

at the crossroads of the world

# THE NEW YORK

## THEATRE

by Lloyd E Klos

The Paramount Theatre and its surrounding 35-story building were the pride and joy of the man who spent \$17 million to make it all possible — Adolph Zukor. Let's go back a bit and learn something about him.

Mr. Zukor was born in Ricse, Hungary in 1873. He came to America when he was 16 and had less than \$40 in his pocket when he arrived. His first job was in an upholsterer's shop for \$2 a week. After his salary had been raised to \$4, he entered the fur business, specializing in cutting mink, sable and fox fur pieces. In the autumn of 1892, learning that for \$10, one could travel by train to Chicago, he went into the fur business there with an acquaintance he had known in New York. They were moderately suc-

Adolph Zukor, the man who built the New York Paramount. At 100 years of age, he survived the theatre which was his pride and joy.

NEXT PAGE: The Grand Hall looking toward the staircase which lead to mezzanine and loge areas. — (Bill Lamb collection)



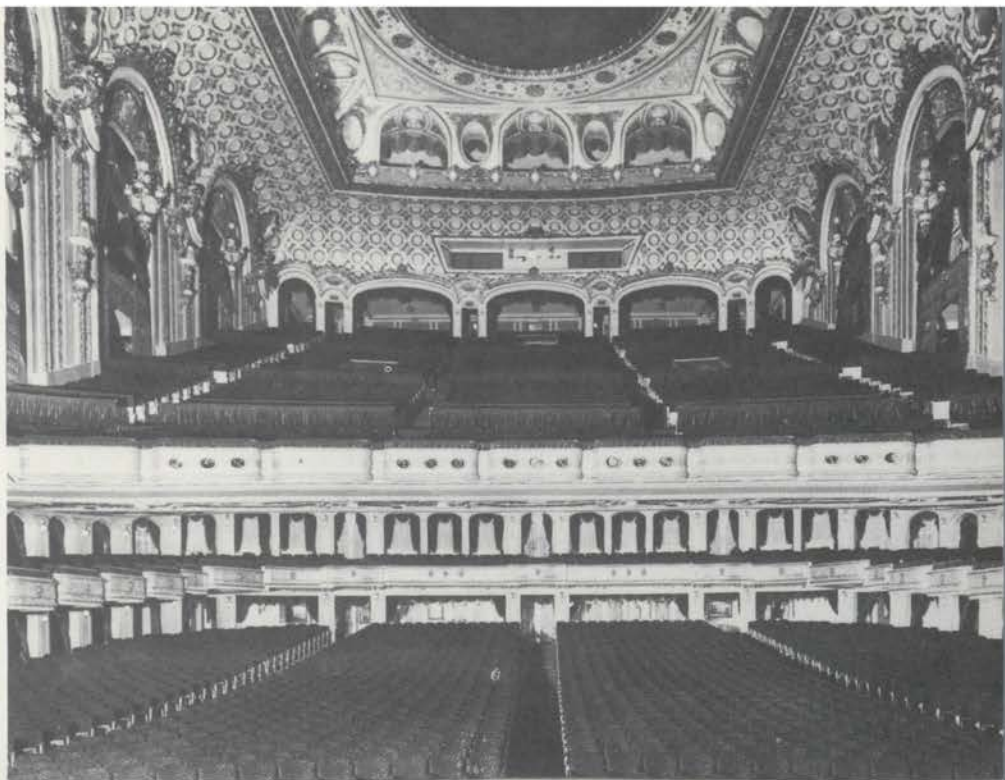


cessful, but in time, Zukor returned to New York and re-entered the fur trade there.

In the autumn of 1903, Mr. Zukor's attention was directed to the entertainment field when he went into partnership with Mitchell Mark, brother of Moe Mark, later of the Strand circuit of theatres. Mitchell had a penny arcade in New York and after joining with Zukor, similar establishments were opened in Boston and Buffalo. With other affiliations, Zukor opened an arcade at Broadway and Fourteenth Street in New York which became very profitable.

Mr. Zukor saw his first motion picture in the Diamond Alley Theatre

The marquee as it appeared in 1926. — (Bill Lamb collection)



The high vaulted auditorium as seen from the stage. The auditorium was rather narrow which improved the sightlines for motion picture viewing. The shape of the auditorium coupled with shallow chambers enhanced the organ and helped in giving it the reputation of being the mightiest Wurlitzer. — (Bill Lamb collection)



in Pittsburgh. It seated only 25, but made a great impression on him. In 1906, he disposed of his interest in penny arcades and joined William A. Brady, a theatrical producer, who had a patent on "Hale's Touring Cars." These were stationary, though built as railroad cars. Travelogues were projected onto a screen, and the spectators were under a traveling illusion, with simulated sounds. Due to a shortage of this type film, the "cars" were later converted to "store" showplaces.

About 1908, the General Film Corporation was formed, and it bought out 10 producers of filmed short subjects. Zukor, by now a student of audience reaction, was convinced that the motion picture could be supported, provided the product were improved. He felt that plays and novels could be performed on the screen. "Bigger and better pictures", became his passion, and he impressed this on everyone with whom he talked.

No one seemed interested in investing money in what to everyone except Zukor seemed a risky business. In 1911, he met Edward S. Porter, an associate of Thomas A. Edison during the great inventor's film ventures.

Porter was impressed by Zukor's ideas and when Universal Pictures was founded, Porter sold his interest in short subjects and joined Zukor.

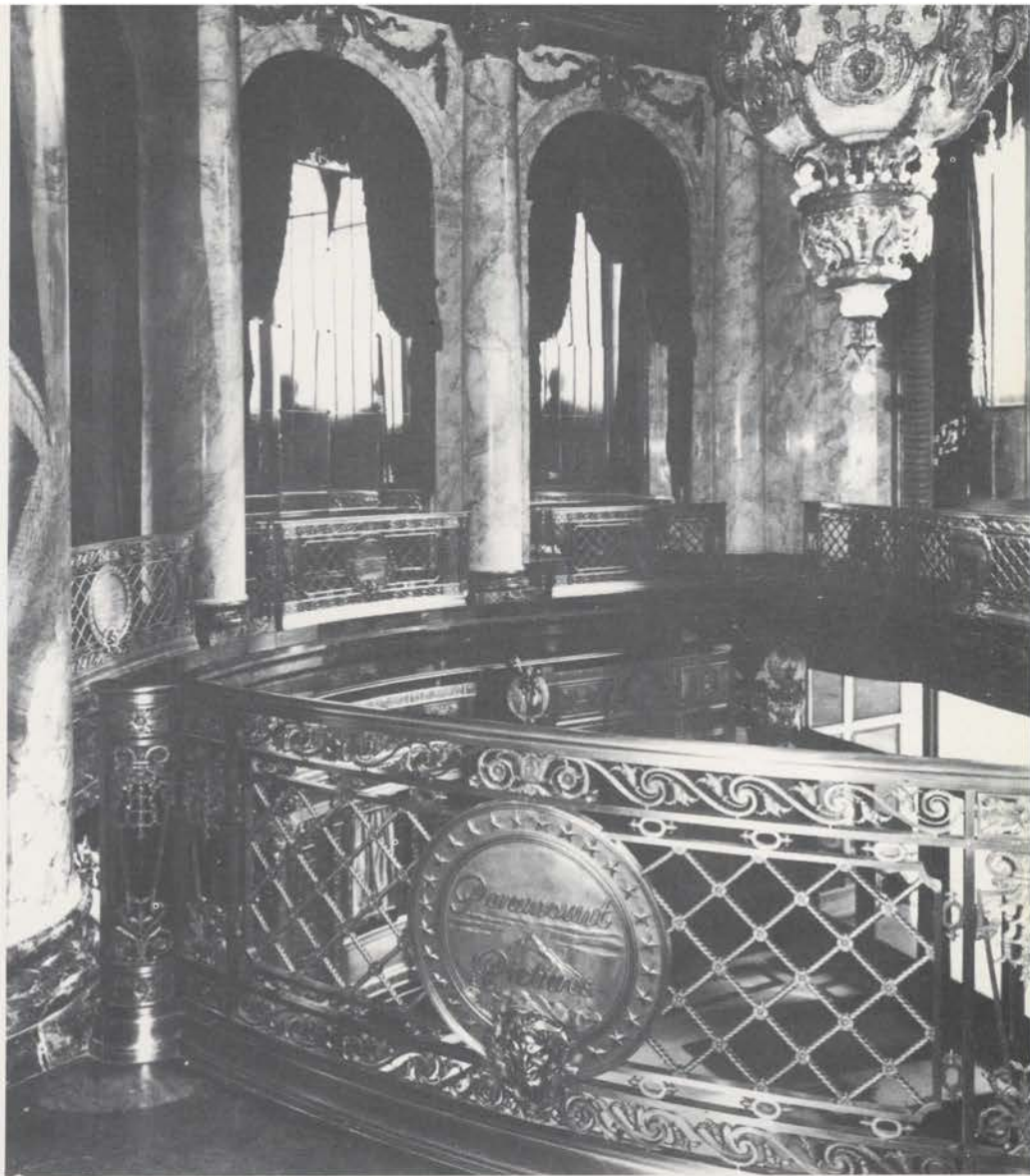
When the partners heard that Sarah Bernhardt was available to make the picture *Queen Elizabeth*, they engaged her. Production cost was \$35,000! It was in four reels, made in Paris, and was the first Famous Players picture to be released.

True to his plan to produce plays for the movies, Zukor approached Daniel Frohman to arrange for actor James K. Hackett to play *Prisoner of Zenda*, which was the first movie feature to use a well-known actor. Later, he became friends with Jesse L. Lasky and they joined forces to make pictures.

So far, we have seen the rise of Adolph Zukor. What about the building which would be a monument to his memory? In 1919, Zukor met Robert Simon, a well-known real estate man. Simon informed Zukor that the Putnam Building and Westover Court in Times Square at 43rd Street were for sale. The parcel was a block long and 207 feet wide. Simon got the property, and Zukor took the contract in the hope that when his company became financially able, he would erect a building which would serve as headquarters for the Famous Players-Lasky Corp., and also contain a theatre in which to show Paramount films. "Paramount" was chosen as the title of the distributing adjunct of the parent corporation.

Some years passed before construction of the Paramount Building was begun. Zukor had a shrewd instinct as to the most favorable time to build, often being at variance with the views of his associates on the board of directors. The property had cost \$4,400,000 before the mortgage was due. "But", said Mr. Zukor, "I had so much faith in Times Square that I did not care to part with the site."

However, in November 1925, excavation was begun, a huge steam shovel biting into the earth, loaded the soil onto a pneumatic-tired, chain-driven truck for removal. The cornerstone was laid on May 19, 1926 by Mayor James J. Walker. Supervising the work was Harold B. Franklin, vice president of Publix Theatres Corp. The building committee engaged C. W. and George L. Rapp as architects (The former died before the project was finished.), and a number of designs



This photo of the ornate railing shows how the Paramount Pictures trademark was worked into the design. — (Bill Lamb collection)

were rejected before final plans were approved. A small model of the theatre was built, complete in every detail.

While the impressive office structure was built to a height of 455 feet, it had no physical connection with the theatre, each having a separate entrance. Atop the building was a giant flashing globe, illuminated from within and visible for miles.

The globe stood 40 feet above the building's tower, was 19 feet in diameter, and was composed of 90 squares of reinforced glass, sheathed in copper. The building's smokestack passed through it, and a steel ladder reached inside the ball from the tower for access to the mechanism. The lamps were connected by a flasher switch with the tower clock so they would flash red on the odd hour and white on the even.

The theatre architecture was from

the French Renaissance period, the lower five stories being of Indiana limestone, carved in heavy relief. At the main entrance, there was a semi-circular colonnade of veined Breche Centella marble, imported from Italy at a cost of a half million dollars, and supported on a black and gold base, itself approximately one story high. Above this was a dome of gold, the top of which was 50 feet above the floor. A bronze and crystal chandelier hung from the center of the dome. The opposite side of the lobby was formed by a huge glass window, fronting on the street. During the day, the lobby was flooded by sunlight, and at night, it sparkled to thousands of electric lights.

Off the lobby was situated the famous Hall of Nations, and on one wall was imbedded a collection of stones from historical buildings in 37 countries, each obtained by the for-

eign offices of Famous Players. In many instances, these stones were taken from theatres, castles, government buildings and cathedrals. There were stones from the Imperial Palaces in Tokyo, Berlin and Warsaw; others from the ruins of Rome and Carthage. The story of each stone appeared on a bronze tablet. Nearby was a bronze bas-relief of Thomas A. Edison.

Then, there was the Grand Hall, 150 feet long, 45 feet wide and 50 feet high. Marble columns supported a dome, and at one end, a stairway widened to the mezzanine landings which led to the loges. Elevators to all floors were located behind the stairway. The ceiling panel of the Grand Hall was called "The Spirit of Light." In order to get the quality of marble desired for this area, a quarry which had lain idle in Italy for 40 years, was reopened.

In the basement was a walnut-paneled lounge for men and women called "The Elizabethan Room". Other rooms were "The College Room", used as a men's smoking lounge and having university emblems to set the decor; a ladies' smoking

room called "The Chinoiserie", done in a mixture of French and Chinese. Other rooms, named so that patrons could designate where they would meet their friends, included the Venetian Room, Peacock Alley, The Galleries, The Rotunda, Club Room, Hunting Room, Fraternity Room, Jade Room, Powder Box, Marie Antoinette Room, Music Room, Colonial Room and Empire Room.

Returning upstairs, we learn that there was special amplification equipment installed in the Paramount so that patrons awaiting seating could be entertained. Thus, music played on the stage, or by the organ or pit orchestra, could be piped into the Grand Hall. Also, in the Music Room overlooking the Grand Hall, a special string orchestra frequently entertained the theatre-goers.

When one stepped into the narrow but high auditorium, he was impressed with the French Renaissance decor with color scheme of ivory, rose red and turquoise blue. The organ chambers were situated on both sides of the proscenium arch, and their grilles con-

sisted of screens of crystal on which "trees of life" were emblazoned.

Indirect lighting in three colors was installed around the stage proscenium, the organ grilles, the soffit of the balcony, the main ceiling and side walls. Bronze crystal fixtures hung from the ceiling along the side walls, and huge bronze brackets were hung between the side arches.

The drapes were red and gold in a figured satin damask, and hung in the archways. A velvet and silk valance, embroidered with gold, with curtains to match, hung from the proscenium arch. The ventilation system was known as the down-feed system, whereby fresh, washed air was brought in through openings in the ceiling and drawn off at floor level by blowers and fans. The chairs were designed for comfort. The architects had designed a theatre for 6,000 seats, but it was decided that comfort should be the governing factor and 3,900 seats were installed. In actual fact, almost 50% of the theatre's interior was devoted to promenades, lounges, rest rooms and other comfortable conveniences for its patrons.

One of the many concourses leading to the auditorium aisles. — (Bill Lamb collection)



One of the many public rooms in the Paramount. No expense was spared in decorating and furnishing the theatre. This picture clearly shows the lavish appointments. — (Bill Lamb collection)



The orchestra pit handled 70 musicians, and the orchestra was raised on an elevator coming from seven feet below stage level. The platform was mounted on a carriage so that it could roll onto the stage and perform behind the acts.

The Wurlitzer organ console was situated to the left of the orchestra pit. It is generally agreed that this 4/36 Wurlitzer, Opus No. 1458, was the finest of the 2231 which were manufactured by that firm. It was said that the strings were the nearest approach to the real thing. Much was said about the 32-foot diaphones which were 34 inches square at the top and tapered down to six inches at the bottom. Each was made of the finest quality pine, 2¼ inches thick and weighed 1,250 pounds. Press releases in those days stressed facts to make the reader gasp!

Backstage, there were seven floors of dressing rooms, a complete hospital and a special room for the stars to meet the press, all accessible by elevators. Three projection rooms were situated in this area, each bigger than the first theatre seen by Mr. Zukor. Equipment of the latest design was installed so that there were no limits to stage extravaganzas and other productions in the theatre.

Such then, was the New York Paramount Theatre on the day of its grand opening, November 19, 1926. For some time previously, carpenters, plasterers, electricians etc. had been working around the clock to insure that the theatre would be ready on the appointed day.

In the afternoon, the crowds began to assemble outside the theatre, and by early evening, had grown so large that 100 policemen were assigned to the area. For more than two hours, no one not having an invitation to the opening was permitted to walk along the west side of Broadway between 42nd and 44th streets. Forty-third Street, west of Broadway, was also closed to traffic. As celebrities arrived, the crowds grew to five deep on the east side of Broadway between 43rd and 44th streets. Six searchlights lighted the sky, which drew more to the scene.

Inside, the theatre was flooded with light. Fountains played on either side of the proscenium, and the "Diamond Horseshoe" lent further brilliance. For an hour prior to festivities, the invited guests, attired in evening clothes,

roamed through the edifice. Among the 5,000 invited guests were the following from all walks of life:

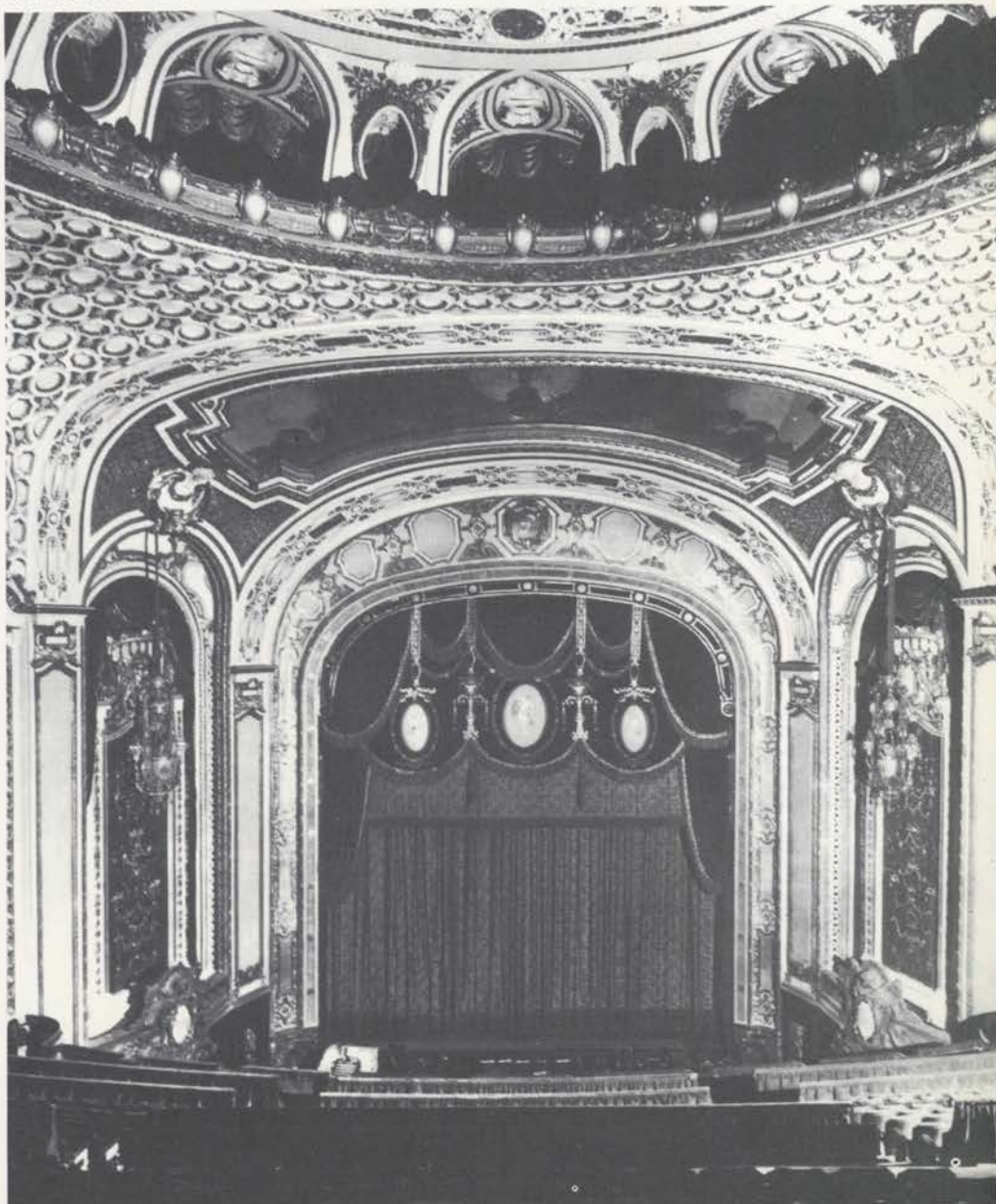
E. F. Albee	Sam Harris
A. J. Balaban	Will H. Hayes
Bruce Barton	Fannie Hurst
Bernard Baruch	Otto Kahn
Rex Beach	Jesse Lasky
Irving Berlin	Sinclair Lewis
Major Edward Bowes	Arthur Loew
Betty Bronson	Jules Mastbaum
Louise Brooks	Mae Murray
Billie Burke	Brock Pemberton
Richard Dix	George Palmer Putnam
George Eastman	Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel
Thomas A. Edison	Tony Sarg
Daniel Frohman	F. I. Shubert
Charles Dana Gibson	Les Shubert
John Golden	Gov. Alfred E. Smith
Samuel Goldwyn	Lawrence Stallings
David Wark Griffith	Gloria Swanson
Arthur Hammerstein	Gene Tunney

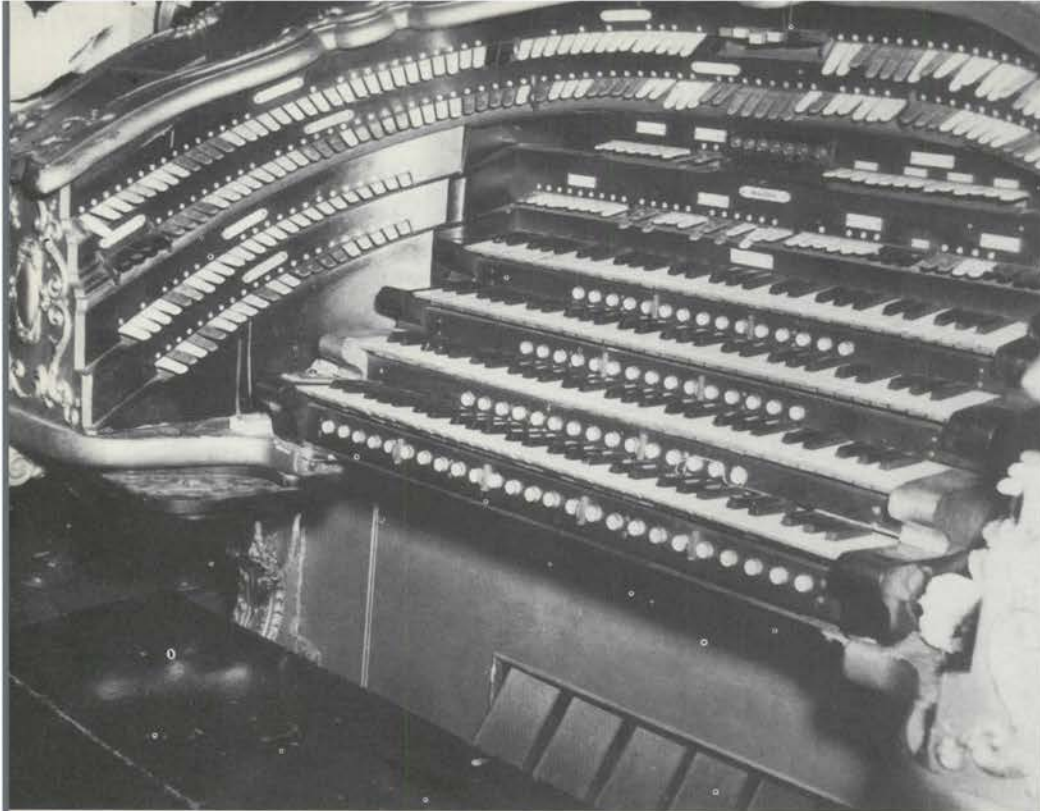
Robert F. Wagner  
Rodman Wanamaker

Lois Wilson  
Florenz Zeigfeld

At 9:15, with the audience settled in the comfortable red plush seats, A. M. Botsford, publicity director of Publix Theatres Corp., appeared on stage as master of ceremonies. In succession, he introduced Lee J. Eastman, president of the Broadway Association; Will H. Hayes, president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America Inc.; and finally, New York's flamboyant Mayor James J. Walker. His Honor stated that he had received channel swimmers, golfers, tennis players and royalty since he took office, but "not until last night did I realize what it means for Mohammed to come to the mountain." He further stated that Mr. Zukor could have built the Paramount

The stage as seen from the center balcony. The graceful contours of the proscenium arch and valances were altered in the 1950's to accommodate a wide screen. — (Bill Lamb collection)





Closeup view of the Paramount 4/36 Wurlitzer console. This organ is considered by many experts to be the definitive theatre organ. — (Bill Lamb collection)

Building before he did, "but it was a sweet compliment to wait until my administration."

The program opened with the national anthem, sung by Marguerite Pingo. The orchestra followed with the 1812 Overture. Organist Jesse Crawford entertained with an original score, "Organs I Have Played." A newsreel followed, showing the razing of the Putnam Bldg. and the erection of its successor, the Paramount.

John Murray Anderson's stage show *A Pageant of Progress* was of interest to inventor Thomas A. Edison who was in the audience, as it showed scenes of the old Koster & Biol's Music Hall where the first motion picture was shown 30 years previously. The feature movie was *God Gave Me Twenty Cents*.

The Paramount was a great success for almost 35 years, and was operated in conjunction with the Brooklyn Paramount which opened in 1928. Its stage shows were as long as the feature movie. The program usually included a line of girls, a name star, and the inevitable dog act. But when one sat through the stage show, organ solo, rendition by the house orchestra, two shorts, a travelogue, main feature, newsreel and coming attractions, he felt that he really got his money's worth!

In the late twenties and into the

thirties, the theatre featured personal appearances by Paramount movie stars. And, they didn't merely appear; they had to work. Mae Murray was one, and she waltzed onstage at the same time she was waltzing on the screen with John Gilbert in the *The Merry Widow*. Years later, another star, blonde Ginger Rogers, waltzed onstage at both the Brooklyn and Manhattan Paramounts. Rudy Vallee hi-ho'd everyone from center stage, and Bing Crosby was hoisted over the audience on a giant boom, singing all the way.

When John Philip Sousa and his marching band appeared on stage, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Crawford at the twin-consoled Wurlitzer, and the 70-piece Paramount orchestra, playing "Stars and Stripes Forever", the sound was heard back to the box office. Trained nurses were alleged to have been stationed in the aisles to revive those who were overcome by the "sheer magnitude of the production."

When the depression was felt in the thirties, plus the demise of vaudeville, stage shows became less lavish and colorful, and the movies became more so. People went to the theatre to forget their troubles and be entertained. In the forties, the Paramount's policy was attuned to youth; a big movie and a No. 1 name band. It was

the era of swing, and according to *Variety*, "An orchestra hadn't arrived until it played the Paramount." Benny Goodman, Harry James, Tommy Dorsey — you name the great ones, they all played there. In 1942, a slender vocalist, discovered by Tommy Dorsey, Frank Sinatra began a long engagement at the Paramount with the house full of screaming females at every performance. On opening day, extra police details had to keep in check over 30,000 spirited youngsters who tried to at least see the new sensation. The movie, which was *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay*, was just something to sit through until the main attraction, Frankie.

Though this story is meant to emphasize the Paramount Theatre's history, it would be remiss of us were we not to give recognition to the two Wurlitzers in the building. In the beginning, Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Crawford played duets on the greatest Wurlitzer of them all, she using a baby console which unfolded from the main key desk. A few months later, a slave console was installed on the right side of the orchestra pit, plus two others which could be rolled onto the stage. Of course, Jesse as well as his wife, played solos, the former noted for his "gems of miniaturization", the latter for her rhythmic selections.

Accompanying the silent movies in the theatre's early days was one of the greats in this phase of entertainment — Sigmund Krumgold. Some have even said that Krumgold was a better musician than the immortal Jesse.

When the Crawfords left to go on American and British tours, a succession of organists offered variety to Paramount audiences: Fred Feibel, Ann Leaf, Reginald Foort, Bill Floyd and George Wright. Don Baker played longer than anyone, a fixture for 14 years.

On the sixth floor of the Paramount Building was situated a broadcasting studio in which was installed the organ with the greatest number of combination pistons ever seen on a Wurlitzer console, 80. It was Opus 1960, a 4-manual, 21-rank special. Since it was impossible to record the organ in the theatre with the equipment then available, this studio instrument was installed so that Jesse Crawford could continue to make recordings without having to travel to Chicago or elsewhere. Also, the studio organ had more resources than any of

the previous organs the Poet had used for this purpose.

Once recording equipment had achieved the capability of capturing the extreme highs and lows which a pipe organ produces, there were a number of organists who recorded the 4/36 theatre instrument. George Wright in 1949-50 turned out 11 records on this organ. Ray Bohr did three in 1956-57; Bill Floyd and Billy Nalle turned out one apiece in 1957; Jerry Mendelsohn two in 1957-58; Ashley Miller an excellent show-tune album in 1967, (it was taped several years before) and Don Baker put out a memorable one of the final public performance of the organ in its original location in September 1964.

Maintaining both organs from the time of their installation until he retired almost 40 years later, was Dan Papp. Thus the Queen Mother and the Crown Prince of Wurlitzers were always assured the loving, meticulous care necessary to keep them in top playing condition.

Before passing on, we cannot fail to mention what Jay Quinby described as "The Greatest Night in Organ History", June 24, 1956. In an early issue of *The Tibia*, he graphically described a session of the AGO National Convention, held in the Paramount Theatre. Canada's Mr. Theatre Organ Enthusiast, H. Clealan Blakely gives us a new slant to the historic "milkman's matinee".

"I was lucky enough to be there, and it proved to be one of the really memorable nights of my life. It marked the first time that the AGO unbent enough to schedule a theatre party as part of its convention. George Wright was supposed to play at midnight, but it was announced that he was incapacitated due to an automobile accident. So, Ray Bohr opened the program, and he put on a great concert for them. I have never heard him play better; he really opened their eyes (and ears)!"

"After he finished, some of the AGO members tried their hands. Searle Wright, Virgil Fox, Pierre Cocherau and Richard Purvis all turned in fine performances with all 13 tremas down. Ray Shelley also played well and wound up the program.

"One thing I enjoyed was the very evident change in attitude on the part of the AGO crowd. When they entered the theatre, they acted as if it were a

big joke; all sorts of wisecracks about the "Wurtlizer", as they called it. When Ray Bohr got into his concert, they stopped laughing and began to listen. Then, when some of their own organists were able to produce some memorable music, their attitude changed to respectful attention. As they were leaving the theatre around 4 A.M., it was interesting to hear their comments of amazement and admiration. Well, after hearing THAT organ, the Queen Mother of theatre organs, how could one expect otherwise? It is notable that a theatre party has been a part of AGO conventions

ever since."

In the late forties, a new entertainment medium pushed antennae skyward over the roofs of millions of American homes. Television had arrived, and this was a big factor in the erosion of the public's theatre-going. Whereas over 50 million went to the movies every week before TV, the figure by 1964 had been cut to less than 20 million. A second factor was the steadily rising costs which dictated economies in the theatre business. A third factor centered on the performers themselves. They could make more money on TV in one night and

"An orchestra hasn't arrived until it has played the Paramount", said *Variety* about 35 years ago. Here the famous marquee announces two in 1937: those of Phil Harris and Ina Ray Hutton. — (Vic Hyde collection)





be seen by more people than in a week of personal appearances at a large theatre.

When a wide screen was installed to handle the 70 MM movies, part of the Paramount's decorative proscenium arch had to be cut away on each side of the stage, and some of the ornate tapestries which had long decorated the area over the stage, were removed. The resulting appearance was a very plain one. Also, the entire interior of the auditorium by this time, had begun to take on a dingy appearance.

By 1964, it was evident that the smaller audiences could not support the temples of the motion picture, and the Paramount was no exception. The final picture to show there was *The Carpetbaggers*, a testimonial to the greed and opportunism latent in Hollywood.

The house was closed in August 1964, but briefly opened for an appearance of a Soupy Sales show, primarily for the youngsters, and for a brief run of movies and rock shows in May 1965. A farewell to the Paramount Wurlitzer was held by the Delaware Valley and New York chapters of ATOS on September 27, 1964. Taking part were such luminaries as Ashley Miller, Ray Bohr, Jack Ward, Jeff Barker, Dr. C. A. J. Parmentier, and finally and fittingly so, the featured artist of the occasion, Don Baker. The number of handkerchiefs seen fluttering when Don took the console down for the last time to "Auld Lang Syne" was most impressive. The organ was removed and eventually installed in the Wichita Auditorium.

The 4/21 studio Wurlitzer had been sold in 1956 to ATOS charter member, Dick Loderhose, who has installed and enlarged it in a magnificent structure adjacent to his home in Jamaica Estates, N. Y.

When Mrs. Evelyn Sharp bought the Paramount complex, the theatre was closed permanently and it was she who approved plans to transform the cavernous interior into offices.

The Paramount Theatre is no more. The once impressive edifice has gone the route of so many Strands, Granadas, Rivolis, Tivolis and Orientals. In its place is the New York Bank for Savings. At the time of compilation of this feature (April 1973), 100-year-old Adolf Zukor was still living. Thus he survived the theatre he built, one of the greatest of all time, his beloved Paramount. □



## ***Detroit Theater Organ Club***

The console, pictured on the cover of this issue, with the Mayan decorative theme is part of the 34 rank Wurlitzer organ which is the proud possession of the Detroit Theater Organ Club a non-profit, private club, non-affiliated with any local, national or parent organization.

The Detroit Theater Organ Club is one of its kind in the world, unique in that the organ, the facility the organ is housed in, namely the Senate Theater, located on the west side of the city, and the recording equipment are solely owned by the club.

In the early sixties the Fisher Theater, a movie house, which contained this fine instrument was being remodeled and converted to a legitimate playhouse. Bids were being accepted for purchase and removal of this organ. One of the bidders was George C. Orbits, fortunately for us, his bid was selected and accepted.

To remove this huge piece of equipment constituted a big operation demanding much help. Where do you find people who would devote time and energy to handle such an instrument with delicate care and appreciation? The word became known that the giant of music was to be dismantled and from all corners of the metropolitan area organ "buffs" appeared to offer help.

Now that the organ was the property of George Orbits what were his plans for this instrument? Place it in storage and then decide it's fate was the first impulse. A crime that this fine instrument should stay dormant when it could offer the opportunity for

people to hear it's majestic sounds. Why not form a club to allow those who could play, the chance to sit at the console and thrill to the touch of the keys and the voices that would emanate from those thousands of pipes and percussion instruments. For those who were non-playing give them the privilege and pleasure of listening to the orchestral sounds.

A frantic search began to find a location to place this instrument and give it a home under the newly formed auspices of the Detroit Theater Organ Club. The Iris Theatre on the east side of Detroit was found and leased for a three year period. Near the end of that period the club gained momentum and decided that larger and more adequate facilities must be acquired.

More searching for new quarters and the Senate Theater was acquired. A gigantic task was faced by the membership for again it took a tremendous amount of effort by this dedicated group to move this giant to the new home which required in itself a large amount of refurbishing to a tenable state.

After these many years of trials and tribulations the club has reached a measure of success and this musical instrument of instruments has offered many people at the hands of talented performers many, many hours of musical pleasure. The members feel confident that the years ahead, as in the past, will be filled with the sounds of music coming from the organ chambers at the Senate Theater under the direction of the Detroit Theater Organ Club. □

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### **TWO THEATRE PIPE ORGANS IN ONE HOME**

Mark Kenning of Richardson, Texas, is one of the few organists who has two theatre pipe organs installed in his home. On January 5 Mark signed a lease to rent his 3/10 Barton to a pizza restaurant now being built in Dallas. The big ornate gold console will be the first theatre organ in a restaurant in Texas. It will be available for North Texas Chapter ATOS meetings.

Mark removed this Barton from the Paramount Theatre in Waterloo, Iowa

in 1960. It will be installed in the pizza house by Jim Peterson of Fort Worth.

The other organ in Mark's home is a 4/17 Robert Morton from the Ritz Theatre in Tulsa. Mark recently acquired another Tibia, set of tuned Sleigh Bells, Brass Trumpet and Sax, upping the Morton to 20 ranks. Mark and his wife built an addition to their home and installed the Morton themselves over the past six years. □