

The Clemmer House 1909 *by Erin O'Connor*

The hybrid Mission Revival Four-Square house at 2612 Harvard Avenue East was built for James Q. Clemmer.¹ He was a premier impresario of Vaudeville and film in his day, in 1932 beating out 200 other west coast managers in the Fox Theater chain's contest for "the most popular manager in the West." It's said that Clemmer managed every theater of note in Seattle and neighboring Tacoma: in Seattle, the Fifth Avenue (Robert C. Reamer, 1925–1926),² the Winter Garden, the Music Box (Henry W. Bittman, 1928–1930),³ the Blue Mouse, the Music Hall, the Paramount (Rapp & Rapp with Priteca & Peters, 1926–28),⁴ and the Orpheum (B. Marcus Priteca, 1926–1927).⁵

Clemmer owned at least two theaters: first the Dream Theater on the first floor of his Kenneth Hotel building at First and Cherry, where Clemmer and his wife also made their first home in Seattle. The Dream was the first theater in the country to feature a pipe organ, and the second edition of Paul Dorpat's *Seattle Now and Then* features a photo of one Oliver G. Wallace playing the Dream's mighty Wurlitzer along with photos of the hotel's exterior and several photos of the Dream's marquee on the first floor. According to the photos, the Dream variously featured the *Passion Play* (for one week only), *A Brother's Devotion*, and *The Man Hunt* or *The Poacher: The Story of a Man Who Loves Better to Hunt Than Be Hunted*. In 1912, Clemmer sold the Dream and built the Clemmer Theater, at 1414 Second Avenue, which he billed as "the nation's first grand theater devoted exclusively to photoplays"—that is, movies. James Q. Clemmer died in 1942 and was memorialized by John Hamrick, who owned the Fifth Avenue, as "the best theater manager I ever knew."⁶

By 1912, when he built the Clemmer Theater, the Clemmer family had been living in the house at 2612 Harvard Avenue East for a while. In her survey of vernacular architecture in Seattle, Caroline Swope cites the Clemmer House as a fine example of the Spanish Mission residential style of the day. Subsequently owned by community activist Don Myers and then by Pamela Mizzi, the unaltered house has recently been acquired by Ron Holdridge, who has furnished it and licensed it as a comfortable B&B. It is now the site of many a musical afternoon. The interior is in the Arts and Crafts mode. A recent visit to the house revealed the original fixtures, wainscoting, boxed-beam ceilings, and ribboned [walnut] floor inlays. Our municipal archives contain both an exterior photo and an interior photo.

¹ Caroline T. Swope, *Classic Houses of Seattle* (Portland, Ore.: Timber Press, 2005), 188, 193.

² David L. Levenson, "Robert C. Reamer," in *Shaping Seattle Architecture: A Historical Guide to the Architects*, ed. Jeffrey Karl Ochsner (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 187.

³ Caterina Provost, "Henry W. Bittman," in Ochsner, *Shaping Seattle Architecture*, 195.

⁴ Miriam Sutermeister, "B. Marcus Priteca," in Ochsner, *Shaping Seattle Architecture*, 182, 357.

⁵ Sutermeister, in Ochsner, 182.

⁶ Paul Dorpat, "91 Clemmer's Dream," *Seattle Now and Then*, Volume 1 2d ed. (Seattle 1984).



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