

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As the day of the videodisc [sic] approaches . . . these empty movie houses are there to remind the wistful of a time when one didn't do *everything* at home in the den. Of the several pivot points of small town life (barbershop, high school, feed store, filling station), the picture show was the only one that provided a continuous feed-in of discussable experience that could be balanced against that generated by the town itself. That the experience one absorbed in watching movies was highly romanticized and often blatantly unreal in no way invalidated its importance to the culture of the small town, or, for that matter, of the city (McMurtry, 1987, p. 103).

There was once a time in America when theaters were an integral component of every small town, often the one building to open its doors after the close of the business day. The theater offered entertainment, amusement, and socialization, as well as a retreat from work-a-day toils and personal worries. With only the price of an admission ticket, patrons could escape for a couple of hours into a world of fantasy, glamour, and adventure very different from their daily existence. Going to a movie was a pleasurable time to meet friends, see acquaintances, or delve into a world of make believe.

Today due to economic woes many historic theaters have been adapted for another use or have gone out of business and stand empty in disrepair. Worse yet, are the theaters that have been demolished to make room for yet another office building or

parking lot. One of the most bizarre examples of a converted theater project is the Michigan Theater (1926) in Detroit, which was partially gutted and is now a parking garage (see Figure 1).¹



Figure 1. Adaptive use of Michigan Theater, Detroit, into parking garage, 1997.

Cars travel through what was formerly the grand lobby on a ramp to the auditorium space with ornate plasterwork hanging suspended overhead as a surreal reminder of its previous life. Ironically the site of the theater was the birthplace of Henry Ford's automobile empire, driving the subsequent flight to the suburbs and the decline of the inner cities (see Figure 2). The dilapidated theater was featured in the 2002 movie "8 Mile," the life story of rapper Eminem. The name refers to 8 Mile Road in Detroit, a

¹ From website, http://www.detroityes.com/downtown/40michtheat_balcony.htm by L. Boileau, 1997, The Fabulous Ruins of Detroit. Copyright 1997 by L. Boileau. Reprinted with permission.

thoroughfare effectively separating the lower-class inner city from the neighboring affluent suburbs. Although Eminem was successful in his struggle to rise above the burned-out shell of inner city Detroit, the Michigan Theater stands virtually in ruins, a testament to another time and place. Many of the remaining large movie theaters that are still operational were subdivided into several smaller theaters in the age of the multicinema, thus destroying the architectural integrity of the buildings (Naylor, 1981).

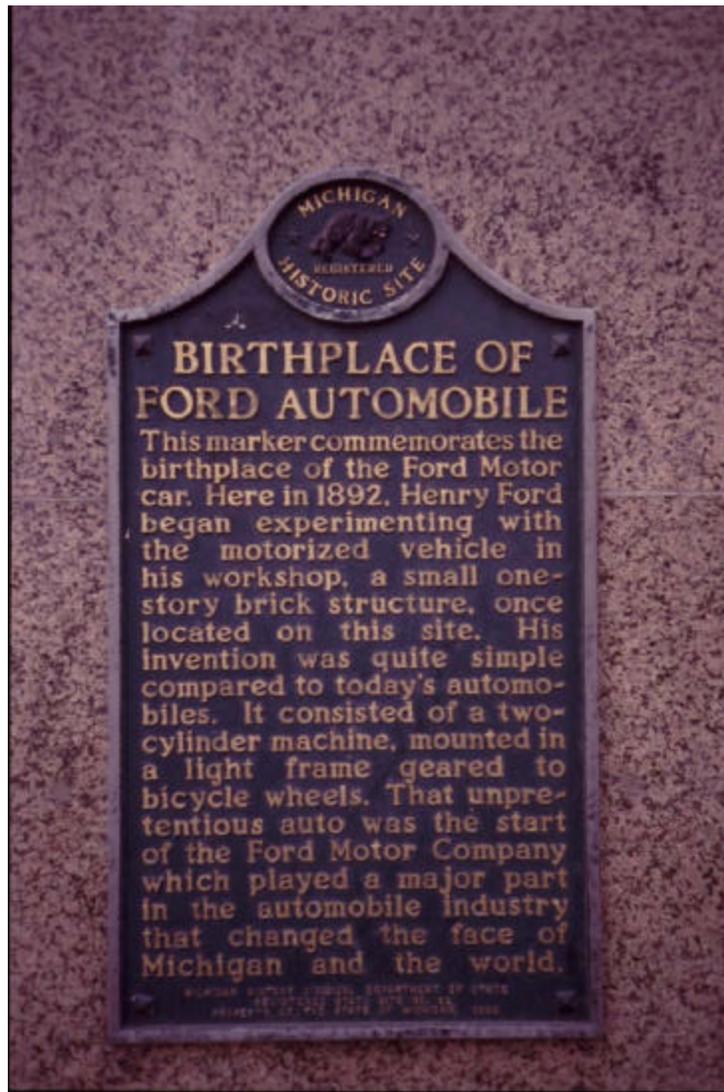


Figure 2. Marker at the site of the Michigan Theater commemorating the birthplace of Ford Motor Company, 2002.

Often people no longer have the option to venture out to the neighborhood theater to enjoy a matinee or an evening's entertainment on the big screen. With the advent of large stadium seating theaters, multiplex theaters and the popularity of VCRs and DVDs, many small town theaters have been unable to survive. Smaller scale theaters that have survived often fill a niche, such as showing 'art films' or alternative films that appeal to a sub-set of the population, and these often struggle to remain viable.

The downtown districts of many small towns remain deadly quiet after business hours in stark contrast to what was once a thriving, lively center of activity and a meeting place for area residents. The continued migration of businesses from the downtown square has pushed more and more businesses into architecturally non-descript malls and strip shopping centers where the owners are trying desperately to recreate a vital, active atmosphere that will encourage residents to shop and spend their money. Not only have the downtowns lost purchasing power, perhaps more importantly, they have lost vitality, energy, and the sense of community that was once an integral part of downtown life and the sense of place connecting the townspeople and the town.

An example of this loss of downtown vitality may be Pulaski, Virginia. Many downtown merchants have moved out of the downtown business area to strip shopping centers on the outskirts of town. A central part of the downtown community and pivotal building on Main Street was the Pulaski Theatre, formerly the Elks Theatre. The Elks Theatre opened in 1911 as a vaudeville house for concerts and other productions that traveled by railroad through the area. The building was a fine example of urban Classical Revival (see Appendix A) architecture when new (see Figure 3). Circa 1922 the Elks Theatre closed and the building became a dry goods store, the Dix-Richardson Store,

reopening as the Pulaski Theatre in 1937 and operating as such until 1991 (Hickam, Douthat, Henderson, Sadler, Sadler, & D'Ardenne, 1993). With the closing of the theatre on December 31, 1991, area residents had to travel to Radford, Christiansburg, or even Roanoke to see movies on the big screen. Since the theatre provided entertainment and a catalyst for activity in the downtown, especially during the evening hours when most businesses were closed, it represented an important component of social life for the town's residents.



Figure 3. Elks Building, circa 1922.

Concerned citizens of Pulaski, feeling the loss of the movie house and entertainment downtown, as well as an even larger concern for the revitalization of the downtown business center, formed The Friends of the Pulaski Theatre in 1993. Over the last several years, through the generosity and concerted effort of local businesses, government agencies, a private foundation and committed citizens, this jewel of downtown Pulaski has been saved from destruction and stabilized and now stands on the

threshold of renovation and rebirth as a keystone of the downtown revitalization movement. The restored Pulaski Theatre will host live theatre, film, musicians, and community shows. In 2001 plans were in place to begin to renovate the theatre as the centerpiece of downtown into a civic center complex to include a restaurant and community meeting rooms and classrooms, giving a much needed boost to the life of the downtown (C. Warden, personal communication, September 6, 2001). Most recently the Friends determined that a more economically feasible route was to renovate only the theatre building and see what the future holds for expansion efforts. Information gathered in this study may aid in the efforts to renovate the theatre as well as help to determine the venues residents would like to see in the theatre.

Adaptive use of old buildings is one way to create a link with our past. These large historic buildings, such as theaters, are a part of the streetscape in urban areas and provide landmarks in all our communities. They provide a sense of place, a link with the past and a nostalgic look back to where we came from. With infrastructure in place, the old buildings are often more economical to use than demolishing and rebuilding. While energy costs are increasing, this labor-intensive work is a less expensive method of acquiring useable space, providing work for skilled laborers and maintaining a sense of history in place. Such recycled buildings usually offer construction superior to modern construction with their thick insulating walls, craftsmanship, and use of materials that are often too cost-prohibitive to duplicate today. With high ceilings and windows that open, they provide the added advantage of ventilation and natural light acting as natural energy savers (Fitch, 1995).

The successful renovation of the theatre and the future adaptive use of the surrounding buildings in this commercial block of downtown Pulaski would provide residents with a sense of pride in their downtown and much needed revitalization of the area. At least some long-term residents associate many happy memories with the theatre and their growing-up years and actively support the revitalization of downtown by activities such as serving on The Friends of the Theatre board and working with fund raising committees, as well as offering their emotional support.

An understanding of the history of the theatre, the meaning of the theatre to the residents, and particularly how this pivotal building fits within the larger community should be known in order to complete a successful renovation. Discovering this will assist town planners and architects in designing and renovating the theatre space, which could give Pulaski the needed jumpstart for the revitalization of downtown.

Purpose of the Study

This study will examine the meaning of the theatre to the residents and its social importance to the town of Pulaski from the time of its opening as the Elks Theatre in 1911 until its closing eighty years later. The research question becomes

- What was the social importance of the Pulaski Theatre, formerly the Elks Theatre, to the residents of the town of Pulaski?

In order to discover the social importance of the theatre, this study focuses on three interrelated tasks:

1. To document the history of the theatre.
 - 1) What are the design features of the original theatre built in 1911?
 - 2) What are the changes to the design of the building over time?

2. To discover the memories or feelings that people associate with the theatre.
3. To determine if design features of the theatre influence these feelings/memories.
 - 1) What are the architectural/design features that people remember and associate with the theatre?
 - 2) Do these design features reflect memories/feelings that represent a sense of place?
 - 3) Is this “sense of place” different for different people?

Justification for the Study

Studying the meaning and social importance of the theatre to the residents of the town may benefit designers, community planners, and urban planners working with cities and towns. If the theatre is found to be a strong part of this community, it may help other designers and planners in creating meaningful downtown communities and recreating what was once a viable, energetic surrounding for residents of small towns, thus helping to curb the migration of businesses from the central core of town.

The diversity of architectural styles and the unique character of historic buildings in cities and towns add immeasurably to the sense of place and the connection residents feel to their community (Grantz, 1994). By reinventing our downtowns we can help to abate some of the cookie-cutter architecture so prevalent in shopping malls and strip shopping centers, as well as many newer planned communities. As early as 1961 Jane Jacobs stated, “...the endless new developments spreading beyond the cities are reducing city and countryside alike to a monotonous, un nourishing gruel...” (pp. 6 – 7).

Unfortunately many of these problems remain unsolved today. In addressing some of the

same issues Jane Jacobs grappled with in the sixties, Roberta Brandes Gratz (1994) states:

So much is happening so quickly and in such a big way that alternative directions are urgent before we lose the opportunity to renew our cities and wind up only with the more expensive, less desirable option of replacement. We have not learned well from past mistakes (p. 26).

By becoming more aware of the issues affecting our cities and towns, we can help to stem the tide of disrepair, demolition, and replacement, and retain the character and sense of place that make our cities and small towns unique and meaningful to residents and visitors alike. Major buildings with interesting architectural details, such as historic local theaters, are instrumental in creating this sense of place, and thus function as a center of activity for the downtown area. The sphere of action surrounding the theatre could have a domino effect supporting additional businesses such as restaurants, coffee houses, and ice cream shops for patrons to frequent before and after attending movies, as happened in the past. The energy surrounding these establishments may generate other businesses such as art galleries, antique shops, and gift shops that people patronize, breathing life into the downtown and recreating the viable, thriving town which was there before. The established identities of local businesspeople and local patrons create a connection, sense of community, and sense of place that is meaningful and unique to a particular town. Each city and town has to find its own unique character and build on this (Gratz & Mintz, 1998) to create a viable, flourishing center that invites people to visit, explore, sightsee, and be stimulated and enriched.

Delimitations

1. This study is limited by selection of a sample of persons currently residing in Pulaski County.
2. In this study, only middle-aged and older participants will be included.

Limitations

1. The purposive sampling procedure decreases the generalizability of findings, and therefore, will not be generalizable to all small-town theaters.
2. Data collected in interviews will be specific to the individual participants and is not generalizable to others residing in this small-town or any other location.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized in the following way:

Chapter II – Review of Literature discusses the development and growth of movie theaters in America including the movie palaces; sense of place, as well as “space” versus “place”; the social importance of environments leading to a sense of community; environmental autobiography (a method of bringing a person’s experiences of a place to a conscious level); a description of Pulaski County leading up to the time that the Elks Theatre was constructed in 1911; and the history of the theatre building itself.

Chapter III – Methodology describes specific methodologies and procedures applied in this research. This chapter includes a description of research objectives and the methods used to collect and analyze data. The data collection methods include a drawing exercise, interviews, and document research. The interview procedures include a description of participants and the interview process. Data analysis includes coding and categorization of drawing exercises and interviews.

Chapter IV – Results and Discussion presents the categories discovered through the drawing exercises and interviews. Categories include (1) 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; (2) the theatre as a very busy, active place, the main source of entertainment in town, with the activity surrounding the theatre supporting restaurants and other businesses in town; (3) other types of entertainment and activities in town including the Dalton, the other movie theater; (4) the formal production of presenting movies at the Pulaski Theatre during this era, including the use of ushers and projectionists; (5) the variety of shows presented at the Pulaski Theatre including movies, children’s matinees, 3-D movies, serials, and other types of shows; (6) seating arrangements in the theatre, including dating and African Americans seated in the balcony during segregation; (7) the architectural features of the theatre; (8) changes to the theatre building over time; (9) the changes of the era leading to the decline of the town and the theatre; and, (10) participant recommendations for the renovated theatre.

Themes uncovered from the findings include: (1) the structure as an integral part of the community, (2) the theatre as reflective of the social norms and roles of the community, and (3) the interior as contributing to the social atmosphere within the theatre.

Chapter V – Summary and Conclusions summarizes the study and its findings and its potential contribution to the field. The chapter ends with discussion and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter begins by discussing the development and growth of movie theaters in America, including the movie palaces and small town theaters. Since a central theme of this thesis is that the theatre was an integral part of the community, the literature on sense of place is relevant to understanding how the theatre represented a meaningful place to the residents of the town. Next, the chapter looks at the social importance of environments and how environments can facilitate a sense of social well-being leading to a sense of community. Next, environmental autobiography (a method of bringing a person's experiences of a place to a conscious level) is examined. Environmental autobiography is instrumental in understanding participants' drawings of the theatre. Finally, the chapter describes Pulaski County, leading up to the time that the Elks Theatre was constructed in 1911, and documents the history of the theatre building itself.

Movie Theaters

The following section discusses the growth and popularity of movie theaters in America at the turn of the twentieth century. Not only are the grand movie palaces examined, but also local small town theaters that collectively served large numbers of people across America.

At the turn of the twentieth century not a building in the world was devoted exclusively to cinematography (Sharp, 1969). The first films shown in music and opera halls were "short and silent" (Sharp, 1969, p. 7) with entrance fees often a nickel. "In 1905, two Pennsylvania men joined the cost of a ticket with the Greek word for 'theater'

to produce ‘nickelodeon,’ a term much associated with the twentieth century’s first decade” (Casto, 2000, p. 130). Some thirty or forty years later cinemas had spread like a “fireball” (Sharp, 1969, p. 7) with as many as two or three movie theaters gracing the main streets of every city or town.

With the advent of talking pictures in the 1920s, the elaborate movie palaces were born. Much has been written on the grand movie houses, which represented “the gaudy, enchanted, phony, preposterous, and lovely Golden Age of the Movie Palace...” (Hall, 1961, p. 1). The large movie palaces clustered in cities included theaters such as the Roxy (1927), the Rialto (1916), the Rivoli (1917), the Capitol (1919), and the Strand (1914) in New York City; the Paradise (1928), the Avalon, and the Oriental in Chicago; the Majestic (1922) in Houston; Loew’s State in Louisville (1918); the Ambassador (1928) in St. Louis; and the legendary Grauman Theaters: Egyptian (1922), Metropolitan (1923), and Chinese (1927) in Hollywood. These grand movie palaces gave patrons a “total experience of escape” (Hall, 1961, p. 2). The era of the twenties was one of extremes in wealth and poverty but for only the price of an admission ticket, movie palaces provided surroundings of opulence the public might only dream of in real life (Hall, 1961; Naylor, 1987; Naylor, 1981; Waller, 1995).

In our big modern movie palaces there are collected the most gorgeous rugs, furniture and fixtures that money can produce. No kings or emperors have wandered through more luxurious surroundings. In a sense, these theatres are social safety valves in that the public can partake of the same luxuries as the rich and use them to the same full extent (Rambusch in Hall, 1961, p. 93).

Movie palaces were designed as neo-Classical structures known as hardtops or as an artificial environment known as ‘atmospherics’. Thomas W. Lamb was the leading architect of the hardtops, while John Eberson was the leading architect of the ‘atmospherics’. Lamb’s Strand Theatre was described as “gilt and marble and deep pile rugs, crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling and original art works on the walls, with luxurious lounges and comfortable chairs, a thirty-piece symphony orchestra ... and a mighty Wurlitzer” (Sharp, 1969, p. 73). Eberson’s ‘atmospherics’ created a romanticized imitation of exotic environments. He wrote, “We visualize and dream a magnificent amphitheatre under a glorious moonlit sky in an Italian garden, in a Persian court, in a Spanish patio, or in a mystic Egyptian temple-yard, all canopied by a soft moonlit sky” (Sharp, 1969, p. 74). Color played an important part in the atmospherics with effects such as a “deep azure blue of the Mediterranean sky” (Sharp, 1969, p. 74). The Paradise Theatre in Faribault, Minnesota, an atmospheric, although not one of Eberson’s, had this notice posted by the switchboard:

PLEASE DO NOT TURN ON THE CLOUDS
UNTIL THE SHOW STARTS.
BE SURE THE STARS ARE TURNED OFF
WHEN LEAVING (Hall, 1961, p. 102).

People had the urge to go places and do things. So they went - to the movies, regularly and often. It became a family outing, once a week. What was playing at the movies was often incidental to the spectacular architecture of the theater itself. The movie palaces drew full houses three or four times a day with an extra show on weekends (Naylor, 1981).

Not only were people attending large movie palaces in urban areas, they were attending movies in every small town in America. Small town theaters have not been studied or written about so fervently due to the fact that they did not offer the visual delights of the movie palaces nor could they attract or hold such large numbers of people. However, collectively these small theaters did hold large numbers of people and were no less significant to the residents of the small towns they served. This study will examine one such theater, the Pulaski Theatre, and its meaning, social importance, and sense of place to the residents of the small town it served in southwest Virginia.

Sense of Place

The following section defines sense of place and spirit of place, differentiates “space” and “place,” and discusses how we may perceive environments as memorable icons through which we can orient and define ourselves.

Steele (1981) defines a sense of place as “the particular experience of a person in a particular setting (feeling stimulated, excited, joyous, expansive, and so forth)” (p. 11). This sense of place is heavily influenced by our own contributions and, therefore, may vary with each individual in the same setting. One person’s sense of place is not the same as another. For instance, sense of place in the theatre may be influenced by various factors, such as where persons sat, or if they attended the theatre alone or with others, as well as their background, socioeconomic level and other influences that they bring to any experience.

Place does not operate in a vacuum, but is a setting composed of many interacting components. The richness associated with being in a good place has a psychological, as well as physical manifestation – a sense of feeling “at home”. Steele (1981) also defines

a spirit of place as “the combination of characteristics that gives some locations a special “feel” or personality (such as a spirit of mystery or of identity with a person or group)” (p. 11).

A sense of place has the potential to empower us. While a ‘space’ is merely occupied, a “place” is a central area that localizes us (Armour, 1993), and that has special meaning. In categorizing “space” versus “place”, Armour (1993) lists the following terms relating to the qualities and perceptions of space and place (p. 67):

Qualities and Perceptions of Space

- ‘is’
- empty
- without boundary
- open
- alien
- emanative
- the final frontier
- prairie
- unnamed
- mundane
- ‘natural’/organic
- impersonal
- existential
- outside
- ignored

Qualities and Perceptions of Place

- expressed space
- full
- bounded by identity
- social landscape
- humanized
- realized potential
- domesticated
- designed response
- named
- sacred
- influenced
- proxemic
- belonging
- inside
- nurtured

While space is unbounded, place is bounded by identity and part of the social landscape. This identity links people to their land or to a place forming a cultural place attachment where “place is also its people” (Armour, 1993, p. 70).

Such a “place” may be the theatre where people form a type of community by virtue of seeing each other on a regular basis. Normally people socialize within social classes based on race, ethnicity, interests and other factors. The theatre may have been one of the few places where blue-collar factory workers and tradesmen could sit side by side with white-collar office and professional people and experience the same human emotions through observing scenes played out on the screen. Even the seating arrangement in local churches may have been hierarchical with certain families favoring particular pews, or more likely various ethnic or socio-economic groups would have attended different churches or worshiped in different ways.

Sense of place varies for different people and at different times. For instance, during segregation African American patrons were relegated to the balcony and could occupy one section of the balcony only. A partition was built in the balcony of the Pulaski Theatre dividing it into two distinct areas, one for Caucasians and one for African Americans. African Americans were assigned to the back section of the balcony area, whereas Caucasians could sit downstairs or upstairs as they wished. African Americans even had a separate staircase for traveling up to the balcony to avoid any contact with Caucasian patrons. Many young Caucasian couples courted in the balcony area, but in their own section. This arrangement remained in place until desegregation in the 1960s (W. A. Ryan, personal interview, November 12, 2001).

There are many definitions for place, ranging from the simplest as a way of identifying a person in a particular location to very complex, symbolic interpretations.

Childress (1994) lists four conditions that differentiate place from space:

1. "...a place is, in some way, recognizably different from its surroundings" (p. 56).
2. "...it is perceived as an integral whole rather than a set of component spaces" (p. 56).
3. "...it is seen as appropriate for belonging to something, someone, or some activity" (p. 57).
4. "...it is something against which we can measure and orient ourselves" (p. 57).

His working definition of place becomes: "A place is an environment made whole in the imagination, and used to define and orient the self" (p. 57). The theatre meets two of Childress's criteria in that it is a recognizable, prominent building on Main Street appropriate for a particular activity - movie going. The question remains as to whether or not the theatre can be imagined as a whole against which one can measure and orient oneself, differentiating the theatre as a place rather than just a space.

Lynch (1981) describes a sense of place as having a particular identity, the extent to which a person can recall a place as having a distinct character of its own. This identity creates the ambience or atmosphere of a place that engages the perceptions of its inhabitants. Perception is defined by Held and Richards (1972) as "the process of knowing objects and events in the world by means of the senses" (p. 166). This sensory experience is made up of scenes, noises, smells, touch, and may be associated with taste

as well. There is an "...interaction between physical urban form and people's perceptions/understandings of that form as the product of experiences, attitudes, memories and sensations" (Tokol, 1999, p. 209). Environmental perception is often part of a social activity and can therefore be regarded as a social phenomenon, representing a mental as well as a physical experience. The physical experience of a place and the social events happening there interact, characterizing the ambience of that environment in a systemic way.

A space on the other hand may be a chair, a room, a building, or buildings within a community. If a space evokes associations that are meaningful, it may represent a sense of place as well. A favored chair of the father of the household, the designated chairs of each family member around a dining room table, a childhood bedroom, or particular buildings on the downtown square all can bring back special memories and associations that are significant in and of themselves, relating to a particular time and place in the past and evoking a sense of place. This sense of place relates to a particular time in our history or runs throughout time with the past continuing to speak to and having relevance to the present. Time is often seen portrayed visually as an arrow moving through space (Tuan, 1977). A sense of place is achieved when a particular space merges with time becoming significant and meaningful (see Figure 4). Recalling scenes of our life throughout time and making meaning of time and place helps to define who we are and orient us in a time and place continuum throughout our own personal history (Tuan, 1977; Lynch, 1972).

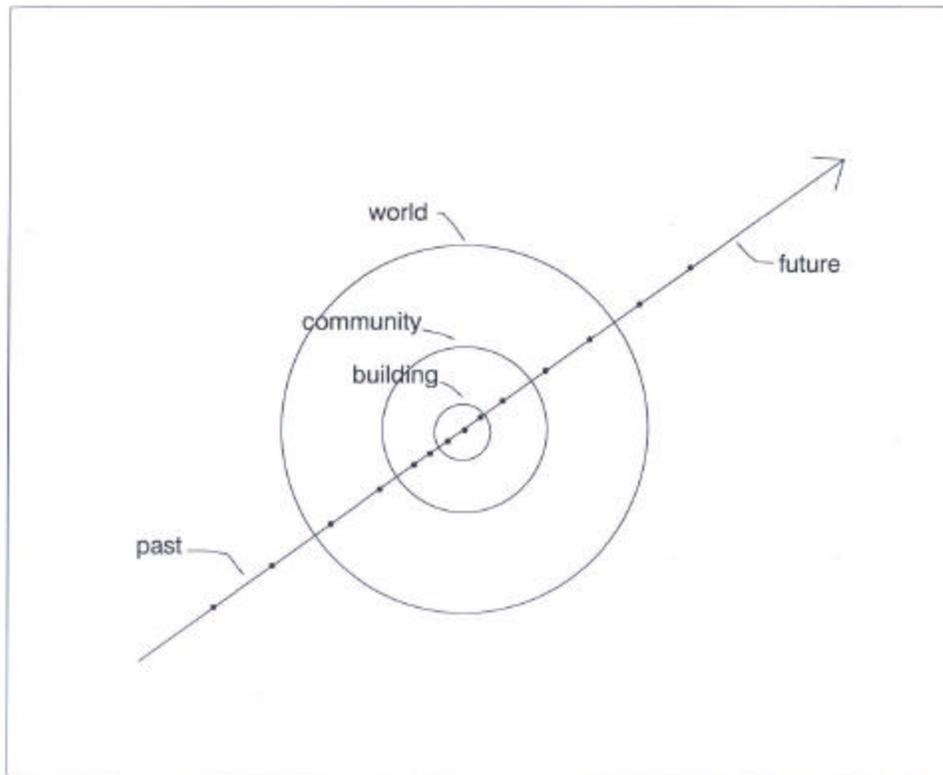


Figure 4. Time/Place Continuum.

Spirit of Place

Certain buildings or “places” are infused with great symbolism that goes beyond a sense of place and takes on a sense of mystery perceived as almost sacred in nature. The sacred nature of the space is palpable as you walk into, around, or through it. This may be a building that you have never seen before that is architecturally compelling, such as a cathedral with ceilings soaring toward the heavens, or it may be a smaller, more intimate space, such as a bedroom in the house in which you grew up. Hester (1990) speaks of a town’s “sacred structures”, places that “exemplify, typify, and reinforce and perhaps even extol everyday life patterns and special rituals of community life; places that are so essential to residents’ lives through use or by symbolism that the community

collectively identifies with them” (p. 10). These icons of a community might include such buildings as the courthouse, the railroad station, the post office, churches, and the theater. Often the memories associated with these buildings in the community become stronger as time passes and they are viewed from a different vantage point; for instance, as an adult who has moved away from the community and returns to visit, or when a structure is threatened for demolition. Many preservation groups have sprung up in reaction to a town’s proposal to demolish a significant historic building. When we view these cultural icons in light of losing them forever, the meaning to the community becomes clearer.

The theatre may indeed represent a sense of place and perhaps even a spirit of place, as well, if the reflections associated with it are found to produce collectively:

- feelings of stimulation, excitement, joy, and expansiveness
- feelings of being “at home”
- feelings representing a distinctive character that localizes oneself
- feelings with special meaning linking people through a cultural place attachment made whole in their imagination
- feelings used to define and orient oneself throughout time and memory
- feelings that allow the past to continue to speak to and have relevance to the present.

Icons of the community, such as the theatre, typify and reinforce everyday life patterns and give a sense of place to a community that is so essential to the lives of the residents that identify with it on a day-to-day basis, as well as visitors that are drawn to visit due to the spirit, uniqueness, and vibrancy the town provides. A town’s unique structures, such

as the theatre, create landmarks in the community that serve as a geographic compass for townspeople as well as visitors. These icons are remembered throughout time providing a link to the past and a bridge to the future.

Social Importance

In determining the social importance of the theatre to the community, the social impact of the theatre to the life of downtown Pulaski, the environment created within the theatre, and memories attached to this environment will be examined. Social impact is defined by Wolf and Peterson (1977) as non-economic or non-market, or non-environmental impacts, although economic factors and environment do interact and affect each other in a cause and effect relationship. Admitting the difficulties involved in residual definitions, Wolf and Peterson introduce global terms such as “quality of life” and “social well-being”. In analyzing these terms, more specific contents are formed, such as “community cohesion,” “neighborhood character,” and “lifestyle” (p. 92). In utilizing these global terms as representative of social impact, while analyzing the meaning of the theatre to a neighborhood or community, the question arises: How did the activities performed in and associated with the theatre influence the quality of life, social well being, cohesion of the community, character of the neighborhood, and lifestyle of the community?

Speaking of the sense of community in her small town of Sullivan, Illinois and the sense of place in connection with her small town theater, Shervey (2000) states:

The complexities of small-town life evolve over years and, in some cases, generations of interaction with the same people in the same

locations for the same reasons. The everyday patterns of life in places like Sullivan build such a level of familiarity, almost to the point of ritual, that it is often overlooked, especially by outsiders, as simplistic and inconsequential. The geography of an area also plays a role: People interact with the surrounding landscape as they do their neighbors. Residents of an area develop similar intimacies with streetscapes, curves in roads, even the bumps and sounds of railroad crossings. Such habitual contact with people and landscape orders residents' lives and creates and reinforces one's sense of place (p. 9).

Beaver (1986) described the sense of community that developed within rural Appalachian communities as "community itself, a combination of elements linking geographically defined place, the daily lives and relationships of people, historical experiences, and shared values" (p. 1). Focusing on social patterns and cultural systems in three rural western North Carolina mountain communities, she discovered a collective representation made of its historical mythic legacy, the connectedness with land, and the continuity of kinship and friendship ties. These connections and the predictability of neighboring offered a sense of place and hope in an uncertain future.

In determining the value of an environment to the community, it has been shown that people value those environments that facilitate positive emotional experiences and that their evaluation of a space is based on the opportunities for valued experiences (Levi, Itteson, Black, 1980). If participants feel that the theatre provided such an environment, the value of the theatre to the community rises proportionally to its facility for creating valued experiences. Realizing that each person brings his or her past experiences, values,

and symbolic interpretations to each experience, perceptions are thus colored in an individual manner. Although each person's experience is an individual one, the social environment also plays an important role in judgments of environmental quality. Sharing an experience with other people can add life to the environment, thus building social support. Attending a movie with friends or loved ones usually increases the possibility of valued emotional experiences. When lifelong partnerships are forged through a connection with movie attendance, the theatre takes on an even higher value rating and becomes more than just a building.

If the theatre is found to facilitate lifestyle choices that provide positive emotional experiences leading to social well-being, community cohesion, and a higher quality of life within the neighborhood, the social importance is greater. When these experiences are shared with others, it can add life to an environment, thus enhancing the social experience.

The prominent buildings of Main Street in America create the unique characteristics of the townscape (Gratz, 1994). A prominent building such as a theater is significant due to our memories of it, as well as for its particular architectural style. If these associations are strong ones, it may be difficult to think of one without the other, with the particular architectural style associated with the memories created by going to the theater. If the Pulaski Theatre is found to be socially important to the townspeople, this research will assist the theatre board in planning for the renovation of the theatre. It may also help town planners and designers in establishing guidelines for town planning and for designing or renovating structures in a manner that impacts their surroundings, the town, and the townspeople in a positive way.

Environmental Autobiography

The following section discusses environmental autobiography, a method of bringing out people's conscious and unconscious affective ties to environments through personal reflection, analysis, synthesis, and presentation. This method has been used as a learning experience in classroom settings (Boschetti, 1987), as well as in investigating the connections among human values, behavior, and space in residential settings (Hasell and Peatross, 1991; Marcus, 1997; Marcus and Sarkissian, 1986).

Clare Cooper Marcus, whose research is based on Carl Jung's (1961) work on the unconscious, researched the subtle bonds of feeling people experience with houses they have lived in, past and present. She found that some people have profound memories of a special childhood home and carry those memories with them to an adult home where they try to reproduce aspects of the earlier residence. The premise of Marcus's study is stated in the following: "As we change and grow throughout our lives, our psychological development is punctuated not only by meaningful emotional relationships with people, but also by close, affective ties with a number of significant physical environments, beginning in childhood" (Marcus, 1997, p. 2).

When interviewing people about their homes, Marcus focused on emotions. She requested that each person put down his or her feelings about 'home' in a picture. Whether they felt they could draw or not, most people found the experience of exploring feelings in a visual image helpful in allowing them to focus before beginning interviews. People described what they had drawn to Marcus. A dialogue would ensue with the participants first speaking to the house about the way they felt about it, and secondly, switching places and speaking as the house back to themselves. Often deep emotion was

aroused or unexpected insights emerged as a result of this process. This exercise brought out conscious and unconscious aspects of the meaning of home to the individuals. Marcus believes that we selectively pay attention and invest emotion into objects and places in our lives, just as we do with people and relationships. These places in our lives present a learning experience by a reflection of the environment around us (Marcus, 1997).

Marcus's (1997) work on people/environment feelings focused on the home. My premise is that these associations travel with us into a larger community including work, entertainment, and other places that we frequent and that allow us to feel "at home". This could be a restaurant or coffee shop that becomes a home away from home; an office where some individuals spend more waking hours than they do at their homes; or a place of entertainment that is frequented on a regular basis. Associations and special memories become attached to these places in the same way they can to a home, forming life-long relationships. A movie theater can become such a meaningful place with the possibility of transference into a life of romance, glamour, or adventure and the enjoyable associations and memories connected to it. A small-town theater often is a special place to the residents of the town, becoming a place to meet friends, to see acquaintances, and sometimes even to forge lifetime commitments.

Marcus (1997) feels that just as we grieve the loss of a relationship or job, the loss of a house should be acknowledged and grieved. If a small downtown theater closes, residents may go through a similar grieving process. When residents of a town have spent countless hours in the theater and have many happy associations connected with it, the final closing of its doors leaves a large hole in the community that may be difficult to

fill. The emotions connected with the grieving process may be expressed in the drawings that the participants create.

Boschetti (1987) used environmental autobiography based on Marcus's research to investigate students' memories of their childhood homes yielding insights into child-environment behaviors. A central theme of this research was the preference for small, enclosed spaces supporting children's need for seclusion, exploration, and imagination.

Rowles (1978) explored the geographical experience of five older people living in a common community context. Participation was restricted to persons at least sixty-five years of age who had lived in a single neighborhood for at least thirty years. Through visits, interviews, and accompanying participants on trips around the neighborhood, Rowles was able to focus on the manner in which older people actually experience the environments of their lives. Four modalities of geographical experience were useful: action, orientation, feeling, and fantasy. Action was defined as physical movement in space including immediate action, everyday activity, and occasional trips. Orientation relates to spaces distinguishable to the individual in terms of degree of jurisdiction, and was represented by three dimensions: personal schema, specific schemata, and general schema, with home as a base radiating outward to surveillance zone, neighborhood, city, and beyond. Rowles believes that feelings about places are imbued with meaning and live by virtue of emotions they evoke within the individual. These emotional attachments provide places with special meaning and differentiate them from surrounding space and can vary according to situational context. Rowles found fantasy an important part of the geographical experience of these older participants as their lives were enriched by involvement in locales displaced in space and time. The word "fantasy" was not used in

any negative sense but was seen as the ability to project oneself into another world, both contemporary and non-contemporary. One may become immersed in the space of a childhood home or imagine technologically advanced future worlds. Participants in Rowles's study imagined such things as seeing gardens growing that they had helped plant on a previous visit to their children's homes, or envisioned their children sitting down and eating breakfast in Japan at a particular time after their move to Tokyo.

From his findings Rowles (1978) hypothesized

1. "that as a person grows older there is a change of emphasis within geographical experience involving a constriction in the realm of action which is accompanied by an expansion of the role of geographical fantasy" (p. 202).
2. "that there are consistent accompanying changes in the older person's orientation within space and in feelings about the places of his life reflecting a selective intensification of involvement" (p. 202).

This phenomenological research focuses on making meaning of the human experience in our everyday world and strives for an understanding of people's experience from their own perspective. Validation of this type of research comes through intersubjective corroboration (Boschetti, 1987), but each person's experience is unique to him or her and stands alone as a valid experience for that unique individual.

Environmental autobiography, while serving as a self-learning process, can also generate concepts for designers' use in the programming phase of design.

Environmental autobiography offers a way to uncover an individual's perceptions, memories, and associations of the theatre, and thus, collectively the meaning of the

theatre to the townspeople and the town. The meaning of the theatre to the townspeople will help to assess whether the theatre represents a space or a sense of place that may be imbued with a spirit of place as well.

Context

In order to place the Pulaski Theatre in context, a brief description of Pulaski County leading up to the time the theatre was constructed, and the history of the theatre building will be examined.

Pulaski County

In 1910 construction of the Elks Theatre was begun in downtown Pulaski. The streets leading into town during this era were fashioned of dirt from the agricultural fields surrounding the town. The majority of the people worked in agriculture, others in manufacturing and various trades, and a few as professionals (Smith, 1981).

The first rail line had been extended into Pulaski County in 1854 paving the way for performing companies to travel into Pulaski to entertain the residents. Further expansion was seen during the 1880s and '90s as mercantile establishments were opening on Valley and Commerce Streets and spreading outward as new streets were laid out in town (Smith, 1981).

The first newspaper, *The Pulaski News*, began publishing in 1886 at the corner of Washington Avenue and Third Street. The Pulaski Opera House opened in 1890 at the corner of Randolph Avenue and First Street North, with traveling companies as well as local talent performing there. The Opera House served as the town's main venue for entertainment until the turn of the century when the Gar-mor-hunt Building with its more modern theatre was built on Main Street. On December 9, 1909 this building was

destroyed by fire leading to the construction of the Elk's Building housing the Elk's Theatre. The Elk's Lodge of Pulaski began construction of this building on Main Street in 1910 and the Elk's Theatre was completed in 1911 (Smith, 1981).

The railroad, which had been bought by the Norfolk and Western Railroad, built the Tudor style Maple Shade Inn in 1884 and the Pulaski Land and Improvement Company completed the Hotel Pulaski in 1891 – a three-story brick hotel at the corner of Washington and Main. With hotels in place for companies traveling on the railroad and theaters open for performances, companies were able to stop in Pulaski and perform for the residents of town (Smith, 1981).

Businessmen predicted “A future Pittsburgh” (Smith, 1981, p. 336) during these boom days of Pulaski. The burgeoning new town was rapidly becoming the industrial and commercial center of the county. When the courthouse burned at Newbern in 1893, Pulaski became the county seat of government as well. The new stone courthouse was finally built on Main Street in 1895 after a long and heated battle with Newbern and Dublin both as contenders (Smith, 1981). With the new courthouse in place, mercantile establishments springing up on Valley and Commerce Streets, a newspaper, an opera house, two banks, two hotels, and the steam locomotive with passenger trains “able to attain the speed of 30 miles an hour with perfect safety” (Smith, 1981, p. 228), Pulaski had become the county's leader in manufacturing, commerce, government, agriculture, and entertainment.

History of the Theatre

The Elks Theatre was built in downtown Pulaski in 1911 and served the community and its visitors during the height of Pulaski's heyday as a summer resort. The

Maple Shade Inn in Pulaski was a popular tourist stop on the railway. The Inn housed 150 travelers, many of whom stopped to enjoy the fine summer climate of the area. Elegant dinners were served every evening and the Inn was popular with residents as well as visitors (Smith, 1981). Vaudeville acts and other entertainers traveling by rail stopped in Pulaski to give performances for residents of the area. A postcard of the time depicts the town with horses and carriages pulled along dirt streets (Wolfe, 1980) (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Postcard depicting Main Street, Pulaski, VA with dirt streets, 1911.

The first manager of the Elks Theatre, Mr. Clarence Painter, unfortunately died only a few days after its opening. He was replaced by Mr. J. F. Wysor and followed by Mr. John Wygal, who owned and operated the theatre until 1921 (Mathews, 1992, May 3; Mathews, 2001, April 8).

The Elks Theatre supported vaudeville shows and other traveling companies, as well as early silent films. An early advertisement and program of the concert and vaudeville series published in the *Southwest Times and News Review* on August 19, 1913 shows the musical program and vaudeville act playing at the Elks Theatre for that evening (see Figure 6). Admission to the musical concert and vaudeville sketches was 50 cents, 75 cents and \$1. The Harman listed in the Harman and Carson vaudeville sketch was most likely Doc Harman of Pulaski (see Figure 7).

Doc Harman, Vaudeville Comedian

Doc Harman was born in Pulaski County in 1892 and passed away in 1964. He owned the local Chevrolet dealership and besides providing comedy to the town, he was Santa Claus in Pulaski from the age of 18 to his death in 1964, except for the years he spent in France during World War I. His daughter, Ellen Kate Carson, a long time resident of Pulaski said that he was “the real Santa”. During the time spent in service he was assigned to an Army band, then was designated as an entertainer. At the time he expected to return home following the end of the war, his Commanding Officer declined to sign his orders stating “for the good of the regiment this man should not return home due to his value as an entertainer for the troops” (E. K. Carson, personal communication, September 29, 2003). He was anxious to return to his family, however, and a child he had never seen. Although Ellen Kate Carson is too young to have attended the Elk’s Theatre, she does remember her father telling her on the opening of the Pulaski Theatre that the building had originally been built for theater.

ELKS THEATRE

Concert and Vaudeville
 EDWIN FELLER, Director

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 1913
 8 o'clock P. M.

Benefit Pulaski Concert Band and Athletic Club

PROGRAM.

Trio from Faust	Gounod
Mrs. Feller, Messrs Fisher and Feller.	
(a) For You Alone	
(b) At Dawning	Cadman
Mr. D. Gray Langhorne.	
I Would That My Love	Mendelssohn
Mrs. Dunlap and Miss Wysor.	
(a) Awake 'Tis Day	Rogers
(b) Come To The Garden	Salter
Mrs. Dunlap.	
Miserere Duet from Il Trovatore.	
Mrs. Feller and Mr. Fisher.	
(a) Spring's Awakening	Hawley
(b) Last Rose of Summer	
(c) Little Blue Dove	Suar
Mrs. Feller.	
Welcome Sweet Springtime	Rubenstein
Mrs. Dunlap, Mrs. Feller, Miss Stearnes.	
Army and Navy Duet	
Messrs. Fisher and Feller.	
(a) Blacksmith Song from Phiteon and Baucis.	
(b) Morning and Evening	Spross
(c) Three For Jack	Squire
O Lovely Night	Offenbach
Mrs. Feller, Miss Stearnes, Mr. Feller.	
(a) Indian Song	Cadman
(b) My Realm of Love	Ronald
(c) Let Miss Lindy Pass	Rogers
Mr. Karl Fisher	
The Singing Lesson	Squire
Mr. and Mrs. Feller.	
(a) Thy Dear Eyes	Hawley
(b) Those Sad Blue Eyes	Sanderson
Miss Wysor.	
Arrangement of Sextette from Lucia.	
Mrs. Feller, Miss Stearnes, Messrs. Fisher and Feller.	
INTERMISSION.	
Vaudeville Sketch.	
Harman and Carson.	

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME

Elks Theatre

Special Musical Concert and
 Vaudeville Sketches
 Edwin Feller, Director.
 Admission 50, 75 and \$1.

Figure 6. Advertisement and program from Elks Theatre for evening of August 19, 1913.



Figure 7. Doc Harman, vaudeville comedian, on the right with unidentified gentleman, circa 1913.

Silent Films

An example of one performance given at the Elks Theatre on Tuesday, May 22, 1917 was “The Cure” starring Charlie Chaplin. Also listed is “A Double Steal” – Chapter Two of “The Railroad Raiders” with Helen Holmes (see Figure 8). Two days later, Thursday, May 24, 1917 the theatre advertised Margaret Fischer in “The Pearl of Paradise, A Thrilling Drama of Romance and Adventure in the South Sea Islands.” Also shown was Chapter 16 of “The Iron Claw”. The advertisement states that 8 reels were shown. The continuing dramas shown in chapters were cliffhangers segmented to bring patrons back into the theatre on successive nights (see Figure 9).

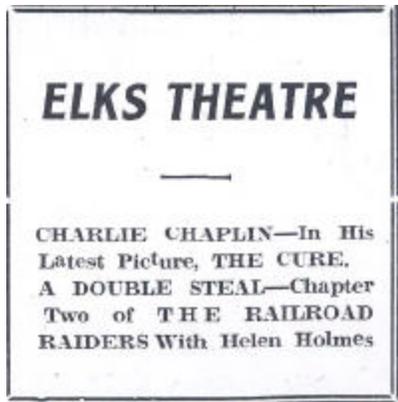


Figure 8. Advertisement for Elk's Theatre, May 22, 1917.



Figure 9. Advertisement for Elk's Theatre, May 24, 1917.

Even in the early days of silent films, there was a touch of the risqué, even if only in the movie titles. One 1912 movie at the Elks Theatre had the suggestive title of “What Katie Did.” Although what she did was probably quiet tame compared to today’s films, it is interesting to note that at this early time, catchy titles could prompt people into the theatre to find out what she did (Mathews, 1992, May 3).

“Silent films” were not exactly quiet, according to Pulaski’s local newspaper, the *Southwest Times*:

Sound accompaniment at the Elks Theatre was provided by an orchestra that consisted usually of a piano and drums. When a sad scene was depicted on the screen the pianist played sad music. When the villain was vanquished and virtue reigned triumphant, the music became quite joyful. There was music for every mood.

But it was the drummer who was called on for the most ingenuity. He had to get the sounds. At one time at the Elks Theatre he had, besides his drums, two trunks full of utensils: bells, horns, tin plates, whistles, a wash-

board, sandpaper, and scores of other things. He laid them all out on a big table and used whatever he needed to follow the action on the screen. He could imitate the sound of a locomotive, a bird, a snoring grandpa, a roaring lion, a window pane being smashed, a squalling baby and anything else necessary. The audience wouldn't do without him (Mathews, 1992, May 3).

In 1922 the Elks Theatre closed and the building was converted into a dry goods store, the Dix-Richardson Store.

Dix-Richardson Dry Goods Store

Mr. James Dix Miller, CPA, and resident of Pulaski, was only nine years old when the Pulaski Theatre opened, but he remembers the Dix Richardson Dry Goods Wholesale business in the '30s. His grandfather, John Dix, owned the business.

John Dix was born in Wythe County and moved to Pulaski in 1922. He and two other individuals, C. E. Richardson and Sexton Dalton (who owned the Dalton Theater, the other movie theater in town) purchased the theatre building on January 25, 1922. They did not purchase the building from the Elks Club. The Elks Club had sold the building on April 5, 1919 to A. H. Wygal and D. E. Seagle. Mr. Wygal and Mr. Seagle then sold it to Mr. Dix, Mr. Richardson and Mr. Dalton.

On November 3, 1922 Dix Wholesale Corporation purchased the property from the three individuals, thus forming a corporation and transferred ownership to the corporation rather than the three individuals. The Corporation name changed to Dix Richardson on February 11, 1924. The principal stockholders were John S. Dix and C. E. Richardson. The wholesale dry goods business began.

The dry goods business included bolts of cloth manufactured in local textile mills. An advertisement in the 1926 Pulaski High School yearbook states that the company sold “dry goods and notions” (see Figure 10). Goods were sold locally and the company covered a considerable amount of territory, southwest Virginia and probably the coalfields of West Virginia.

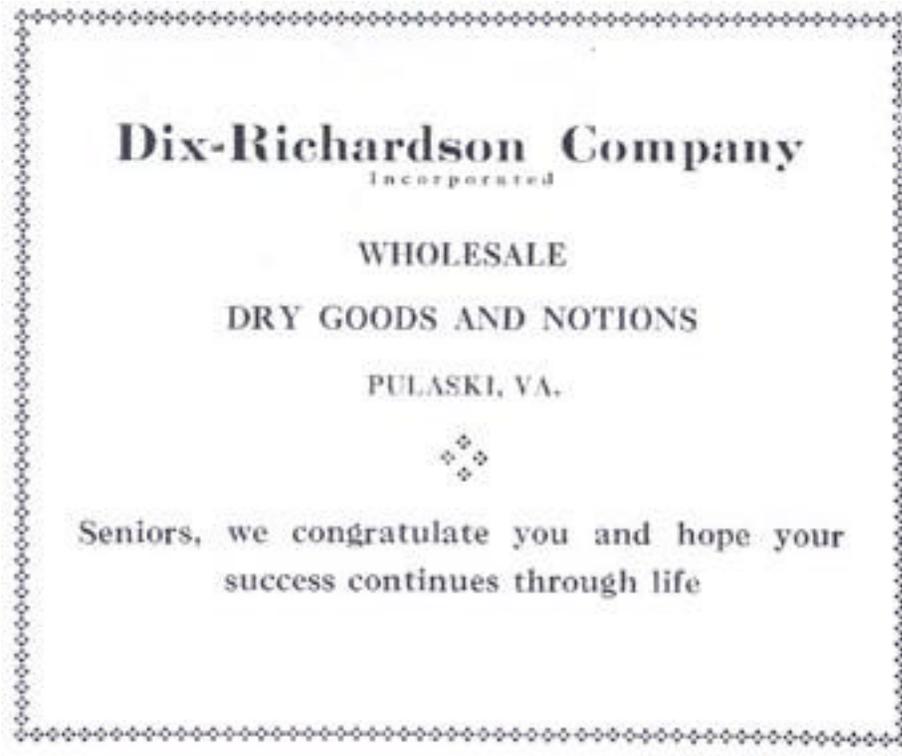


Figure 10. Dix-Richardson advertisement in Pulaski High School Yearbook, 1926.

Mr. Miller fondly remembers the parade through town when the circus came into Pulaski by way of the railroad. They would unload at the freight yard to go to Cool Springs to set up. The dry good business had a large window facing Main Street with a table on which goods were displayed. Mr. Miller, as a boy, remembers standing up on the table and watching the parade. He was able to see over the heads of people in the street as the circus paraded through town.

The Pulaski Theatre

After serving the community as a dry goods store for fifteen years, the building saw a return to its original entertainment venue in 1937. Dix Richardson Corporation leased the building to Neighborhood Theater, Inc. of Richmond, Virginia on March 9, 1937 for a twenty-year term. Neighborhood Theater was owned by the Thalheimer family of Richmond, with Morton G. Thalheimer serving as President. The building was renovated for a theatre and opened on November 11, 1937 as the Pulaski Theatre, a motion picture house that served the community until it closed its doors on December 31, 1991.

During the period of the renovation of the theatre, Mr. Miller's grandfather became aware that he had cancer and was sick for five or six months. Right before the theatre opened, Mr. Dix was driven downtown by family members so that he could see the new theatre occupying what had been his dry goods building. He passed away on November 21, 1937, ten days after the theatre opened.

After Mr. John S. Dix passed away, his wife, Lina Dix inherited the corporation. It was liquidated shortly after that and she owned the property as an individual until February 25, 1946, when she passed away. Mr. and Mrs. Dix had three daughters: the eldest Willie Mae Dix Miller (Mr. Miller's mother); a middle child, Cecile Dix Kirchner; and the youngest, Helen Dix Wyatt, who inherited the property. After 1946 the daughters owned the theatre as a partnership.

At the end of the lease period there was a conversion from Neighborhood Theater to Davidson Theater as operators. Mr. Thalheimer opted not to renew the lease and it was released to Davidson Theater who operated it for a period of time. Theatre

attendance began dropping and the building was not leased after 1991, ceasing operation as a theatre. The property began to deteriorate and fell into disrepair. The roof was leaking and it became difficult to get adequate insurance. The building had a retractable fire escape that could be pulled down for emergencies. Youngsters started jumping up and pulling the steps down, and the Millers became worried about liability issues. Since the condition of the building made it unsuitable for renting, the Millers made a deal with the county, giving it to them on February 11, 1992 (J. D. Miller, personal interview, July 8, 2003). When the county began to talk of demolishing the old theatre building to make way for a parking lot, the Friends of the Theatre group was formed. The Friends incorporated in 1993, and began the effort to save the theatre and renovate the building. It was hoped that saving this building would jumpstart the revitalization of downtown Pulaski (J. R. White, personal communication, February 8, 2004).

The Relationship between the Pulaski Theatre and the Dalton Theater

Circa 1920 Mr. Dexton Dalton built a new theater on North Washington Avenue in downtown Pulaski named the Dalton Theater. Mr. Dalton operated the theater successfully until 1937, the year that the Pulaski Theatre opened (Mathews, 2001, April 22). At that point Neighborhood Theaters out of Richmond took over management of both the Dalton and the Pulaski Theatre.

The Dalton showed “B” pictures during the week and what was referred to as “horse operas” on Saturdays featuring cowboys such as Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Buck Jones, Tex Ritter, Tim McCoy, and Hop-Along Cassidy among others. Most of these good guys wore white hats which never came off even during the toughest fistfights. Although the cowboys had girlfriends, they usually just sang to them and left the hugging

and kissing to the romantic stars such as Clark Gable and Tyrone Powers (Mathews, 2001, April 22). After the Dalton closed its doors in 1979, cowboy fans had to venture out to other towns or be content with the Lone Ranger and other westerns on television.

The Pulaski Theatre was described by a *Southwest Times* reporter as “the pride of entertainment to everyone in the community” (Mathews, 2001, April 22). Not only was the theatre a source of pride to the community, it was a special place for young people courting in the balcony and a consolation for many others including defense workers and wives and sweethearts left behind during World War II who found refuge from loneliness and anxiety for a few hours at the theatre, where such stars as Clark Gable, Vivian Leigh, Tyrone Powers, Ginger Rogers, and David Niven weaved their magic spell and seemed to make time stand still (Mathews, 2001, April 22).

Lloyd Mathews stated that in the ‘40s and ‘50s:

In those days a movie was an event and many young lovers would go in early and court through two complete shows. Every couple had their special place in the balcony, and could usually be found there every time a new movie came. I’m sure that many lifetime commitments were made right there in the dark shadows of the Pulaski Theatre (Mathews, 1992, April 12).

The Pulaski Theatre showed more classic and romantic movies and was considered the better movie house in town. An advertisement from the *Southwest Times* tells of screen star Tallulah Bankhead and Charles Coburn co-starring in “A Royal Scandal” at the Pulaski on Monday, May 7, 1945. Featured at the Dalton the same day is “Show Business”, billed as a musical cavalcade of show-folks starring Eddie Cantor, George Murphy, Joan Davis, Nancy Kelly, and Constance Moore (see Figure 11).



Figure 11. Advertisements for Pulaski and Dalton Theatres, Monday, May 7, 1945.

Pulaski Theatre continued to show first run movies throughout its history with the Dalton showing “B” movies or westerns. On Friday, January 20, 1961 the Pulaski Theatre advertised Jerry Lewis starring in “Cinderfella” with a “3 Stooges” comedy extra treat. The Dalton Theatre showed “The Wild and the Innocent,” an Audie Murphy western (see Figure 12).

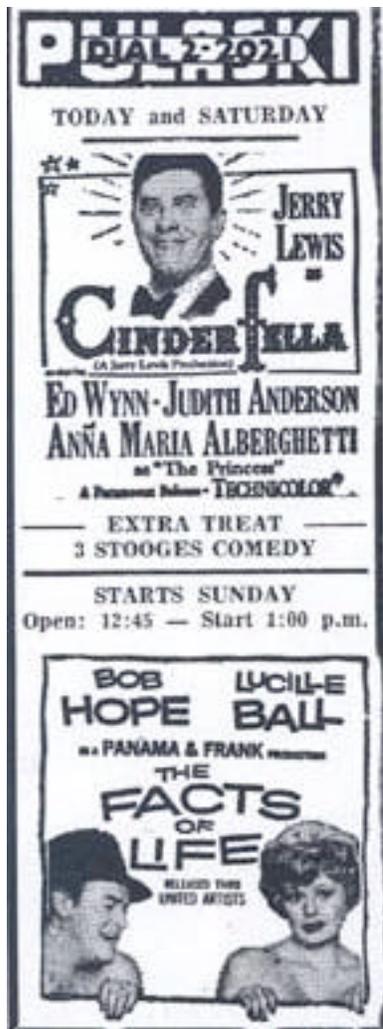


Figure 12. Advertisement for Pulaski and Dalton Theatres, January 20, 1961.

Stars were known to visit the theaters in person from time to time, as an ad stated, “for Wednesday only, Tex Ritter, singing cowboy of the screen, will appear in person on the stage of the Dalton. Accompanying him are his “Musical Tornadoes” (Southwest Times, 1939, August 19; Mathews, 1979, September 19).

When the Dalton Theater closed in 1979, the interior was converted into offices. The building had been named a Virginia Historical Landmark in 1977 and a National Historical Landmark in 1978 (Shadrui, 1982). Residents of Pulaski awoke early on the

morning of June 12, 1982 to find that the Dalton building had collapsed during the night, falling onto a parking lot on First Street and crushing an automobile (see Figure 13). Luckily, no one was injured in the middle of the night collapse. Rebuilt after the collapse, the façade was recreated exactly as the original (see Figure 14), with the interior designed for office spaces.



Figure 13. Dalton Theater collapse, June 12, 1982.

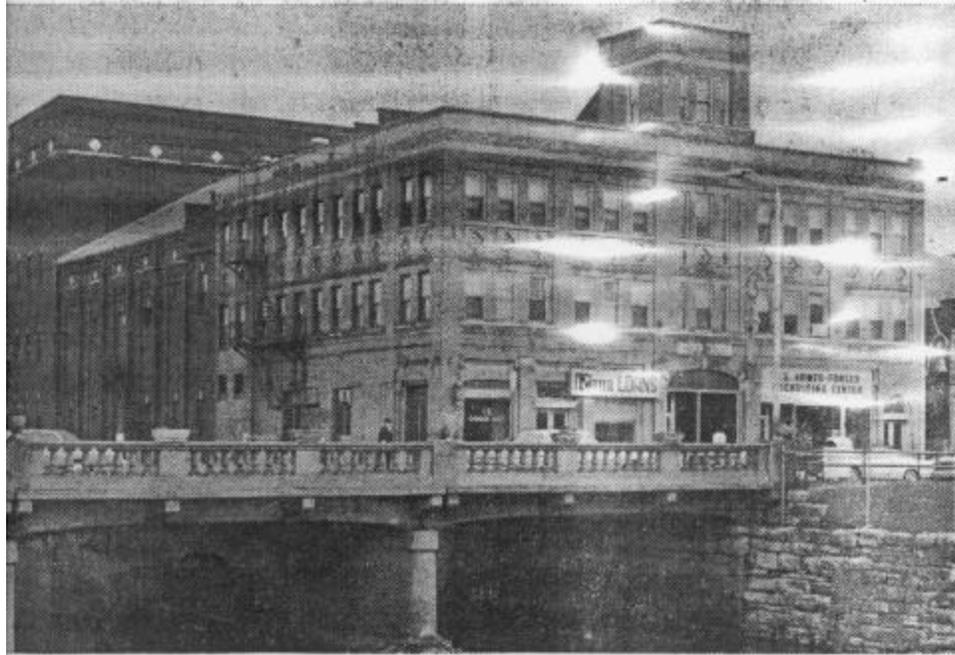


Figure 14. Dalton Theater, 1977.

Changes in the Elks Building over Time

The original theatre building, built in 1911, was a Classical Revival style of red brick with yellow brick quoins delineating the three bays (see Figure 15). The roof was hipped with a parapet wall. Outer bays contained round windows set in recessed rectangular panels. A bracketed cornice ran across the top of the building with a semi-circular pediment in the center bay adorned with the head of Dionysus, the youthful and beautiful god of wine and drama. Sockets for lamps were placed between each bracket on the cornice, illuminating the façade at night. The commercial buildings adjoining the theatre were treated with similar classical treatment with quoins delineating three business spaces, entrance bays to second floors, and a bracketed cornice. The theatre building occupied a key corner location and was a contributing building in the historic district of downtown. An historic district survey completed in June 1985 described

changes that have been made in the original building. It states, “The bracketed cornice w/semi-circular pediment has been removed, original brick façade now stuccoed & scored to look like stone” (Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks Survey, 1985) (see Figure 16).



Figure 15. Elks Building, circa 1922.



Figure 16. Pulaski Theatre, 1985.

The semi-circular pediment and head of Dionysus were removed circa 1950. The pediment was slightly slanted and while Mr. Wilmer Ryan, the projectionist, was up on the roof, he noticed that the pediment rocked when he brushed up against it. Fearing the worst, the pediment and head of Dionysus were taken down, leaving a safer but less exciting façade for the theatre (W. A. Ryan, personal interview, April 2, 2003). Dionysus (see Figure 17) now resides in the Raymond Ratcliffe Museum, the local history museum housing artifacts of the town’s early history. The Museum is located in the renovated stone railroad station (see Figure 18), which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Figure 17. Head of Dionysus displayed in history museum, 2003.

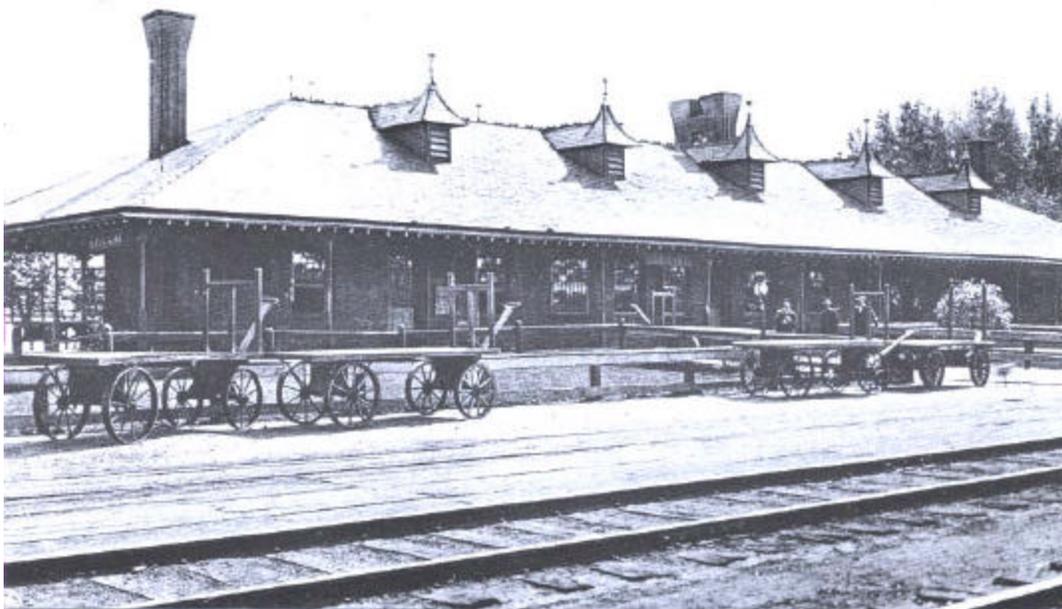


Figure 18. Historic Norfolk & Western Railway Station, Pulaski, VA, built 1888.

Renovation Effort

In 2001 a plan was developed to renovate the theatre building along with the former Southwest Times building and the Edmonds Printing building into The Pulaski Theatre Civic Centre. Architect Tom Douthat designed plans for the Civic Centre (see Figure 19). In an historic survey completed in May 1985, the Southwest Times building is described as a Colonial Revival two-story, three-bay building with a shed roof with a parapet wall. It has a projecting central pavilion with a recessed central entry. The façade is Flemish bond brick with glazed headers. The north wing is a Colonial Revival storefront (modern) which is recessed with 3-bays and a running bond façade. The survey states that the cornice may have been removed (Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks Survey, 1985).

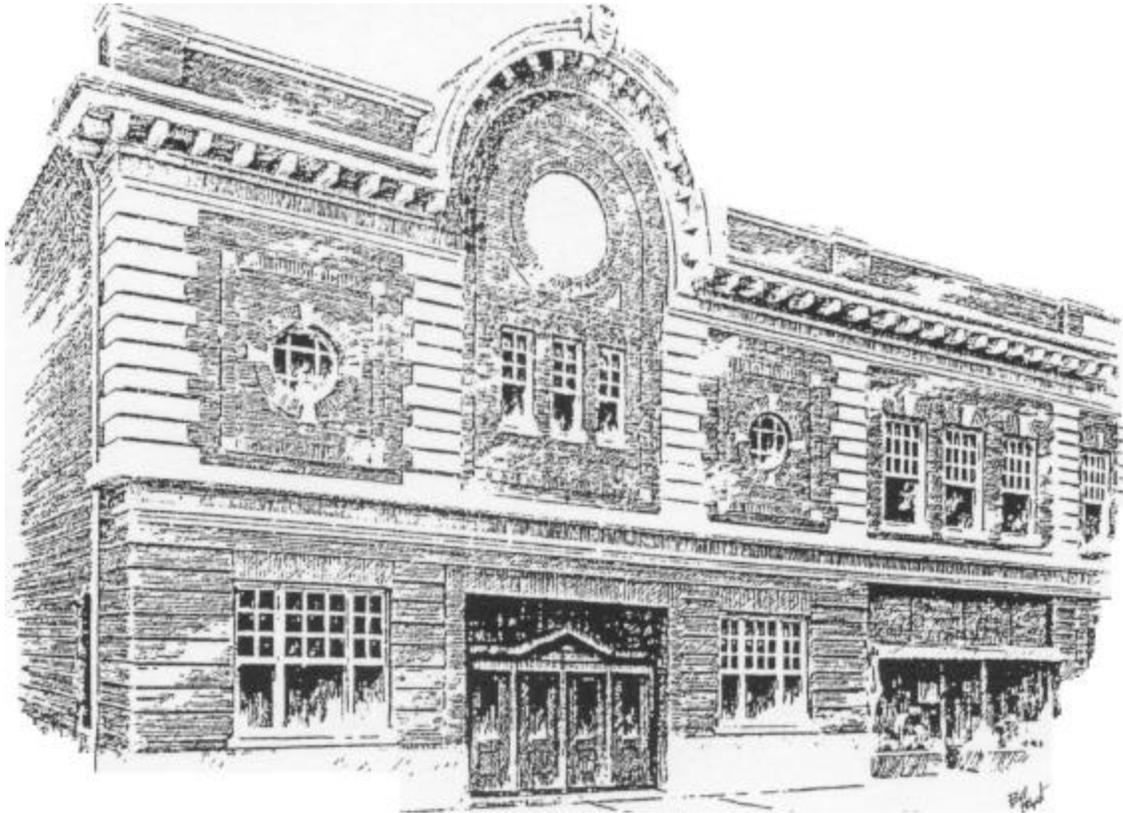


Figure 19. Architect Tom Douthat's rendering of proposed theatre/civic center, 2001.

In an historic survey done at the same time as the theatre and Southwest Times building, the Edmonds Printing building is described as an early 20th century structure with a 1936 addition. It is a one-story, three-bay building with a gable-end roof with a round arched entry. The front section was added in 1935 – 1936. This is the third location of this early Pulaski commercial enterprise (Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks Survey, 1985). As a result of the survey, the central business district of town, where the theatre sits, was proclaimed an “historic district”.

The plans for the civic center have been put on hold at the present time. Due to economic considerations, the theatre board voted to renovate only the theatre building in order to make it operational and see what the future holds for the other buildings. It was felt that the important issue was to open the theatre and that would be a more realistic plan for Pulaski at the present time. A timeline of events regarding the theatre is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Timeline

Dates	Event
1911	Elks Theatre constructed by Elks Club
April 5, 1919	Elks Club sold building to Wygal and Seagle
January 25, 1922	Building purchased by Dix, Richardson and Dalton
November 3, 1922	Dix Wholesale Corporation formed
February 11, 1924	Dix Richardson Corporation formed
March 9, 1937	Lease agreement for 20 years with Neighborhood Theater, Inc.
May 8, 1937	Plans to renovate building by Architect A. O. Budina
November 11, 1937	Pulaski Theatre opened
March 17, 1948	Plans for renovation of façade by Architect A. O. Budina
Circa 1950	Arched pediment and head of Dionysus removed from façade
1985	Central business district of town (includes theatre) proclaimed historic district
Circa late 1980s	Faux marbling and floral ornamentation painted on facade
December 31, 1991	Pulaski Theatre closed
February 11, 1992	Dix/Miller family donated building to Pulaski County
June 30, 1993	Friends of the Pulaski Theatre incorporated
March 1, 1999	County deeded theatre to Friends group
2001	Plans for renovation of theatre by Architect Tom Douthat