

THE LAST PICTURE SHOW

Balderson Theatre 1915-1957

When Perth's only cinema was sold by local owners to a Toronto-based theatre chain in 1947, a *Perth Courier* editorial observed that,

More than any other single business, the Perth Theatre has contributed to the prosperity of Perth merchants, inasmuch as it forms one of the greatest factors in attracting our neighbors from the surrounding district. A careful check of those who contribute to the merchant's prosperity during the afternoon, will reveal a large number who are in Perth for the day, largely because of their intention to attend the Perth Theatre at night ... if there were no theatre in Perth, it would pay our businessmen to build one themselves.¹

Just 10 years later the newspaper was lamenting the theatre's demise, leaving "a darkened spot on Gore Street, which once was a show-place on Perth's main thoroughfare"².

In the summer of 1816 soldier-settler John Adamson (1775-c1841) built his 'Red House'³, a log building, now sheathed in clapboard and still standing at 55 Craig Street. In addition to its function as a tavern and inn, the Red House can also be seen as Perth's first theatre space. Its second floor was divided by a single wall that swung up and latched to the roof beams. The resulting space hosted court hearings, political rallies, lodge meetings, school classes, church services, lectures, dances, and such theatre and musical entertainment as the remote pioneer community could attract or muster from within its own ranks.

Perth's first purpose-built theater, the Robertson Music Hall, operated from 1855 through 1892. Located at 11-15 D'Arcy Street, in a building that also still stands, the facility was located above a ground floor shoemaking and leather goods shop. It boasted an ornate plaster ceiling and faux marble painted walls and served as a venue for Perth citizens to enjoy itinerant theatre and music acts, ranging from song-and-dance troupes to opera singers. For nearly four decades travelling shows made the Robertson Music Hall a regular stop on their tours between Montreal and Toronto.



The Robertson Music Hall occupied the second floor of this building at 11-15 Darcy Street

¹ *Perth Courier*, February 13, 1947.

² *Perth Courier*, October 24, 1957.

³ So-called for a later paint job.



The Perth Opera House or Concert Hall was located on the second floor of Town Hall from 1864 until the 1970s

When Perth built its Town Hall in 1864, on its second floor it included a municipal 'Concert Hall', also known as the 'Opera House', a space that would serve its purpose for 100 years. Initially, the hall mostly accommodated public meetings, bridge and euchre parties, penny readings, dances, club activities, amateur theatricals, etc., but in the 1870s and 1880s travelling shows also occasionally played the town hall stage. When the Robertson Music Hall closed in 1892, however, John Andrew Kerr (1852-1940)⁴, who had been hired as Town Clerk in the same year, began to pro-actively engage theatre troupes for the Town Hall Opera House. In 1902 Kerr hired 11-year-old William A. H. Hamilton (1891-1960) to take tickets and lead

the singing during community singsongs, a feature of show business of the day. Hamilton's part-time job at the Town Hall theatre was the beginning of a 50-year career, with four different theatres, entertaining the citizens of Perth and district.

In the mid-1880s the Starland Theater, managed by Earl Flock of Syracuse, New York, opened in a small brick building located across the street from Town Hall, at what is today 91 Gore Street East. Flock's theatre provided a third venue for visiting vaudeville troupes and other entertainers.

It was at the Town Hall Opera house in 1897 that local theatre-goers saw their first 'moving pictures'. That film was presented by itinerant showman John C. Green, apparently also an American. Thereafter, Green periodically visited Perth over several years showing films at the Opera House or at the Starland, either in partnership with Earl Flock or by renting the Starland premises. Green advertised the,

OPERA HOUSE,
THREE NIGHTS,
Commencing on MONDAY.
JUNE 14, 15 and 16,
EDISON'S PROJECTOSCOPE!
The Wizard's Latest Invention.
SEE
The Great Hurdle Race.
The Famous Battle Scene.
The Buffalo and Chicago Express
changing passengers and baggage
at Geneva, N.Y.
The New York Fire Department.
Ex-Pres. Cleveland Going Fishing.
The McKinley Inauguration Parade.
McKinley taking the Oath of Office.
All these and fifty others.
Change of Views Nightly.
The machine is direct from Edison's Laboratory, Orange, N. J., and is new and complete, throwing a perfect picture with no fluttering or spots. Two Hours of Solid Fun. Popular Prices Prevail.
Reserved Seats, 25c. Gallery, 15c. Ten Cent Matinee, Wednesday afternoon 2.30 to everyone. 41c

Edison Projectoscope, the wizard's latest invention, direct from Edison's laboratory, Orange, New Jersey, new and throwing a perfect picture, no fluttering or spots, two hours of solid fun. – 'The Great Hurdle Race', 'Famous Battle Scenes', the 'Buffalo & Chicago Express', 'New York Fire Department', 'Ex-President Cleveland Fishing', 'McKinley Inauguration Parade & Oath of Office' – Reserved Seats 25¢, Gallery 15¢, Matinee 10¢.

⁴ John Andrew Kerr served as Town Clerk 1892-1932. See *le Petit Canada* <https://www.perthhs.org/documents/le-petit-canada2.pdf> elsewhere on this website.

More than a decade later, in May 1908, Perth's first dedicated moving picture theatre was established next door to the Starland when "two young men, Messrs. Dowsley of Prescott, and Cooper of Ogdensburg, NY, rented the Robertson store under the name Victoria Theatre Co.". Their apparatus, they claimed, was "as perfect as science can make it and the view will be flickerless". The new theatre advertised "three 40-minute performances nightly at 10¢ and a 5¢ matinee on Saturday".⁵

Located "opposite the Opera House"⁶ (i.e., Town Hall), in a small stone building known as the Robertson Store, Dowsley and Cooper's Victoria Theatre Co. branded their Perth venture the 'Gayety Theatre', and promised that,

*... the class of picture shown each evening will be the finest that is produced and will consist of all the latest and best productions of the day ... the most delightful and instructive entertainment ever offered to the public. The admission is only 5¢ and the accommodation offered to the public is the best. Bring the children Saturday afternoon at 3 o'clock*⁷.

On opening night, a large crowd enjoyed a "moving picture show and illustrated song act"⁸.

The Gayety Theatre, however, seems to have lacked the appropriate operating license and immediately found itself out of favor with Perth Town Council. At its June 1908 meeting the town fathers directed Clerk John A. Kerr to,

*... collect from the managers of the Gayety Theatre the sum of \$4.00 per week for the privilege of conducting a theater in the town, and when the sum of \$100 has thus been collected, the managers are to be allowed the privilege of conducting the theatre for the space of one year from their first opening in town.*⁹

Faced with these rather punitive fees, the Gayety Moving Picture Theatre disappeared shortly after Town Clerk Kerr came calling.

By 1909 Earl Flock at the Starland Theatre was offering weekly moving picture shows on his own account, in addition to hosting the usual vaudeville troupes. In March that year

*... the theatre held a capacity audience on Saturday night. The 'Samson & Delilah' film was the best seen in Perth to date. Wednesday night the drama 'Romeo & Juliet' was greatly appreciated by another large crowd*¹⁰.

⁵ Perth *Courier*, May 1, 1908

⁶ Perth *Courier*, May 29, 1908. This appears to be a reference to the Town Hall Opera House as, at the time, there was no other 'Opera House' operating in Perth.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Perth *Courier*, June 9, 1908.

¹⁰ Perth *Courier*, March 26, 1909.

That October, Flock leased the Starland to his brother-in-law C. L. Bacheller and Miss Muriel Wood, “a graduate of Hawthorn Institute of Music”¹¹ was hired as theatre pianist. Keeping the Starland operational and turning a profit presented Bacheller challenges beyond his own control, however. A movie house requires a dependable supply of electricity but the locally owned Canadian Electric and Waterpower Company¹², generating electrical power at the Haggart Island dam, frequently failed. Winter ice was a particular problem. The power plant, and thus the Starland Theatre, was often out of operation for more than a week at a time.

When Bacheller moved on to more promising fields of endeavor in about 1911, Flock sold or leased the Starland to home-grown empresario Robert W. Marks (1855-1937). Robert was the eldest of seven brothers who comprised the ‘Canadian Kings of Repertoire’, an entertainment enterprise begun at Perth that sent multiple ‘Marks Brothers’ vaudeville companies touring across



Robert Marks (1855-1937)

Canada and the northern United States from the late 1870s into the 1930s.¹³ Robert Marks ran a stage show at the Starland and poached William Hamilton, ticket taker and sing-song conductor, from the Town Hall Opera House to help him. Marks, however, operated the Starland for less than a year before it was acquired in about 1912 by Hannah “Anna” King-Ball (1866-1915). Anna Ball was the widow of William Ball (1863-1908) of Toronto and Port Hope, but reportedly had family connections in Perth.¹⁴

Except to man the ticket wicket, with her miniature poodle sitting in her lap, Anna Ball placed management of the Starland in the hands of her son Robert Percival Ball (1888-1917), who continued to run the theatre as a mixed vaudeville and cinema venue. In November 1912, patrons of the Starland saw what was probably the first color movie ever screened at Perth. *Delhi Durbar*¹⁵ was a hand-colored¹⁶ 150 minute film documenting the visit of King George V and Queen Mary to India in December 1911. Admission was 10¢. The projection of moving pictures at the Starland was in the hands of William Vandusan.

¹¹ Perth *Courier*, November 5, 1909.

¹² The power company generators, owned by MP John Haggart (1836-1913) and Senator Peter McLaren (1833-1919), were installed at the Haggart mills in 1891.

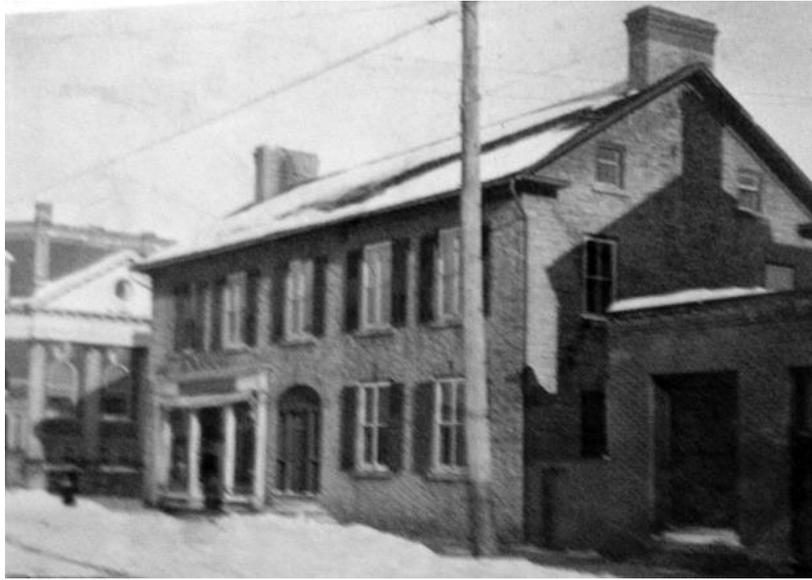
¹³ Born and raised near Christie Lake in Bathurst Township, the sons of Thomas Marks (1833-1904) and Sarah Jane Burns (1802), the ‘Marks Brothers’ were Robert (1855-1937), Thomas Jr. (1857-1936), John/Jack (1858-1940), Joseph (1861-1944), Alex (1872-1914), Ernie (1879-1952), and McIntyre (1882-1920).

¹⁴ Their marriage certificate records William Ball’s trade as “Piano Action Supt.” which may have been what the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles, Edition II* (1943) listed as “Piano Action Regulator/Adjuster” and may provide a hint as to how Ball became involved with theatres. Ball may have purchased a stake in the Starland shortly before his death from tuberculosis in 1908 but by 1912 Anna Ball appears to have been the sole proprietor and she may have purchased the business on her own account after her husband’s death. Hannah ‘Anna’ King-Ball was the daughter of Irish immigrants Robert King (1824-1896) and Margaret Davison (1832-1910).

¹⁵ aka *With Our King and Queen Through India*.

¹⁶ Kinemacolor additive color process.

In May 1912, shortly after the Balls took over the Starland, the Federal Government announced that it had purchased the neighboring property, at the corner of Gore and Basin Streets, as the site for a new Post Office. The largest building on the lot was a two-story stone retail store built in 1858 by distiller and merchant Robert McLaren (1799-1848)¹⁷. The \$7,750 deal also included a smaller stone building next door, the Robertson Store, which had briefly housed the Gayety Theatre in 1908, and a single-story brick building adjoining the Starland Theatre. The Balls, at first, held out, but in August finally agreed to sell the Starland for \$3,000.



The McLaren Building that was demolished in 1914 to make way for the new Post Office.

The Starland continued to offer regular stage shows and moving pictures until the wreckers arrived to clear the Gore Street site in the spring of 1914¹⁸. That April the theatre moved into temporary accommodation at the Town Hall Opera House while a bowling alley¹⁹ leased at 35 Gore Street East was “transformed into a theatre for talking pictures, an Edison invention”. The new Royal Theatre was “equipped with opera seats, eight ventilating fan lights, three exits, dressing rooms for the vaudeville performers and seating for 300”²⁰.

While the Balls could legitimately claim their Royal Theatre screened the first ‘talkie’ ever shown at Perth, just as their Starland had shown the first color movie, the “Edison invention talking pictures” were not modern soundtrack films. They were Kinetophone shorts synced by a complex process to a separate audio playback from shellac discs played on a gramophone behind the screen providing some narration and music but no lip-syncing. A failed technology, the Kinetophone system was abandoned after only two years.²¹

¹⁷ Father of Whiskey King John A. McLaren (1831-1901). In 1912 the lot was owned by the Whiskey King’s nephew and inheritor John A. Stewart (1867-1922). See *Unfortunate Child* elsewhere on this website <https://www.perthhs.org/documents/unfortunate-child.pdf>

¹⁸ Even though the site was cleared in 1914, the Federal Government did not complete construction of a new Post Office on the site until 1932.

¹⁹ The blowing alley had been established in 1912 by George Kerr and J. E. Morgan.

²⁰ Perth *Courier*, March 27, 1914.

²¹ The Thomas Edison company produced only 200 Kinetophone shorts between 1913 and 1914.



Lt. Col. James Morris Balderson (1862-1943)

In July 1914, just as the Royal Theatre was finding its feet, the *Perth Courier* reported that local lawyer and militia officer Lieutenant Colonel James Morris Balderson (1862-1943) had purchased salvaged stone from the McLaren and Robertson Store demolition for use in the construction of a new theatre block at 18 Gore Street East.

Balderson had been born at the crossroads bearing his name north of Perth, the son of Robert Hewitt Balderson (1828-1917) and Susan Morris (1838-1900) and grandson of soldier-settler Sergeant John Balderson (1784-1852) and Anne Hewitt (1794-1861). He practiced law at Perth from 1887 and served a single term as mayor in 1902. From 1908 through 1920 he was commanding officer of the 42nd Lanark & Renfrew Regiment of Militia.

Work on the new theatre began in the final week of August 1914 on an empty lot that, until destroyed by a massive fire in 1892, had been occupied by the Douglas Block²² that housed a hardware store, grocer, dentist, butcher, photographer, and the office of the *Perth Star* newspaper. The rubble and weed-covered ground that remained had been closed off for over two decades by a tall wood fence used as a billboard, mostly to advertise theatrical attractions appearing at the Starland and Town Hall Opera House.

Designed by Brockville architect Andrew Stuart Allaster (1884-1938), Balderson's new theatre was the largest such venue between Toronto and Montreal and cost \$150,000²³. It had a total seating capacity of 1,100 in its orchestra, double balcony and boxes mounted along both side-walls. Brass railings surrounded the boxes and orchestra pit. Its advertising proudly proclaimed that the Balderson was equipped with all the latest technology, including a "stationary vacuum cleaning system, [the] same as Shea's Hippodrome and Massey Theatre in Toronto"²⁴ and that, in summer, its "electric fan system keeps the theatre 20 degrees cooler than outside"²⁵.

In addition to the theatre, the new Balderson Block included two store fronts on the ground floor facing Gore Street, occupied over the years by a pharmacy, jewelry shop, flower shop, music and gift shop, and a brokerage office. On the second and third floors there were four residential apartments.

²² Constructed in 1848 by Robert Douglas & Co.

²³ Balderson is believed to have had a number of partners or investors in the theatre project, but the details of its financing are unclear.

²⁴ *Perth Courier*, April 23, 1915.

²⁵ *Perth Courier*, July 26, 1918.

Under the direction of its first manager George Keral, supported by George Venture, “operator of the motion picture machine” and D. A. Ainsworth, pianist and musical director, Perth’s Balderson Theatre opened amid much fanfare on Thursday, August 26, 1915. The Citizen’s Band played in the street as guests filed in beneath the marquee and Bush’s Orchestra played from the pit. The opening night show was the farce *A Pair of Sixes*²⁶, staged by a travelling company that arrived “direct from Kingston” for a one-night-stand before moving on to the Rideau Theatre in Smiths Falls and the Russell Theatre in Ottawa. The following week the Ernie Marks Stock Co. staged a four-night run of “the great Canadian drama ‘The Call of the Woods’, a story of lumber days in Northern Ontario ... 25¢, 35¢, 50¢”²⁷.



The Balderson Block, 18 Gore Street East, c1917
(Photo courtesy of David Bromley, [www.PerthRemembered](http://www.PerthRemembered.com))

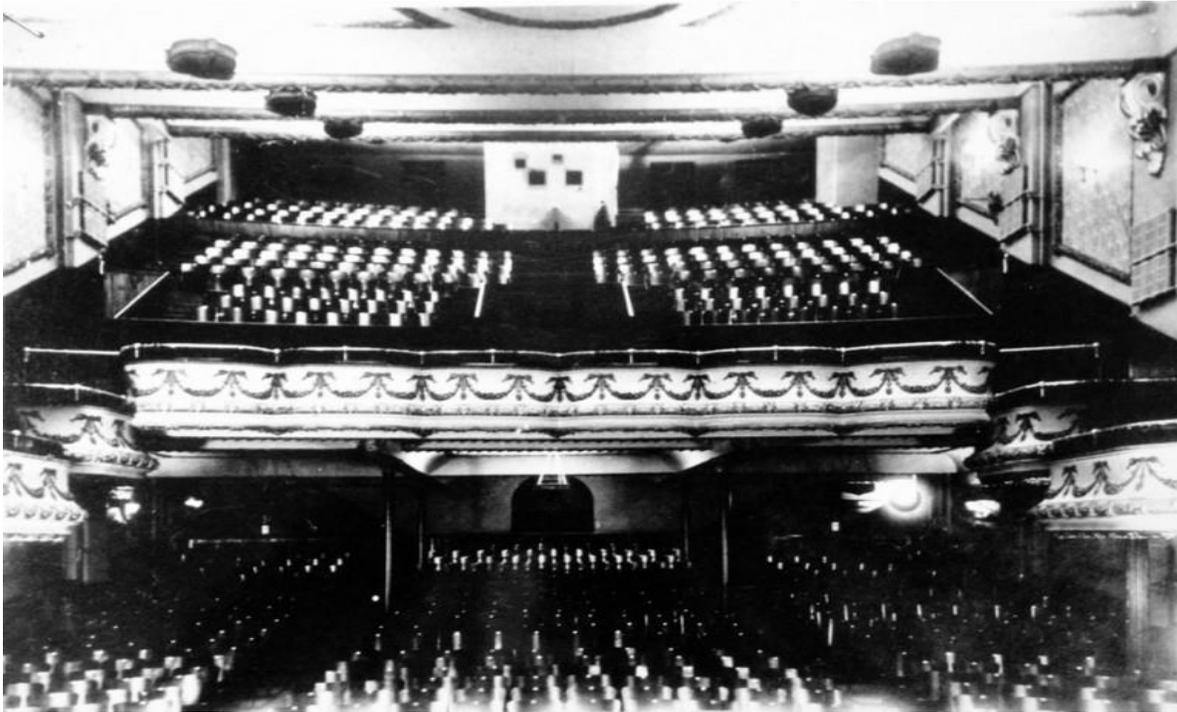
Across the street that week, patrons of the Royal Theatre, watched a documentary film about the assembly of Ford motorcars and the drama *Wildfire* (1915) starring Lillian Russell. Charlie Chaplin’s four-reeler *Ambition*²⁸ was advertised for the following week.

²⁶ By Edward People (1914).

²⁷ *Perth Courier*, August 27, 1915.

²⁸ The *Perth Courier* advertisement names the coming attraction as “Charley Chaplin’s ‘Ambition’”, although no film by that title appears in Chaplin’s filmography.

In October, while the Royal showed the Mary Pickford film, *'Mistress Nell'* (1915) the Balderson screened its first moving picture, George Kleine's *Spartacus* (1914) followed a few weeks later by another Kleine picture, *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1914). "Whether they are in one part or ten parts", the Balderson Theatre promised its films would always be "lively, snappy, and interesting from beginning to end. No padded or long drawn out picture is allowed to be shown"²⁹



Balderson Theatre Original Interior
(Photo courtesy Perth Matheson House Museum)

Forty-nine year old Anna Ball, proprietor of the Royal Theatre, died suddenly of a stroke in November 1915 and in February of 1916, fire put an end to her theatre. Rather than compete further with the new Balderson Theatre and the well established Town Hall Opera House, Percy Ball, joined by his younger brother William J. Ball (b.1890), salvaged what they could from the ruins and opened a new theatre in Lanark village. Within months, however, William enlisted for service in WW1 and in July Percy accepted an offer to manage the Balderson Theatre at Perth. Then, in October, Colonel Balderson opened his second theatre, the Princess in Smiths Falls, and put both of his theatres under the direction of Percy Ball. Assistant manager William Hamilton, formerly of the Town Hall Opera House, the Starland and the Royal, oversaw day-to-day operations at the Balderson with Lawrence Consitt (b.1893)³⁰ as pianist. Less than a year later, in March 1917, Percy Ball died of tuberculosis at Weston Sanitorium, Toronto. His brother, William Ball, did not return from the war until 1919³¹, by which time the Ball family connection to Perth's theatres was history.

²⁹ Perth *Courier*, October 15, 1915.

³⁰ Born at Perth, the son of George Alfred Consitt (1836-1925) and Margaret Ann Lee (1855-1944).

³¹ William Ball returned from WW1 in an unbalanced mental state and was discharged from the army in April 1919. His story after that date is unknown.



Lt. Col. John E. de Hertel
(1863-1945)

On the death of Ball, owner James Balderson took on the job of manager himself, with the continued assistance of William Hamilton, until 1919 when he appointed John Edward de Hertel (1863-1945) as manager of his Perth theatre. The new manager was Balderson's brother-in-law³² and had served as the 42nd Regiment Major under Balderson's command. In late November 1915 de Hertel had been promoted Lieutenant Colonel and during WW1 served as Chief Recruiting Officer for Lanark and Renfrew Counties. After four years at the Balderson Theatre de Hertel retired in October 1923 and Balderson re-assumed the title of manager with William Hamilton as assistant manager and 'moving picture machine operator'.

Through the teens and twenties, the Balderson Theatre played host to a wide range of theatre companies and entertainers from Canada, the United States, England and even further afield. There were performers like Irish singer Kathleen English, British violinist Isolde Menges, and the Russian trio of Leo, Jan and Mischel Cherniavsky (violinist, pianist, cellist) who praised the acoustical properties of the Balderson Theatre as "*only excelled by Covent Garden in London, England*"³³. Danish Violinist Alexa Skovgaard gave a concert "*playing his 1712 \$13,000 Stradivarius violin*"³⁴. The Boston English Opera Company performed *Il Trovatore* (*The Troubadour*) by Giuseppe Verdi, "*to a small but appreciated audience*"³⁵.

Such high-brow entertainment was not the norm. In 1928, when the Metropolitan Operatic Company was booked to perform selections from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Martha* and *Il Trovatore*, their appearance was cancelled because the show was not drawing crowds anywhere on their Ontario tour. Minstrel shows, however, always assured a full house at the Balderson and many of the biggest names in the business performed on its stage.

Gus Hill's Minstrels boasted 35 members, a band and orchestra, and paraded through the streets of Perth before their evening shows. J. H. Haverly Greater Minstrels were promoted as,

*... one of the oldest recognized organizations on tour ... They wear the swellest, most expensive wardrobes ever worn by any minstrels ... the members are the highest salaried and the best treated of any minstrel men on the road*³⁶ ... [having] *the best trained Octoroon*³⁷ *Beauty Chorus on the road* [and] *Noah Robinson and Charles Beechan, the two most celebrated colored comedians in the world* ...³⁸

³² John Edward de Hertel was married to Susan Rothwell Balderson (1875-1935).

³³ *Perth Courier*, October 24, 1957.

³⁴ *Perth Courier*, March 16, 1923.

³⁵ *Perth Courier*, February 10, 1922.

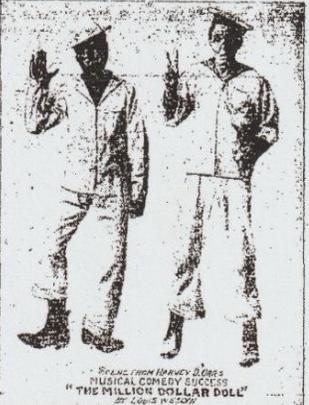
³⁶ *Perth Courier*, April 20, 1920.

³⁷ A person who is one-eighth black by descent.

³⁸ *Perth Courier*, May 7, 1921.

Whoopee! Coming Whoopee!
TO THE
BALDERSON THEATRE
ONE NIGHT ONLY
Wednesday, Nov. 6
Irvin Richardson
PRESENTS THE
**BLACK BIRDS WHOOPEE
MINSTRELS**
20—People—20
Band and Orchestra
ALL COLORED
Big Street Parade at Noon
So be there and see it—and don't miss the
Show at night.
Admission—Downstairs, 75c; Balcony, 50c;
Rush 25c; plus tax.

BALDERSON MONDAY OCT. 30
THEATRE ONE NIGHT ONLY!
The World's Brightest Dark Spot
**HARVEY'S
GREATER
MINSTRELS**
Minstrels Vaudeville Musical Comedy
50--Strutting Colored Artists- 50
JAZZ Famous CREAM
INGER Huzzar Band COLORED
INGLES REOLE
HORUS
GORGEOUS STREET PARADE DAILY
PRICES—Entire Lower Floor \$1.00.
Balcony—50c; Balance of bal. 25c. Boxes \$1.00.

A Guaranteed Attraction, Balderson Theatre, Friday, April 13th
Harvey D. Orr Presents the Speediest of All Musical Comedies
THE MILLION DOLLAR DOLL
THE BIGGEST NOVELTY AND DANCE SHOW OF THE SEASON
40 PEOPLE! CARLOAD OF SCENERY AND ELECTRICAL EFFECTS
ORIGINAL CAST AND PRODUCTION WITH HARVEY AND HAROLD ORR
22 SONG HITS 22 THE IMPERIAL QUARTETTE GAY GIRLS GALORE
Feature Extraordinary N. Y. Winter Garden Novelty Something New! Don't Miss it! The Illuminated Runway
HAUNTING TUNES! CAPTIVATING CHORUS! YOUTH AND BEAUTY!
Most Beautiful and Expensive Costumes Ever Carried with a Road Production
BIGGEST SUCCESS IN YEARS MAGNIFICENT STAGE SETTINGS
A \$2.00 Musical Comedy at These Prices: \$1.00, 75c, 50c & 25c. Boxes \$1.50 SEATS NOW ON SALE BALDERSON THEATRE

—REPLICATED FROM HARVEY D. ORR'S
MUSICAL COMEDY SUCCESS
"THE MILLION DOLLAR DOLL"
BY LOUIS PEREZ

The Balderson regularly played host to Guy Brothers' Minstrels and J. C. Rockwell's Colored Show. Billy King's Big Colored Show advertised "a chorus of 40 creoles"³⁹ and the Black Birds Whoopee Minstrels toured with 20 performers, plus band and orchestra, "all colored"⁴⁰. These troupes were not, in fact, always "all colored". Many of them, even most, were blackface shows. A few others were all white.

³⁹ Perth Courier, September 22, 1922.

⁴⁰ Perth Courier, November 1, 1929.



Vaudeville entertainment at the Balderson never lacked variety. Its early showbills offered Madam Wanda, fortune teller, and Dr. Zell Hunt, hypnotist and card reader, who advertised his show by hypnotizing a young woman one afternoon and leaving her “in a sleeping posture in the theatre block window until 9:00 o’clock”⁴¹. Another hypnotist set a hypnotized man to riding a bicycle in the window of the *Courier* office. Magic acts also included Joseph Ovette, “the world’s greatest illusionist”⁴² in conjunction with Mar-Jah the mentalist.⁴³

‘Shorty Montana’, a veteran of the Boer War and WW1, appeared for three nights in a lassoing and rope throwing act. A Mr. Brockelbank offered a Hawaiian Guitar concert. A group of Swiss Bell Ringers, The Musical Eckardts, and The Grosjean Marimba-Xylophone Trio drew good crowds, as did Ross Hamilton, “the world’s greatest female impersonator”⁴⁴. On movie nights, between reels, audiences were entertained by comedians like Sam Weller and “miniature comedian”⁴⁵ Pat Rafferty (apparently a dwarf).

Over many years Marks Brothers Companies, most frequently a company led by Ernie Marks and his wife Kitty Reynolds (1884-1964), or another run by Arlie Marks (1890-1940), daughter of Tom Marks, one-time owner of the Starland Theatre, staged comedies and dramas at the Balderson. These were often shake-down performances before setting off on another country-wide tour.

Second only to a Mark’s Brother troupe, the most popular vaudeville act to ‘tread the boards’ of the Balderson were Canada’s own Dumbells. The Dumbells show was formed in 1917 near Vimy Ridge, France, when 10 talented soldiers⁴⁶ from Canada’s Third Division were organized by Honorary Captain Merton ‘Wesley’ Plunkett (1888-1966), a YMCA entertainment director, to entertain troops in the front line. Their outstanding talent saw them go on to perform at the Coliseum in London, England, the following year and when they returned to Canada in 1919, they continued to perform as civilians. They made 12 cross-Canada tours and performed a

⁴¹ Perth *Courier*, March 29, 1918.

⁴² Perth *Courier*, September 7, 1928.

⁴³ A number of local histories state that Harry Houdini played the Balderson Theatre “in the 1920s”, no documentary proof of that claim was found in researching this article.

⁴⁴ Perth *Courier*, February 8, 1929.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Later expanded to 16.

12 week stand on Broadway in New York, before disbanding in 1932 in the face of the 1930's economic depression and competition from 'talking pictures'. Over the life of their touring show the Dumbells played the Balderson Theatre in Perth at least six times.

Balderson Theatre
Wednesday Eve., April 17

The DUMBELLS

New SPRING, SONG,
SKETCH, DANCE
& FUN REVUE.

"HERE 'TIS"

CAPT. M. W. PLUNKETT
PRODUCTION

*With all the clever
Boys and Girls
who helped to make
their 10th Year the
greatest in
DUMBELLS' HISTORY*

PRICES—50c, \$1.00, \$1.50, and \$2.00
Add 10 per cent for Govt. Tax.
Mail Orders Now. Seat Sale opens
Monday.

Remember They Sold Out Last Time, so get
your Tickets Now.

BALDERSON THEATRE, TUESDAY, OCT. 21st

THE "DUMBELLS" C.E.F BOYS
Presenting Their Original Overseas Revue

BIFF, BING, BANG



With the Same Great Soldier Cast and Chorus
that Played Over 500 Performances
to Our Boys in France

Gorgeous Gowns--Beautiful Scenery

22---Sure-Fire Song Hits---22
—Not a "Dud" in the Bunch—

PRICES--50c, 75c, \$1.00. Boxes \$1.50

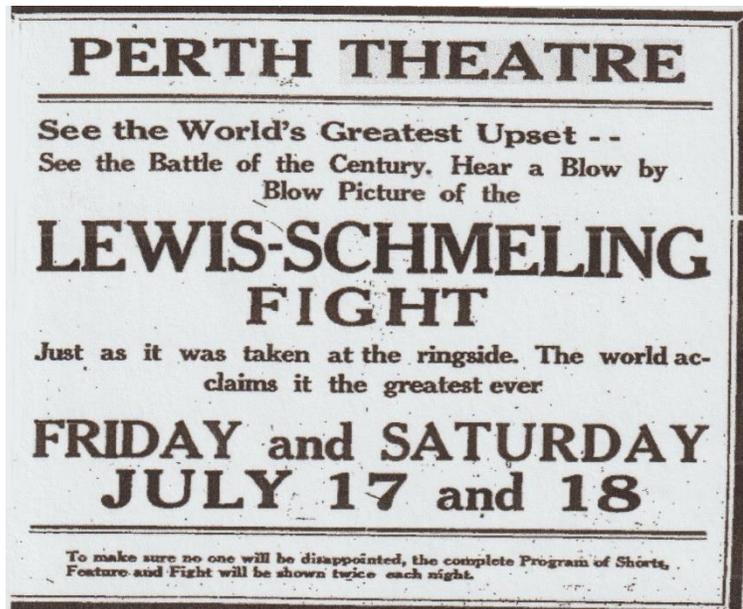
Seat Sale Opens at the Theatre Monday
Mail Orders Now

The Balderson periodically offered 'Grand Sporting Nights'. In September 1921, under auspices of the local branch of the Great War Veterans Association (GWVA), it hosted a wrestling match for the light heavy weight championship of America, with amateur boxing bouts also on the bill. On November 12, 1926, the theatre screened a film of the 10-round heavyweight title match between Gene Tunney and Jack Dempsey that had been fought in Philadelphia on September 23rd. A year later, when Tunney and Dempsey faced each other in a rematch, the theatre,

... made arrangements to receive the results [by telegram] of the big Championship fight between Tunney and Dempsey ... Thursday, September 22nd ... This, in conjunction with our regular picture program, gives you the best dollars' worth you ever received – Balcony 25¢, downstairs 35¢".⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Perth Courier, September 19, 1927

From January through March 1918, when WW1 rationing caused a serious coal shortage at Perth, three of the town's churches, St. Andrews Presbyterian, Knox Presbyterian, and Asbury Methodist, saved fuel by conducting joint Sunday services at the Balderson Theatre⁴⁸. In 1925, at the time of church union, when neither Knox Presbyterian nor Ashbury Methodist churches were large enough to accommodate their combined congregations, the newly formed United Church met in the Balderson Theatre for several weeks until additional seating could be created at St. Paul's United Church⁴⁹. Church services were held at the Balderson Theatre for a third time in 1939 when installation of a pipe organ displaced the congregation from St. Paul's United Church. The Ottawa Salvation Army Silver Band presented a series of concerts in the mid-1920s.



The Balderson also provided a venue for local talent. The Asbury Methodist, St. James Anglican, and St. John's Catholic youth groups regularly staged theatricals, private music teachers presented their students in recital, the Perth Citizens Band performed a season of concerts each winter, and the Perth Choral Society gave annual concerts. The 25 member Perth Symphony Orchestra, founded by Harold Edward Burns (1893-1977), performed a sold-out concert in 1926 on a joint bill with an Old Time Fiddlers Contest.

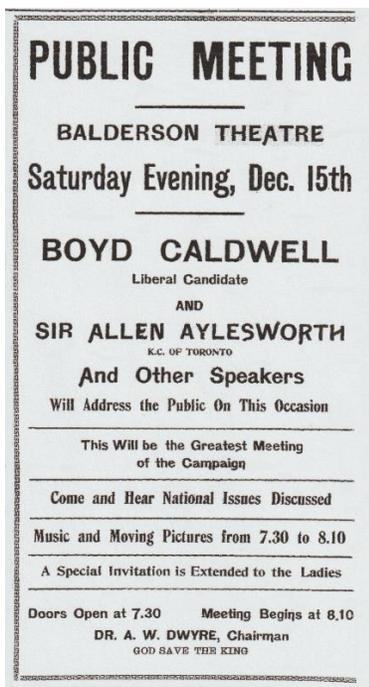
In March 1925, as a promotion for Perth's upcoming Old Home Week, a collective of local talent performed a live broadcast concert at the CNRO⁵⁰ radio studio in Ottawa, heard by an estimated audience of 10,000,000 across Canada. A week later the stage of the Balderson Theatre was "*fitted to resemble the broadcasting studio*"⁵¹ and the show re-enacted in full by the original cast.

⁴⁸ The same fuel rationing regulations only permitted the Balderson to operate as a Theatre on Tuesday evenings.

⁴⁹ Formerly Knox Presbyterian.

⁵⁰ Canadian National Railways Radio, Ottawa. Developed, owned, and operated by the Canadian National Railway to provide en route entertainment and information for its train passengers, between 1923 and 1932 broadcasts could be received by anyone living in the coverage area of station transmitters, in this case 'O' Ottawa.

⁵¹ Perth *Courier*, March 20, 1925.



When an election was called, the Balderson was the arena of choice for political meetings. In December 1922 Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King (1874-1950) was headline speaker at a Liberal Party rally, and the following day a Conservative Party rally took over the space. During the provincial election of 1923 Ontario Premier Ernest Charles Drury (1878-1968), leader of the United Farmers of Ontario-Labor coalition government, held a rally at the Balderson. In the 1920s and 1930s citizens could gather to hear Federal and Provincial election returns, received by wire, announced at the theater. On November 7, 1924, on a more bipartisan occasion, a municipal reception was held at the Balderson for visiting Governor General Julian Hedworth George Byng (1862-1935) 1st Viscount Byng of Vimy.

The Balderson Theatre regularly hosted patriotic events such as Empire Day and concerts to mark St. Patrick's Day, St. Andrew's Day, and St. George's Day. Temperance League meetings were held in its auditorium. When Orange Lodge's met en masse, they did so at the Balderson.

Educational lectures frequently occupied the Balderson stage. In 1923 famed Canadian conservationist Jack Miner (1865-1944) gave a talk supported by "2,000 feet of bird film"⁵². In the mid-1930s a Dr. Lewis from the Department of the Interior offered an "interesting and educational color slide picture show for the Public and Separate School [children] ... 'Wildlife in Canada' and 'Skiing in the Canadian Rockies'".⁵³

Informercials of the day were occasionally presented afternoons or between the acts or reels of evening features. One example was a musical program "consisting of some of the latest records rendered by the New Orthophonic Victrola supplied by Perth's Girdwood's Drug Store, in charge of Dawson Kerr ... You can purchase for \$115."⁵⁴ Another was a "demonstration of the qualities and uses of a wide variety of cotton materials [by] Miss Florence Sparling of Wabasso Cotton Co., of Three Rivers"⁵⁵. Shaw's Store, with the participation of other merchants, staged an annual fashion show for many years.

In the summer of 1928, the Balderson Theatre was sold to the Perth Theatre and Realty Corporation Ltd. Stockholders of record were local businesspeople John A. Hope (1890-1954), Hugh A. O'Donnell (1893-1958), Gladys Buchanan, Elsie L. Abercrombie (1895-1977)⁵⁶, and Helen M. Hughes (1886-1984). That November the Perth *Courier* reported that,

⁵² Perth *Courier*, February 9, 1923.

⁵³ Perth *Courier*, January 15, 1937.

⁵⁴ Perth *Courier*, March 12, 1926.

⁵⁵ Perth *Courier*, March 2, 1934.

⁵⁶ Mrs. William Douglas Abercrombie (1896-1973).

... the Balderson Theatre is installing a transverter which will convert the present alternating into a direct current thus insuring a steadier and brighter picture on the screen. By installing this transverter the Theatre is taking the first step towards placing itself in readiness to adopt synchronized [i.e., sound] pictures should they prove a success and practicable for the theatres of this description.⁵⁷

BALDERSON THEATRE

FRIDAY SATURDAY
Two grand and glorious days
with
Al Jolson
IN
"The Jazz Singer"
Sparkle and glitter of Broadway

MONDAY TUESDAY
Meighen
Tops his best in
The Mating Call
A vivid dramatic story, replete
with suspense, romance
and action

WEDNESDAY THURSDAY
A tale of the underworld as it
really is
Thrilling Startling Dynamic
The battle between blue-
jackets and black jacks, for
the heart of a girl.
A UNITED ARTIST PRO-
DUCTION
With an All-Star Cast
Alibi
Starting our New Serial
**Pirates of
Panama**
PATHE REVIEW

BALDERSON THEATRE, SEPT. 4, 5, 6, 7

EDWARD F. QUIGLEY presents

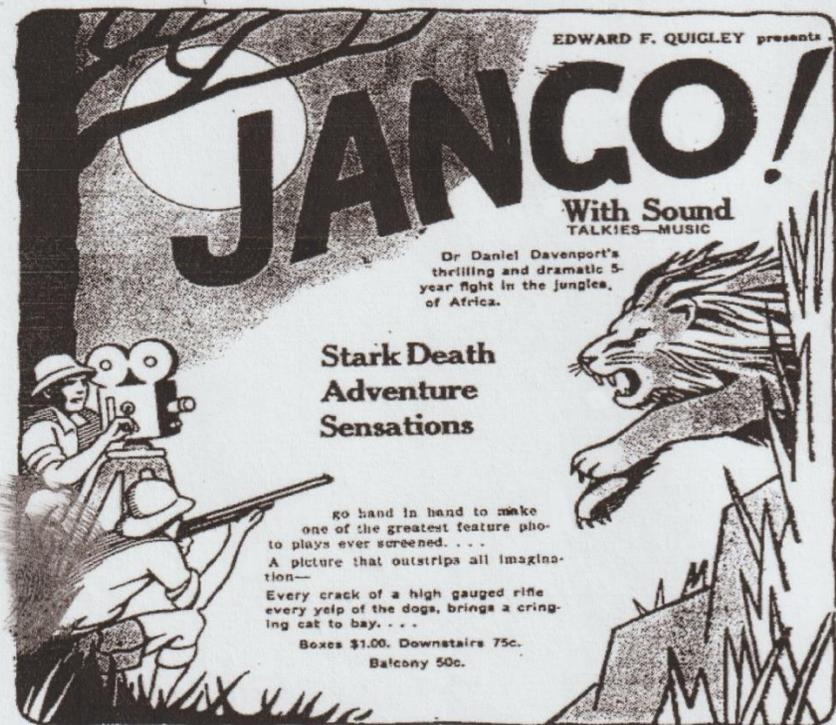
JANCO!

With Sound
TALKIES—MUSIC

Dr Daniel Davenport's
thrilling and dramatic 5-
year flight in the jungles,
of Africa.

**Stark Death
Adventure
Sensations**

go hand in hand to make
one of the greatest feature pho-
to plays ever screened. . . .
A picture that outstrips all imagina-
tion—
Every crack of a high gauged rifle
every yelp of the dogs, brings a crin-
gling cat to bay. . . .
Boxes \$1.00. Downstairs 75c.
Balcony 50c.



Six months later the Balderson screened its first 'talkie', *The Jazz Singer* (1927) starring Al Jolson. This was, however, still not a fully sound-on 'talking picture', but one that used a technology not unlike that debuted at the Royal Theatre fourteen years earlier. Nevertheless, *The Jazz Singer* boasted both a synchronized recorded music score and lip-synchronous singing and speech in several isolated sequences⁵⁸. The film,

... drew big business to the Balderson Theatre last Friday and Saturday nights, especially Saturday night when the house was packed. The picture was the best seen at the local house in a long while. An added attraction on both nights was a double singing and dancing specialty by little Miss Virginia Fairchild of Miami, Florida, the Fairchild family spending the summer months at Rideau Ferry. Miss Virginia is a clever performer, and her acts went over great ...⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Perth Courier, November 16, 1928.

⁵⁸ Produced by Warner Brothers with the Vitaphone sound-on-disc system, *The Jazz Singer* featured six songs performed by Jolson in blackface.

⁵⁹ Perth Courier, August 30, 1929.

The following week the Balderson screened *Jango* (1929)⁶⁰, produced by Canadian Daniel Davenport. The nine-reel feature was a travelogue of big game hunting masquerading as scientific exploration filmed in Cameroon and Congo. It used the same sound technology as *The Jazz Singer* – “A picture that outstrips all imagination ... every crack of a high gauged rifle, every yelp of the dogs, brings a cringing cat to bay ... Boxes \$1.00, Downstairs 75¢, Balcony 50¢”.

BALDERSON THEATRE, PERTH
Saturday Night, Sept. 25



OLIVER MOROSCO Presents
THE SUPREME SUCCESS
OF SUCCESSES
**PEG
O' MY
HEART**
By
J. HARTLEY MANNERS
By which
LAURETTA TAYLOR
MADE A WORLD'S RECORD RUN
OF TWO CONSECUTIVE
YEARS IN NEW YORK

PEG and MICHAEL

The Original New York Production, and Superb Cast of Players.
The Most Refreshing Comedy in Years.
SEALS NOW ON SALE AT BOX OFFICE
Prices 25c—50c—75c—\$1.00.

P. C. I. CONCERT

This Friday evening, the
22nd, the Perth Collegiate
pupils will present in the Bal-
derson Theatre the play en-
titled

"LENA RIVERS"

Under the direction of May
Bell Marks. Selections by the
Glee Club and gymnasium
display.

Miss Mavis Berry
Entertainer



WITH THE
Musical Eckards
BALDERSON THEATRE
TWO NIGHTS
March 9 & 10
Prices 25c, 35c, 50c
Plus Tax.
Certain at 8.15

Balderson Theatre, 2 Days, Thursday--Friday, June 9--10
A BIGGER AND BETTER SUPER SPECIAL AT REGULAR PRICES
John Barrymore in "DON JUAN"

But the technology for ‘talking pictures’ was advancing rapidly. Less than a year after showing its first sound-accompanied movies, the Balderson announced that it would close on Saturday June 21, 1930, “to allow the theatre to be changed for the talking pictures, thus falling into line with many other towns all over the country. The people want the talkies for the talkies have made good and proven popular everywhere”⁶¹.

Over the next four months the new owners undertook a renovation project that went far beyond what was necessary to equip the theatre for ‘talking pictures’. The auditorium was completely remodeled. The stage was reduced in size to make way for an increase in floor seating from 494 to 634. The box seats and upper balcony were removed reducing balcony seating to 62. All of the seating was replaced with new chairs. A Northern Electric sound system and a new, larger, Daytona Screen, replacing the one in use since the theatre opened, were installed, as well as an automatic curtain control. A new fireproof wall separated the projection room from the auditorium.⁶²

⁶⁰ Re-released in 1931 under the title *Ubangi*.

⁶¹ *Peth Courier*, June 20, 1930.

⁶² The nitrate film of the day was highly combustible and dangerous. Chemically, it was very similar to gunpowder, and once ignited could not be extinguished because the combustion process generates its own oxygen. In the early 20th century theatres at Arnprior,

Although she had not been named among the shareholders of the Perth Theatre and Realty Corporation, in reporting on the renovation project the *Perth Courier* made it public that “Perth owes its new modern theatre to the civic spirit of Mrs. John A. Stewart who felt that it had become a community need”. Jessie Henderson-Stewart (1868-1956) was the wealthy widow of John A. Stewart (1867-1922), inheritor of the John A. McLaren whiskey fortune, lawyer, entrepreneur, former mayor, MP, and Minister of Railways & Canals. “The town is indebted to the owner for the excellent equipment installed in the interests of theatre patrons. The theatre is a credit to Mrs. Stewart and will be a big boon to Perth”.⁶³

OPENING OF

PERTH'S NEW THEATRE

AFTERNOON MONDAY, NOV. 10th EVENING

A \$6.00 ATTRACTION.
The laugh tornado that cost New Yorkers \$6.00 a seat now showing at popular prices. America's loveliest beauties; the most dazzling of spectacles and comedy's peak funster in the merriest myth ever told. A wonder of wonders!

Thanksgiving Day
ALSO TUESDAY, NOV. 11th

Riotous fast stepping comedy!
Sublime scenic investiture!
Broadway's most brilliant stars!
Sensational magnificent to the Nth degree!

Founded upon the stage play by Owen Davis entitled "The Nervous Wreck." Based upon the story "The Wreck," by E. J. Ratto in collaboration with Robert H. Davis. Produced on the stage by Lewis & Gordon.

Music by WALTER DONALDSON, Lyrics by GUS KAHN—From the Musical Comedy by WILLIAM ANTHONY McGUIRE.

You don't know what a good time is until you've seen this hilarious spurge into comediana with the king and queens of good cheer riding high wide and handsome to the merriest capers ever seen on stage or screen.

Flo Ziegfeld, genius of the theatre, and Samuel Goldwyn, genius of the screen, have combined to make the supreme comedy triumph of the year.

ALL TECHNICOLOR
UNITED ARTISTS PICTURE

IT'S HERE! THE HIT OF HITS
FLORENZ ZIEGFELD and SAMUEL GOLDWYN
present
EDDIE CANTOR
in the most spectacular 'Comedy Smash of All Time'
"WHOOPEE"

**Where
The
Screen
Talks**

No expense has been spared in equipping the new Perth Theatre with the very latest and most efficient Northern Electric Sound system. In tests made by their engineers it has proved itself perfect, clear and distinct to a satisfying point. It will give our patrons the very best in Sound, Music and Dialogue.

MATINEE MONDAY, NOV. 10th, at 2.30.
Prices--Children 10c, Adults 45c.

2 SHOWS NIGHTLY, AT 7 p. m. and 9 p. m.
Prices--Children 20c, Adults 45c.

With the reopening of November 1930, the name on the Gore Street marquee changed. The 'Balderson Theatre' was no more. The facility had become the 'Perth Theatre'. However, Colonel John Edward de Hertel, who had retired from the Balderson seven years before, returned to the post of manager.

*Col. J. E. de Hertel is the manager and Billie Hamilton the operator in charge of the two machines [projectors]. Mable Joynt is in charge of the box office; John Rathwell, front house door keeper; ushers are Allan Cole, Stewart Gillespie, William Hartwell, and Edgar Fournier.*⁶⁴

Renfrew, Carleton Place and in towns all over Canada were burned to the ground by fires originating in the projection booth. In 1921 Fred Isadore Kane, 22, of Perth, working as a projectionist at the Imperial Theatre in Cornwall had his burned hands and arms badly burned when film jammed in the projector and burst into flame.

⁶³ *Perth Courier*, November 14, 1930.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

On opening night, the new Perth Theatre screened the first technicolor film shown in Perth, *Makin' Whoopee* (1928), a musical farce starring Eddie Cantor. The comedies *French Fried* (1930) and *Sugar Plum Papa* (1930) shared the bill.

In 1934 theatre manager de Hertel announced that *"in the coming season several road shows will be held in Perth Theatre which was one of the few theaters to retain its stage when the talkies were installed"*⁶⁵ However, reducing the size of its stage had effectively removed the Perth Theatre from the A-circuit for Vaudeville troupes. The *Perth Courier* lamented that *"the Dumbbells are not likely to be seen here again because the local theatre was turned into a talking picture house"*⁶⁶. In any case, there were fewer and fewer Vaudeville troupes to book, their popularity having been undermined by those same talking pictures.

PERTH THEATRE
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30
 Curtain at 8.30 p.m.
'Jay White's Revue'
 FEATURING
Jay White and His Famous Orchestra
 OF TEN PIECES
The Great Lipton
 Master Illusionist and Master Mind
 Magician.
 MUSICAL NOVELTIES, BEAUTIFUL SINGING
 AND DANCING CHORUS
 ADMISSION—50c and 75c. Plus Tax
 25 People. Not A Talkie.

A NEW POLICY
 BY THE
PERTH THEATRE
 Commencing Wed. and Thurs., Jan. 2nd and 3rd
 And Continuing Throughout the Year, this Theatre will Establish
A New Policy of Showing Double Bills
 Having Completed our Picture Contracts for the year with the six leading Film Producers, we are now
 in a position to give our patrons the very best in Entertainment.
 Watch the Local Papers for the List of Wonderful Pictures we have Booked for January
Now is the Time for you to Boost Your Local Theatre
 There will be no change in the Starting Time of our Night Show—7 p.m.

Nevertheless, while the stage was too small for the 40-to-50-member musical and drama troupes of former years, through the 1930s-1940s the Perth Theatre continued to present live entertainment. Shows like James Temple, the Mental Marvel (mind reader & mental telepathist), Jay White's Revue (10-piece orchestra & illusionist 'The Great Lipton'), and the pipes and dancers of the Scottish Musical Players were better suited to the diminished stage. Although not in the turn-of-the-century Vaudeville tradition, there were other live acts fitted to the re-designed theatre, shows like George Wade & The Corn Huskers, the most popular Canadian country music band of its day, and Rusty Reuben's Ranch Boys from western Pennsylvania who performed as a cast of characters and mixed comedy routines with their music.

⁶⁵ *Perth Courier*, November 2, 1934.

⁶⁶ *Perth Courier*, September 25, 1931.



George Wade & The Corn Huskers

As the years passed, however, the emphasis was increasingly on the movies. All of the Oscar winning Hollywood pictures of the era were screened at The Perth – *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), *King Kong* (1933), *Thirty Nine Steps* (1935), *Lost Horizon* (1937), *Gone With the Wind* (1939), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Casablanca* (1942), *Going My Way* (1944), *Lost Weekend* (1945), *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), *All About Eve* (1950), *From Here To Eternity* (1953), *Around The World In 80 Days* (1956). In 1935 more than 2,000 people saw *Anne of Green Gables* (1934) starring Anna Shirley and Tom Brown at the Perth Theatre.

HE BROKE THE SWORD OF NAPOLEON WITH A STROKE OF HIS PEN!
 "That a father's dying wish... a mother's love... a son's loyalty... might be fulfilled!"

JOHN H. EDWARDS
 GEORGE ARLISS
 in the DARRYL F. ZANUCK production
THE HOUSE OF ROTHSCHILD
 with Boris Karloff, Lovell Young, Robert Young
 Released by UNITED ARTISTS

PERTH THEATRE, PERTH,
 Friday and Saturday, Sept. 7th, 8th

PERTH THEATRE Where Sound is Perfection
 To-night (Thursday) Feb 1—"Dangerously Yours."

<p>Fri Sat. Feb. 2nd and 3rd</p> <p>Paddy the Next Best Thing with JANET GAYNOR WARNER BAXTER</p> <p>Paddy's father wanted a boy and what he got was the next best thing, a tomboy, fiery, gay and mischievous. Better than "Daddy Long Legs."</p> <p>Comedies, Hooks and Jabs; Paramount News.</p>	<p>Mon., Tues. Feb. 5th and 6th</p> <p>Moonlight and Pretzels (45 minutes) with Leo Carrillo, Mary Brian</p> <p>Roger Pryor, Herbert Rawlinson and Lillian Miles. The smash musical hit, eight big song bits. In all the centre's return engagements have been the order of the day. Comedies, Glusman's New Deal; Strange As It Seems.</p>	<p>Wed., Thurs. Feb. 7th and 8th</p> <p>Police Car 17 with Evelyn Knapp Tim McCoy and Wallis Clark.</p> <p>He never knew when the voice from headquarters would send him to fame and glory or to his doom. Comedies, Mickey's Tent Show; Roastin' Through Russia; Movie Struck; Screen Snapshots.</p>
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COMING—8-10 Hold Your Man; 12-13 Man's Castle; 14-15 Beauty for Sale; 23-24, Henry VIII.

PLEDGE NOW TO BUY WAR SAVINGS CERTIFICATES!

Perth Theatre

LAST SHOWING TONIGHT: "HIGH BERRAS" & "HONEYMOON FOR THREE". Don't miss "Kiss Under Fire."

FRIDAY, FEB. 28 — SATURDAY, MARCH 1
 BOBBIY LAURIE and ROBERT PRISTON in
Moon Over Burma
 SHORTS: Fox News; Gender; Mother Goose; Green; Archer Darts!

MONDAY and TUESDAY — MARCH 3 & 4
 To see Many Patrons Please see this...
 CLIVE BROOKE in
CONVOY
 SHORTS: CARTOON.

WEDNESDAY and THURSDAY — MARCH 5 & 6
 You'll Find out it's Great...
 KAY KYBER
 - In -
Tugboat Anne
 Sails Again
 SILVERWARE NIGHTS

LEND-TO DEFEND!
 Pledge TODAY to buy WAR SAVINGS CERTIFICATES Regularly!

Perth Theatre

MATINEES WEDNESDAY & SATURDAY 2 p. m.
 .. EVENING SHOW STARTS 7 p. m.

LAST SHOWING TONIGHT—Dennis Morgan in "God Is My Co-pilot," and Robert Stanton in "The Blonde From Brooklyn."

FRIDAY & SATURDAY—SEPT 21 & 22

A ROOTIN' TOOTIN' WARNER RIOT!

JACK BENNY · ALEXIS SMITH
"The Horn Blows at Midnight"

with DOLORES MORAN · ALYNN JOSLYN · REGINALD GARDINER · GUY KIBBEE · JOHN ALEXANDER · Directed by RAOUÏ WALSH

ROY ROGERS · TRIGGER
BELLS OF ROSARITA

with GEORGE "BARRY" HAYES and BOB HOPE
 and BEN HURAN AND THE SONS OF THE PIONEERS
 and MERRYL DREYFUS—With BILL HAYES, ALICE COPE
 HENRY ARNOLD, MARY DORRANCE MARY PETERSON
 A REPUBLIC PICTURE

SHORTS—Fox News, Monster and Ape Serial, Do You Remember?

MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY,
 SEPT. 24, 25, 26, 27

MATINEE—MONDAY at 4 p. m., after school
 MATINEE—WEDNESDAY—2 p. m.

**THE GREAT SEQUEL TO
 "LASSIE COME HOME!"**

Meet "Laddie," son of a champion! He had his mother's beauty... but he had to prove that he had her fighting heart! Drama, romance, adventure... and scenic wonderland in **TECHNICOLOR**

SON OF LASSIE

STARRING
PETER LAWFORD · DONALD CRISP
 with **JUNE LOCKHART · NIGEL BRUCE**
 WILLIAM · BILLY SEVERN · LEON AMES
 DONALD CURTIS · NILS ASTHER · ROBERT LEWIS

LASSIE and LADDIE

Story and Screen Play by James Hottel • Based on Screen Characters from the Book "Lassie Come Home" by Joe Craig • Directed by J. STULLINGSMITH
 Produced by EDWARD JAMES
 A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture

SHORTS—Mouse Trouble, Truck and Field Quiz.

Even more popular with younger audiences were the Saturday afternoon matinees. Preceded by a Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck cartoon, audiences laughed through comedies featuring Ma & Pa Kettle, Francis The Talking Mule, the Three Stooges, and Abbott & Costello. Dramatic fare included *Superman*, *Adventures of Lassie*, *Robin Hood*, and horror films like *Frankenstein Meets Wolfman*. The singing cowboys Roy Rogers, Gene Autrey and Tex Ritter had their following, but most popular were western serials. Featuring Deadwood Dick, Billy The Kid, Hopalong Cassidy, Red Ryder and the Cisco Kid, episodes always closed with the hero or damsel hanging precariously from a literal or figurative cliff.

The Perth Theatre always strove to sustain the 'show must go on' tradition. On Monday October 9, 1933, when projectionist William Hamilton opened the shipping case from Paramount Film Service Ltd. containing the week's feature film, *International House*⁶⁷, he discovered that the first two of the film's seven reels had been mistakenly replaced by reels of another picture.

*By long distance telephone, Manager J. E. de Hertel got in contact with Paramount in Toronto. Paramount agreed to rush the reels to Perth by airplane and as a result the reels reached here shortly before six o'clock, in time to be used at both of the night shows. The distance of approximately 130 miles was covered by pilot Johnston in one hour and 55 minutes. The airplane made a landing in a field on Ferry Road owned by Mr. Roy Darou, and was met by Col. de Hertel, William Hamilton, Stewart Gillespie, and several spectators including a couple of dozen boys. Pilot Johnston returned to Toronto on Tuesday morning.*⁶⁸

It might be suspected that the delivery of missing film reels by an aircraft landing in a local farmer's field was a publicity stunt, but apparently not. In reporting the incident, the *Perth Courier* also explained that, despite the airlift, the missing reels had not arrived in time for the Monday matinee and the feature was shown minus the first two reels, "... but in order that there be no disappointment, a special matinee [was] given on Tuesday afternoon ... for which all present at the Monday matinee [were] given free tickets".

⁶⁷ International House (1933), a musical comedy, starred Peggy Joyce and W. C. Fields.

⁶⁸ Perth Courier, October 13, 1933.

In the summer of 1933, the Theatre published a notice congratulating staff on the passing of provincial licensing exams. Chief Operator (projectionist) William Hamilton passed *“with honors, his final examination, Grade A, the highest honor that can be obtained in his department and Stewart Gillespie, Second Operator, has also passed with honors from Grade-C to Grade-B.”*⁶⁹

As it had since opening as The Balderson, the Perth Theatre and its stage continued to serve as a venue meeting local needs. It regularly hosted events like benefits for the Crippled Children’s Fund and the Great War Memorial Hospital, amateur shows, children’s singing contests, dance class reviews and piano student recitals. The Perth Citizen’s Band continued to play regular concerts and area groups like the Brockville Collegiate Glee Club visited the stage. Over two decades the PCI Literary Society and Glee Club staged annual productions at the theatre and the High School always held its commencement exercises there. During the mid-1930s Santa Claus made his seasonal appearances at the Perth Theatre, arriving by train at the CPR station and then parading through town to the theatre where candy was distributed to children before the afternoon matinee.



Further improvements were made to the theatre in 1934, including the addition of *“500 watts to the lighting of the entrance making it really a ‘great white way’ thereabouts and giving the front of this popular amusement house a decidedly more attractive appearance”*⁷⁰.

In 1937 the Theatre Holding Corporation Ltd. of Perth leased their Perth Theatre to Premier Operation Corporation Ltd. (the Allen Brothers chain⁷¹). With the change in operational control Colonel de Hertel retired for the second time and William Hamilton, formerly of the Perth Opera House, the Starland and Royal Theatres, was appointed manager. Former usher Stewart Gillespie became projectionist.

During WW2 the Perth Theatre played its part in the war effort. From October 1939 all soldiers in uniform were admitted at reduced prices. The theatre screened patriotic films such as *London Can Take It*, depicting life under the Blitz, *Canada Carries On*, portraying the contribution of Canadian industries to the war effort, and the NFB film *Left of the Line* on the Canadian and British forces advance from before Normandy to liberation of Brussels. A Canadian Army Ordnance Corps Band concert drew a sell-out crowd,

⁶⁹ Perth Courier, July 14, 1933.

⁷⁰ Perth Courier, October 12, 1934.

⁷¹ Jules Allen (1888–1964) and Jay Allen (1890–1942).

Local and district men volunteering to canvas for the Victory Loan of 1941 were provided training and shown a film promoting the campaign. The theatre stage hosted a band concert in aid of the IODE cigarette fund and the Lever Brothers Lifebuoy Follies, a troupe raising funds for the Red Cross. The lobby served as a drop-off point for contributions to the Canadian Club's 'Aid to Russia Fund'. During 1941 children attending Saturday afternoon matinees were admitted in exchange for salvage items like old newspapers, tires, metal, etc.

At the end of their 10-year lease in 1947, the Allen brothers' Premier Operation Corporation Ltd. purchased the Perth Theatre from Jessie Henderson-Stewart's Theatre Holding Corporation Ltd. At the same time, manager William Hamilton was pushed into retirement after 45 years in the theatre business at Perth. He was replaced by Jack Allen and, in 1954, Allen in his turn was replaced by Ken Carter who had been a projectionist.

In 1947 the Perth Kinsmen Club sponsored a three-act play at the theatre, staged by the Canadian Theatre Guild, prompting the *Perth Courier* to comment that it was the "first stage play to come to Perth in quite a while". Over the following years the Kinsmen sponsored several Theatre Guild productions, as fund-raisers for the 'Food For Britain' campaign.

The Perth Theatre was the cause of some controversy in 1948 when it screened the public service short *Mom & Dad*. The film presented "... to adolescents and their parents, the danger which lurks in ignorance of sex matters ... the danger of venereal disease". Despite some opposition, screenings proceeded with segregated showings "... for women only and for men only"⁷². The cause was taken up again in 1952 with *No Greater Sin* educating the public "concerning the deadly danger of neglect in the case of syphilis and gonorrhoea"⁷³.

Meanwhile the Perth Town Hall Opera House, like the Perth Theatre, was facing many of the same pressures brought on by changing times. In 1948 a rehabilitation project was undertaken. The stage was torn out and replaced by a portable riser. "It is believed that this will be much more suitable for requirements and will provide a much better dance floor"⁷⁴. The balcony was removed, parts of the floor

Perth Theatre

MATINEES WEDNESDAY & SATURDAY 2 p. m.
EVENING SHOW STARTS 7 p. m.

LAST SHOWING TONIGHT—Geo. Sanders, Donna Reed in "The Picture of Dorian Gray." Ina May Hutto and her Orchestra tra in "Ever Since Venus."

FRIDAY & SATURDAY—SEPT. 7 & 8
MARY BETH HUGHES, JAY KIRBY, GLADYS BLAKE, TIM RYAN and SPADE COOLEY, in
Rockin in the Rockies

ESCAPE IN THE DESERT
BLAZING LOWDOWN ON THE ESCAPED PRISONERS OF WAR
WARNER PICTURE
with JEANETTE PHILIP HELENE
SULLIVAN · DORN · DANTINE
ALEX IRENE SAMUEL S.
HALE · MANNING · HINDS

SHORTS—Fox Latest News, Monster and The Apt Serial, Cartoon.
MONDAY & TUESDAY—SEPT. 10 & 11

SHE WANTED TO BE A KISSLESS BRIDE — BUT HE WALKED IN HIS SLEEP!
Spencer TRACY Katharine HEPBURN
Without Love

with LUCILLE BALL · Keenan WYNN Carl ESMOND
PATRICIA MORISON · FRED BRESSART
PAUL KELLY and VIRGINIA GREY in
Grissley's Millions
SHORTS—Selected.

WEDNESDAY & THURSDAY—SEPT. 12 & 13

Today!
Lena TURNER
LARAINE SUSAN
DAY · PETERS
BY M.C. LAY
KEEP YOUR POWDER DRY
They Laugh They Weep They Kiss They Sigh

'MIRACLE'-MAN PRESTON STURGES
keeps you LAUGHING and THRILLING every minute of Paramount's
The Great Moment
JOE MCELDERRY BETTY FIELD
Marty and Betty
Presented and Directed by PRESTON STURGES
A PARAMOUNT PICTURE
SHORTS—Para News, Scenes.

⁷² *Perth Courier*, August 19, 1948.

⁷³ *Perth Courier*, April 24, 1952.

⁷⁴ *Perth Courier*, August 18, 1949.

replaced, and a new ceiling installed with improved lighting fixtures. The remodeled auditorium was officially opened in January 1950. Better equipped for dances and public meetings, shows were still staged at the Opera House from time to time, but there were fewer and fewer with each passing year.

On the evening of Tuesday July 4, 1950, the “*first television test in the Ottawa Valley*”⁷⁵ was conducted in the back room of the electrical appliance store of W. G. Sawdon & Russ Ellis⁷⁶, at 60 Foster Street. The test,

*proved to be an outstanding success with a clear reception of 90% relayed from the TV station in Syracuse, NY, [WSYR-TV] 135 miles from Perth. There was a little interference from sources which we could not clearly define. A small crowd was present to witness this initial experiment ... In spite of numerous arguments against the possibility of TV in this district ... Perth finds she can have television.*⁷⁷

Time would soon show that the appliance store experiment represented the first tolling of the death knell for many small-town cinemas, but at Perth in 1950 television was still regarded as a novelty or a passing fad. In December that year the Perth Theatre completed another round of renovations and equipment upgrades. The 23-amp projector was replaced with a new 43-amp model, and a new screen installed. The stage was repaired and outfitted with new curtains and side drapes. New lighting was installed in the auditorium, the seats repaired and reupholstered, new rest rooms fitted and the lobby repainted.

The optimism expressed by this facelift was, however, out of step with the rapidly increasing competition for entertainment dollars. Better automobiles and better roads widen a movie lover’s choice of cinema. In 1953 the Port Elmsley Drive-In Theatre, built at the cost of \$75,000, opened for business, entering a local market already served by the Perth Theatre, the Soper (Smiths Falls), the Roxy (Carleton Place) and theatres not much further afield at Brockville, Kingston, and Ottawa. More important, just five years after the Sawdon-Ellis test of 1950, Perthites purchasing television sets could already receive three channels - WCNV (Carthage), CBOT (Ottawa), CKWS (Kingston).

⁷⁵ Perth *Courier*, July 6, 1950.

⁷⁶ William George Sawdon (1911-1999), Russ Ellis (1936-1989).

⁷⁷ Perth *Courier*, July 6, 1950.

The fate stalking the Perth Theatre seems foreshadowed by an accident in January 1955 when rotten woodwork led to the disintegration of part of the façade. At 11:30 a.m. on a Sunday morning the second storey coping tore loose and plummeted some 10 meters (30 feet) to the street below. The entire protruding portion of the second-storey roof *“tore loose with a fierce rip and dropped amid a cloud of dust”*. Several large pieces of masonry also broke loose from the top of the wall and crashed down. It all narrowly missed passing pedestrian Walter Griffin (1883-1966) who ... *“heard a harsh rending noise as the wooden framework broke from the masonry [and] stepped into the foyer of the theatre a moment before more than a ton of lumber, metal and stone crashed to the sidewalk”*⁷⁸.

The beginning of the end came in February 1957 when the Perth Theatre was sold again, and the *Courier* reported that *“it is believed Perth will be without a theatre within the next 12 months. If the theatre is not patronized, it cannot be expected that the owners can continually lose money to keep the theatre open for a few regular patron”*⁷⁹.

The name of the purchaser was not immediately made public, but it soon became known that R. A. Beamish Stores Co. Ltd.⁸⁰ was the new owner and would convert the property to retail space. That May it was announced that the theatre would close in April 1958, but that date was overtaken by a further announcement on October 10, 1957, that, in just nine days, the theater would *“close permanently after the evening show on Saturday, October 19, 1957”*⁸¹.

After serving the movie-loving public of Perth and district for 42 years, the Perth Theatre closed its doors on Saturday night and now presents a darkened spot on Gore Street, which once was a showplace on Perth’s main thoroughfare.

*The Perth Theatre has followed in the footsteps of many more movie houses in other communities which went by the wayside when the attendance fell to such a low ebb that it became a financial drain on its owners. There are many reasons offered ... but perhaps TV has been the greatest opposition to these houses of amusement. Down through the years there were always the same citizens who were faithful patrons of the theatre, at every change of picture. But those patrons gradually fell off, and younger set have other sources of amusements. Even the city theatres have been badly hit by a falling-off of patrons.*⁸²

On its final night the Perth Theatre screened a double bill, *Funny Face*, featuring Audrey Hepburn and Fred Astaire and *The Tall T*, starring Randolph Scott.

⁷⁸ Perth *Courier*, January 6, 1955.

⁷⁹ Perth *Courier*, February 7, 1957.

⁸⁰ Beamish Stores Ltd. was founded by Richard Albert Beamish (1876-1968), a native of Arnprior, who established what would become a chain of 38 Beamish Variety Stores at 41 Foster Street (the corner of Gore and Foster Streets) in Perth in 1930 and moved the business into the Balderson Block in 1958.

⁸¹ Perth *Courier*, October 10, 1957.

⁸² Perth *Courier*, October 24, 1957.

Not everyone took the news with the resignation expressed by the *Perth Courier*. The night before the final show local students showed their disappointment and displeasure by vandalizing the theatre. They defaced the lobby, sliced open the seat leather and tore out the padding. In order to avoid a repetition, young people were barred from the theatre on closing night. Ironically the Perth Theatre seats were later sold to the Perth and District Collegiate Institute Board (P&DCI), and 600 of them installed in the auditorium of the new high school then under construction. Those seats are still in use 65 years later.

The Beamish Variety Store in the Balderson Theatre Block closed in 1985. Army & Navy Stores occupied the retail space 1985-1987, then Bi-Way Stores 1987-1996. The space was later occupied by a Home Hardware Furniture Store and a Ladies Wear Store.

From October 1957, for the first time since 1897 when the first 'moving picture' was shown at the Town Hall Opera House, Perth was without a local cinema. In November that year, L. P. Williams, operator of the Port Elmsley Drive-In, brought movies back to the Opera House with Saturday matinees, but the scheme only lasted a few months. Then the Opera House, too, disappeared in 1971 when the space was converted to accommodate the Town Council Chambers and the Perth Citizens' Band room. Over the years since movies have been shown on an occasional basis at the PDCI auditorium, the Studio Theatre and Full Circle Theatre, but since the mid-1950s Perth has had no dedicated 'movie house'.

Live Theatre has fared better. The Studio Theatre (197 seats), was established in 1995 and the Full Circle Theatre (102 seats), opened in 1995 and the auditorium at PDCI (600 seats) provides ongoing service to the high school drama club, other theatre groups and for concerts.

Today, non-theatrical functions once served by the Music Hall, the Opera House and the Balderson Theatre have a multitude of facilities to choose from – the Royal Canadian Legion Hall, Lions Club Hall, Farrell Hall, school auditoriums at PDCI, St. John's High School, Stewart School, Queen Elizabeth, and church halls at St. James, St. Andrew's, and St. Paul's.

PERTH THEATRE

PHONE 166

MATINEES SATURDAYS AND HOLIDAYS 1.30 P.M.

Thurs., Friday, Saturday—Oct. 17, 18, 19,

A new dimension in musical entertainment!
 A Paramount Picture 1942
AUDREY HEPBURN **FRED ASTAIRE**
Funny Face
 - KAY THOMPSON

PLUS

HEAD AND HOLSTER ABOVE THE OTHERS!

RANDOLPH SCOTT **THE TALL T**
 IT IS FOR TERROR!
 RICHARD BOONE
 MAUREEN O'SULLIVAN
 ARTHUR HUNNICUTT

Starring Fred Astaire and Audrey Hepburn in "Funny Face" - A Columbia Picture
 Starring Randolph Scott in "The Tall T" - A Columbia Picture
 Based on a story by DANIEL LINDEN - Produced by ROBERT ROE BROWN
 Directed by BARRY SEETHORPE - A SCOTT BROWN PRODUCTION

WITH THE CLOSING OF THE THEATRE AFTER OUR LAST SHOW ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 19, THE MANAGEMENT AND STAFF WOULD LIKE TO SAY THANK YOU TO THE PEOPLE OF PERTH AND DISTRICT FOR YOUR PATRONAGE OVER THE PAST YEARS.

The Last Picture Show