

A Century of Theaters in Liberty

During much of the 20th Century, Liberty's Main Street had more than one year-round movie or live performance theatre operating at any given time.

The Opera House used to stand at the corner of Main and Chestnut Streets (where the Green Building is now). Featuring vaudeville acts, minstrel shows, opera soloists, Shakespeare plays and cowboy bands, it introduced to Liberty the new "moving pictures" then called "Vitagraph" and "Pictograph" reels.

Across the street (in the old Town & Country building), the Lyric Theatre competed with its own silent films and vaudeville acts.

The great Main Street fire of 1913 destroyed the Opera House and damaged the Lyric Theatre. Within a year the Lyric reopened as the New Lyric Theatre. The same year the Garnen Theatre opened down Main Street (across from what is now the HSBC bank). During one busy week the two theatres booked the same epic film, "Quo Vadis", and ran ads claiming each had the original version. "You pay to see it", said the Garden Theatre, "so why not enjoy it by seeing it right." "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," the New Lyric answered back.

In 1920 the Village's first Liberty Theatre, with seats for 500, opened at 22-24 N. Main Street (It's the brick building with "1914" carved into a stone at the top). For 25 cents patrons saw Harold Lloyd comedies, local amateur shows and vaudeville acts booked direct from the Fally circuit of New York City.

Four years later, in March of 1924, the Village celebrated the grand opening of its own movie palace: the New Liberty Theatre at 31 Main Street. First

nighters walked under a neon-lit marquee and through a mirrored lobby into the theater's 850-seat, chandeliered auditorium to see Marion Davies in "Little Old New York." Opening night also offered an organ recital on the theatre's new Wurlitzer, and acts from Joe Dealy's Vaudeville Show, performed on the grand stage framed by a huge proscenium arch (the stage, arch, curtain and backstage dressing room balconies are still intact).

In the 1950's the Academy Theatre opened to cater to the crowds of visitors who flocked to Liberty's Main Street during the summer season (It's the building to the left of LaPolk Park).

Most of these theaters have closed. But it's remarkable that so many of Liberty's early theater buildings have survived fire, demolition and economic depression—architectural reminders that our Village's theatrical heritage has not disappeared.

OPENING PERFORMANCE

NEW LIBERTY THEATER

MONDAY EVENING, MARCH 3, 1924

Special Opening Picture
"LITTLE OLD NEW YORK"

Seats Now on Sale

at the corner store in the new theater building every afternoon from 3 to 5 o'clock. All seats for the first show must be reserved. Tickets \$1.10 each. The first performance starts at 7 p. m., the second at 9 p. m.

A special feature of the opening performance will be an

ORGAN RECITAL

by a New York artist.

Also Harold Lloyd Comedy
"NEVER WEAKEN"

Edelman's 5--10--25c Store

Guaranteed Pure Aluminum
Pots, Water Kettles, Rice Boilers
and Coffee Percolators
Colonial Style

\$1.00

Green Building Liberty, New York

By Allan Berube

Research based on records in the collection of the Sullivan County Historical Society, Hurleyville

Pictures above and below reprint from February 21, 1924 page 5

Broadhead Points to.

Just Keep Your Eyes Wide Open
And Look For

FANTOMAS

"The Man in Black"

4 REEL THRILLER 4

Excitement Almost Beyond Control

Showing At The
Garden Theatre Liberty, N. Y.

THURSDAY APRIL 2nd

Matinee 2:30 Evening 8:30
Admission 15 Cents to All

NEW

Lyric Theatre

Wed. Apr. 1st

DANIEL FODINAN presents
James K. Hackett

"The Prisoner of Zenda"

A DRAMATIC MASTERPIECE OF ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE
Produced by Famous Players
Film Co.

MATINEE 2:30
EVENING ONE SHOW ONLY
STARTING 8:30

Admission 25 Cents
Children 15 Cents

Next Week--Mary Pickford
"THE MAUD ADAMS OF THE MOVIES" IN
"The Bishop's Carriage"