

Once Upon a Time in North Park
THE LAST PICTURE SHOW AT NORTH PARK'S
OTHER MOVIE THEATER
by Tom Shess

Although we lived in Golden Hill on 23rd St. between F&G; my parents would travel to North Park during the middle to late 50's to see second run movies at the Ramona Theater (now a 99 cent store on the alley between 30th & Ohio on University Ave.) The Ramona charged two adults fifty cents and kids were free. That was for a double feature. It was a bargain even by 50s standards. Needless to say, as an 8 year old, I got to see a lot of movies. We would drive rain or shine up Fern Street and around the bends in the road on Grape and at Upas.

On certain nights the Ramona management would have gimmicks. I remember my dad won \$5 playing Keno during intermission between movies. I very proudly went up to the stage to capture the family winnings. The Ramona did a thriving business on concessions-and Keno was a perfect way to keep the audience busy.

One of my last memories of the Ramona Theater was one ill-fated night when I was ten-years-old. Near tragedy struck the theater that evening. The theater was dark. Intermission had just ended and the credits for the second feature were rolling. I was eating buttered popcorn when suddenly an awful groaning was heard throughout the hushed movie house. It was a loud and mournful sound.

At first people were upset because the structural groaning was interrupting the flicks. But before anyone had a chance to investigate the loud noise-a loud snapping echoed through the building. The support cable must have snapped because the huge chandelier lighting fixture fell from the Ramona's tall ceiling (three stories) to the main aisle-midway between the screen and the front of the movie house. It slammed hard with a thunderous crash, landing no more than five seats away. I remember a piece of ceiling striking my shoulder. Luckily, no one was under the huge lighting fixture. If it had fallen during intermission many people would have been severely injured or possibly killed. Thinking we were experiencing an earthquake, my father ordered my mom and me out of our seats. He wanted us out of the theater fast, and we left quickly as did many others. Once safely outside I discovered that my buttered popcorn was filled with soot. That really made me mad.

Note: This article first appeared in the North Park Community Association Newsletter in May 1996. The building is still there and it is still a discount store.