

The “Movie” Craze Arrives in Jefferson City



The Roxie Theater in 1911, C. Trenton Boyd postcard collection, Columbia, Missouri.

The beginnings of what we know of as the “movies” came about with Edison’s invention, the kinetoscope, in 1891. It immediately gained interest from the public. In 1895, major refinements by the Lumiere Brothers of Lyon, France, resulted in a lightweight camera and projection equipment. The new design made more varied and versatile filming which was more interesting to the public.

The moving pictures were such an improvement over still photography, only several decades old, that it was so appealing to its viewers that it became an overnight novelty success.

By the end of the 19th century, the novelty effect began to wear off and gave way to more serious and professional entertainment. Briefly, between 1904 and 1908, a large number of nickelodeon theaters appeared in the United States, playing one reel “shorts” of around sixteen minutes.

In 1910, the appearance of the multi-reel “feature films” captured the imagination of viewers as a new form of entertainment that had come of age. Vaudeville and Nickelodeon theaters were rapidly converted to movie theaters and new theaters were

rapidly being built to present the silent movies that were a result of a rapidly growing industry. As movie going increased in popularity there was a proliferation of comfortable and lavishly decorated theaters across the country to satisfy the growing demand for movie entertainment.

Jefferson City was not immune to the demand for movies, consequently a significant number of movie theaters sprang into being between 1910 and 1913. Among these new theaters were names like: Jefferson, Grand, Star, West End, Roxie, and Dunklin. Some of these theaters would close and disappear early, while others that would prosper and maintain audiences. Several of these theaters would eventually experience a change in ownership and an associated change of name. For this article we will limit the coverage to six distinct theaters in the downtown and southside area.



Dunklin Theater, 115 E. Dunklin St. – Initially opened in Nov., 1914 under the name Southside Theater and within weeks the name was changed to Dunklin Theater. After several changes of ownership, the theater was permanently closed by Christmas of 1916 having been open less than two years.

Roxie Theater, 218 Monroe St. – Initially opened in 1911 and hosted both vaudeville and movies. In December 1917 the theater experienced a fire causing significant destruction. The theater was rebuilt and continued business. It was announced in a local newspaper that the theater would reopen under Dubinsky management in 1937 as the Gem Theater. The Dubinsky Brothers operated a chain of over 40 theaters in Missouri and Kansas. The Gem continued under that name until it closed in 1951.

State Theater, 315 E. High St. – The State Theater originally opened as the Miller Theater in 1929. It was later remodeled and by 1941 it was under the management of the Durwood theater chain and had been renamed the State Theatre. It closed permanently in 1961 and was demolished in 1969.

Jefferson Theater, 101 E. High St. – Although other sources indicate that the theater opened in 1913 as a nickelodeon theater, the Jefferson Theater appears on the 1908 Sanborn map of Jefferson City. The theater, although it had a street address on High Street, the theater auditorium proper was behind what we later knew as Schell & Ward, the Yum-Yum Shop and the next shop to the east. The auditorium extended to the alleyway adjacent to the Broadway Building and was the largest theater in Jefferson City. The Jefferson Theater closed in 1935 only to reopen under Dubinsky management in 1937. It remained open for an indeterminate period of time and had been closed for some time when totally destroyed by fire Dec. 04, 1950.

Star Theater, 225 Madison St. – The Star Theater opened in 1913 on the east side of Madison Street as a nickelodeon theater. It lasted until 1915 and was eventually destroyed. Little else is known about this theater.

Capitol Theater, 111 W. High St. – Dubinsky Bros. announced the purchase of the Krafft Motor Company building, 111 West High street, and that the erection of a new theater on the site would begin February 1. The Capitol Theater, which is best known by more contemporary generations, was known to be the theater which presented the best known, “first run” movies. It was opened on June 05, 1935 as part of the Dubinsky circuit. It was two levels with the main floor and a balcony with a mezzanine intervening. It was built and decorated in the Art Deco style and had a total seating capacity of 1270 seats, 900 on the main floor and 370 in the balcony. It joined the Durwood chain in 1948 and closed on May 15, 1970. The theater was later converted to a one-level parking garage with many of the interior features tattered; but still intact. The building is still essentially intact today.