

After the Final Curtain

The Fall of the American Movie Theater

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JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

Loew's Poli Theatre, Bridgeport, Connecticut

Billed as "The Playhouse Beautiful" in early advertisements, the Loew's Poli Theatre opened as the Poli's Palace Theatre on September 4, 1922 in Bridgeport, Connecticut. It was designed by architect Thomas W. Lamb for theater mogul Sylvester Z. Poli, who also owned the nearby Palace Theatre in Waterbury. When it opened, the 3,642-seat Loew's Poli was the biggest movie theater in Connecticut, and the largest of all Bridgeport's theaters. Its sister establishment, the Majestic, which is located directly next to the Palace in the same building, opened two months later. The complex consists of two theaters, a hotel and a number of storefronts along Main Street.





Adams Theatre, Newark, New Jersey

The Adams Theatre in Newark, New Jersey, originally opened on January 12, 1912 as the Shubert Theatre. It was designed in the Beaux-Arts style by architect William E. Lehman, who also designed the Proctor's Palace Theatre in Yonkers, NY. The 2,037-seat auditorium was originally used for theatrical productions, Broadway tryouts and revivals.





Harold Minsky of Minsky's Burlesque took over the management of the theater in September 1952. His initial application for a permit to put on burlesque shows was turned down, but it was granted on appeal. On December 21, 1955, the city of Newark passed an ordinance that made burlesque illegal. It stated that shows in which an actor disrobed or gave the "illusion of nudeness" were not allowed. It also outlawed profane, indecent or lewd language. This was immediately challenged in court by the Adams Theatre Co. and I. Hurst Enterprises. (Hurst operated the nearby Empire Theatre, another burlesque venue.) The legal battle eventually reached the US Supreme Court, which declined to hear the case, and the ban on burlesque came into effect. However, Minsky did not wait for the verdict and stopped showing burlesque at the theater on February 7, 1957.

Eventually, the Adams Theatre began showing grindhouse and B movies. It closed on March 31, 1986, due to a 400% increase in the insurance rates, which also caused the nearby Paramount Theatre to close. It was sold in 1990 to the Freeman Group, a Manhattan-based investment firm, which planned to restore and reopen the theater. However, this never happened and the building was sold once again. Not all of the theater has remained unused since its closure: over the years, a number of retail stores (including a men's clothing store) have occupied the former lobby space. However, the lobby, like the rest of the theater, is currently unused.

Paramount Theatre, Newark, New Jersey

The Paramount Theatre opened on October 11, 1886 as H.C. Miner's Newark Theatre. It was originally a vaudeville house managed by Hyde & Behman Amusement Co., a Brooklyn based theatre management company. After Miner's death in 1900, his surviving relatives retained ownership of the theater for several years before selling it in 1916 to Edward Spiegel, the owner of the nearby Strand Theatre. At the same time, Spiegel also purchased the adjacent building with the intent to demolish it so he could use the space to expand the theater. On September 18, 1916 Spiegel announced that the auditorium would be enlarged at a cost of \$125,000 (\$2,717,000 when adjusted for inflation). Sparing no expense, Spiegel hired famed theater architect Thomas W. Lamb to do the alterations.

The original wood frame balconies were removed and replaced with a single steel and concrete balcony. Lamb redesigned the interior of the auditorium in the Adamesque, or Adam style. Adamesque is an updated version of the Neo-Classical style of architecture inspired by Greek and Roman ruins. The original seating capacity of the theater was 1900; after the remodelling was completed an additional 103 seats were added.



Boyd Theatre, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The Boyd Theatre, Philadelphia's only art deco movie palace, opened on Christmas day in 1928. Located in Philadelphia's Center City neighborhood, the 2,450-seat theater was commissioned by Alexander Boyd and built by Hoffman-Henon, a Philadelphia architecture firm also known for the construction of the nearby Prince Music Theatre. One of the companies commissioned for the Boyd's interior decoration was the Rambusch Company, who later decorated the Loew's Kings Theatre.





Unlike many theaters built in the 1920s, the Boyd was originally intended to be a movie theater – although there were backstage dressing rooms, it did not feature vaudeville shows. According to the opening day brochure, the Boyd was dedicated to women’s progress throughout history. This appreciation for women is referenced throughout the theater, especially in several murals, one of which shows an Amazonian queen fighting African and Asian armies.

After its construction was completed, Alexander Boyd sold the theater to the Stanley Warner company, which ran many theaters in downtown Philadelphia. Shortly after the Boyd changed hands, a Kimberly theatre organ was installed, which remained in the theater until 1969. When it was removed it was the last theater organ in a downtown Philadelphia theater. Various movie premieres were held at the Boyd over the years, including *The Unluckiest Millionaire*, *Rocky III* and *Philadelphia*. At the premiere of *Philadelphia*, upon entering the Boyd, actor Tom Hanks is said to have remarked, “Oh, a real movie theater!”



Uptown Theatre, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Stevie Wonder, The Jackson 5, The Temptations, Ray Charles, Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye, and the Supremes all have one thing in common, besides being renowned musical artists; they all performed at the Uptown Theatre in Philadelphia, PA. The Uptown originally opened on February 16, 1929 in the North Central neighborhood of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The 2,040-seat theater was designed by the architectural firm of Magaziner, Eberhard and Harris. It was built by Samuel Shapiro (who owned a number of theaters in the Philadelphia area) and operated by the Warner-Stanley (Warner Bros) Theatre Circuit.





Loew's Canal Theatre, New York, New York

The Loew's Canal Theatre opened on September 8, 1927 in the Lower East Side neighborhood of New York City. Thomas W. Lamb, one of the foremost theater architects of the 20th century, was contracted by the Loew's Corporation to design the 2,314-seat theater. Lamb designed the interior in the Spanish Baroque style of architecture, with ornate terracotta ornamentation and grand chandeliers. The contracting firm of M. Shapiro & Son began construction on the theater in the fall of 1926. Even though it was the second largest motion picture theater in Manhattan when it opened, it mostly showed B movies and serials. Loew's sold the theater to the Greater M&S Circuit a little over a year after it opened, and bought it back when they went bankrupt in 1929.



Loew's Kings Theatre, Brooklyn, New York

Loew's Kings Theatre opened on September 7, 1929 in Brooklyn, NY. Designed by the architectural firm of Rapp and Rapp (also known for the Uptown Theatre in Chicago, IL), it was originally intended to be a Paramount Theatre, but was turned over to Loew's before construction started as part of an agreement between Famous Players (Paramount) and Loew's Incorporated. According to the agreement, Loew's would not build any theaters in the Chicago area if Famous Players (Paramount) did not build any more in the New York Metropolitan area. The Kings is one of the five "Loew's Wonder Theatres" along with the Loew's Jersey Theatre, Loew's Paradise Theatre, the Loew's Valencia Theatre and the Loew's 175th Street Theatre. The Kings opened as a vaudeville and "talkie" motion picture theater, but the live performances were stopped in June 1930 due to low attendance and complaints from the performers that they could not reach the rear of the auditorium.



