

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

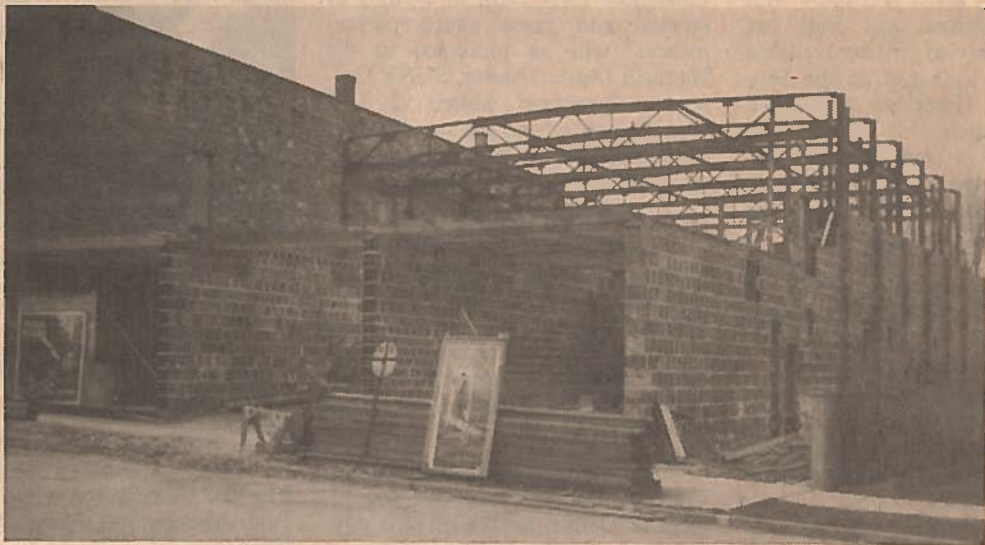
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## THE RIALTO THEATER



Last week Wednesday and Thursday the old Rialto Theater on Main St. in Albion was torn down. Although motion pictures have not been shown there since the mid-1960's, it brought to a close the final chapter of this once important entertainment facility. As I stood there and briefly watched the demolition, I thought about the thousands of people who must have purchased tickets over the years to see the art and drama of Hollywood projected on its huge screen. I thought of the raucous roars of laughter that once permeated these walls as well as the scary flicks that made you cover your eyes when they really got tense. I thought of the smell of popcorn and the newsreels that used to command your attention. And I thought too, of how young lovers went there on their first date and of the smooching in the balcony.

Yes, Rudolph Valentino, Jean Harlow, Montgomery Clift, Vivian Leigh, Stan Laurel, Mae West, J.C. Fields, Marilyn Monroe, Errol Flynn, Snow White, Rock Hudson and hundreds of other leading actors and actresses appeared there, at least in light and shadow from the projection booth. The two original projectors cost \$1,000 each in 1925.

No, I'm not lamenting that it's gone. I'm just making some observations. In fact, it looks better now that it is removed. Over the past few years the building had deteriorated and was not of any particular architectural importance. I guess it goes to show that no matter what period of time in which we live, it is always a period of transition. The accompanying photo was taken by the late Fred Holt in the spring of 1925 when the Rialto was under construction. The building to the left is the former Odd Fellows Temple, while a poster to the right advertizes a film featuring Pola Negri. A stack of lumber appears in the foreground and the steel frame roof girders form a pattern against the sky.

The Rialto opened to the public on December 2,

1925 with two shows, one at 7 P.M. and the other at 9 P.M. On this occasion children were admitted for 25¢, adults 50¢ and Mezzanine seating was 75¢. The higher price here was for reserved seats which were wicker chairs. The heavy cast iron railing in the mezzanine or balcony had actually come out of the old Pratt Opera House and was purchased by Will Robson for the Rialto when he built it.

Opening night at the Rialto not only included a film feature "Seven Keys to Baldpate" starring Douglas McLean but also two acts of vaudeville - a dog and monkey circus and an orchestra under the direction of "Pete" Dragon. The Rialto had a fine stage and fly space and two niches for organ pipes which were never installed.

The facade of the building included two stores on the ground level and offered space on the second floor. Drs. J.W. Cramer and R.H. Dollinger had their dental offices in the north suite of rooms for many years. Sheret Post also for a while, occupied rooms on the second floor before acquiring a building of their own on East Park Street. Mrs. Althea Volk had one store front for a millinery shop while Dr. James K. Durling M.D. had a store front. These were the original tenants.

Indeed, times were different. As I look over old movie ads from the past, the Rialto changed its movies two or three times a week with the cost varying from 10¢ to 35¢ in early years. In later years it was owned by Charles Martina but television and drive-in theaters forced the Rialto to close as did many other small town theaters. Before these movie theaters there were opera houses for traveling shows which succumbed to the movie projector. Yes, we're always in a period of transition.

"Nothing is either good or bad but thinking makes it so"

-- Shakespeare.