



Once Upon a Time In North Park

Memories of the North Park Theater

By Lorraine Halac, NPCA History Committee

Note: The following article written by Lorraine Halac first appeared in the NPCA Newsletter in September 1998.

Fifty-plus years ago, during the Second World War, I worked at the North Park Theater as an usherette and cashier. Our uniforms were (to me, at the time) gorgeous. The top fitted bodice with puffed sleeves, embroidered collar and lapels was light blue and beige. The fitted trousers were beige and full at the lower leg, like palazzo pants. The men wore black tuxedos. Management made certain these uniforms fit well and insisted that we always looked nice. We felt special ushering patrons into the theater, our flashlights aimed at the aisle floor to make it easy for them to find their seats. It was also our responsibility to maintain a good atmosphere within the theater (behavior problems were few).

The snack bar sold candy and popcorn, but no drinks, because the spillage inside the theater was too unpleasant and difficult to control. No smoking was allowed even then.

The inside walls of the theater were of a very elaborate scroll-and-leaf pattern, the trim from the period of construction (1928). The carpet was thick, in a maroon swirl pattern that followed down the aisles. The ornately designed curtain opened and closed with each feature.

The eight back rows were the loge section, with what is now called “stadium seating” – high back soft chairs, comfortable thick arm rests and no obstruction of view.

Three of us were good friends, Barbara, Mabel, and me (Nellie). We were called the cute “gruesome” trio for some reason – I can’t remember why. **The picture shown here was taken at the corner of University Avenue and 29th Street in 1945, before the war was over.**

Arthur Paulsen was manager of the North Park Theater for 15 years. He was a kind and soft spoken gentleman we all respected and liked. Mr. Paulsen later managed the Valley Circle Theater in Mission Valley after the North Park Theater closed, and actually spent 40 years in the movie theater business.

On our days off, we went to another theater house to see previews of movies and coming attractions. One of our benefits was free admittance to any Fox West Coast Theater. I saw every movie Ann Sheridan ever made.

The theater today is only a shell of what I recalled as I sadly walked its aisles again recently. It was a good time in history, and should be remembered. The Theater could still be renewed and converted in some way to provide a focal point of entertainment for the North Park Community.

After word: Seven years to the month after Lorraine Halac’s article appeared, and almost 20 years since going dark in the mid 1980s, the North Park Theater will reopen with a grand dedication to celebrate its \$8 million renovation. Under the management of the Lyric Opera San Diego, the North Park Theater is envisioned as a venue that will provide entertainment not only to North Park but to the entire city.