

While Looking For an Organ . . .

KESWICK UN-MODERNIZES

The facade of the Keswick Theatre. The modern marquee will be replaced by a duplicate of the original.
(Photo by Randall Wolf, courtesy of Today's Spirit newspaper, Hatboro, Pennsylvania.)



After saving the Keswick Theatre (Glenside, Pennsylvania) from the wrecker's ball, the Glenside Landmarks Society which now owns it is looking for a theatre pipe organ to fill the empty chambers.

The Keswick was originally equipped with a 3/11 Aeolian-Votey organ, one of five unit organs built by that firm for theatres. The console and some pipework were damaged beyond salvage by water used to fight a fire in the theatre. The remainder of the instrument was removed and stored in New Jersey, subsequently being sold for parts.

On Christmas night 55 years ago, the Keswick Theatre opened its doors for the first show. It was designed originally as a vaudeville and movie house. Such stars as the Marx Brothers, Mae West, Stepin Fetchit and Fannie Brice appeared on its stage. After the demise of vaudeville, the theatre continued to operate as a film house until early 1980, when it was purchased, along with the rest of the block, by a savings and loan firm located a few doors from the Keswick.

The new owner planned to demolish the theatre to provide the parking space required for a new building. At this point, ATOS member W. Charles "Chuck" Schrader stepped in. He formed the nonprofit Glenside Landmarks Society, collected signatures

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1983

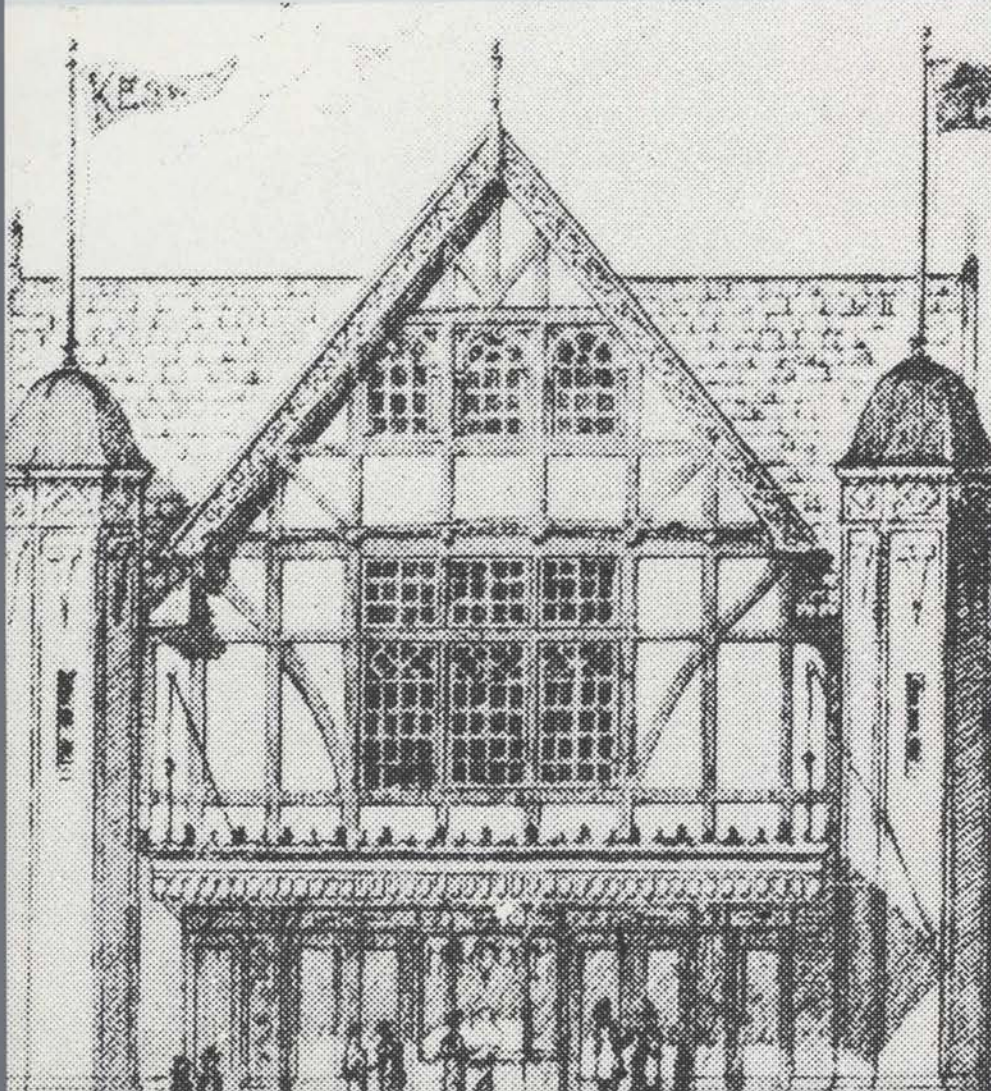
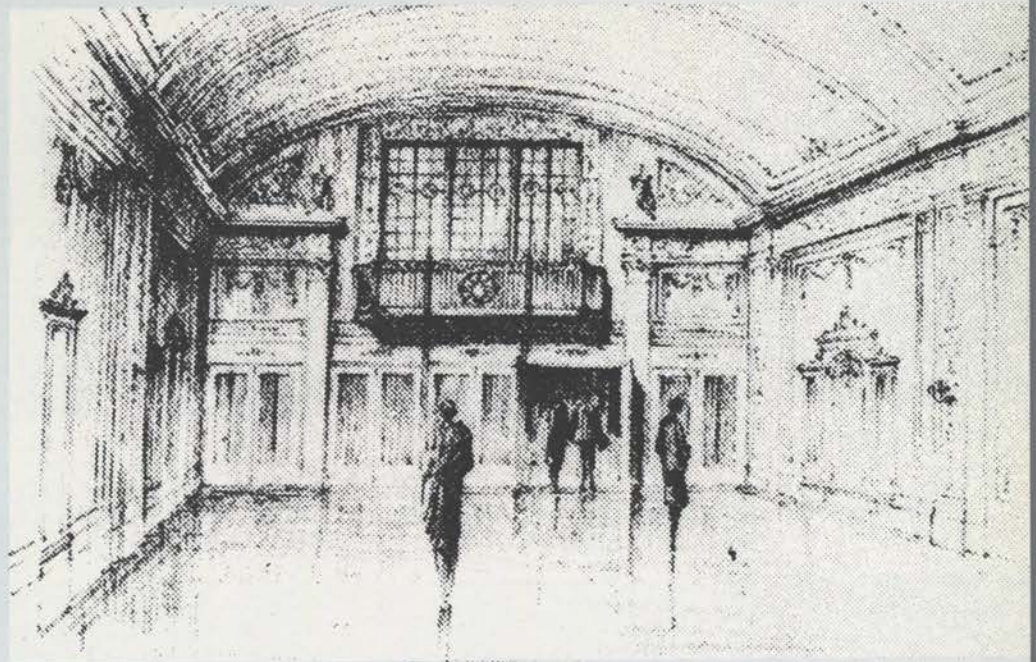


The lobby as it is today (left), and as it will be when restored (below). (Photo by Geoffrey Patton; Sketch by Horace Trumbauer, architect.)

on a petition to save the structure, and appeared before the township commissioners to plead his case. Ultimately, the commissioners granted a variance so that the savings and loan building could be built without the additional parking.

Glenside Landmarks Society leased the Keswick until June 30, 1982, at which time a bank loan enabled the Society to purchase the theatre. The

Architect's sketch of the facade of the theatre. The marquee in this sketch is to be restored.



Keswick is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Work is now underway to raise funds for restoration, which will include a new heating and air conditioning system (the present one is installed on the stage!), new stage rigging and curtains, and new lighting and sound equipment, as well as the renovation and restoring of the auditorium, lobbies and facade to their original splendor. It is estimated that the project will cost \$3.5 million. Two designated grants have been received so far. Plans call for completion by the end of 1985.

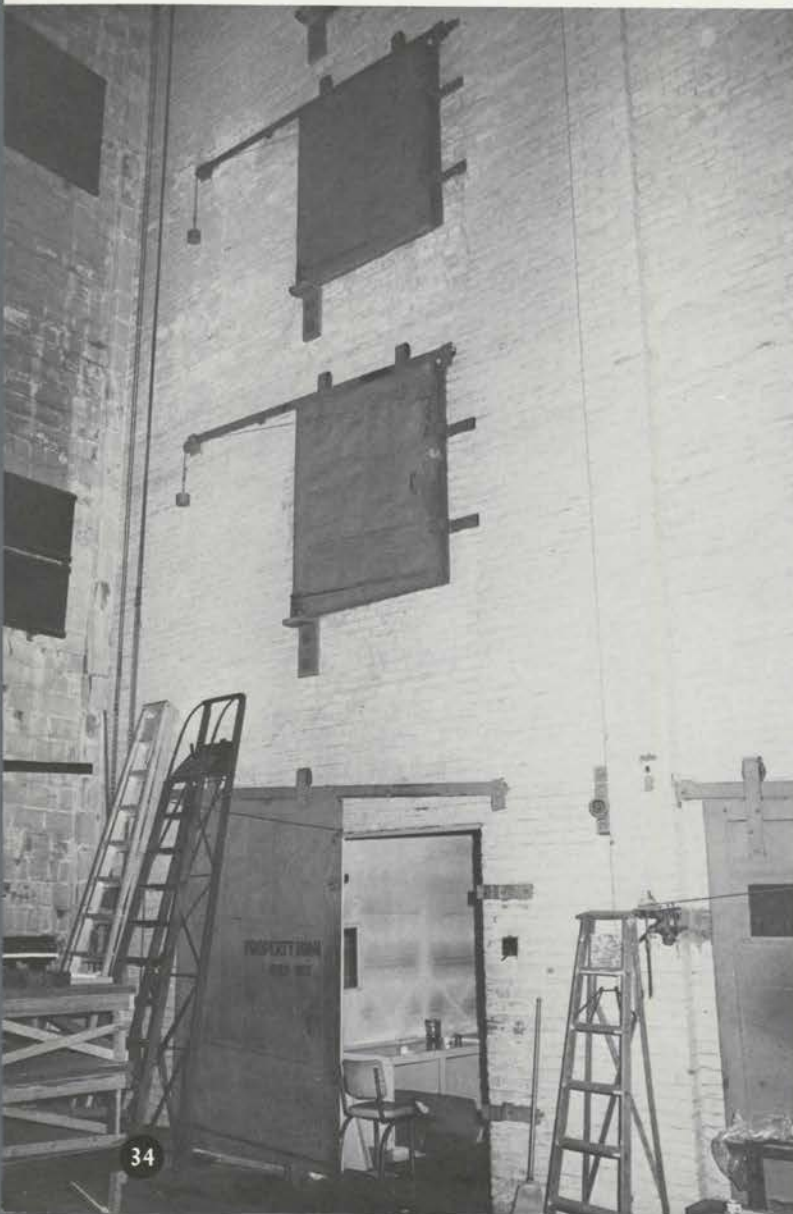
An entirely separate drive is underway to raise funds for the purchase and installation of a theatre organ. A three-manual, 11- or 12-rank instrument would fill the bill nicely. Of course, donation of an instrument would be most welcome. Persons caring to contribute should make their checks payable to Glenside Landmarks Society, and mail them to 510 Central Avenue, North Hills, Pennsylvania 19038. Checks should be marked "Organ Fund." All donations are fully tax-deductible.

The Keswick is the only theatre designed by Horace Trumbauer, the architect who planned the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Philadel-

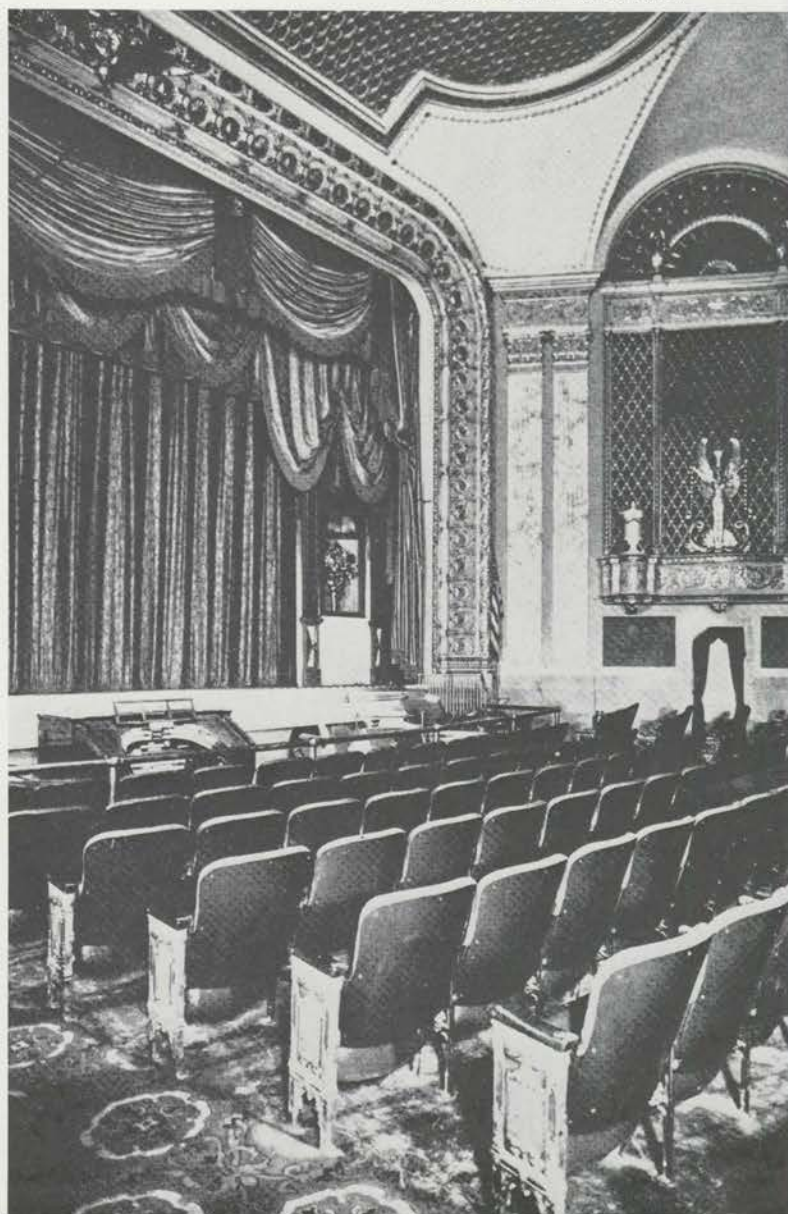


Chuck Schrader, standing, who helped save the historic Keswick Theatre, talks with Livingston Taylor in his dressing room prior to the singer's performance. (Geoffrey Patton photo)

View backstage of two of the three doors to corridors in the dressing room areas. A pulley and rope allowed performer's trunks to be lifted to the appropriate level. (Robert Lee photo)



In this view the original Aeolian-Votey organ console can be seen in the center of the orchestra pit, and the details of the proscenium and organ grille are visible. (Photo courtesy of The Console.)



phia Free Library. The exterior is finished in stucco with Elizabethan half-timbering, and with octagonal towers at each side of the facade and a gable roof suggests such historic theatres as the Globe of Shakespeare's London.

The beautiful lobby, decorated with intricate ornamental plasterwork, was buff-colored with blue and gold trim. Concealed lighting, located inside wide cornices, illuminated the barrel-vaulted ceiling. A double grand staircase of marble, with railings of iron and bronze, leads to an upstairs lounge.

At present, the auditorium contains 1329 seats, but plans call for expanding seating to 1500 during restoration of the theatre. Each seat provides an excellent view of the stage, and the auditorium has superb acoustics.

The theatre ceiling was extremely



View toward stage as it was when the Keswick opened in 1928.

(Photo courtesy of The Console.)

View toward stage as it is today, with wide screen set-up partially masking organ chambers.

(Robert Lee photo)



elaborate, with back-lighted stained glass designs. Although these were removed, they are all stored in the building and are in good condition. A huge ceiling dome, cove-lighted in various colors, was also removed, but the basic steel structure is still intact.

Columns, arches and ornamental plasterwork adorned the side walls of the auditorium, which recessed tapestries and concealed lighting. The color scheme of the auditorium was peacock blue and old gold with brighter highlights.

The stage is 60 feet wide and 30 feet deep with a 68-foot-high fly gallery. The proscenium arch is 20 feet high and 40 feet wide. The beautiful hand-painted asbestos fire curtain is still in excellent condition. Three tiers of dressing rooms adjacent to the stage can accommodate 50 performers.

Considerable community support for the Keswick Theatre of the Performing Arts has been developed by the Glenside Landmarks Society. This support has come from clubs, organizations and businesses, as well as from individuals. A wide variety of attractions have been presented in the Keswick — plays, big bands, jazz groups, solo concerts, dance companies and children's shows. A fine theatre organ will complete the restoration and permit an even greater range of programs, including film festivals.

Some material for this article was drawn from an article by Paula H. Goff which appeared in *The Reporter*, March 19, 1982, and is used by permission. Photos credited to Geoffrey Patton are also taken from *The Reporter* with permission. □

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