, stands the Robert & Elma Elder House (1895), behind a 1926 Mediterranean-style commercial addition. Next door, at 2138 Kittredge, the John C. Fitzpatrick house (1903–04) hides behind a 1935 Georgian Colonial commercial brick addition. On the northeastern corner of Kittredge and Oxford streets stands Oxford Plaza (WRT-Solomon Etc, architects), a multi-use infill development completed in 2009.

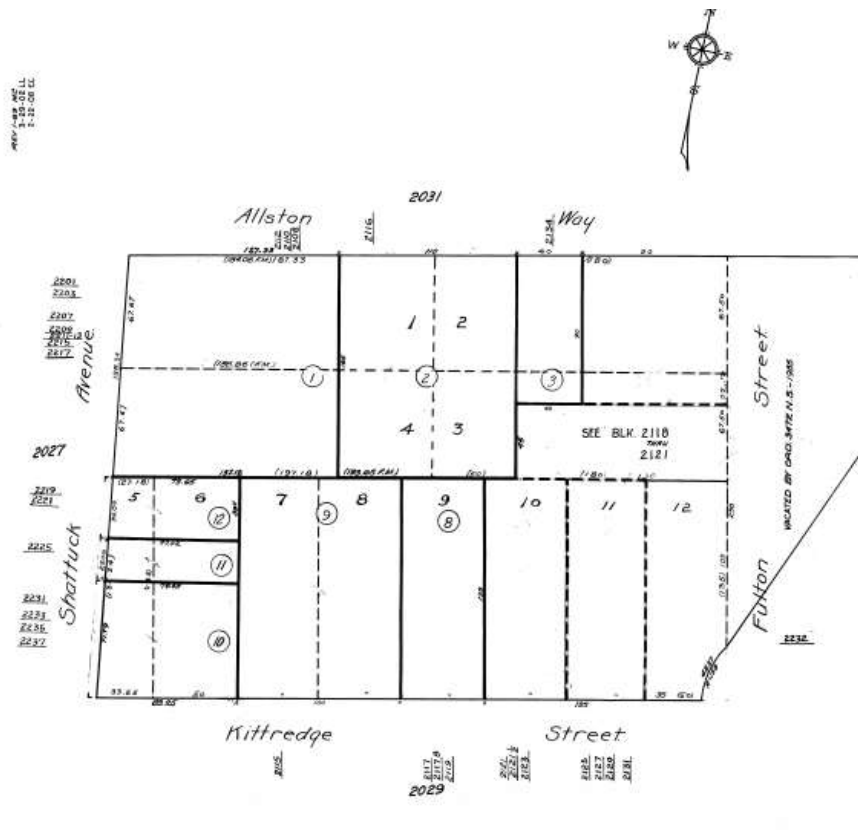


Figure 3. Map No. 3 of the Blake Tract, Alameda County Assessor's Office, Map 57. Note that lot numbers 7 and 8 are identified with the address of 2115 Kittredge, instead of 2113 Kittredge.

According to the original building permits, the theatre's construction in 1913 used concrete footings and piers, and the foundation is concrete with steel rebar. Walls and other piers are brick, and the trusses and girders are steel.

The exterior today is clad in stucco and features a host of Art Deco elements, dating from a major alteration in 1929–1930. The façade presents a symmetrical design with a central architectural bay and four parapet walls, two on each side. The central bay is divided by a row of five vertical piers and is located in a central plane under the highest parapet. Just below the central plane, are two overlapping flanking wall planes on each side, in a stepped pattern, under the

lower parapets. The wider, outer walls are each punctuated with a narrow vertical niche, separated from the base of the building by wide horizontal bands.

The ornament course along the parapet has a curving, scalloped coping. Beneath the coping is an elongated zigzag that resembles a saw tooth pattern. It peeks out from the coping, an unusual treatment of the typical zigzag motif that was popular in the 1920s and 1930s Moderne style.

The five vertical piers that step out from the wall separate a series of plaster *bas-reliefs* of stylized curves. The design looks like a shell or a fan, and is also known as frozen fountains. At the base of the fountains are cascading swirls, like bubbling water. Below the frozen fountains are projecting rectangular corbels, faced with a vertical zigzag motif.



Figure 4. Art Deco details on façade, including piers, rectangular corbels, and “frozen fountain” bas-reliefs, November 2021. Photo: Therese Poletti

At the center of the façade, above the entrance, is the theatre’s large marquee, from whose center projects a neon sign that curves like a lyre. A two-sided projecting prow in the marquee showcases stylized neon letters, with each side spelling out California on a background of navy-blue, highlighted by light blue vertical neon tubes. The blue neon tubes in the background were originally set to act as chasers, and flashed one after the other, in sequence.

The metal neon letters and the lyre-like centerpiece are outlined in gold, denoting the blue and gold school colors of U.C. Berkeley. The letter forms are

straight up and down, instead of slanted, and in a typography style that marks a transition between the Art Deco era and into mid-century modernism.



Figure 5. California Theatre's blue and gold marquee and neon sign. November 2021.
Photo: Therese Poletti

One unusual feature of this sign is that the letters are individually formed or sculpted of metal and outlined in neon tubing, giving the letters a sculptural quality. Many theatre signs of the era often had letters painted onto the so-called metal tin can. The neon tubes were then attached over the painted letters, bent to spell out a business or a theatre, such as C A S T R O at the Castro Theatre.³

Beneath the marquee is a recessed entry, where the glass doors and a basic blocky ticket box in glass and steel are currently covered by plywood. The soffit of the recessed entrance is faced with thick plaster ornamentation depicting tropical leaves or vines. On each side of the main entrance are glass display windows, along the building's base, for posters of feature films and coming attractions. This entry, marquee, and stylized neon sign were part of a 1952 remodel by Fox West Coast Theatres.

The building is set back from the sidewalk by about six feet, and both brick sidewalls are visible from the street. Both sidewalls and the rear are exposed brick and completely braced to full height with steel bracing, placed in vertical, horizontal and diagonal patterns in a seismic retrofit, completed in 2002.⁴ New fire escapes were also added to each side. A 20-foot-high block to store the stage machinery used in vaudeville and other live performances in the early days at the back of the theatre was also removed at that time.

³ Phone interviews with Jim Rizzo, founder of Neon Works of Oakland and former service provider of the California Theatre and Randall Ann Homan, co-author of "San Francisco Neon: Survivors and Lost Icons" and neon preservationist.

⁴ City of Berkeley Planning Department, Permit Number, B2001-03243.



Figure 6. Side walls, right side, of the California Theatre, November, 2021.
Photo: Therese Poletti

Features to Be Preserved

The distinguishing features of the California Theatre include the following:

- Rectangular mass
- Height of approximately 60 feet
- Brick wall structure
- Stucco façade
- Art Deco-style façade with five vertical piers & six ornamental bays
- Art Deco stepped design pattern of façade and roof parapets
- Four stepped roof parapets
- Main central bay and two flanking bays on upper 3/4th of street façade
- Angled fluted upper string course and Art Deco curved coping
- Zigzag saw-tooth pattern under the coping
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- Lyre shaped center metal piece covered in neon tubing
- Leaf-patterned ceiling/soffit beneath the projecting marquee
- Recessed entry
- Stucco-and-glass box office
- Glass-and-aluminum entry doors
- Glass poster-display cases

15. History

The original Blake Tract was made up of land that had originally been owned by José Domingo Peralta, the son of a Spanish pioneer and soldier, Don Luís Maria Peralta, who had divided his property among his four sons. Domingo Peralta sold his land, including today's central Berkeley, to a group of investors. In 1856, George Mansfield Blake purchased Plot 69, made up of approximately 160 acres of the 640-acre Rancho San Antonio, for \$5,000, a plot that he had just three years prior unsuccessfully tried to claim, along with three other Berkeley pioneers: Francis Kittredge Shattuck, James Leonard, and William Hillegass.⁵

Kittredge Street and Shattuck Avenue are both named for Francis Kittredge Shattuck, often called the "founder of Berkeley," having been an early investor in Berkeley real estate, a developer of its downtown core, and an early promoter of rail service to Berkeley.



Figure 7. Francis Kittredge Shattuck, *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, September 10, 1898

⁵ Daniella Thompson, "The Tapes of Russell Street," February 1, 2005. http://berkeleyheritage.com/essays/block_h_blake_tract.html

In a tragic irony, Shattuck, who was also one of the early mayors of Oakland, died at age 73 of injuries after being accidentally struck with major force by a hurried passenger who was exiting the train at Shattuck Avenue and Center Streets in downtown's Berkeley Station.⁶

In 1876, two years before the incorporation of Berkeley, portions of the Blake Tract were put up for auction by Shattuck, who was Blake's brother-in-law and co-executor of his will. Blake, who died in 1875, was also an influential East Bay citizen, having been a mayor of Oakland, district attorney for Alameda County, and at the time of his death, a judge. His wife, Millicent K. Blake, was F.K. Shattuck's sister and an early educator. Shattuck and his sister were executors of Blake's will.⁷

An ad appeared in all the local papers in October, 1876, describing the auction of much of the Blake Tract as, "That Splendid Property, Known as the Blake Tract!" That auction was for 40 business and residence lots and 140 residence lots, some with frontage on the university.⁸

The Blake Tract, Map No. 3, which includes Kittredge Street, was subdivided in 1881. One early sale was in 1887 of Lots 13 and 14 on the southwest corner of Fulton and Kittredge streets (then spelled Kittridge) to George W. Webb, by Blake's widow, for \$900.⁹ Webb apparently purchased the lots as an investor, as he and his family continued to live in their residence nearby, on Bancroft Way & Fulton.¹⁰

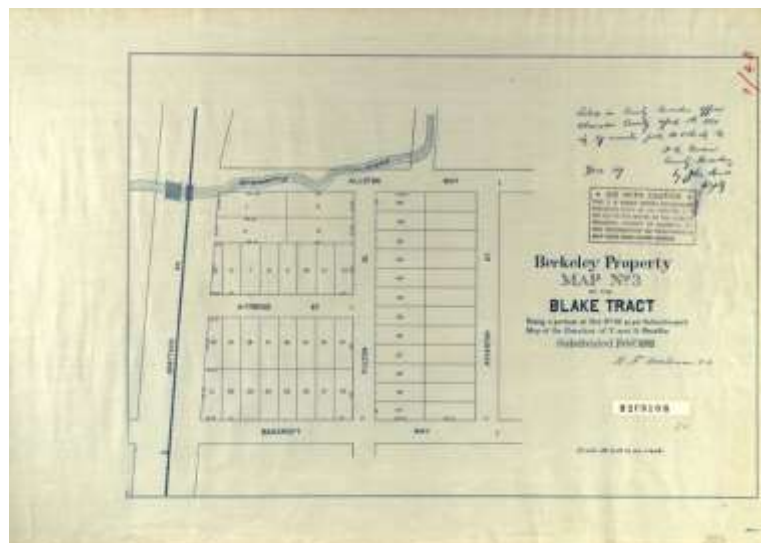


Figure 8 Blake Tract, Map No. 3, 1881. Courtesy Berkeley History Online, Berkeley Public Library, Berkeley, CA.

⁶ "Passing of the Founder of Berkeley," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, September 10, 1898.

⁷ "Judge Blake's Will," *Oakland Tribune*, October 23, 1875.

⁸ Onley & Co Real Estate Auctioneers ad, *Oakland Tribune*, October 9, 1876.

⁹ *Oakland Tribune*, August 29, 1887.

¹⁰ Berkeley City Directory, 1888-1889.

The Muldoon Family

The California Theatre is located on lots 7 and 8 of Blake Tract No. 3. Lot 7 was occupied by the home of John F. Muldoon, a real estate investor, who moved to Berkeley sometime after the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906.

Muldoon's family and heirs still own the property and the theatre today.

John Muldoon's mother and father were both Irish immigrants, and John was born in Philadelphia in 1862. His father Michael, born in Cork, Ireland and his two older brothers worked as coal miners in the industrial county of Lackawanna, Pennsylvania. John was born in Philadelphia. At age 16, John and a third brother were also working in the mines as drivers.¹¹

By the time he was 21, John had moved west to California's gold country, where he registered to vote in 1884 while living in the town of Jackson in Amador County. According to his obituary, he worked in the Muldoon Mine,¹² named after Edward Muldoon, an unrelated man who discovered it on his grazing land outside of Jackson. (The mine later became known as the Kennedy Extension and the target of a lawsuit between two rival mining firms in 1909.¹³ The Kennedy Mine went to a depth of 5,912 feet, was the deepest gold mine in the U.S. and closed in 1942.)

Even though it was not his claim, Muldoon's early mining ventures appear to have been successful, because he stayed for 20-plus years in the small Gold Rush town of Ione, where he ran his own livery and stable business and was involved in local politics. He also met and, in 1894, married his wife Teresa Scully, of the prominent Scully family. Muldoon eventually amassed many real estate holdings in Amador County, while his wife was busy with her family, a local Masonic order, the Native Sons and Daughters of California, and raising their three children, William, John Jr., and a daughter, Madeline. Her family home in Ione, the Scully Ranch, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Muldoon family left Amador County for the Bay Area sometime after 1906. Muldoon's name can be found buying parcels, lots, or houses in Berkeley and Oakland, beginning in August 1906, when he takes over the deed to a lot in Claremont.¹⁴ It's likely he saw a major investment opportunity in East Bay real estate amid the rush of refugees fleeing San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake and fire,¹⁵ and that could have even been the impetus for him to move his family.

¹¹ 1880 United States Census of Lackawanna, PA, via Ancestry.com, accessed November 2021.

¹² "Funeral Tomorrow for John Muldoon," *Oakland Tribune*, July 30, 1933.

¹³ "Big Mining Suit, Kennedy Extension vs. Argonaut, \$700,000 Damages Asked," *Amador Ledger*, December 3, 1909.

¹⁴ "Lizzie Smith to John Muldoon, Lot 23 Parkside, Claremont," *Oakland Tribune*, August 14, 1906.

¹⁵ Berkeley's population grew from 26,000 in 1906 to about 38,000 a year later, according to Richard Schwartz, "Earthquake Exodus, 1906: Berkeley Responds to the San Francisco Refugees," (Berkeley: RSB Books, 2006), p. vii.

John Muldoon first appeared at 2113 Kittredge Street in the 1908 Alameda County voter registration rolls, but he was listed in assessor's records as early as 1907 as owner of Lot 7, while local investor Frank M. Wilson owned Lot 8. In the 1910 U.S. Census, Muldoon and his family were enumerated as living at 2113 Kittredge Street in a house he owned, and his profession was described as a broker of real estate and stock.

While the Muldoon family were settling into their more urban life in Berkeley, change was happening all around them. The small town of Berkeley was experiencing a major early 20th-century growth burst. The downtown commercial district was undergoing a building boom, and more public transportation was being added to the main Shattuck Avenue commercial corridor, including a new Southern Pacific Railroad station. Constructed for mixed use, many new buildings marked the transition from wood-frame structures to fireproof buildings, clad in brick and/or stucco, with fire escapes and some with fireproof metal sashes.¹⁶

At the same time, entertainment venues for the growing population were also starting up, as the early days of motion pictures proved to be very profitable for savvy entrepreneurs in the young rough-and-tumble business.



Figure 9. Southern Pacific station on Shattuck Avenue, circa 1909

Just around the corner from the Muldoons, on Shattuck Avenue, was the new collegiately named Varsity Theater, reportedly the first playhouse in Berkeley devoted primarily to movies, which opened in November, 1908 on the street level of the newly constructed Brooks Apartments Building.

¹⁶ Franklin Maggi, Leslie Dill and Sarah Winder, State of California DPR 523 Primary Record, Brooks Apartments.

"The Varsity theater on Shattuck Avenue which was opened about two weeks ago by an aggressive San Francisco business man, is one of the prettiest moving picture show houses on the Pacific Coast, and is attracting large houses every afternoon and evening," reported the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* on November 20, 1908. "The Varsity gives nothing but clean, high class programs."



Figure 10. Ad for *The Varsity* in the *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, November 6, 1908.

The Varsity's aggressive business man was Claude E. Langley, a directing manager of the Turner & Dahnken circuit, an up-and-coming moving pictures company in San Francisco. The Varsity was doing so well that in December, 1910, it got a permit to expand into one of the stores next to the cinema, which would add another 200 seats to its capacity.¹⁷ The Varsity closed a year later, when T&D opened the larger Berkeley Theatre at Shattuck & Haste in August, 1911, also run by Langley. In November, T&D officially closed the Varsity. In a bit of a self-serving statement they noted that "the pull" to the larger, more commodious new Berkeley Theatre was too strong to compete against, even though it was also a T&D theatre.¹⁸ But Turner & Dahnken were not finished investing in Berkeley.

San Francisco-based T&D, one of the largest independent theatre chains, began as a partnership between William Turner and Fred Dahnken who started together in the film-supply business after the 1906 earthquake and fire.

Eventually, Turner and Dahnken sold their film exchange and invested in early movie theatres. Among their first investments were two small movie houses on Market Street in San Francisco.¹⁹

¹⁷ "Varsity Theater to be Improved," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, December 8, 1910.

¹⁸ "Doors of Varsity Theater Closed," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, November 17, 1911.

¹⁹ "The History of Contra Costa County," by Frederick Hulaniski (Elm Publishing Co., 1917), p. 588-589.

**Lyric
Theatre**
1064 Broadway.
FIRST

Program changed daily. Two or more first runs (films shown the first time anywhere), are shown here each day. More new pictures shown here than all Oakland theaters combined.

Films supplied by **TURNER & DAHNKEN**, the largest film house in the West.

Another early venture was the Oakland Photo Theatre (1911), funded by department store magnate H.C. Capwell and located on Broadway and 15th Street, with 1,900 seats and a vaudeville stage.²⁰ By 1913, they had also taken over the Lyric in Oakland, where they had once been the film supplier, as seen in this February 1909 ad in the *Oakland Tribune*.

As T&D expanded in the East Bay, the central section of Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley, closer to the university, still interested them. After opening the Berkeley Theatre, they looked at a property on Shattuck and University, but deemed the two lots near their former Varsity on Shattuck as more suitable.

Real estate investor, banker, and Berkeley mover-and-shaker Frank M. Wilson,²¹ who owned one of the two Kittredge Street lots with Muldoon, held lengthy talks with T&D Circuit executives over several weeks.²² In September 1913, the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* reported that Wilson and Muldoon had agreed to build a \$150,000 motion picture theatre to be operated by Turner & Dahnken.

After Wilson orchestrated the deal with the T&D executives, and permits were filed for the theatre, it appears that Muldoon had the family's two-story Victorian wood-frame house moved to 2417 Blake Street, based on the permits filed at the time with the City of Berkeley.²³

Muldoon's children would stay at the Blake Street house until they married, and John Sr. lived there until his death in 1933 at age 71.²⁴



Figure 9. Frank Wilson in his garden at 2400 Ridge Road, courtesy BAHA.

²⁰ "Oakland Theater largest of its kind in the U.S.," *Oakland Tribune*, September 29, 1911.

²¹ Thompson, Daniella, City of Berkeley Landmark Application, 2508 Ridge Road. https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Planning_and_Development/Level_3_-_LPC/2016-02-04_LPC_ATT2_2508%20Ridge_Landmark%20Application.pdf

²² "Turner and Dahnken Complete Negotiations for a \$150,000 Theater Here," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, September 18, 1913.

²³ City of Berkeley, Permit #3490, February 3, 1914, "Repairs to a building moved to that location," Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association archives.

²⁴ "Funeral Tomorrow For John Muldoon," *Oakland Tribune*, July 30, 1933.

John Jr., the second oldest son, went on to be a star rugby player at Berkeley High School and Santa Clara University. After graduating in 1919, John played on the U.S. Olympic Rugby Team²⁵ which won the gold medal in 1920 in Antwerp, and again in 1924. His younger brother William, also a Santa Clara student, was another member of the two gold-medal-winning teams.²⁶



Figure 11. U.S. Olympic Team, 1920, J. Muldoon, back row, 4th from right, W. Muldoon, middle row, 3rd from right. Photo: Rugbyfootballhistory.com

John Jr., who became part owner of the Dana Garage in Berkeley, died at age 47, after an illness, leaving behind his wife and three children, including Jack Muldoon (John Muldoon III),²⁷ who ultimately became the owner of the Cal Theatre before his death in 2012.

The T& D in Berkeley

The permits for the new, single-screen Berkeley T&D Theatre were filed in December 1, 1913, with an estimated initial cost of \$50,000.²⁸

The T&D Theatre ended up costing \$150,000. It opened on December 9, 1914 and showed the film "Cabiria," a three-hour Italian epic silent film with towering sets and thousands of extras, and a two-reel Keystone comedy, "The Property Man." Despite a downpour of heavy rain, the theatre opened to a full house, and Mayor Charles Haywood participated in the opening ceremonies.²⁹

The architect chosen by the T&D Circuit was Albert W. Cornelius, also of San Francisco, and the builders were Kidder and McCullough of Berkeley. Cornelius

²⁵ "Alumni Rugby Teams Stage Fast Battle," *Oakland Tribune*, December 26, 1920

²⁶ "Rugby at the Olympics," list of team members, 1920, 1924 Olympics, Rugbyfootballhistory.com

²⁷ "Garage Man Dies in Berkeley Hospital," *Oakland Tribune*, January 3, 1944

²⁸ City of Berkeley Building Permit No. 3418, December 1, 1913.

²⁹ "New Berkeley Theatre Ceremoniously Opened," *Oakland Tribune*, December 11, 1914.

designed several theatres in California for the T&D Circuit, including those in Pittsburg, Richmond, Sacramento and Salinas. He also designed several residential homes in Oakland, Berkeley and San Francisco.

The Berkeley T&D was an imposing two-story edifice, with heavy ornamentation, sculpted *bas-reliefs* inside arches over the upper windows, and a larger arched window over the entrance. The massive window was divided into multiple panes of art glass. The theatre was described as Greek or Greek revival in style, but as in most early movie theatres, the designs often were an eclectic combination of architectural motifs and styles.

Inside, the theatre had a large auditorium and a balcony. With 2,000 seats, it was described as the largest auditorium in Alameda County at the time.³⁰ The theatre had velvet carpets, French tapestries, a ventilation system, a stage and equipment for full theatrical productions, an immense pipe organ, a huge balcony with supporting posts, an enclosed projection room, orchestra pit, upholstered seats, and many exits. Balcony seats cost 20 cents, twice the price of the standard seat. Even though it was the 10th movie theatre in Berkeley at the time, it received a lot of press, due to its central location, size and design.

“Architect Cornelius has made a life study of this particular branch of his profession, and in designing the new building he has incorporated the latest and most modern ideas in theater construction,” reported the *Berkeley Daily Gazette*³¹

Cornelius’s theatre in Pittsburg, named the California Theatre and completed in 1920, is an extant example of a theatre similar to the T&D Berkeley, before its remodel in 1929–1930. The California in Pittsburg is currently a community arts performance venue and has many neoclassical features, such as Corinthian columns, sculpted urns, figurative sculptures, and, as in the T&D Berkeley, a large arched window, set with art glass, over the entrance.

The California Theatre in Pittsburg was also clearly inspired by the Palais Garnier, also known as the Paris Opera House, albeit on a much smaller, less grand and ornate scale. The Paris Opera, designed by Charles Garnier and completed in 1875, was one of the major achievements of Emperor Napoleon III’s reconstruction of Paris, led by Baron Haussmann, and an inspiration to students of Paris’s influential architecture school, l’École des Beaux-Arts.

Many of the early theatres before World War I were designed in the Beaux-Arts style, which became popular in America after the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. After many of the best architects in the U.S. studied at the École des Beaux-Arts, in part due to the paucity of architecture schools in the U.S. during the late 19th century, they passed on the school’s teachings to their American colleagues. Methods included competitions to address an architectural problem, planning, and academic precision in drawing. Studies at the École were

³⁰ “New Theater is formally opened,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, December 10, 1914.

³¹ “New T&D Theater to open Wednesday,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, December 7, 1914.

also heavily influenced by the embrace of classical architecture and the antiquities of ancient Rome and Greece.



Figure 12. California Theatre in Pittsburg, CA, A.W. Cornelius
Photo: Cinema Treasures.org

The conservative, imposing style also fit the changing movie business, as it transitioned from the small, scrappy storefront venues – where fire was a danger because of the nitrate film and open projectors – to safer, fire-proofed playhouses to accommodate the growing audiences.

The T&D Berkeley was one of the better of the T&D theatres in the Beaux-Arts style. It also featured the signature T&D logo in plaster, set in the middle of the massive metal awning, directly below the arched art-glass window. Part of T&D's appeal, news stories reported, was its fine selection of moving pictures "of a high moral character," seen as a hallmark of the T&D Theatres. In mid-December, after the showing of "Cabiria," the T&D Berkeley hosted a spectacular production of "Neptune's Daughters" with a cast of 1,000.

"Berkeley's Picture Palace," got far more press attention than the smaller Strand (now the Elmwood) on College Avenue, which opened just days before the T&D in 1914,³² possibly because the Strand didn't buy any newspaper ads for its grand opening, lacking the funds of the T&D Circuit.

³² "Big Drama of the North Will Open New Theater on College Ave. and Derby St., *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, December 7, 1914.



Figure 13. New T&D Theatre, *The Architect & Engineer*, February, 1915

The T&D Circuit

Several months after the December opening of the T&D Berkeley, the young company was riding high, with a one-page spread in a 1915 issue of *The Moving Picture World* featuring photos of its top four executives, and five of its Bay Area theatres, including the Berkeley theatre.

As a company, though, T&D had already experienced one brief ownership squabble with a manager at the Lyric in Oakland, an incident that landed in the press when an attorney for T&D used an iron bar to batter down the front doors in a standoff with the Lyric's manager.³³

It was a precursor to an even fiercer battle after the unexpected death of co-founder James Turner, struck by the Spanish Flu in 1918, aged 45. Turner died after a 10-day illness, the second death at the circuit during the influenza

³³ "Oakland Attorney Retakes Theater," *Oakland Tribune*, July 25, 1913.

pandemic. Dahnken, who had recovered from it, had just returned to work when Turner succumbed.³⁴

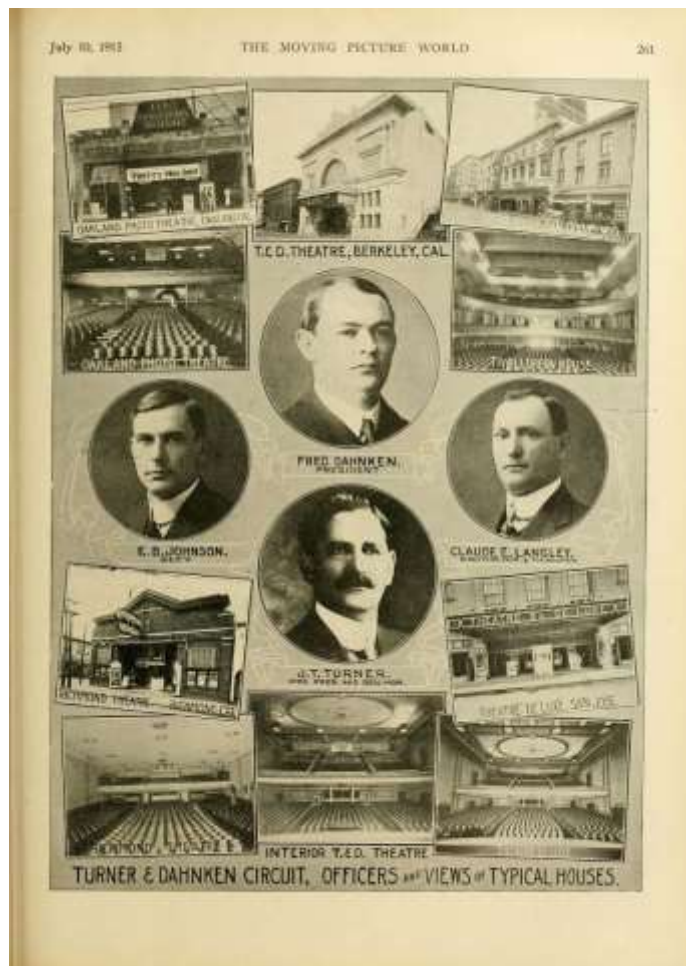


Figure 14. *The Moving Picture World*, July 10, 1915, courtesy Daniella Thompson

After Turner's death, his widow Hattie Turner took over his position, but "dissatisfaction arose in the corporation between [Fred] Dahnken and Mrs. Turner interests."³⁵ In the summer of 1921, Dahnken was ousted as president by the board, and Turner's widow took his place. Dahnken refused to acknowledge the vote and release T&D's books and records to the board. Ultimately, a few months later, the two sides reached an agreement, and Dahnken was made chairman of an advisory committee.

But this saga was the beginning of the end for the T&D Circuit. In January 1923, executives announced that the T&D and its 26 movie houses would be sold

³⁴ "James T. Turner Dies of Influenza," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 5, 1918.

³⁵ "Fred Dahnken Concedes Election of Mrs. Turner as Head of Corporation," *San Francisco Examiner*, October 8, 1921

to a Los Angeles group led by film pioneer Sol Lesser and his firm West Coast Theatres, Inc., for a sum of under \$4 million. The deal was called “one of the largest deals in the history of motion pictures.”³⁶ When the deal actually closed in March, it was described as a \$1.67 million deal for 90% of T&D stock.³⁷

In the very first days of the completed deal, the general manager for the group, A.W. Bowles, talked about plans for some of the theatres, and mentioned the T&D in Berkeley as on the list for a \$100,000 remodel.³⁸ One month later, West Coast Theaters filed for a permit to erect a scaffolding as part of an interior remodeling project to remove the box seats, change rows of balcony seats, and install a new office door. The permit estimated the work at \$4,500, a far cry from the promised \$100,000.³⁹

The year 1923 was also a tumultuous one for the city of Berkeley, which after over a decade of commercial and residential growth, had its own natural disaster: a major fire that started in the Berkeley Hills but descended toward the U.C. Berkeley campus and downtown. Most of the structures destroyed were homes, and another wave of construction in Berkeley followed in the 1920s.

As the 1920s roared on, the Shattuck Avenue commercial district grew with new, taller buildings, department stores, restaurants, and small parking garages. One major downtown development was the creation of Shattuck Square, next to the Southern Pacific station. The three Beaux-Arts style buildings in the square were designed by architects J.R. Miller and Tim Pflueger of San Francisco, and one was designed as the Berkeley branch of the Roos Brothers department store.

With growing commerce, population, and more transit options in urban areas, the movie business was growing, too. Ever-larger movie palaces, featuring revivalist European architecture or references to faraway locales seen only on the silver screen, became part of the cinema-going experience.

Sometime after the T&D sale to West Coast Theaters was completed in August 1923, the theatre on Kittredge Street was renamed the California. While several other theatres in the chain were also named the California, in Berkeley, the new name was also an opportunity to connect more with the local U.C. Berkeley community. The first ads with its new name began to appear in late 1923. Under the new owners, the theatre and its management also got involved with the growing downtown Berkeley business community: they hosted Christmas parties for children, PTA meetings, a fundraiser for the U.C. crew team, and had boy scouts as ushers for an event. The theatre also hosted fashion shows for Roos Brothers, usually in conjunction with a film screening.

³⁶ “Lesser Takes T&D Circuit for \$4 million,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 23, 1923.

³⁷ “T&D Theatres Sold for Sum of \$1,675,000,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 20, 1923.

³⁸ “Old Factor in Movie Game Passes,” *San Francisco Examiner*, August 23, 1923.

³⁹ City of Berkeley, Building Permit 14961, September 18, 1923, Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association archives



Figure 15. Roos Bros ad, Berkeley Daily Gazette, February 24, 1926

Enter Fox Studios

The film industry evolved from small nickelodeon operators, to upstart companies, to studio conglomerates with moguls at the top. These studio heads wanted ownership of more theatres. In January, 1928, Fox Studios, led by William Fox, purchased the parent company of West Coast Theaters, Westco Corp., for \$100 million, a deal that included four other cinema chains. A total of 250 movie theatres were involved in the deal.⁴⁰

When Fox made this big acquisition, the industry was just becoming obsessed with a new technology: sound. Even though there had been experiments with sound effects prior to Al Jolson's 1927 film, "The Jazz Singer," when that film became a major smash hit with recorded sound performances, there was no looking back.

The development of sound in film culminated in another shift in the business, a change more technological than architectural. But it still led to a flurry of upgrading and remodeling in many houses, and Berkeley's California Theatre was among them. The switch to sound also was an excuse to further modernize many theatres, or to redecorate and remodel in the range of revivalist, exotic and escapist styles that were becoming popular after World War I.

⁴⁰ Fox Films Buys 250 Theaters, *Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1928.

Just a few months after the Fox acquisition of the West Coast Theatres, in May, 1928, the California closed with a small, cryptic notice in the *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, which announced, "'The Dove,' [a film starring Norma Talmadge] will automatically come to a close tonight with the closing of the California Theatre."⁴¹ It wasn't until November, 1929 that Fox West Coast Theatres filed a permit for alterations. Nothing else was on the permit, except "per plans." Costs were cited as \$40,000, it was filed by the Los Angeles contractor, A.C. Lane.⁴²

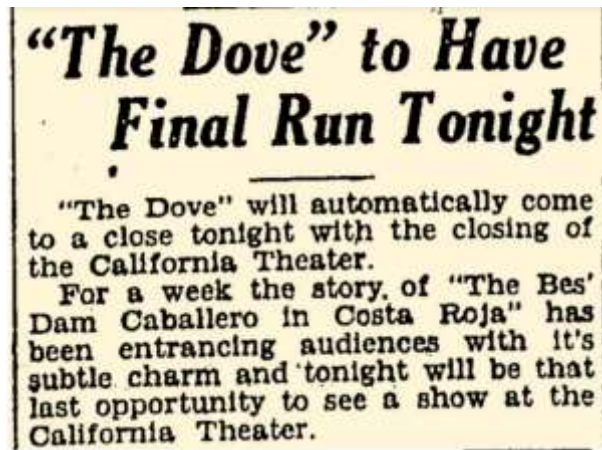


Figure 16. Mention of California Theatre closure in the *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, May 5, 1928.

The year 1929 was a tumultuous one in America. The stock market crash in October ultimately led to the Great Depression of the 1930s. But in the first few weeks after the crash, it wasn't immediately clear how severe the impact would be, or that the Roaring 1920s were at an end. All over America, building was still going at a breakneck pace; movie palaces were still on drawing boards, including in the Bay Area. In June, 1929, Fox had just completed the San Francisco Fox, a 4,651-seat, so-called spectacular theatre, designed by New York architect Thomas Lamb. In October, Paramount Publix started talking to San Francisco architect Tim Pflueger about a major movie palace in Oakland, an approximately 3,000-seat theatre to compete with the one-year-old Oakland Fox around the corner.

When the California Theatre, now known as the Fox California, finally reopened in October, 1930, as noted by Betty Marvin in the State's Historic Resources Inventory form filed in 1978, "reporters in 1930 were uncertain whether to say the 1914 T&D had been remodeled or demolished."⁴³

⁴¹ "'The Dove' to Have Final Run Tonight," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, May 5, 1928.

⁴² City of Berkeley, Permit No. 33702, November 12, 1929, Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association archives.

⁴³ Marvin, Betty, State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation, Historic Resources Inventory, "California Theater," January 13, 1978.



Figure 17. California Theatre under construction, 1929 or 1930
Swingle Collection, BAHA archives.

The *Berkeley Daily Gazette* said, “the new structure rises on the site of the old California, an important and colorful theater in the city’s past.”⁴⁴ The *Oakland Tribune*, though, noted that most of the reported \$250,000 in expenditures on the theatre were on the interior furnishings and stage equipment.

In under a year, the theatre had been transformed into a “symphony in modernism” by the theatre’s architect, Clifford A. Balch, his engineer partner, Floyd E. Stanbery, and their decorators. But it is clear from a construction photo at the time that the work was mostly on the façade, where the contractors transformed the once-ornate Beaux-Arts façade into an imposing, tripartite front with a stepped parapet and roofline, narrow niches and Art Deco motifs such as zigzags and frozen fountains, and a new marquee designed of modern materials such as metal, plastic, and neon.

While the exterior of the theatre was modern or modernistic, the interior also combined different themes and references, common among theatre architects of the 1920s. The Fox California followed a “modernistic theme in structure” with “several forms of architecture” adapted for the interior. “A touch of Kipling’s India is to be found in the stage curtains, with French renaissance architecture for the auditorium, and modernized Spanish schemes for the foyer,” commented the *Oakland Tribune*.⁴⁵

The yearning for exotic foreign lands and styles was also a key element of the Art Deco movement, which sought to eschew the standard classical European

⁴⁴ “Theater will be Opened Friday,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, October 9, 1930.

⁴⁵ “Fox Opens New Film Theater in Berkeley,” *Oakland Tribune*, October 11, 1930.

references, or at least transform them. As Maggie Valentine describes in her book on theatre architect S. Charles Lee, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk*:

Exotic styles not only connoted escape but demonstrated the ambivalence of American attitudes in the 1920s. Having seen much of Europe during the war, America soldiers returned with images of French chateaus and Tudor cottages that over the next decade sprang up in bungalows, apartment buildings, and commercial architecture throughout the United States. However, national disillusion with international commitment and the rejection of a position as a world power shaped the isolationism and laissez-faire policies that characterized the 1920s. Period revival architecture was the cultural expression of that ambivalence.⁴⁶

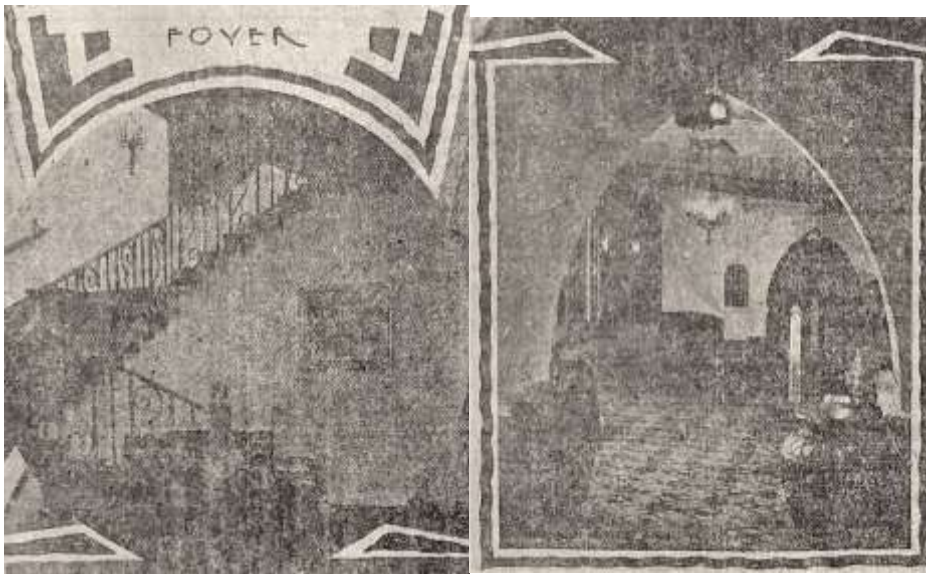


Figure 18. 1930 photos of foyer and mezzanine, published in the *Berkeley Daily Gazette*

The new theatre maintained much of its original footprint and the wing for theatrical and stage equipment. Its total auditorium, including a new balcony built with steel trusses, still held about 2,000 seats. Patrons went upstairs via one of two sweeping “futuristic” staircases that featured new metal railings with a swirling pattern, passing into the mezzanine through pointed Moorish arches. Black-and-red occasional chairs, comfortable lounges and settees dotted the foyer and the mezzanine, all modelled on modernistic lines.

The main auditorium featured a new proscenium design, where neutral walls flowed into the proscenium of buff- and sand-colored blocks surrounding the screen and stage area, where “one vivid spot of color” came from the curtain designed to cover the new screen, made of a “shimmering orange velvet” with a modernistic floral design, in magenta and a royal blue as a border, trimmed with

⁴⁶ Valentine, Maggie, “The Show Starts on the Sidewalk, An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre Starring S. Charles Lee,” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 72.

multi-colored gems, silver sequins and metallics. The new pipe organ was a \$25,000 Wurlitzer, finished in gold with raised fleur-de-lis on either side.⁴⁷

There was also a new projection booth twice as large as standard booths, with a double ceiling that was designed as a safeguard against fire, three projectors in sound-proof compartments, and two generators, in case of breakdowns.

Other new equipment included a new Magnascope screen for better picture quality and, most important, the latest in “talking equipment” from Western Electric, intending to give “the people of Berkeley a show house of perfect sound.”⁴⁸ The theatre also provided headsets for the hard of hearing.



Figure 19. Ad in a special section on the theater of the Berkeley Daily Gazette, October 9, 1930.

While the *Oakland Tribune* sounded disappointed by the lack of pomp and long speeches by Berkeley Mayor Thomas Caldecott, throngs were reported to attend the second grand opening of the theatre. The 1930 talking film “Follow Thru,” a whirlwind romantic comedy starring Buddy Rogers and Nancy Carroll, was preceded by some short subjects, including a Mickey Mouse cartoon.

⁴⁷ “‘Modernism’ is Keynote of New Theatre Building,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, October 9, 1930.

⁴⁸ “Perfect Acoustics Worked Out After Study by Engineers,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, October 9, 1930.

The Architect

In the six-page special section on the theatre in the *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, which gave the theatre the most coverage, nothing was written about the firm Balch & Stanbery, responsible for the design and engineering of the theatre.

Balch and Stanbery were based in Los Angeles and appear to have formed their partnership in the late 1920s⁴⁹ as an architect and engineer team, much like Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan in Chicago. They worked together off-and-on until the late 1930s. Balch also worked with Walker & Eisen, a highly regarded and prolific firm in the Los Angeles area, as an associated architect, where he designed more theatres in the Art Deco style, including the United Artists Theatre in downtown Pasadena and its Berkeley twin on Shattuck Avenue, which opened two years after the California Theatre.

Clifford Allison Balch was born in Preston Lake, Minn. in 1880, the son of a carpenter and the oldest of four siblings. His family moved to California around the end of the 19th century, and in the 1900 census, they were listed as living in Pasadena and the 19-year-old Clifford was working as a day laborer. Ten years later, his mother Anna was a widow, and Clifford described his profession as architect, still living in Pasadena, where he and his three brothers all resided in the parental home.

In 1917, Balch, already a second lieutenant in the National Guard, took a War Department exam and was appointed first lieutenant in the U.S. Army, which had not yet entered World War I.⁵⁰ He eventually joined Company 1 of the 160th Infantry. In 1918, he shipped out of Brooklyn, N.Y. to France. During his service there, his mother's letter-writing friendship with the French woman who was hosting Balch in her home was featured briefly in the *Los Angeles Times*.⁵¹

Balch fits the type of architect described in Valentine's book on S. Charles Lee, as one of the many architects who served in the First World War, and returned to the U.S. with revivalist visions of Europe or other foreign lands. He began working on movie theatres in the 1920s, and one of his first designs to receive attention was the Bard Theatre Building in his home town of Pasadena. The theatre in the mixed-use commercial building was described as Egyptian and presented vaudeville shows produced by Alexander Pantages.

After the 1922 discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in Egypt, the architect and the theatre's owner, Lou Bard, were swept up in the ensuing Tut-mania that was all the rage through the 1920s, influencing architecture, clothing design and even the makeup of many flappers. Balch and his patron were also likely also inspired

⁴⁹ Pacific Coast Architecture Database (PCAD), listing on Balch & Stanbury, pcad.lib.washington.edu accessed December, 2021.

⁵⁰ "California Commissions in the Guard Confirmed," *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 1917.

⁵¹ "Strangers But War Makes Them Friends," *Los Angeles Times*, November 11, 1918.

by Sid Grauman's Egyptian Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard, which had opened in October, 1922, with the first-ever Hollywood movie premiere.



Figure 20. Ad for Bard Theatre Building, *The Pasadena Evening Post*, June 22, 1925

Great pharaoh heads, silent sphinxes, and racing chariots were among the motifs to decorate the theatre. Reds, jade green, and black intermingled with hundreds of pounds of gold leaf in the mural decorations inside the theatre, reported the *Pasadena Evening Post*.⁵²

Little is known about Balch's early training, but he clearly was interested in drawing and was talented as an artist. In 1902, at age 22, he entered a Board of Trade contest to design the cover of a souvenir book and won.⁵³ According to the Pacific Coast Architecture Database, Balch worked on approximately 38 movie theatres, all of them in California, either on his own, with Floyd Stanbery, Walker & Eisen, or a firm he started later with his brother, Balch & Balch.

One project—the West Coast outpost of the famous New York restaurant Sardi's—showed Balch working in an even more modern style, in collaboration with the Austrian modernist, R. M. Schindler, who by then had settled in Los Angeles. One *Los Angeles Times* mention in 1932 noted, “plans are now being completed by architects C.A. Balch and R.W. [sic] Schindler” for Sardi's. A later ad cites Schindler as the building architect; Balch was architect for the owners.

⁵² “Egyptian Elegance to be Disclosed in Bard's New Theater,” *Pasadena Evening Post*, June 22, 1925.

⁵³ “Sixteen Identified,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1902.

Sadly, the sleek modernist café-restaurant burned in a kitchen fire in 1936.⁵⁴



Figure 21. Ad for the new Sardi's, Los Angeles Times, January 3, 1933.

As a WWI veteran, Balch tried to serve his country again during the Second World War, registering for the draft in 1942 at age 61. In 1948, Balch and his brother William worked on an “ultra modern” drive-in theatre in Pomona, called the Valley Drive-In. This appears to have been Balch’s last project. He died at age 83 in 1963.⁵⁵

Balch and Art Deco

In many of his theaters that survive today, Balch was working in what we refer to today as the Art Deco style, and described at the time as Art Moderne, Zigzag Moderne, modernistic, zigzag, jazz or, as the ad copy for the Fox California read, simply modernism. The style derived its current name from a 1925 exposition in Paris, called *L'Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, where a

⁵⁴ “Eight Injured as Sardi's Café Destroyed by Fire,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 1936.

⁵⁵ Funeral announcements, “Clifford A. Balch,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1963.

decorative style that had been bubbling up in Europe, influenced by a convergence of modern art movements, made its debut.

In her book, *Essential Art Deco*, author and V&A museum curator Ghislaine Wood describes the wide-ranging style:

Art Deco is perhaps best understood as the style of an age of extremes. Spanning the boom of the roaring twenties and the bust of the Depression-ridden thirties, it came to represent many things for many people. It was the style of the flapper girl and the factories of Fordism, the luxury ocean liner and the skyscraper, the fantasy world of Hollywood and the real world of the Harlem Renaissance. It could be deeply nationalistic, but it spread like wildfire all over the world, dominating the skylines of cities from New York to Shanghai and sheathing offices and factories from London to Rio. It presented a return to tradition and simultaneously celebrated the mechanized modern world. It embraced handcraft production and the machine...It affected all forms of design, from the fine and decorative arts to fashion, film, photography, transport and product design and reached beyond these to encompass literature, music and dance. It was modern and it was everywhere.⁵⁶

While the newspapers did not go into much detail about the exterior of the California Theatre in its 1930 re-opening, the massing of the façade and its plaster ornament are quintessential of the style and are highly regarded today.

The stepped pattern of the façade is an element that became quite popular, one that was an oblique reference to ancient temples of Mesopotamia, the Mayans, and the Egyptians. This fascination with ancient worlds, combined with the 1914 zoning requirement in New York for setbacks on new skyscrapers to allow more sunlight on the streets, fueled a fascination with ziggurat shapes. This shape, and various Cubist interpretations of it, led to the so-called "skyscraper style," where even furniture took on the shape, such as the skyscraper bookcases created by designer by Paul Frankl.

Another common motif is what are referred to as frozen fountains, captured in plaster, as seen in the California's façade. This motif repeats itself again and again in many buildings around the world, from the mid- to late 1920s, when the style was effervescent. The concept of the frozen fountain is possibly a reference to the fountain of glass designed by Renée Lalique, one of the foremost designers of the period, for the Paris Expo. A stained-glass version of the fountain was also depicted on the cover of the French weekly news magazine *L'Illustration*.

In addition, the zigzag pattern, seen on the theatre's façade, was such a popular motif that it was sometimes used as a nick-name for the style in the 1920s. It was also a likely double entendre referring to carefree drinking during Prohibition, since zigzag was used during World War I to denote drunkenness.

⁵⁶ Wood, Ghislaine, *Essential Art Deco*, (London: Bullfinch Press, 2003), p. 6.



Figure 22. Postcard featuring Lalique's fountain, Paris 1925 Exposition



Figure 23. Stained glass window created for the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes depicts the new style as seen in Lalique's fountain.

Balch also deployed the style in several other theatres, notably in five United Artists theatres, including the Berkeley U.A. on Shattuck Avenue, which was completed two years after the California Theatre on Kittredge. Balch was described as an associate architect with Walker & Eisen of Los Angeles.

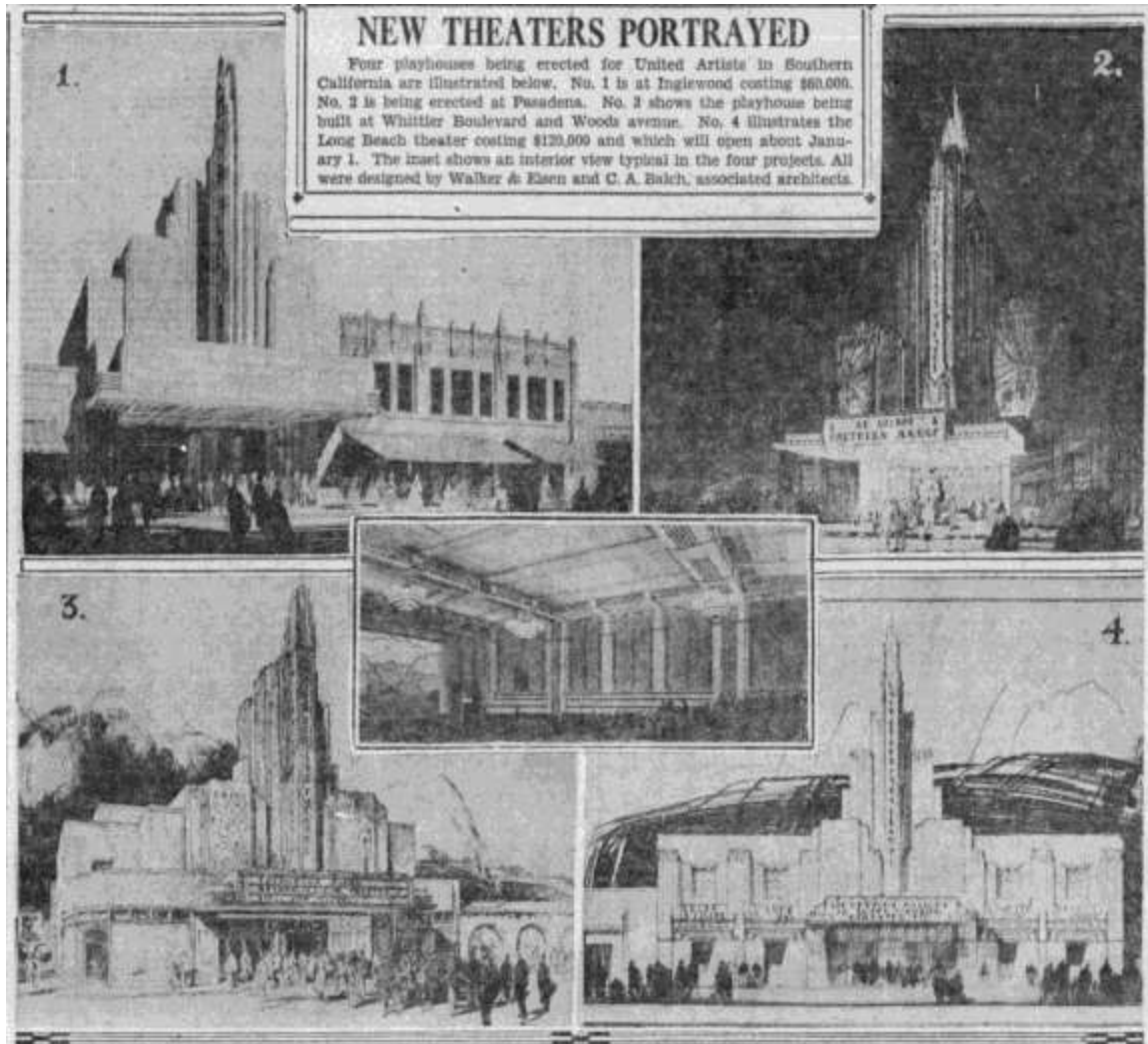


Figure 24. Architectural renderings of four U.A. theatres in the Art Deco style by Walker & Eisen, C.A. Balch as associated architect. (c) Los Angeles Times, September 13, 1931.

The Pasadena Theatre, as seen in illustration No. 3 above, is still extant on Colorado Avenue as a gym and a restaurant. The United Artists Theatre, still an active movie theatre on Shattuck Avenue, is nearly identical in form, with a stepped façade, narrow tower, vertical lines, and sculpted *bas-reliefs* on each side of the tower, depicting “Artistry” on the left and “Unity,” on the right. Theatre historian Gary Parks has noted that the art work is reversed on the façade of the Pasadena theatre.

When the U.A. Theatre opened in September, 1932, the tower glowed with neon, which was removed, possibly sometime in the 1960s or 1970s.⁵⁷ The original United Artists marquee has also been removed.

Like many of the architects of his era, Balch would gradually become more modernist in his designs, as the Art Deco ornament would be stripped from designs in the later 1930s, partly due to budgetary consideration, and as the design evolved into what we now call Streamline Moderne.



Figure 25. United Artists on Shattuck Avenue, November 2017
Photo: Therese Poletti

The Cal Endures

In 1933, as the economy worsened during the Great Depression, Fox West Coast Theatres filed for bankruptcy as a way to get out of many unprofitable movie theatre leases. The move was criticized by legislators during a Senate committee hearing on bankruptcies that took place in Los Angeles. One year later, the assets of the bankrupt chain, including 125 theatres, were sold for \$15.6 million to National Theatres Corp., a company organized to purchase the Fox

⁵⁷ Finacom, Steven, "Berkeley's United Artists Theater Turns 75," *The Berkeley Daily Planet*, September 14, 2007.

chain and headed up by Spyros Skouras, the brother of Charles Skouras, a former top executive of Fox West Coast and a trustee of the bankrupt company.⁵⁸

Back in Berkeley, the California Theatre carried on; it continued to screen movies and hosted or sponsored typical community events, such as an Easter egg hunt with partner the *Berkeley Daily Gazette*. The theatre was still named the Fox California; it wasn't until the early 1950s that another big change occurred, as the Fox West Coast chain sought to counter post-war issues that were affecting the movie theatre business. Drive-in movie theatres were becoming all the rage as America started moving to the suburbs, and the threat from television was beginning in earnest, as the numbers of operating television stations grew.

In April, 1952, the Fox California closed for two weeks, as rumors were dropped in a gossip column in the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* about plans in the works for a star-studded opening in May. After its brief closure, the theatre had a grand "reopening" to celebrate a remodel that featured a marquee redo and the addition of a huge glowing neon sign, spelling out California on two sides. The exterior of the theatre was also repainted in a shade of chartreuse.⁵⁹ The neon sign today remains the most enduring element of the 1952 remodel.



Figure 26. California Theatre's working neon in 2008. Photo © Thomas Hawk

At the grand re-opening in 1952, actresses Clare Trevor and Jeanne Crain, and the actor Charles Coburn were the biggest stars to attend the event, which raised funds for a U.S. Olympic Games Fund and a Berkeley Chamber of Commerce youth program.

⁵⁸ "National Theaters Take \$15 Million Chain, 125 Houses are Involved, Out of Bankruptcy," *Los Angeles Daily News*, November 20, 1934.

⁵⁹ "Grand Opening Being Planned for California Theater," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, April 30, 1952.

"The theatre itself has been completely remodeled and redecorated," the *Gazette* reported.⁶⁰ In its own two-page ad, Fox West Coast said it had "engaged the most progressive and modern creators in the architectural and decorative professions."

In reality, Fox had given its theatre the so-called "Skouras Style" treatment, which was an interior remodel style of Fox West Coast Theatres under the leadership of Charles Skouras, who took over the chain sometime in 1933. The signature style involved the use of plaster in three-dimensional hand-tinted floral patterns and scrolls, applied to interior walls and the surrounds of the proscenium. Fox worked with theatre designer Carl G. Moeller, who also remodeled the box office and the soffit of the marquee in the same scrolling, three-dimensional style. The arches at the top of the staircases were also reconstructed, and turned into curving, rounded entry ways, leading into the revamped mezzanine area.

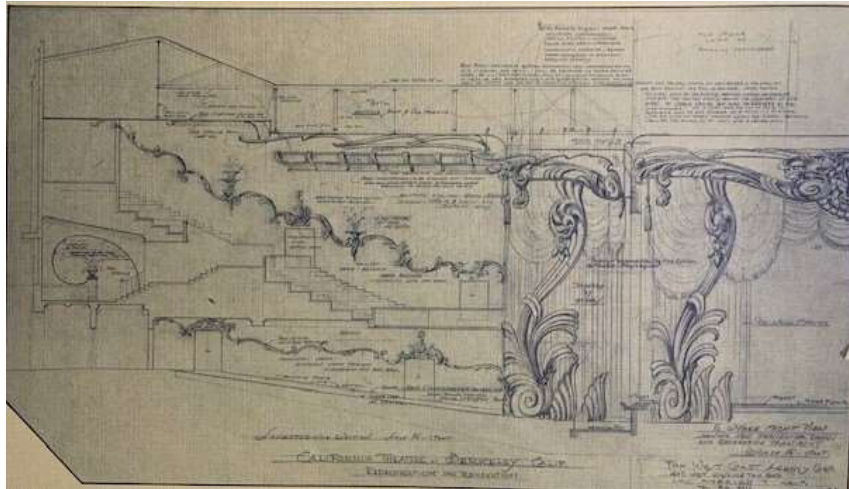


Figure 27. Renderings of the California Theatre interior, longitudinal view, reproduced in the *Annual of the Theatre Historical Society of America*, 1987. Photo courtesy Gary Parks

Preston Kaufmann, the author of a now-highly collectible book on the San Francisco Fox Theatre, also wrote an issue for the Theatre Historical Society of America on the Skouras Style in 1987. Kaufmann said that this form of decoration was almost exclusively seen in showplaces operated by National Theatres, especially the Fox West Coast Theatres. Kaufmann described it as:

Showmanship in architecture...sweeping scrollwork, deep hanging festooned drapes, multi-colored neon-lit coves, generous use of gold leaf, and lighting fixtures of brass and aluminum...are just a few of the very unique components of what historians call the "Skouras-Style."... Film goers were greeted in the lobby by a clean but fanciful concession stand, decorated with

⁶⁰ "Hollywood Stars to Be Here for Berkeley's Gala Theater Premier May 14," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, May 8, 1952.

etched aluminum panels. Skouras-Style ornament and painting continued in the auditorium – on the walls and ceiling. Seemingly as in days past, the theatre was a show in itself.⁶¹

The Skouras treatment could be called a lower-cost, three-dimensional version of the heralded Heinsbergen murals that decorated many Californian movie theatres of the 1920s and early 1930s, but at a fraction of the cost. “Obviously, these decorations were relatively inexpensive, compared to use of intricate staff work,” Kaufmann wrote. “But the Skouras[es] were interested in only one thing – making money.” He noted that the style was used for approximately nine years. When Charles Skouras died suddenly of a heart attack in 1954, the inspiration behind the style came to an end.

Not much can be learned about Carl Moeller, the chief creative behind these effects. He is cited as one of the designers of the now demolished Hawaii Theatre (1940) on Hollywood Boulevard, which featured some precursors to the Skouras Style, with floral embellishments.

An ad in the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* (Fig. 26) included some rare photos of the stylized ornament on each side of the California Theatre’s proscenium.

Figure 28. Partial section of two-page ad from the *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, May 14, 1952.

⁶¹ Kaufmann, Preston, “Skouras-ized for Showmanship,” *Theatrical Historical Society of America, Annual*, No. 14, 1987.



Figure 29. Mezzanine photo circa 1950s, with redone archways, 1930 staircase railings and bas relief in gold or aluminum leaf on the left. Jack Tillmany Collection, BAHA archives.

The 1970s to today

As movie theatres continued to be hurt by the explosion of television in the 1950s and 1960s, some theatres closed or sought new ways to attract the public and remain viable and profitable. The advent of shopping malls and the megaplex in the late 1970s led to another round of pressure on single-screen theatre operators, and many went out of business. Other theatre owners responded by partitioning their theatres, splitting large auditoriums into two or three separate small theatres, where they could screen a handful of movies every day.

The California was one of those venues. In 1976, the theatre was managed by Marty Foster and Phil Harris, whose company, Marphil Corp., operated a chain of art house theatres in the East Bay. They hired architect John A. Elphick of Oakland to split the upstairs balcony into two smaller theatres, each with its own separate entrance off the mezzanine. As much of the Skouras treatment as possible was left intact, but decorative elements that got in the way of the twinning of the balcony level had to be removed.

After the split into three screening rooms, the theatre was called the California 3 for a time. By the 1980s, it was known as California Cinema, as repertory houses came into vogue. In 1994, a company founded by Gary Meyer, who managed the U.C. Theatre, a popular rep house on University Avenue, took over the lease. His then-young company, Landmark Theatres, had the lease on the theatre until October, 2021. Like all movie theatres across the U.S., the theatre was shuttered during the COVID-19 pandemic and was on the verge of reopening when the heirs of John Muldoon III cancelled Landmark's lease.

Under Landmark's management, the California began again to host big movie events that involved the community, as it had done in its early years.

Daniel Ellsberg, author and former military analyst who was the source of the Pentagon Papers, was a frequent movie goer at the Cal. Another local Berkeley celebrity, U.C. Berkeley professor of public policy and former secretary of labor Robert Reich, was also in the house on three occasions for the showing of a documentary, "Inequity for All," by Berkeley filmmaker Jake Kornbluth. Reich, who stars, in the film, participated in a Q&A at each showing.

Another major event took place in 2013 for the showing of the film "Fruitvale Station," about the 2009 shooting of Oscar Grant by a BART police officer, who said he mistook his gun for a taser. The film's director, Ryan Coogler, hosted a packed Q&A session after one showing of the movie.



Figure 30. Filmmaker Ryan Coogler during an audience Q&A after a showing of the film "Fruitvale Station" in 2013. Photo courtesy Dale Sophia

16. Context

The California Theatre is located on Kittredge Street between Fulton Street and Shattuck Avenue, on two parcels, known as Lot 7 and Lot 8. The block is part of Blake Tract, Map No. 3, which was originally bounded by Shattuck Avenue, Allston Way, Atherton Street (now part of the U.C. campus), and Bancroft Way.

This block of Kittredge built up slowly in pre-1906 Berkeley, and then experienced more change in the rapid post-earthquake and fire growth of the small city. From its earliest days, the quiet block right off the hubbub of Shattuck was a popular area for rooming houses and apartments for both students and families, with its easy proximity to the university. In the mid-1920s and again in 1935, commercial storefronts were added to the oldest historic Victorian homes on the block, as the theatre and large corner apartment buildings added to the business activity in the area and the mixed-use nature that still exists today.

Although Blake Tract, Map No. 3 was subdivided in 1881, its development was slow. By 1890, only two houses had been built on the north side of Kittredge, including on Lot 8, the lot that investor Frank M. Wilson would eventually purchase in 1906. This early dwelling on Kittredge was an income property from the beginning, with a dwelling and a small carriage house in the rear.

According to Assessor Records, Lot 8 was owned from 1890 to 1903 by Ann A. Shepard,⁶² who moved to California from Iowa with her daughter, May, a very early student at the University of California, in 1879. They settled at 2020 Hearst Way (then College Avenue), a rooming house where May met her future husband, a law student named Lemuel Warren Cheney. After May and Warren married in 1883, Mrs. Shepard continued to live with them.

Warren Cheney became a journalist and was a well-regarded contributor to the literary magazine called *The Californian*, and eventually took it over in 1882, and then merged it into *The Overland Monthly*.⁶³ After the Cheneys married and sojourned in Europe, they briefly resided in Lodi. They returned to Berkeley in 1886, where they lived on what was then called Audubon Street (now College Avenue), north of Bancroft Way. Their home was located adjacent to the U.C. campus, an appropriate location at the time for the Cheneys.

May Cheney would go on to found the first teacher placement agency west of the Rockies, and her husband would join in its management. In addition, May Cheney was a co-leader in the movement to have Phoebe Apperson Hearst named as the first woman regent of the University of California.⁶⁴ Warren Cheney also sold real estate, where he made important contributions to the development of Berkeley.⁶⁵ In 1890, it appears that Mrs. Shepard purchased the property on Kittredge for investment purposes.

By 1894, most of the north side of the block had been built up, but the south side remained undeveloped. An additional dwelling on the north side of Kittredge, as seen in the 1894 Sanborn map, was a dwelling on Lot 7, also known as 2113 Kittredge. In 1893, that dwelling was owned and occupied by William Murray, a bookkeeper, and his daughter Anita L. Murray, a music teacher,

⁶² Alameda County Assessor Records, BAHA archives.

⁶³ "The Californian magazine has changed hands." *Alameda Daily Argus*, July 22, 1882.

⁶⁴ Thompson, Daniella, "U.C. Offers the American Turgenev's House for One Dollar," BAHA website, http://berkeleyheritage.com/berkeley_landmarks/cheney.html.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

according to City Directories and assessor records. William Murray died in 1896, leaving Anita the house on Kittredge.⁶⁶

Street grading and curbing of the block of Kittredge to the east of Shattuck and west of Fulton did not occur until 1895.⁶⁷ Cement sidewalks were laid out on each side of Kittredge in 1896.⁶⁸

That same year, the *Berkeley Gazette* (which later became the *Berkeley Daily Gazette*) published a cheerful progress report on the young town.

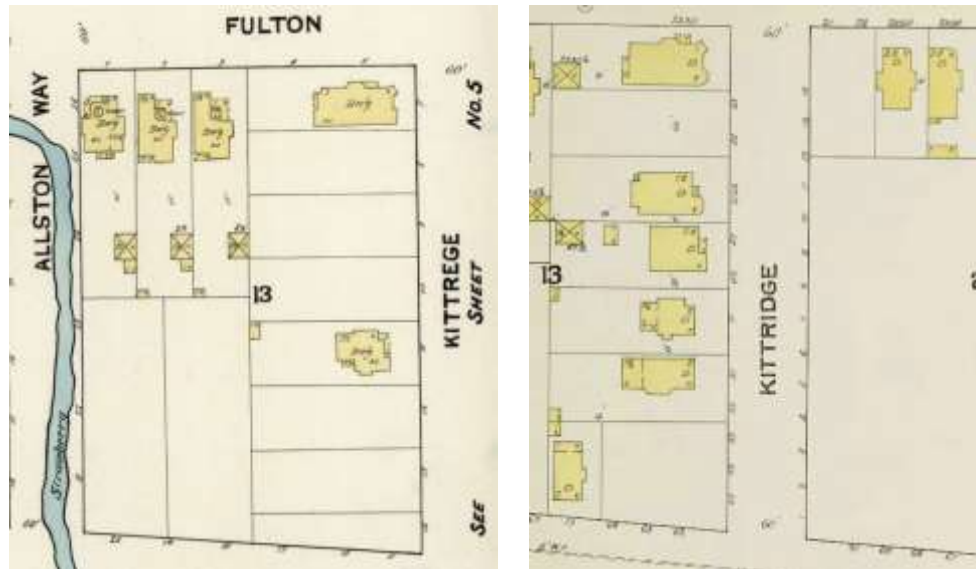


Figure 31. Sanborn map 1890 (left) and Sanborn 1894 (right)

The newspaper was an advocate, citing all the reasons home-seekers should look to Berkeley for the “most beautiful building sites,” with the University a nucleus as an education center. Noting the town’s achievements to date, the writer added, “It is not yet eighteen years since Berkeley was organized.”⁶⁹

Those achievements included a growing manufacturing industry, a police force, a banking institution, services such as electricity in every home, good markets for food, a new public library and a growing number of graded streets. Commercial buildings were one or two stories, wood frame construction, but as the Shattuck Avenue Commercial Corridor Historic Context and Survey noted, “by 1895, more substantial multi-story structures began to appear that were of brick construction.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *Berkeley Gazette*, May 8, 1896.

⁶⁷ “Kittredge Street Macademize and Gutter: Resolution Ordering the Work,” *Berkeley Gazette*, October 3, 1895.

⁶⁸ *Berkeley Gazette*, May 26, 1896.

⁶⁹ “Berkeley’s Progress, Something about the Past and Present Time,” *Berkeley Gazette*, December 24, 1895.

⁷⁰ Shattuck Avenue Commercial Corridor Historic Context and Survey, City of Berkeley, p. 25.

Public transportation to the fledgling university and the young town growing around it was initiated in 1876 with the 3.84-mile Berkeley Branch Railroad from Oakland. This subsidiary of the Central Pacific had its first terminal on Shattuck Avenue between Center Street and University Avenue.

In 1895, two buyers purchased properties on the south side of Kittredge Street, again for investment purposes. One was Robert Elder, an investor who built a house across the street, slightly cater-cornered, from the California Theatre. The house was originally a two-story wood-frame Shingle Style house. In 1896, it became the home of the new U.C. chapter of the Delta Upsilon fraternity for a couple of years, until the growing fraternity moved to larger quarters. In need of its own house, in 1902, the fraternity began raising funds by incorporating a house association, and built a fraternity house on Channing and Bowditch streets in 1905.⁷¹

Also in 1895, Ivy Melvin Tripp and his wife Emma built a house at 2106 Kittredge Street (Lot 19).⁷² By 1900, the Tripp family had moved out, and their former home became a boarding house. In 1902, a suspicious fire in the boarding house, owned for one week by former miner and capitalist Gustave Wanger, greatly damaged the building.⁷³ A year later, Wanger commissioned Berkeley architect William H. Wharff to design a three-story, fire-proof building on the southeast corner of Shattuck and Kittredge for apartments and commercial storefronts. In mid-1904, J. F. Hink & Sons Dry Goods (the precursor to Hink's Department Store), moved into the ground floor.



Figure 32. J.F. Hink & Son promotional postcard, circa 1904, of the new store in the Wanger Block courtesy Daniella Thompson.

⁷¹ "The Delta Upsilon Quarterly," Volume XXIV, October 1, 1906, p. 260-261.

⁷² *Oakland Tribune*, January 14, 1895.

⁷³ "Disastrous Fire is Probably Due to Incendiarism," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, December 29, 1902.

The unbuilt lots on Kittredge Street continued to be sold in the early 1900s, and most of them were income properties, with apartments or rooming houses that appealed to the growing university community. E.J. Martin, a North Berkeley resident who was the manager at the San Francisco gas company, acquired lots as a speculative venture in 1901 and planned to build “tasteful cottages of seven rooms.”⁷⁴ In April of that year, Martin filed a permit for all work except electrical wiring and gas fixtures on a two-story house on the north side of Kittredge, 50 feet west of Fulton, with double specifications.

This likely was the two-story building at 2125-27-29-31 Kittredge, originally four flats that had grown to 12 apartments and rooms by 1950. A classified ad from 1902 for 2127 Kittredge described clean, well-furnished rooms for rent, and a French and Spanish table, where both languages were spoken and practiced.⁷⁵

By 1903, there were dwellings on all seven lots on the north side of Kittredge, while the south side was gradually developing, along with downtown Berkeley. More public transit had an even larger impact on the growth, with the formation of the Key System in 1902 and its arrival in Berkeley with streetcars that left Shattuck for a ferry connection to San Francisco beginning in 1903.⁷⁶



Figure 33. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1903

In January, 1904, a livery and stable owner named John C. Fitzpatrick hired the well-regarded Berkeley architect Wharff to build a two-story residence with a basement on the south side of the block, at what is now 2138 Kittredge, for the large sum of \$4,090.⁷⁷ Fitzpatrick had also purchased the lot next door, to the

⁷⁴ “Will Improve Real Estate,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, May 17, 1901.

⁷⁵ Classified ads, *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, September 30, 1902.

⁷⁶ Shattuck Avenue Commercial Corridor Historic Context and Survey, p. 24.

⁷⁷ “To Erect Large Building,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, January 4, 1904.

east. He, his wife and their five children, had been living across the street at 2115 Kittredge, according to the 1904 Husted's directory. After many years as a railway superintendent, at the turn of the century, Fitzpatrick had opened up his own livery and stable business on Allston.

After Fitzpatrick's new home was built, he also moved his livery and stable business next door. The original 1904 home, which was built set back from the street, features a full-width hipped main roof and other Victorian era features such as a projecting bay to the east and curved wooden brackets.⁷⁸

Fitzpatrick's livery and stable business evolved with the times. In 1907, it even had a veterinarian who had his office on site, which probably was very useful when horses were stabled there. But transportation was shifting to the automobile, and by 1915, a year after the T&D Theatre opened, it was advertising limousines available at any time at Fitzpatrick's Garage.⁷⁹



Figure 34. View of Kittredge Street circa 1915 with Fitzpatrick's Garage covered in ivy on the left. Postcard courtesy Anthony Bruce

Two major events led to a further explosion of growth of downtown Berkeley. The San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 and the construction of the Southern Pacific railroad station in 1908, both led to more commercial

⁷⁸ Franklin Maggi, Leslie Dill, and Sarah Winder, "John C. Fitzpatrick House," State of California DPR 523 Primary Record, March 2, 2015, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Classified ads, *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, December 2, 1907 and December 15, 1915.

construction and development. Some buildings in downtown Berkeley suffered some damage, but nothing like the devastation seen in downtown San Francisco.

The year 1906 was also important for the block. The Victorian house at 2113 Kittredge on Lot 7 was sold by Anita Murray to John Muldoon and his family in 1906, while the house next door passed from Mrs. Ann Shepard at her death in 1903 to her other daughter, Fannie Beardsley.

In March 1906, one month before the San Francisco earthquake and fire, Frank Wilson purchased that same property from Stanford and Sarah Luella Cartwright,⁸⁰ who owned the property for about three years. Wilson is named in Alameda County historic assessor's records as the owner of the property from 1907 through 1913, but the assessment on the Lot 8 improvements was markedly reduced by 1911. The 1911 Sanborn map (Fig. 34) shows only a shed in the rear of Lot 8, indicating that Wilson either razed or moved the house circa 1910-11.

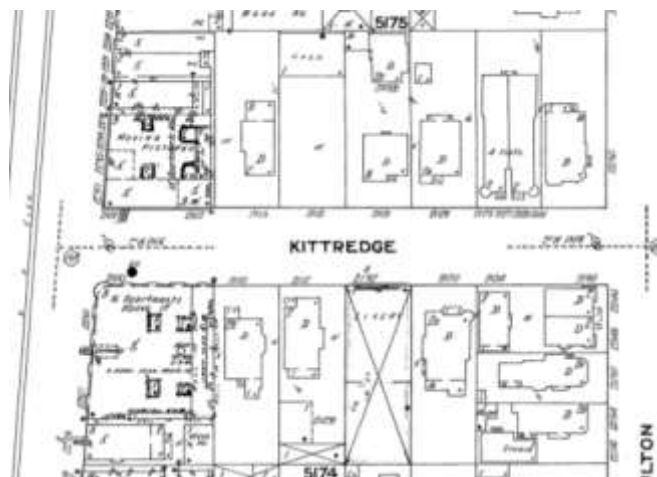


Figure 35. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1911

With so many people fleeing San Francisco, many in Berkeley saw an opportunity both to profit from and to boost the young city's growth in this time of tragedy across the bay. For example, a group of real estate men formed, dubbing themselves the Berkeley Real Estate Exchange, to market the city of Berkeley and its locations, including the Berkeley Wharf, to manufacturers and other businesses in San Francisco that had been ruined or damaged in the earthquake.⁸¹ Their efforts were successful. A few months later, Warren Cheney wrote in the December issue of *Sunset* magazine about the host of commercial enterprises that had moved to Berkeley from the city.⁸²

⁸⁰ *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, March 6, 1906.

⁸¹ "Real Estate Exchange is Working to Secure Large Business Houses," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, May 1, 1906.

⁸² Shattuck Avenue Commercial Corridor Historic Context, p. 26-27.

Another investor who sought to capitalize on the 1906 rush of refugees from San Francisco was business leader B.F. Brooks of Berkeley, who commissioned San Francisco architects Henry Meyers and Clarence Ward to design a three-story apartment building of reinforced concrete and brick, for the corner of Shattuck and Kittredge, at a cost of \$60,000.⁸³

Shortly after the Muldoons purchased their home, construction began in October, 1906 on the Brooks Apartment building (also known as the Amherst, Berkeley City Landmark No. 253.) Upon the completion of the Neoclassic Revival style building in 1907, the section of Shattuck Avenue from University to Bancroft was “solidly built” on both sides.⁸⁴ In addition to the large apartments upstairs, the building was home to commercial storefronts, including the storefront Varsity nickelodeon, the first home of the T&D Circuit in Berkeley, accessed on the Shattuck street side.



Figure 36. Postcard circa 1907, showing corner of Shattuck and Kittredge, with Brooks Apartments (left) and Wanger Block (right), courtesy Daniella Thompson

The neighborhood continued its growth into the 1920s, and some of the original building owners, seeing an opportunity, adapted their structures to the need for commercial storefronts. The Robert Elder House, for example, was altered in the 1920s. The charming Mediterranean-style commercial storefront addition, which today has the address of 2124–2126 Kittredge, was built in 1926 and retains its architectural integrity.⁸⁵

⁸³ “Two Handsome Modern Buildings Soon to be Erected in this City,” *Berkeley Gazette*, October 23, 1906.

⁸⁴ Two Handsome Modern Buildings Soon to be Erected Landmark in this City,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, October 23, 1906.

⁸⁵ Franklin Maggi, Leslie Dill & Sarah Winder, State of California DPR 523 Primary Record, Robert Elder House, March 2, 2015.

Another earlier survivor on the block is the A.H. Broad House (1894) that added commercial storefronts. The A.H. Broad House stands adjacent to the California Theatre, at 2117 Kittredge Street. This Structure of Merit, designated in 2001, was the home of Berkeley builder and artist Alphonso Herman Broad,⁸⁶ who lived there with his family from 1907 to 1915, during a period when the block's character was being transformed from residential to commercial.

Broad would take advantage of this transformation in the mid-1920s, when he built two storefronts in front of his former home.⁸⁷

"Two new businesses that definitely foretell the speedy conversion of Kittredge street to one of commercial activity have just made their bow to the Berkeley public," wrote the *Berkeley Daily Gazette*.⁸⁸



Figure 37. Photo of A.H. Broad building and new commercial storefronts, June 12, 1925, *Berkeley Daily Gazette*.

"Residences and rooming houses have long held sway in this block of Kittredge street, despite the nearness to the city's main artery," said the *Berkeley Gazette*. "Only the California theatre and the Pepper Tree Inn disputing residential dominance in the past."⁸⁹ The new storefront closest to the theatre was a lunch and candy shop, called "The California Sweets," an excellent companion to the T&D Theatre, which had already brought the biggest change to the block since its opening in 1914.

Across the street from the theatre was a relatively new Pepper Tree Tea Room, a neighborhood restaurant and café, which was opened in 1923 by Alma Taylor, after her husband purchased their home at 2138 Kittredge from John C.

⁸⁶ Thompson, Daniella, "Builder-artist A.H. Broad left his mark on Berkeley," August 6, 2009, BAHA website, http://berkeleyheritage.com/eastbay_then-now/ah_broad.html

⁸⁷ Thompson, Daniella, "Builder-artist A.H. Broad left his mark on Berkeley," BAHA website.

⁸⁸ "Rapid Development on Kittredge," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, June 12, 1925.

⁸⁹ "Rapid Development on Kittredge," BDG, 1925.

Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick's wife died in 1919 and in 1921, he put his garage and auto repair shop up for sale, saying it was "at sacrifice, account sickness."⁹⁰ At the time, the garage had storage for 35 cars, was doing a good business, and cleared about \$400 a month, the ad in the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* stated.

The T&D Circuit ended up buying the garage, which it sold a few years later in 1925, to the operators of the University Garage on Telegraph.⁹¹

The second business was a hair salon, described as a ladies and children's hair-cutting parlor. Various owners would take over the hair salon, which lasted through the 1950s.

A Sanborn fire insurance map from 1929, after Fox West Coast Theatres took over the theatre, shows all the commercial activity on the block, including a new gas station on the corner of Kittredge and Fulton.

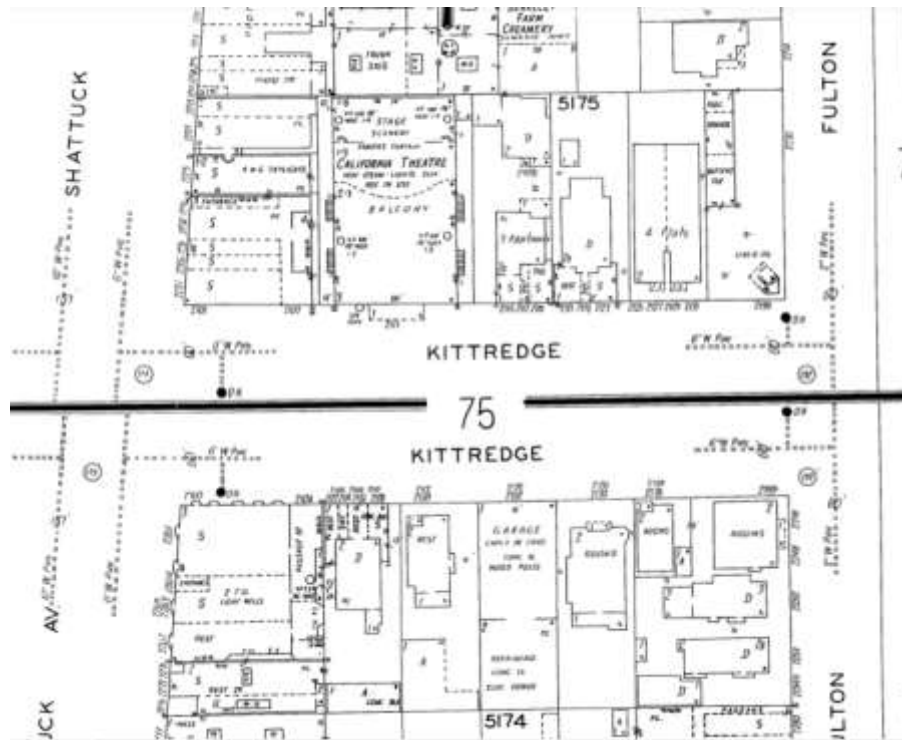


Figure 38. 1929 Sanborn Fire Insurance map, BAHA archives.

The biggest development on the other side of Shattuck Avenue would be the construction of the new main public library, at 2090 Kittredge. The library, completed in 1931, after the 1929–1930 remodel of the California Theatre, would continue the Moderne or Art Deco style. The building was designed by James W.

⁹⁰ "Mrs. C. Fitzpatrick Called by Death," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, March 1, 1919. Classified ad, *Oakland Tribune*, June 15, 1921.

⁹¹ "Felt and Millett buy T&D Garage," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, September 5, 1925. (This sale was likely conducted by the heirs of Turner and Danhken, since T&D had been sold by that time.)

Plachek, a local architect who single-handedly reshaped downtown Berkeley and the Civic Center area between the wars. The new library was built to replace the smaller library designed by John Galen Howard, the main architect of the U.C. Berkeley core, with funding from industrialist Andrew Carnegie.⁹²

Today, as local City of Berkeley Landmark No. 56 and listed in the National Register, the Berkeley Public Library is an exquisite example of the Art Deco style, in massing, design, and ornament, with *bas-reliefs* that reference Egyptian art, illustrating the trend of designers of the period to incorporate motifs of non-European derivation.



Figure 39. Detail of Berkeley Public Library, November 2021. Photo: Therese Poletti

One year later, the United Artists Theatre on Shattuck was completed, also in the Art Deco style, by Walker & Eisen architects, with Balch as associated architect. Including the California Theatre, these three Art Deco buildings in the area are all excellent examples of the style, and represent the neighborhood's change from early residential to an even larger, modern commercial district.

Another nod to the increased commerce in the area happened in the mid-1930s, when the Taylors, as new owners of the Fitzpatrick house at 2138 Kittredge, also embarked on a commercial renovation, a move that would also accommodate more patrons in the popular Pepper Tree. Their project was built 10 years after storefronts were added in front of the A.H. Broad and Robert Elder houses and injected additional charm to the block.⁹³

⁹² Maggi, Franklin, Leslie Dill & Sarah Winder, State of California, DPR 523 Primary Record, Berkeley Public Library, March 15, 2015.

⁹³ Maggi, Franklin, Leslie Dill, & Sarah Winder, State of California, DPR 523 Primary Record, John Fitzpatrick House, March 2, 2015.

In 1935, the Taylors commissioned a brick-faced addition to their home, with a two-story, modified Georgian Colonial façade, “inspired by early-American house construction.”⁹⁴ There are graceful arched door openings and arched windows on the ground floor, symmetrical focal windows on the second floor, and decorative steel half-round balconettes. The small, stately addition would fit right in among the Federalist homes on Boston’s Beacon Hill.



Figure 40. Taylor addition (1935) to Fitzpatrick House, 2138 Kittredge Street.
Photo © 2021 Anthony Bruce.



Figure 41. Ad for the remodeled Pepper Tree, November 1935, Berkeley Daily Gazette

Today, this core area of Kittredge Street next to Shattuck Avenue retains its mixed-use character, and most of its historic buildings are contributors to a

⁹⁴ Maggi, Franklin, Leslie Dill, & Sarah Winder, State of California, DPR 523 Primary Record, John Fitzpatrick House, March 2, 2015.

potential historic district of Shattuck Avenue. In addition, these historic mixed-use buildings from the 1890s to the 1930s are all important links to downtown Berkeley's historic past and its evolution to today's dense urban center.

17. Significance

Consistent with Section 3.24.110A.1.a. The California Theatre possesses architectural merit. Originally constructed in 1913–1914, it was remodeled in 1929–1930 in the Art Deco or Moderne style and retains most of those features: Art Deco façade, including Art Deco style massing and design features such as stepped parapets. The theatre retains all its original Art Deco ornaments, such as the curved coping, zigzag trim, vertical stepped out piers, frozen fountains, and protruding corbels with zigzags. A remodel in 1952 added a neon sign of architectural significance, with rare so-called raceway letters that extend upwards. The stylized letter forms are also individual sculptures of metal and the letter form is a rare up and down script and is fitting with the Art Deco style.

Consistent with Section 3.24.110A.1.b. The California Theatre is one of the last three movie theatres in the Art Deco style in Berkeley, and one of the last 12 extant in that style in the San Francisco Bay Area. It is one of two theatres in Berkeley to be designed in its 1929–1930 remodel by a significant theatre architect, Clifford A. Balch of Los Angeles, who was a prolific theatre designer.

Consistent with Section 3.24.110A.1.c. The California Theatre is an architectural example worth preserving for the value that it adds to the neighborhood fabric. The California Theatre is a striking presence on Kittredge Street and is an extant example of the commercial boom in the 1920s of the area, after the block transitioned from residential homes to small neighborhood businesses. The theatre added to the neighborhood fabric when it was an active movie theatre as a venue for the community to attend films and documentaries, sometimes interacting with directors, and in general, providing educational events on film. The theatre has a history supporting the University of California through hosting events or sponsoring fundraisers.

Consistent with Section 3.24.110A.4. The California Theatre also possesses historic value, as one of the earliest moving picture theatres in Berkeley, and one that is still extant. The theatre also has a close association with early California motion picture pioneers, the owners of the T&D Circuit, William Turner and Fred Dahnken, who commissioned its construction as their third movie house in Berkeley. The California also has a close association with Fox West Coast Theatres, a major force in the early days of Hollywood. The California hosted

many Hollywood film stars and prominent actors during its grand openings of 1914, 1930, and again in 1952.

Historic Value: City Yes Neighborhood Yes

Architectural Value: City Yes Neighborhood Yes

18. Is the property endangered? Possibly. The building is vacant, its fate is unknown.

19. Reference Sources/Bibliography/Acknowledgements:

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20. Recorder: Therese Poletti Preservation Director, Art Deco Society of California

Date: January 10, 2022



Figure 42. California Theatre at night, 2018. Photo courtesy of Ira Serkes

