

Bethinking of Old Orleans

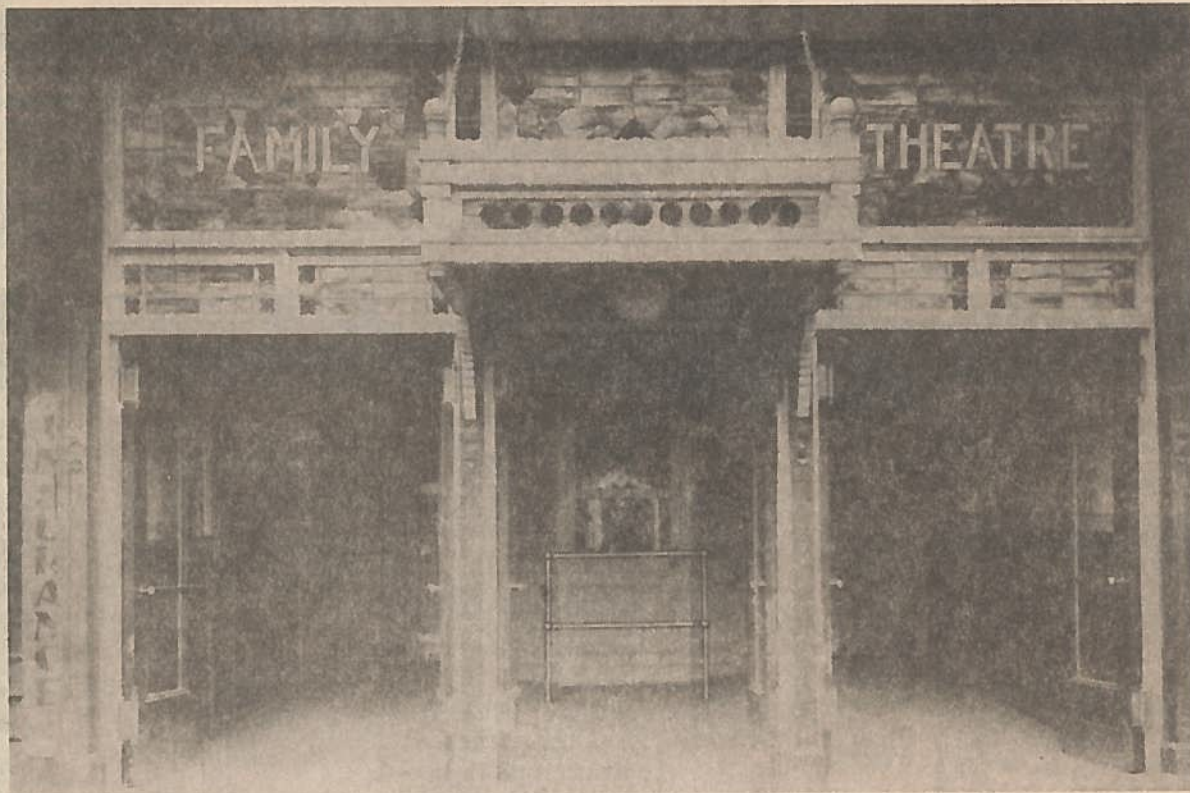
2-24-99

Vol XXI

C.W. Lattin County Historian

No.8

FAMILY THEATER



The accompanying photos show the Family Theater which was once located on East Bank Street in Albion. This theater, which was established after the turn of the century, took up a store front space in the Bordwell Block or the Masonic Building. The stairs to the Masonic Temple are to the immediate left of the theater.

In an article published in an out-of-town paper in 1914, we find the theater was undergoing alterations. It was then that this front was built which included extensive stained glass transoms and a small marquee. A two-story addition was added to the rear for seating and a stage. The stage measured forty feet wide and twenty-five feet deep. The plans, according to the newspaper, were designed by architect Burt Fischer of Medina. The article also states: "Lloyd Harris has taken a long term lease of the opera house and will book only the better class of high class road shows at popular prices. During the nights when no regular performance is playing, the house will be operated as a moving picture theater, giving a continuous performance."

This theater would go back to the days of silent films when pianists were hired to play throughout a film.

In later years when the theater no longer functioned, the interior space was made into part of Newberry's Store. The old stage in the back, on a



higher level, became the stock room for Newberry's.

At the turn of the century, besides the Pratt Opera House on Main Street, there were several movie houses: The Bijou Dream (1908) in the Odd Fellows Building, The Dreamland on the north side of East Bank Street and the Family Theater on the south side. In 1924, Will Robeson opened the Rialto Theater which he built on Main Street, now the site of Navarra's Family Restaurant. This was later owned by Charles Martina and continued in operation until the mid-1960s.

In the mid-1950s Clarence Miller built the Orleans Drive-In Theater west of Albion. Changing tastes and technology have certainly taken their toll on all the local theaters as we and former generations knew and enjoyed them.