

# BIGGEST LITTLE ORGAN IN CENTRAL INDIANA

The Paramount Page of  
Anderson, Indiana  
*As Told By  
Lewis E. Hodson*

Very soon after returning from the 1964 A.T.O.E. Convention in Buffalo, I couldn't get the sound of live theatre organ music out of my mind. I remembered some ten years ago, as a high school student, an evening at the Paramount Theatre with the music for a dance review being presented on a theatre pipe organ, and decided, as all good enthusiasts, to investigate the condition of that organ.

I approached the manager of the theatre with my intentions. Investigation completed, restoration was the only answer. The only visible damage was the accumulation of thirty-five years dirt and, because the chambers are the only access to changing light bulbs around the organ grills, the 2' Strings and Flutes were smashed beyond hope. Luckily I was able to purchase replacements from a departing Muncie, Indiana, hybrid PAGE THEATRE ORGAN located in a church which was being replaced by a more dignified instrument.

Immediately, I enlisted the help of my good friend Rex Hoppes. Incidentally, Rex is the proud owner of Opus 1806 Wurlitzer. This organ was originally

in the Riviera Theatre just across the street from the Paramount. His restoration project has suffered somewhat while working on the Paramount Page, but things are getting back into full swing again.

I must state that without the understanding of Mr. Robert Jackson, District Manager for Alliance Theatre Corporation, we could not have made this dream become a reality. Bob knows the value of the organ, and has done his best to see that little damage has come to the instrument while he has been manager of the Paramount.

Work officially started in September 1964. A general cleaning of the two chambers (one fifty-five gallon barrel per chamber) was the first order of the day. All pipes were removed from the chests and polished inside and out as well as the chests receiving a coat of badly needed wax. Every magnet was taken apart, cleaned, inspected, and checked.

The console lift was inoperable due to its being raised and coming off the support tracks some fifteen years ago. We found that it had been disconnected rather than ruined. With a little general cleaning and testing of wiring we were able to get things working properly and most important the upper limit switch working properly. Next, we almost com-



Paramount Theatre - Anderson, Indiana  
Photo by Willis Burch

pletely gutted (pardon) the console. The moths had really taken their toll. I cannot remember that we found one whole piece of leather or felt within the console. All stop-tabs and keys were removed, cleaned, and inspected and replacement of contacts made where necessary. New felt and leather were installed throughout. The pedal-board was taken apart and completely re-finished. While this was going on, the console shell was scraped to its original gold finish. Because of the years of neglect and some coats of green paint it was impossible to restore the golden look. We gave it an eggshell white enamel coat with the trim in gold. One of the biggest tasks was completely rebuilding the pre-set action. All pneumatics were re-leathered, new plastic tubing installed, and all contacts cleaned including very dirty setter-switches. A new console lighting system with twenty-seven miniature lights with larger sockets was installed.

At the writing of this article the finishing touches are being applied to the console and lift including new carpet on the lift floor to match the aisles in the theatre. Chest re-leathering is coming up next. As usual the more you do the more you find to do.... To all organ buffs, I say find an organ in a theatre, if you can, and jump right in. I had never worked on an organ until the Paramount Page. Learning takes place fast and the rewards are many. Just remember to enlist the help of interested people who know more than you know.

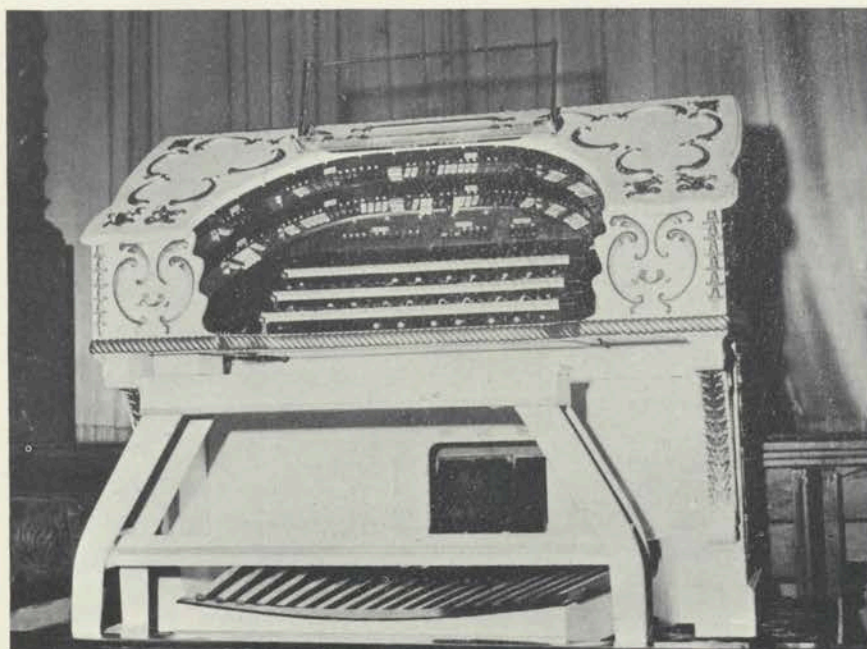
Several people have had their fingers in the pie, so to speak, including chapter member Lanny Losure (the gold trim on the console) and Jim Stump (re-leathering of all percussion action), resident of Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

In the following I will try to present a brief sketch of the history of the Paramount Theatre and the Page Organ in residence.

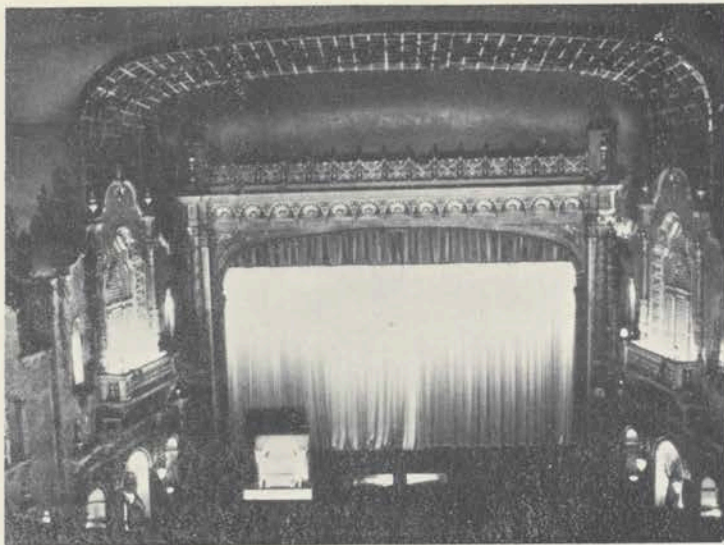
## THE THEATRE

The time was pre-1929; the place, Anderson, Indiana. Three men by the

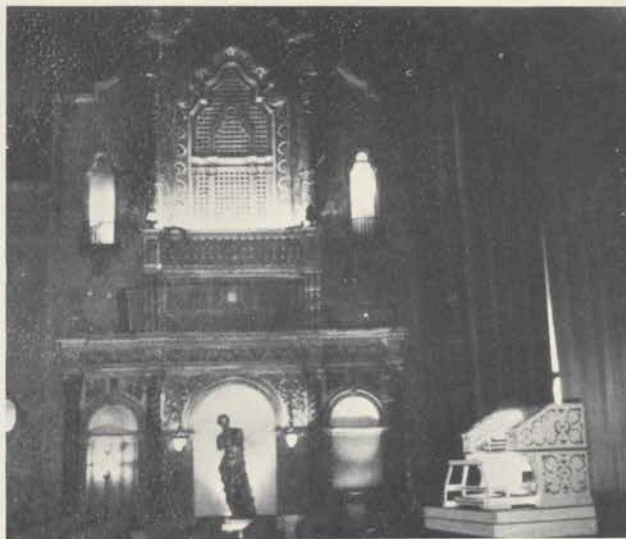
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The Beautiful Page 3/7 in "UP" position - Photo by Bill Bussell



View of the stage from the balcony  
Willis Burch Photo



Looking toward main chamber from  
orchestra floor, console at extreme  
right - Willis Burch photo

names of Challace, Wolff, and Young had an idea to build a theatre at the northeast corner of 12th and Meridian Streets in downtown Anderson. Mr. George Challace, mentioned above, seemed to head the group in connection with starting the new theatre.

The historical material is rather vague during this period of time. As we all know, history is made, but the tracing of such is another matter.

Anderson had two leading theatres called The Riviera and The Starland. Silent movies were the rage and each theatre had an organ to accompany these films. The Riviera had a Smith Organ, later replaced by a 2/7 Wurlitzer (Opus 1806) which is still near the city. As far as can be learned, the Starland had a Kimball Organ of undetermined specification and its whereabouts is unknown.

John Eberson of Chicago was engaged to design the new Palace Theatre for Challace and company. A long term lease was signed for the land, owned by Ike Holycross and Neil McCullough, on which the theatre now stands. The theatre was built but opened under the name of Paramount Publix instead of The Palace Theatre as originally planned. This was somewhere in the 1929-1930 period. Eberson designed the theatre in a romantic Italian style with star-sky overhead. Two small false balconies overlooked the stage with the organ chambers about one-third of the way back from the stage.

Challace and Company did not continue long and, in 1931, the theatre closed. The theatre then reverted back to the property owners, Ike Holycross and Neil McCullough.

Wolff and Young sometime later started the Y and W Theatre Chain which Summer '66

is still in operation.

Since neither Mr. Holycross or Mr. McCullough were acquainted with theatre operation, their manager of The Riviera, Mr. Harry Van Noy, took over the operation of the Paramount Theatre. This was in 1931.

A few years later, Mr. Holycross and Mr. McCullough formed the Anderson Amusement Company which controlled the Paramount, Riviera, and Starland Theatres.

The 1,700-seat Paramount Theatre was run by this company under the able management of Mr. Harry Van Noy until February, 1946, at which time Mr. Holycross died. The Anderson Amusement Company was dissolved and the theatre and land sold to The Alliance Theatre Corporation for some \$610,000.

On April 1, 1946, Mr. Harry Van Noy turned over the keys to The Anderson Amusement Company, which in turn placed them in the hands of The Alliance Theatre Corporation, the present

owners.

So ends a rather brief and vague early history of the Paramount Theatre.

The organ, a 3/7 Page Theatre Organ, is unique as are all theatre organs. The original delivery tag contains the following information:

For: Palace Theatre 1124 Meridian St.  
Meridian and Twelfth Streets  
Anderson, Indiana

Date: 1/3/29

From: The Page Organ Company  
Jackson & McKibben Streets  
Lima, Ohio

This organ is a relative to the 4/15 Page located in the Embassy Theatre, Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Though only half as large, it is a fine organ indeed.

A wonderful musician and well remembered lady by the name of Miss Hilda Lindstrom of Elwood, Indiana, would come each day by Interurbano to Anderson and preside at the console of the instrument. Even though no longer present on the scene, she was loved by all she entertained, and will stand as an important figure in the history of this instrument.

Other leading organists in the Anderson area were George Henninger, who opened the Riviera in 1919. Harry Stewart also was heard in the Anderson area. Mr. Robert Minton occasionally played the instrument although he was the regular staff organist at the Rivoli Theatre, Muncie, Indiana. (Wurlitzer Opus 1552).

A.T.O.E. members can see this organ by making arrangements with member Lew Hodson of Anderson, Indiana.



View of main chamber showing sopsophone, flute and string - Lew Hodson photo.