

STARKER AUDITORIUM

A TIMELINE

1913

Construction on the Johnson Porter building, designed to house The Majestic Theatre and other businesses, begins in Spring of 1913. The theatre opens on August 5th. The auditorium is described in the Gazette-Times as “carpeted... The color scheme in all decorations and tintings is in old rose and gold, and Louis XV frescoes add to the beauty. Hangings...are of brown velour...chairs finished in leather upholstery, mirrors, tiled entrances, three double doors...leave nothing to be desired.” The auditorium has a balcony, three aisles, and four boxes, and it seats 800 people.



1914

The Corvallis Amusement Company, the business entity running the Majestic at the time, holds their annual employee banquet. They hire a photographer to take a group portrait, resulting in the only known extant photograph of the auditorium's original fresco work.

1918-20

During an outbreak of the Spanish Flu, the Majestic is redecorated during a mandated closure due to quarantine. The Gazette-Times reports that “the theater has been tinted, papered, and painted throughout.” This is perhaps also when the theatre's original blade sign is installed. In 1919, a massive Wurlitzer organ is ordered, and installation is completed by early 1920.

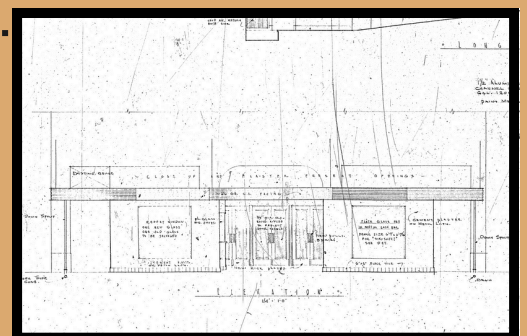


1927-28

The Whiteside Brothers hand off management of the Majestic to Universal, and the new theater manager extensively renovates the space. The B.F. Shearer Company is hired to design the new interior. New seats by Heywood-Wakefield are installed, as well as new drop curtains and a still-extant piece of scenery, hand painted by Lerner & McConnell Scenic Studio. The theatre is also retrofitted for “talkies.” This is likely when the Wurlitzer organ is removed.

1937

The Majestic undergoes another renovation, this one much more extensive. The boxes are removed, the orchestra seats are rearranged with two aisles instead of three and the addition of 40 seats, and the balcony is reduced. The interior and exterior are completely redecorated in chrome and neon. New projectors and a state-of-the-art air conditioner are installed.





1949

The Majestic Theatre is closed and transformed into a theater for movies only. It is rechristened The Varsity. The Gazette-Times describes the new theatre as “modernistic inside and out.” The foyer gets thick new carpet, mirrors, and “pastel-shaded” walls. A snack bar and a cry room are added. The shape of the auditorium itself remains largely the same. The Heywood-Wakefield seats likely remain.

1968

New seats are installed in the auditorium on the orchestra floor, but the balcony seats remain untouched. The orchestra seats will be repainted, reupholstered, and reused for the next six decades. The auditorium seats 350 on the orchestra level and 150 in the balcony.

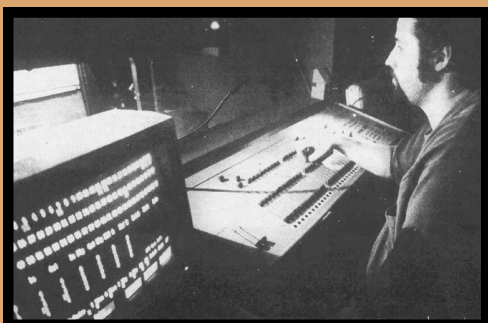


1978-85

The Varsity closes its doors in 1978, and the theatre sits derelict until 1986, when a generous donation from Betty Starker made it possible for the City of Corvallis to purchase the building and renovate it into a restored Majestic Theatre to serve as a performing arts center for the community.

1986-90

Through the efforts of volunteers, the Majestic is remodeled, repainting the 1968 seats, rebuilding the proscenium and parts of the stage, adding an ADA section, removing several rows of seats, and doubling the size of the lobby and backstage areas. The balcony remains, but isn't used, reducing the seating capacity to 300. The theatre is run by a new nonprofit called Majestic Theatre Management.



1996-99

Another wave of fundraising allows Majestic Theatre Management to convert the entire balcony into a tech booth and the second floor into a handful of rehearsal spaces and offices. The glass canopy that graced the façade of the theatre in its earliest days is recreated.

2000-Present

The Majestic Theatre is currently managed by the City of Corvallis Parks & Recreation department. Two new ADA sections are added in 2021, and another in 2025, reducing the seating capacity to 284. The seats, originally installed in 1968 and untouched since 1989, are in desperate need of a refresh.

