

A Pictorial Glimpse of the ...

**RKO
PALACE**

BETTE DAVIS
OLIVIA DE HAVILLAND
HUSH - HUSH.
SWEET CHARLOTTE

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HUSH - HUSH.
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RKO PALACE'S MOST BEAUTIFUL
THEATRE



Meet Mr. Jay Golden, Divisional Manager for RKO Theatres. From his office in the RKO Palace Theatre in Rochester, Mr. Golden directs the activities of numerous RKO theatres in several states.

Coming to Rochester soon after the Palace opened, Mr. Golden has always taken a special pride and interest in "Rochester's Most Beautiful Theatre."

It was he who brought to Rochester all the leading vaudeville stars. It has been he and his loyal staff who have kept the RKO Palace one of the cleanest, most sparkling motion

picture palaces that have survived their 1920-1935 heyday.

And, when a group of theatre organ enthusiasts requested permission to restore and maintain in playing condition the theatre's long silent Wurlitzer pipe organ, it was Mr. Jay Golden who not only granted their request but gave his wholehearted moral support and encouragement.

Because of his continued interest and aid the present and future generations of Rochester area residents are assured of hearing the incomparable sound of the theatre pipe organ.

You hold in your hands more than a pictorial record of a famous Rochester landmark. This is a memento of a bygone era when only the well-to-do owned autos, when radios were a novelty and television was unheard of.

This was the age that saw "the house that shadows built" transformed from a plain movie hall into a big, ornate motion picture and vaudeville theatre.

In the larger cities these were great entertainment palaces seating from three to six thousand persons. They were as luxurious as they were huge.

Midst such regal splendor the common folks could sit as kings and queens. Here the clerk, the laborer, the tired housewife came to forget for a few hours the cares of the day. Here they entered the exciting realm of live entertainment and music. Here they were enchanted by the wonderful screen world of romance and adventure.

There were larger theatres but none were more beautiful than Rochester's RKO Palace which opened on Christmas Day, 1928.

The opening film was "Scarlet Seas" starring Betty Compson and Richard Barthelmess. The stage show featured Joe Howard, Vaudeville Headliner. At the console of the Mighty Wurlitzer pipe organ was Tom Grierson who continued as staff organist until use of the organ was discontinued some sixteen years later.

The 2916-seat theatre had provisions for every type of stage show. There was a bath for trained seals, a chute for bringing animals into the stage basement and onto the stage, and seven floors of dressing rooms that included a billiard room, kitchen and children's playroom for the convenience and comfort of performers. A film preview room, a machine shop, carpenter shop, electrician's shop, stage door watchman's glass enclosed booth, and an organist's room complete with music and song slide storage facilities were included "back stage."

Every important vaudeville act of the times played at the RKO Palace. Many,

such as the famous Olsen and Johnson, returned year after year. The still popular Jack Benny, Bob Hope and Kate Smith were among the many stars that performed on the Palace stage.

To put on the elaborate vaudeville shows required the services of from eight to fifteen stage hands.

As radio became more popular many vaudeville stars left the strenuous three acts a day, seven days a week schedule of the vaudeville circuit for the easier and much more profitable once a week performance on a nationwide radio network.

Top grade vaudeville left the stages of America's motion picture palaces. Soon the curtain fell on the last act. Vaudeville was gone.

For a while the talking pictures continued to attract enough patrons to fill the large theatres. But even then movie-goers ceased to be attracted more by the theatre than the show that was presented. Now they first sought the picture they wanted to see and THEN the theatre where it was being shown. The motion picture palace itself was no longer the prime attraction.

As radio, TV and the family auto filled the leisure hours of more and more families the number of empty seats in America's movie palaces increased.

One by one they closed their doors and fell under the wreckers' ball. The Fox in San Francisco; the Roxy and Paramount in New York; and now, the RKO Palace in Rochester. On its site will be erected a modern motel-office-theatre complex with twin eighteen story towers. The new 1200-seat theatre will be in the luxury class with the latest projection and sound equipment plus roomy seats that offer patrons "living room comfort." It will be under RKO management.

May this memento keep the majesty and splendor of the famous Palace vivid in your memory. May it serve as a means of sharing this memory with others who were never so fortunate as to have experienced the pleasure of "an evening at the Palace!"



Stage door entrance

Exterior view of lobby and auditorium from corner of Clinton Ave. No. and Mortimer St.





Side entrance showing box office

Main entrance to "Rochester's most beautiful theatre"





Outer lobby looking toward street



"Vestibule" between main entrance and outer lobby

Inner lobby with its refreshment stand adding a somewhat discordant note





Main stairway from lobby to balcony



Ladies' powder room—balcony

Main entrance from lobby to auditorium





Outer lounge—ladies' powder room (balcony)

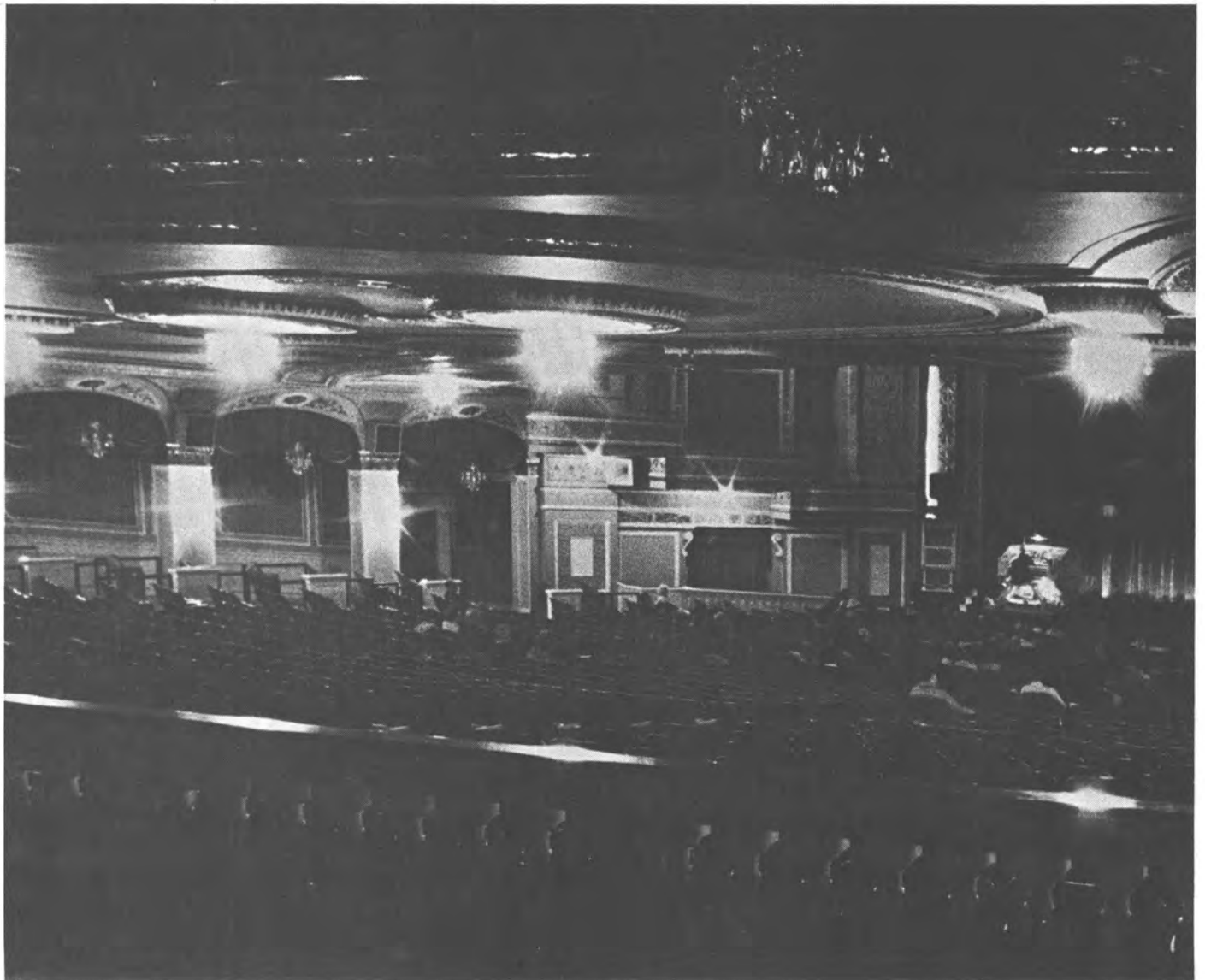
Main floor men's lounge

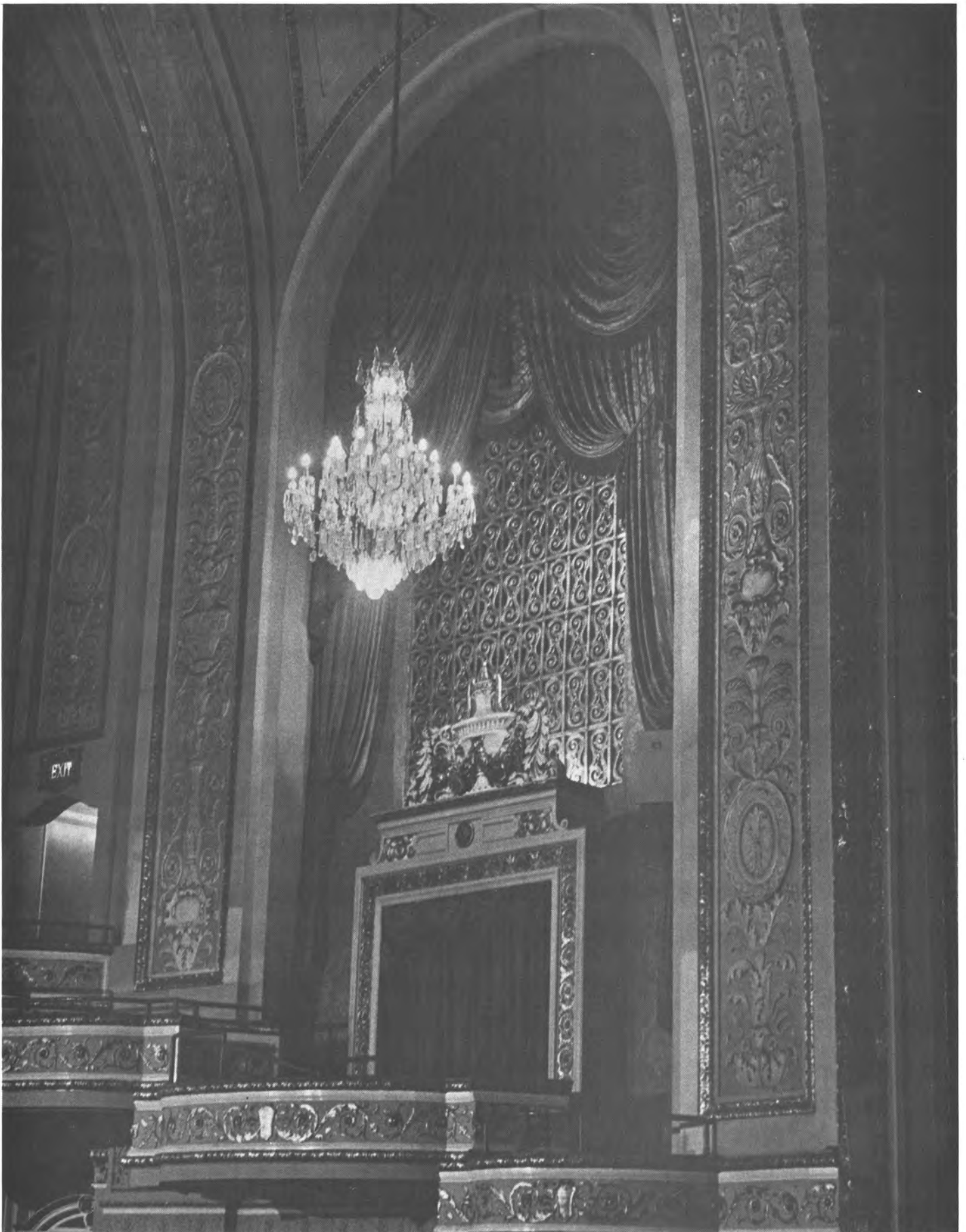




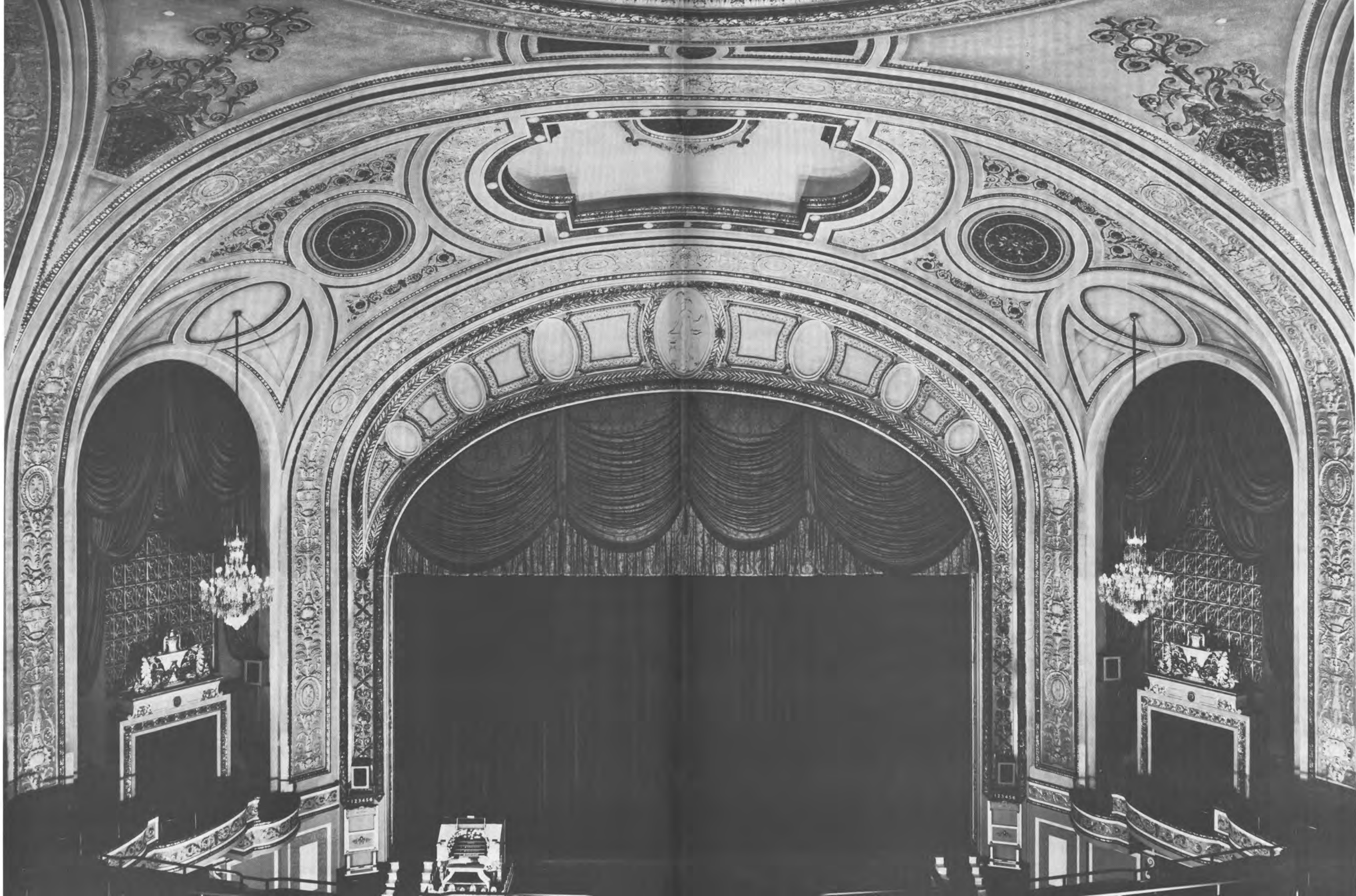
Close-up view of left side of orchestra

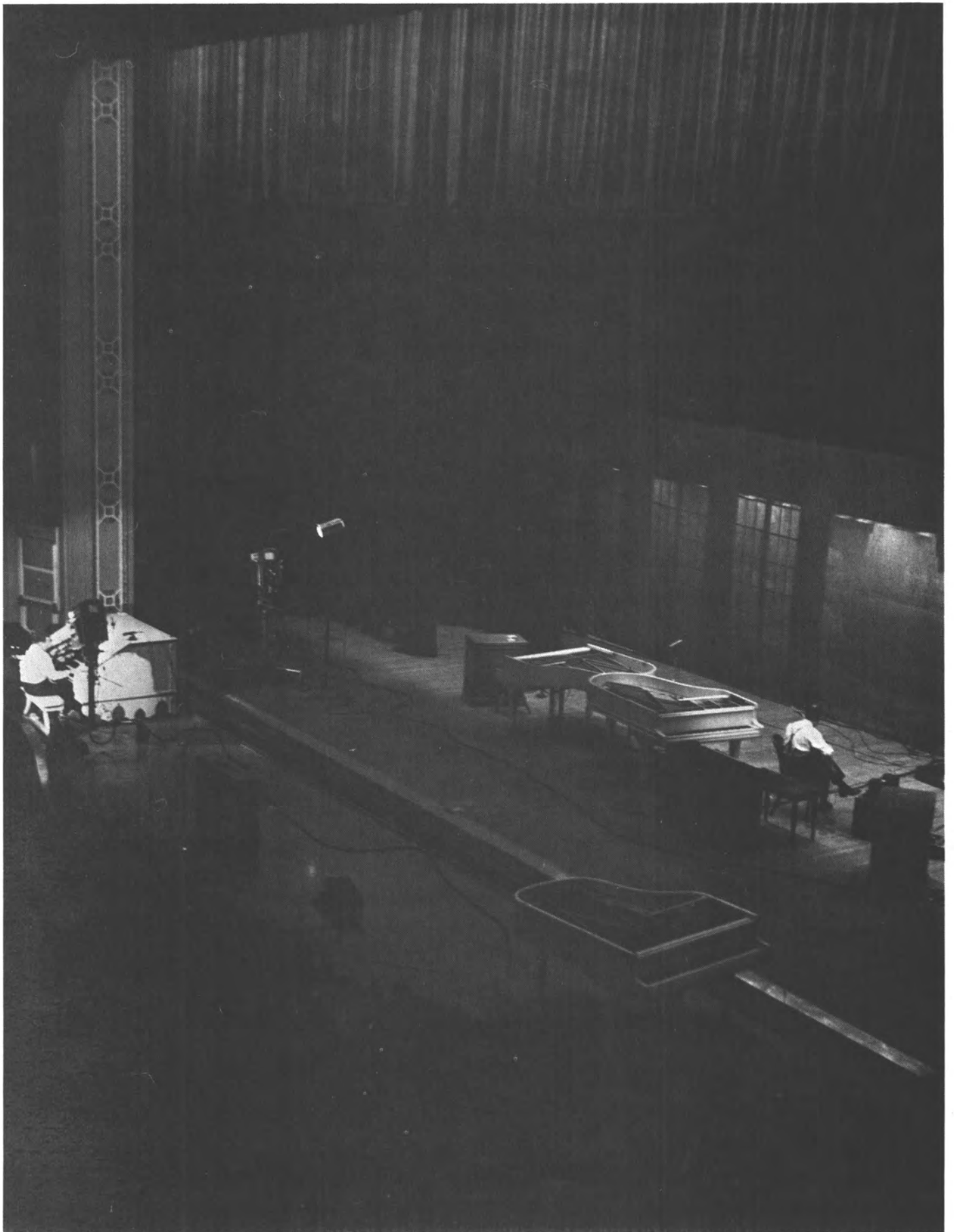
View of auditorium from rear of orchestra





The rare beauty of the Palace Theatre is apparent in this view showing one of the two golden grilles in front of the organ chambers





Ready for action! Organ, orchestra pit and 85 foot wide stage



Exit sign



Outlet for vacuum cleaner system

Announcement case used for the names of vaudeville acts. Some of the most famous names in American vaudeville appeared on this case



One of many decorative light fixtures



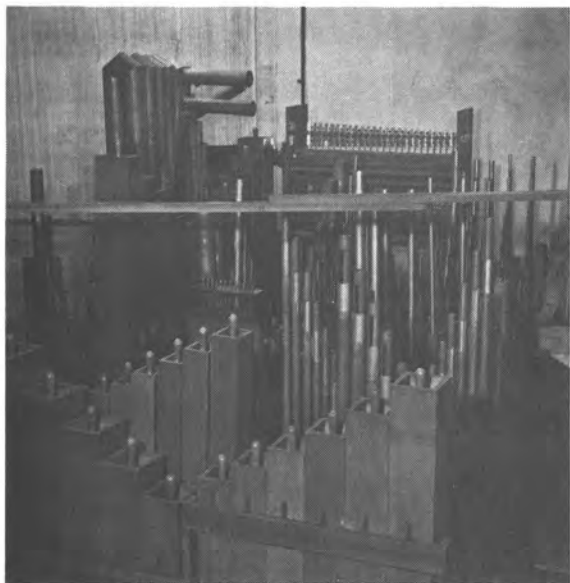


The organ console

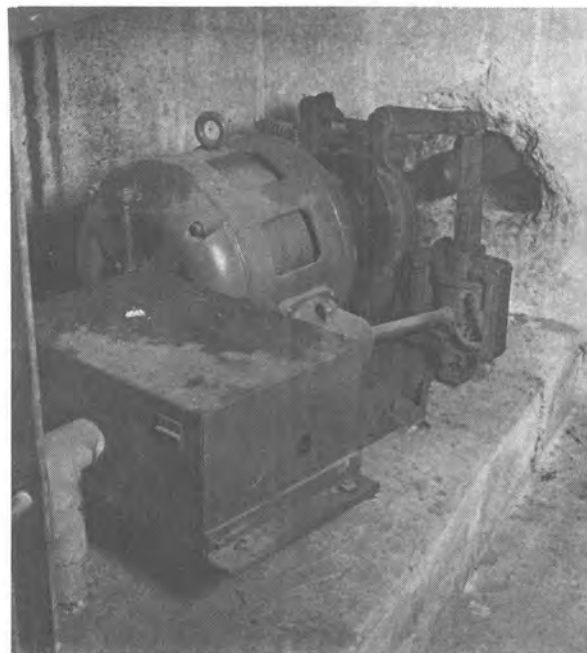
This great four manual twenty-one rank theatre pipe organ is one of the finest ever built by the Wurlitzer Company of North Tonawanda, New York. It was made especially for the RKO Palace Theatre and installed in the new theatre in 1928 at a cost of \$75,000.

In addition to its 1495 pipes ranging in size from a few inches in length to the big 20-foot pipes weighing four hundred pounds, there are real percussion instruments which are played from the console. These include chimes, drums, castanets, cymbals and glockenspiel. The pipes produce a myriad of pure organ tones plus many which bear a striking resemblance to the strings, woodwinds and brass instruments of an orchestra or band.

The pipes, percussion instruments and sound effects (surf, auto horn, bird whistle, etc.) are housed in two big rooms or chambers behind the golden grilles on each side of the auditorium. A view inside the main chamber is shown on page 17.

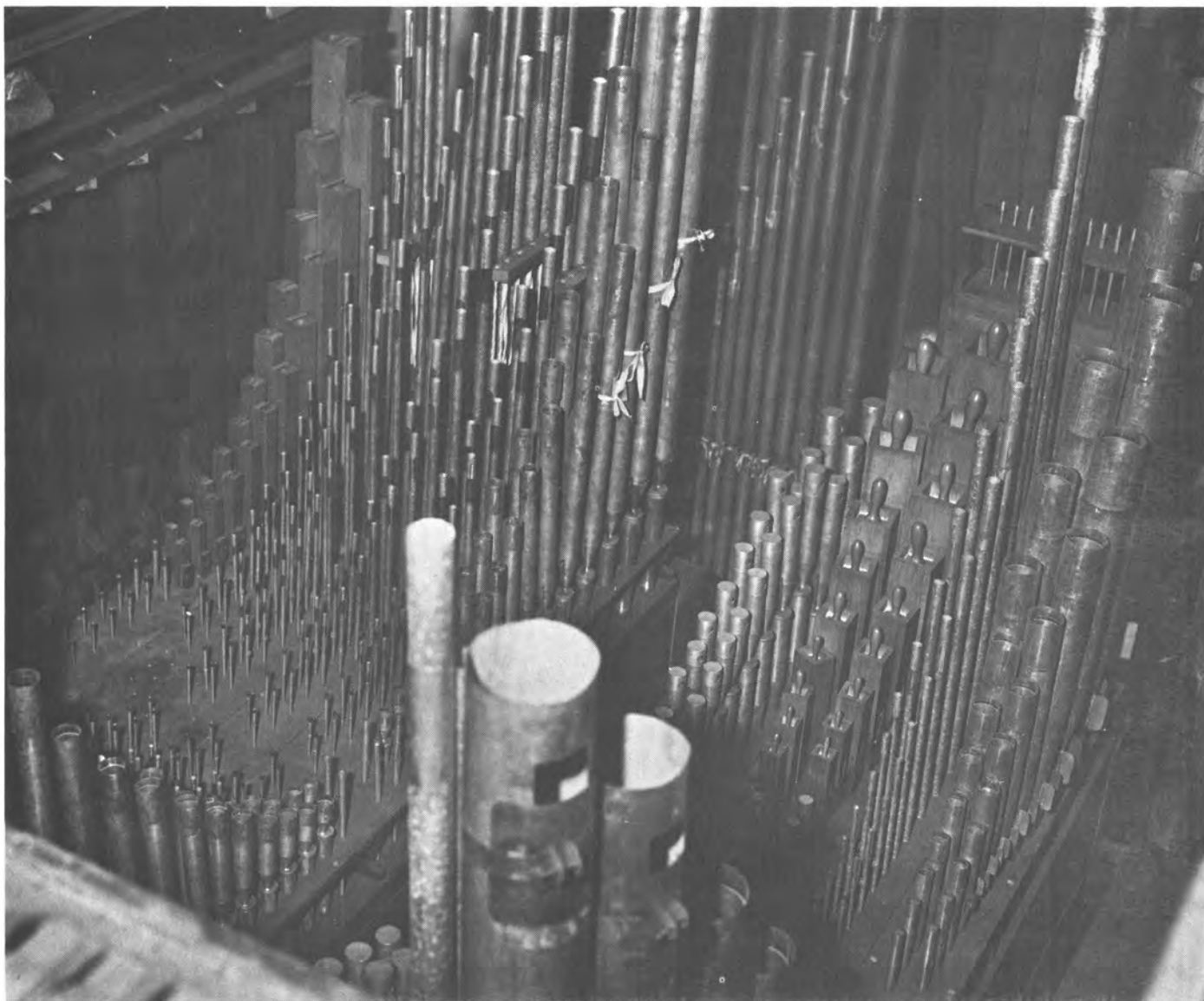


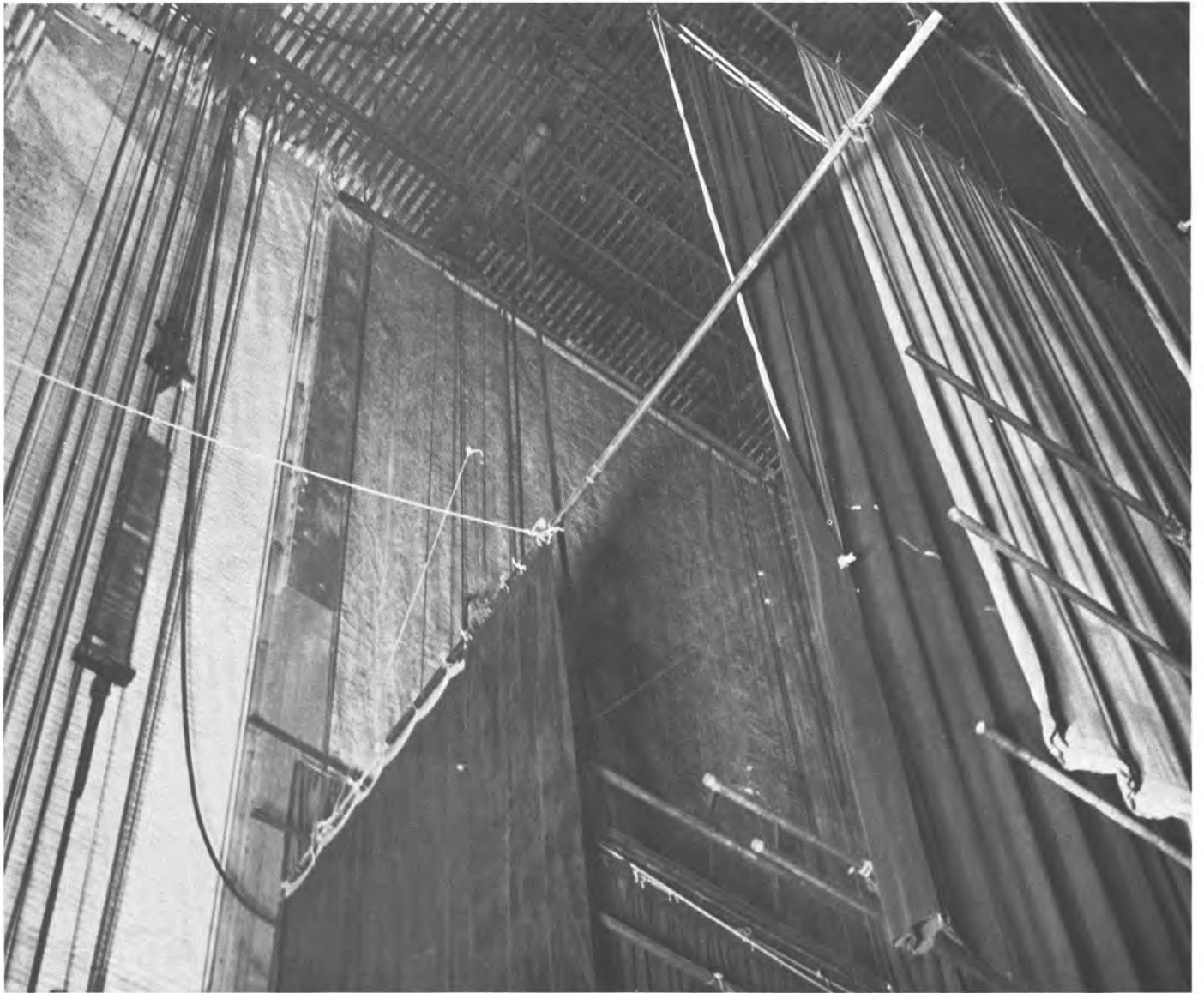
View inside left organ chamber



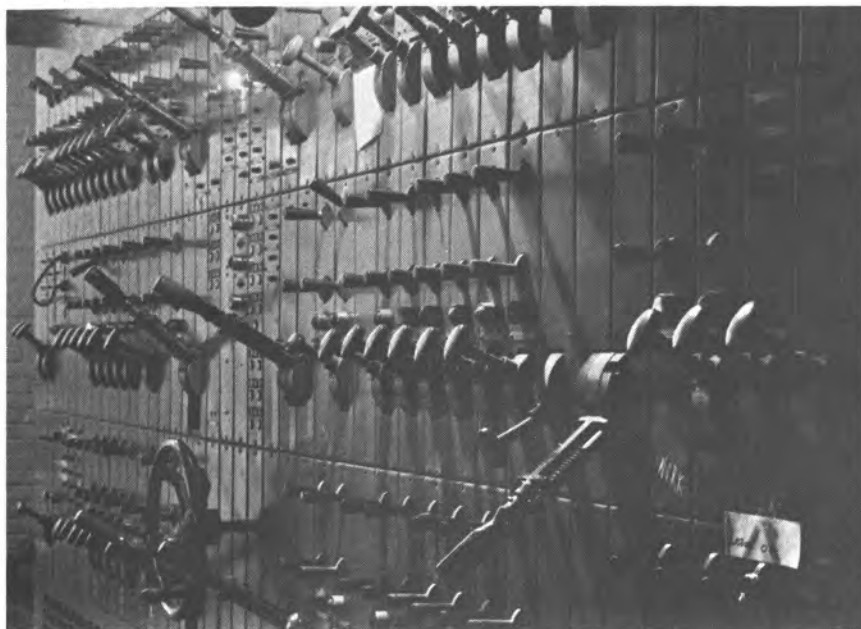
Lift mechanism for organ console

Close-up view of left organ chamber

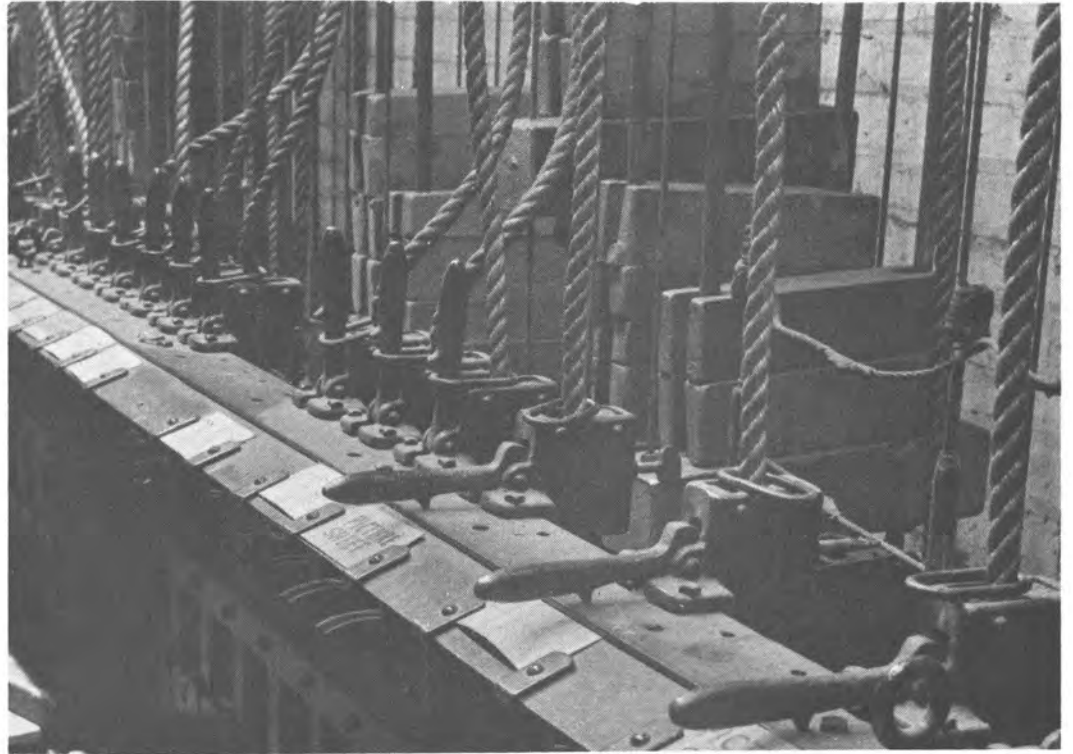




View looking up from stage floor



Switchboard controlling theatre
and stage lighting

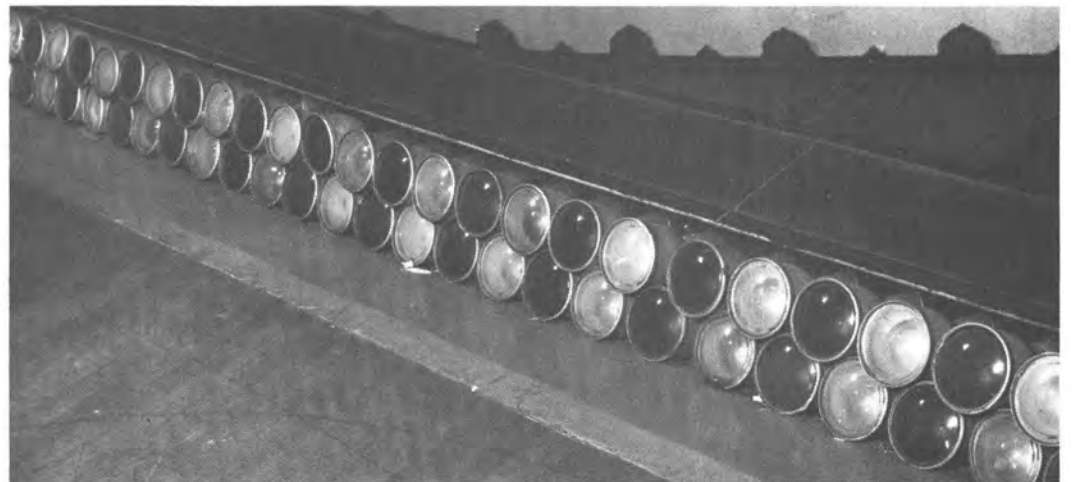


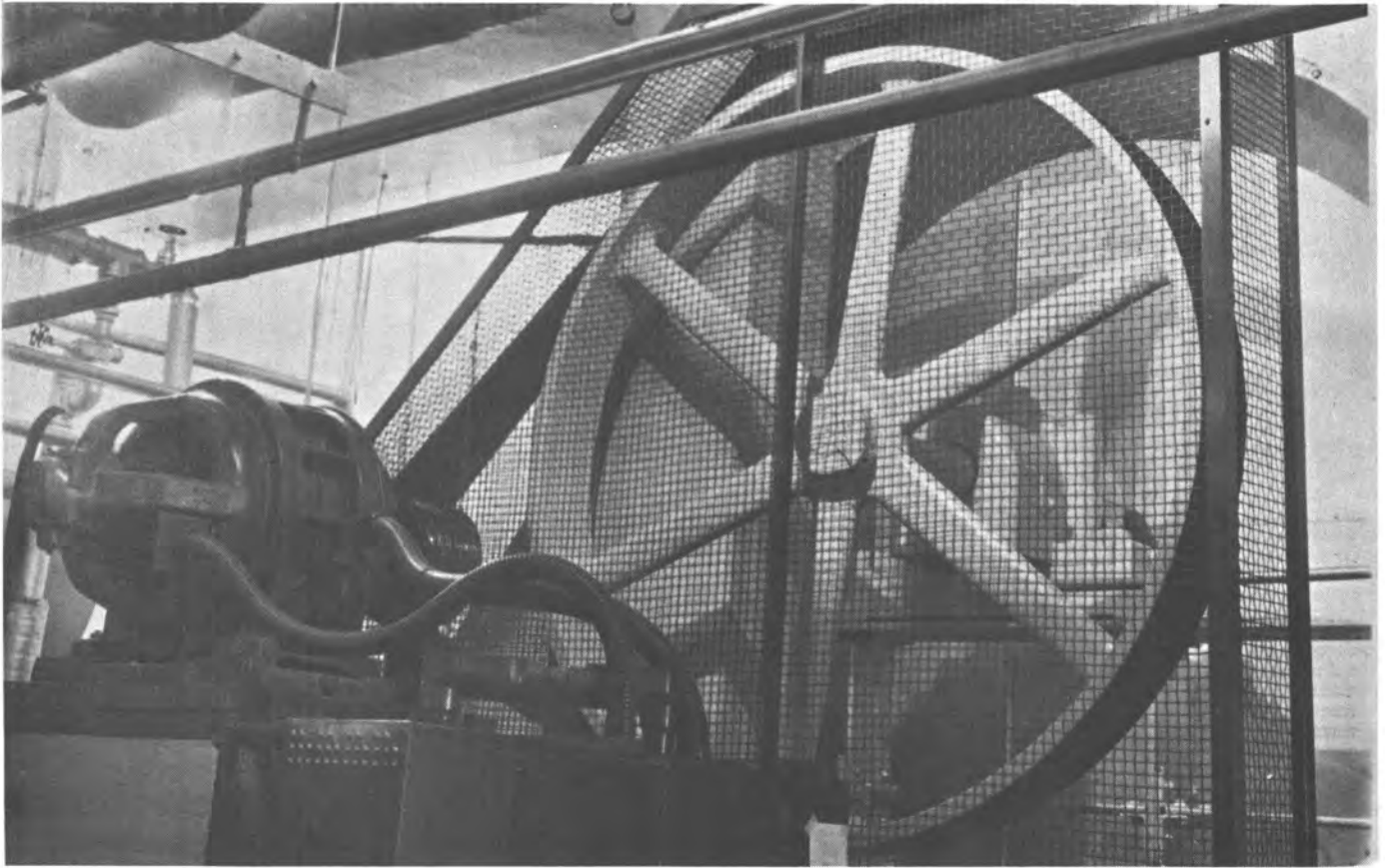
Ropes with weights used for lifting scenery



Microphone rises from stage floor

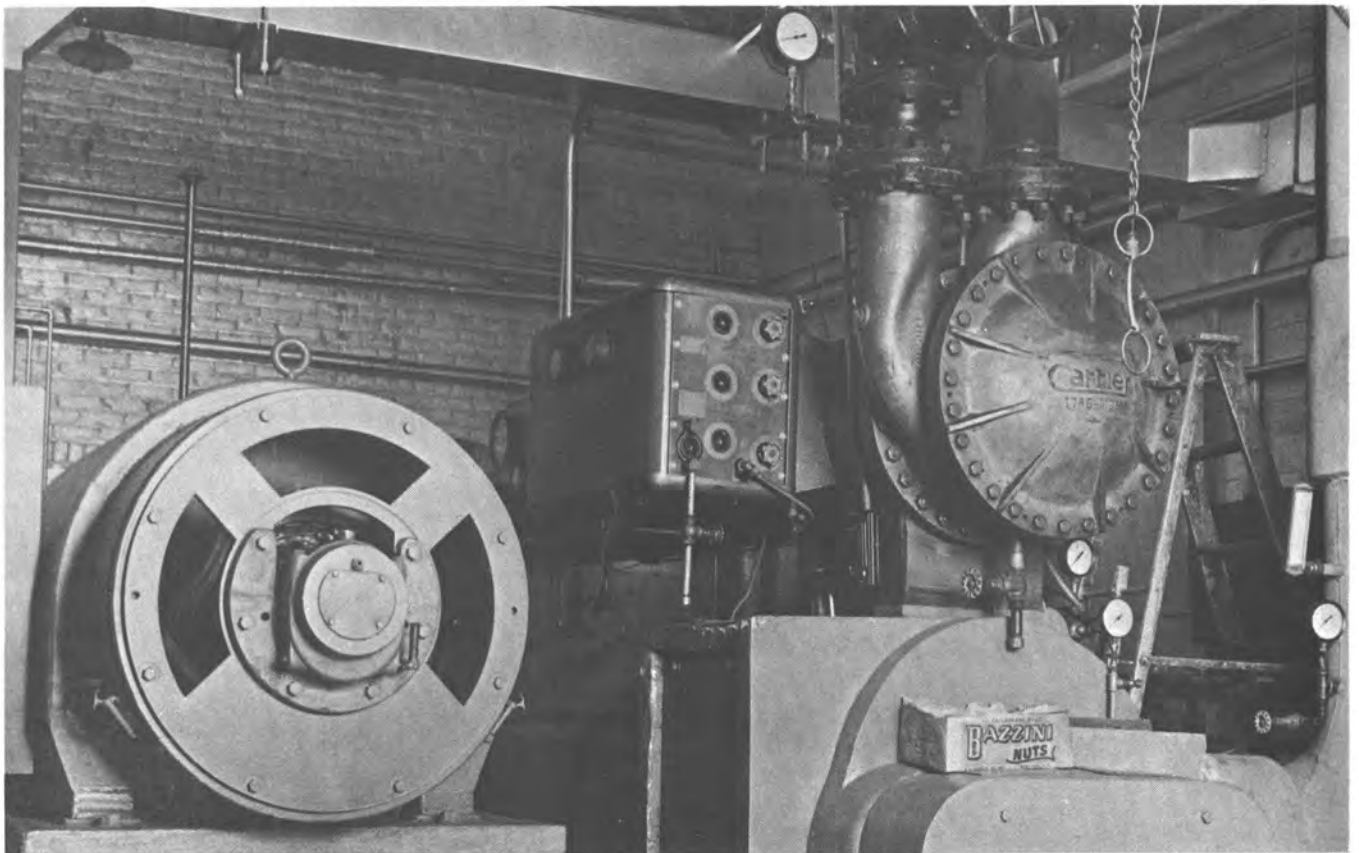
Foot lights

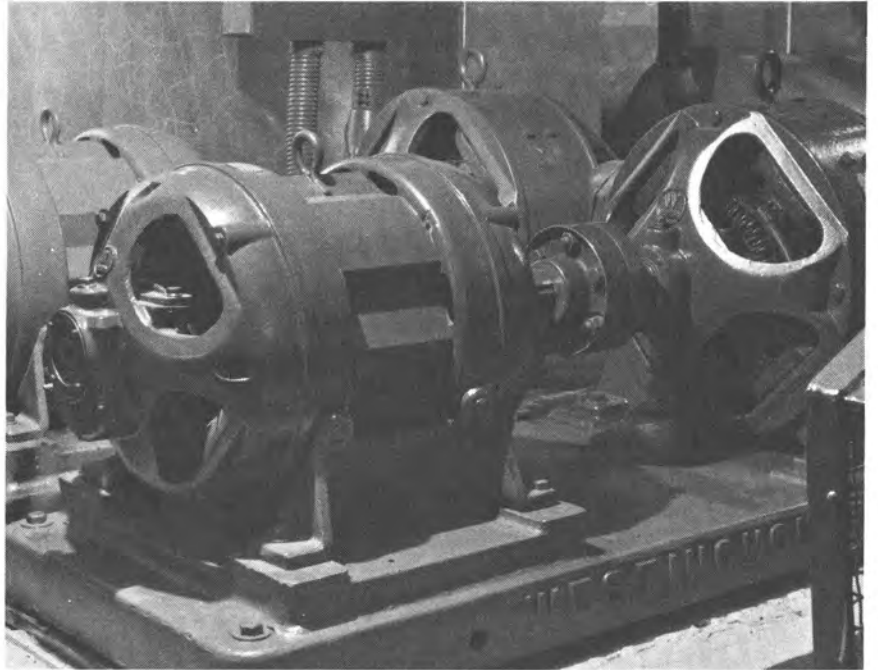




Air conditioning refrigeration equipment

Blower mechanism of air conditioning system



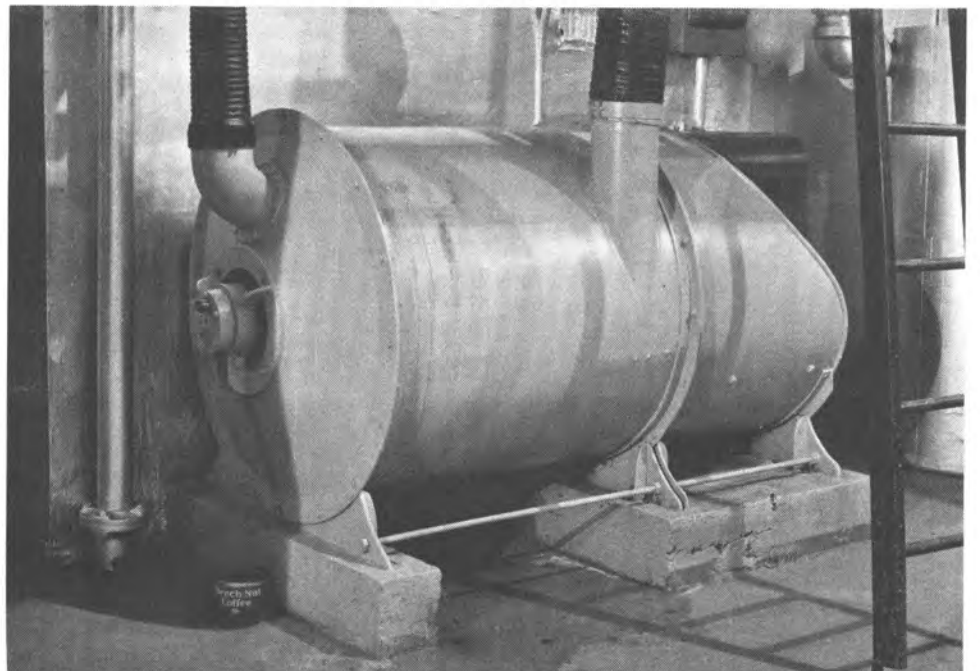


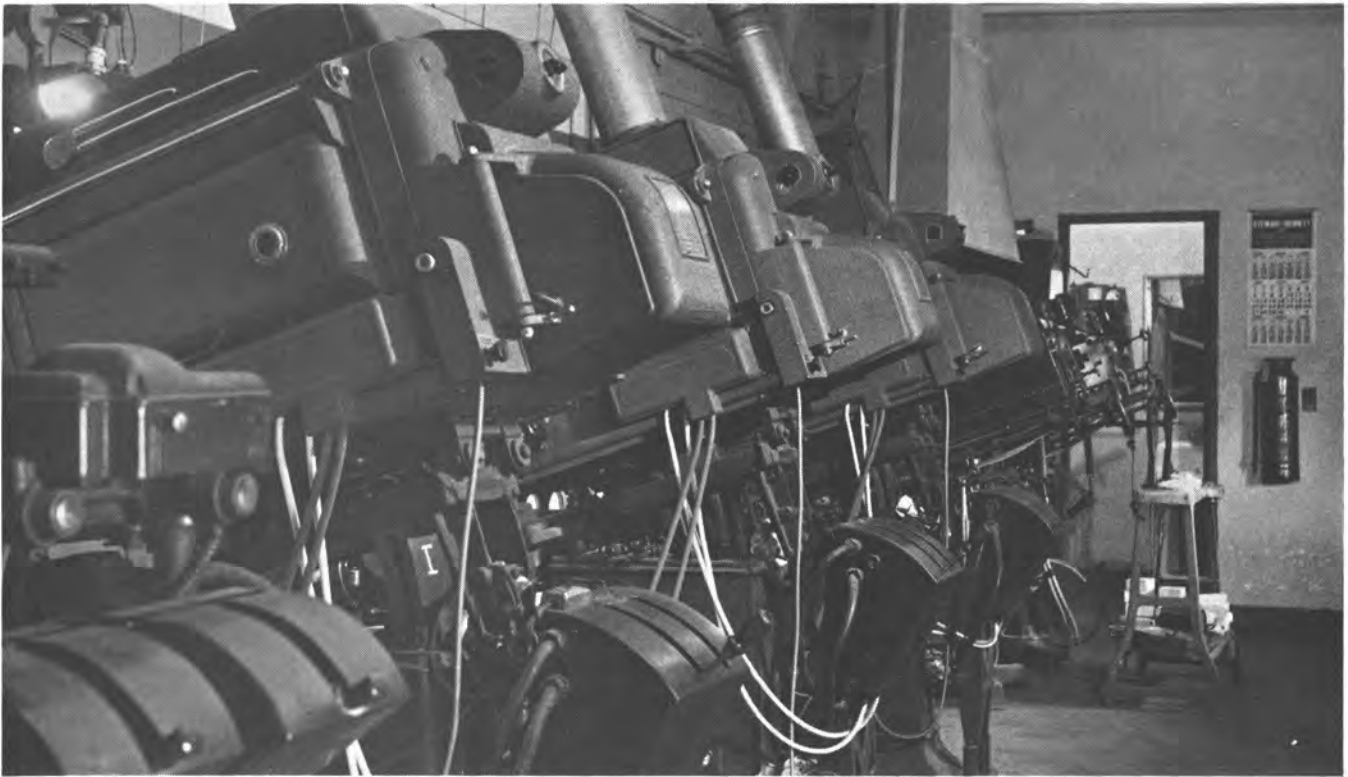
Motor generator supplying direct current for arc lamps in the projection booth



Access hall through basement of auditorium

Fan for theatre vacuum cleaning system





In the projection booth. Left to right: Brenograph, projectors and spotlight



THE BRENOGRAPH
A super magic lantern that not only projected song slides for the organ interludes, but an endless variety of scenic effects by means of multiple lenses and moving slides and intricate fades and dissolves. Some effects: Aurora Borealis, Babbling Brook, Descending Clouds, Blizzard, Flying Angels, Flying Birds, Flying Butterflies, Flames, Lightning, Fire and Smoke, Fast-Moving Dark Storm Clouds, Ocean Waves, Sand Storm, Snow Waterfall, Twinkling Stars, and Waving American Flag.

This memento of the RKO Palace Theatre is published by the Rochester Theatre Organ Society, Inc. Proceeds from its sale will be used to help relocate the great Wurlitzer pipe organ where it can continue to sound for this and future generations of Rochester area music lovers. Additional copies of the memento are available from the Society Secretary, Box 53, Fishers, New York 14453 at two dollars each. Further information regarding the Rochester Theatre Organ Society, Inc., may also be obtained from the Secretary.

This booklet's publication was made possible by the cooperation of the RKO Palace Theatre. The copy was written by Fred Dise and the photographs were taken by Richard Neidich, Ron Throunk and other members of the Rochester Institute of Technology's School of Photography.



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