

Theater page mailbag

Sunday,

SHOCKED BY LOSS OF STATE

Theater Editor:

I read the article in the Sunday, Oct. 11 edition of the Gazette about what may happen to the beautiful State Theater, and was shocked that such a thing is a strong possibility.

The Gazette story detailing the likely fate of this venerable movie palace revived my memories of the theater.

I was going to Central High and had a one-hour lunch break so would walk to town each day to watch the progress on the new State Theater, from the excavation to the finished beautiful building. Fortunately, I was able to

attend the opening night on July 14, 1927 and was completely thrilled.

Living in Kalamazoo for 40 years, I attended the theater every week. It would be awful if the theater were to be gutted or razed.

I was in hopes of making a visit back during October of this year and would have gone to the State, but an automobile accident prevented that. I hope when I do return that the State will be there as ever.

I feel very deeply about this. It took nine months to erect that beautiful structure — the same as it takes to create a human being. After 54 years of living one

wouldn't destroy that life, and the same applies to the State Theater.

I have lived in the Los Angeles area 25 years now and I can honestly say that in all of the Los Angeles area, Hollywood included, there is no theater that can compare in beauty to the State Theater back home in Kalamazoo. Everyone in Kalamazoo should give support to save this most beautiful theater.

Good wishes to those who are trying to keep the theater and its beautiful Barton organ, and to those who have worked to retain this spot of beauty in Kalamazoo.

Donald F. Roeder,
11028 1/2 Hesby St.,
North Hollywood,

Wednesday, March 24, 1982

Farewell weekend set for the State

Kalamazoo area residents will get the opportunity to pay a fond farewell to Kalamazoo's State Theater as a regularly operating movie theater when remembrance days are observed April 2, 3 and 4.

The event was announced by Butterfield Theaters, owner and operator of the 54-year-old one-time vaudeville and legitimate house which was closed March 14. Plans call for the showing of three movies first released in the era when the theater opened, a half-hour concert by William Mollema on the Barton organ preceding each showing, tours of the theater including backstage areas by members of the State Theater Vaudeville Committee and "25 cent popcorn and lemonade." The cloud machines also will be in operation.

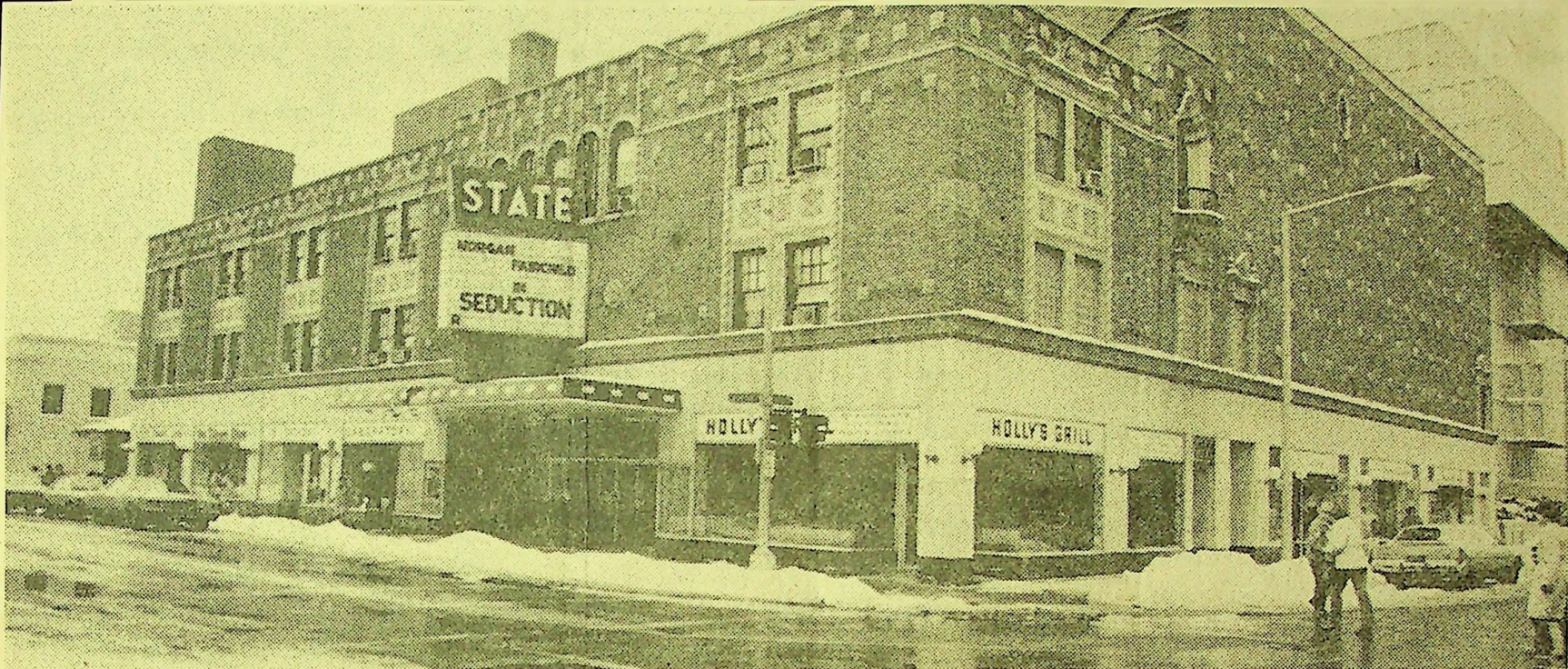
Shows will be offered Friday evening, Saturday afternoon and evening and Sunday afternoon. Matinee prices will be \$1.50 for all seats and evening admission will be \$2.50 for adults and \$1.50 for children. Tickets will go on sale Wednesday, March 31 at the theater box office between 11:30 and 5:30.

Butterfield is promoting the event as "this could be your last chance to visit this elegant movie palace."

STATE THEATRE - "REMEMBRANCE DAYS"
FRI.-SAT.-SUN., APRIL 2-3-4th
 THIS COULD BE YOUR LAST CHANCE TO VISIT THE
 MOST ELEGANT MOVIE PLACE IN THE MIDWEST..
 JOIN US AS WE RE-CREATE 55 YEARS OF ENTERTAINMENT
 WHEN GOING TO THE MOVIES WAS A MEMORABLE EVENT...

TICKETS GO ON SALE WED., MARCH 31st AT THE THEATRE BOX OFFICE.
 AFTERNOON ALL SEATS \$1.50 - FRI. & SAT. EVE ADULT 2.50 - CHILD 1.50
 OFFICE OPEN 11:30-5:30 DAILY - 25¢ POPCORN & DRINKS DAY OF SHOW

<p style="text-align: center;">THRILLS- SAT. AFTERNOON APRIL 3rd, 1:30 ONLY</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>HENRY FONDA "THE RETURN OF FRANK JAMES"</p> <p>A 1939 ACTION PACKED WESTERN IN COLOR</p> </div>	<p style="text-align: center;">ACTION- SATURDAY EVENING APRIL 3rd. 7:00 P.M. ONLY!</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>STATE FAIR</p> <p>THE ORIGINAL 1933 VERSION STARRING WILL ROGERS</p> </div>
<p style="text-align: center;">FRI. EVE. APRIL 2nd AT 7:00 P.M. SUN. AFTERNOON APRIL 4th AT 2:00 P.M.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>ALICE FAYE - TYRONE POWER DON AMECHE "IN OLD CHICAGO"</p> <p>A 1938 MUSICAL - DRAMA</p> </div>	<p style="text-align: center;">ALSO AT EVERY PERFORMANCE OLD TIME NEWS REEL PLUS... SEE!! THE SKY CLOUDS AND STARS SHINE FROM THE CEILING THE ELEGANT FOUNTAIN WILL SPARKLE ALONG WITH ORIGINAL STAGE SCENERY</p> <p style="text-align: center;">HEAR! BILL MOLLEMA ROCK THE WALLS WITH THE BARTON THEATRE PIPE ORGAN GUIDED THEATRE TOURS FOLLOWING EACH PERFORMANCE.</p>



THE LAST PICTURE SHOW — For nearly 55 years, the State Theater on the southwest corner of Lovell and Burdick streets has been a beacon of light in the movie business — and a elegant home of entertainment, first featuring vaudeville and silent movies, later offering touring plays and shows and “talking movies” and, in recent years, movies only. Unless there is some dramatic last-

minute move, all of that will come to an end shortly before midnight Sunday when the lights go out. Butterfield Theaters, which built the structure now called an “architectural gem” by theater historians, has directed the theater to close after Sunday’s showings. Efforts to arrange a sale of the theater were unavailing. However, there are no plans at the moment to raze the building.

— Gazette photo by Jerry Campbell

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

3/1/82

The state of the State

By DON W. CARLSON, Gazette Theater Editor

What's happening at Kalamazoo's State Theater?

Many people have been asking that question since we reported in these columns late last October that the downtown "movie palace" (and one of the last still regularly operating as a film theater in Michigan) was nearing the end of the road and probably wouldn't operate much beyond its Christmas attraction, "Cinderella." (That turned out to be a bit of irony: the 31-year-old Disney animated fantasy breathed a few more weeks of life into the the 54-year-old theater).

So now it's early March. The State is still operating. But on a week - to - week basis. It's future is every bit as bleak today as it was in early winter. Any hope that the lovely old theater could go on for very much longer was pretty well wiped out by a truly cold and snowy winter. In still another last-ditch effort to keep the State going while some negotiations were in progress, admission prices were substantially reduced with an eye to increasing revenue. The jury is still out on that one. Attendance is up slightly but, with lower prices, total revenue isn't increased much.

Meanwhile, a Butterfield Theaters spokesman has confirmed that "nothing substantial" has developed in its contacts with at least four different individuals or groups which expressed an interest in acquiring the theater. One offer, we're told, could hardly be taken seriously. Another would have utilized every tax break in the books with Butterfield Theaters, the owner, as a partner. Others have not pursued their proposals and there are no meaningful negotiations in progress at the moment. The State continues to operate on a week-to-week basis, and employes have been so advised.

The spectre hanging over all hopes of keeping the State going, possibly as a home for concerts, recitals, dance, lectures, plays, small touring shows and for convention use — is, of course, the Michigan economy.

Incidentally, efforts are under way to restore one of South Bend's once leading movie theaters, the Colfax, closed since 1977. A new, young owner, Dave Whitaker, says he'll spend about \$178,000 "to put the place back together" and hopes for a May 1 opening with a schedule of family films. We remember the Colfax as the theater where we saw our first "talking" motion picture and also as the site of the world premiere of "Knut Rocke, All-American." South Bend saved another theater, the Palace, which is now home of the South Bend Symphony and touring Broadway shows.

Last act Sunday at State Theater

3/9
This was on the front page

By DON W. CARLSON
Gazette Theater Editor

Kalamazoo's 54-year-old State Theater will be closed after next Sunday's final performance. The Gazette learned today.

Word of the long anticipated closing for the 1,500-seat downtown "movie palace" was received by the theater's local management from Butterfield Theaters in Southfield, the Michigan film exhibition chain which has owned and operated the State since its opening in July, 1927.

There was no amplification of the decision to close the theater which has been operating on borrowed time since last December when Butterfield announced that the theater was no longer profitable as a movie house and that it would either sell or close it. Though several purchase proposals were received, no meaningful negotiations from Butterfield's standpoint developed.

Butterfield also owns and operates the Campus and Beacon twin theaters here.



LON CHANEY (CHAINED) IN "PHANTOM OF THE OPERA"
Silent horror classic to be shown at theater Halloween party

State hosts Halloween party

It could be the last opportunity to see and hear a silent movie with full organ accompaniment at Kalamazoo's venerable State Theater, which now faces an uncertain future.

A community Halloween party featuring the showing of a classic Hollywood horror film first released in 1923 has been planned for midnight Saturday, Oct. 31 by the State Theater Vaudeville Committee and WKMI-Radio. The film to be shown is the original "Phantom of the Opera," starring Lon Chaney, and accompaniment will be by John Catherwood at the theater's restored Barton organ.

All tickets are \$3, and may be purchased by mail by sending a check or money order and self-addressed, stamped envelope to State Theater Vaudeville Committee, P. O. Box 649, Comstock, Mi. 49041.

Butterfield Theaters, which owns and operates the downtown movie palace, confirmed last week that a decision on the future of the State probably will be made shortly. Indications are that it will close by the first of the year.

Seat/on the Aisle

'The Galesburg Connection'

By DON W. CARLSON, Gazette Theater Editor

Director Ted Kistler and his associates at the New Vic Theater had no idea they were getting a play with a Kalamazoo County connection when the decision was made to produced Jon Phillip Palmer's new work.

The San Francisco playwright's latest creation is a comedy entitled "Teddy in That Splendid Little War" opening March 26. Centering on such historical figures as President Theodore Roosevelt and Clara Barton, the play also has a character by the name of Gen. Rufus Shafter, and that should ring some bells out Galesburg way. Shafter is the U. S. general who hails from Galesburg and whose statue adorns the village square.

The playwright describes "Teddy" as "a Catch-22 version of the Spanish-American War." The play chronicles the formation of the Rough Riders from the time Gen. Roosevelt was given the charter by the president to end the war and Teddy's clash with Shafter. He presents the fabled Rough Riders as they really were — an odd collection of cowboys, Indians and East Coast socialites.

The play had its premiere in 1976 on the University of California-Berkeley campus with David Dukes as Roosevelt, James Doohan (Star Trek's Scotty) as Gen. Shafter and Ruth Kobart as Clara Barton. In its New Vic staging, Ross Mielke will be seen as Roosevelt with Arnold Johnston as Shafter and Bea Baupre as Barton.

Palmer is no stranger to Kalamazoo audiences. Two other plays of his, "The Trial of James McNeill Whistler" and "Home on the Range," both were warmly received here.

FINAL NIGHT FOR THE STATE — Many people are truly saddened by tonight's closing forever of Kalamazoo's venerable State Theater. And for good reason. It is the last of its breed in outstate Michigan and there will never be another one like it here.

The 54-year-old theater came into existence when the film industry was growing like Topsy and "movie palaces" were a-building everywhere. It opened when vaudeville was still in its glory years, was in operation when the "talkies" arrived, witnessed the death of vaudeville, served as a stop for touring shows with famous players, hit its earning peak in the golden years of the 1940s and finally slid into decline with the proliferation of movie complexes in shopping malls and the suburbs.

The State saw the best of years and the worst of years but it never became tawdry or run down in the manner of many downtown movie palaces. Butterfield Theaters saw to that when it extensively remodeled the showplace less than 20 years ago without destroying its basic architectural design, and the decision to close was taken most reluctantly. Local theater buffs helped to keep the theater attractive with restoration of its Barton organ, sky clouds and stars and lighting improvements made possible by several vaudeville shows which were launched on the theater's 50th birthday.

Organist Bud Taylor was a prominent figure at the State for many years. Now living in Carmichael, Cal., he dropped us a note this week noting "there are many cities which have lost such beautiful theaters as the State and now wish they had them back." He recalled that "Col. Butterfield and Pat Heavy (manager of the State for many years) managed to keep the organ playing longer than any other theater in Michigan."

4-21-82

Saginaw's example

To the Editor:

On a recent trip to Saginaw it was our privilege to attend a showing of the movie "The Sound of Music" at the Temple Theater. The Temple — like our State Theater — was faced with the threat of closing. A group of volunteer citizens, headed by the Junior League, assumed the responsibility of running the theater, showing old movies. Volunteers manned the box office, took tickets, ushered and ran the concession stand. Members of the Organists Guild played the organ on a rotating basis.

Judging by the attendance the night we were there the appeal is not limited to those of us who were seeing the movie for the second or third time — people of all ages were in attendance. At \$2 per ticket it was a "cheap date" and there were many young people there.

I understand that "Casablanca" played to standing room only audiences and most of the other movies have done very well.

It seems to me that showing movies suitable for children (especially during the summer months) might be very successful, since about 99 percent of the current movies are not what most parents would wish their children to see.

Is there a group in Kalamazoo which might keep the State open in a similar manner? **MRS. R.M. ROYLE, 2238 Springhill Drive.**

Aisle

(Continued From Page C-1)

that role, one of the very best things in a brilliant and courageous movie.

So where does all of this speculating leave "Raiders of the Lost Ark" and "Ragtime"? Each were each nominated for eight awards. Although well down in our list, "Raiders" nevertheless should do well in technical and other categories. "Ragtime" just seems to be in competition too heavy for a film of its calibre.

Although we are convinced that "Reds" was the year's major cinematic achievement and is fully deserving of an Oscar for best film, it would distress us great if that award went to "Chariots of Fire."

NOT TOTALLY KAPUT? — Some things seem to have changed since Butterfield Theaters revealed its plans to close the State Theater and indicated it was ready to hear offers. Nothing much came of those offers, and when the key was turned in the lock a week ago, the impression coming out of Butterfield's corporate headquarters in Southfield was that this lovely old film palace was kaput as a movie theater.

So now we have a farewell weekend coming up next Friday through Sunday along with rumors that other classic films might be booked if this week's program proves popular. Biggest surprise of all was talk that, come summer, when the kiddie movies start hitting the market and youngsters start flocking to the flicks, the stately old State might be back in operation. For the warm weather months at the very least.

Butterfield, meanwhile, indicates that talks are continuing with some prospective purchasers.

Speaking of the State, here's an item that should interest old theater buffs.

Fine Arts Posters in the Kalamazoo Center is currently having 200 limited edition prints made of an acrylic painting depicting the State Theater. The painting was completed last year by Kalamazoo artist Dan Cooley. Prints will be completed by mid-June and will go on sale along with 20 artist's proof of the historic structure. In the meantime, the original is being displayed in the store.

Prints of Cooley's work also are being presented to the Upjohn Co., James River Corp., Kalamazoo Gazette, Gilmore Art Center, Western Michigan University, Nazareth College, Kalamazoo College, Bronson Hospital, Borgess Hospital and Kalamazoo Center.

South Haven group eyes theater purchase ^{4/6}

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven's Michigan Theater, which has been listed with local realtors for some time, has recently caught the interest of the South Haven Downtown Development Authority which has formed a committee to explore the possibility of pur-

chasing and renovating the facility located at 210 Center St.

According to Butterfield Theaters, the owner, no firm buyers have been located and the theater is scheduled to re-open for the summer. South Haven Chamber of Commerce officials report a fair

amount of interest in the purchase of the property, which has been given a price tag of \$98,000.

The theater has been closed throughout the winter months, with the management citing a faulty heating system as one reason for its locked doors.

*The State should be saved ^{4/3}

To the Editor:

"The Barton theater pipe organ is our pride and joy. In many ways, it was the reason founders of the Michigan Community Theater Foundation made efforts to 'Save Michigan.'" This is an excerpt from a current newsletter released in Ann Arbor announcing appearances of nationally known theater organists. Silent and classical films, stage productions, various concerts and other forms of the performing arts can be enjoyed at the restored Michigan Theater in Ann Arbor.

Well now, if an old water tower and a very unattractive old Masonic building can be spared for posterity, certainly Kalamazoo's elegant State Theater should be a shoo-in. The State Theater is one of the very few irreplaceable Spanish courtyard gems remaining in all the Midwest. The State should be a center for performing arts in downtown Kalamazoo. With its excellent stage facilities and Barton theater organ it is a natural. Even beautiful Miller Auditorium has lost its pipe organ to the new Western fine arts building and has replaced it with a Rodgers electronic organ. Kalamazoo should have a public auditorium equipped with a pipe organ, especially a theater organ.

If Ann Arbor, Fort Wayne, Columbus, Ohio, Atlanta, Chicago and numerous other cities find ways to preserve their old movie palaces, Kalamazoo should do no less. Only the State can provide Kalamazoo with the glorious sounds of the theater pipe organ. There are local and national organizations such as the American Theater Organ Society that should be interested in assisting with this endeavor. Community leaders should act now to preserve this community treasure. **KENNETH W. BUTELA, Vicksburg Route 1.**

Last visit to the State? ^{4/13}

To the Editor:

Saturday, April 3, I went to the State Theater. It was my second time and maybe my last. I used to hate old fancy buildings until I saw the inside of the State.

I will hate to see it torn down for a parking lot. **JILL SLUNICK, 116 E. Hill, Plainwell.**

Sunday, March 28, 1982

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Three '30s films chosen for State's farewell weekend

The original "State Fair," a 1933 release starring Will Rogers, "In Old Chicago" co-starring Don Ameche and Alice Faye and an early Henry Fonda feature, "The Return of Frank James" have been chosen for showing when Kalamazoo's State Theater holds its remembrance weekend Friday through next Sunday.

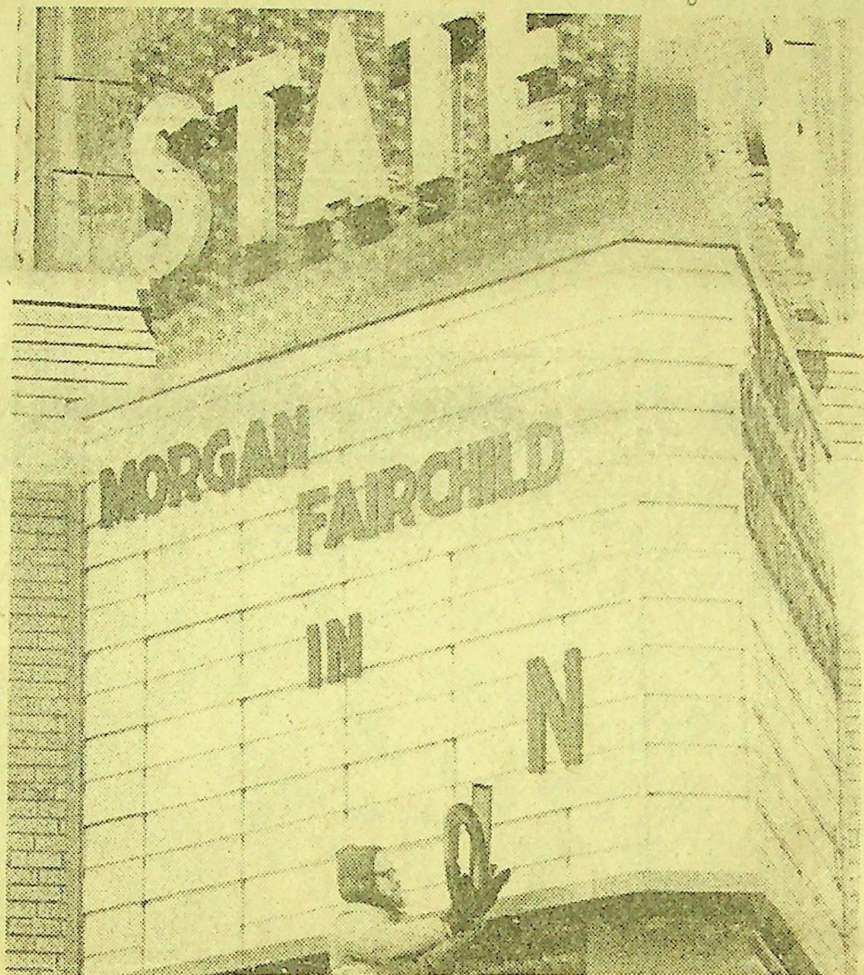
A farewell of sorts to the downtown movie palace which ended its days as a regularly operating movie theater a week ago, the three-day program also will feature half-hour concerts by William Mollema on the theater's Barton organ preceding each showing, tours of the backstage area by members of the State

Theater Vaudeville Committee and cut-rate popcorn and lemonade.

Friday's concert will be at 7, followed by an old Fox Movietone newsreel and the 1938 film, "In Old Chicago." Saturday's matinee will begin with the concert at 1:30 and "The Return of Frank James," also starring Gene Tier-

ney, at 2. Janet Gaynor is Rogers' co-star in "State Fair" which will be shown Saturday night at 7:35 following the organ concert at 7. The Sunday program will begin with organ music at 2, a newsreel at 2:30 and "In Old Chicago" at 2:37.

Tickets will go on sale Wednesday at the box office.



MAINTENANCE MAN LARRY BALLENTINE REMOVES LETTERS
 Last regular film showing at State was Sunday night

—Gazette photo by Robert Maxwell

Final movie at State draws only 30 people

By BLAIR DAVIS
 Gazette Staff Writer

The charms of Morgan Fairchild in "The Seduction" weren't enough to lure many filmgoers to the last picture show at the State Theater.

After nearly 55 years of providing movie entertainment in Kalamazoo's central business district, the final curtain was drawn Sunday night on regular showings

of films at Spanish-styled movie palace.

This morning the marquee reads "Classics Weekend Coming March 26," hinting that the State may not be closed for good. Officials of W.S. Butterfield Theaters, contacted this morning, could give no further details.

(See THEATER on Page A-9)

Theater

(Continued from Page A-1)

The final regular showing of films had been anticipated for some time. The theater's audience had been dwindling. There were high operating expenses, parking problems and competition from suburban multiplex theaters. The only remaining movie theater downtown is the Le Bijou, with two screens in the Kalamazoo Center.

The 1,300-seat State Theater at 404 S. Burdick began projecting flickering images on the silver screen July 14, 1927, with a photoplay, as films were first known, by the title of "Frisco Sally Levy."

The last projection ended at 10:55 p.m. Sunday with "The Seduction," a film with some poor reviews.

Only some 30 persons paid admissions of \$1.50 each to bid the State a last goodbye, a moviehouse where State manager Howard Poth said he paid his 10 cents as a youngster in 1938 to watch a feature. "Pennies From Heaven," starring Bing Crosby, was showing. Adult admission was 35 cents.

Poth, who managed the theater since 1971, said "there's no reason not to think" that someone will make good use of the theater.

"We all anticipated it way back last fall," said Poth, who started with the Butterfield chain in 1945 at the defunct Capitol Theater. "It just no longer serves as a movie house."

The State's screen is the biggest in Kalamazoo. The next biggest is at the Campus.

The entrance to the State's balcony was barricaded several years ago. Employees had to use a key to open a door to the balcony to get to the projection booth. A U-shaped area in the upstairs architecture hints of a mezzanine-level snack bar.

Lester Weiss, projectionist at the State since 1966, said of the

closing, "I'm not surprised, of course."

Weiss, who declined to reveal his age, said he "was just a kid" when he began showing movies at the Garden Theater in Flint in 1914. During his years from 1923 to 1966 at the since razed Capitol Theater, he saw vaudeville performers thrown out of work as movies came in. Television in the 1950s caused theater attendance to "nosedive" by 40 percent, throwing still more people out of work.

"I have no resentments, because I have had so many good years," Weiss said. "I'm sorry to see a nice theater like this close, but it's been expected. Our overhead is really tremendous compared to the other theaters.

"I've stayed in it because I liked it. I like projection. I like the art."

Weiss said he has no immediate plans for the future, but noted that he belongs to a bicycle club and makes some of his own films.

"I'll be busy riding my bicycle, taking my pictures and waiting for an opening," he said. "My heart has always been in this, so I'll keep going as long as I can."

Marvel Hilton sold tons of popcorn and gallons of soft drinks, since she "started working here in March of '48." Just turned 62, she said she enjoyed working at the State, and was sad to see it close.

"It's something that probably had to happen," she said. "I won't say anything because I've got my feelings about the theater."

She said she'll move on to the Campus.

Duwain Hunt, who as manager-director of the Vaudeville Committee helped organize four vaudeville shows at the State in recent years, told of how much effort and time he and the committee put in to restore the theater's organ, stage lighting and stars and clouds in the moviehouse's "sky."

"You can always tell when I'm in the theater because the clouds and stars are on," said Hunt, because the special lighting was not always illuminated. He and his wife, Darlene, were there to enjoy the "atmosphere" for the last show.

Can the majestic movie palace somehow be saved?

"I can't foresee the future more than anyone," Poth said, but "I hope so."

Hunt said, "I'd like to see it used as a community performing arts center," although it must compete with Western Michigan University's Miller Auditorium and the Kalamazoo Public Schools' Chenery Auditorium.

Detroit's Redford Theater has brought customers back in with 1930s and 1940s movie musicals and organ concerts on weekends.

"Oftentimes, they're sold out," Hunt said. "This may very well be a good use for the State Theater if the community were willing to support it."

The city of Kalamazoo should buy the theater and use it for a "community cultural center" to attract conventioners staying downtown, someone suggested.

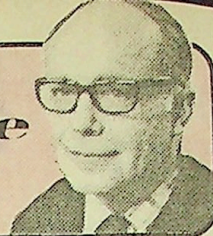
Downtown Kalamazoo once boasted many movie theaters. The Majestic, which opened on East South Street in 1907, later became the Capitol in 1924. It was razed in the late 1970s to make way for a parking garage.

Pedestrians who look up can still spot the name "Fuller" above the Iron Kettle restaurant on the Kalamazoo Mall. That's where the Fuller Theater opened in 1909 as a legitimate playhouse, and later became a Butterfield moviehouse. It closed in 1951.

Some other downtown theater names out of the past include: the Gem, Elite, Grand, Lyric, Royal, Michigan, New, Orpheum, Star and Uptown.

Seat on the Aisle

By Don Carlson



There will never be another like the State

There will never be another theater in Kalamazoo that even comes close to the State. Now facing an uncertain future and likely to be closed in the next few months, southwestern Michigan's leading theater for a substantial part of its 54 years remains even in its declining years an impressive example of *the* golden era of stage and screen. Constructed at a cost of \$350,000, it couldn't be duplicated today for millions.

It was built in 1926 and 1927 when ornate architecture and decor for theaters were the vogue. In an era when "movie palaces" were opening almost daily, some were of Egyptian styling, others Chinese and Moorish.

The speciality of the State, which opened its doors on July 14, 1927, was Spanish motif of the Hispano-Italian style popular during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. It was a shining example of the best work by the Austrian-born theater architect, John Ebersson, who had created his first atmospheric vaudeville and movie house with construction of the Majestic in Houston, Tex., in 1923. Spanish courtyards were incorporated by Ebersson into the State with its sky of twinkling stars and moving clouds. Ebersson, who died in 1934 after designing over 300 theaters, also used the atmospheric design in the Grand Riviera of Detroit, Avalon and Paradise Theaters and Avalon Ballroom in Chicago.

The State's exterior is of buff tapestry brick with ornate terra-cotta trimmings, and some of the decoration — including a facade directly above the marquee — was removed in remodeling in 1964. That remodeling was carried out conscientiously, and the theater's architectural roots were not seriously disturbed, which is why the State is so unusual today.

For several years, vaudeville from the Keith Circuit and silent movies were regular fare, with orchestral accompaniment for vaudeville provided by Don Warren and orchestra. There was also a "house" organist for the theater's Barton organ.

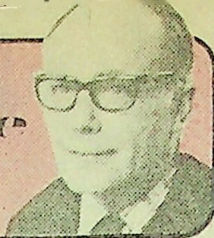
When vaudeville died in the post-Depression years, the State began to offer many legitimate attractions with some of the biggest names in show business. The great Ethel Barrymore played there in "The Corn Is Green" and "White Oaks," Eugenie Leontovich in "Tovarich" and Clifton Webb in "The Man Who Came to Dinner.

Other touring shows included "Three Men on a Horse," "You Can't Take It With You," "Hellzapoppin" with Olsen and Johnson and "Watch on the Rhine" starring Paul Lucas. There were also musicals such as "Blossom Time" and "The Merry Widow," and the 1940s brought the "big band" — Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Jack Teagarden, Russ Morgan and Ted Weems who had a vocalist by the name of Perry Como.

The end of the State may be said to have been sealed in the 1970s with the construction of theater complexes in shopping centers and suburban areas. But none of them ever will enjoy anything like the architectural distinction, popularity or fame that was the State's at its peak.

Seat on the Aisle

By Don Carlson



Only part of the challenge

Raising the money to acquire Kalamazoo's 54-year-old State Theater wouldn't be an insurmountable task. But funding to keep it functioning either as an auditorium for public use or music, dance and theatrical events is another matter.

That's the view of Duwain Hunt, who staged annual vaudeville shows at the movie palace and was, along with Jerry Alexander, a leader of the group that helped restore the elegant movie palace to much of its former luster. He's made a rather extensive study of possible uses for the theater which apparently will be closed down after the Christmas season by its owners, Butterfield Theaters, Inc. As reported on these pages a week ago, time seems to be running out on the majestic State.

Hunt is among hundreds of Kalamazoo area people who truly hate to see the theater closed, altered or possibly even razed. Reaction to last week's announcement that the showplace probably will be closed in a couple of months has ranged from "we really hate to see it happen" to the realistic view that Kalamazoo doesn't really need another performing arts center. More than a few people have noted that loss of the State would be another step in turning the midtown area into a 9 to 5 place of activity.

It was Hunt who pointed out that the community recently raised funds to save the state hospital watertower which far exceeded that which might be required to acquire the State Theater property. Even with taxes forgiven and other expenses trimmed, keeping the theater property operational could be a real burden at a time when the economy is creaking and groaning.

At the same time, Hunt also knows that the theater, last of the regularly operating outstate movie palaces, was pointed up not so long ago was Kalamazoo's most valuable historical structure.

Preserve State Theater

To the Editor:

Some time ago there was a story in the Gazette about the State Theater being a landmark. This building brings beauty to our downtown along with the Kalamazoo Mall.

I wish that the Butterfield Enterprise, Inc. would consider giving the property to the city in memory of its founder, and also as a memorial to the settlers of Hispanic origin who left their homelands to settle in the New World. The building is of Spanish architecture.

The city needs an attraction of this kind to show our future generation what the theatrical era was all about. The maintenance and upkeep of the building would be supported by monies from the rents. The theatrical part could be used by charitable organizations to raise monies for research programs, schools for their activities, or for any other useful program.

I hope, that the Butterfield Enterprise, Inc. would consider my recommendation, before thinking of selling the property. **CHRIS ARMENIS, 2815 S. Westnedge.**

Letters to the Editor

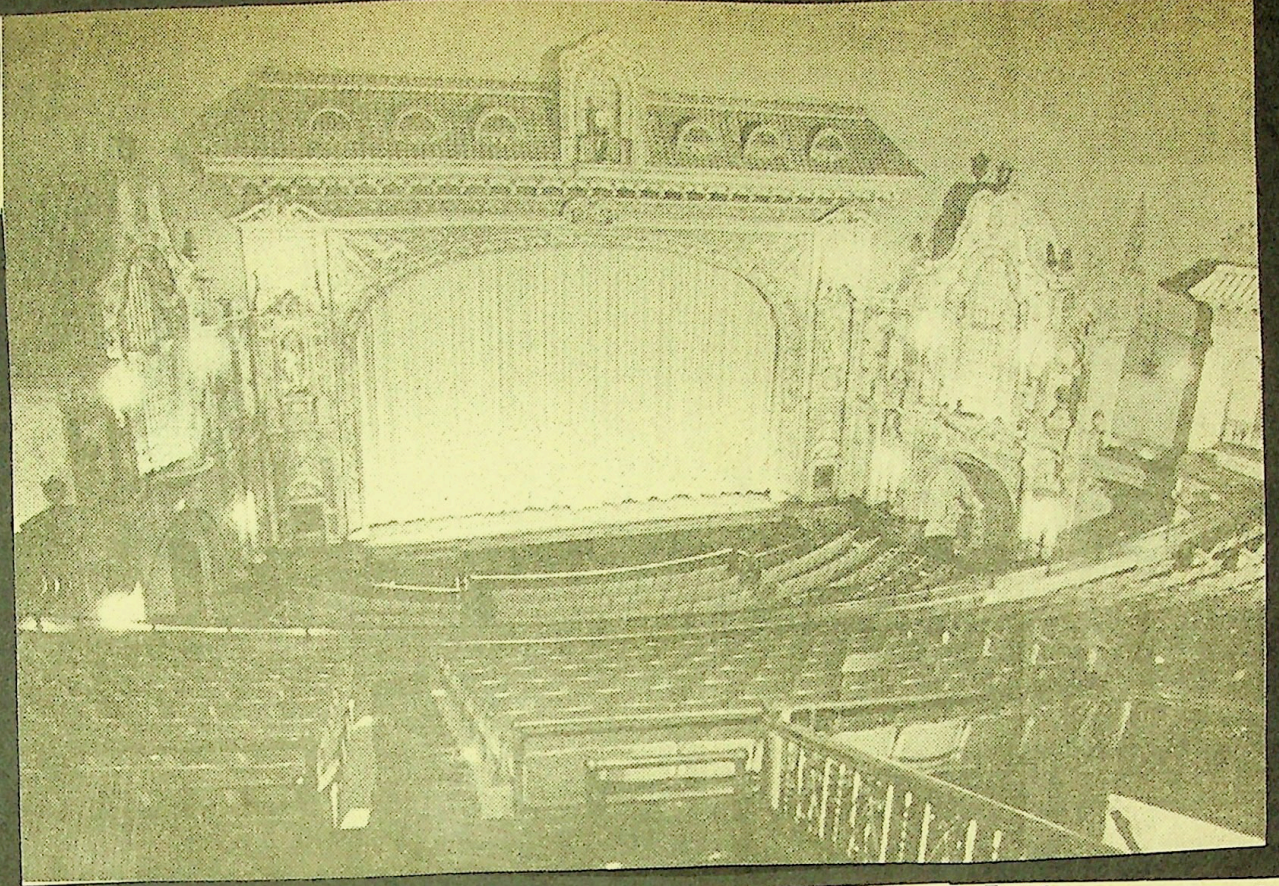
State Theater is an asset

To the Editor:

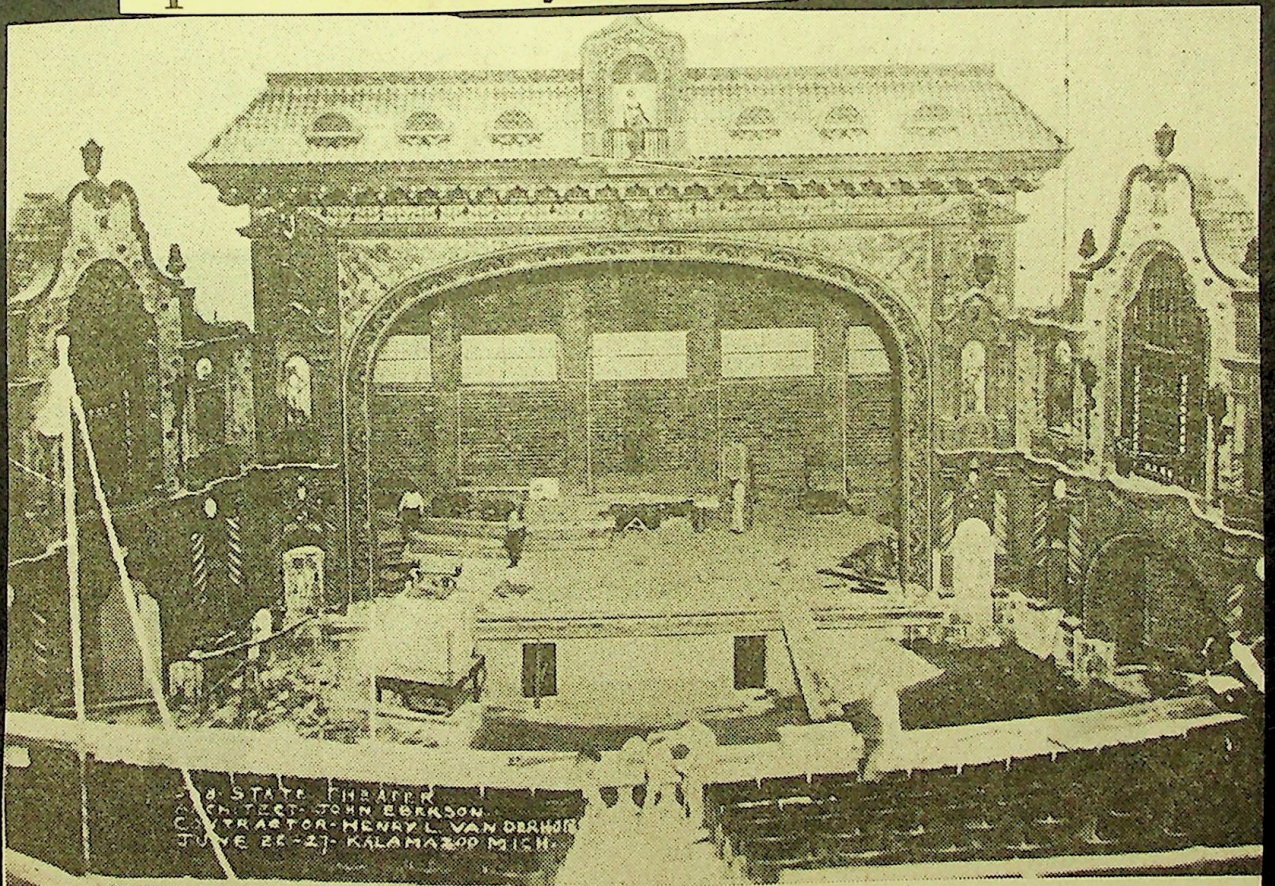
If the city of Detroit can rally round and "try" to save some of her "grand old ladies;" i.e., the Fox Theater, cannot the All-America City of Kalamazoo do likewise?

The spirit of downtown Kalamazoo is lying dormant, biding its time. It needs beauty like the State Theater to nurture it along, to bring it to maturity and full bloom.

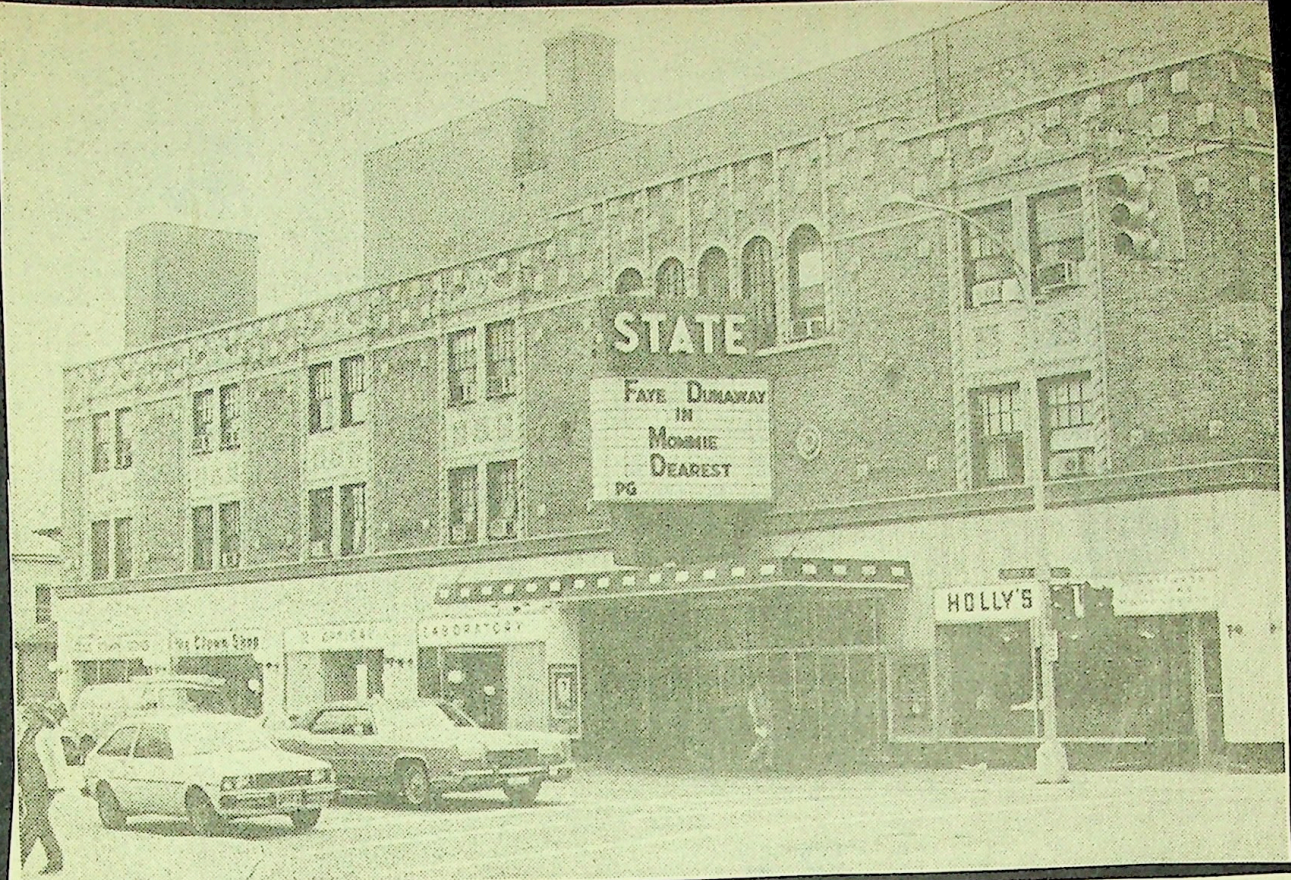
Special attractions, promotions, benefit performances or wine festivals — whatever it takes, we need to give the State Theater our best shot. Those of us who love downtown Kalamazoo choose to believe that the Hinman Project and the State Theater can indeed be friendly neighbors. **MARY KAY ALLEN, 1426 Edgemoor.**



State Theater as it appears today with its ornate Spanish courtyard interior



STAGE AND AUDITORIUM ON STATE THEATER DURING CONSTRUCTION IN 1926
Famed theater architect John Eberson designed vaudeville and movie house



This is the way Kalamazoo's State Theater can be remembered if its doors close forever. These are exterior and interior views of the late Col. W. S. Butterfield's one-time vaudeville-silent film, legitimate theater and later the city's leading

movie theater which has dominated the southwest corner of Lovell and South Burdick streets for over half a century. The Spanish courtyard motif is clearly visible in the picture on the right. No longer considered viable as a movie theater,

Butterfield Theater officials have confirmed that a final decision on the theater probably will be made shortly, but the outlook is not encouraging. Hopeful that some local civic or government

group can be encouraged to acquire and preserve the theater, the owners presently plan to continue its operation through the Christmas season. (See story on page A-1).

— Gazette photos (left) by Jerry Campbell and (right) by Robert Maxwell

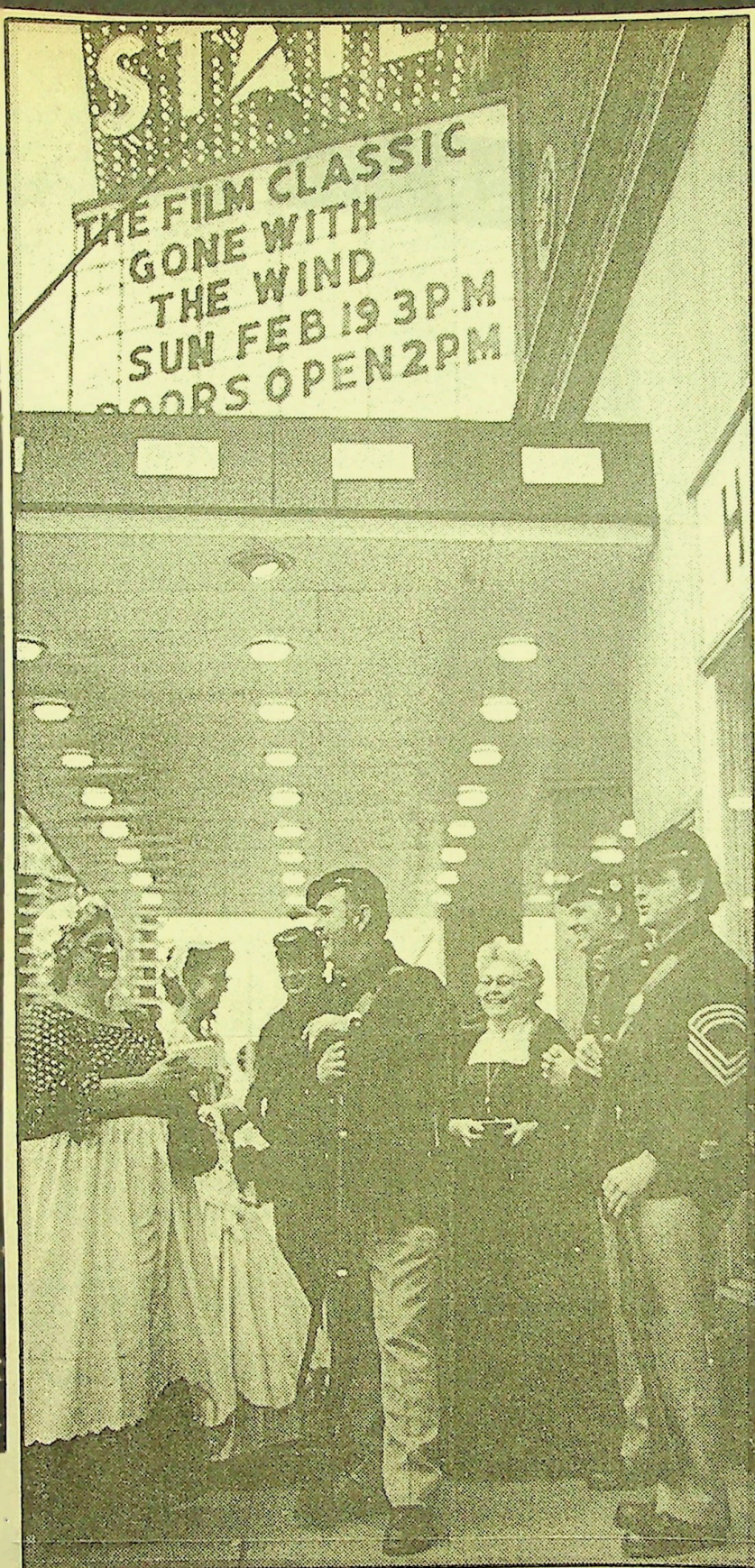


King of the blues

Blues guitarist extraordinaire B.B. King's face is full of emotion as he solos on his axe, which he affectionately calls Lucille, in this 1982 file photo. King returns to Kalamazoo for two shows at 7:30 and 10:30 p.m. March 30 in the State Theater. Tickets are \$10.50 and \$12.50, reserved, and are available at Boogie Records, Flipside Records and Sunshine Submarine.

—Gazette file photo

1-5-84



GAZETTE PHOTO / BILL KRASEAN

Echoes of days past

Shadows of a beautiful and bygone era haunted the halls of Kalamazoo's historic State Theater Sunday afternoon as men in Confederate uniforms and women in hoop skirts greeted patrons to a benefit showing of the Civil War epic "Gone With the Wind."

Some 1,200 film fans attended the showing sponsored by the State Theater Vaudeville Committee. The group hopes to prevent the razing of the historic movie palace. Salutations of "thank y'all fer comin'" from ushers and a special "dixie-land" organ program by organist Bill Mollema on the theater's resonant Barton Theater Organ also added to the atmosphere.

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State Theatre

KALAMAZOO MICHIGAN

State Theatre Vaudeville Committee Presents

DAVID O. SELZNICK'S production of MARGARET MITCHELL'S
Story of the Old South

GONE WITH THE WIND

in TECHNICOLOR starring

Sunday
February
19th
3:00pm

ALL SEATS \$3.00

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Keyboard Center
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Saving the State

In Kalamazoo, one of the last grand old movie palaces is threatened

In the days before going to the movies meant going to a nondescript mini-theater at the mall, moviegoers had more to look at than just the giants of the silver screen.

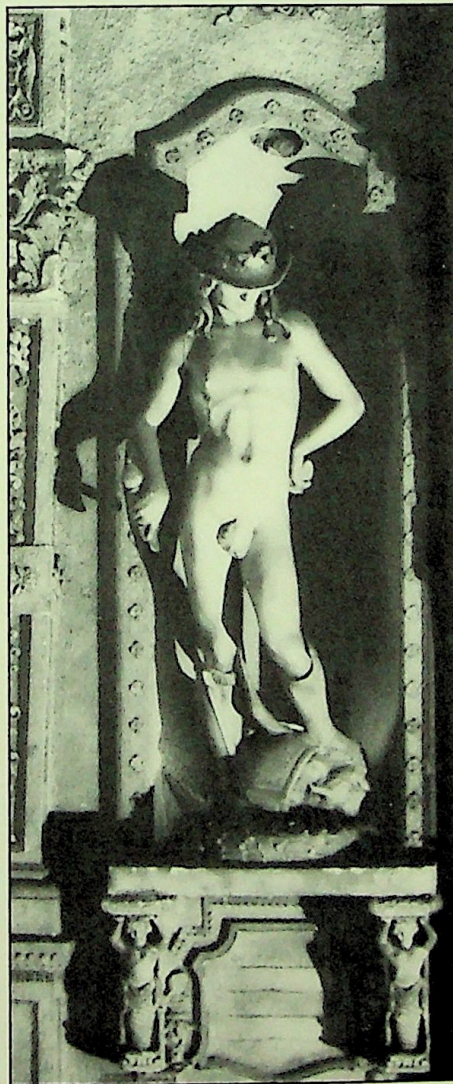
Part of the show was the theater itself — often an extravagant affair with a spectacular lobby and equally ornate auditorium. All across the country, Americans settled into plush seats and routinely awaited the astonishing: drama, opera, ballet, big bands, stage shows, dance revues, movies (silent and talkies) and more.

During Hollywood's heyday, virtually every city of any size had its own movie palace. Almost 4,000 of these massive structures went up between 1915 and 1945 but by the late 1960s many had fallen victim to downtown decay and the competition of television.

In recent years, however, a vibrant theater-restoration movement has brought life back to many long-dormant stages, giving a shot of adrenalin to decaying downtown areas in the process. These former sanctuaries of cinema, often combining meticulous restoration with imaginative renovation, are hosting everything from grand opera to Broadway shows.

The State Theatre in downtown Kalamazoo is no exception. This 56-year-old structure is currently threatened with extinction, and a group of Kalamazoo folks are trying to stop that from happening.

The theater was designed by John Eberson, an architect who worked during the 1920's and 30's and took an approach that was characterized by a style now known as Hispano-Italian. He was also the creator of a style of movie palaces that could be called



atmospheric. The style placed the audience in a simulated garden or courtyard with a plain, dark-blue ceiling alive with twinkling electric stars and moving clouds. The auditoriums Eberson created had side-walls that were designed as building facades and garden walls with windows that were lit from behind.

The State Theatre is a prime example of Eberson's work. Completed in 1927 for a cost of \$350,000, the building features a Spanish patio of the Hispano-Italian style that was in vogue during the reign of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella.

Through the years the theater has been the site of many attractions. There were vaudeville performances, musicals, classical ballet, Big Band orchestras and nationally known personalities.

While the theater continued to operate in recent years as a movie house, it failed as a money maker and its owner, W.S. Butterfield Theatre Inc., announced that its doors would be shut for the last time on March 5, 1982. Butterfield, of Southfield, Mich., is the largest independent theater chain in the Midwest.

When it began to look like the last picture show for the historic theater, local arts groups and Kalamazoo city officials organized the "Save the State" committee and began looking for ways to preserve the building. Several options were considered but the most feasible proved to be purchasing the theater by an as yet unnamed independent, non-profit foundation. The foundation hopes to be in business by June 1 and will then begin to raise money to purchase the State.

If all goes as planned, the State will be

by Donna Allgaier Christian

used as a special events center and a home for the Kalamazoo Arts Council. Plans call for raising \$750,000 to buy and restore the building.

Duwain Hunt, a county commissioner and vice president of the Greater Kalamazoo Arts Council, is one of the principals in the "Save the State" campaign. Originally from Detroit, he witnessed the deterioration of eight theaters in his hometown before he left, and vows not to see the same thing happen in Kalamazoo.

Though the theater is "virtually intact" according to Hunt, minor work such as bringing electrical standards up to code and fixing glass, plaster work and chandeliers remains.

"The theater is remarkably preserved," Hunt says. "Butterfield didn't modernize the building like you might have expected."

Typically an architect has but a few photographs to work with when planning a restoration, Hunt continues, but in the case of the State all the artifacts that were removed were simply stored in a back room.

Some structural renovation was completed in 1977 by a group called the State Theatre Vaudeville Committee. This group of volunteers researched and organized replacement of some 4,000 light bulbs, re-rigged and rehemped stage equipment, and added fire doors to get ready for a special event they called the Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration Show. The show was planned to raise interest in the theater and to bring back the type of entertainment that had crossed its stage in years past.

"That first show was a bigger success than any of us could have imagined," Hunt says. "It was the first time in fifteen years that all the seats were sold out for both planned performances."

Hunt was among those who went out to knock on doors to raise funds the first time around. He also recalls the number of theater supporters who just shook their heads



You won't find this kind of interior at the local mall mini-theater. The interior of the State Theatre is a perfect example of the rococo style of some of the grand movie palaces.


in amazement at the committee's plans.

"Most everyone thought we were out of our minds," he says, "but one person, Dorothy Dalton, didn't." Dalton, a long-time supporter of art and theater in the community, called to ask what she could do to help. This was at a time when the committee was ready to scrap the whole venture.

Dalton's financial support enabled the group to proceed with the vaudeville show and the annual shows for the next few years until her death in 1981.

A big draw of the theater that has continued since its early days, is the "Golden Voiced" Barton organ. Still in its original location, the organ was used regularly until 1937 when it fell silent and gradually deteriorated. When John Catherwood and William Mollema found out about the organ's demise, they volunteered to rehabilitate the instrument and began a long love affair that is going into its second decade. The pair spent nearly ten years rebuilding and renovating the instrument and even though Catherwood has left Kalamazoo he still makes the trip from Spring Lake for his labor of love.

Mollema, a musician who has maintained the organ for over twenty years, is the one who tunes and plays the instrument at the fund-raising concerts that take place from time to time. At a concert that took place last April, Mollema played to a full house instead of the mice and ghosts that usually make up the audience of his midnight to 3 a.m. concerts.

Even in Kalamazoo, where there are a wealth of theaters with working stages, the State Theatre is unique. The architecture alone merits serious thoughts of preservation. Though the theater has yet to receive an official historic or landmark designation, it has unofficially been granted this status by its many friends and supporters who are determined to save this gaudy bauble of Kalamazoo history. 



Exterior shot: The Spanish motif was evident on the exterior as well as interior as shown in this circa 1927 photograph. Ornate terr-cotta was used on the building for its entire length along both Burdick and Lovell Streets.

classic "The Phantom of the Opera". Since the spring of 1972, the Barton has not been heard publicly as a part of the State's theatre presentations. That is, until the 50th Anniversary celebration of the State Theatre. In addition to many of the theatre's staging resources being utilized, the Barton accompanied the classic "The Gold Rush" starring Charlie Chaplin.

While the theatre pipe organ, in general, has been experiencing a revival in theatres, restaurants, and other public buildings all across the country, Kalamazoo is indeed fortunate to have a theatre organ still in its original installation. The State Theatre's Barton renaissance has most recently been the work of John Catherwood, William Mollema, Bob MacNeur, John Ferguson, Max Brown, and Robert Pratt. Their unselfish labor is greatly appreciated and apparent as you listen to the Golden Voiced Barton today. Special thanks are also in order to Betty Darling for her support and help. The rejuvenation goes on. As with any form of entertainment, public response could encourage the use of the Barton; whether in solo work, or in the many forms of accompaniment it can provide.

The Barton originally had 11 ranks controlled from its ornate 3 manual console. Presently, there are 12 ranks playing and projected work will bring the total to 15 ranks. The 12th rank is the English Post Horn just recently added to the Solo chamber. Below is a list of the organ's ranks of pipes, percussions and effects, and all of their locations:

Main Chamber

- Tuba Horn
- Open Diapason
- Concert Flute
- Gamba
- *Tibia Clausa
- *Vox Humana
- Chrysoglott

Under Stage Chamber

- Marimba Harp

Traps (In Solo Chamber)

- Snare Drum, Bass Drum, Brush Cymbal, Wood Block, Castanets, Tambourine, *Crash Cymbal

*Ranks and Percussions to be added

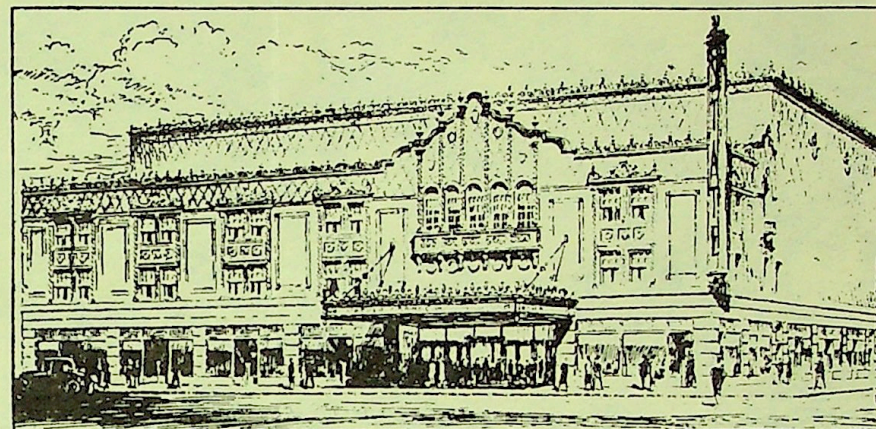
Solo Chamber

- Solo Tibia Clausa
- Solo Vox Humana
- Clarinet
- Viol D'Orchestre
- Viol Celeste
- Oboe Horn
- Kinura
- English Post Horn
- *Trumpet
- Xylophone
- *Glockenspiel

Front cover illustration from Opening Night Program, July 14, 1927

State Theatre

KALAMAZOO MICHIGAN



State Theatre Vaudeville Committee Presents

3 ACTS OF VAUDEVILLE &

THE MUSICAL YOU'LL
ENJOY AGAIN, AGAIN
and
AGAIN!

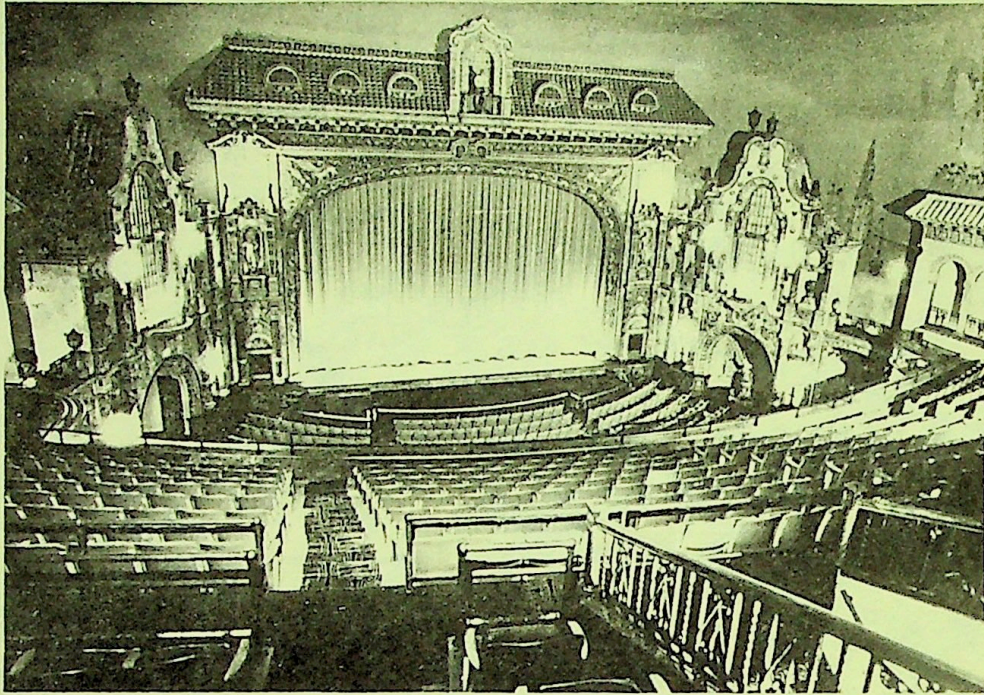


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All Seats \$3.00

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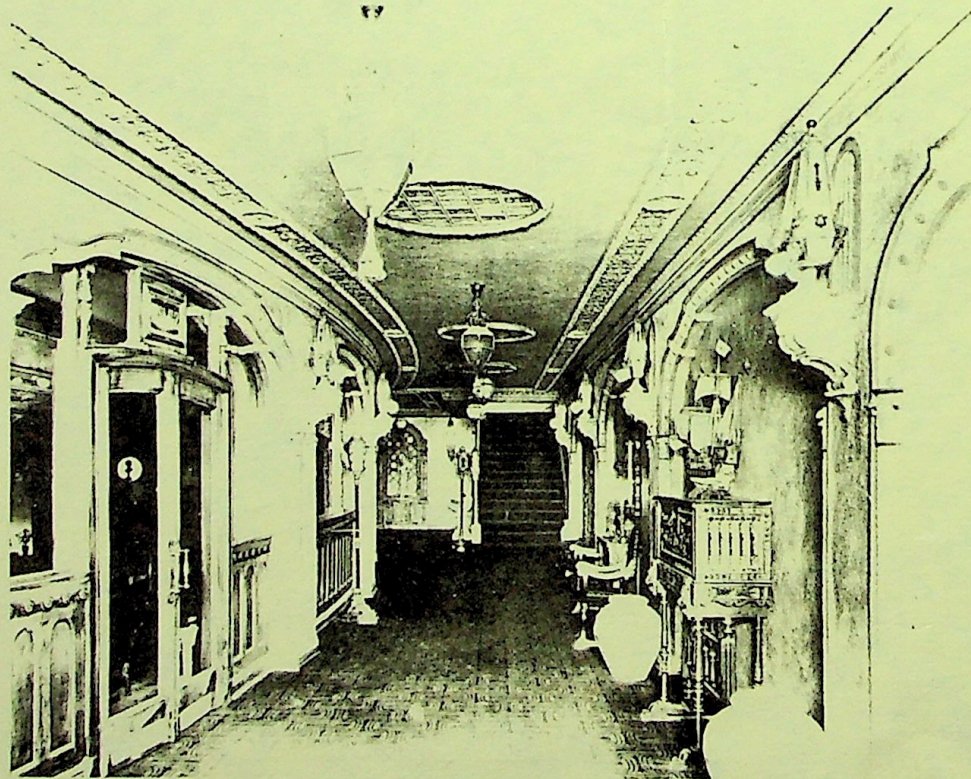
State Theatre Vaudeville Committee
P.O. Box 649
Comstock, Michigan 49041



the State Theatre & the Barton Organ

If you ever dreamed of relaxing in a romantic Spanish courtyard and being entertained as if you were royalty ... then on July 14, 1927, your dream came true. Your expenses would surely be small, your pleasure great, and you would only have to pass through the ornate facade of the State Theatre, Kalamazoo. On through the richly appointed lobby, and you are there. Theatre designer John Ebersson's "atmospheric" design has lifted you from everyday reality and placed you in the midst of an Hispano-Italian fantasy. The terra-cotta, tapestries, mirrors, paintings, wrought iron, statuary, colonades of arches, balconies, and cove-lit niches have

assaulted your senses and literally taken your breath away. In the auditorium the twinkling stars and gently drifting clouds sooth you as you are entertained by first-class attractions beneath the tile-roofed proscenium. Vaudeville, stage shows, dance revues, movies (silent and talkies), drama, opera, ballet, big bands; it has all been presented here. ... Although, today some appointments have been removed and painters have changed the decor in some areas of the building, the State's virtually intact auditorium is still reminiscent of the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. And within this auditorium is still another breath-taker. ... The house lights are dimmed, and a most magnificent chorus of music bursts forth from ornate grilles on each side of the courtyard. A golden spotlight pierces the night sky and picks out the rising artist and console of the Golden Voiced Barton Theatre Pipe Organ.



The State's 3 manual - 11 rank theatre organ was played on opening night by Al Gillickson. He was making a guest appearance away from his usual stint at the Capitol Theatre. The first House Organist, Edith Ehrens, entertained patrons for the first year and was replaced by Clarence Leverenz in 1928. Even though silent films gradually faded away, Mr. Leverenz was featured for sing-alongs until 1934 when Bud Taylor took over until 1937. The Barton then fell silent into disuse as a regular attraction until 1950 when Bud Taylor returned. Mr. Taylor played intermissions until 1951. Again the organ fell silent and deteriorated heavily. 1961 brought John Catherwood and William Mollema to the State volunteering to rejuvenate the Barton. When once again playable, they alternated playing intermissions on Saturday or Sunday evenings. This continued until 1972. In November, 1971, organist Stan Kann from the Fox Theatre, St. Louis, Missouri, accompanied the silent film