

No July 2009 Meeting . . .

Since three sets of really great plans have been made in succession and then one-by-one fallen-through, most regrettably, we will not be able to have a meeting during the month of July; BUT stay tuned for a really BIG one in August that will more than make up for it.

August 2009 . . .

Saturday, August 22nd from 4:00 pm until 9:00 pm... Chapter Drop-In / Come-And-Go ... at the home of our President, Mr. Bucky Reddish and the amazing Walker 3/35 RTO ... featuring at least FOUR national ATOS artists (in alphabetical order): Mr. Ken Double, Mr. Chris Elliott, Mr. Larry-Douglas Embury, Mr. Dave Wickerham and other surprise guest artists. These great artists will be playing many short segments in rotation throughout the afternoon and evening, helping us celebrate Bucky turning 60 years old! So, join us for "Bucky's Big Birthday Bash" for some great food, lots of warm fellowship and truly fantastic theatre organ music!

September 2009 . . .

Sunday, September 20th (tentative), 3:00 pm... Open Console at the Stephenson High School Page Theatre Pipe Organ. Come, have a great time and take the old girl for a spin (or sit back and have a listen), both see and hear the hard work that Mr. Jack Sandow and his dedicated crew have accomplished on this wonderful labor-of-love. Even with only a big portion of the organ up and running, "she sure sounds great!" was the exclamation heard recently!

October 2009 . . .

Sunday, October 18th, 3:00 pm... Halloween at Schloss von Carter (Home of Ron and Donna Carter). Fall is in the air as we get set for a wonderful time enjoying the wonderful Allen GW-IV as well as the always-warm-and-inviting hospitality of Ron and Donna. Stay tuned for a surprise artist to come and chase away any spooks that might spoil our theatre organ fun!

Phillip Allen

Theaters of Atlanta and their pipe organs

By John Tanner

With the opening of the Fabulous Fox Theatre in December of 1929, Atlantans saw the end of the movie palace building boom that had lasted all through the 1920's, starting with the opening of the Howard in 1920 and ending with the Fox in 1929. Never again would Peachtree Street witness such temples to celluloid.

During this same period, as Atlanta's suburbs began to spread out towards cities like East Point, Decatur, and Roswell, Atlantans saw the construction of what would be referred to as the neighborhood houses.

These smaller theaters usually did not offer a first run show, but did offer a second run feature and on many occasions some extra entertainment. It enabled Atlantans to still be entertained

without the expense of traveling back downtown. Many would agree that you couldn't beat the show you got at the downtown houses but the smaller neighborhood houses did offer a quick get away to a movie. Although not as opulent as the downtown houses, they did possess their own unique architecture and charm. Some of these theaters even featured an organ of some type and such is the topic of this article.

In those days one did not have to travel very far from Five Points to be out in the suburbs, most of these theaters were built in areas, that today are well within the confines of Interstate 285.

One of the first theaters to open was the Palace Theater in Inman Park at Little Five Points. Not very much is known about this theater, it was open as early as September of 1924 and by 1928 would run ads that boasted "The Little Theater with the Big Pipe



Ad for Palace Theatre and the "Big" pipe organ.

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Organ." After examining fire maps of the area and the fact that the building is still there (although not a theater anymore) it was not a very large theater to begin with, maybe seating around 400. So any pipe organ would have certainly been "Big" in that space. The organ is believed to be a Kimball, and is referenced in the Kimball list but little more, although according to the Kimball list the organ was installed in 1924. There is also a listing from the Operators Piano Company of some model of a Reproduco being installed at one time, probably before the Kimball, since the local sales rep here represented both companies.

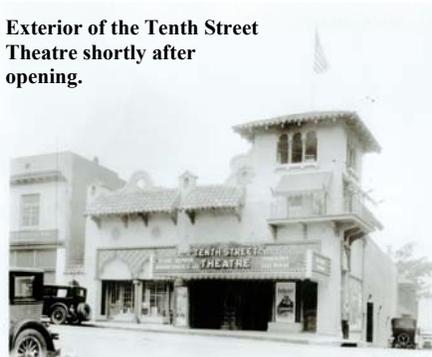
All the downtown theaters had some sort of architectural style that could apply to them, the Howard—Italian Palazzo Chiercati, the Capitol—Adam, the Georgia (Roxy) — French Rococo, the Fox—Egypt-Moorish-Shriner, The Grand — Victorian. With the success of the Palace, Manager Alpha Fowler soon opened several other theaters in which the Spanish style of architecture would be the main architectural theme. The first of these theaters to open was the "West



Exterior of West End Theatre in the late 1930's.

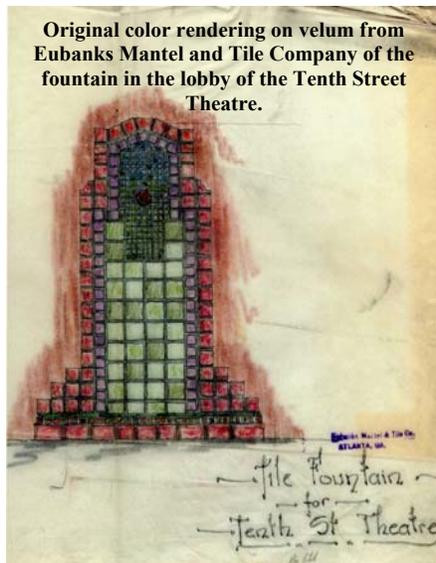
End", near the intersection of Lee and Gordon Streets, in the West End section of Atlanta. Opening Nov. 15, 1925 as the "Alpha" (shortly changed to West End) and was described in the Atlanta Constitution as follows: "The Alpha is of Spanish design and of that new type of Spanish beauty and harmonious coloring which will enhance the beauty of whatever section it might be placed in. Every convenience for the comfort of patrons has been given though in its construction and will be a veritable showplace for the south side." (Atlanta Constitution Nov. 15, 1925) A two-manual 4-rank Robert Morton was installed in 1925. The West End operated into the late 1950's and later after being the location of Cantrell's book store, torn down in the 1960's. The fate of the Robert Morton is unknown.

Exterior of the Tenth Street Theatre shortly after opening.



Meanwhile at the corner of Peachtree and 10th street (yes that was the suburbs) on September 27, 1926, Alpha Fowler in association with Lucas and Jenkins would open his most elaborate neighborhood house, The Tenth Street theater opened with the film "Cohens & Kellys." The local papers describe the theater as follows: "The theater cost

Original color rendering on velum from Eubanks Mantel and Tile Company of the fountain in the lobby of the Tenth Street Theatre.



\$200,000 and seats about 550 persons. The Moorish atmosphere is carried out in the draperies and the upholstery as well as in its mural decorations and in the lobby decorations. A small fountain in the foyer is a noticeable feature of the decorative scheme. The doormen and ushers wear Spanish costumes. All the interior lighting is indirect, and the exterior of the building is so illuminated at night that it presents an impressive picture. In the tower, varicolored lights are employed." (Atlanta Constitution Sept. 26, 1926)

"Inside every modern improvement known has been installed. The miniature stage is model of perfection with gorgeous draperies and colorings displayed. On each side is a balcony like affair that lends color and charm to the entire theater. In equipment, the theater is decidedly up to the minute. Air-cushioned seats that invite one to tarry longer are a feature that plays no small part in the success and popularity of a theater. A large and beautiful concert organ is another feature of the new theater that will prove popular." (Atlanta Journal Sept. 26, 1926)

Here again is a mystery organ, although there is a listing in the Operators Piano Company of a "Reproduco" being installed in the Tenth Street,

By the mid 1930's the Tenth Street was showing some selected first run films and went through a remodeling of sorts which seemed to be confined to new carpet, draperies and a new paint job.

However, by the late 1940's the exterior of the theater had a major remodeling. Gone were all the traces of Spain. The tower was gone and a modern marquee proclaimed the 10th Street theater.

The demise of the theater ultimately came due to its location. As one crossed Peachtree heading west on 10th Street, drivers had to make a sharp dog leg to continue on 10th Street, which became a narrow street running down beside the theater. If drivers were not careful they could end up in the lobby of the theater. In the late fifties it was decided to widen the section of 10th Street from Peachtree to Northside drive. The theater was demolished, and 10th Street was straightened out and now runs where the theater once stood. Many people think

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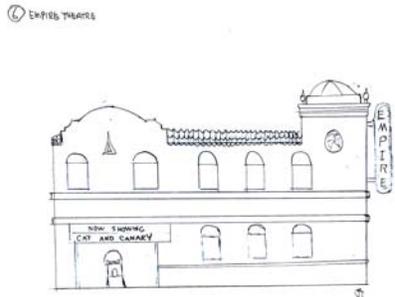


Exterior detail of Madison Theatre in 2008.

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that a restaurant called the House of Eng was in the theatre building. However, the House of Eng was in the building that the now demolished theater was next to.

Over in East Atlanta on Flat Shoals Avenue, the "Madison Theater" opened on July 2, 1927. Designed by local architects, Daniell and Beutell, The Madison was their first version of a Spanish style theater. From exterior to interior the Spanish theme was carried out down to two side balconies similar to the ones found in the Tenth Street theater. "The new theater ranks as one of the finest and most expensive neighborhood theaters in the south, and it provides a welcome addition to the community theater field in Atlanta. Furnishings in the theater are the most modern to be had. The seats are of the latest design and are calculated to lend comfort and beauty to the theater. A new \$5,000 pipe organ has been installed in the theater, ranking the Madison in musical facilities along with the best in the city.' An accomplished graduate of one of the largest musical conservatories in the east has been engaged as organist', the management announces. Beyond this there is no other description of the organ or any organist who played there." (Atlanta Constitution July 2, 1927) Of the neighborhood house that opened during this time the Madison is one of the few still standing. Operating as a movie theater into the 60's, later as a church, then closed during much of the 80's and 90's the theater still retains many

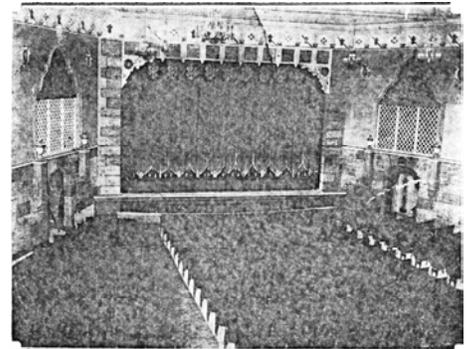


Line drawing of Empire Theatre from plans of a 1940 remodel.

of its architecture elements especially on the exterior and even some of the interior elements remain.

On March 11, 1928 out in South Atlanta at Georgia Avenue and Crew Street, Alpha Fowler opened the Empire theater. Again the Spanish style was used. By this time sound was being introduced into films and the Empire was not going to be left behind. "A feature of the new theater, Mr. Fowler states will be the novel and improved Orchestrphone, which will provide synchronized musical accompaniment for the pictures shown in the Empire. In addition the house will boast a magnificent Seeburg pipe organ. Again nothing has come to light about the organ." (Atlanta Constitution March 11, 1928) The theater operated into the early sixties and one could still see the marquee ablaze at night while traveling south on the newly completed Interstate 75-85. The theatre and all the surrounding structures were soon demolished to allow for the construction of the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium (since demolished) and its parking lots.

One other theater that I would like to include with the previous theaters did not have a pipe organ, but it did have some reasonably-sized organ chambers and could have been home to a 7 to 10-rank organ had the theater been built a few years earlier. On June 2, 1930 the very last of the neighborhood houses opened that still embodied the movie palace design. The Buckhead Theater opened on Roswell road with the film "Gold-Diggers of Broadway." Designed by Daniell and Beutell, the Buckhead would also be one of the largest neighborhood houses constructed, seating a little over 1000 patrons in Spanish surroundings. Over the years the Buckhead would undergo many remodelings and several name changes. By the 60's it was known



Interior of Buckhead Theatre in June 1930.

as the Capri and would show films up until the 1980's. During these remodelings much of the Spanish decor was lost; however, its exterior still retains its 1930 look. Currently the building is the home to the Coca-Cola Roxy and is undergoing renovation at this time.

Although the Buckhead never had an organ, it did achieve a bit of notoriety in April of 1933. The film "She Done Him Wrong" starring Mae West, was set to open at the Paramount theater; however, the local board of review was determined that not only would the film not be shown at the Paramount but that it would be totally banned from being shown in any theater in Atlanta, The Paramount appealed to the Fulton Superior Court to overturn the review board's decision. However, Judge Virlyn B. Moore upheld the review board's decree. So the film could not be shown in the city limits of Atlanta. Score one for the review board. However, they did not realize that just outside the city limits, Manager Willis Davis, the manager of the Buckhead, announced that the film would be shown in his theater. For the next four weeks (usually films played a week) the Buckhead had capacity audiences that took some time to come up and see what Mae West was up to, and what all the fuss was about.

Next Article will be part 3 of the Atlanta Fox articles, then its time to travel around the state and look for theaters that had organs and who knows, there may be a few surprises along the way.

Thanks for the Donation
Bob McKoon

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**Congratulations to
Atlanta Chapter Member
David Burud !**

David was a finalist in the ATOS Amateur Theater Organist Competition and won third place. He and his wife Lori have been members of the Atlanta Chapter for several years and hosted our October 2008 program on their Allen GW-IV in their beautiful Sharpsburg home.

Other winners were Jon Steen (Texas) 1st place and Peter Rusted (England) 2nd place.

Judges were Jim Riggs, Rob Richards and Ron Rhode. This project is co-chaired by Susan Cole-Shaw (Atlanta Chapter member) and Mike Hartley.

Welcome New Members

Paul & Kathryn Lanegger
2514 Kingswood Drive, Marietta, GA 30066-6257
770-429-0215

ATTENTION

In order to save club money, we are offering you the option of receiving your monthly newsletter in Adobe Acrobat (PDF) format by email instead of "snail" mail. This will not only save on postage expense, but reduce the reproduction and envelope costs. Also, it is in color. *Note:* These are fairly large files and this choice might not be satisfactory for dial-up internet connections.

If this is your preference, please email elfields@yahoo.com.

Upcoming Meetings & Events (Mark your Calendars)

- July—No meeting
- August 22, Saturday, 4:00 pm - 9:00 pm at the Reddish residence. See article on Page 1.
- September 20, 3:00 pm (tentative), Meeting—Open console on the Page at Stephenson High School.
- October 18, 3:00 pm, Meeting— Surprise Artist to be announced.

**Watch for an article on the Strand Organ Project in the Marietta Daily Journal.
It should appear in the next two weeks.**

Atlanta Chapter, ATOS - Membership Application

Name _____ Phone _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State/ZIP _____ Email _____
 Do you own an organ? _____ If so, description _____

Meetings are held monthly, usually on the 3rd Sunday afternoon. Annual membership dues \$35 (Student \$17.50). **Please make check payable to Atlanta Chapter, ATOS.** Mail this application and your check to: Wanda Carey Fields, 413 Concord Road SW, Smyrna, GA 30082-4509