

HISTORY OF THE FULTON THEATRE FULTON, MISSOURI

The history of The Fulton Theatre can be traced to July 14, 1927 when The Glenn Realty Company publicly announced the planned construction of a new \$56,000 theatre building designed specifically for motion pictures and theatrical attractions (vaudeville). Glenn Realty Company was a partnership of Mr. Walter E. Glenn and Dr. R.N. Crews and in spite of the fact there were two existing theatres in Fulton, The Pratt and The Gem Theatres, Glenn and Crews forged ahead to build the new theatre on Court Street in Fulton. The contract for construction was assigned to Haden & Austin of Kansas City with a projected completion date of November 1, 1927. An older frame boarding house, owned by Mr. Glenn, was torn down for the new construction.



Walter E. Glenn



Dr. R. N. Crews

The original design specified a seating capacity of 1,000 patrons, 650 on the main floor auditorium and 250 in the balcony. The building was equipped with the Campbell heating and cooling system, designed to keep the temperature of the building down to 70 degrees Fahrenheit during the summer months. Design plans called for the stage dimensions to be 35 feet by 35 feet with dressing rooms on either side. An orchestra pit and pipe organ were included in the plans. Upon completion of construction, the new theatre was leased to Barney Dubinsky for a period of ten years. Barney Dubinsky was a partner in the firm of Dubinsky Brothers Entertainment of Jefferson City, the founding company that eventually became the current-day AMC Theaters, the second largest theater chain in the country.

Although the projected occupancy date for the new theatre was November 1, 1927, the grand opening



Fulton Theatre circa 1939.

night did not occur until January 26, 1928. According to the January 27, 1928 edition of The Fulton Sun-Gazette, "...the opening number of the entertainment that Thursday evening was the playing of the "Star Spangled Banner" by the Fulton Theatre Orchestra, which was augmented for the occasion by members of the Miller Theatre Orchestra of Jefferson City. ...The stage is large, sufficiently so to accommodate the largest of road shows when it is possible to bring them to Fulton. The

front curtain is quite handsome and when the orchestra in the pit at the front of the house began playing, it made one think of the city show houses. The seats are comfortable, leather upholstered bottoms and the rows far enough apart to provide all the room desired even by tall people. ...There are 904 seats in the theatre, 524 of them on the first floor and the others in the loge and balcony. ...The lighting fixtures and effects are quite artistic and add much to the attractiveness of the house."

THEATRE MANAGEMENT CHANGES HANDS - 1948

Over the next 20 years, The Fulton Theatre was leased to The Dubinsky Brothers who sublet the operation to Sol Banks in 1933. Then on July 14, 1947, Walter Monroe Glenn, son of Walter E. Glenn, publicly announced that Glenn Realty would operate the theatre with the change effective February 1, 1948. At that time, Mr. Glenn also said that he would manage the theatre with film services supplied by Commonwealth Theaters, Inc. of Kansas City, Missouri. Mr. Glenn also announced that the theatre interior would be completely renovated to "make it a modern, comfortable and up-to-date theater."

The entire theater was redecorated and a new screen and sound equipment were installed. The box office was moved flush with Court Street and a new snack bar was added in the lobby area. A 10-million candle-power search light that cast a beam of light 5 miles into the air was brought to Fulton to herald the opening of the renovated theater. The light could be seen for 20 miles from Fulton. The new magna screen was the latest development in

the movie industry and the new projectors had high-intensity lamps to give the brightest possible picture on the new screen. The lens for the new projectors used the latest coating technology to create the highest picture definition. The new cellular high-frequency horn speakers provided clarity of speech for people throughout the auditorium.

Fulton Sun-Gazette, January 26, 1928.

Fulton Sun-Gazette 1948.



Inner lobby view - 1948.



New snack bar-1948.

During their 18-year period of theater management, The Glenns purchased the Fulton Drive-In Theater from Mr. Don Fike.

For the next 18 years Monroe and his wife, Daphne teamed up to manage the theatre. Throughout these 18 years there were other updates to the facility to include: new seating, new CinemaScope projection and yet wider screen, a larger-capacity cooling system, a short-lived first-generation 3-D projection system, and other amenities. On occasion, a movie star would be scheduled to visit the local theater fans.



View of inner lobby - 1948.

In early 1950's a western movie star named Tim Holt visited the theatre. Tim appeared in over 50 cowboy movies and co-starred with Humphrey Bogart in the classic movie "The Treasure of Sierra Madre". Shown in the photograph below (left to right) are: Philip Glenn, son of Monroe and Daphne; Tim Holt; Nancy Glenn Green, daughter of Monroe and Daphne; and David Horton, a friend of Philip and son of Dr. David and Mrs. Janet Horton.



Film actor Tim Holt with friends circa 1952.



W. Monroe Glenn, son of Walter E. Glenn

THE GLENNS SELL THEATERS TO WEHRENBURG THEATERS

In the spring of 1966, Monroe and Daphne Glenn sold both The Fulton Theatre and The Fulton Drive-In Theater to Wehrenberg Theaters, Inc. of St. Louis, Missouri. Wehrenberg Theaters owned and operated



New ownership - 1979

The Fulton Theater until the end of 1979 at which time they sold the operation to B&B Movie Company of Salisbury, Missouri.

WEHERENBERG THEATERS, INC. SELL TO B&B MOVIE COMPANY – 1979

Wehrenberg Theaters, Inc. sold both The Fulton Theatre and The Fulton Drive-In Theater to B&B Movie Company in late 1979. B&B was a partnership consisting of the Sterling Bagby and Elmer Bills families. Sterling Bagby and his wife, Pauline, had owned and operated the Bagby Road Show, a traveling

movie show serving small towns throughout the Missouri – Kansas area before purchasing a circuit of theaters in Kansas. The photo above shows (left to right) Ray and Marie Parker of Wehrenberg Theaters; new owners Sterling and Pauline Bagby and Elmer and Amy Bills; the new manager Bob Bagby and his wife, Bridgette.

In 1980, B&B converted the balcony of the theatre to a separate 150-seat auditorium, replaced the main floor auditorium screen, and updated the projection systems to new state-of-the-art equipment. They continued to own and operate The Fulton Theatre in that configuration until 2005.

B&B MOVIE COMPANY DONATES THEATRE TO THE FULTON COMMUNITY

In 2005 The B&B Movie Company announced their decision to build a new 8-screen theater in Fulton and their desire to donate the old Fulton Theatre building to the Fulton community. At that time, the Fulton community organized The Callaway Arts Council (CAC) to receive ownership of the theater. The CAC prepared the required paperwork to become an approved not-for-profit organization with the Internal Revenue Service and took a parallel approach of scheduling events in the old theater while attempting to raise funds to renovate the facility. This approach failed to meet the desired objectives for The Theatre and in 2010 a majority of The CAC Board of Directors resigned with Mr. Dale Lewis and Mr. David McDaniel remaining as the sole members of The Board.

Although a lot of volunteer effort was accomplished to clean the old building after 2010, progress toward fund-raising and renovating The Theatre was stymied. As a result, in 2014 The Fulton Brick District, an association of downtown business owners and other community leaders, organized a new sub-committee to assist Mrs. Lewis and McDaniel in developing a strategic plan to bring the historic Fulton Theatre back to life.

