



Backstage at the 7th Street...

Where stars light the sky and the stage

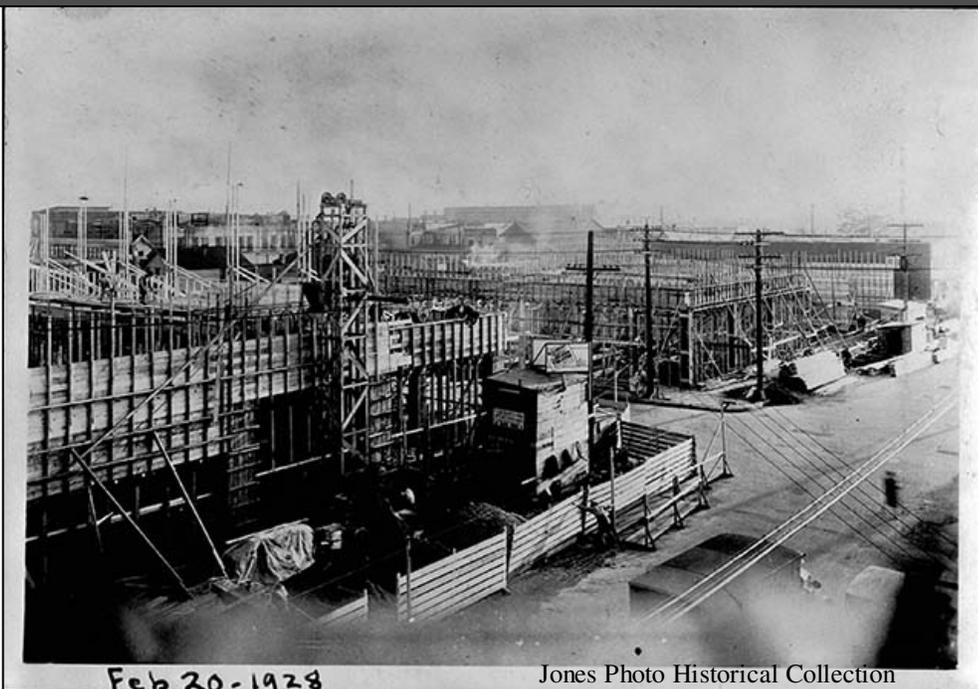
Winter/Spring 2008 ■ Volume 3, Number 1

Hoquiam's Theatre Beautiful: The 7th Street Story

*By John Larson, Director of
Hoquiam's Polson Museum*

The 1920s were prosperous years on Grays Harbor. County-wide, 71 lumber and wood products plants and 31 logging firms boasted a total employment of over 10,000 people. The annual timber harvest by the late 1920s was 1.75 billion board feet of lumber and the market looked to only keep climbing. Hoquiamites, in particular, proudly coined a slogan that asked others to "Hear Hoquiam Hum." Indeed, the town was abuzz not only with the sound of sawmills but with new construction, car horns, restaurants, bars, stores, hotels, and the footsteps of people downtown seeking new ways to entertain themselves.

During that decade, Hoquiam's built commercial landscape changed dramatically as many wooden buildings of the 1880s and 1890s were replaced with modern concrete and brick fire-resistant structures. Sturdy new buildings like the American Veteran's Building and Polson Logging Company offices – both built in 1920 – promised to modernize the town. Sure enough, dozens of new structures followed including a new fire station, telephone exchange, public market, several service stations, and the towering three-story Masonic and Quimby & Wilson buildings. The grand Hotel Emerson opened in 1924 and by 1928, progress downtown was really in full swing. That year was perhaps the single biggest year for big projects in Hoquiam.



Feb 20-1928

Jones Photo Historical Collection

Downtown Hoquiam's 7th Street was a busy construction zone during the first half of 1928. At left is the 7th Street Theatre less than a month after the first forms were laid. Also visible on the corner of 7th and J Streets is the new J.C. Penney building taking shape. The pace of construction was rapid as Penney's celebrated its grand opening in June 1928 and the Theatre followed in early July.

In May of 1928, the Simpson Avenue Bridge opened to traffic with Governor Ronald Hartley on hand to cut the ribbon on the \$500,000 bridge. The Simpson Hotel also debuted that month and J.C. Penney launched its

new department store at 7th & J Streets in June. The Grays Harbor Pulp and Paper Company had just finished their first year in operation and the Hoquiam City Council authorized the purchase of lots to build a new city hall.

The 7th Street Theatre was also built in 1928 and, in many ways, represented the culmination of a 1920s "urban renewal" of downtown Hoquiam. Hoquiam's "Theatre Beautiful" – as the magnificent 7th Street was dubbed – was arguably the most im-

Celebrating 80 Years

7th STREET
HOQUIAM'S THEATRE BEAUTIFUL

1928-2008



MEMBER

7th Street Theatre Board

President—Ray Kahler
Vice President—Mickey Thurman
Secretary—Mickey Miller
Treasurer—Sandie Pennant

Additional Board Members:

Jim Heikel
Scott Johnston
Ken McDonald
Mickey Miller
Claudia Self
Marcel Wingate
Lane Youmans

7th Street Kids Liaison:
Jeannie McNeal

Backstage at the 7th Street
Layout: Phyllis Jones
Editor: Mickey Thurman

Webmaster: Ralph Hogaboom
Event Coordinator: Jamie Brand

Board meetings are held monthly on the second Wednesday.

Contact and Address Information

7th Street Theatre Association
313 7th Street
P.O. Box 777
Hoquiam, WA 98550

Phone: 360.537.7400
E-mail:
info@7thstreettheatre.com

Hoquiam's Theatre Beautiful (from page 1)

pressive public facility erected in the city since the grand Hoquiam Hotel was finished in 1889.

The 7th Street was the brainchild of Ed Dolan and O.T. Taylor of the newly-formed Hoquiam Amusement Company. As President of the corporation, Dolan was publicly regarded as the "financial genius" who managed to secure the \$175,000 it took to construct the new theatre. Taylor, who was Dolan's principal associate, was considered by theatre critics a "wizard of artistic visualization" and was responsible for directing the building's overall aesthetic design. Dolan and Taylor teamed up locally with Hoquiam architect Edwin St. John Griffith, who in turn worked with the Seattle architectural firm Huntington & Torbit to develop plans for the project. By early 1928 they were set to begin construction.

On January 9, Hoquiam general contractor Nelson & Johnson was awarded the contract to build the 7th Street. Within the month, the firm was mobilized to begin work and early reports in the *Hoquiam American* noted that they "worked day and night for three days" the week of February 5 pouring the first concrete which went into the basement under the stage. Over the next four months, the theatre took shape quickly with a dozen

local and regional sub-contractors taking part in the project. By May 31, headlines announced that the "beautiful playhouse is rapidly nearing completion" and that an opening date would soon be set.

In the weeks prior to the 7th Street's much anticipated public opening on July 10, writers at the *Hoquiam American*, *Washingtonian*, and *Aberdeen World* newspapers were given advance tours of the building and printed column after column describing vividly and enthusiastically every detail of the structure. Architect Griffith authored a guest column in the *Hoquiam American* that provided readers with a better understanding of the 7th Street's atmospheric design – the first of its type in the Pacific Northwest (and, sadly, now the last). Griffith described the night blue ceiling as "giving the sky effect with myriad of tiny stars twinkling [to] create that atmosphere of restfulness which recently has become the most desired thing in theatre decorations."



Washingtonian, July 8, 1928

Local and regional contractors who helped construct the 7th Street Theatre

- George A. McLean, Grays Harbor – plastering
- Electric Equipment & Engineering Company, Aberdeen – electrical
- Pryde Brothers Sheet Metal, Hoquiam – metal work
- Archie M. Hall, Aberdeen – masonry
- Elway-Miller Company, Aberdeen – plumbing and heating systems
- F.G. Foster Company, Hoquiam – furnished cement, reinforcing steel, hardware, tile, and fire brick
- East Side Lumber Yard, Hoquiam – furnished lumber from the stocks of Hoquiam's North Western & E.K. Wood sawmills
- Stouffer-Bowman, Aberdeen – terrazzo work
- Lidgerwood Company, Tacoma – supplied structural steel
- Reliance Iron Works, Seattle – ornamental iron work.
- Grays Harbor Construction, Hoquiam – pile driving, sand and gravel
- Sharpe Sign, Tacoma – furnished the Everlast Neon Sign

Continued from page 2



Edwin St. John Griffith, architect
(courtesy Polson Museum)

Griffith's July 5 article went on to describe in great detail the "harmonious colorings" throughout the building, the 1,000 light outlets in the auditorium, the latest Wurlitzer organ, Wilton velvet carpets, 800 yards of velour drapes, as well as special scenery designed by O.T. Taylor and "built by some of the finest scenic artists in the east."

One feature of particular note was that the ventilation system was capable of completely changing out the air in the theatre within three minutes. Design challenges for ventilation were unique to a timber town like Hoquiam as the fresh air intake was located, according to Griffith, on the "lee side of the building to prevent any drifting in of smoke, sawdust and cinders." In 1928, such airborne pollution was commonplace and the theatre's proximity to the nearby North Western, E.K. Wood, and Blagen sawmills would have been of concern.

The 7th Street's public opening took place over a three-day, mid-week period from Tuesday, July 10 through Thursday the 12th. The *Washingtonian* reported that the theatre was "thronged" by sell-out crowds at its formal opening which featured the Association Vaudeville whose varied acts included such performers as the

Georgalis Trio who were billed as "European Marksmen Deluxe" capable of playing musical instruments and removing women's garments with bullets! During this three-day extravaganza, the entire D&R Theatre orchestra was moved to Hoquiam with the act. The 7th Street announced plans to show vaudeville regularly one night each week after the opening and promised to devote the other six nights to feature pictures (the debut film starred Madge Bellamy in "The Play Girl").

Local newspapers also reported on what was arguably the most historically interesting and locally relevant opening feature. The *Hoquiam American* noted that "among the novelties planned for the occasion will be the formal dedication by means of a Hoquiam-made film." Among those "starring" in this film were Hoquiam Mayor George Brault, Hoquiam Chamber President E.L. Scott, Rotary President Harry Wilson, Kiwanis President Laurence Leyine, Active Club President Allen Thompson, and Business and Professional Women's Club President Ella Fleming. O.T.

Taylor and Ed Dolan were also introduced in the film which was made during the first week of July. Even famed Aberdeen pioneer Sam Benn – at 96 years old – graced the silver screen!

The 7th Street's grand proportions and depiction of an exotic locale were certainly a reflection of the prosperity and optimism that existed both locally and nationally in the late 1920s. The era of wealth that gave birth to such magnificent American treasures as the 7th Street Theatre would, however, end all too soon. As the Depression of the 1930s gripped the Harbor and the nation, the 7th Street endured as a place to escape and to dream. The thousands of live performances and films that have been enjoyed there since are a testament to the space's timeless relevance to Grays Harbor society and culture.

As was the case in 1928, our theatre will again serve as the anchor for downtown Hoquiam's renewal. It endures as a national landmark with a timeless beauty that inspires and awes each new generation that steps through its doors.

The 7th Street's original "candlestick" sign, marquee, and awnings were electrified beacons for downtown Hoquiam. At nearly 28 feet tall, the neon sign at the 7th and J Street corner maintained proportion with the grand building. (The theatre board welcomes any information regarding what happened to the original neon sign.)

Photo courtesy of Jones Photo Historical Collection. Visit www.jones-photocollection.com

