

HAWARDEN.....HOW IT ALL BEGAN

THEATRES ON MAIN STREET

Chapter 37

By: Mary Truesdell Johnson

Before the advent of television, videos, DVD's TiVo, DVR's. Play station and X box, people entertained themselves at home with table games, outdoor activities, social gatherings and lots of family time.

In 1908 Seal Van Sickle, Seal Van Sickle, Jr. and G.J.Anderson decided to offer Hawarden and area residents another form of entertainment.

In the location of the former Streit Pharmacy building, 809 Central, south of Central Auto Parts, they constructed an "air dome". It was an open air summer playhouse with comfortable chairs and a stage. The outdoor theatre greeted customers with an artistically decorated entrance and the cost for admittance was 5 cents. The theatre also offered one of Edison's animated picture machines, which changed its venue twice a week. There was also a piano on site and Ella Fleshman and the soon to be movie star, Hope Emerson often sang and played before the shows and during intermissions.

Other theatres sprang up during this era. The Electric Theatre was on the east side of Kansas Street (Central Ave.) and later the Lyric Theatre presented weekly silent movies to capacity audiences under various managers and owners.

In 1921 E.T.Dunlap acquired the Lyric Theatre and another silent movie theatre, The Auditorium (so named because it was located in the new City Hall building and auditorium built in 1918). Mr. Dunlap entertained audiences with movies at these locations until 1924 when the new Dunlap Theatre opened its doors at 809 Central (the previous site of the open air theatre). Mr. Dunlap had purchased the property and built a large two story building there. The Dunlap name is still evident on the top of the building today. This new theater boasted 400 seats and reportedly cost \$35000.00.

The first film shown in this new theatre was "Boy of Mine" and the last movie to play in this building was The Pleasure of His Company with Fred Astaire in October 1961.

When the theatre opened in 1924, Mr. Dunlap arranged for the Hawarden Concert Band to play outside on Central Avenue as the people entered. A very elegant event. The second floor of the building was also filled with offices, studios and shops as were most of the buildings on Main Street at that time. Long, steep stairways did not seem to be a problem as these second story businesses thrived in the early 1900's.

This new modern theatre, called the Dunlap Theatre, also boasted a large canopy covering its entrance which looked very impressive; especially at night when its many lights were lit.

Mr. Dunlap ran the theatre until 1928 when the equipment and picture contracts were sold to new owners. The theatre was named the Tivoli. Excitement and curiosity spread through the area when it was announced that a new talking machine had been installed. In May 1929 the first talkie movie Coquette was shown to a full house and a pleased audience. At this time a matinee tickets were \$.35 and \$.15.

In 1933 the owners of the furnishings and equipment of the Tivoli were J.H.C. Schoeneman and Philip March. Their partnership was called Marschoene Theatres Inc. Air conditioning came to the theatre in 1936 and Shirley Temple appeared in Poor Little Rich Girl.

Harry Lankhorst was hired by Marschoene Theatres to manage the Tivoli theatre in the early 1930's. After managing the theatre for six years, Mr. & Mrs. Harry Lankhorst purchased the business in 1939 and changed the name to the Sioux Theatre. A large Indian Chief Head was installed as the marquee and it soon became a landmark in Hawarden. That neon lighted Indian remains a vivid memory to anyone who grew up in the 40's thru 70's in Hawarden. The Sioux

Theatre remained on the west side of Main Street until the fall of 1961 when it was sold to Jerry Streit to house Streit Pharmacy. Mr. Lankhorst used clay and cement fill to level the theatre floors and the ceiling was also lowered to accommodate the new ultra modern drug store. Sadly it now sits empty.

Harry Lankhorst also owned a theatre at the corner of 8th and F Street. This theatre was known as Our Theatre and was purchased by the Lankhorsts in 1942 and in 1944 was completely destroyed by fire. Mr. Lankhorst then opened the Comet Theatre at 710 Central, just south of the present 1st State Bank. The Comet Theatre was also damaged by fire in 1951, but was able to be remodeled.

Hawarden was filled with entertainment. Two theatres with weekend matinees gave everyone in the area a chance to enjoy the entertainment. In the 1940's it is reported that out of a population of 130 million in the United States, it was estimated that 55-60 million Americans went to the movies every week. There was approximately one movie theatre for every 8,000 people. Hawarden certainly exceeded that quota. For several decades Hawarden could boast two or more theatres.

The Newsreels of the 1940's were a popular attraction. These Newsreels were an "eye to the world" for most Americans. Now, instead of newspaper reports and radio commentators, every theatre brought moving pictures of the destruction and horror of war to its audiences. These newsreel segments were filmed by cameramen and reporters who defied dangers to capture moments of history on film for moviegoers. For over 50 years newsreels informed and entertained whole generations of Americans until the new technology called television arrived on the scene.

When Harry Lankhorst sold the Sioux Theatre at 809 Central to Streit Pharmacy he announced that the Sioux Theatre would be moved across the street to the site of the former Comet Theatre. The Indian Head Marquee was quickly moved, the building remodeled, a large wall to wall, ceiling to floor movie screen was installed and the theatre held a capacity of 250 spectators. November 10, 1961 was the opening date showing the movie *Tammy Tell Me True*. A new generation of movie goers attended movies at this location, and continued to be entertained there until December 31, 1982 when *E.T.* was shown to a packed house. When the movie ended, the doors were locked, and movie theatres in Hawarden became only a memory. At the time the Sioux Theatre closed it was owned by B.N. Brown. Mr. Brown also owned the Wigwam Drive In theatre which he purchased from Mr. Lankhorst and it continued to show movies in the summer and fall for several years.

The last report of the mammoth Indian Head Marquee indicates that is resting safely in a local barn. The Hawarden Historical Society is keeping a close watch over it, and plans and dreams are circulating that some day it may find a home of distinction at Calliope Village or some other prominent site. Hopefully those of us who remember it so well will still be around to see its "rebirth".



