The Golden Era of Buffalo Theater: 1880s - 1970s

The Dean of American Showmen

In an era when Buffalo was dominated by regimented self-made men, a man named Michael Shea dreamed big. His ambition was to create for Buffalo the same kind of impressive theater that was becoming a national phenomenon. Shea purchased his first neighborhood theater, the North Park Boulevard, in 1926. His vision was to attract a diverse audience with top vaudeville acts including George M. Cohan, Douglas Fairbanks, W. C. Fields, Buster Keaton, and others.

Shea's great entertainment empire.

For a time, the Shea's theater chain stayed afloat, but the theaters were subsequently sold off to other owners. During the heyday of downtown movie palaces, the big Hollywood studios invested in theater ownership. Shea purchased his first neighborhood theater, the North Park Boulevard, in 1926. His vision was to attract a diverse audience with top vaudeville acts including George M. Cohan, Douglas Fairbanks, W. C. Fields, Buster Keaton, and others.

Throughout the early 1900s, Michael Shea's collection of downtown theaters continued to grow with the Palace, the Majestic, the Majestic Erlanger, and the Lafayette. Shea's Great Lakes Theater, named for the nearby lake, was opened in 1929. He envisioned a showplace such as Buffalo had never seen. Continuing in 1930, the Shea brothers purchased the 59 million dollar Shea's Buffalo opened to great fanfare.

As the show business marketplace matured, Shea continued to add theaters to his empire. He opened the Shea's Tivoli Theater where he booked some of the era's most popular singers, actors, acrobats, jugglers, and Transportation

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The Show Goes On

The Palace Burlesque

The Palace Burlesque, located at 710 Main Street, was owned by Dewey Michaels from the late 1870s until it closed on September 29, 1877. The Palace was a popular entertainment venue featuring both theater and burlesque productions. In the early 1900s, Michael Shea took over the house and continued to attract audiences with his impressive productions. In the late 1920s, the facade of burlesque. Michaels was a showman, during a vaudeville Coney Island, promoting the show, and attracting attention. In the 1970s, Michaels operated his theater for 30 years, becoming one of the most prominent theaters in the downtown area. In 1988, the city purchased the Palace and restored it to its former glory. The building is now home to the Buffalo Theatre, which continues to attract audiences with its diverse programming.

The Paramount Theater

During the heyday of downtown movie palaces, the huge, ornate theaters were built in major markets throughout the nation. Fox and Loew's ran the 3,300-seat movie palace at 611 Main Street, which was known as the Paramount Theater. It operated first as Fox's Theater and then as Fox's Great Lakes. In 1931 Michael Shea, with Paramount in his partner, acquired the property group. In 1950, the theater reverted to its original name of the Paramount Theater. The house was sold in 1965. The interior was restored and is a thriving presenter of professional theater season.

Performing Arts Center) has been restored and is a thriving presenter of professional theater season.

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