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OVERVIEW

The souvenir program below, commemorates May 31, 1947, which is the opening day of the Fourth Avenue Theater in Anchorage, Alaska. Its pages (which are not all shown) include a mention of the evening's movie "Jolson Story", a list of sponsors, a drawing of the theater done by its architect, and a dedication from the builder of the theater, Captain Austin E. Lathrop.

The program is fully colored with an overall theme of gold, and also includes illustrations of an Alaskan mountain range, and the murals within the theater, depicting Alaska's pioneering industries. The end result is an example of Late Modern Era media as grand and opulent as the theater itself.

This particular program captures the importance of using the English Language to bring people together and inspire hope, post war in Alaska.

In this project we look at the program through three different lenses: the specific historical context of the program and Lathrop's dedication, the broad historical context of the Fourth Avenue Theater, and a linguistic inquiry in to Lathrop's use of deictics (pronouns) in his dedication, making audiences feel directly connected to the event.

Opening Day Souvenir Program

- On May 31, 1947, "patrons entered the lobby after having purchased their tickets (\$1.50 on opening night, but only 80¢ for adults, 25¢ for children, and \$1.00 for lodge seats thereafter), they were handed a souvenir program and guided by an usherette to the waiting room" (Berry 4).
- The actual opening day souvenir program is pictured to the right, along with some inside contents; a drawing of the theater by a Seattle-based architect firm, and Lathrop's dedication to the people of Anchorage.
- Note in Lathrop's dedication he says, "We have deeply appreciated the patience you have shown during the war years when we were forced to stop construction." "Started in 1941, the work had to be halted during the war. Materials were not available. Shipping space was insufficient to allow the movement of those materials that were available. Labor conditions were such as to further complicate the picture" (Anchorage Daily Times 1947).²
- "The construction of the theater was one of the longest in the city's history" (Carberry 2).
- The 1000 seat theater opened to rave reviews. The paper described the theater's "ultra-gorgeous interior", saying its "like walking through a kaleidoscope". "The Alaska flag twinkles in the blue ceiling", and the screen is "flanked" by two murals "which were hauled over the Alaska highway in trucks" from Los Angeles (Anchorage Daily Times 1947).¹
- The souvenir program itself embodies many of the theater's attributes within its pages.

Territory Days & Beyond: The 4th Avenue Theater

- Although its formal name is The Lathrop Building, "Fourth Avenue Theater" is how it is commonly known. Sometimes the theater also goes by "Lathrop's Showhouse" (Carberry 1 & 5).
- "It is the most important edifice in Alaska to honor the noted public figure, Austin E. "Cap" Lathrop (1865-1950) a transportation, mining, and theater tycoon--and one of the earliest multimillionaires in Alaskan History" (Carberry 2).
- Cap "had the intention of leaving the Fourth Avenue Theater and Lathrop Building as his legacy 'to the fine people of Alaska'" (Carberry 2).
- Known as the "Showplace of Alaska", "the theater is considered by experts to represent 'the culmination of the Art Deco movement in the U.S.'", saying "'the regional motif and creative, exciting individuality' is unsurpassed by any other known example in the Pacific coast region" (Carberry 2).
- "By the late 1940s Art Deco was no longer in fashion, but when the building had first been designed in the early 1940s the style's influence from decades before was still strong" (Berry 3).
- "Art Deco, which originated in Paris, was first called moderne or contemporaine; it was a streamlined style with geometrical patterns of zig zags and circles, jewel colors, and accents of gold and silver" (Berry 3).
- At the time Anchorage had only a small town population of about 5,000, "so Fourth Avenue Theater was most capacious and lavish for the time and place" (Carberry 2).
- "Lathrop initially intended that the building would also contain his first Anchorage radio and later TV Station KENI" (Carberry 5).
- However, erecting such a magnificent movie theater was no easy feat as construction ultimately came to a stand still. "With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, life in Anchorage became tense and uncertain" (Atwood 35-36).
- "Price ceilings were placed on consumer goods and services, and an Office of Price Administration opened in the city" (Atwood 38).
- "One writer described Anchorage as 'coated with dust, drenched with whiskey and plagued with overcrowded quarters and a high cost of living'" (Atwood 39).
- "Anchorage was well on the road to bigger and better things in 1945 when World War II came to an end" (Atwood 41).
- For a small community on the heels of war, the Fourth Avenue Theater appeared to be a symbol of optimism and hope, as illustrated in the following articles;
- "The Greatest significance is one that will touch the daily lives and thinking of all persons who call Alaska home. The Fourth Avenue Theater is more than an expensive and elaborate building. It is more than a place to see motion pictures. The theater is a landmark in the transition of Anchorage from a frontier community to a city of permanence. It is a landmark in the development of a city in which families live, work, play and die" (Anchorage Daily News 1947).²
- "Captain Lathrop, by investing his money in the Fourth Avenue Theater, has shown his conviction that Anchorage has a brilliant future" (Anchorage Daily Times 1947).²
- "When the history of Anchorage is written, the opening of the Fourth Avenue Theater will be one of the highlights in development that will always be mentioned" (Anchorage Daily Times 1947).²
- "Whoever wrote that might be disappointed to learn that there is little mention made of the Fourth Avenue Theater in any of the existing histories of the city" (Berry 3-4).
- Today the fate of the Fourth Avenue Theater, which has survived so much, including the 1964 earthquake (Berry 7) is uncertain. Over the years it has passed through many hands. It now sits boarded up. The debate on what is to be done with the building continues.



Deixis: Using Pronouns To Connect

- "The term 'deixis' is derived from the Greek word meaning 'to show' or 'to point out'" (Huang 132).
- "Deixis is directly concerned with the relationship between the structure of a language and the context in which the language is used" (Huang 132).
- There are several types of deictics, but for the purposes of this analysis, we will focus on the personal pronouns or "participant deictics" (Hanks 178).
- "Participant deictics" include "first (I), second (you), and third (he, she, it) persons, singular and plural, as well as inclusion versus non-inclusion of a plural addressee" (Hanks 178).
- Cap Lathrop's dedication in the Fourth Avenue Theater Opening Day program uses "participant deictics" to relate and connect to the people of Anchorage and the context of the time.
- A great example of this is the use of "we" and "you" in the lines, "We have deeply appreciated the patience you have shown during the war years when we were forced to stop construction."
- In this example, Lathrop's use of the word "we" has created a deep sense of solidarity among the people of Anchorage, while the word "you" addresses them directly.
- "Deixis is a universal linguistic phenomenon. All human languages contain deictic terms." "A language without deictics cannot serve the communicative needs of its users as effectively and efficiently as a language which does have them" (Huang 132).

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