



Quarterly Newsletter

Volume VI, Issue 4 December 2018

A History of Pickwick Theater By Mary Hursh

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Theatorium and Oakland were first theaters in Syracuse

There has been a theater in downtown Syracuse since the early 1900s. The Theatorium, a wooden structure, was the first theater in town. It was renamed the Oakland. This theater burned in 1925. The Oakland was famous for hosting a theater masquerade . A \$5 gold piece was offered as a prize for the best masked couple. Around that time a photoplay, "Three Live Ghosts," was popular. Vause Polen was the proprietor of the Oakland.

W.E. Long developed the Pickwick Block in 1936

In the winter of 1936, W.E. Long purchased two large buildings on Main Street. The buildings were known as the old Guy property at the corner of Huntington and Main and the adjoining building on Main known as the Beckman property. The Guy property housed the Bachman store and the Beckman property, on the site of the old theatre, housed the Beckman Furniture store. His plan for the properties was to convert the entire half block into a modern business property to house modern shops and stores. This became known as the Pickwick Block. In the building occupied by the Syracuse Journal and the Recreation Bowling Club, workmen removed partitions and cleared the way for the motion picture theater. The contractors for the theater were Hartzel Construction Company of South Bend, IN.



"Wake Up and Live" was first movie shown at the Pickwick Theater

The Pickwick Theater was built in an English Tudor style as part of the Pickwick Block . There were 400 seats in the theater.

The premiere program when the theater opened on May 22, 1937 was "Wake Up and Live," " Moose Hunters," a Mickey Mouse cartoon, a Fox movietone, and a color travelogue. The staff consisted of a manager, a projectionist, a cashier and three ushers.

Flour Mills By Ron Sharp

I thought that since the holidays is a time for food, fellowship, and more food, that a little history on a local flour mill would be a great addition for this quarter's newsletter. ~Jamie

The flour mills were “the life breath of the community.” The mill on the race built by Crosson and Ward was owned by Lewis Lapes in 1869. He reported that the mill was turning out 50 barrels of flour per day. The mill was powered by water with a turbine turning the machinery to grind the grain into flour.

1872: In April, Lapes shut off the water in the race and citizens used the opportunity to gather fish from the race. It was reported that bushel baskets of fish were gotten this way (i.e. with pitchforks, rakes, etc.). The citizens “caught” a total of 325 lbs. of fish that day.

1873: In July, water was so low in the race that a steam engine was brought to the mill to turn the grinding machinery. Lapes sold the mill to Nathaniel Crow for \$12,000.

1874: For many years thereafter, during the dry season, the water did not provide enough power to turn the mill machinery. A forty-horsepower steam engine was purchased by Crow for \$3,000. In fact, in 1879, some of the citizens residing around the lakes contended that the use of water power by the mill lowered the lakes three to four feet.

In 1887: The local newspaper reported that citizens of Syracuse held a meeting to discuss putting the flour mill back into working order. In 1888 Crow purchased materials to refurbish the mill.

January 14, 1890: The flour mill burned down at 2:00 a.m. due to unknown causes. Loss was listed at \$9,000 with insurance coverage of \$2,500.

1895: The former mill owner, Benjamin Crow, died June 20, 1895. His property went into an estate, which was later purchased by the Syracuse Water Manufacturing Co.

1904: The Syracuse Water Power Co. operated a mill under the management of L. A. Neff.

In July 1888, a newspaper account reported that a rolling mill was producing 75 barrels of flour per day. In 1896, Lunt and Owns were listed as owning the rolling mill. In 1908, P. O. Woods and Co. was operating it.

Ron Sharp's Chronicles, volume 2, pages 255-256

A History...Cont..... By Mary Hursh

Movie of the Month contest popular at Pickwick Theater

At this time, the theater ran several "Movie of the Month" contests. To be eligible for a first, second, third, and twelve small prizes, a patron had to attend three shows each month for six consecutive months starting in June of 1937. Answers to set questions about the movie and the actors were due at the box office by the end of the month. A first prize was \$25; a second prize was \$8; a third prize was \$5, and twelve small prizes were worth \$1 each.

1946 fire destroys much of Pickwick Block

On February 7, 1946, a fire destroyed much of the Pickwick Block. The loss was estimated at \$400,000. At the time of the fire, the air temperature was 15 degrees and high winds were blowing. The theater only lost its



lobby and second story but sustained \$45,000 in damages.

"Courage of Lassie" opened the theater in 1946

After the fire, the theater reopened with the movie "Courage of Lassie." The movie starred Elizabeth Taylor, Frank Morgan and Tom Drake. There was a Tom and Jerry color cartoon, "Quiet, Please," and a Pete Smith specialty, "Guest Please." Admission was 40 cents for adults and 14 cents for children.

1971 fire destroys much of Pickwick Block but not the theater

The theater survived a second fire in 1971. When the Pickwick Block was rebuilt, the basement was made into the Down Under, a restaurant, which is still in operation.

The fire of 1971 started in the bowling alley below the theater. A malfunction in the wiring in the public address speaker might have caused the fire.

Wrights have operated the Pickwick Theater since 1983!

David and Linda Wright currently own the Pickwick Theater. They have owned it since 1983. According to an article by Tim Ashley of the Mail Journal, "in 1985, the Wrights had a single xenon bulb 35 mm projector with a platter film handler installed. In 2006, the auditorium was re-seated with new chairs and in 2009, Pickwick was the first single screen theater in Indiana to switch to digital projection and Real D 3D. The cost of converting to digital was \$92,000.

Donations

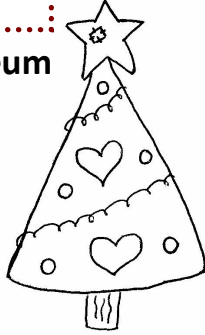


- ◊ Marsha Wade—VHS video camera and a Royal typewriter
- ◊ Carol & Eloy Stevens—Henry Cook survey book of Syracuse and Wawasee Lakes
- ◊ Linda Martin—Children's literature dating from 1891-1942 belonging to her mother and grandmother
- ◊ Barrie Hooley—Lake Papakeeche property articles and copy of the "Wawasee Waltz"

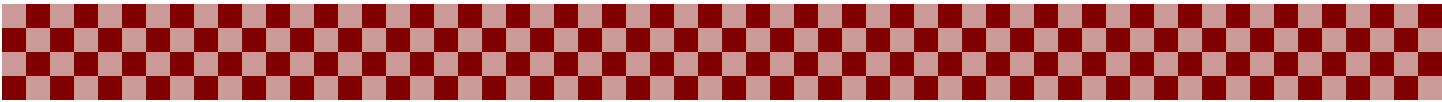


Syracuse-Wawasee Historical Museum

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**The museum will be closed
12/23/2018 to 1/7/2019 for
Christmas Break.
We will reopen on 1/8/2019
at 10 a.m.**



Thank You!! By Jamie Clemons

Thank you very much for your wonderful donations, both in money and items. Without either, the museum would cease to exist, and the community would not be able to see the history of Syracuse.

It's not too late to get your end-of-year donations in! All donations postmarked by December 31 are eligible for tax deductions (as allowed by law) for the 2018 year.

If you are still holding on to the donation letter that we sent out earlier in the year, it's not too late to send it in. It costs approximately \$100 to keep the museum open each day. We can't stay open without your help! This year's donation letter has raised +\$6000 to help offset this year's expenses.

