

B. A. Stover, longtime Capitol Theater owner, recalls years of silent films, advent of talkies

By Bill Thompson
Bulletin Staff Writer
The Old Capitol Theater is dead.

Once the finest theater in Bend, and for many years the social center of the community, it was torn down this year.

A symbol of a changing era. "We used to run special fronts for everything," recalls B. A. "Dutch" Stover, longtime owner of the Capitol.

Glenn Shelley was our organist. He gave concerts every Sunday afternoon in the 20s and 30s.

The Capitol was finished in February 1923 by Dennis Carmody, and secured by Stover four months later in June 1923.

After many years of successful operation, Stover sold the Capitol in 1948.

And it appeared that Dutch got out while the getting was good. For the movies began to falter as "the" entertainment. Then came television, the signal of the end for the Capitol.

As late as last summer they tried movies. It didn't work. And so the Capitol was torn down this spring to make way for the new Equitable Savings and Loan building.

Those Were the Days
But in 1923...

Those were the days of Buster Keaton, Constance Talmadge, Jackie Coogan, Strongheart the Wonder Dog, Richard Barthelmess, Dorothy Gish.

Dutch used to include a small editorial opinion of his shows in the daily ads in the Bend Bulletin. In his first editorial to Mr. and Mrs. Bend in 1923, Dutch announced:

"I shall endeavor from time to time to give you my honest opinion of the Capitol pictures, as well as comments, for or against, of the patrons. To make this a success, I wish you would do your part by telling me frankly exact-

ly what you think of the shows you see.

"Comments on Fury last night were unusually good, although one man said it was too sad. Personally, I'm prejudiced where Barthelmess is concerned.

Sometimes Dutch's comments were not so favorable, as in "The Mysterious Witness." Wrote Dutch:

"My agreement was to say exactly what I thought of a picture, if I said anything at all. There is a good fight scene, very little humor; some paths, but the balance is bad.

"Acting only fair, while direction at times is terrible. This is a western proper — some might like it, but the majority won't."

Suitable Today
The editorial would probably fit any number of today's TV offerings.

In those early days they ran matinees. And sometimes in the summer it got hot.

Abernethy first provisional chief

When Oregon was under provisional government, George Abernethy headed the list of state officers.

He was elected by popular vote on July 14, 1845.

On March 3, 1849, he was succeeded by Joseph Lane, who was appointed by President Polk to head the territorial government then established.

Lane resigned in 1850 but was again appointed to the post by President Pierce in 1853. His second term was shorter than the first, including only three days.

The first governor of the State of Oregon was John Whiteaker, a Democrat, who was in office from March 3, 1859 to Sept. 10, 1862.

But not at the Capitol where the matinees were cooled with ice.

But sometimes it got too cold, as in February 1929 when the picture, "The Singing Fool," with Al Jolson, had to be switched to the Liberty. Wrote Dutch:

"We have been unable to properly heat the Capitol. The Liberty has good heating facilities and will be nice and warm. You can really enjoy the picture there."

Stover, a native of Ohio and a graduate of Ohio State University, came to Bend in 1915 as a forestry student. He worked in the forests, piled lumber, when wound up in the Army.

After World War I he was associated with a film company as a film representative. Thus did he drift into the theater business.

First For Students
The Capitol was one of the first to have a student price, and for years prices were 35 cents for adults, 25 cents for students and 10 cents for kids.

But there was a period when extra hard times set in. It was at the height of the depression in 1931, and the picture with Seventh Heaven.

Many didn't have the price of admission, so Dutch announced that there would be regular prices for those that could afford it, "but by my guests if you can't afford it."

"The first night everybody paid," Dutch recalls. "But later many paid just what they could afford. Some paid a dime, some nothing. The response was really tremendous.

"We also had free shows on Christmas and on birthdays. And we would invite the athletic teams quite often. On Christmas we carried the nicknames of all our help in a big ad."

For the first three years Dutch personally was at the door every night to greet Mr. and Mrs.

Bend.

House Packed
And the theater enjoyed thousands of packed houses. Those were the days of the full-page ads in the paper, such as the one for "The Lost World" in October 1925, so popular that it played not only the Capitol, but the Grand as well.

One of those early ads built up the famed Buster Keaton and a newcomer called Brown Eyes — billed as the first cow ever to attain stardom in pictures.

The silent pictures included Constance Talmadge in East, is West. "They came." "They saw." "They laughed." "They cried." "All went home." "Well satisfied."

There were others like the "Hunchback of Notre Dame," with Lon Chaney (Dutch paid 10 per cent war tax for that one).

Rattlesnake sings his swan song

ROME, VI. (UPI) — Mrs. Myra Treglown Stansell was walking in her backyard on her way to feed the chickens when she heard a pleasant sound like something or someone "singing."

Mrs. Stansell looked in the direction of the sound just in time to see a rattlesnake. She leaped back before the reptile could strike.

The five-foot snake, who apparently was "singing" for his supper, just didn't have a chance. Mrs. Stansell summoned a neighbor and they shot the snake with a shotgun.

Just to make sure it was dead, they fired several rifle bullets into the snake's body and beat it with a large stick for good measure.

that included an especially arranged music score and an orchestra under the direction of Glenn Shelley.

Best Picture of 1929
And still more like Mrs. Wallace Reid in "The Human Wreckage" (many turned away); Emil Jennings in Ernst Lubitsch's "The Patriot," (best picture of year in 1929); and Pola Negri in "Bella Donna."

Occasionally there were nationally known vaudeville acts such as the Penny Parker family—trapeze, juggling, balancing, acrobatic and novelty act.

And after the talkies came in. Dutch occasionally lined up some of the best vaudeville acts from the famed Casimire circuit. He still has a picture of one of the acts featuring Watermelon Eddie Johnson and Rudolph Priml's kids — Lucille Priml and Rudolph Priml, Jr.

And there were the local productions like the opening concert of the Bend Orpheus Club, featuring 21 male voices; or the Elks Club musical comedy, "Cheer Up," with "pretty choruses, gorgeous costumes, sparkling music, all-star local talent."

And then there was the Bend Volunteer Fire Dept. benefit, amateur night on Monday and the "Tarzan Club," that let kids in for a nickel instead of a dime.

Ice Skating Act
Once the Capitol was host to an early Shipstad and Johnson ice skating act, where the performers skated on a wax board.

The big event, of course, was the coming of the talkie.

"At first the pictures were only part talking — 10 per cent, 25 per cent, 50 per cent," Dutch said.

"Sometimes the needle would bounce off and you'd get a guy on the screen with a woman's voice — or a woman with a bass voice. But our operator fixed that by putting a weight on so it could

not bounce off."

The coming of the first 100 per cent talkie was a gala event in April 1929.

The theater was redecorated green and gold, seats were re-cushioned and the Bend Bulletin ran a special theater section.

The picture, aptly enough, was called "Interference" and starred Evelyn Brent, William Powell and Olive Brook.

Bulletin Editorial
An editorial in the Bend Bulletin Friday, April 12, 1929, read:

"Bend folks who saw last night's talkie appear to be unanimous in their opinion that talking pictures are a marked improvement over silent pictures. There were no censors used."

The Bulletin in 1930 also noted that a Dutch Stover posed out a home run in the annual Kiwanis-Lions baseball game — and won two passes to the Liberty Theater.

"The theater business was an exciting business," Dutch recalled, while sitting in his lovely Mirror Pond home. "We ran large billboard sheets, big ads..."

"Now days a lot of the theaters are making more on their concessions than they do from admissions."

No Concessions
Dutch never sold concessions, however.

"I didn't want to spoil the picture for my friends."

"And we never had any picture distortion. We had the operator right on the ground."

"Nowadays the trend is to build smaller theaters — and to run the picture maybe six, eight weeks. But movies will be around for a long time."

"No, I didn't foresee a drop in the theater business. I had a good offer and sold. Just lucky..."

The telephone rang. It was a golfing buddy wanting to play a round. Dutch brushed aside the

Three form fair court

Reigning over the 40th annual Dischutes county fair will be a trio of area lasses.

Queen Cathie Lanthorn of Redmond will be attended by Princesses Kathy Fahey of Bend and Karen Coomber of Redmond.

Queen Cathie was a princess for the fair last year. She has served on other royal courts such as the junior — senior from her senior year at Redmond Union High School.

The Queen has also been secretary of the high school student body, attended Girls' State her junior year and was graduated fifth in her class at Redmond this June.

She will attend Central Oregon College this fall on a scholarship.

The 17-year-old, dark-haired miss has been riding for 11 years. She broke and trained her deep sorrel red Quarter Horse gelding, Nugget, which she will ride for this year's fair activities. Nugget and his mistress won the 4-H grand championship horse showmanship contest in 1958.

Journalistic advertising is the eventual goal of Princess Kathy. She was graduated from Bend high school in June and plans to attend Central Oregon College for two years, then the University of Oregon.

A member of the 4-H Red Riders club, Princess Kathy has five years riding experience. She owns a registered American Saddlebred gelding, Jean's Easter Sunrise (Sunny). In the fair she will ride a bay Quarter Horse, Skeeter, owned by Rodney Rosebrook.

The Princess is 18 years old. Completing the court is Princess Karen, 20, who has ridden since she was seven years old. She will

memories of the old Capitol, and hastened for his clubs.

But the memories will be back. For Dutch and a lot of others.

Donald Nelson still serious

LOS ANGELES (UPI)—Donald M. Nelson, former war production board head, remained in serious condition today at Good Samaritan Hospital suffering from a stroke.

The 70-year-old Sears, Roebuck and Co. vice president was stricken Sunday at a party honoring him and his fourth wife, Lena, whom he wed last Feb. 12. The party was hosted by Greta Peck, former wife of actor Gregory Peck.

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