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Our last meeting was "Remember When" by our members. We had many members who came and gave us so much good information and stories. Frances Dekle's aunt, Mrs. Rex Gordy, the former Miss Estelle Melton of Dawson, was present, and told us of visiting Valdosta when she was young. Everyone present made a comment, and it was a good program.

We are not having meetings this summer, of course. Nor are we open to the public. We can open at any time, especially if you have people visiting here and want to see it. Call me, and I, or someone, will be glad to meet you at the Museum. I was recently at the Archives in Atlanta and during the day, spoke with someone about the April to October 1905 newspapers (The Valdosta Daily Times) that are not on microfilm anywhere. The Archives said they would microfilm the ones we have collected (15 in all) and give the Society a copy of the film. Do you have more 1905 newspapers? There should be about 56 papers for that period not on film, as the newspaper was bi-weekly then, later becoming weekly near the first week of October 1905. We need these papers now, so that we can get them to Atlanta in time for filming. They were most pleased with this find, and I want to thank the Richardsons again for giving us the papers that they did. They have, of course, given us many more than the 1905 papers. Oh, there is a period of 1918-1919 that is not on film, either, and we were able to carry one paper from each year for the roll of film. We need the papers for those years also. So please let me know if you have them. I will be glad to make a special trip to Atlanta to deliver them. Miss Corry was most helpful, and asked for our newsletter. I talked at length with Mr. Williams and with Thomas Holmes, former Valdostan.

Progress is progress, and beautification is good too, but still we hate to see a nice old landmark go. The Ritz Theatre was there all of the lives of some of us. We spent many an enjoyable hour there. Naturally I had to write about it.

The Last Show at the Ritz

by

Albert S. Pendleton Jr.

The walk from the box office of the Ritz Theatre to the ticket stand did not seem nearly as long, or the space as wide as it used to seem, on this, the day before its last day. It had been years since I'd walked that distance, or stood there waiting for a movie feature to be over. My mission was to see Manager W. K. Henderson and ask for some mementoes of the Ritz scheduled to be torn down after June 1st.

The last show at the Ritz was a real-life, colossal affair. Its own demolition, its own demise was a gigantic, much attended show. I had taken many pictures of the Ritz, before and after, collected some items from Henderson and began remembering the Ritz as I had known it, a downtown theatre built about 1928-29. My thoughts went back to even before that, to newspaper accounts of local theatres before the turn of the century.

Microfilm of The Valdosta Times has very little about plays and shows that came to Valdosta, but they do mention a few. One advertisement was March 21, 1896 when it announced "Minstrels Monday Night" at Stuart Hall. Stuart Hall hosted many a traveling play or one man show.

A friend tells me that the first theatre was over the old City Hall, once situated on the southeast corner of Hill Avenue and Ashley Street; the next one was near the present site of the C & S Bank, where it was "dark as Egypt," and then there was the Montgomery.

Around 1900 to 1904, the Montgomery Theatre, a movie house, was where Sportsman's Center

now is located. Kathleen Roberts Winn says that she and her family had passes to this theatre because their father owned the building. She saw "Perils of Pauline" there. Mrs. Winn and her sisters, Margaret Roberts Graham and Dinah Roberts Parramore remember a theatre where Blackburn's Studio used to be, behind King's Grill. At this theatre they once gave away a trip. There was a drug store where King's Grill is now, run by Mr. Monroe and a fruit drink cost 2½¢.

In the City Directory for 1904, there was listed the "Pine Park Casino, Pine Park, end of North Patterson." This Park was located approximately on the corner of North Patterson and East Alden, covering most of the block to Williams Street, where there were shows, fairs and racing.

In the Fall of 1905, The Valdosta Times announced Lee Street's first building. It was called the Opera House, and also called "Valdosta Theatre"; "Valdosta Theatre, one night only, Thursday, October 19, 1905, A Revival of one of America's and England's Greatest Successes. Sowing the Wind by Sydney Gundy, with Suzzanne Santze, supported by Edward R. Mawson, and an Exceptionally strong cast. Management Al. S. Roth. Prices 50 cts. to \$1.50. Seats on sale Monday, October 16th, at Breedlove's." And in a later paper, other attractions that Fall would be, "Human Hearts on the 18th, and George Ade's County Chairman on the 20th. All of these plays are said to be good and they will draw good crowds." The newspaper for September 28, 1906 announced the coming of the play, Violette, and others would be, Some Old Love, and Dear Old Dixie with Corinne Frances.

Clyde McKey White remembers the Opera House quite well because she lived just a block away. She told me that she and her friends used to run over there at night to look in the windows. One night when the theatre presented the opera, Faust, she said they hurried over to look in and play around the back steps, but the "devil" came out and chased them off, scaring the wits out of them. Clyde also remembers when a theatre was on the corner where Corn's Barber shop used to be (now Butler Shoes). Going to the silent movies one day, she and her friends went down front to invite the new piano player home with them to play while they danced. It was Elsa Horn, who played for the local movie theatres quite a while, later organizing her own band, and associated with music and all us Valdostans for many years.

The City Directory of 1908-09, found at the Chamber of Commerce office, printed by R. L. Polk and Company, again listed Pine Park Casino under Theatres, and also "Valdosta Opera House, foot of East Valley" with "W. L. Ricks, manager." This building is the site of our present Lee Street Baptist Church.

In the City Directory for 1917-18 there is listed the Valway Theatre at 210 North Patterson Street, with W. S. and R. W. Tyson as managers. However, the June 10, 1918 issue of The Valdosta Daily Times has the following advertisement: "Rex Theatre, Today, William Fox Presents, Francis X. Bushman and Beverly Bane in 'With Neatness and Dispatch,' A five-act Metro Screen drama of laughter and romance. Would you crack a safe to please the girl you loved? Also, Harold Lloyd in 'It's a Wild Life,' a roaring comedy, 10 and 15¢; Tomorrow, William Fox Presents, Jane and Katherine Lee in 'American Buds,' A sparkling romantic drama blooming with laughs and heart appeals. A picture that will delight everyone. Also Hearst-Pathe News, All the world before your eyes, 10 and 15; Wednesday, Mary Miles Minter in 'A Bit of Jade,' 'What maid shall wear these beads of jade, must marry e'er the poppies fade.'"

The City Directory for 1923 lists: "Strand Theatre, 210 N. Patterson Street. And, in 1925 Directory, the Strand is in the same location with W. F. Howell, as manager. My sister said that was where I stood in the seat and sang the song, "Always", with the movie music.

Also listed in the same directory was the Larkin Theatre, 614 Jackson Street. Though not a movie house, this theatre was beyond York street and was also listed as, "Grocery and Theatre J. E. Larkin at 614 Jackson, home address 604 Jackson." This colored theatre entertained for several years.

We lack City Directories from 1925 until 1930-31 and can only find in microfilm movies that were advertised in the newspaper when the Ritz began. The building was possibly built about 1928-29. The 1930-31 Directory lists, "Ritz Theatre, 310 N. Patterson, Vitaphone and Movie-tone presentations -- phones 360-361, F. T. Sands, Mgr." and "Palace Theatre, 410 S. Patterson Street," with no manager listed. In the 1937 City Directory under Motion Picture Theatres for Valdosta we find this listing, "Palace Theatre, Jos. B. Alderman mgr." and "Ritz Theatre, 310 N. Patterson St., Wm. O'Neill mgr." And I must add for all of you who remember, in this same directory was this ad, "The Ritz Soda Shop, Curtis Jackson, James Dasher, 312 N. Patterson Street." If we had gotten a coke or root beer on September 25, 1937 (and probably did) we

waltzed into the Ritz and saw "Broadway Melody of 1937," with Robert Taylor. I remember Susie McKey Thomas said that in Hollywood they had to put Taylor on a box to make him taller than his lady costars. The advertisement for that movie has him towering above the very tall Eleanor Powell.

By 1940 we had four downtown theatres; the Ritz, the Palace, the Liberty on Florida Avenue, and the Dosta on Ashley Street. And about that time, I think, we had a theatre called the Grand, but I can't remember where it was; Ashley, I think. The Valdosta Times advertised on February 19, 1940, "Ritz Theatre, adult .25, student .15, children not in arms, .10 and night was .35, .20 and .10." The movie on that date was "Congo Maisie" with Ann Sothern. But the movie of all movies came March 5, 1940. It was "Gone With The Wind" and tickets in the daytime were 75¢ and at night they were, \$1.10 reserved, not reserved .75¢." The paper also announced that Aunt Pitty Pat's Parlor was reproduced at Touchton's. On May 11, 1940, there was, "Deanna Durbin At Height in 'It's a Date.'" Robert Stack made his debut in one of her movies. Was this it? When the Ritz closed the price of admissions were: \$1.75 and .75.

I remember so many wonderful movies, sitting there entranced, not worried at all that we might have to walk all the way home as we had probably missed out on a ride. There was "Marie Antoinette" with Merle Oberon and Tyrone Power; "Treasure Island" and "Viva Villa" with Wallace Berry, Shirley Temple in everything and Judy Garland's "Wizard of Oz." We fought and wept through many a story. There was only one movie we saw more times than "Words and Music" (3), in a single run; that was "Orchestra Wives," six times, I think, twice in each balcony and twice downstairs. This was the Glen Miller movie with Chattanooga ChooChoo, At Last, etc. Would that we could see another Bette Davis tear up the silver screen again with her excellent performances, "Dark Victory" among the top. It did me good to see Joan Crawford come back in "Mildred Pierce," and there were other good ones for her after that. We used to wait for new movies of the following: Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire; Jeanette McDonald and Nelson Eddy musicals; Bob Hope, Bing Crosby; even Our Gang Comedies. And though it was overshadowed by another book and movie, no one could forget the tone and grasp of "Rebecca." The glorified Western came along and then the glorified Western-musical, and I remember "Annie Get Your Gun." "An American in Paris" has to be tops for the musical category, and ...

Now, of course, our movie houses are the Beverly (once called the Roxy) and Cinema I and Cinema II, with Alan Richardson, long time employee of Martin Theatres, in the twin Theatres at Five Points, where we also have the Martin Drive-In Theatre. There is the Sky-Way Drive-In Theatre on the Bemiss Road, and we once had the Forrest Drive-In on Forrest Street.

It was slow at first, the tearing down of the Ritz, the last show, mainly because the workers worked inside for two weeks. Then on June 22nd the big cement block began to swing in onto the back wall of the theatre building, and bank employees, depositors, and passersby stopped everything to watch the show.

Earlier when I met the manager, we found a few things to take away; signs, film clips, some old Ritz tickets. But there really wasn't much. He invited me back to later go upstairs in the rear of the building where he remembered seeing some boxes of stuff. We stood later in the auditorium where a field of disassembled seats lay prone on the ground.

With a bulldozer and several men the inside demolition began a few days after June 1st. Just before that time I walked up the back stairway with bank officials. We found the interesting boxes of unknown contents in a dimly lit second story storage room, under rows and rows of old theatre seats, completely unaccessable without a lot of work and strong help.

By the time I returned, early one cloudy morning, the wreckers were on the roof, but the foreman allowed me, and two of my workers to go in, only to find the room much too dark without electricity. We sent for a light, moved unhandy theatre seats, sweated and found very little.

We wanted some of the colorful inside molding. The day before we found some lying just inside a door, but the large, two-three inch plaster was far too heary to even lift. On the last day, we were not allowed to try to move it for the roof was being caved in above us.

The next day we watch the cement block bombard the plaster and brick of the back walls. The steel part of the building, its veins, held stubbornly together. But after continued thrusts from the huge tall crane and the wire and block, the south wall of the rear of the building was almost down by late afternoon. The rest of the tearing down made as greata show as the beginning. And maybe, like the story of Samson, there was a reason. Driving away from the soon-to-be former site of the Ritz, I agreed with both my young daughters who said, "Somehow it's so sad to see it go down." "Yeah, but they showed dirty movies!"

We went out of town for a couple of days, and when we returned the old Ritz Theatre was gone.