

285 DONALD STREET – FORMER METROPOLITAN THEATRE
C.H. Crane, 1919



Constructed in 1919 as the Allen Theatre, this is the only movie theatre of its kind remaining in its original form in Winnipeg. Its competitors have either been demolished, or have been sectioned into smaller theatres.

Located on Donald Street, just south of Portage Avenue, the theatre was part of a national chain of Allen movie houses owned and operated by brothers Jay J. and Jules Allen. When this theatre opened in 1920, the Allen chain was the biggest of all Canadian chains and the most prominent, stretching from Vancouver to the Maritimes with forty-five theatres under their management. The Allen Theatres were large, luxurious and built to stringent safety codes, all designed by one architect, C. Howard Crane, from Detroit, Michigan.

Howard Crane adopted and enlarged upon neo-classical motifs established for picture palace design in the United States by renowned movie palace architect, Charles Lamb. They both used

the Adamesque Georgian style to ornament the exterior of the buildings, which were identified by symmetrical facades with repeating low relief classical ornamentation and Palladian motif windows. The upper portion of the Metropolitan Theatre is unchanged from its construction in 1919, constructed of brick with terra cotta ornamentation, featuring fluted pilasters, garland panels and an elaborate entablature. Small shops were located on the ground floor with the main entrance-tranceway, but these have been altered.

The entrance and box office on the main floor are the only areas that have been significantly modernized. Still intact are twin staircases leading patrons up to the magnificent mezzanine level, which is decorated with classical pilaster ornaments, garlands and theatrical grotesques. Mirrors and the original wall fixtures illuminate the space that has changed little since 1920.

The main auditorium, which seated 2,500 movie goers, features a large domed plaster ceiling with a massive chandelier. The balcony and loges are decorated with plaster garland swags recalling the ornamentation on the exterior of the building.

In 1923 Famous Players acquired the Allen Theatre Chain and renamed the building the Metropolitan.

Despite the modern facade, the most impressive features of the original movie palace is still intact: the auditorium with its huge dome, balcony and loges, and the elegant mezzanine promenade. The promenade is still gracious, furnished with comfortable furniture and recently painted with great care given to the elaborate plasterwork. The Metropolitan remains a grand old movie theatre.