

(Editor's note: While researching a recent feature on the Phipps Center, associate editor Steve Adams found this historical information about the Capitol Theatre in St. Paul. We felt that we wanted to share it with our readers.)



Hamm Building, St. Paul. C.P. Gibson

All photos of the theatre were provided by the Minnesota Historical Society.

St. Paul's Capitol Theatre: *A True Cathedral of Motion Pictures*

Stephen F. Adams

America in the first two decades of the 20th Century was an international marvel of growth and innovation. Travel to foreign lands was not only easy but fashionable. An envious world looked upon America as the symbol of everyman's dream; a place where one was limited only by his lack of ambition.

By 1915, America's seemingly unbridled appetite for tasting all the world had to offer had begun to meld motion pictures with Vaudeville. America's opera houses,

built in the European opera house tradition, began installing projection booths, screens, and, in many cases, pipe organs.

St. Paul, Minnesota, is located near the headwaters of the Mississippi River, and by 1900 was well established as the grain milling and shipping capitol of the Mississippi River Valley. Vast fortunes made in commodities, created enormous wealth with the resulting desire for the culture and refinement associated with the aristocratic of Europe.

In 1911, Bishop John Ireland led the Archdiocese of St. Paul into the most ambitious building project ever: The Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul. Constructed on the bluffs overlooking the city and the Mississippi River, the artistry of this building is equal to its enormity. Now in the shadow of the new cathedral, the old cathedral became a quiet part of the Archdiocesan assets. And an asset that needed to create income to help pay for the largesse of the new cathedral.

The Mannheimer Brothers Department Store was a well established St. Paul retailer. Located at 6th and Roberts Streets, they began their business in 1871, as "A Store of Fashion, Service and Quality," carrying furs, shoes, needlecraft, linens, and curtains. Seeing an opportunity to expand their operations, the Mannheimers negotiated a land lease on the old Cathedral site in 1911.

Not until 1914 were plans for the site made quietly public. The St. Paul architectural firm of Toltz, King & Day had designed a six-story structure almost as massive and artistic as the new cathedral. It would border on St. Peter, 6th, and 7th Streets and would contain not only the Mannheimer Bros. Dept. Store, but professional offices and a theatre. The old Cathedral was demolished, foundations poured, and a steel skeleton erected. Then, just as quietly, construction was halted late in 1915.

In the news, the Kaiser was threatening world safety, and an economic recession began to show in U.S. retail sales. For the next three years, Mannheimer Brothers would pay on their lease, but no further construction would take place. During these years, the massive, rusting structure would be known as "The Great Open-Air Building of St. Paul."

The aging Archbishop Ireland had been troubled by the Mannheimer's stalled project, and it must have represented the last detail in his great ambition of constructing a monument to his faith. For in 1918, he called real estate wizard and St. Paul Saints ball club owner John Norton to his chambers. "I wish you could do something for these people before they go broke," said his Grace.

John had heard a rumor that the munitions company, E.I. duPont of Wilmington, Delaware, was looking for property in St. Paul. By devious means, John was able to get an appointment with John J. Raskob, manager of duPont real estate interests, and legendary financial mogul. While the rumor may have been true, John Norton was unable to interest Mr. Raskob in the property. However, back in St. Paul, Archbishop Ireland greeted John with another idea.

William Hamm, heir to the famous Theodore Hamm Brewing Co., had assumed a position of prominence in St. Paul. It was Mr. Hamm that Bishop Ireland envisioned taking over the Mannheimer project. It just happened that John Norton was a good friend of William Hamm and knew just how to approach the subject. John suggested that he finish the building as a "monument to William Hamm." The deal was quickly executed between the three parties, and construction



Capitol 1923. C. P. Gibson

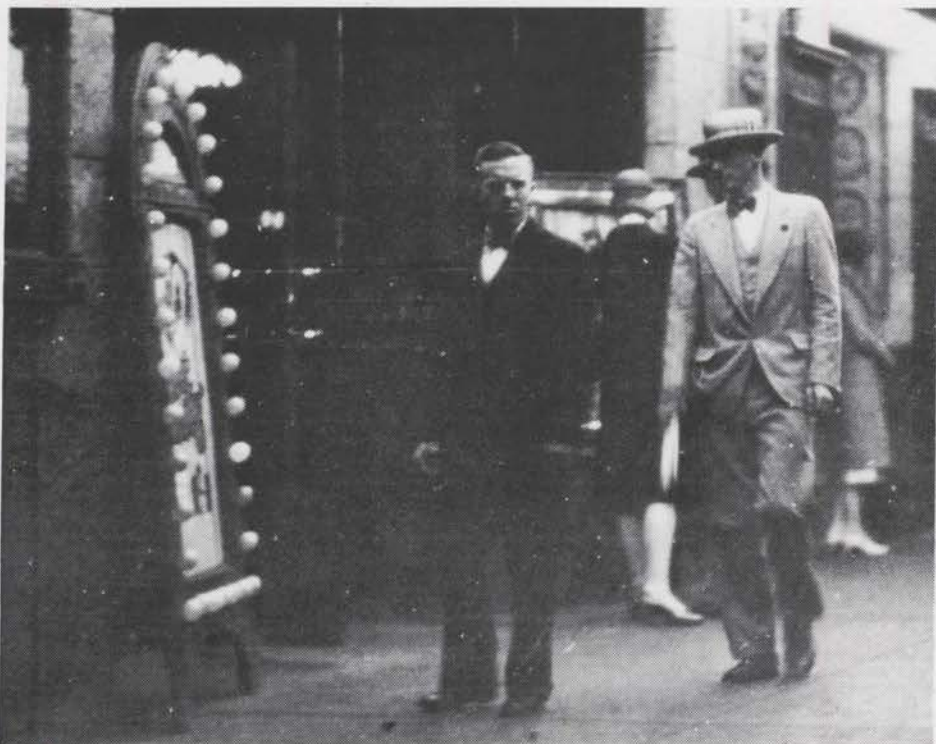
resumed in 1919. P.M. Reagan, manager of the Hamm Realty Co., assumed responsibility for the half-city-block project. Unfortunately, Archbishop Ireland didn't live long enough to even see the deal signed.

Since the beginning of film exhibition, the team of Finkelstein & Ruben had been leaders in Twin Cities nickelodeon operations. Their first motion picture theatre was located on 7th Street between Cedar and Wabasha, just a few blocks east of the old Cathedral site. Carefully watching the exhibition industry, they began to see the emergence of the movie palace. Perhaps the most impressive evidence was the 1919 opening of the Capitol Theatre in New York City, the largest theatre in the world in every respect. In Chicago, B & K had begun an impressive building spree. And flickers had begun to emerge as more than a mere diversion.

The new Hamm Building offered a golden opportunity to lease a property they could design in the latest style: the motion picture palace. All the pieces fell together perfectly. Taking no chances, F&R contracted with B&K's secret to their success, the firm of George & C.W. Rapp, to design the interior of the house. After visiting the legendary Capitol in New York (see Acres of Seats), it was decided to use the name, Capitol, and to adopt the same policies for presentation. In all, it was an enormous gamble for F&R whose modest wealth had come from numerous small houses. It's quite likely the Hamm Family encouraged them to create a theatre in the likeness of Gotham's Capitol. F&R was undoubtedly

the organization best suited to meeting the challenge.

On November 13, 1919, building permit #75077 was issued for the completion of construction. Cost of completion was listed at \$1,800,000. Surprisingly, there was little publicity surrounding the sudden resumption of construction, but rapidly the rusting steel skeleton was altered to new plans, sheathed in an elegant armor of beige terra cotta and fitted with ironwork lamps, bronze plaques, semi-columns, festoons, cherubim, gargoyles, and dentilated cornices. Regarded as an excellent example of the "Chicago Commercial" style, it exemplified the post WWI ideal of the "Skyscraper," in spite of its modest six stories. Covering more than 45,000 square feet of ground, the Italian Renaissance style was an instant hit. Arc lights topped the vertical pier lines of the facade at roof level. There are nine floors, six above ground, and three below. First and second floors were designed for retail stores and the theatre, the next three floors for offices, and the sixth floor for medical and dental offices. The first basement level was leased to the St. Paul Recreation Company, and contained 40 bowling lanes, 75 billiard and pocket billiard tables, cafes, and a large ballroom. The second basement was equipped with a massive ice-skating rink. The third basement was dedicated to an electrical shop, heating plant, telephone equipment, ventilating and air-washing apparatus. A 1200-foot deep artesian well supplied an unlimited amount of purified water for the building. Ash pits for the



Night street scene at Capitol Theatre entrance, July 1926.

steam boilers also occupied the third basement level.

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In a conservative manner quite in keeping with the City of St. Paul, publicity surrounding opening of the Capitol was confined to the week preceding the festi-

vities. However, in a style befitting any of the nation's leading exhibitors, the coverage was lavish and filled with enticing pictures of soloists, glimpses of the interior and, of course, the star of the featured film. Repeated comparisons to the Capitol in New York appealed to the senses of those readers who had experienced this landmark.

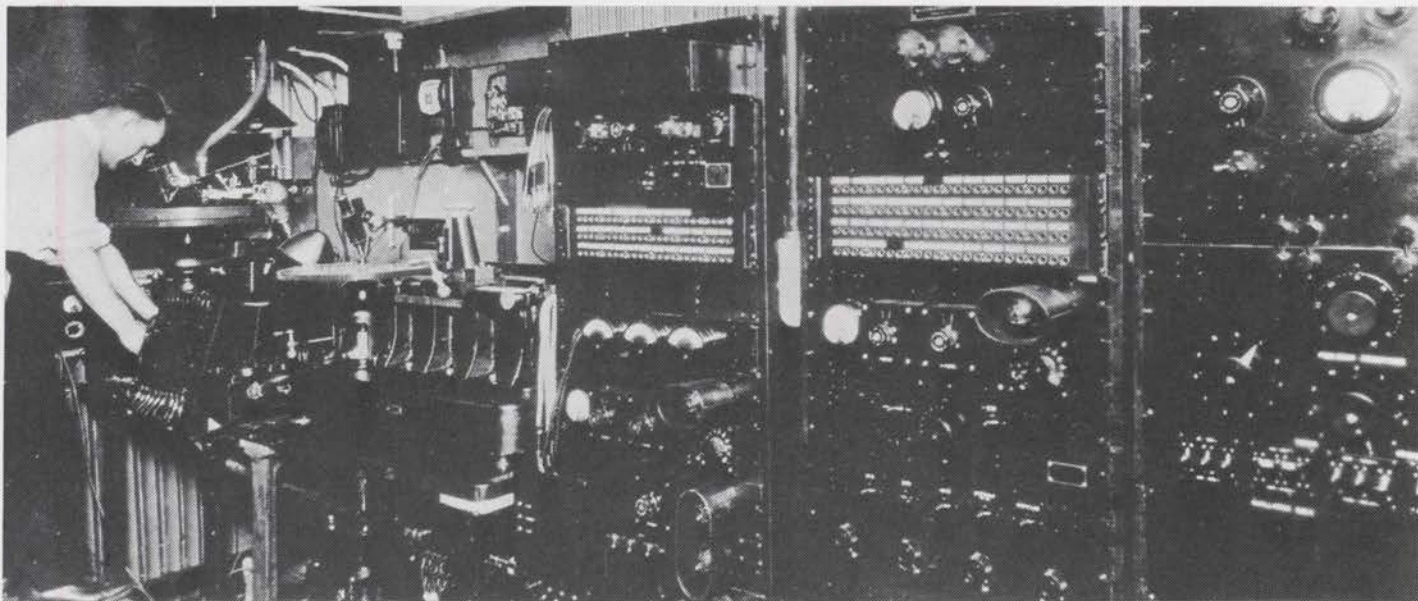
Wednesday, September 8, 1920, marked the grand opening of the Twin Cities' first motion picture palace. Featured was Norma Talmadge's latest film, *Branded Woman*. Solos by organist Arthur DePew and vocalists Irene Williams (soprano), Henry Taylor (tenor), and Samuel Geddes (baritone) were befitting an evening at New York's Capitol. And rightfully so, as

DePew and Williams were formerly from the Capitol. Oscar Baum and his Capitol Symphony Orchestra were the backbone of the program's sophistication.

Coverage of the opening night appeared in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* the next day. In phraseology couched in understatement, mention is made of nearly every element witnessed by the public. Only when commenting on Norma Talmadge's wardrobe in the film, does the reviewer hint at something less than perfection: "Certainly no wronged wife ever left her husband, child and home in a more attractive going away gown than Norma Talmadge chooses for the occasion." Without a doubt, however, the new Capitol Theatre was a hit!

Little did the press realize that their praise was lauded on a theatre very much the equal to theatres anywhere in the country. Every element of the Capitol represented a facility of versatility, luxury, and tastefulness. On stage lighting equipment was by Frank Adam. The stage was 88-feet wide, 33-feet deep, and 70 feet to the grid iron. The orchestra pit sat 30. The house seated 2,200, (despite claims of almost 4,000), and a 300-seat Entresol, or Diamond Horseshoe, added a feeling of luxury. In the "Kino" (projection) booth could be found three motion picture machines, two follow spots, and two stereopticons. And, of course, there was a pipe organ.

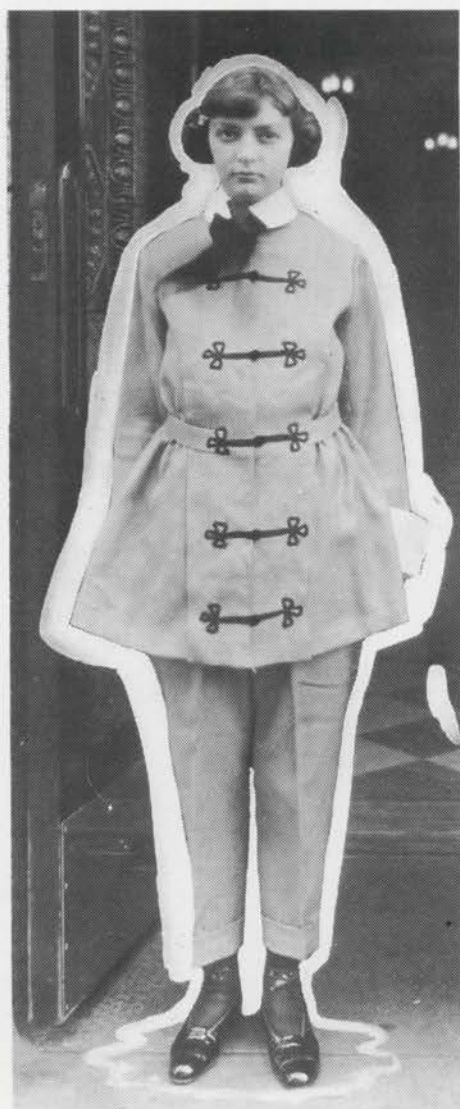
It is not known how F & R decided on a Kilgen pipe organ, except that by 1920 nine Kilgens were installed in Twin Cities theatres. No doubt a strong Twin Cities representative of the company was in part responsible. It's also quite possible that in their efforts at largesse, F & R selected the builder who offered what appeared to be the most organ for the money. But no



Vibraphone - Capitol 1927.



Stage-orchestra (Oscar Baum, Conductor), May 1921.



Usher, circa 1921.

matter how the decision was made, the instrument designed for the Capitol (opus 3037) was very large for a theatre. And as history would later bear, it was the largest Kilgen ever constructed for a theatre. (It would share that distinction in 1921 with sister theatre, the State, in Minneapolis, opus 3038.)

Consisting of four manuals and 31 ranks, the Capitol Kilgen was, without question, the same product the company produced for churches, except for the inclusion of a few percussions. Four chambers were located above the highest box seats (behind proscenium arch grilles), two on each side of the house. The chambers were elliptical in shape, with hard plaster walls and generous swell openings. At six stories, the auditorium was unusually tall. If distance lends enchantment, the Capitol's Kilgen needed all it could get from its fifth and sixth floor locations. The Echo Division was located at an ever greater distance, over the rear of the balcony. The blower for all of this was located in a sub-basement room making it the least audible part of the organ.

As a classic organ, the bottom keyboard would have been the Choir, next would have been the Great, and next the Swell. The fourth (top) manual controlled the Echo. The console was stationary and located outside the orchestra pit, auditorium-left. It was a straight-rail console of Mahogany, suggesting that playing it was serious business. Indeed, to play popular music must have been a chore, and only modestly successful even by the best musician. The console was electric, yet was

equipped with only six pistons each for the Choir, Great and Swell, and three for the Echo. It must have had a massive, if somewhat church-y, sound that worked well with such music as was played by Arthur DePew opening night: "Pilgrim's Chorus" and "My Heart Is Thine."

Press coverage of the opening night contained the ubiquitous exaggerations, including: "The largest pipe in the organ is 32' long, into which a child could crawl." Unfortunately, the organ didn't have a rank extending to 32'. Also: "The four-manual organ is the largest west of New York City, contains 90 stops, and cost \$75,000. Gotham's Capitol Theatre is the only theatre with a larger organ." By 1920, Moller, Kimball, and Austin had produced organs for theatres in excess of 31 ranks. And Kilgen prices during this period were about \$1,000 per rank, not \$2,000. Perhaps the most curious of false claims is contained in a comment regarding the blower: "The blowing apparatus has the horsepower equivalent to 15 horses." The Kilgen organ was installed with a 7½hp DC Spencer that produced 8" of wind pressure. In 1921, a similar, if not identical, Kilgen (opus 3038) was installed at F & R's State Theatre, Minneapolis, with a 10hp DC Spencer that produced 8" wind pressure. The State blower was located high above the stage floor on a pin rail gallery, and was enclosed in fire-proof brick. In 1922, Kilgen records show a new blower was shipped to and installed in the Capitol. This blower was a 15hp Kinetic that produced 10" wind pressure. A conclusion one might draw is that the base-



Main entrance Paramount, 1965.

sota Theatre (1927) in Minneapolis, would outsize and outdazzle the Capitol. But by 1924 styles had changed, and it was clear that Twin Cities audiences wanted a greater variety in programming. Young people wanted to hear the latest popular songs in an atmosphere of fantasy and abandonment. No longer were film exhibitors battling the reputation of being on the edge of indecency. (Later, Hollywood would earn that reputation for the conduct of stars on and off screen.) Musicians in the pit and on the stage since the early days found themselves having to learn the latest popular songs on a daily basis. Many older musicians were replaced by young men and women willing to take a chance on playing the latest novelty or ballad and flopping. It took a lot of guts to solo in front of so many people when down the block there's an even cleverer organist seated at a better organ!

Over a two-year period, the Capitol and its sister theatre, the State (Minneapolis) were upgraded in programming and appearances. To show the public they meant business, F & R expanded Capitol stage presentations in 1924 with "Nellie Sterling & Company, World's Only

ment location of the Capitol blower proved to be too distant, causing wind-sag under full-load conditions.

Juxtaposed to exaggerations in the ads are statements that could be true. It did, for instance, have "Thunder Drums" and a "Celestial Harp" that made quite an impression opening night. Another, is: "22 men worked daily for 14 months constructing the organ." And, "More than 500 sheepskins were used to make the bellows." All of which could have been true, depending upon the efficiency of the Kilgen factory and the size of sheep in 1919.

Two important ties between Kilgen and the Twin Cities can be found in Eddie Dunstedter and Theodore Bender.

Eddie Dunstedter was born to a musical family in Edwardsville, Illinois, at the turn of the Century. He married Viva (Vee) Drummond in 1917, and moved to St. Louis, Missouri, to apprentice in pipe voicing at George Kilgen & Son. His apprenticeship was spent under a Mr. Wilson, who came to Kilgen from the Hope-Jones Organ Co. of Elmira, New York. During this time he continued his organ performance studies with Charles Galloway, a student of the famous French organist, Alexander Guillmont. Eddie may have been one of the 22 workers at Kilgen who toiled daily for 14 months on the Capitol instrument. And it may have been his close contact with this organ that led him to seek an opening-week staff position. Whatever his motives, Eddie and Vee moved to St. Paul to open the Capitol. Returning to St. Louis, he opened the

fabled Missouri Theatre 4/32 Wurlitzer. The experience of playing such a large and comprehensive Wurlitzer probably left a lasting impression on Dunstedter as he returned to the Capitol for a return engagement, after which he played a stint at the Garrick Theatre, Minneapolis (2/8 Wurlitzer). Eddie's popularity in the Twin Cities was firmly in place early in the early 1920s, so when F & R purchased the Capitol's 260 Special, Eddie joined F & R as staff organist. (It's possible that the alterations made to the subsequent standard 260 specification for the Capitol instrument, were Eddie's ideas, as he's credited with consulting on the specification and assisting with the installation of the 4/20 Wurlitzer at the Minnesota Theatre (1927).

Fleeing the terror of the Kaiser's European rampage, Theodore Bender came to the United States from Germany. Trained as an organbuilder, he went directly to a position with George Kilgen & Son, of St. Louis, whose lineage also traces to Germany. During his years with Kilgen, he became a good friend of Alfred Kilgen, one of the four sons of Charles Kilgen, second-generation company owner. Theodore Bender later named his son Alfred and made Alfred Kilgen his Godfather. While installing a large three-manual Kilgen in St. Paul, he became quite fond of the area, and decided to go into the business representing Kilgen in the Twin Cities. It was Theodore who installed the Kilgen at the Capitol in 1920.

The Capitol Theatre was never out-classed in St. Paul. Only the fabled Minne-

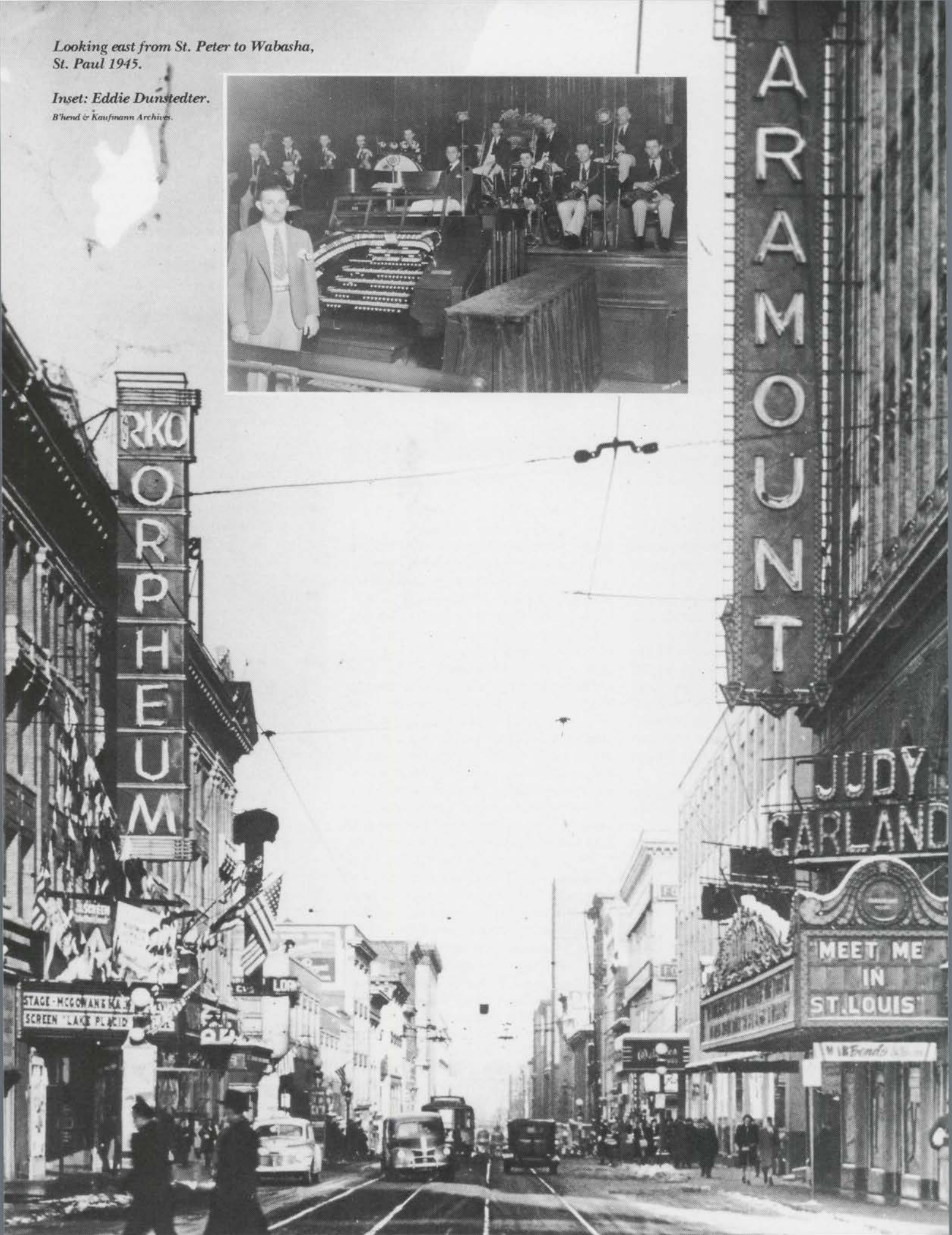


Second floor lobby, 1965.

Looking east from St. Peter to Wabasha,
St. Paul 1945.

Inset: Eddie Dunstedter.

B'hend & Kaufmann Archives.



Snowshoe Dancers." An enthusiastic St. Paul public asked for more, and F & R responded with a circuit of homespun vaudeville that was mounted and presented for one week at the State, then "went on the road" to St. Paul's Capitol for one week. All, or part of the show would then go on to neighborhood and outlying F & R houses. (By 1926 there were 15 in St. Paul alone!) A massive undertaking, the shows took on the character and quality of a Fanchon & Marco "Idea."

With "Pilgrim's Chorus" and "My Heart At Thy Sweet Voice" no longer on the program, and with novelties and ballads a regular feature, the Kilgen was particularly unsuitable. The lack of traps and percussions also hampered the effective accompaniment of a broadening spectrum of film themes and emotions. So, after only four years of service, F & R purchased a Wurlitzer model 260 Special (opus 1404) for the Capitol through the Wurlitzer showroom in Minneapolis. Since the choice was Wurlitzer, it's safe to assume that F&R wanted to cash in on the Wurlitzer name. And cash in they did. At more than \$32,500. Eddie Dunstedter, Leonard Leigh, Margaret Miltch, Dick Kinny and other staff organists finally had the ultimate machine on which to play.

To accept the new Wurlitzer, F & R remodeled the orchestra pit, and placed the console in the center on a Barton lift. Only the lower two proscenium chambers contained pipework, with a third above the Solo, containing the Wurlitzer relay. The new blower was a 15hp DC Spencer. (The normal size for a 260 was 10 hp.) This may have been at the naive request of F & R, fearing a repeat of wind problems experienced with the Kilgen's first blower. It's interesting to note that two years later, when F & R purchased a Wurlitzer for the State in Minneapolis, it was equipped with the standard 10hp DC Spencer but located in a new blower room in the basement (with new windlines)!

The Wurlitzer was installed by Theodore Bender, now well established Twin Cities representative of George Kilgen & Sons, as well as technician-at-large. By 1924, Theodore had been servicing F & R instruments of various makes, and was familiar with Wurlitzer products. Wurlitzer contracted with Theodore to install the new 260 Special, and it was Theodore who arranged for a local Catholic church to purchase the Kilgen from F & R; of course, Bender removed and installed the Kilgen in its new location. Working on the installation of the Capitol Wurlitzer was his son, Alfred, who would eventually take over his father's business.

The job of removing the Kilgen, preparing for the Wurlitzer, and installing the

260 Special must have taken a toll on the men on Bender's team. The theatre remained opened during the project, and all work was performed after hours. Installation of the Wurlitzer completed the project of giving the Capitol a face lift. A new stage policy, fresh paint and new drapes were combined with a third name change. (The house opened in 1920 as the Capitol. In 1922, a minor spruce-up saw the name changed to the New Capitol. Then, in 1924, back to the Capitol).

The process of rehearsing AND a full day of performances, required the Capitol to function for one purpose or another 24 hours per day. The Kilgen (and later Wurlitzer) were tuned twice a week, with particular attention to reeds. Tuning, cypher chasing, repairs and adjustments, all had to take place at night as morning rehearsals began early.

For exhibitors who began operating theatres early enough to log a full decade prior to the Depression, the era was a bonanza. And for those who managed their business prudently, the ups and downs could be weathered without harm. Films were improving in content and technology at a dizzying pace. Almost as soon as the latest in projection equipment was installed, it was obsolete. No better example of this was the introduction of the first sound systems. Vitaphone, Movie-Tone, and dozens of other innovations pelted the industry as the decade came to a close. The investment in projection booth technology was substantial, but necessary if an exhibitor was to maintain his edge on the competition. It was an era of rapid change, and what better way to tell the public that things were different inside, than to change the name on the marquee.

Another name change to the Capitol came in 1929, and that name would stay on the marquee for the next 36 years. F & R joined hundreds of theatres across the country in becoming a member of the Paramount Publix circuit. Donning a new marquee and vertical sign, the Capitol shed its former identity, but not its prestige or luxurious interior. Amid its timeless architecture, the new Paramount presented Publix vaudeville and Paramount Pictures with all the style and verve the public associated with them. Of course, on Paramount programs were Eddie Dunstedter and Arthur DePew, who, as stars, toured the F & R circuit.

Sadly, however, the Paramount Theatre was no exception to the ravages of the Great Depression. Just like other theatres in the country, the Paramount's Publix vaudeville was soon discontinued. And as a result of anti-trust suits, Paramount could no longer exclusively show their films in theatres they owned or leased. Any

theatre owner could be the successful bidder for showing a Paramount picture. Yet, the survival of theatres everywhere rested squarely in the hands of the Hollywood movie moguls and their creative staffs. A new era of entertainment emerged overnight during a devastatingly unhappy national Depression. But happily, the public turned to their motion picture palaces for relief from the oppression they faced on a daily basis. America's theatres had been a place of amusement. Now they were just what the doctor ordered.

But the great escape movies of the Depression years came a matter of months too late for some exhibitors. F & R had built an empire of theatres throughout five states based in large part on the success of their Twin Cities operations. Their flagship houses, the State, Capitol, and Minnesota, set the standards and provided the talent for a vast circuit. A casualty of the Depression, F & R holdings were purchased by Minnesota Amusement, and a new prosperous era began.

For the next two decades, Hollywood provided the Paramount with more than enough product to keep the house filled to profitability. The Paramount's stage remained dark, with only occasional special events, and frequent give-away programs intended to boost attendance during some hours of the day. The Paramount Wurlitzer was never used again in the theatre, due to union regulations. The Musicians Local in St. Paul rigidly enforced the regulation that required a minimum house orchestra be paid for any performance at which a theatre organ was used. Ostensibly, this assured orchestras that they would not be replaced by the theatre organ. Ultimately, it assured NO musicians would play in any pit in the Twin Cities well into the latter half of this century.

Remaining the premier house of St. Paul until the 1960s, ownership quietly changed from Minnesota Amusement to ABC NorthCentral Theatres, as the television giant began diversifying into film exhibition.

For about 36 years, the Paramount Theatre had remained relatively unchanged. A new marquee, the elimination of the vertical sign, a series of snack bar changes, and the attrition of lobby furniture were the obvious changes to the front of the house. Drapery was installed over the organ grilles and box seats to avoid reflection of light from the CinemaScope screen off the gold leafed ornamentation. To all of this, a bit of wear and tear must be added, but, as a flagship house, it was well-maintained.

Then in 1956, Stanley E. Hubbard, owner of KSTP TV, negotiated the purchase of the Wurlitzer from Minnesota

Amusement. Mr. Hubbard hired his friend, Al Bender, to remove the organ he and his father, Theodore, had installed, repair it as necessary, and install it at the KSTP TV studios a few miles from the theatre. Water-damaged and filthy from decades of neglect, the organ must have looked destitute. The unprotected console was covered with popcorn, candy, dried soft drinks, and mouse droppings. At some earlier time, the motor for the Barton lift had been removed, and the lift platform cranked down beyond the limit switches to take the console further out of sight. And for some odd reason, the 15 hp DC Spencer blower had been disconnected and moved away from the windline in its sub-basement room. Mr. Hubbard's memory of the organ's sound was all he had to work with as the instrument was inoperable by 1956. Water damage to the relay and Solo chamber assured malfunction, even if the blower had been reconnected.

Most of the removal work was done by Jerry Orvold, another Bender employee, and supervised by Al Bender. All work was done between 5:00 a.m. and noon, except when morning screenings by movie critics were scheduled. Catnaps on balcony carpeting while waiting for a screening to end were probably quite normal for maintenance men during the 20s, but must have seemed odd for Jerry and his partner whose work normally took them to churches during daytime hours. Fortunately, chambers were easily reached from the second balcony level. But Solo parts required walking across the balcony to the 6th Street fire exits. From there, parts were carried down a counter-balanced steel fire escape in an alley. The console elevator had to be hand-cranked back up to the pit floor level, then dollyed up the center aisle to the lobby, and out the front doors. A moving van was parked in the alley each day to receive the removed parts. As a testimonial to tastes and how they have changed over the years, Jerry Orvold recalls having found window-shade affairs of $\frac{3}{4}$ " felt installed just inside the swell shades to soften the organ. These devices were found in many F & R instruments, and may have been installed by Al Bender's father, Theodore. Also, when opus 1404 was ordered, several rank substitutions were made to the standard 260-specification which would soften the organ.

In an effort to increase public interest in movie-going and reduce their operating expenses during the sluggish 1960s, ABC NorthCentral Theatres decided to renovate the noble, but dated, Paramount Theatre. In a complex deal with William "Billy" Hamm, son of the building's namesake, (and his United Properties, Inc.), a plan



Eddie Dunstedter 1968.



Leonard Leigh. B'hend & Kaufmann Archives.

was devised which called for the demolition of the old six-story auditorium, and the creation of an 800 seat house of only one story. Only the first floor of the old three-story lobby would be used as the new lobby. The top five floors of the old auditorium would be incorporated into the office and retail space of the Hamm Building. Effectively, this meant that the Hamm interests would be able to increase rentable floor space by 36,000 square feet, and ABC NorthCentral would take a major reduction in their rent. The deal was signed, including a 20-year lease, and in 1966 the Norstar Theatre opened, touting the latest in technology and drip-dry architecture at a cost of \$1,500,000. Gone was any trace of the venerable Capitol Theatre.

1983 marked one more event in the history of the Capitol/Norstar Theatre. The serious decline in motion picture attendance felt since the 1960s, eventually closed dozens of houses throughout the Twin Cities. Not even the high-tech, maintenance-free Norstar could withstand the competition of cable television on a sub-zero Minnesota evening. While closed and with two years to go on the lease, Landmark Management Corp. negotiated the purchase of the Hamm Building from "Billy" Hamm and his United Properties, Inc., in 1983. The closed Norstar Theatre was, without a doubt, a liability to the sale. Equally as certain, was that its redevelopment was a high priority item for the new owners.

Actor's Theatre, a local legitimate theatre company, leased the former Norstar lobby, and fitted the space with a stage and 250 seats. The old Norstar auditorium, the last vestige of film presentation, was annexed into the first floor square footage of the Hamm Building. Actor's Theatre still uses the original entry of the Capitol, but retained the marquee and polished stone facade of the Norstar renovations.

The Hamm Building is a great source of pride to the City of St. Paul, and its owners, Landmark Management Corp. Nominated to the St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission's list of historic sties, the Hamm Building retains much of its original regal appearance. Like many cities that have discovered the legacy of their architectural heritage, St. Paul's preservation efforts have created an elegant, almost European feel to the center of the city. Although the Capitol Theatre is just a memory now, the Hamm Building continues as evidence of the grand scale and post-war optimism characteristic of construction during the first half of this century. St. Paul's love for its architectural heritage assures that the Hamm Building will not suffer an indiscriminate fate.