

# PARAMOUNT THEATRE

549 WASHINGTON STREET

EST. 1930-32

ARTHUR BOWDITCH, ARCHITECT

THEN



Courtesy of the Bostonian Society

NOW



## HISTORY

The Paramount Theatre was designed and built in the 1930's by Arthur Bowditch as a 1,500 seat movie theater. Bowditch, a local architect who had built the 3,000+ seat Keith-Albee Boston Theater at 614 Washington Street in 1925, designed the Paramount in accordance with the design trends of the time. Today, the Paramount Theatre is perhaps downtown Boston's premier Art Deco building. The building's flat, sparsely ornamented granite façade, contrasted sharply with the neighboring B.F. Keith Memorial Theatre, and provided a backdrop for the eye-catching white-on-blue marquee and sign. The simple exterior belies an interior of exotic, inlaid woods, gold leaf, and richly designed murals.

As the Globe reported on opening day "it is not a great palace of vaulted halls, marble staircases, and glitter, but a moderate-sized, 'homey' theatre designed and executed for the best possible projection of sound pictures." Though no Hollywood stars were in attendance opening night, Massachusetts Governor Joseph Ely, Boston Mayor James Curley, and the mayors of Newton, Haverhill, Salem, Gloucester, Cambridge, Lynn, Brockton, New Bedford, Providence, RI, and Newport, RI were among the 1800 on hand (Boston Globe, February 26, 1932). *Shanghai Express*, featuring Marlene Dietrich and Clive Owens was the Paramount's opening feature.

The Paramount Theatre was open until the 1970's, at which point, like the Modern Theatre, it was used as a pornographic theater until its close in 1976. The Paramount's doors would remain closed for over 25 years. Much of the building's interior was irreparably damaged by asbestos removal in the 1980's, and the Art Deco vertical sign and marquee were damaged by years of neglect.

In 2002, Millennium Partners agreed to fully restore the Paramount's façade, marquee, and vertical sign as a community benefit during the construction of the Ritz-Carlton on Avery Street. And in 2005, Emerson College launched a \$70 Million Paramount Center project to restore the formerly lavish interior of the theater and to provide student dorm rooms and rehearsal spaces in the neighboring property.