



Charlene Duval, Executive Secretary

[cduval@sourisseauacademy.org](mailto:cduval@sourisseauacademy.org)

Leilani Marshall, Archivist

[lmarshall@sourisseauacademy.org](mailto:lmarshall@sourisseauacademy.org)

Phone: 408 808-2064

*Sourisseau Academy*

*Smith-Layton Archive presents:*

# Let's Go To The Movies!

by Rick Helin

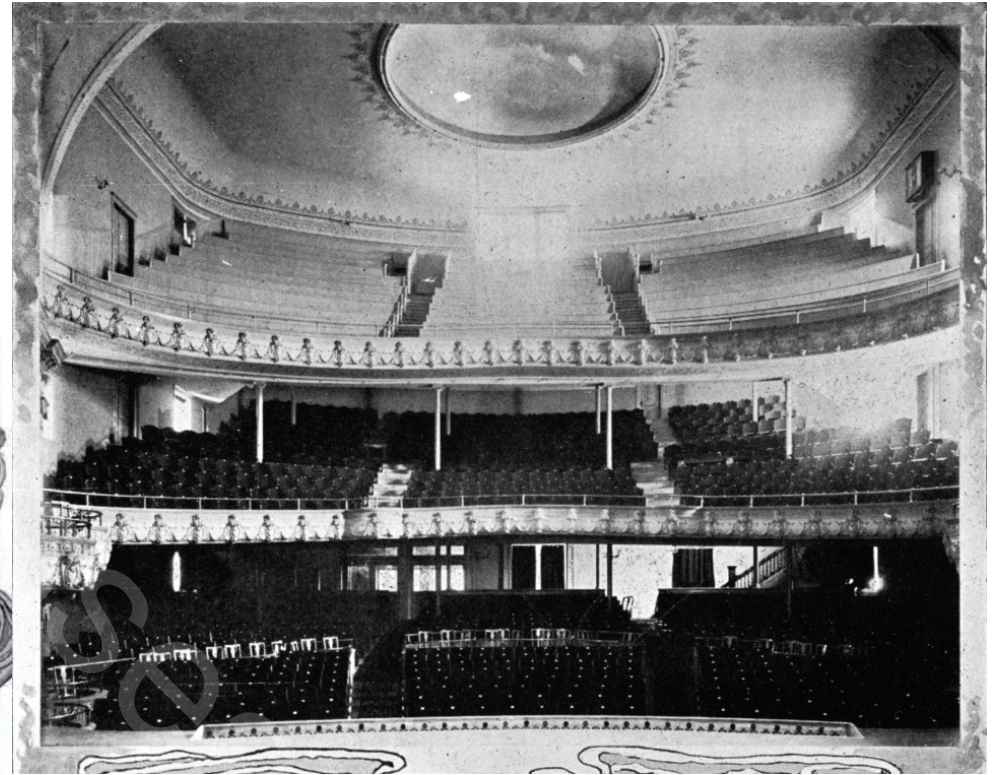
*Les Amis (The Friends)*

*Your donations help us purchase historic photos. Thank you!*

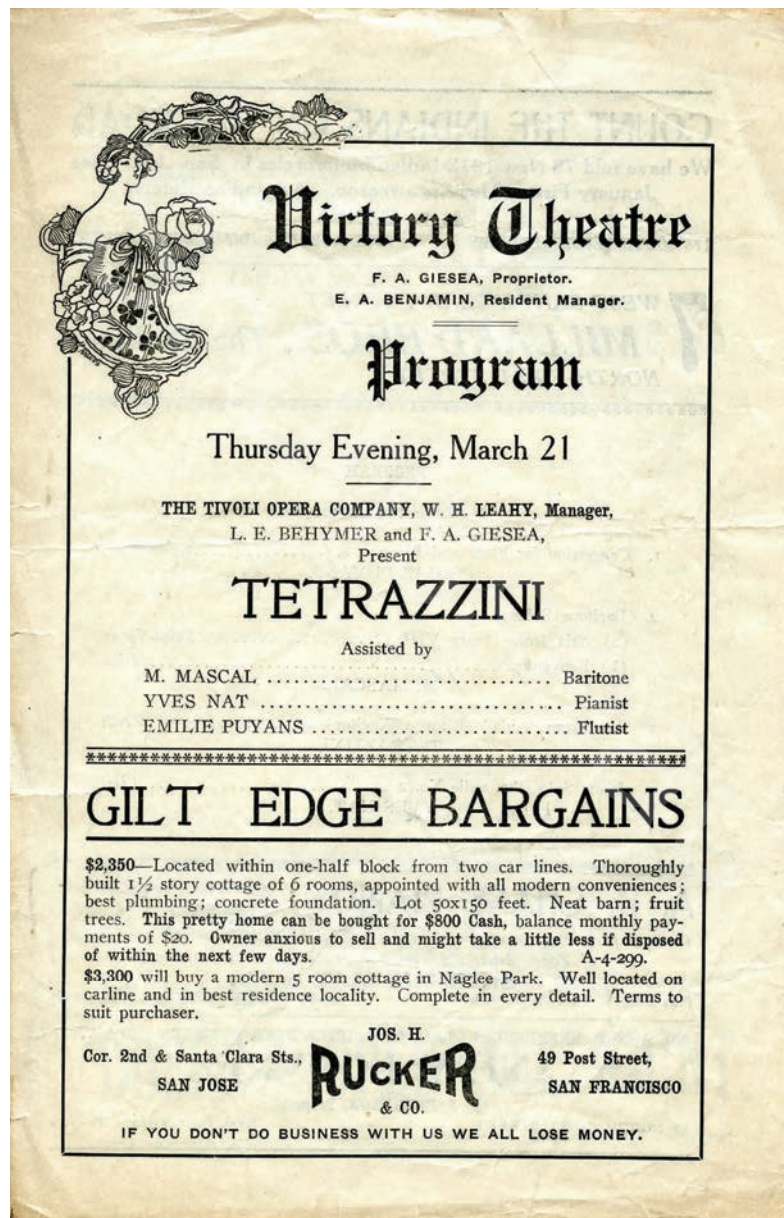
<http://www.sourisseauacademy.org/>



[116] **Vaudeville was alive and well at the Unique!** In February 1903, San Jose celebrated the grand opening of the Unique Theatre at 20 to 26 East Santa Clara Street. It was owned and operated by showman “Sid” Grauman as part of the Sullivan-Considine Vaudeville circuit. “One thin dime, one-tenth of a dollar!” was all you needed to enter a mesmerizing world of dancing dogs, singers, tap dancers, comedy sketches and movie vignettes. The Unique staged the debut of Al Jolson (famous for his “black face” routines), as well as one of their own employees, Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle, who went on to silent movie fame. The earthquake of April 1906 not only destroyed the Unique and many other local theaters, but it foreshadowed vaudeville's ultimate demise. The rebuilt Unique survived until 1925, only to be leveled to make room for the Bank of Italy (now Bank of America) building at the corner of First and Santa Clara.



[117] **The Victory Theatre.** San Jose's Victory Theatre was built by Senator James Phelan at 45 North First Street and opened its doors in 1899. The name celebrated the American victory in the Spanish-American War. Its expansive auditorium was sufficient to seat the largest audiences that San Jose could generate. After extensive repairs following the 1906 earthquake, the theater, then managed by Robert Barton, hosted the Lombardi Grand Opera Company. In 1936, the façade of the Victory was remodeled in the Art Deco style; and about 1950, it was renamed the Crest. It was finally destroyed in a dramatic blaze in June 1965.



**Victory Theatre**  
F. A. GIESEA, Proprietor.  
E. A. BENJAMIN, Resident Manager.

**Program**

Thursday Evening, March 21

THE TIVOLI OPERA COMPANY, W. H. LEAHY, Manager,  
L. E. BEHYMER and F. A. GIESEA,  
Present

**TETRAZZINI**

Assisted by

M. MASCAL ..... Baritone  
YVES NAT ..... Pianist  
EMILIE PUYANS ..... Flutist

---

**GILT EDGE BARGAINS**

**\$2,350**—Located within one-half block from two car lines. Thoroughly built 1½ story cottage of 6 rooms, appointed with all modern conveniences; best plumbing; concrete foundation. Lot 50x150 feet. Neat barn; fruit trees. This pretty home can be bought for \$800 Cash, balance monthly payments of \$20. Owner anxious to sell and might take a little less if disposed of within the next few days. A-4-299.

**\$3,300** will buy a modern 5 room cottage in Naglee Park. Well located on carline and in best residence locality. Complete in every detail. Terms to suit purchaser.

JOS. H.  
Cor. 2nd & Santa Clara Sts.,  
SAN JOSE

**RUCKER**  
& CO.

49 Post Street,  
SAN FRANCISCO

IF YOU DON'T DO BUSINESS WITH US WE ALL LOSE MONEY.

[118] **The Victory Theatre hosts Luisa Tetrazzini.** In March 1912, opera soprano Luisa Tetrazzini, the Florentine Nightingale, performed for four nights at the Victory Theatre. Both San Francisco and New York would claim credit for creating "Chicken Tetrazzini" in honor of Luisa's 1908 American tour. We side with Chef James Beard, who credits San Francisco for the recipe! Tetrazzini was famous for consuming a quart of red wine before every performance. Perhaps we in the Santa Clara Valley should take credit for that!



[119] **Theatre Jose began as a vaudeville venue.** Theatre Jose at 64 South Second Street opened its doors in October 1904. David Jacks ("Monterey Jack"), for whom the cheese was named, hired architect William Binder to design Theatre Jose. The contractor was Zibeon Orison Field, chosen because of Field's reputation for constructing the Victory Theatre.



[120] **Theatre Jose then became a movie house.** By 1920, vaudeville audiences had declined and the Theatre Jose transitioned to a cinema under a new owner, Liberty Amusement Company, a group of local investors with James Beatty as president. This 1920 photo of the marquee announces a double feature: *Deep Water* and a comedy short: *Beating Cheaters* — both accompanied by a live orchestra.



[121] **Theatre DeLuxe was San Jose's first real cinema.** The Theatre DeLuxe on South First Street was opened in 1912 by T&D (Turner & Dahnken) as San Jose's first venue designed primarily as a cinema. The architects were Binder and Curtis. The price was ten cents admission for adults and five cents for children. This 1917 photo of the marquee announces *The Zeppelin's Last Raid*. As the audience squinted to read the subtitles, a thirty-two-musician orchestra set the emotional tone for every scene. The DeLuxe featured a state-of-the-art ventilation system, which refreshed the air in only three minutes!

Images on file at the Smith-Layton Archive, Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History  
October 2015



[122] **The Liberty Theatre was also designed as a cinema.** Designed specifically for movies in 1914 by architects Binder and Curtis, the Liberty Theatre was owned by the Liberty Amusement Company. Silent films were accompanied by a Morton pipe organ until the "talkies" arrived. The organ was then moved to Grace Baptist Church, where it is credited as the only original San Jose theater organ remaining in its hometown. In 1976, the Liberty was renamed the Mexico to reflect the Spanish language movies that were then being screened there. When the Mexico closed in 1980, its colorful fluorescent signage was transferred to the former Esquire Theatre on Santa Clara Street. The old Liberty Theatre building was destroyed in October 1982 as part of a redevelopment project on South Market Street.



Images on file at the Smith-Layton Archive, Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History  
October 2015



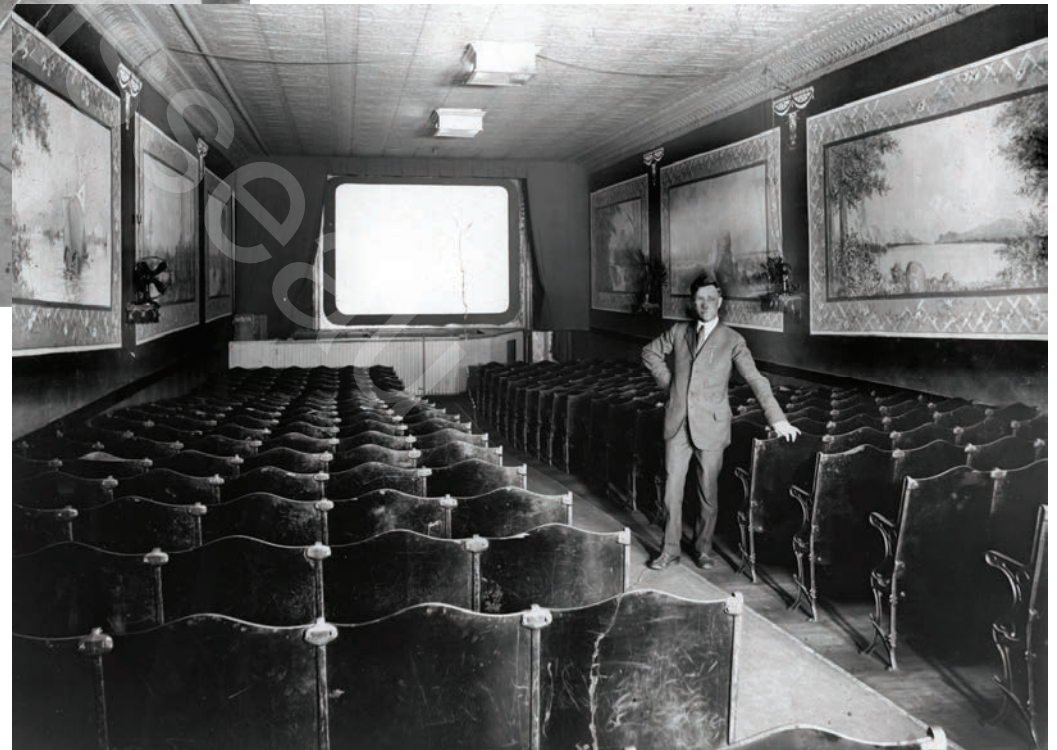
[123] **Theatre DeLuxe becomes the Mission.** Theatre DeLuxe underwent several name changes, including T&D, and then in 1924, it became the California. In 1927, it was renamed the Mission Theatre and achieved local fame as the first theater in San Jose to feature "Talkies" — movies with sound!

Images on file at the Smith-Layton Archive, Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History  
October 2015



[124] **The Hippodrome becomes Beatty's American.** The Hippodrome, designed by William S. Binder, was constructed in 1919 at 261 South First Street as part of the Ackerman and Harris theater chain. With more than 1,600 seats, it was the largest theater in San Jose. In 1922, James Beatty's Liberty Amusement Company took over its operation and renamed it Beatty's American. Architects Weeks and Day later designed the California, one block to the south, and gave it an almost identical facade.

Images on file at the Smith-Layton Archive, Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History  
October 2015



[125] **Not all theaters were sumptuous!** The Hippodrome may have offered 1,600 plush seats and soaring balconies. But even in the Roaring Twenties, the Lyric Theatre, which opened in 1909 at 63 South Second Street, could do quite well — thank you! — with a tiny screen and a tunnel-like seating area. We can imagine a full house with a piano player at this 1923 screening of the silent film *Souls in Bondage*. The Lyric Theatre operated until 1960.



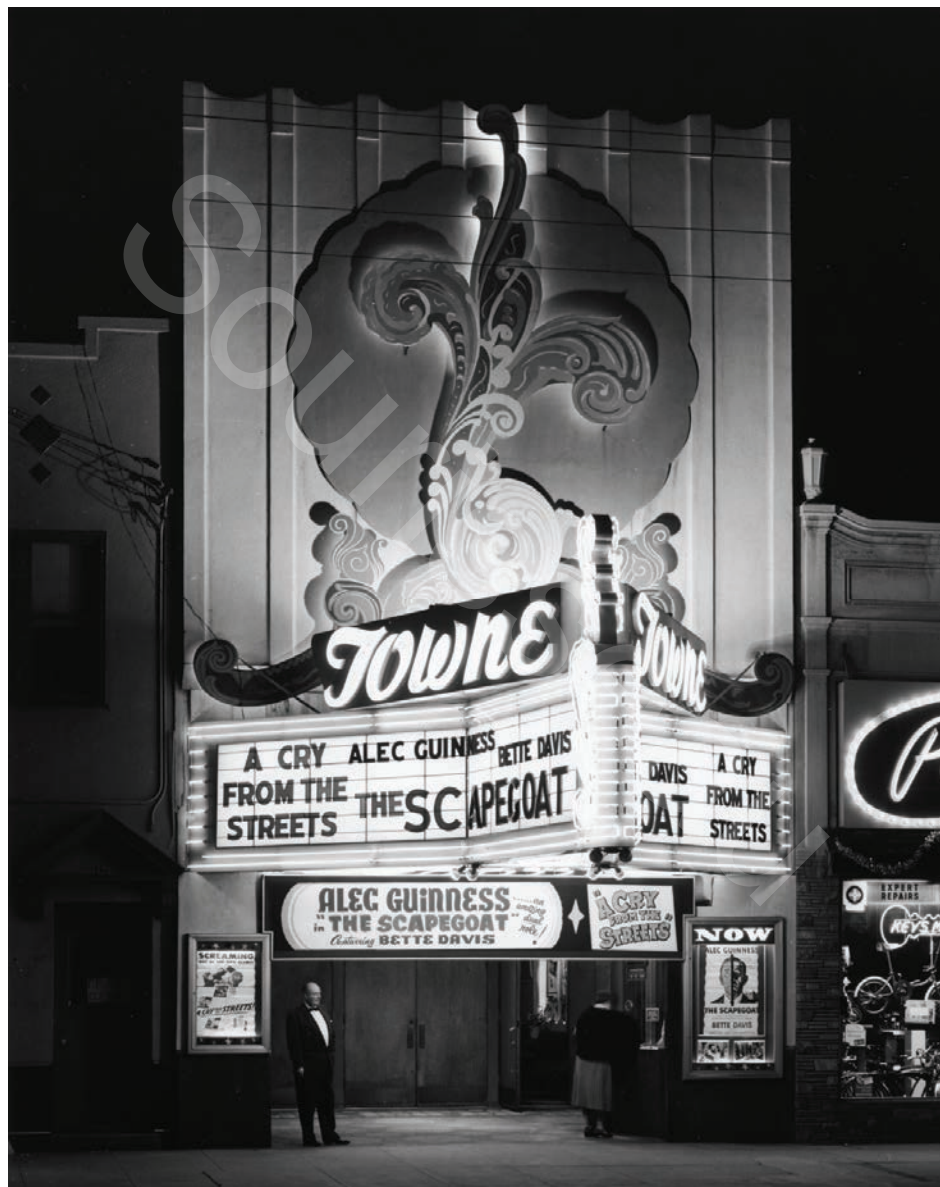
[126] **The South First Street Theatre District in 1926.** In July 1926, movie fans could queue-up at any of three theaters along a fifty-yard stretch of South First Street. If they had already seen the offerings at the DeLuxe and the American Theatres, they could watch *Palm Springs Girl*, starring Bebe Daniels at the California. Note the partially constructed Bank of Italy (later Bank of America) building further up the street.



[127] **Repurposing Buildings: the Padre Theatre.** Searching for locations to satisfy the demand for additional movie theaters in downtown San Jose, Fox West Coast opened the Padre Theatre at 145 South First Street on May 26, 1933 in a commercial building formerly occupied by the Adler 15-Cent Store. This new venue was in direct competition with the American Theatre, just a few yards down the street.



[128] **Beatty's American Theatre.** Circa 1930, the American Theatre hosted the filming of a local stage production including the "Great Lester," a ventriloquist. Its rococo facade would later be removed to achieve a modern look when it became the State Theatre in 1938; and in 1951, it was renamed the United Artists Theatre. The structure was demolished in 1976 and replaced with a parking lot.



[129] **And into the Hood: The Hester becomes the Towne.** The first local neighborhood theater outside of downtown San Jose was built in 1925 at 1433 The Alameda. Christened the Hester Theatre, its first configuration accommodated silent movies, as witnessed by a small pipe organ crammed into an even smaller orchestra pit. Its original neo-Egyptian/Spanish style façade, designed by architects Binder and Curtis, was modernized when the theater was renamed the Towne in 1952. In 1959, when Arnold Del Carlo took this photo, the Towne was featuring *The Scapegoat*, starring Alec Guinness.



[130] **What's in a name?** The grand opening of the Mayfair Theatre at 1194 East Santa Clara Street (across the street from my favorite Mexican restaurant, Plaza Garibaldi) was celebrated in May 1949 with the well publicized giveaway of a brand new Buick. In 1959, when Arnold Del Carlo took this photo, the featured film was *Under Capricorn*, starring Ingrid Bergman. In 1962, the Mayfair was renamed the Esquire, and in 1980 it was renamed yet again — the Mexico — and adorned with signage from the old Liberty Theatre. Finally Jose Borges relocated the signage from the Mexico to the Esquire.





[131] **Innovation and loss.** The story of theaters in San Jose is one of innovation and loss. San Jose's Century 21 at Winchester and the 280 Freeway, a mid-century domed masterpiece, opened to great fanfare in November 1964, featuring Stanley Kramer's *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. It was the very first dome to be constructed in the entire Century dome series, and the only one designed for screening CINERAMA films. This iconic venue closed in March 2014 after a half-century run. (Photo by Gretchen Steinberg 2014)



[132] **Efforts to save the Century 21.** Local preservationists are working hard to save the Century 21 building! In April 2014, the State Historical Resources Commission deemed the Century 21 eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. In May 2014, the San Jose Historic Landmarks Commission unanimously recommended that the Century 21 be granted City Landmark status. (Photo by Heather David 2014)

Special acknowledgements to the following reference resources used in the preparation of this album: Boston, Linda Larson. *San Jose's Vaudeville House: Theatre Jose San Jose, CA*: Self Published (2000). Douglas, Jack. *Historical Footnotes of Santa Clara Valley*. San Jose, CA: San Jose Historical Museum Association (1993). Parks, Gary Lee. *Theatres of San Jose* San Francisco, CA: Arcadia Publishing (2009). News archives of the San Jose Mercury and San Jose News