

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to examine the meaning of the Pulaski Theatre to the residents of Pulaski and its social importance to the town. In determining this the history of the theatre was examined including design features and changes to the building over time. Interviews were conducted with residents of the town to discover memories or feelings that people associate with the theatre and to determine if these memories represent a sense of place. Various research methods were utilized, including a drawing exercise, personal interviews, and information gathered from local documents.

The methodology is divided into the following sections: description of the participants, procedures for the drawing exercise, the interview process, document research, and method of data analysis.

#### **Participants**

Participants are fifteen adult women and men from the Pulaski area that attended the theatre throughout its lifetime (see Table 2). In order to maximize the number of years of theatre attendance, participants are middle-aged and older adults, both African American and Caucasian. A demographic information sheet was completed for each participant (see Appendix B).

**Table 2. Participants**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Dates Attended</b>
Male	Caucasian	57	50s – 80s
Female	African American	43	70s
Male	Caucasian	82	30s – 40s
Female	Caucasian	72	30s – 90s
Female	African American	53	60s – 70s
Female	Caucasian	62	40s – 60s
Female	Caucasian	49	60s – 70s
Male	Caucasian	56	50s – 60s
Male	African American	56	50s – 70s
Male	African American	54	60s
Female	Caucasian	63	50s – 80s
Female	Caucasian	72	30s – 60s
Female	Caucasian	70	50s – 90s
Male	Caucasian	57	50s – 80s
Female	Caucasian	55	60s

Participants were solicited through The Friends of the Pulaski Theatre group and by placing flyers in local grocery stores and businesses (Appendix C). The researcher participated in the May Day celebration in downtown Pulaski on Saturday, May 3, 2003, and spoke with people as they came by the theatre booth (see Figure 20). Sign-up sheets were provided at the booth. Participants were asked for names of additional volunteers in a snowball effect. The nature of the volunteer sample assumes the possibility of a particular type of individual self-selecting into the sample, but the variety of methods of attracting volunteers provided a diverse and heterogeneous sample. Although each individual's 'truth' of history is biased by the telling of her individual story of lived experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), these individual 'truths' can be woven into a tapestry where a collective truth is formed indicative of the meaning of the theatre to the town and its people.



Figure 20. Booth in front of theatre at May Day celebration, 2003.

Interviews were conducted in an office provided by the Town of Pulaski in their downtown location. Furniture, a telephone, and office supplies were provided, and calls were made to set up appointments for interviews by the researcher from this office, as well as from the researcher's home. One interview was held at the home of the participants and one interview was held at a participant's office. Interviews were also held at the office of Mr. James Miller, whose family owned the theatre building for many years; and the homes of Mr. Wilmer Ryan, who ran the projection equipment in the theatre, and Mr. Lloyd Mathews, a local historian.

## **Drawing Exercise**

Before the interview began, participants were given a sheet of drawing paper and offered a variety of pencils and felt-tip pens (black and colored), and asked to draw a picture of the theatre that expressed their feelings of their experience of the space. The emphasis of the picture was left to the discretion of each participant.

Seven people participated in the drawing exercise portion of the interview. For various reasons, this exercise was not completed by eight participants. One participant was visually impaired and others were uncomfortable with drawing and asked to be excused from this part of the interview. If a participant chose not to create a drawing of the theatre, their request was honored and we proceeded directly with the tape-recorded interview.

## **Interviews**

After the drawing exercise, participants were asked to discuss their drawings of the theatre and the meanings connected with them. They were interviewed regarding their earliest recollections of the theatre; the dates they attended the theatre; the types of movies they remember seeing; where they sat in the theatre; if they attended the theatre alone or with others; and what the theatre meant to them and to the town (see Appendix D). The drawing exercise helped to bring the experience of the theatre to a conscious level for the participants and allowed them to express these feelings during the interview.

An invaluable resource for this study was the late Wilmer Ryan, who ran the projection equipment at the theatre for 53 years. Mr. Ryan had several extensive scrapbooks on the theatre with pictures and newspaper articles that feature the original décor of the newly renovated Pulaski Theatre, as well as articles commemorating events

that were held in the theatre. Mr. Ryan agreed to lend his support to this research project and was interviewed regarding changes to the theatre over time and important events and happenings over the theatre's lifetime. Many of the photographs included in this work are from his scrapbooks.

Interviews were also conducted with Mr. Lloyd Mathews, a local historian and long-time newspaper journalist in Pulaski, and with Mr. James Miller, whose family owned the Pulaski Theatre building for most of its history. Telephone interviews were conducted with Jennifer White, Executive Director of the Friends of the Pulaski Theatre, and Ellen Kate Carson, daughter of Doc Harman, who performed in vaudeville acts at the Elks Theatre.

### **Document Research**

Old newspapers and documents in the Raymond Ratcliffe Museum, the historic museum in Pulaski; documents from scrapbooks; architectural plans; and information from the Town of Pulaski's files were examined for information relating to the theatre throughout its lifetime including various movie or show advertisements, pricing of shows, dates, and openings and closings of the theatre during its transition from the Elks Theatre to the Pulaski Theatre.

### **Data Analysis**

#### Drawings

Drawings created by the participants were examined to discover significant memories and associations regarding the theatre. Since participants were given no direction when asked to "draw a picture of the theatre that expresses their feelings of their

experience of the space”, the drawings reflected what the participants consider most important and memorable about the theatre. Drawings were analyzed to determine the participants’ emphasis on the exterior of the building, the street scene, adjoining buildings, or interior features of the theatre and to determine which features of the space are prominent in the drawings. Participant drawings reproduced in this document were highlighted to provide sharper image quality.

### Interviews

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher (Ives, 1974). Data were coded to look for emerging themes or categories and emerging categories that relate to the research question were assessed for developing theory (Merriam, 1998). Themes relating to social importance were examined to evaluate this aspect of the Pulaski Theatre to the residents of the town of Pulaski. Of interest also is whether the meaning of the theatre varies with groups, such as participants who sat upstairs as opposed to participants who sat downstairs, or African Americans versus Caucasians.

Information from documents along with the drawings and interviews of the participants were used to paint a montage of the theatre during its lifetime and its social importance to the townspeople of Pulaski. Whether or not the ‘space’ that is the theatre also represents a ‘place’ creating a ‘sense of place’ for the residents of the town and perhaps even a ‘spirit of place’ was examined as well.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this chapter findings related to the drawing exercises, interviews and document research will be examined. Changes to the building over time that were discovered through document research will be examined. Various themes that were identified from the research will be examined, such as (1) the structure as an integral part of the community, (2) the theatre as a reflection of the social norms and roles of the community, such as segregation, and (3) the theatre interior as contributing to the social atmosphere of the space. Topics discussed by the participants in interviews and through drawing exercises regarding the theatre and its relationship to the town will be presented. Names of participants are not listed except where needed for clarification.

#### **Changes to the Theatre Over Time**

Architect A. O. Budina of 1013A East Main Street, Richmond, Virginia designed the plans for the renovation of the Pulaski Theatre in 1937. Additions to the Classical Revival building façade included a modern marquee with rounded corners and triangular elements in keeping with the Art Deco architectural style of the era. The signage on top of the marquee stating “PULASKI” was fashioned in a rounded style of the period as well. These elements were not in keeping with the classical features of the building exterior. Display windows fashioned with triangular pediments atop were also incongruent with the original style of the building. The ticket window box is visible to the right of the entrance door (see Figure 21).



Figure 21. Pulaski Theatre, circa 1938.



Mr. Budina's plans are dated May 8, 1937 and copies of them are provided in this research study (Appendix E). Plan No. 1 shows the foundation plan, a section through the entrance and lobby, detail of marquee, cross section, and front elevation. Plan No. 2 is the main floor plan, details of footlight trough, detail of carpet strip for auditorium aisle, and elevation of front wall of projection room. Plan No. 3 is the balcony plan, mezzanine floor plan, detail of balcony rail and typical moldings. Plan No. 4 is a longitudinal section, plan of balcony soffit, and detail of cornice in auditorium. Plan No. 5 contains details from the front elevation, poster frames, and box office and plans of lobby, lounge, and "Colored" entry. The "Colored" entry was originally shown on the front of the building. Plan No. 6 shows plans and details of stairs and a section through stairs from the African American entry. Floor plans of the main floor of the theatre (see Figure 22), and the balcony and mezzanine floor (see Figure 23), drawn from the original 1937 plans, are shown below.

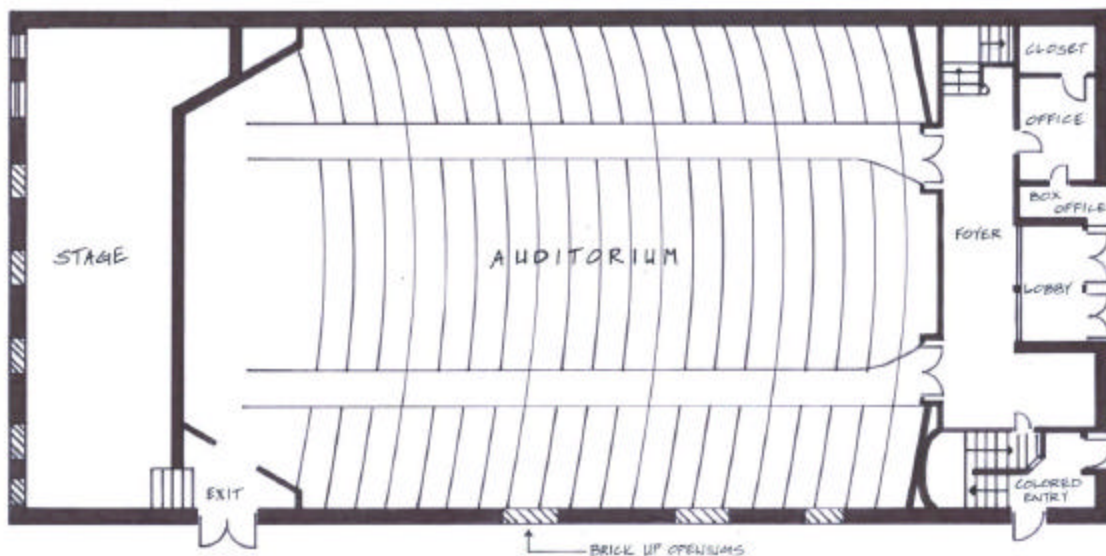


Figure 22. Main floor plan.

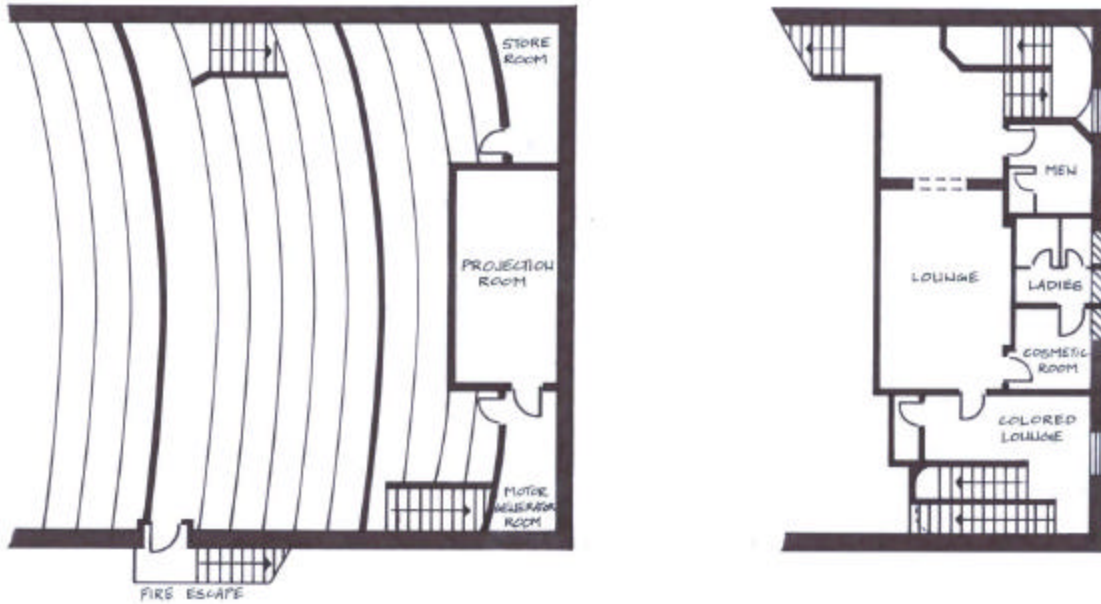


Figure 23. Balcony and mezzanine floor plan.

The interior of the theatre shows curved, rounded lines in the auditorium space in keeping with the Art Deco style of the period (see Figure 24). The simple round lights in the ceiling, rounded sides of the screen and narrow plaster moldings with simple patterns are evident in the newly renovated space.

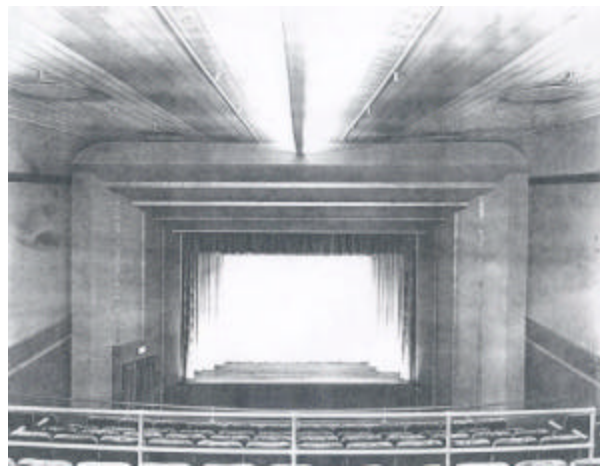


Figure 24. Interior of theatre, view from balcony.  
 Photograph by David C. Kent, 1937. Reprinted with permission.

Mr. Budina was called upon to redesign the front of the theatre March 17, 1948 (see Appendix F). Window displays were redesigned with simpler frames and no excessive ornamentation (see Figure 25). The architect stated on his plans “all existing poster frames on front to be removed” and “new aluminum poster frames to be furnished by owners.” The entrance on the left side of the front of the building was bricked up. This was originally the African American (then called “Colored”) entry when the Pulaski Theatre opened in 1937, so it appears that at that time African American patrons would have entered through the side door in the alleyway, left side facing the theatre.



Figure 25. Pulaski Theatre with redesigned exterior window displays, circa 1949.

When the semi-circular pediment and head of Dionysus were removed circa 1950, the theatre was left with a façade compiled of parts and pieces representing the various decades of its existence. The somewhat incongruent appearance today depicts remnants from the original classical style with the quoins still in place and the circular windows present but filled in. The semi-circular pediment, head of Dionysus, and bracketed cornice are all missing. The rounded marquee and the window displays are in place from the renovations of 1937 and 1948. Ornamentation of garish paint colors, floral motifs and faux marbling of recent days only adds to the weariness of the building facade (see Figure 26).



Figure 26. Pulaski Theatre stands empty, 2003.

## **Topics Discovered Through Interviews and Drawing Exercises**

Topics that came out of the drawing exercises and interviews include:

- descriptions of Pulaski as a thriving town during the time that the theatre was actively operating with people living downtown in apartments and within walking distance of the theatre
- the theatre as a very busy, active place, the main source of entertainment in town, and the activity surrounding the theatre supporting restaurants and other businesses in town
- other types of entertainment and activities in town including the Dalton, the other movie theater in town
- the formal production of presenting movies at the Pulaski Theatre during this era including the use of ushers and projectionists
- the variety of shows presented at the Pulaski Theatre including movies, children's matinees, 3-D movies, serials, and other types of shows
- seating arrangements in the theatre including dating and African Americans seated in the balcony during segregation
- the architectural features of the theatre
- the changes of the era leading to the decline of the town and the theatre
- suggestions for programming when the renovated theatre opens

### Pulaski, A Thriving Town

During the heyday of the Pulaski Theatre, 1937 through the sixties and into the seventies, the town of Pulaski was a very active, thriving town (see Table 3 for

population figures). The downtown area included diverse businesses such as supermarkets, banks, a flower shop, an alterations shop, three drugstores with soda fountains, quality men’s and women’s clothing stores, a millinery shop, a department store, five and dime stores, appliance and furniture stores, a car dealership, two hotels, a photographer, and the library. People lived, shopped, worked, and were entertained in Pulaski and the town provided everything that people needed to sustain themselves during this era. People shopped downtown patronizing the local businesses, thus keeping the money in the local economy rather than supporting big box retailers as happens so often today.

**Table 3. Population Estimates**

<b>Population</b>	<b>1940</b>	<b>1950</b>	<b>1960</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
<b><u>Town of Pulaski</u></b>	8,792	9,202	10,469	10,279	10,106	9,985	9,473
<b><u>Pulaski County</u></b>	22,767	27,758	27,258	29,564	35,229	34,496	35,127
<b><u>New River Valley</u></b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	141,343	152,680	165,146

Sources: 1997 Pulaski Comprehensive Plan; U. S. Bureau of the Census; Weldon Cooper Center

...it was very active then ...all the stores were on Main Street. Right beside of the theatre was... a clothing store and then Hatcher Askew was on the corner...Main Street was a lot of activity. I can remember several super markets that was there...one of them was the Bear Super Market and Reigel’s was another one. Of course the courthouse was over across from it, was really one of the prettiest sights of Pulaski... Across the street from there would be the library... On one corner was the...People’s National Bank and Pulaski National Bank...There was a Charles’ store on the Main Street. One side was Roses’ Five and Ten and the other side of where Singer’s was, was McCroy’s and they had the wooden floors. We’d walk in and the candy counter, ooh...They had a Snyder’s Flower Shop, which was on Main Street...My mother run an alterations shop also in the Crowell Building which was a block down from Pulaski Theatre upstairs. And then down below it was...a clothing



store, it was Seagle's, I think it was... We had Miss Emmart's...I'll never forget it and she sold a lot of beautiful hats...and there was a Carlton's Store...Ray's Clothing, Working Man's Store, Felix, Bee's Cut Rate was up there, and there was another Pulaski Appliance, they're called Weiser's then.

(62 year old, Caucasian female)

There was the Piggly-Wiggly Grocery Store (see Figures 27 and 28)...which was over on Jefferson, but it's just a corner around from Main Street and the banks were downtown. There was a store that was owned by some of the parents' of my classmates. Anne Rutherford's mother had a clothing store. Ernie Wallace's mother and father – one owned a dress and clothing store (see Figure 29) and the father ran the shoe store. So we were able to come to town and there was a store at the other end called Felix's and that's where I did a lot of shopping and Morris's. Then there was McCroy's Five and Ten Cent Store – just about everything you wanted – you could get anything that Wal-Mart has...Even a photographer was downtown.

(53 year old, African American female)



Figure 27. Piggly Wiggly Grocery Store, 1939.



Figure 28. Piggly Wiggly interior, 1939.

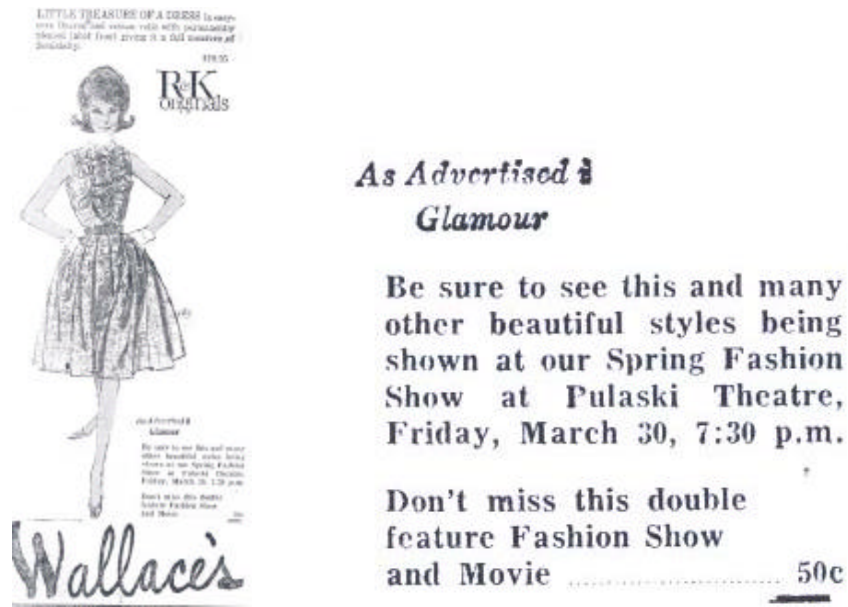


Figure 29. Advertisement for Wallace's, March 27, 1962. Text shown enlarged on right.

Many people lived downtown in apartments or within walking distance of downtown. Almost everyone knew everyone on sight, if not by name, and it was a very safe town where parents felt comfortable allowing children to walk to matinees or people felt safe walking to the theatre at night. Not everyone had a car and often walked to work and to the theatre, thus eliminating much of the pollution, parking, and some of the health problems we encounter today in our automobile driven society (Kay, 1997; Schlosser, 2002).

I would get off work and me and my sister or whoever maybe if I had a date or something, we would meet at the theatre. We didn't have cars. Everybody didn't have a car then and we walked wherever we went and I lived on Martin Avenue, which was maybe a mile, a little over a mile, and I walked back and forth to work. My aunt lived over on Third Street in an apartment so sometimes we'd go over and have supper with her and then she would go to work (her aunt worked at the Dalton Theater) and I'd go to the theatre...and when the theatre, when the movies were over, we would walk her home and then we'd walk home...

(63 year old, Caucasian female)



It was safe for me to walk to town and even with girlfriends as we became high school girls, we could even walk at night to the theatre because I didn't drive, of course, and it was safe and downtown was a very safe area.

(62 year old, Caucasian female)

Main Street filled with shoppers on Saturdays and people came downtown to see and be seen and would even park and watch the activity of the people in town just for the entertainment value.

Oh, it was wonderful...we used to come to town every Saturday and shop... spend the whole, well, the afternoon, any way. We would come about 1 o'clock and stay until the stores closed at six...

(72 year old, Caucasian female)

...my recreation on Saturday was to take my mother down and park on Main Street and watch the people...They was just droves of people, you know, they had two five and dimes there and drug stores. So we'd go down there on Saturday afternoon and park just to see everybody. Sidewalks full, both sides.

(72 year old, Caucasian female)

Life was centered in and around the town and radiated outward from the town center, with the theatre central to the landscape of downtown. Working downtown at the theatre at the epicenter of this activity was a fun experience. A participant that worked at the theatre in his youth states:

...And then on Saturdays... downtown was packed. There wasn't parking places. People could go sit in their car to watch the people ...they'd dress up and be walking the streets. And, it was a ball working Saturdays and hanging out the windows hollering at everybody as they went down the street.

This vibrancy and life surrounding the theatre represents the importance and meaning of the theatre to the townspeople, to those working in the theatre as well as to the residents coming into town for shopping and other business.

## Pulaski Theatre, Center of Entertainment in Town

The Pulaski Theatre was renovated and opened November 11, 1937. The building was owned by the Dix-Miller family. An early picture of the exterior of the theatre, circa 1938, shows the details of the building and its position beside Seagle's Drug Store, which later became Martin's Pharmacy (see Figure 21). The ticket window faces the street and is directly to the right of the door as is also shown in this later picture when "Enchantment" was playing, circa 1948, taken after the 1948 renovation (see Figure 30).

The theatre was a very busy, active place and the main source of entertainment in town. Although there was another theater in town, the Dalton, the Pulaski Theatre was considered THE place to go for entertainment. The theatre was always full with long lines leading down the street to get into the theatre (see Figures 31, 32 and 25). Sometimes people dating could not even find seats together until some kind-hearted soul offered to exchange seats to accommodate them.



Figure 30. Ticket booth to right of doors, circa 1948.



Figure 31. Long lines to theatre from east side of town for the movie, “Snow White”, circa 1938.



Figure 32. Long lines to theatre from west side of town, circa 1938.

It was not unusual to see very long lines...Appalachian Power is on the corner and I've been there at times when the line stretched all the way to the courthouse...That was a thriving theatre.

(63 year old, Caucasian female)

One participant's drawing shows the exterior of the theatre building, drawn as a tall building with “It's Alive” on the marquee. The doors to the theatre are shown and a window/ticket box. The lines to enter the theatre are very long stretching all the way down Main Street to the courthouse (see Figure 33).



Figure 33. Participant drawing No. 1.

...and it was always full...Yeah, that was the only thing to do, you know, back then.

(82 year old, Caucasian male)

...a lot of times we couldn't get seats together...because there would be so many people there...you would be dating and whenever the movie...first started, you couldn't sit with your date because you couldn't get a seat together...and then maybe somebody would move or something.

(72 year old, Caucasian female)

...it was a pretty popular thing to do (going to the movies), was one of the few things to do in Pulaski, you know, except maybe go and play softball or somethin'. But it was kind of like a gatherin' spot...

(54 year old, African American male)

Other than shopping, church activities, and city recreational facilities, the theatre was the major entertainment venue in town and where people went to see others, be seen, and be entertained. It was quite an event and people got dressed up to go to the theatre in their Sunday best clothes.

Well, we use to go at least three times a week. Every time that...the movie changed, we were there...and there would be so many people there that they would be lined up all the way around to the Southwest Times building...to get in, and of course, we usually would always go to the nine o'clock movie... that was in the '50s...and I mean, you know, just nice clothes and heels and a bag... and ...even after people started getting more casual and everything, and there was still a lot of people that always dressed up to go to the theatre.

(72 year old, Caucasian female)

Going to the theatre was an experience that led to other activities, such as eating out before or after the movie and helped to support other businesses in town creating a symbiosis of mutually beneficial relationships.

I remember my Mom, there used to be a restaurant called Ray's and we went to Ray's and got 15 cent hamburgers and...then they took us to see the "Green Slime", and that was the first movie. We was all in the

back of the truck and they let us out and we went there. And I remember seeing the “Ten Commandments” there, “It’s Alive”, “Green Slime”, just a lot of movies and I remember it was always a lot of people there...

(43 year old, African American female)

...there were people downtown all the time...after they left the theatre at nine o’clock, there was actually two or three places to go eat downtown.... had the Washington Café around the corner and...Danny’s Blaho’s owned a Greek...and the food was really good. The place was just a typical old downtown diner type thing...”Number One” was like a soda fountain thing. ...But it was really neat. It had a lot of sundaes and stuff in it. Dee’s Cut Rate was up on the corner....magazines and sundries and tobacco and stuff like that but those guys were open you know until about 10 o’clock usually...so there was something going on...

(57 year old, Caucasian male)

### Other Activities in Town

The theatre was one segment of small town life in Pulaski that played an important role in people’s lives, but there were other activities and forms of entertainment in town that played a significant role in growing up in a small town. These included town recreational activities, such as the YMCA and baseball and football leagues; Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts; church activities sponsored by the many area churches in Pulaski, as well as preaching every Sunday night in the park by ministers from the various denominations; a duck pen bowling alley; and the other theater in town, the Dalton. One section of town with nightspots and “juke joints” formed a neighborhood referred to as “up on the block” that provided an active place for African American citizens to socialize and feel at home, creating a sense of place for many African American residents of Pulaski. The elite of Pulaski had their private clubs serving as closed societies such as the Country Club, various men’s coffee clubs, and The Round Dozen, a garden club for ladies.

There were special occasions when Main Street would be closed off for street dances, and the courthouse lawn was used as a gathering spot. On Halloween the children would come downtown in their costumes where judging would take place for the best Halloween costumes followed by a gala street dance. There were also community concerts held in Jackson Park. Often people made their own entertainment.

...you made your own entertainment with families...My father was an excellent...bluegrass musician. He made his own instruments and he could hear a song and play it...made banjos and guitars...he would sit out in the evenings and play banjo. We had a big orchard and we would sit out there. The kids would play...kick the can or some type of kick ball out in the streets...Did a lot of outdoor activities, fishing...We'd go camping for days at a time over on the New River...up at the head waters before it got to the wide part so it was just a time when we were more self-sufficient...  
(63 year old, Caucasian female)

Out in the country where I lived you know, you'd always be adventures, like going through the woods or finding a stream or something, little makeshift fishing.

(54 year old, African American male)

Everyone had a radio in the forties and fifties, and families would gather together around the radio in the evenings and listen to music or programs before the advent of television, which became a major part of family life during the fifties.

### Dalton Theater

The Dalton Theater was the second movie house operating in Pulaski during most of the run of the Pulaski Theatre. The Dalton Theater, built circa 1922 by Mr. Sexton Dalton, was originally built as an opera house, designed for stage shows with dressing rooms and an orchestra pit. It was southwest Virginia's stage show theater, with any show in the area playing at the Dalton Theater. Movie stars and celebrities such as

Gabby Hayes, Will Rogers, Tex Ritter, and Lash LeRue traveling through the area stopped by the Dalton to perform and meet the people. During the era of silent movies a pianist played from the orchestra pit to accompany the action on screen. Although the Dalton was a larger, more ornate, elaborately designed space (see Figure 34), the Pulaski was considered the premier theatre in town with the Dalton Theater showing “B” movies and “horse operas” while Pulaski showed first run movies.

...the Dalton, I remember that when the first moving picture, it was a movie picture but it was silent, no sound...they had a piano player down there in the pit, they called it, and she watched the thing and she bu-bu-bu-buh (made finger motions as if playing the piano). If the cowboys were running or whatever, she was bu-bu-bu-buh...I remember that movie. I was about this high (gesturing with his hand)...So then they had that whole pit there that they had the complete orchestras in and stage shows of all kinds – that came in.

(82 year old, Caucasian male)

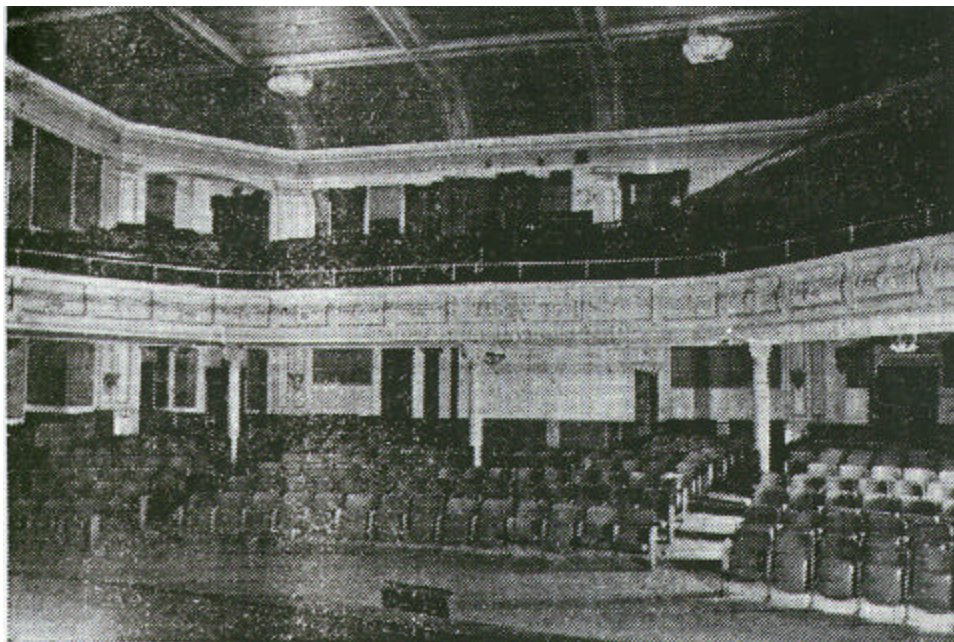


Figure 34. Dalton Theater interior, 1977.



Attitudes toward the Dalton changed during the later decades of its existence as a movie house and some felt it was not appropriate for their children or even for themselves. The Pulaski was kept immaculately clean (see Figure 35) and was considered a more “respectable” place to be seen in town.

...there was the other theater, Dalton Theater, and I don't know what kind of movies they showed there. My mother wouldn't let me go there... I never was real sure – mean old boys or ...I don't know. Now my brother would go there to the movies but I wasn't allowed to so...I just, I wasn't allowed...

(49 year old, Caucasian female)

Never did go to the Dalton Theater much – it was, it never was very clean, and all, like Pulaski Theatre.

(72 year old, Caucasian female)



Figure 35. Pulaski Theatre hallway, circa 1943.



Even though the Pulaski was considered the premier theatre in town, the grandeur of the Dalton was evident in pictures of the theater.

...the Dalton Theater had the fanciest architecture. It was really something. Down inside both of them...and they're like big old dungeons down under there and the Dalton Theater had...marble walls, oh, it was so nice...it was beautiful. Absolutely beautiful.  
(63 year old, Caucasian female)

The architecture and interior of the Pulaski was understated in comparison to the Dalton. Many felt that the Dalton was the theater that should have been preserved in town, but unfortunately this was not to be. The building collapsed in mid June 1982 and the façade was rebuilt, but much of the interior remains buried, never to be seen again. Although the building façade still overlooks Peak Creek in downtown Pulaski, the interior is divided up into office spaces. Pulaski citizens awakened to learn of the Dalton's demise on June 12, 1982 and were saddened by the loss.

In discussing the differences in the architecture of the two theaters and the puzzling fact that the plainer theatre was the premier movie house in town, a participant summarizes:

It didn't have to do with the architecture because at that time people did not appreciate it. Now people are looking at our heritage. Back then they were looking at it in a utilitarian sort of way, and I don't think people appreciated the beauty and the grandeur of that Dalton Theater. I really don't. And it was, it would have been spectacular. I know I sat down and cried when I heard that the theater had collapsed. But it was the grandest. The Pulaski is simpler but it has it's own beauty. It has stateliness about it that is understated but if you look at the details... you can see the beauty and the grandeur. It was simpler and stately, but it was the premier theatre in town.

(63 year old, Caucasian female)

## Formal Production of the Theatre

When the Pulaski Theatre opened in 1937, it was operated in a very formal and precise manner. Ushers (see Figures 36, 37, 38, and 39) attired in suits and ties formally escorted people to seats, often difficult to find due to the number of people attending.



Figure 36. James Bolden, Usher, circa 1937.



Figure 37. Alvin Simmons, Usher, circa 1937.



Figure 38. Edward Turman, Doorman, circa 1937.



Figure 39. Oscar Seagle, Usher, circa 1937.

Well, Joe was the head usher and...I think there was six of us – were tied (made a motion of tying a tie) and neat. Shoes polished and all that – did inspection...I know that contrary to what happens today in the theaters, we were big time because the usher had to ...take you with a flashlight and seat you and that doesn't happen anymore, you know.  
(82 year old, Caucasian male)

...you would have two ushers, one on each side and when you would go in...they would have flashlights and they would take you and help you find a seat...because there would be so many people there.  
(72 year old, Caucasian female)

Ushers also were responsible for monitoring the theatre for behavior problems, such as making noise, throwing popcorn, or putting feet on the top of seats, all forbidden at the Pulaski Theatre. Patrons exhibiting disruptive behavior were asked to leave if they did not comply with the ushers' requests. The theatre manager was resolute in assuring patrons that they could enjoy the movie without undue distractions. Proper behavior was expected from the moment you bought your ticket (see Figure 40) to the time you exited the theatre.



Figure 40. Lady in ticket booth, circa 1948.

The formality of the theatre is reflected in participants' drawings of the theatre. Participant drawing No. 2 includes the ticket window, ticket collector, two ushers in the aisles, and the manager's office. Drawn primarily in plan view, it also shows the theatre marquee; the line waiting to enter the theatre; the concession stand with candies and popcorn machine; entrances; seating; stairway to balcony; balcony; stage and screen; restrooms; and exit doors (see Figure 41).

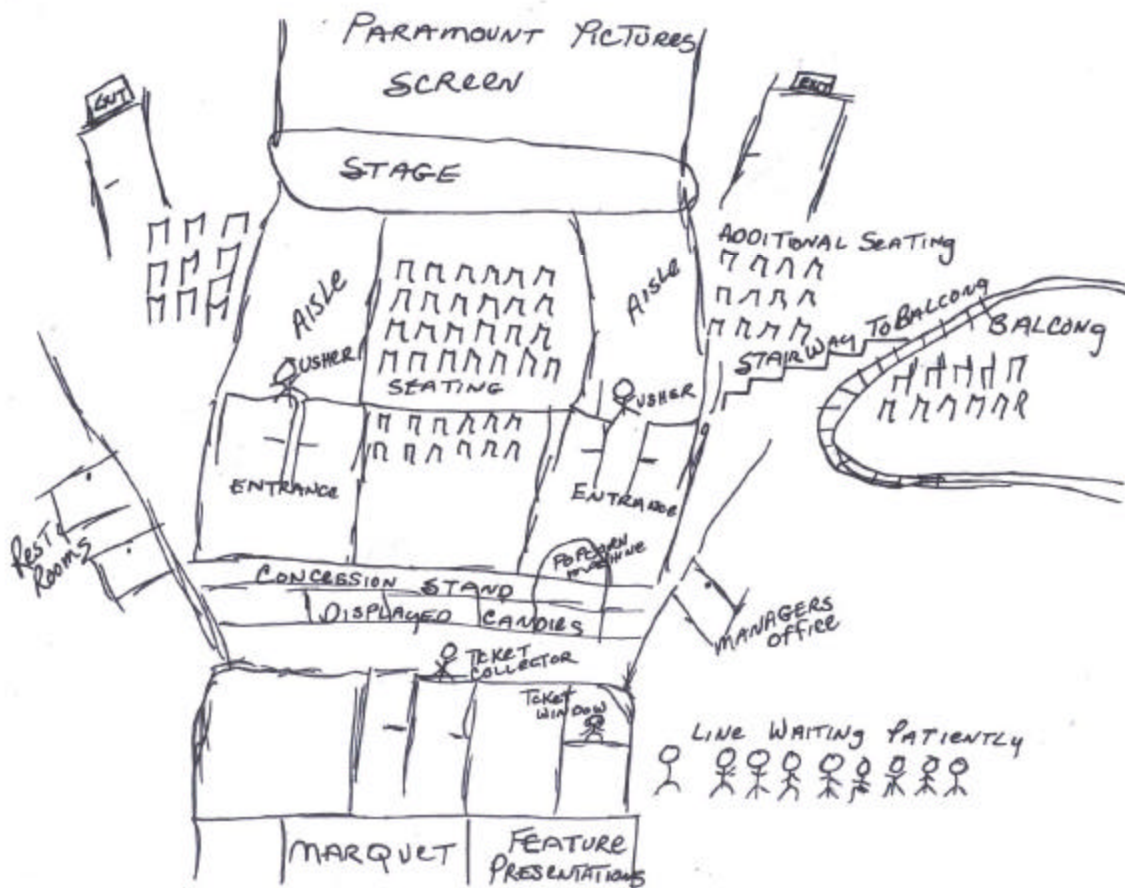


Figure 41. Participant drawing No. 2.

Another participant's drawing shows the entrance doors to the theatre and the concession stand with sodas and popcorn. Ropes direct patrons into the theatre and to an aisle way on the right (see Figure 42). The theatre was monitored for appropriate behavior, and this drawing showing doors and ropes regulating entrance into the theatre may reflect standards, such as entering and exiting with decorum.

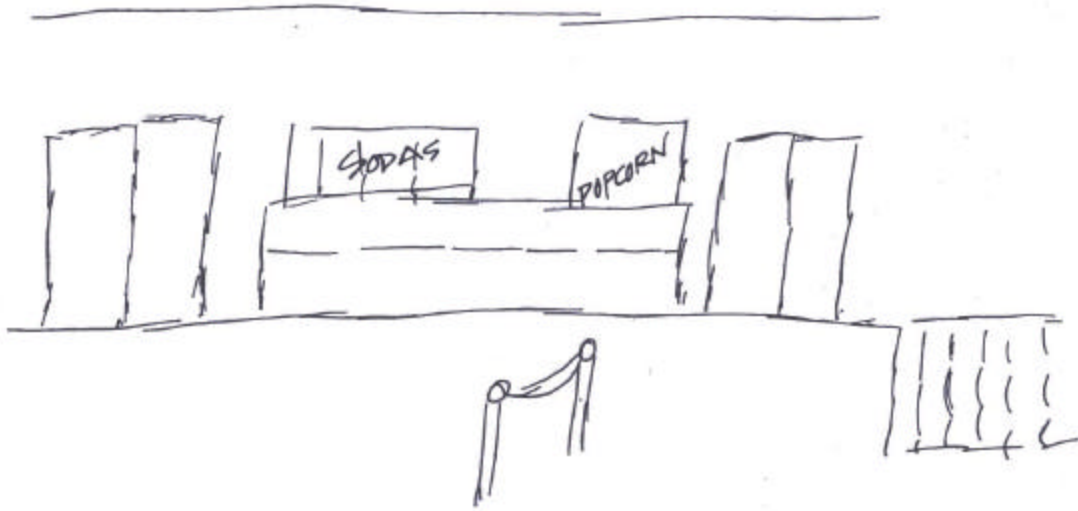


Figure 42. Participant drawing No. 3.

...it always was sort of a downer to me when the house lights would go up and Wendell Jones (the Manager) or someone would come down and give us the lecture on behavior. That happened monthly it seemed...that all of a sudden the house lights would come up and the picture would stop and Mr. Jones would come up and come onto the stage and give us the lecture about what a privilege it is to have the theatre and how he's not gonna tolerate the rather loud and boisterous behavior that was disturbing other patrons and all that sort of stuff...

(56 year old, Caucasian male)

...if people would start talking or anything... they (the ushers) would come down and make them behave, be quiet, and if they didn't, I mean they would put you out of the theatre, too... they would be asked to leave.

(72 year old, Caucasian female)

Once a friend and I were kicked out for roughhousing. Wendell Jones, the manager, made us leave and we could only come back to the theatre after coming back and apologizing to Mr. Jones, who was very gracious about it.

(57 year old, Caucasian male)

...I remember more about the Pulaski. I remember there for a while I wasn't going to the Pulaski. I would always go to the Dalton...some disagreement with the lady at the front...you know, the ticket lady... by me being big she wanted to charge me more, you know, cause she thought I was older than what I actually was...and somehow I smarted back off at her...I think I ran away from the window and...people say, "oh that lady down there lookin' for you"...so I'd always go to the Dalton... I guess over the years I finally just walked up there and bought a ticket...

(54 year old, African American male)

Participant drawing No. 4 shows the exterior of the theatre displaying the marquee, movie posters, entrance doors to the theatre, the ticket box window with the "ticket lady", and the street in front of the theatre. This participant recalled the incident with the ticket lady and this was a reminder of the formality and proper behavior expected at the theatre (see Figure 43).

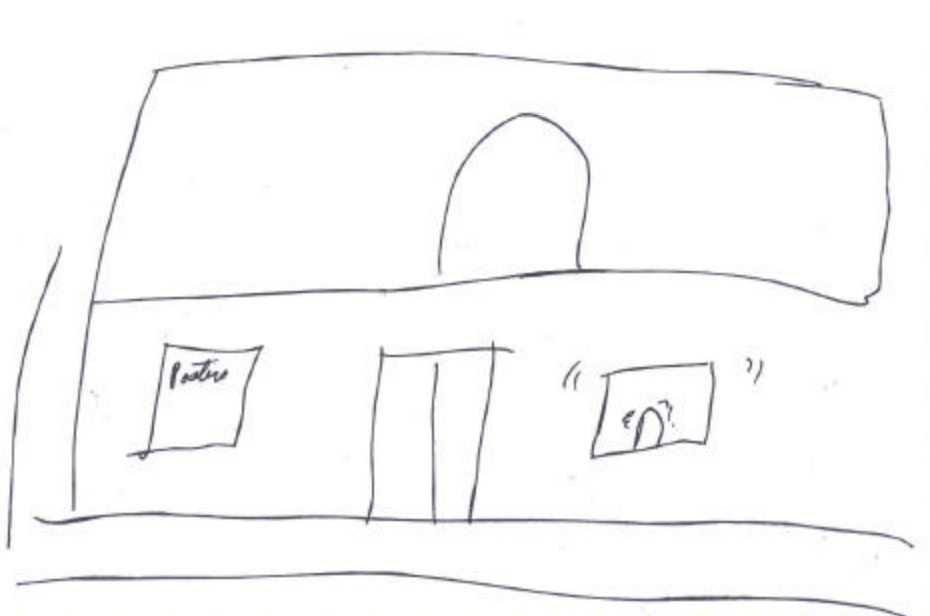


Figure 43. Participant drawing No. 4.

I'm sure there was spitballs that came out of the balcony...and probably popcorn that dropped down. I think it was mostly balcony behavior... it was just the place you went to to be rowdy...it was always sort of a tough bunch of White kids that went up to the balcony, or that was just the place you'd go to to misbehave...

(56 year old, Caucasian male)

...we had some kind of boys that...wore the black leather jackets and the jeans...I don't want to call them roughnecks...They wore ducktails, the flat tops, blue suede shoes, the white tee shirts, the Fonz look...I can remember because one boy we called Slick Virus...that was the era that, in 1950s, when Elvis Presley came into being, rock 'n' roll and I remember a lot of his movies and there was the...pink and black craze...I made a dress and it's pink and I stitched it in black with my mother's assistance and my first cousin had a pair of pink trousers with the black up, and he wore a black shirt with the pink stitching with the blue suede shoes and the long key chains. I'll never forget it... We weren't allowed to wear trousers, pants to school then. We wore the long skirts with about five or six crinolines starched stiff with bobby socks and ponytails...black and white saddle oxfords shoes, but I choose the penny loafers. I always liked the loafers the best.

(62 year old, Caucasian female)

Along with keeping patrons quiet, the ushers also monitored the amplification of the movie sound in the theatre. A buzzer on the sidewall was pushed once to request louder sound quality and twice to signify that the sound was too loud. This alerted the projectionist to adjust the volume.

You had a little button – today's thing is all automatic you know, but there was a button on the side wall that you buzzed...twice if the sound was too loud. If it wasn't... loud enough, you pushed the button one time. So Connor up in the projection room would adjust the volume.

(82 year old, Caucasian male)

Running the enormous projectors (see Figure 44) called for a great deal of knowledge and skill and keeping the equipment in prime operating condition was of utmost importance. Two projectors were required to show a movie. One projector



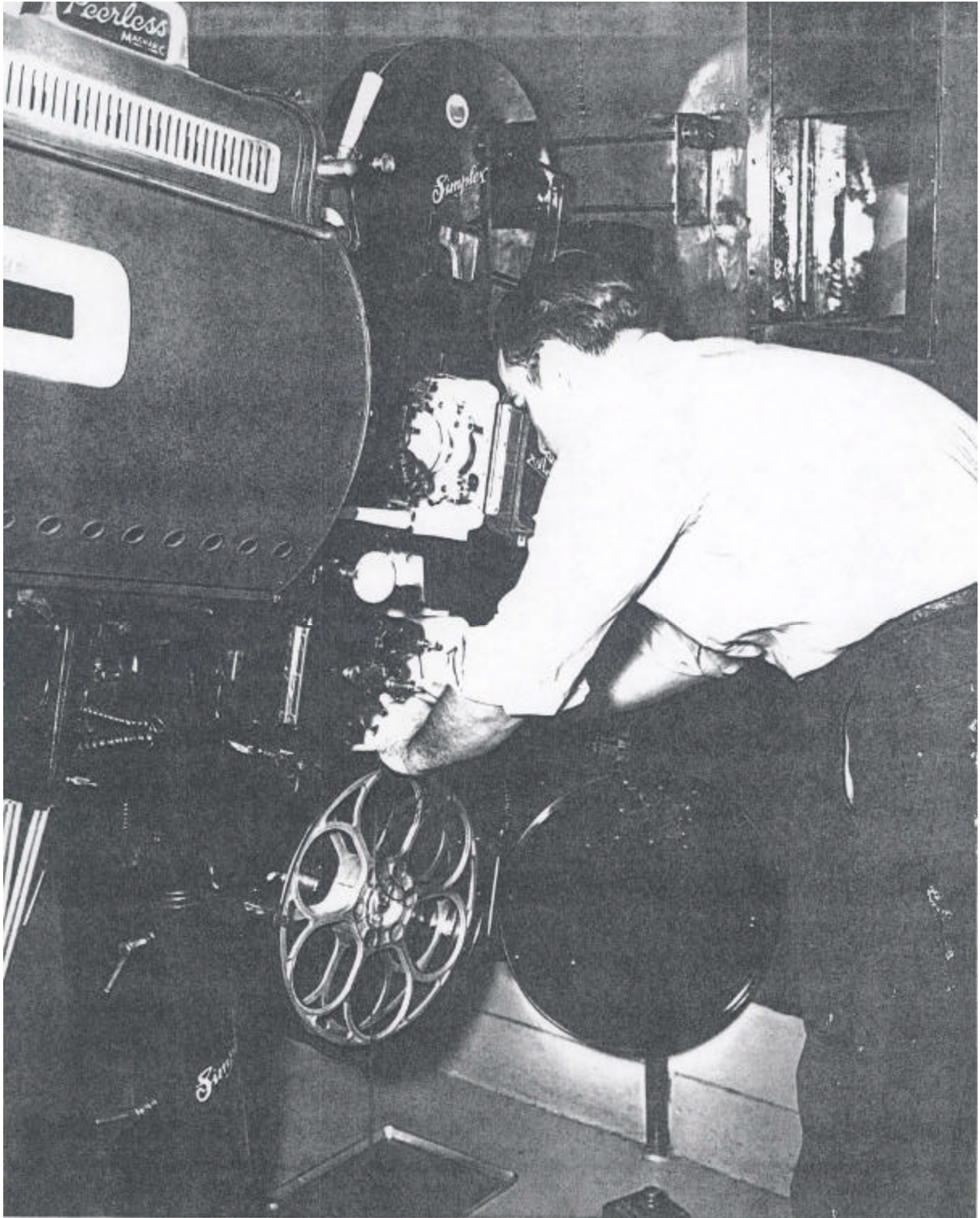


Figure 44. Gentleman operates large projection equipment, circa 1946.



started the movie and since multiple reels were necessary for most movies, another projector was in place to begin immediately upon completion of the first reel. Everything worked like clockwork. The projection room could be a hot place. The first film was cellulose and as it ran through the projector it heated up and there was always the danger of it catching on fire so it needed to be monitored vigilantly. Sometimes film would break and had to be quickly spliced back together as restless theatre patrons waited. Projectionists had to be knowledgeable about the equipment and adept at slicing film back together as well as maintaining and servicing the equipment.

One projectionist that spent some 50 years of his life working for the Pulaski Theatre Corporation was Mr. Wilmer Ryan. Beginning work as an usher when the theatre opened in 1937, he later learned to run and maintain the huge projection equipment. Mr. Ryan could take the projection equipment down to its smallest part and reassemble it. When film broke during a movie, which it often did, he could quickly splice it back together keeping the audience appeased. Due to his skill he was in demand at the Dalton Theater as well as the Pulaski. He taught many people to work the projection equipment over the years and was instrumental in producing the quality showmanship produced at the Pulaski Theatre over much of its tenure.

Special displays for the theatre, such as the large lady adorning the top of the marquee for the movie, "The Petty Girl" (see Figure 45) were made by Mr. Ryan. The lady was constructed on a '24 sheet' display, which was as large as the billboard display beside the Hotel Pulaski in town (see Figure 46). It took three men to transport the lovely lady to the theatre, and Mr. Ryan received quite a bit of ribbing from local townspeople and friends as he made his way through the streets of Pulaski to the theatre.



Figure 45. “The Petty Girl” cut-out, circa 1950.



Figure 46. Billboard for theatre on side of Hotel Pulaski, circa 1938.

Mr. Ryan was remembered by a participant that worked at the theatre:

Mr. Ryan taught me, yes. He was a master at those machines...he said “if the machines are down, you’re out of business”...and that was his attitude. He protected them like babies. It was ridiculous how many times we had to oil ‘em and clean ‘em...I trained with him...when I was running it, a movie would be four or five reels, and you’d change from one machine to the other...Do the changeovers and all, and so were attendance up there the whole time a movie was running.

Presenting a movie at that time was taken very seriously and it was a real production orchestrated in a very specific manner. The opening of the curtains and the dimming of the lights in the precise way that it was accomplished was a matter of pride for the manager of the theatre and the people working there, and it signaled the patrons to settle back into their seats and enjoy the show. People attending the movies anticipated this lead-in and it became an integral part of the movie going experience.

A participant that worked at the theatre described the opening of the show:

...we took pride in presenting a show...we had a procedure...if you've been in the projection booth, all those big levers (see Figure 47) on the left were to bring the lights down, those were dimmer switches. And so we would go in and all the dimmer switches would be up, the curtain would be closed. Everything would be off. First thing we'd do...we'd fire up the lights on the projector. And then we'd start the projector right as soon as you'd hear the background music and then drop the lights so that it was actually shining onto the curtains. O.K. Then we'd go over and drop the lights...two at a time. We'd bring them from the back all the way to the front. The last set of lights to go out was across the footlights. And then as soon as those dimmed you reached up and flip the switch that would start the curtains opening and then the show was on. By the time you did that you were starting the movie credits or the cartoons or whatever...there was a pride in how it was presented. It was neat. And it showed. And I notice it now...that they don't do that at all in any theater. And that was Willie (Mr. Ryan)...and Neighborhood Theaters. It was a different era.



Figure 47. Light switches in projection booth, 2003.

### Variety of Shows

A variety of shows were presented in the Pulaski Theatre including movies, children's matinees, 3-D movies, weekly serials, newsreels, a weekly children's radio hour, the "Dottie Doolittle Story Hour" (see Figure 48) and other events such as local beauty pageants (see Figure 49) and fashion shows (see Figure 29). An advertisement in *The Southwest Times* on Sunday, April 3, 1949 featuring the Walt Disney movie "So

Dear to my Heart” stated that the Dottie Doolittle Story Hour would be broadcast over station WPUV direct from the stage of the Pulaski Theatre at 7:15 PM (see Figure 50).



Figure 48. Dottie Doolittle Story Hour, circa, 1950.



Figure 49. 1961 Miss Southwest Times Cover Girl Contest.

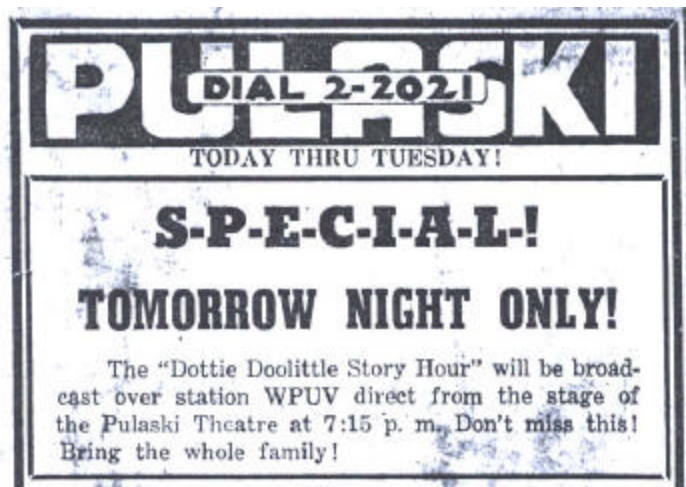


Figure 50. Advertisement for Dottie Doolittle Story Hour, April 3, 1949. Top portion shown enlarged on right.

The children’s matinees (see Figure 51) were shown weekly during the late 1950s and ‘60s and were free for school age children during the summer months. Tickets were sponsored by various local merchants and were distributed through their stores. This was



a real treat for the children of Pulaski filling the 650-seat theatre to capacity (see Figure 52).

# Pulaski Theatre

*Pulaski, Virginia*

## Saturday Morning Kiddie Shows

BOXOFFICE OPENS 9:30 A. M. — SHOW BEGINS 10:00 A. M.

DOOR PRIZE EVERY WEEK  
**HUCKLE-BERRY  
 HOUND-DOG  
 COLOR FORM  
 Drawing Set!**  
 Play The New Game . . .  
**"BOOBY-TRAP"**  
 Loads of Fun!

★  
**Admission Price:**  
**25c**  
 Children and Adults

GRAND PRIZE!  
 TO BE GIVEN AWAY  
 On Sat., April 29th  
 A Boys or Girls  
**BICYCLE!**  
 BE HERE  
 EVERY WEEK!

EXTRA TREAT!  
 Comedy and  
 Color Cartoon

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Saturday, Feb. 11</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">JACK H. HARRIS' production of  <b>DINOSAURUS!</b>  <small>CINEMA SCOPE · COLOR by DeLuxe</small></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Saturday, March 11</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>"a Dogs        Best        Friend"</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Saturday, April 8</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE LOST        WORLD</b>  <small>IN 3-DIMENSIONAL        CINEMA SCOPE</small></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Saturday, Feb. 18</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>A DOG OF        FANDERS</b>  <small>CINEMA SCOPE        COLOR BY DE LUXE</small></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Saturday, March 18</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">STEVE REEVES in  <b>GOLIATH        AND THE BARBARIANS</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Saturday, April 15</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>"Yellowstone        Kelly"</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Saturday, Feb. 25</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE BOY        AND THE        PIRATES</b>  <small>EASTMAN COLOR</small></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Saturday, March 25</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE MUMMY</b>  <small>ALL NEW! IN TERRIFIC        TECHNICOLOR</small></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Saturday, April 22</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>ATTACK        OF THE PUPPET        PEOPLE</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Saturday, March 4</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">James STEWART        Shelley WINTERS        Dan DURYEA        Stephen McNALLY  <b>WINCHESTER</b>  <small>73</small></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Saturday, April 1</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>FOR THE        LOVE OF        MIKE</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Saturday, April 29</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE 7<sup>th</sup>        VOYAGE        OF        SINBAD</b>  <small>DYNAMAGON        Technicolor        A WORKING        PRODUCTION        A COLUMBIA PICTURE</small></p>

**Notice To All Parents:**  
 Take This Opportunity To Do Your Shopping at Your Favorite Store In  
**DOWNTOWN PULASKI, VIRGINIA**

Figure 51. Flyer from scrapbook of Wendell Jones, circa 1960.

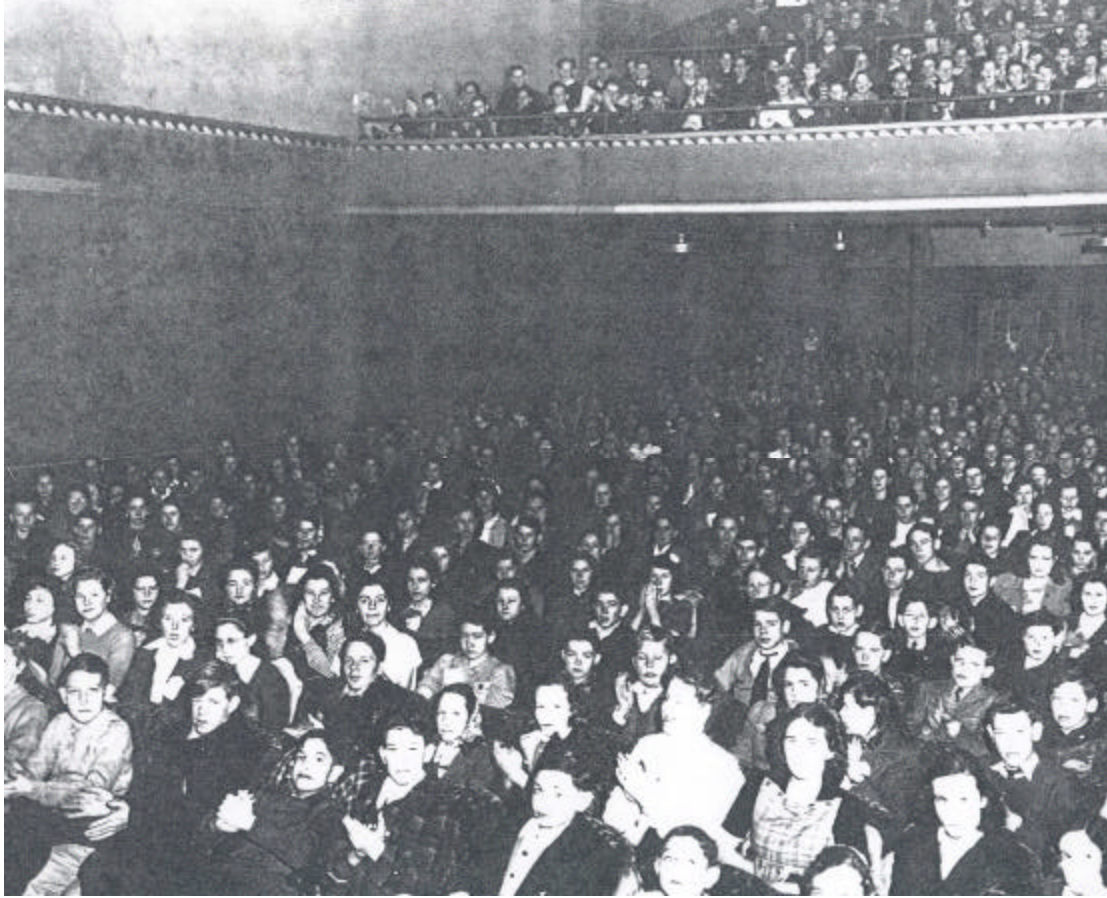


Figure 52. Children's Easter show, circa 1950.

At the time when I was growing up...probably like the age of ten or twelve years old, the neighborhood businesses would have a summer movie program that they sponsored. Children were able to attend the theatre free weekly, once a week for...the movies that would be appropriate for young people...there were just loads of boys and girls that would come in and I know that my father would always receive the tickets from the Piggly Wiggly Store that was...Daniels was the owner...I lived in what's considered North Pulaski just beyond Randolph Avenue and the neighborhood children would walk from home to town...to attend movies in the summer.

(53 year old, African American female)

I remember attending the theatre as a child. I lived in town and once a week the neighborhood children would walk down to the theatre in groups, from about the age of ten. We had a booklet with tickets...for a morning show, around 10 or 11 AM every week. These were probably given out in school. The children filled the theatre. The theatre held 650 people.

(57 year old, Caucasian male)

A short serial was often featured at the theatre and provided movie goers the incentive to come back week after week to see what happened next, much like our continuing dramas, reality shows, quiz shows, and soap operas on television today.

Each Saturday they had a serial that continued from one Saturday to the next and it was usually a western type serial...with the Lone Ranger or that type and it was really interesting – and that kind of kept you coming back cause you wanted to know what was happening.

(62 year old, Caucasian female)

Pulaski Theatre had serials...like Superman...and Tarzan.

(70 year old, Caucasian female)

Three-dimensional movies of the '50s provided a new and exciting venue for moviegoers ranging from comedies such as “The Three Stooges” to horror films such as “The House of Wax”.

...I'm trying to remember the year that the three-dimensional came into effect and I remember it was “The Three Stooges” and they would throw pies and it was like it was coming out at you and you'd automatically duck knowing it wasn't gonna hit you...I want to say that might have been in the early '60s or maybe even before that ...I took them off (3-D glasses), if it's a scary movie so I couldn't see the spiders coming at me.

(62 year old, Caucasian female)

...the earliest memory I have is going to a 3-D movie...and I could not have been more than four or five years old...which meant that I was going with a cousin who probably had a date and she was responsible for babysitting me and so, as a function of childcare I got drug along to this movie and it was Vincent Price and The House of Wax... it was pretty scary movie and ...maybe there was a telekinesis or something going on. I couldn't visually get the 3-D exactly and I was fumbling around with the glasses...but I do remember very vividly Vincent Price and the mummy in “The House of Wax” and the...screaming that...went on during this movie...

(56 year old, Caucasian male)



Newsreels were a big part of the movie going experience, providing news in a visual format that was not readily available during the pre-television era. It was especially enlightening during the war years to keep abreast of the activities of soldiers, enabling residents of Pulaski to feel more in touch with their local young men who were away at war, as well as the many others fighting for freedom on their behalf. The theatre supported the war effort by building displays in the lobby and windows of the theatre and selling war bonds. While Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland entertained in “Girl Crazy” (1943), the theatre supported the war effort by auctioning off war bonds and prominently displaying a mock Hitler’s casket (see Figures 53 and 54).



Figure 53. Mock Hitler’s casket displayed outside theatre, circa 1943.



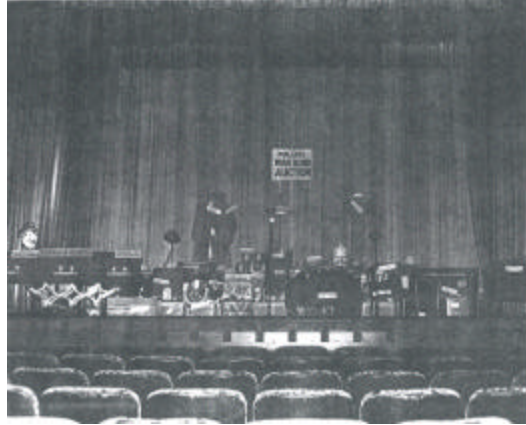


Figure 54. War bond auction, circa 1943.

They always had a newsreel...and I can remember...during the war...we used to have the troop trains come through here...and then you would go to the movie and the newsreels, you would see all these troop trains going through all the different towns and the soldiers...a ten or fifteen minute newsreels of...everything that was going on in the world and that was just as exciting to you because we didn't have time to read the paper...

(72 year old, Caucasian female)

...I can remember...walking down the street and joining friends, to see the Saturday afternoon matinees, and it was really, it was terribly entertaining, but also educational, cause you got to see a newsreel and sort of what all was going on. I can remember still this day the issues of Cyprus were a biggie on the newsreels. And the division of Cyprus between the Greeks and the Turks and I can hear it even how in my mind's eye - Archbishop Makarios who came to Cyprus to bring peace to represent the Greek influence and how the Turks didn't like that...

(56 year old, Caucasian male)

The Pulaski Theatre was also rented out for various special occasions such as minstrel shows, beauty contests, and a weekly Children's Radio Hour.

...I can remember also there were times that the movie theatre's stage as such would be rented out...I don't know exactly how this all transpired but there was a lady by the name of Stella Grubb who is now deceased and she would have what you would call minstrel shows and she was the sponsor of several of those and I can remember attending some of those in person.

(53 year old, African American female)

## Seating Arrangements/Balcony

Memories of the theatre often revolved around seats and whom you were sitting next to. Some people sat downstairs only, some preferred to sit in the balcony and some were required to sit in the balcony. People had their favorite areas to sit and favored seats, which needed to be guarded when the theatre was especially busy.

...when I was a teenager, we used to go up and sit in the balcony, but my favorite was on the end seat in the middle of the theatre half way back... always sat on the end and people would come in sometimes and they'd say "Would you mind scooting over?" and I'd say "No I got here first, this is my seat, you climb over"...but people would want you to get you a prime seat and then they'd come in later and would you mind moving. I'd say, "You go somewhere else".

(63 year old, Caucasian female)

...my biggest memories have to do with seats and seating next to people... so here you are in the seats and, you're with you know, so and so and so and so, and the stages of my being in the theatre have a tendency to revolve around who I'm sitting with ...I remember I never sat in the balcony – that I recall. I always sat down and usually it was sort of in the middle of the area...middle section, middle...I didn't go to the sides although I knew there were people that did. But I was sort of, you know, sort of more in the middle. I wasn't there for clandestine activities much.

(56 year old, Caucasian male)

People sitting in seats at the theatre were represented in participants' drawings. Drawing No. 5 showed many patrons seated in the theatre with the stage, screen and curtains prominently placed in an elevated position. The aisle and exit door are shown (see Figure 55).



Figure 55. Participant drawing No. 5.

During the days of segregation, African Americans were restricted to the balcony and even had a separate entrance door (see Figure 56) and staircase up to the balcony. Several participants expressed that the African Americans had “the best seats in the house.” Although they were aware that both races attended the theatre, some African American participants expressed mystification about where Caucasian people sat, and some Caucasian people wondered how African Americans got into the theatre because they were not standing in line with them. When the Pulaski Theatre opened, there was a dedicated entrance for African American patrons with a little booth inside, similar to a hatcheck stand. They entered on the west, alley side of the theatre. They could literally get a ticket, go upstairs, and never go into the area where Caucasians were, so there was no mixing of the races at the theatre during the early years of the theatre. A sign stating “Colored Only” with an arrow directing African Americans to the back stairwell still survives to this day (Figure 57). The entrance for African Americans was changed to the

front entrance during the later years of segregation, but they were routed down the hallway by the concession stand and up the back stairway.

Not only did they have to sit in the balcony, African Americans were required to sit in the back of the balcony. The balcony was divided into two sections, a front and back section, with a low partition between the two sections. African Americans sat in the far back section of the balcony. Seats in the back section of the balcony were wood frame, not upholstered, as they were downstairs. So sitting in a hard wooden seat in the very back of the balcony was a very different experience from sitting in an upholstered seat of your choosing.



Figure 56. Side entrance door originally for African American patrons, 2003.



Figure 57. Sign directing African Americans to balcony during days of segregation, 2003.

Some African Americans were resentful about being relegated to the balcony while others just accepted it as “the law of the land”. When asked how this made them feel,

African American participants had various responses:

...it was always a mystery to me what was down there, you know, why we couldn't sit down there, but you had to go upstairs...

(56 year old, African American male)

...definitely as a child when we were going to the summer vacation movies, the children were, Black children were required to sit upstairs.

(53 year old, African American female)

Of course during the time I was attending, my earlier times, it was before integration...Well you know, that was a standard thing...what could you do? You know, and it's the way it's been with segregation and being, being not invited into America but bought into America. What can you do...you go along with it or either you go along with it or you stay at home...

(54 year old, African American male)

The ushers patrolled the entire theatre including the balcony and were very strict regarding behavior, but some African American patrons in the balcony felt that they were targeted.

...they kept an attendant standing there, you know, even when the movie started to make sure we didn't make any noise...it was his job with his flashlight [to] come by ever so often to see what we were doing. And we never saw the light down in the White section of the balcony... we was just sittin', watchin' the movie. If you clapped too loud or got too excited...it just wasn't kosher to do that...

(56 year old, African American male)

After integration many African Americans continued to sit in the balcony. They had sat there for many years and felt at home there. Some felt ill at ease sitting downstairs and felt as if the Caucasian patrons did not welcome their company.

...when civil rights legislation was passed, we got to go downstairs to sit...There's a lot of people didn't like that...having to sit, you know, integrated...No, they didn't like that at all!...they wouldn't sit beside you...remember the Clingons on Star Trek?...well, that's what you felt like. You felt like an alien force had landed...but you know, things have gotten better...I went to Pulaski High in '61 and that's where I met Johnny White, guys of that caliber...they were good folk...so, trying to make things different, but not only the theatre but the high school.

(56 year old, African American male)

...but even I think after it changed, a lot of 'em still go upstairs, you know. We were used to going upstairs and it was away from everybody too...

(54 year old, African American male)

And I can't go back to a date when that changed, but I, personally, I felt like it was a fairly good view, so when I was dating, that's where we sat as well. So I can't say that we were not allowed to sit downstairs during the '60s, but late '60s anyway – probably that changed during that time.

(53 year old, African American female)

Some Caucasian patrons enjoyed the balcony and wished to sit there. After integration the balcony would be closed if there were not enough people to fill the theatre and many people missed being able to sit up there.

I love to sit in the balcony, cause we could sit up there and hang our feet over which... the ushers wouldn't let you do, but we did it...I can

remember then whenever they closed off the balcony because people didn't start coming to movies like they did, so they didn't need the balcony...  
(72 year old, Caucasian female)

Although no major racial incidents occurred during the segregated portion of the history of the theatre, it was an enormously painful period for many African American residents of Pulaski and was acknowledged as such by Caucasians as well. Changes were made with integration, but Pulaski, as in many small towns, has changed slowly.

...the irony of it is, the best seats in the house were upstairs...so that's not salve to the pain of it all, but there is a little bit of irony there in terms of the...best seats are upstairs.  
(56 year old, Caucasian male)

I guess I didn't come up during the time when it was such a bad period of time, however, I guess I didn't really pay a lot of attention. I can remember even the train station being a situation where you had the side for the Blacks only and the side for the Whites only, but I guess I was sheltered, perhaps by my parents a lot and so I wasn't in that setting a lot.  
(53 year old, African American female)

It was fine, it was ok...it was better than it was downstairs...it was better...but we, you know, we enjoyed Pulaski and the theatre and everything that went on because that was the law of the land. We didn't know any different...that's the way it was...that's like, Bruce Hornsby, you familiar with him?...”that's just the way it was...some things never change”...it went good and all the folk, we just, you know, you just went on and then things change.

(56 year old, African American male)

### Dating

The Pulaski Theatre was the primary spot in town for dating or for seeing and interacting with members of the opposite sex during the pre-dating years. There really were not a lot of options for dating in Pulaski and the theatre was considered “the place” to date in town. Many of these dates led to life-long friendships and more.

I had my first kiss in the theatre around the age of 12...We were sitting downstairs in the middle of the theatre and we are still close friends to this day. Many of my Seventh Street neighborhood kids still live in Pulaski and the majority...are still married, and have done things together all their lives. My wife went to school with us and many are still close friends...I dated my wife at the theatre...It was "the place to go" on dates in Pulaski.

(57 year old, Caucasian male)

I did have my first date going to the movie. I guess you'd call it a date... my father took me and we picked the boy up and we went to the movie and everything...there was a drug store right beside of it, Martin's Pharmacy, and those people would always let...the kids come in after the movie, use the telephone, you know, call Daddy, come pick me up. The movie's over.

(49 year old, Caucasian female)

...I did attend movies there when I was dating my present husband and so that would have been in the '60s. We started dating I think in '68 and so through '68 until about '72 we attended the movies there...

(53 year old, African American female)

Well, of course little boys and girls used to come to the theatre and meet and go in and hold hands...before you know they were old enough to date... you thought that you had really been on a big date or something when you got to go to the theatre and meet your boy friend and sit there...

(72 year old, Caucasian female)

People met their future spouses in the theatre. One participant tells of meeting his wife while working at the theatre. Sharon was a couple of years younger than Bob and only in the sixth or seventh grade when they met. She was not allowed to date and was very upset when her family moved away from the area to North Carolina. Sharon returned every summer to stay with her aunt and visited the theatre almost daily to continue her friendship with Bob. Bob fondly remembers those early years:

Well, I was working as an usher and this really cute little ole girl from Dublin started coming to the theatre...Caught my eye. And seemed like she came right frequently...especially after I'd give her tickets and not tear the tickets and she could use them over and over...



tickets were about a quarter a pop...I was probably ninth or tenth grade tops...We never did date until high school...

Sharon went to the theatre primarily to see Bob. She stated:

In the summer when I came up here...He would just be working there. And my cousin and I...she's a couple of years younger than I, so I kept her in the summer. And we would go...he would let me in and then he'd come and talk to me, you know. We'd stand around and talk and everything and...really, that's about all we did. We just went to the movies and then...I went to high school in North Carolina...and my cousin went to school with Bobby, and she told Bobby that I was old enough to date...

### Sense of Place and Social Importance

The theatre building was transformed over time, from a vaudeville house to a dry goods store to a movie house. As parts of the façade were changed or fell away, the core of the building remained and memories associated with it across time were significant in creating the sense of place associated with this compelling structure in the middle of Main Street. Whether sitting in the balcony or downstairs, standing in line at the box office for tickets, or working in the theatre, participants shared memories of their experience of the theatre and the meaning of the theatre to the town. The theatre was much more than just a building and more than just a space. Pulaski Theatre was indeed remembered as a place, a particular setting that brought excitement and stimulation to children and adults for many years. Participants felt “at home” in the theatre, having favored sections of the theatre where they routinely sat. Many people attended movies every time the marquee changed.

The theatre seemed to represent a spirit of place, as well, for many residents. School children attending the weekly matinees in the summer and African Americans required to sit in the back of the balcony developed a special identity with their cohorts

and with that particular space within the theatre. Even after segregation, many African Americans continued to sit in the balcony where they had sat for many years and felt at home. The unique characteristics of these spaces were dependent on the people that frequented them rather than the architecture of the building. The sense of place and spirit of place was one of personal relationships and emotional attachments rather than of bricks and stone. The theatre was a place where wooden seats were familiar and preferred because they were representative of a particular time and place and a particular group of people. Memories of the theatre were stories of groups or individuals and their interactions in the space. The building represented these individuals and what they brought to this place and time. It represented a cultural place attachment where “place is also its people” (Armour, 1993, p. 70).

The lives of the people of Pulaski were entwined through everyday patterns such as traveling into town for business, shopping or entertainment. Whether traveling into town by car or on foot, there was a level of familiarity with their surroundings and with neighbors and businesspeople that they interacted with on a regular basis. The relationships built with people, shared values, and historical experiences culminated in this particular place, this community, to link people throughout time. Over the years these interactions lent a level of orderliness, reinforcing their sense of place. The Pulaski Theatre played a large part in these interactions with friends and neighbors and was significant in reflecting a sense of place in the community.

### Architectural Features

Architectural features and furnishings of the theatre that were most memorable to participants included the vastness of the theatre, the plush seats (depending on where you

sat), the curtains, and the lights. People had difficulty remembering the specifics of the furnishings and architectural details of the theatre and often used terms, such as “If I remember”, “I think”, “I believe it was”, and “If I’m not mistaken”. Matching colors and color memory is difficult without actual fabric and paint samples, but the colors were most often remembered as red, dark red, burgundy, maroon, deep red or some variation. Although the Pulaski Theatre is rather plain compared to grand movie palaces of its day, it was considered very elegant and extravagant for the small town of Pulaski. The large, open scale of the theatre is remembered.

About the only thing of course back then – anything new – it was real extravagant as I recall – you know, it was like you were walking into the Radio City...for those days...the plush backdrops and everything...  
(82 year old, Caucasian male)

It was pretty big inside – to us it was big. Yeah, to us it was big...  
(43 year old, African American female)

The major thing that I remember about the interior space of the theatre is the bigness and openness, the spaciousness of the theatre.  
(57 year old, Caucasian male)

The seats downstairs were remembered as upholstered in a plush burgundy or maroon velvet-like fabric, but the seats upstairs in the back of the balcony were wood frame.

Well, the seating was the spring seats...in burgundy material. I want to say it’s a velvet type material... burgundy mingled carpet going down the aisles...I want to say the walls were like a cream colored, that went with the burgundy...  
(62 year old, Caucasian female)

...and as the seats were very comfortable, you know...See the seats were deep and plush and comfortable. You could just sit back and relax.  
(63 year old, Caucasian female)

...I remember the seats were wood...They wasn’t the cushion seat...  
(43 year old, African American female)

The screen and curtains were a prominent part of the theatre with the formal production of the opening of the curtains at the beginning of the movie signaling the start of the show.

...the whole backend, I mean up where the screen was...it was something else. It was called the big screen too, because it was a larger screen than the Dalton building had...and curtains, drapes, I would call them rather, as I recall a royal, royal red...it's a maroon, not a maroon, it's a dark red...  
(82 year old, Caucasian male)

...remember those big old wine colored curtains (see Figure 58) that were in there. I remember they used to be so heavy and they looked so lush to a small person, and I remember thinking, gosh if those things fell...it'd smother somebody.

(63 year old, Caucasian female)

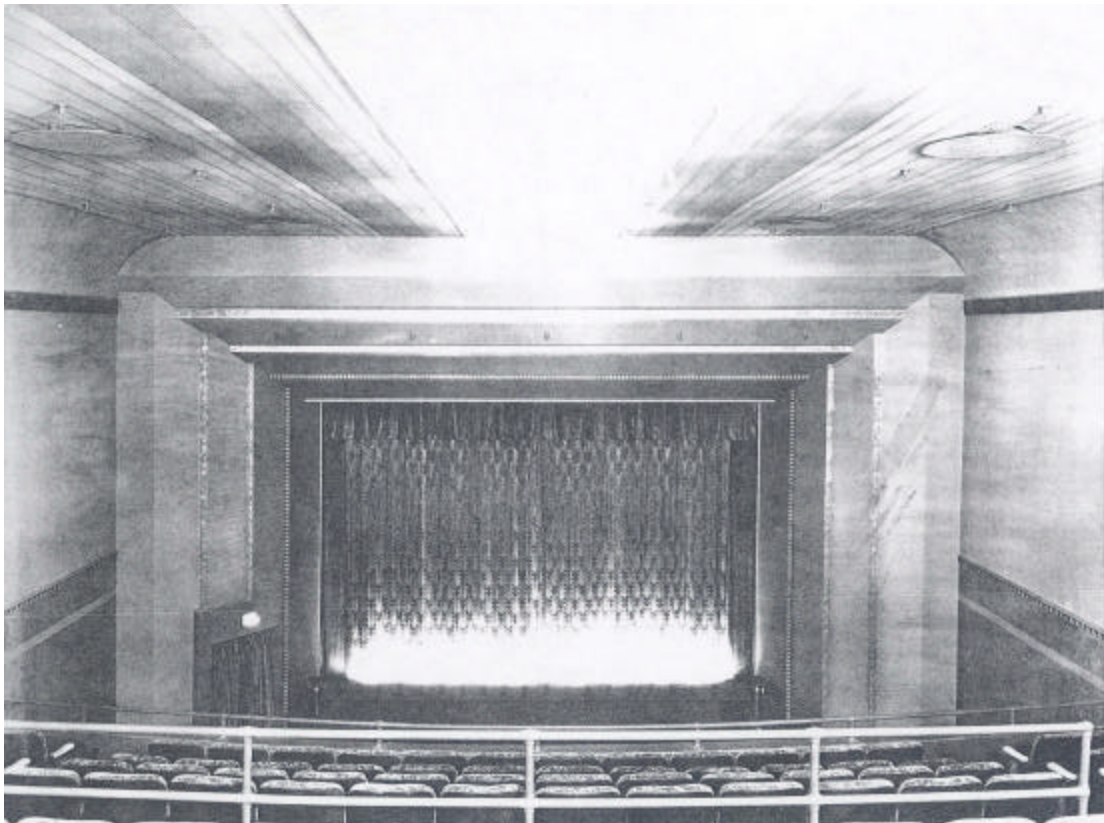


Figure 58. Draperies at stage front, view from balcony. Photograph by David C. Kent, 1937. Reprinted with permission.

If I'm not mistaken, I think...they used to have the curtain and just before the movie...they would open up the curtains. And I think the curtains were red, a deep red...

(43 year old, African American female)

The stage and draperies are shown in two of the participants' drawings. Drawing No. 6 emphasizes the screen with an elaborate drapery surround. Patrons are shown seated in their seats looking intently toward the screen. Shading the stage curtains more darkly than the stage, may represent the dark burgundy or wine colored draperies in the theatre (see Figure 59).

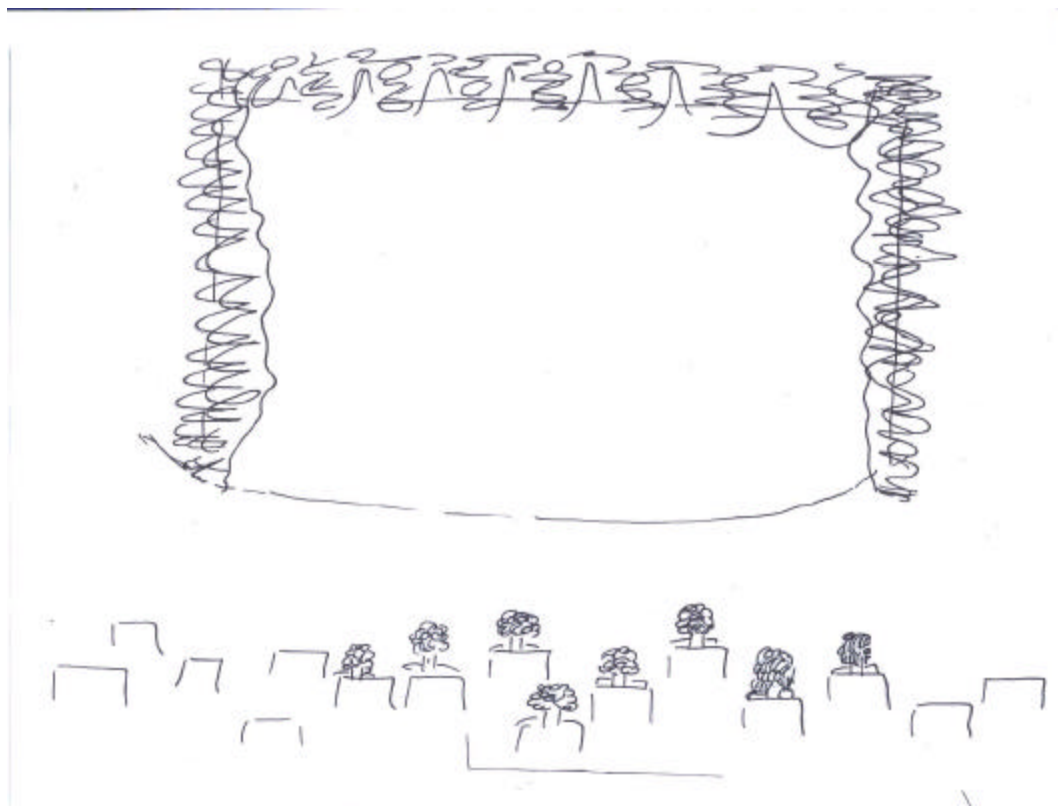


Figure 59. Participant drawing No. 6.

Lighting represented a significant memory including the overhead lights, runway lights trailing down the aisles, the flashlights the ushers used to police the theatre, and the gradual dimming and brightening of lights before and after the movies.

Also I remember the special lighting on the ceiling. The lights would be turned down at the beginning of the movie and brought back up at the end. The lights were on ten or fifteen switches so that they would gradually fade down and brighten back up as the lights were switched on or off. Once while managing the theatre, I had to replace the lights in the ceiling and it was a scary proposition. There must have been about 100 lights and it was necessary to crawl along the top of the ceiling and replace each bulb (see Figures 24 and 60). I would never want to do that again!

(57 year old, Caucasian male)

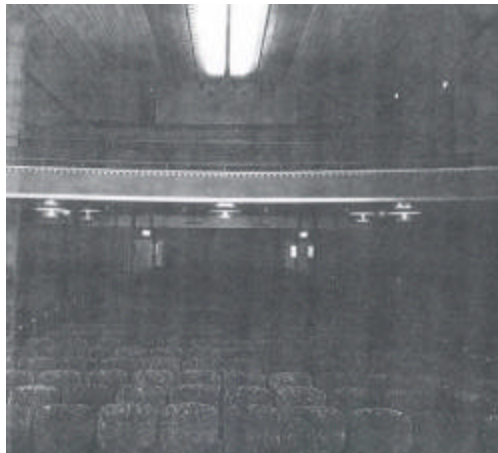


Figure 60. Lights on ceiling, view from stage area toward balcony. Photograph by David C. Kent, 1937. Reprinted with permission.

There was lighting down...runway...little tiny lights...

(82 year old, Caucasian male)

And then the lights that they had on the sides, the interior lights – they were beautiful...it was kind of an indirect lighting...

(72 year old, Caucasian female)

And you can see the booth where the cameras were coming out...you could see the lights and stuff where the camera, where the picture was coming through – that was pretty neat.

(43 year old, Caucasian female)



The experience of going to the movies was described as a sensual experience. Literally all of the senses were involved with the visual and sound coming from the screen, the feel of the plush seats and the smell and taste of popcorn and soft drinks. The lights dimmed as the movie began, changing the ambience, color, and texture of the space and signaling you to sit back and enjoy the show.

...my experience visually, the lights coming on in the theatre...It's sort of like the deck of the star-ship Enterprise, because at the time there was nothing comparable to it...You would go in and the lights would be down and when they came up, these circular lights lit and all of a sudden, the whole texture of the place changed...it's a sensual experience when the newsreel came on and the lights dimmed...you had this feeling of enclosure, or enrapture...there was always the visual on the stage... and I can remember the aisles and the usher who would walk down the aisle with the flashlight in hand...and also there would be little seat lights all along here, so that added to sort of the visual experience of the...lights up above that I remember to be circular, and then there was sort of a lighting panel down the middle that would light up, and then there were side lights over here on the side of the wall...but, it was an experience of sound and light and...the sound was of course coming from everywhere, and then you'd see the visual up on the stage. Now of course that was accompanied by what was usually in your hand, which was a Coke or popcorn or something like that. But here you were sitting armed for battle...that's sort of my visual sense of it all.

(56 year old, Caucasian male)

Light is reflected in several of the participants' drawings. Participant drawing No. 7 emphasized the lighting within the theatre. The aisles are shown with lights leading down the center of the theatre and the large ceiling lights are prominently displayed. The stage is shown. Patrons are shown at their seats holding popcorn and sodas. Four large round ceiling fixtures are prominently displayed with rays extending from the circular lights. Light rays also project along the side aisles as someone jauntily travels up the aisle to a seat (see Figure 61).

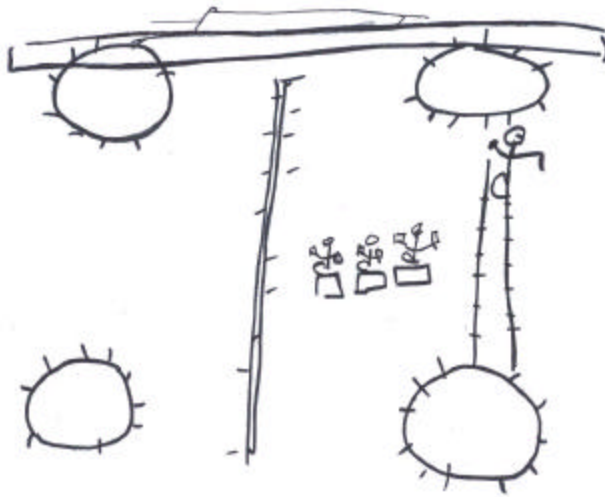


Figure 61. Participant drawing No. 7.

The lounge (see Figure 62) on the mezzanine was a resting place for patrons between shows or when waiting for friends. It was well furnished with upholstered sofa and chairs, a large-scale leaf print wall covering and patterned carpeting, a floor lamp, table lamps, plants, and stars encircling the cornice of the room.

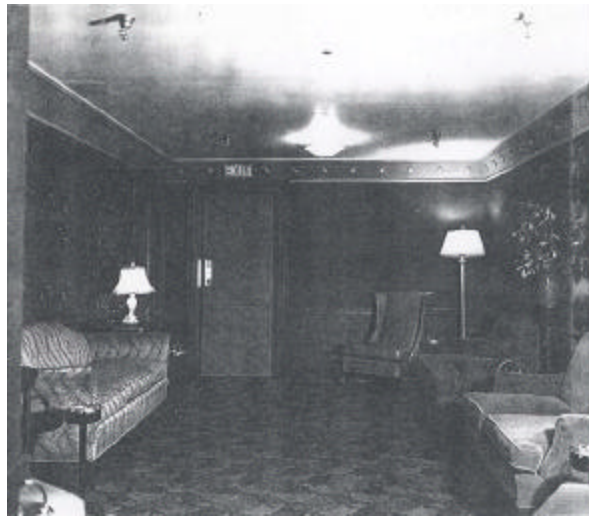


Figure 62. Lounge area on mezzanine. Photograph by David C. Kent, 1937. Reprinted with permission.

The...mezzanine upstairs, it was gorgeous. Oh, it was. It had the lounge, it was beautiful. They had couches and chairs... to match...And of course the restrooms were up there... But you could go up there and wait until the movie started or something like that... but it was beautiful... it really was!  
(72 year old, Caucasian female)

I think it was reds and golds...and they even had plants up there, real pretty plants... it looked beautiful.  
(70 year old, Caucasian female)

The head of Dionysus reigned supreme for many years atop the façade of the theatre, but unfortunately both Dionysus and the pediment it rested upon came down, circa 1950. Although this was done for safety reasons, it obviously left the building in a much plainer state. Dionysus left the theatre for parts unknown but was discovered by Mr. Oscar Seagle, one of the original ushers. Mr. Seagle rescued the head of Dionysus from a cabin at Claytor Lake, restored it, and it now happily resides in the history museum in town housed in the historic railroad station. Dionysus patiently awaits his return to the renovated theatre façade. Mr. Seagle stated:

...was a picture of this thing that was up on the very top of the building. I found that over at Claytor Lake hanging on the side of a cabin over there and got it – and brought it in and restored it and it's in the museum over here...

### Decline of the Town and the Theatre

Not surprisingly the decline of the theatre paralleled the decline of the town. Society has changed in many ways during the last decades and many of these changes affected shopping and entertainment choices. As our society became increasingly automobile driven, people were freer to jump into their individual motorized transport and drive to outlying areas for shopping, dining, and entertainment. Family life changed with the invention and mass distribution of television in the fifties. This visual medium

was brought right into the living rooms of Americans, with families gathered around their television sets almost nightly to get the latest news and view their favorite programs, such as Perry Mason, Amos 'n Andy, the Jack Benny Show, and Alfred Hitchcock. Perhaps even more significant was the introduction of VCR and DVD players in the eighties and nineties. You could actually choose the particular movie that you wished to watch without being confined to the programming on television, with video stores providing an enormous range of options to choose from.

...now the VCRs and all this stuff at home...you could go select whatever you want to watch – there's hundreds and thousands of movies that you can watch, you know, and if they have a movie come to this theatre, it's set...come if you want to. If you don't like it, don't come...that's what it amounts to...

(82 year old, Caucasian male)

With the inflated price of movies, popcorn and soft drinks at the movie theaters, staying at home and renting a movie became a real bargain, and in our increasingly casual society, provided the additional incentive of not having to get dressed to go out. You can watch the movie in your pajamas if you wish, alone or with others of your choosing. There are no annoying distractions such as cell phones ringing and you can pause the movie as you like or watch part of it one day and the rest another. It became especially difficult for a theater to operate with only one screen in competition with the multiplexes, which showed several movies concurrently, providing options for viewers.

During the '50s, it was a thriving theatre, very much... places like Roanoke and surrounding areas began to have the multi-theaters, it began to cut down. Downtown Pulaski was a thriving town and if you look at the history of the town...and the history of the theatre sort of follows the decline of the whole area around here began to go down and the theatre sort of followed that pattern. I think the big malls,

the tendency for people to want to go somewhere else and shop, also took the entertainment to another area, which was a tragedy.

(63 year old, Caucasian female)

Social change in America has left us living singularly and insularly, disconnected from one another with disintegrated social structures (Putnam, 2000). In commenting on the lack of attendance at clubs and other events in Pulaski, a participant states:

...Masonic Lodge here, used to have Lord how many members and now they have, they very seldom have enough men to open up the Lodge. They don't have a quorum. Same with the Elk's Club, the Moose, any of them. They're all the same...Even your churches, your church membership is, there's too much golf, too much Myrtle Beach, and too much of everything...

(82 year old, Caucasian male)

Businesses began moving out of downtown Pulaski to out-lying strip malls and shopping centers and the Wal-Mart store (see Figure 63) opened March 30, 1991 in the Memorial Square Shopping Center on the outskirts of town, taking a big bite out of the local economy. Major repairs were needed on the old theatre building at the same time that attendance and revenues were dropping, initiating the eventual closure and demise of the theatre (see Figure 64).

...Of course, the town has grown, you know, the further out you are now, the more you need a car. But it used to be that they walked wherever they wanted to go – most people didn't have cars, of course.

(82 year old, Caucasian male)



Figure 63. Wal-Mart store with many cars in parking lot, Saturday, June 28, 2003, 7:10 PM.



Figure 64. Pulaski Theatre with downtown deserted, Saturday, June 28, 2003, 7:00 PM.

### Participant Recommendations for the Theatre

For the theatre to be successful, people will have to support it and attend performances there. The economy of the area and the residents of Pulaski come into play. What type of events would people enjoy and go out and spend their money on, becomes the question. When the renovation is complete, participants felt that possible events to host in the theatre might include live performances such as plays, musicals, music concerts, local talent shows, and dance recitals, as well as movies. Suggestions for movies included old or classic movies, silent films, or optimistically first run movies. It was felt by most that a variety of performances and different venues should be presented to include a diverse group of people and not exclude anyone.

I think we need some live stuff for sure. Uh, I know that the movies bring in the dollars because we've seen some studies that say that's where you make your money, but ....I think in order to get people to come into it...and it being a center for downtown, it's gotta have live performances.

(57 year old, Caucasian male)



Perhaps they would attend musical events. People like music and it makes them feel good. The Wytheville Theater has music events that are well attended.

(57 year old, Caucasian male)

...if they could do the same thing as the Barter Theater.

(82 year old, Caucasian male)

...even some small plays for the smaller children –teach ‘em some of the older ways that is as good as the computer ways... I think some of the live performances...would be good...maybe bands, or maybe spiritual concerts, like some of the religious groups, would bring some of the church groups to see it probably.

(62 year old, Caucasian female)

...Well, for instance the children who do the dance. I have a granddaughter who is taking dance, and they have to go to the high school for their recitals. And that is part of the Fine Arts Center and so it would be, you know, just ideal for shows like that – children – even I would venture to say that seating is not necessarily adequate for the recital at the high school ‘cause it’s “The Little Theater”, the name of theater, so it’s not seating capacity for a lot of people. So the seating would be more suitable.

(53 year old, African American female)

Several participants thought that movies would consistently be the biggest draw for residents of the area. Some felt that older movies would be successful and others felt that the movies should be first run.

I would think for the people that live around here, the movies would probably be the most interest...I haven’t been to the movies for a while but I’ll take a spell of going. I go to Wytheville, always have. They get movies before Roanoke.

(49 year old, Caucasian female)

...the ‘40s, ‘30s and ‘40s movies. ...several theaters...had silent movies and they brought in music and played the music while they had them. Been very, very successful...AMC had a festival where they showed a

lot of silent stuff. You know the movies go back to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> [20<sup>th</sup>] century. The first successful movie was right at the turn of the century, about 1900, 1901, something like that.

(63 year old, Caucasian female)

If they just make it a movie theater running third run movies or classic movies like some of these old dumpy theaters in some of these big cities... that's exactly what you'd get coming there. You won't get, get the folks that are professionals...and if it's not cleaned and it's not well managed... and the staff is not friendly...it'll die right on the vine. Need to have a little bit of that showmanship thing.

(57 year old, Caucasian male)

In order to keep people in town on the weekends, it was felt that a diverse venue of shows were needed to peak people's interest and provide entertainment for everyone in Pulaski, not just a select group. One participant had a variety of ideas for possibilities of performances at the theatre.

...probably a series of old westerns...also have local talent...back to the old, like old vaudeville acts...have a talent show, do a thing like old gong show, get somebody out there, they try to sing, they don't sing, pull 'em off stage like Apollo Theater they have on television... bring in cultural diversity, you know. One night bring in a Latino group and let them dance and play. Next week have...somebody playing bagpipes... Expose the town to diversity...may erase some of the tension...something to bring people together for sometime. So maybe this theatre can educate some people. Of course...you want a series of plays. You want comedy. You want serious action. You want a country western band...a little tap dancin', want some clogging, but just have a good smorgasbord of culture. Expose people to touch on the interests of all instead of one select group...

(54 year old, African American male)

Perhaps a change in attitude is needed for Pulaski to grow and change. Several participants spoke of the conservative nature of the small town and attitudes, which are

slow to change. The bigger question becomes do attitudes change first or does growth and change affect attitudes? Some residents questioned the status quo.

...That's what worries me about Pulaski. Until the attitude changes, we're gonna continue to die. It's gonna continue to go downhill... and this is the gem city of the south. And it's pretty. You can wake up and look out the window and see Draper Mountain...things people pay a lot of money just to come and visit...we don't take advantage of it. The theatre, I don't [know] which direction it will take...if it's all bluegrass, that excludes Black folks again, you know... Your main instrument in bluegrass music is banjo...that's a Black instrument but it was used in a blues venue at that time... but you know, if the theatre reopens...it's gonna have to be all inclusive or we...go right back downhill again, so, I hope it does. I hope we reopen and we get the right ideas and the right attitude because that would determine the altitude.

(56 year old, African American male)

When the theatre reopens, the history of the theatre could be documented and preserved in place to enable future residents and visitors to acknowledge, discover, and talk about this era of the theatre's history. Prominent in that history is the seating of African Americans in the balcony and the staircase dedicated to African Americans, separating the races in the theatre during the years of segregation. Even if African Americans had what some considered "the best seats" in the house, being restricted to a back section of the balcony with wooden seats gives a different perspective to the theatre experience. Hopefully the theatre board can preserve this history in place and citizens will donate the signs and other parts and pieces of the theatre that have been removed over time to this effort to document a very important part of the history of the theatre and the town. Regarding this preservation effort, one participant states:

I guess when you grow up with that, you think nothing of it until someone points it out to you and why. There is at least the existence

of one sign I know of...that has an arrow pointing upward and says "Colored Only"...this is, you know, one more of those artifacts that have left the theatre, but they have enormous historical and social value that in my opinion need to be preserved in the context and with an explanation of the role they played in the history of that building... I would very much like for us to preserve that area because we need to recognize that portion of the theatre's history.

(56 year old, Caucasian male)

### **Themes**

The following significant themes evolved from the research: 1) the structure was an integral part of the community, 2) the theatre reflected the social norms and roles of the community, and 3) the interior contributed to the social atmosphere within the theatre.

#### Theme No. 1: The structure was an integral part of the community

The original façade of the Classical Revival building with its arched pediment top, bracketed cornice, and head of Dionysus represented a prominent structure situated in the heart of downtown. It served as the center of entertainment for the town both literally and figuratively.

The theatre was a very busy place, often with long lines waiting to gain admittance. It was not unusual for people to wait in line for several blocks for the most popular movies. The long lines generated energy that imbued the town with excitement and made going to the Pulaski Theatre a significant event. Many residents attended the theatre every time the marquee changed, dressing up in their best clothes. Going to the theatre was an event and often included patronizing other businesses before or after the movie. This created a domino effect with other businesses, such as drug store soda shops benefiting from increased business.

The variety of shows offered something for everyone, adults and children alike. The theatre was busy throughout the day with matinees in the afternoon and at least two shows scheduled in the evenings. The matinees offered parents the opportunity to take advantage of inexpensive babysitting services while they did their weekly grocery and other shopping in downtown Pulaski on Saturdays.

Perhaps more important than the façade or the configuration of spaces in the building was the sense of place that was created in and around the theatre. The theatre offered residents of Pulaski a chance to meet friends, to socialize, and to feel a part of the community. When participants were school children, they attended matinees on a regular basis and now have fond memories of seeing their friends there. Many even walked into town together to attend the matinees. Many adults remember walking into town to see movies as well. With people living in apartments downtown and in houses within walking distance, the need for cars diminished and the opportunity to see friends and neighbors was enhanced. Combined with eating out or shopping activities, movie going was an important part of life in town, becoming a weekly treat that many anticipated. The memories and associations of residents attest to the meaning of the theatre building as a place that facilitated social well-being and a sense of community.

As the town and community began to decline, theatre attendance declined. With the popularity of VCRs and DVDs, the growth of multiplex cinemas and shopping malls, the increasing reliance on automobiles, and the inflated cost of going to movie theaters, small towns and small town theaters found it increasingly difficult to remain viable. Pulaski Theatre was no exception to this rule. The theatre was an integral part of the downtown and as stores closed downtown or moved to outlying shopping centers, the



theatre found itself in decline as well. Residents did not think of going downtown to shop as they had previously, and the theatre was left behind.

Theme No. 2: The theatre reflected the social norms and roles of the community

The social norms and roles of the community were exhibited in the theatre by the architectural style of the building, by the entrances to the theatre, by the division of the interior space and seating arrangements, and by the types of entertainment shown and the production methods employed by the management.

When built in 1911 the Elks Building was a prominent building taking up one whole block of Main Street. With its arched pediment, bracketed cornice, head of Dionysus, and quoins, the façade reflected an image of stability and permanence. With lights shining between each bracket on the cornice, it was a source of pride to the townspeople. Although it would have been considered insignificant if compared to the grand movie palaces, for a small town like Pulaski, it was considered quite grand. When it was renovated in 1937 and reopened as a movie theatre, one resident stated that people were so proud of the new theatre that you would have thought they were stepping into Radio City Music Hall in New York City.

For many years, the theatre had two separate entrance doors, one for Caucasians and one for African Americans. As with most places in the south during segregation, African Americans and Caucasians did not enter through the same doors or use the same water fountains or sit together at church, or in trains, or at other functions. Pulaski was part of this segregated tradition and African Americans had to enter the theatre through a separate entrance, travel up a separate stairway, and sit in the back of the balcony. The seats in the back of the balcony were wood frame, not upholstered as the rest of the

theatre. African Americans and Caucasians could go to the theatre, watch a movie, and not even pass by each other in the process. It is not surprising that Pulaski, located in southwest Virginia and part of the segregated south, upheld these traditions at this time in their history. Although Pulaski was integrated in the sixties, as was most of the south, these unfortunate happenings provide painful memories for many African American residents of Pulaski today, as well as for many Caucasians.

Changes to the façade and the interior of the theatre over the years reflect the changes in the town and in society. The separate entrance doors for the races were eliminated with desegregation along with the requirement that African Americans sit only in a separate section of the balcony.

The removal of the arched pediment and head of Dionysus, circa 1950, although taken from the building for safety reasons, represented a loss of character to the building and left a less prominent building façade. The theatre was thriving during this period, so the loss of those architectural elements evidently did not deter patrons and thus did not seem detrimental to the management. This speaks to the social norms and roles of the community as well as the sense of place created within the theatre. It appears that patrons enjoyed the experience of going to the movies so much that the decorative features of the building became secondary to the experience.

The variety of entertainment, shows, and movies that were held in the theatre also speak to the social norms and roles of the community. Weekly children's matinees appropriate for middle school age children were shown during summer vacation. Pulaski showed first run movies including 3-D movies when they became the rage, along with serials to bring patrons back week after week. Special events were held in the theatre

such as local beauty shows and a children's radio hour. Although the majority of residents of Pulaski seemed to enjoy the theatre, not everyone felt that the theatre was a positive influence in the community. Mr. Ryan, the projectionist, stated that on more than one occasion a street preacher came by declaiming that they were all going to hell for watching movies (W. A. Ryan, personal interview, November 12, 2001).

The method of showing movies in the Pulaski Theatre was one of formality. Lights were dimmed and curtains were drawn to alert movie goers that the movie was about to begin. Disruptive behavior was not tolerated, and occasionally managers were known to halt the movie and make a speech regarding unacceptable behavior as the offending culprits squirmed in their seats. Ushers patrolled the theatre and rebellious youth would be expelled for the night or longer if the management saw fit. Participants remembered, often fondly, the expectations and standards of behavior within the theatre. Stories were recalled regarding misbehavior, such as the time some teenage boys set the trash cans on fire in the bathrooms and the smoke forced everyone to exit the theatre.

### Theme No. 3: The interior contributed to the social atmosphere within the theatre

The Pulaski Theatre was the main source of entertainment in the town and was a bustling, active place. From standing in long lines to enter the theatre, to purchasing popcorn and soft drinks from the concession stand, to sitting with friends in your favored area of the theatre, the movie going experience was one of social contact and a place to meet or see friends and enjoy an outing together. The architectural features of the space were significant in reflections. Participants remembered such things as waiting in long lines in front of the theatre with friends to purchase tickets; buying tickets at the ticket box; listening to stage speeches by Mr. Jones, the manager for many years; film breaking

and Mr. Ryan running up the stairs to splice it together; people throwing popcorn and candy wrappers down from the balcony; losing shoes that were taken off and placed under seats during the movie and fearing having to walk home barefooted; the heavy fragrance permeating the air after some mischievous teenage boys doused the theatre with a bottle of cheap perfume; sitting side-by-side with a special someone before you were old enough to really date; or sitting in the upholstered furniture in the lounge waiting for friends or relaxing before the movie began.

When it was time for the movie to start, the lights in the theatre would begin to dim and the curtains were drawn. This alerted the audience that it was time to sit back and relax and enjoy the movie. Ushers monitored the theatre at all times to maintain the formality and dignity that came to be expected by all at the Pulaski Theatre.