

The Family Theatre

BY C.W. LATTIN

In a February 1914 issue of the Orleans Republican, we find an article about the Family Theatre. This had been established previously in the Bordwell Block on East Bank Street in Albion, consisting largely of a store front. The Bordwell Block will also be known as the Masonic Temple.

By 1914 however, the manager of the Family Theatre, Lloyd Harris, recognized the need for improvements.

Working with John Bordwell, owner of the building, and Bert G. Fisher, an architect who resided in Medina, remodeling took place, thus improving the theatre. Seating capacity was increased to 700, while steam heat and a modern ventilating system were installed.

An addition was made to the south end of the building

to provide for a deep stage and plenty of overhead room for several sets of drops. The front was redesigned for foyer, ticket office and a booth for two motion picture machines.

The paper indicates these improvements were made so as Harris could book "highclass road shows at popular prices. During the nights when no regular performance is playing, the house will be operated as a moving picture theatre giving a continuous performance."

It is interesting to note that the story about the plans makes no mention of lavatories or concession stand. I would also point out that movies back then were silent films and did not play in the theatre for more than a night or two. A few Albion people will remember Betty Frank Weale (Mrs. Daniel Weale) who played piano there for silent pictures.

In 1914 traveling road shows were still popular and somewhat common. However, the old Pratt Theatre on Main Street, with its auditorium on the third floor, did not lend itself well to the modern and convenient way of doing things in the 20th century.

The Family Theatre served well for a decade or so when Will Robson built the Realto Theatre on Main Street in 1925. It was bigger and better, and consequently the Family Theatre met its demise.

Our photo from around 1915 shows the Family Theatre with the stage set up for an Elks Club minstrel show.

Eventually, Newberry's occupied this space. The housewares section would have been right in front of the stage, with Newberry's receiving room on the stage level in the back.



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