

Our Mission

To serve the public with arts, entertainment, and community events in the most beautiful historic setting in Indiana.

About the Paramount

John Ebersson started building this atmospheric theatre in 1928. It opened on August 20, 1929. We can relate to 1929 because our history and memory of 1929 was the Great Depression. John Ebersson, and the country, ran out of money and down-sizing of plans began.

The Paramount was primarily built for vaudeville and movies, to escape the real world. The design was to give the illusion of a Spanish casa or villa complete with wrought-iron gates, statues, a ceiling painted like a sky with stars that really twinkled, and clouds projected onto the ceiling which slowly moved across the sky. Thousands of tiles in the original design of the lobby floor were set by hand and the terra cotta façade on the building facing was so detailed it merited its own blueprints.

The entire complex was originally designed as a seven story hotel and theatre with a ballroom on the 7th floor. With down-sizing, the building stopped with three floors and the third floor is now the ballroom. There are 12 of these John Ebersson atmospheric theatres left in the USA. Originally, there were 155. John Ebersson also sold plans (around 1,500) for others to be built. Indiana has two of the 12 remaining theatres: The Embassy in Fort Wayne and the Paramount here in Anderson.

The original owner was Publix Corporation. Local developers had planned to call the theatre The Palace. When Publix entered the picture, it became The Paramount and opened with that name.

In 1985, the theatre closed for four years. By 1989, the complex had been owned by eight different groups and was actually facing the wrecking ball to become a parking lot.

Three weeks before the last reading of the ordinance to tear down the Paramount, Leslie Davisson, a young lawyer with offices across the street, saw a program on TV about other theatres that had been saved. She called the TV station for the address, wrote to Washington, got a copy of the program, called a group of people together and said, "Let's save the Paramount!" That was the start. The name of the TV program was "The Movie Palaces" narrated by Gene Kelly.

In July of 1989, the group (now called the Paramount Heritage Foundation) entered the theatre and turned on the lights (those that were working). Carrying flashlights, they saw water running down the aisle into the orchestra pit. The dressing rooms were filled with water and other debris. When they turned their flashlights toward the balcony and the ceiling, they saw something cloud-like and thought they had caused a fire. What they were seeing were mold spores floating in the air. In the balcony, plaster with large holes was hanging from the ceiling. Pigeons and bats had made this their home. With over four years of no heat, no cooling, and water damage from a deteriorating roof, the whole complex was in dire straits. The Paramount Heritage Foundation and, indeed, the people of the city of Anderson, embarked on a renovation program that, quite frankly, is still ongoing today.

In January of 1995, the theatre was closed, all seats removed, and scaffolding brought in – all the way to the top of the theatre, front to back, and side to side. A Conrad Schmidt artist used an air brush to paint the ceiling. He had seen a beautiful sunset as he looked to the West from his hotel room, and his goal was to duplicate that view. The clouds were painted in two and one-half days.

The theatre re-opened on August 19, 1995, with Sammy Kaye and the McGuire Sisters performing. The deadline was very close. The last seat was bolted in place at 11:45 AM, rehearsal started at 12:00 noon, and the show started at 7:30 PM to a sold out audience

Interesting Notes

THEATRE

Originally, there were 1,700 seats. New, wider seating lowered capacity to 1,458 seats.

The detail on the 13 half shells above the stage had the only gold leafing when the theatre opened in 1929.

All the statues along the walls are original:

HEBE' – Goddess of Youth – is holding a cup, and part of the arm was missing. One of the plasterers from Chicago took a cast of his 11-year-old daughter's arm and made the replacement arm for HEBE'.

VENUS – There are only two of this size in the world.

The original print from 1928 was used for the trees and greenery on the lattice work.

There is a catwalk above the ceiling to access the night lights. There are 221 lights. The blinking of lights was originally caused by the covers being cone-shaped. At the bottom of each cone, tinsel floated, causing the lights to twinkle.

Birds, peacocks, doves, and pheasants were a favorite for John Ebersson. The birds were his trademark. Ebersson used these in most of his theatres.

The theatre screen is 40' X 20', the second largest screen in Indiana.

The Grande PAGE Organ is one of only three such pipe organs remaining in their original theatre installations in the United States. The PAGE, installed in 1930 to accompany films, was used continuously until 1984. It was a three manual, seven rank instrument. In 1997, the PAGE was restored and enlarged to a three manual, 12 rank organ with 966 pipes. The organ is a phenomenal instrument, and it offers an aural experience people talk about long after they have visited. The Paramount serves as host to the annual convention for the American Theatre Organ Society.

The Paramount Theatre wishes to extend our deepest gratitude for your generous support during the 23/24 season. Thanks to your incredible contributions, we were able to achieve remarkable milestones at the Paramount Theatre Centre & Ballroom.

With your support, we have:

- Installed New aisle lights
- Installed much-needed handrails in the balcony
- Renovated and enlarged the Courtyard
- Replaced all the exit doors on the north side of the building
- Updated and renovated the catering kitchen
- Repaired the roof
- Started a Summer Theatre Camp
- Launched a Silent Film Series
- Completed the stage lift for the organ
- Repaired and renovated the Marquee
- Fixed our movie projector
- Resurfaced our parking lot
- Provided free movies for the community
- Reached 70% of the funds needed for the MainStreet dressing room project

- Kept costs affordable for ticket buyers and other arts organizations that utilize our beautiful, historic venue.

As can be appreciated with a historic building of this unique design and character, there are and will continue to be, many more projects in our future....

THE PARAMOUNT HERITAGE FOUNDATION INC.

d/b/a **The PARAMOUNT Theatre Centre and Ballroom**

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