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A Majestic Presence: A Study of the Development of the Majestic Theater In Gettysburg

Abstract

In an era of collective entertainment, before private home entertainment systems, people sought amusement within their communities. One aspect of this community entertainment, the theater, offered a social gathering place. Theaters provided an important dual role for the community—both for entertainment and also a certain amount of public service. Theaters in the 1920s and 1930s, in small towns such as Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, served a much different purpose than they do today, with a more prominent and more important role within society. In the 1920s and 1930s, Gettysburg had several theaters. The two most prominent were the Majestic and the Strand (known as the Photoplay before the 1926 renovation). These buildings acted as true centers and hubs for Gettysburg and the surrounding area. These theaters, “served as a showplace and a gathering place for people of all ages from Adams County and the surrounding area of Northern Maryland.” The building’s primary use, as a theater, provided a much needed social environment where people could come, relax, and be entertained, people would come from all over to attend the movies. As the years went on, renovations were made to improve the building. Even more important than the Majestic’s role as a theater were its ties with the community.

Keywords

theater, the Majestic, Gettysburg community

A MAJESTIC PRESENCE: A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAJESTIC THEATER IN GETTYSBURG

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In an era of collective entertainment, before private home entertainment systems, people sought amusement within their communities. One aspect of this community entertainment, the theater, offered a social gathering place. Theaters provided an important dual role for the community—both for entertainment and also a certain amount of public service. Theaters in the 1920s and 1930s, in small towns such as Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, served a much different purpose than they do today, with a more prominent and more important role within society.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Gettysburg had several theaters. The two most prominent were the Majestic and the Strand (known as the Photoplay before the 1926 renovation). These buildings acted as true centers and hubs for Gettysburg and the surrounding area. These theaters, “served as a showplace and a gathering place for people of all ages from Adams County and the surrounding area of Northern Maryland.”¹ The building’s primary use, as a theater, provided a much needed social environment where people could come, relax, and be entertained, people would come from all over to attend the movies. As the years went on, renovations were made to improve the building. For instance, “in 1926, Mr. Troxell refurbished the theater completely, installing a new screen, the latest in upholstered chairs, new aisle carpeting, a two console organ and a huge fan designed to change the air every minute.”²

Even more important than the Majestic’s role as a theater were its ties with the community. The theater came about because of a need in the community, and once in place the theater continued to maintain strong ties with the community. This occurred in many ways. One of the simpler ways that the theater built ties with the community was by using community members as employees, both adults as well



1 Greg Carbaugh, “The Strand Theater, Gettysburg, PA,” Provided by William Troxell.

2 Ibid

3 Ibid.

4 William Troxell, Major of Gettysburg, interview by Jay Gallagher (25 April 2001).

as teenagers. This helped to build the sense of community and helped the town feel some level of ownership in the theater. Even the way the Strand Theater advertised their shows demonstrated and strengthened this tie to the community. For instance, one of the main ways of advertising was, "to take over a thousand circulars or handbills with the list and description of coming events and distribute them door to door over all of Gettysburg once a week."³ The theater also used sandwich board advertisement, a technique in which a person would wear a device that would place a board on their front and another on their back. On each board an advertisement would be placed, then each of these people would walk up and down the street trying to engage people in conversation and to get them to go to the theater.⁴ These techniques obviously bolstered ties with the community as it put a face to the theater. They placed the employees in the town talking to the community members, as opposed to the much colder techniques we see for movies today, mostly just TV commercials, with almost a complete lack of advertisement for the theater itself.

Theaters also had a reciprocal role with the community, and oftentimes gave something back to the community. The theater served as a hub to its town. It provided one of the few social outlets, and often attracted large crowds from all walks of life. In the case of the Strand, Saturday night was the biggest night of the week, attracting people from all across town, as well as farmers from the suburbs. The theater also tried to give back to the community. For instance, the Strand, from time to time, would have a special admission movie where they would change the admission price; instead of charging a fee, they would require patrons to bring a food item to donate to charity. Another tradition at the Strand was to have one day where all school children were allowed to come to the movies for free.⁵

Many of the movie theaters were also used for other purposes, such as speakers, conventions, live shows, town meetings, and the like. The Strand did play a part in this role of theaters as well. The Strand frequently hosted live shows and bands when not showing a movie. The theater also served the community in a more tangible, generous sense. For instance, when Eddie Plank was pitching for the college, and the game happened to be away, the Strand would open its doors for free to the public. Inside people could sit and relax. The theater would set up a telegraph station and the action in the game would be relayed from wherever the game was being played. The theater then had someone who would go up front and update the crowd on how Eddie Plank and the Gettysburg Bullets were doing.⁶

This public service aspect, however, also became one of the drawbacks of the theater. The Strand was just too small, seating only 300 after renovations. A town such as Gettysburg needed a larger space in order to hold town meetings and functions, attract larger shows, provide space for local sports teams games to be broadcast, and offer

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

a place for the college and high school to hold events such as commencement.

In January of 1923, Henry Scharf attended a town meeting at which the main topic of discussion was the building of a community hall for the town of Gettysburg. He joined a committee that was charged with developing definite plans for such a building.⁷ An architect was hired to draw up plans for a building that would seat 1450 people and would be adaptable for many uses, including conventions, dances, theater, basketball and other indoor sports. Plans for the building were submitted in May of that same year, but the costs of the building project forced the town to indefinitely shelve the idea.⁸

Almost a year later in February 1924, Scharf announced that the Gettysburg Hotel would be expanding to fill the empty lot behind it with an entirely new building. This new structure would include a community center as well as an expansion for the hotel which would occupy the upper floors of the annex. This was to be Henry Scharf's special community project, fulfilling the need to expand his business, but at the same time meeting the goal the town had set for a community hall.⁹ The building Scharf proposed would include new rooms for the hotel, but also, perhaps not surprisingly, an auditorium, a theater and several commercial areas that would be for town use.¹⁰

The architect who was hired to design the building was W.H. Lee of Philadelphia, who had designed many notable theaters in Pennsylvania.¹¹ It is possible that he was drawn into the project by his connection with Hotel President P.H. Fuhrman and Hotel Treasurer Max Schmidt, the three men were from the same town of Shamokin, Pennsylvania.¹² The plans for the building went through many stages before they were firmed into what became the Hotel Annex and Majestic Theater. The ultimate plans contained two separate large rooms, one a theater with permanent seats that could hold up to twelve hundred people and the other a gymnasium that could hold up to six hundred people.¹³ Attached to the gymnasium was a ladies' retiring room (bathroom), kitchen, men's smoking room, dressing rooms, and shower-baths for men and women. The entrance to the gymnasium was through the foyer in the annex lobby that connected it to the theater. The theater was designed to be 120 feet long and 70 feet wide.¹⁴ The floor was graded towards the stage to allow for a good view from every seat in the house. The front end of the theater held the stage and an orchestra pit, as well as a large pipe organ. There were restrooms, music rooms and dressing rooms beneath the stage floor. Along Carlisle Street were the ticket booth as well as several spaces for stores.

8 Scharf-Fox, 61.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Sandra L. Tatman, "Philadelphia Architects and Buildings." N.d. <http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm?ArchitectId=A0817> (28 April 2001).

12 Hilary Russell, *The Majestic Theater, Gettysburg PA: A Preliminary Historic Research Report on the Majestic Theater, Gettysburg, PA*, Sept. 5 2000, produced by Janis A Barlow and Associates, p. 18.

13 "Hotel Annex Embodies Latest In Architectural Design and Superior Construction Work," *Gettysburg Times*, July 15, 1925, supplement.

14 Ibid, *Gettysburg Times*, July 15, 1925, supplement. 15 "Auditorium of 1,500 Seating Capacity is Promised Town," *February 8, 1924*, p. 1.

This entire project, however, hinged on the passing of an ordinance by the town council allowing the hotel owners to build a bridge over Race Horse Alley, connecting the two buildings. If the council refused to pass the ordinance, the hotel company would simply expand upward and build new floors on the current building, which would deprive the town of its proposed auditorium.¹⁵ On Thursday February 7, 1924, the Gettysburg Town Council passed an ordinance allowing the building of the bridge.¹⁶

However, one of the councilmen still had doubts about the feasibility of the theater portion of the hotel annex and wrote to the President of the hotel company, Mr. P. H. Fuhrmann with his concerns. Mr. Charles Butt worried because there was a plan to enlarge the Lincoln Way Theater, and was concerned Gettysburg could not support two theaters.¹⁷ Mr. Fuhrmann demonstrated the Hotel Gettysburg's determination to continue the addition as planned by explaining they had a moral obligation to build the theater and they could either "make it convertible to other purposes such as a picture house or theater or not build it [the annex] at all."¹⁸ Clearly the hotel company was devoted to their idea of building the annex and would keep their word to build the promised community hall, even in the face of competition from other venues.

The other problem the Hotel Gettysburg faced in building their new addition was funding. The total cost of the annex was about \$350,000. One of the ways they found to finance their endeavor was to sell bonds to the townspeople of Gettysburg, since this project was for community's benefit.¹⁹

The Hotel Gettysburg ran several ads in the Gettysburg Times announcing the sale of bonds in April 1925, but two months later still did not have enough interest. In a letter from Mr. Fuhrmann to Herbert L. Grimm of the Gettysburg Times, Fuhrmann requested more advertising that would speak to the public's sense of community pride: "Incidentally, the pride of the residents of Gettysburg should be in the properly way aroused to such extent that they want to be personally identified with our enterprise by purchasing some of our bonds, which in order to give even the poorest man a chance, have been made in denominations of as low as \$100.00."²⁰ He also suggested adding that citizens in surrounding towns, such as Hanover, were raising money for new hotels out of public spirit, and that the majority of the stockholders who "carry all of the risk connected with our enterprise are residing in other towns."²¹ Mr. Fuhrmann was clearly disappointed that so few of the Gettysburg townspeople were showing interest the project. He tried to instill a message of healthy competition with other towns along with the idea of Gettysburgians shouldering some of the burden.

¹⁶ Ibid, Gettysburg Times, February 8, 1924, 1.

¹⁷ Charles Butt, letter to P.H. Fuhrmann, May 15, 1925, Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, in the Scharf Collection at the Adams County Historical Society. (hereafter ACHS)

¹⁸ P. H. Fuhrmann letter in response to that of Charles Butt, May 17, 1925. Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

¹⁹ Scharf-Fox page 61

²⁰ P.H. Fuhrmann, letter to Herbert Grimm of the Gettysburg Times, June 29, 1925. Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

²¹ Ibid.

Another letter from Mr. Fuhrmann to Mr. Scharf mentions a visit from some members of the Knights of Columbus to the Hotel Gettysburg. Mr. Fuhrmann thought that “some of them are prospective buyers of our bonds and I am therefore particularly anxious that they should be pleased with the service at the hotel.”²² Mr. Fuhrmann was concerned about finding buyers for the bonds and was looking wherever he could. In another letter to Scharf he also voices his frustration with the lack of interest, saying, “I myself refuse to accept any responsibility for the consequences, although I shall do my best to float the bonds.”²³ Despite these problems, they managed to get the money together and begin construction.

The Gettysburg Times recorded on March 27, 1925 that the construction of the annex project was expected to take eighty-five days beginning in April of 1925; in actuality it took one hundred and four days.²⁴ Nevertheless, such a swift construction demanded respect and notice of the hotel management and townspeople. The Hotel Gettysburg hired the renowned Austin Company of Philadelphia to oversee the completion of the annex. Observing the organization and quality of the Austin Company’s work, the Gettysburg Times printed an article on July 15, 1925 describing the Austin Company as a well-established, nation-wide firm, known for its fast construction.²⁵

Before the Austin Company took control of the site, however, the builder and contractor A.R. Warner of Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, first had to construct a foundation and framework for the annex, using 785 square yards of concrete in the foundation and 185 tons of steel in the framework.²⁶ This imposing task evidently required a great deal of time—the Austin Company was forced to ask for an extension on the project because Warner’s steelworkers had not finished the framework when expected.²⁷ W. H. Lee understood the contractors’ predicament and replied:

We appreciate the fact that you have prosecuted your work as rapidly as possible as is consistent with good construction and therefore, owing to the delay as stated above, an extension will be granted you, and the number of days fixed when the steel work and the steel erectors are entirely out of your way.²⁸

The Austin Company eventually began its work in mid-May, when Warner’s men had finally completed their impressive task. The Austin Company’s workers received \$3.50 a day: \$2.50 for food and \$1.00 for lodging.²⁹ These workers provided general labor for the construction, using materials from various companies. In addition, some firms, such as electrical companies, sent their own laborers to install their products.

22 P. H. Fuhrmann, letter to Henry Scharf, May 7, 1925. Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

23 P.H. Fuhrmann, letter to Henry Scharf of the Hotel Gettysburg, April 25, 1925. Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

25 Gettysburg Times, July 15, 1925.

26 Gettysburg Times, Majestic Theater Files, Adams County Historical Society, hereafter ACHS.

27 Letter to W. H. Lee from The Austin Co., April 23, 1925, Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

28 Letter to The Austin Co. from W. H. Lee, April 27, 1925, Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

As the contractors of the Hotel Gettysburg Annex, A.O. and Oscar Larson and Fred E. Voges of The Austin Company acted as a link between Henry Scharf and the individual companies responsible for different aspects of the annex's construction. On July 15, 1925, the Gettysburg Times printed a series of company advertisements that gave a breakdown of the different pieces that fit together to complete the hotel annex. In addition, various letters and invoices of 1925 from The Austin Company to Henry Scharf described the firms' involvement with the construction. M. and T.E. Farrell of Gettysburg provided the crushed stone used for the foundation. The Harrisburg Lumber Company constructed the hardwood flooring, framing, doors, trim, and stairways. The asbestos roofing was completed by The Worden Paint and Roofing Company of Harrisburg and York, Pennsylvania. The Waterproofing Company of St. Louis made certain that the roof was watertight. Potts Manufacturing Company of Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, constructed various metalwork including steel staircases and fire escapes. The paint was provided by Sherwin & Williams from the Gettysburg Department Store, while the Adams County Hardware Company in Gettysburg and J. Jacob Shannon and Co. of Philadelphia equipped the project with most of the other hardware. The Austin Company hired G. R. Thompson's Sons of Gettysburg for cementing and plastering, and Auburn Shale Brick Co., Inc. of Auburn, Pennsylvania, for brickwork. Novinger & Wagner of Pennbrook, Pennsylvania, provided wood and metal lathers. H.T. Maring of Gettysburg provided sheet metal for the project. Finally, the Everlastone Corporation completed the stucco on July 21st for the exterior.³⁰

For the interior of the annex, many more companies staked their claim in the construction. Philadelphia plumbing contractor Daniel J. Keating oversaw all of the pipe-work, while the company of W.D. Armors constructed the bathrooms. Within the bathrooms, Columbia Mosaic & Tile Company of Washington, DC installed decorative tile and marble. Furthermore, the nationwide Otis Elevator Company provided elevators. The Cumberland Valley Telephone Company installed telephones in the annex. Live Wire Electric Company of Gettysburg installed electric light fixtures, while Ross Electric Construction Company of Philadelphia took charge of all other electric work, including the Sprinkler Alarm System and installation of the pipe



²⁹ Payroll sheet, September 16, 1925, Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

³⁰ Advertisements in the Gettysburg Times, July 15, 1925; contract with Waterproofing Co. of St. Louis discussed in letter to Gettysburg Hotel Co. from Austin Co., September 16, 1925, Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS; invoice of J. Jacob Shannon and Co., Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS; guarantee to the Austin CO. from Everlastone Products Corp., August 28, 1925, Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences, 1925, ACHS.

organ in the theater.³¹ The construction of the annex proved an enormous project. A great many firms from a variety of locations, both in and out of Gettysburg, contributed their efforts under the leadership of the Austin Company.

The complicated task of the theater's construction required many more companies and laborers. The Art Decorating Company of Philadelphia directed the decorative style of the theater. For the theater's lighting, T.R. Blake installed decorative light fixtures. Novelty Scenic Studios of New York City provided draperies and stage settings. Lewis M. Swaab & Son Co. of Philadelphia erected motion picture screens, while the Hertner Electric Co. provided the generator for motion pictures, which Swaab's men also installed. The American Seating Company of Chicago installed the 1,200 comfortable and sturdy seats for the floor and the balcony, which totaled \$9,476.18; \$6,527.28 for chairs on concrete and \$2,928.90 for chairs on wood. In addition, Lee Lash Studios of Mount Vernon, New York provided scenery, rigging, and installation totaling \$4850.60.³²

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the theater's creation, however, was the selection and installation of the pipe organ. The hotel management wished to purchase an organ to accompany the silent motion pictures in the new theater. By owning an organ, the hotel would not regularly have to hire a full orchestra. One of the last components of the theater to be installed, the pipe organ was carefully selected. In a letter to Henry Scharf at the end of July 1925, P. H. Fuhrmann wrote:

During my conversation with Mr. Schwartz yesterday, he stated that it was impossible to get up an orchestra at Gettysburg and it is therefore of the greatest importance that the order for the organ should be placed with the least possible delay.³³

Scharf replied two days later that, "The selection of the organ for the theater should be based in my opinion upon the reputation of the organ, the manufacturers and their ability to service it at regular intervals." Scharf wrote of a friend's claim that, "Möller Organ is to organs what Fords are to automobiles."³⁴ Fuhrmann and Scharf eventually agreed that M. P. Möller, Inc. of Hagerstown, Maryland, would give them their best option—a quality Manual Pipe Organ at the reasonable price of \$10,000.³⁵ While most of the companies

31 Advertisements in Gettysburg Times, July 15, 1925; letter to Mr. A.O. Larson of Austin Co. from Henry Scharf, July 1, 1925, concerning Cumberland Valley Telephone Co., Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS; letter to Austin Co. from Henry Scharf, September 28, 1925, concerning Ross Electric Co. Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

32 Letter to Henry Scharf from T.R. Blake, December 15, 1925; letter to Gettysburg Theater from Novelty Scenic Studios, November 4, 1925; letter to Lewis Swaab from Henry Scharf, November 6, 1925; letter to Henry Scharf from Lewis Swaab & Son, concerning Hertner Electric Co., October 20, 1925; bill from American Seating Company, September 12, 1925; estimate from Lee Lash Studios, December 26, 1925; all in Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

33 Letter to Henry Scharf from P. H. Fuhrmann, July 29, 1925, Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

34 Letter to P. H. Fuhrmann from Henry Scharf, July 31, 1925, Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

35 Contract and Specifications of Möller Organ, Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

participating in the construction of the annex, as a whole, came from Gettysburg and other Pennsylvania locations, the theater's construction drew companies from all over the United States. Scharf and the Austin Company were dedicated to hire the most reputable and skilled companies of theater construction. On July 15, 1925, the Gettysburg Times described how the new theater measured 120 ft. x 70 ft. (the stage itself measured 67 ft. x 30 ft.) and could seat more than 1,200 people. It had graded floors, a balcony and loges, paneled walls and ceilings, and comfortable dressing rooms under the stage. There was an operator's coup in the balcony for moving pictures. The theater's entrance was to the left upon entering the main door. There were ticket offices and marble floors in the foyer, and marquee over the entrance. The theater was ventilated by the latest fresh-air-blowing devices.³⁶ Furthermore, W. H. Lee had specified that the theater would be decorated in mulberry and gold, with velour cover the balcony rails.³⁷

While most of the work for the annex had been completed by mid-August, the theater still needed work as the summer drew to a close. On August 18, 1925, the Gettysburg Times described the timetable of the theater's construction:

The theater-auditorium will be finished last. Mr. [Oscar] Larson stated this morning that this section of the structure was not included in the contract to be completed within 85-working days, but that all work would be finished within a short time after September 1. The metal ceiling, paper work on the walls, practically all the balcony decorations and front of the auditorium have been completed. Laying of the floor and installation of the seats remain as the bulk of the work to be accomplished in the new theater.³⁸

A couple of days later, James B. Aumen, chief of the Gettysburg Fire Department, made a formal inspection of the annex. Aumen praised the project, explaining, "Hotel Gettysburg's new \$350,000 annex is as fireproof as any building I have ever seen. . . . It is equal to any city building . . . and I am pleased to learn that the hotel management was so concise and specific relative to the fireproof construction." Along with six 75-foot fire hoses along the walls and panic bolts in the doors, the theater boasted a modern and complicated system of fireproofing:

The skylight over the stage in the theater contains fused side doors which drop automatically when these fuses reach a certain degree of heat. At the same time the asbestos curtain drops automatically. The ventilation and air currents caused by the dropping of these skylight

36 Gettysburg Times, July 15, 1925, and Elise Scharf Fox, *Hotel Gettysburg*, 64.

37 Architect's specifications for the theater, July 17, 1925, *Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925*, ACHS.

38 Gettysburg Times, August 18, 1925.

doors and the lowering of the asbestos curtain—both automatic—causes any fire on the stage to be drawn out through the skylight.³⁹

Yet another firm involved in the theater's construction, James H. Channon Mfg. Co. provided the asbestos curtains for the fireproofing.⁴⁰ In case a calamity did strike the theater, or the annex as a whole, the hotel management had invested in insurance from various companies, such as Laura B. Fissel and William E. Olinger, both of Gettysburg., the Gettysburg Insurance Company, Theater Inter-Insurance Exchange of Philadelphia, and Fidelity-Phoenix Fire Insurance Company of New York.⁴¹ The Gettysburg Hotel's attention to excellence in the Majestic Theater's construction was matched by its dedication to fire safety and insurance.

As construction of the theater drew to a close in mid-October, loose ends were tied up for the grand opening scheduled for mid-November. Scharf gave praise to the respected Austin Company on October 3 proclaiming, "Congratulations are due you for the wonderful construction record made by reason of your skillful direction of the forces under you. It is to be noted that quality of work was not at any time sacrificed for the speed that was necessary."⁴² The Austin Company fulfilled its duties as contractors with efficiency and outstanding quality. In the beginning of November, Henry Scharf and the Hotel Gettysburg made final preparations for the long-anticipated opening. Scharf telegraphed to Lewis M. Swaab & Sons, the installers of the motion picture screen, on November 6, "[We will] open immediately after you finish."⁴³ The movie screen would be essential for opening night, as Cecil B. De Mille's 10-reel motion picture *The Road to Yesterday* was scheduled as the main event of the evening.⁴⁴

The opening gala at the Majestic Theater on November 14, 1925 evoked the excitement and pride of the community. P.H. Fuhrmann, Fred E. Voges and the Larsons of the Austin company, along with the architect W.H. Lee all attended. The Gettysburg Times printed a lengthy description of the ornate theater two days later:

The pipe organ chambers and side walls are paneled with additional medallions and stencil work. The chairs were upholstered and comfortable and the lights consisting of big ceiling fixtures, a pyramid fixture at each organ chamber, and softly shaded wall brackets aided considerably in producing the delightful tone of the environment. In the balcony all the aisles with small fixtures attached to the seats were lighted during

39 Gettysburg Times, August 22, 1925.

40 Letter to Austin Co. from Channon Mfg. Co., July 21, 1925.

41 Advertisements in the Gettysburg Times, July 15, 1925; Letter to Theater Inter-Insurance Exchange from Henry Scharf, November 3, 1925; Letter to Philip R. Bickle of Gettysburg Insurance Co. from the Division Engineer of Fidelity-Phoenix Fire Insurance Co., May 28, 1925, all in Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

42 Letter from Henry Scharf to the Austin Co., October 3, 1925, Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

43 Telegraph to Lewis Swaab from Henry Scharf, November 6, 1925, Hotel Gettysburg Correspondences-1925, ACHS.

44 Elise K. Scharf, Reflections on the Hotel Gettysburg, presented at ACHS September 4, 1984, p. 13. Scharf Family Collection, ACHS.

the performance. The lighting in the lobby, as in the theatre, carried out brilliant warmth by the use of canary gold lamps. Entering into the lobby one sunk deeply in the heavy carpet which continues from the lobby into the foyer and aisles of the theatre auditorium. In the rear a beautifully lighted drinking fountain was observed, while to the right of this was an attractively decorated and furnished ladies parlor.⁴⁵

The Higgins Amusement Company became the lessees and operators of the theater, with W.E. Woodward as manager. Woodward stated in admiration, “[The Majestic] is one of the most beautiful houses I have seen anywhere in my twelve years’ experience in theatre management.”⁴⁶ The citizens of Gettysburg, fully impressed with the splendidly decorated and equipped theater, were also deeply grateful to the Hotel Gettysburg for creating such a modern and beautiful facility.

The hotel company set out with very clear objectives. One of the primary objectives of the Hotel Gettysburg Company in building the annex with its theater and combination gymnasium-ballroom was to take advantage of the off-season market offered by the presence of over one thousand students from Gettysburg College and other nearby schools. But another important objective was to equip the hotel for the growing and extremely lucrative convention trade.⁴⁷ Based on the community’s response and especially individual comments made, they achieved their objectives well.

Many prominent people in the community praised the hotel. For example, Elise Singmaster, a prominent author said, “One of the chief benefits the town will derive from the annex to the hotel Gettysburg will come from the large and spacious auditorium, much needed for conventions meeting here and for local gatherings.” Even competitors spoke favorably of the annex. For instance, George Lynch, who was the proprietor of the Eagle Hotel, said, “My compliments to the management of the Gettysburg Hotel for their enterprise in adding the annex which, with its basketball court and auditorium, fills a long-felt want in Gettysburg.” These remarks were typical of the warm response the new annex received.⁴⁸

The theaters in this era, specifically the Majestic, played an integral role in their local communities. As the Times praised, “The thousands of guests entertained there during the space of a years time will convey their impression of Gettysburg as a live, modern, up-to-date town, by their appreciation of the modern conveniences.”⁴⁹ The theater became the centerpiece of entertainment in the town, both for locals and travelers. In

45 Gettysburg Times, November 16, 1925.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Gettysburg Times, July, 15, 1925.

49 Ibid.

the case of the Majestic, the addition of the theater and the gymnasium launched the hotel to a status of national fame. The building became an instant magnet for all, both within and outside the town. The hotel even gained enough prominence to attract Presidents Calvin Coolidge and Dwight Eisenhower. The theater within the Hotel Gettysburg, a social hub of extravagance and popularity, achieved the high standards set by its name: a majestic pride of Gettysburg.



Years after its completion the theatre continued to draw many famous people, including President Eisenhower, who became good friends with the proprietor of the theatre, Mr. Henry Scharf.