

GIVE MY REGARDS TO MARKET STREET
THEATERS AS A REPRESENTATION OF URBAN GROWTH IN
WILMINGTON, DELAWARE, 1870-1930

by

Courtney Lynahan

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Urban Affairs and Public Policy

Summer 2010

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Unless otherwise noted, all photographs and images are work of the author's.

ABSTRACT

Theaters are structures which have existed in cities for millennia. In the last two centuries, their growth in America in the forms of live performance and cinemas speak to their popularity. Within the city of Wilmington, Delaware, theaters can be used to represent the cultural, social, economic and historic changes.

Three theaters remain from the historic era studied (1870-1930). The first is the Grand Opera House, the first permanent theater in the city of Wilmington built in 1871. The second theater studied is the DuPont Theater, which was constructed as part of the large urban building and improvement projects by the DuPont Company and the du Pont family, constructed in 1913. The third theater is the Queen Theater, a movie palace opened in 1916 and the last such historic structure within the city of Wilmington. Each of these three theaters offers a glimpse into a historic era of the city and the construction of the theater corresponds to particular trends both locally and nationally.

These three theaters were once part of nearly thirty five more theaters within the area of Wilmington. The loss of so many structures can be attributed to numerous factors, but the overall goal in modern times is to conserve these buildings. Whether this is done by reopening the structure as a theater or merely maintaining the building, preservation of theaters is imperative to a city's identity and in certain cases, renewal. With Wilmington being actively revived, the operation of old theaters alongside new structures shows how these buildings are markers to a city's identity and history.

Chapter 1

ENTR'ACTE

Theaters and drama¹ have been a consistent presence in the cities of the western world since about 500 B.C. From the hillsides of Greece, with the festival of Dionysus to the hillsides of California and the film industry of Hollywood, this art has remained influential for nearly 3000 years and the story of it can be seen in surviving structures. The history of theaters and drama as an art form is a long one. Cultures from all over the world have their own form of performance and stage styles. While examples of exclusion exist, theaters are for the most part public buildings that can be used by everyone. As a means of entertainment, they bring communities together in one location and often involve the whole community when performing or producing a show. Theaters are structures which represent cultural, social, economic and historic changes in a city.

A variety of visual clues help the public identify as places to find entertainment. Often times theaters have a more distinct, unrestrained architecture than other buildings, featuring popular styles of different periods. Buildings that serve as cinemas often have marquees and the titles of films are placed outside the building. In

¹ For this thesis, “drama” refers to the performance and writings of theater. “Theater” refers to the building and structure in which a performance occurs.

cities with multiple theaters built in different eras, the theaters act as timelines of architectural eras.

Theater locations can reveal historic business districts positioned to bring in maximum audiences. In some instances, they demonstrate cultural or racial segregation in a community. Dating the earliest structure shows when the theater was introduced to a community, often coinciding with an important milestone, such as a population increase or the appearance of the railroad or new production company.

Intangibly, theaters can invoke memories of by-gone eras, such as the Vaudeville era of the stage or the Golden Era of Hollywood. For people who did not live during these times, the images still evoke years of history by association. By maintaining these structures, even the exterior appearance, communities can preserve an important visual reminder of their history.

The history of theatrical architecture is a much studied topic, but often limited to specific cities, only focusing on the most famous theater locations such as New York's Broadway or London's West End. For the purpose of this thesis, a different city, without a renowned relationship to drama was chosen to demonstrate that these buildings act as more than just entertainment venues; that they are historic markers. Due to location, as well as what became many unique factors, Wilmington, Delaware was the city selected. Its proximity to New York, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. offers a history that intertwines with these large metropolises which have historic theater districts.

Modern Delaware theater history begins in 1871 with the construction of the Wilmington Grand Opera House. Over the next sixty years, 35 theaters opened within the city. The end date of 1930 was chosen since the construction of theaters

within the city had nearly stopped at this point.² Historic resources in the forms of newspapers and business accounts allow for the primary research. The literature for the time period is sparse but does exist. This was an era in which Wilmington was emerging as an important part of the business world and the era coinciding the construction of a large number of theaters has a definitive connection. Most of the written histories of Wilmington did not include this fact, though. They mentioned the numerous openings of theater buildings, as in Carol Hoffecker's *Wilmington, Delaware, Portrait of an Industrial City 1830-1910*.³ She ends at the era of the DuPont Corporation, a major figure in Wilmington's growth. That era is picked up in a biography of Pierre S. du Pont, *Pierre S. Du Pont and the Making of the Modern Corporation*.⁴ What these works leave out is how important theaters were to the city during this time, and why they were being built as such a high pace.

The theaters of Wilmington have been written about, as well as the history of Wilmington, but the two never together. For the history of all the Wilmington theaters and their current status, Marjorie McNinch's *Silver Screen* proved indispensable. A general guide to all the theater constructions within the city starting in 1870, this book included a general history of Wilmington, the introduction of the cinema to the city and picks up where other sources leave off. However, the work focuses mainly on design and productions and not the importance to the city's history.

² Marjorie McNinch. *The Silver Screen*. (Wilmington, DE: Cedar Tree Books, Ltd., 1999.)

³ Carol Hoffecker, *Wilmington, Delaware: Portrait of an Industrial City, 1830-1910*. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1974.)

⁴ Alfred D. Chandler and Stephen Saulsbury, *Pierre S. du Pont and the Making of a Modern Corporation*. (Washington, D.C.: Beard Books, 2000.)

McNinch also touches on the sociological impact of theaters and their importance to a city's identity. This theme is a popular one with current trends in Main Street revitalization. Many recent works about the importance of theaters as part of Main Street revitalization and cultural identity have been written, including Aimee Lala's thesis, *Delaware's Small Town Theaters: An Evolution to Elegance*.⁵ This thesis discussed the importance of small town theaters to the state of Delaware but does not include the city of Wilmington. These works are vital in the emphasis of theaters as being an integral part of a city's identity and its fabric. Still, this trend falls short in that none show the ways that these structures identify the moment in a city's history when a particular theater was built.

The amount of research done in the first half of the twentieth century on two of the Wilmington's largest theaters was immense. With regards to the Wilmington Grand Opera House Roger Bruce Bond's *Wilmington's Masonic Lodge and Grand Opera House*⁶, Elbert Chance's *A History of Theatre in Delaware*⁷ and Toni Young's *The Grand Experience*⁸ tell the story of the construction, design and history of the theater. Other theses from the now defunct undergraduate theater program at the University of Delaware talk about the history of the Playhouse Theater

⁵ Aimee Lala, "Delaware's Small Town Theaters: An Evolution in Elegance", (Master's Thesis, University of Delaware, 2002.)

⁶ Roger Bruce Bond, "Wilmington's Masonic Lodge and Grand Opera House", (Thesis, University of Delaware, 1969.)

⁷ Elbert Chance, "A History of Theatre In Delaware" (Master's Thesis, University of Delaware, 1952.)

⁸ Toni Young, *The Grand Experience: A Drama in Five Acts...*, (Watkins Glen, NY, American Life Foundation: 1976.)

(now called the DuPont Theatre). Joseph John Simmon's *A History of the Wilmington Playhouse, 1913-1930*⁹ describes the origins of this theater as well as describing the construction and performances at the venue. Donald Morgan continues the study with his *A History of the Wilmington Playhouse, 1930-1945*¹⁰, providing more information about the Playhouse's operations and productions. While these theses provided historical detail and lists of productions, accounts of construction and unlimited first hand sources, they stopped short of explaining why these buildings are so important to the city. They also limited the study to only two of nearly forty theaters which existed in the city between the years 1870 and 1950.

Numerous sources exist with regards to the basic history of theaters in any city, but none truly explore the importance of the theaters as the "story-teller" for the history of a city. What can be established from these sources is the presence of theaters within Western cities for over two thousand years. While the structures were not always designated "theaters" performance venues have existed in some form within cities in the Western world for nearly three millennia, constantly being part of the cityscape.

Usually these sources divide the eras of theater into the major groups of Ancient, Renaissance, and Modern Theater. These can again be divided, for this thesis, into theater before 1865 and after 1865.

⁹ Joseph Simmons, "A History of the Wilmington Playhouse, 1913-1930", (BA Thesis, University of Delaware, 1963)

¹⁰ Donald Morgan, "A History of the Wilmington Playhouse, 1930-1945", (BA Thesis, University of Delaware, 1964.)

A History of Theater to 1865

Scholars argue about when Western theater began. Some say prehistoric times, others, like Iain Mackintosh, that a study of primarily English speaking theater must start with Elizabethan theater in the later sixteenth century.¹¹ However, in order to observe a trend of representation of a city, it is crucial to go back as early as possible. Glynne Wickham's *A History of the Theater*, starts earlier than Mackintosh, stating that the origins for the overall history of Western theater began in Ancient Greece.¹² Greek theater, starting in recorded history around 2,500 years ago, marks the beginnings of Western drama and theatrical design. From this point an evolution of writing, performance style, and stage type occurred, continuing to modern times. The plays included comedy and drama and are still performed today. These plays were as much a source of entertainment as they were a source of moral lessons and religious observation. Many were performed during religious festivals. The importance of the theatrical buildings within the communities is recognizable especially in the religious connotations. Within Greek culture, religion was part of every aspect of daily life and theaters became an integral part of this too. These performances were meant to be seen by most of the community.¹³ Thousands of people could gather to watch a performance in outdoor theaters called amphitheaters (Figure 1.1). These semi-circular shaped stages were nearly surrounded by tiers of seats cut into the earth. A wall behind the stage served as a permanent scenery piece. This design provided optimum

¹¹ Iain Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor & Audience*. (New York: Routledge, 1993,) 8.

¹² Glynne Wickham, *A History of the Theatre*. (London: Phaidon Press, 1992,) 31-33.

¹³ Wickham, 34.

acoustical value as well as sight lines for attendees¹⁴; and these simple design values continued on into the next millennia.

As time progressed cultural interaction across the Western world developed. The most influential culture was that of the Roman Empire. Rome borrowed much of its culture on the Greeks, because of their reverence of that civilization. The Romans performed their own versions of the Greek plays, altering them to fit Roman religion and society, contributed to both theater design and style, introducing theatrical structures in cities across Europe. The spectacle performance, such as Gladiatorial events, as well as the design of arenas was Roman contributions to theatrical history¹⁵ (Figure 1.2).

Examples of arenas are found in Arles, France, and most famously in the form of Rome's Coliseum. Seen today in the forms of sports arenas, theaters in the round and arena stages, the Romans built these structures on a grand scale all over their empire. The importance of Rome to theater cannot be ignored as their conquest of Europe led to the construction of arenas and the movement of theater to other lands.¹⁶ After the fall of the Roman Empire, theater was again restricted to primarily religious purposes. Though condemned by the church, religious performances of events from the Bible occurred in churches and traveling performers persisted. By maintaining the idea of performance, these religious and traveling shows meant the popularity of drama remained.

¹⁴ Wickham, 39-40.

¹⁵ Wickham, 49-52.

¹⁶ Wickham, 58.

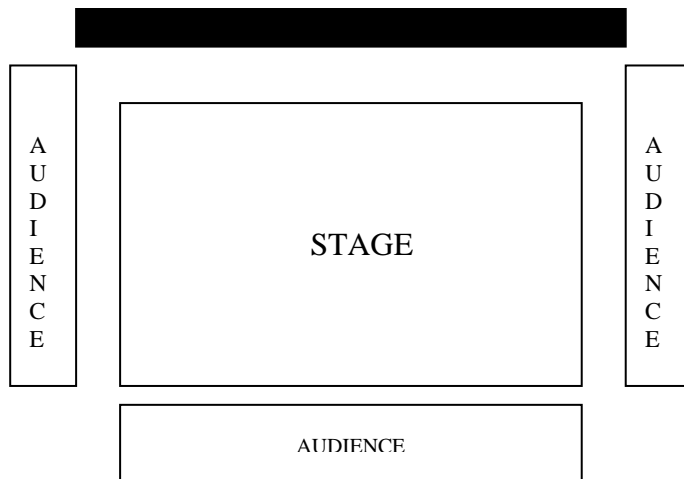


Figure 1.1
 Amphitheater design, popularized in Ancient Greek theater design.
 Drawing by the author.

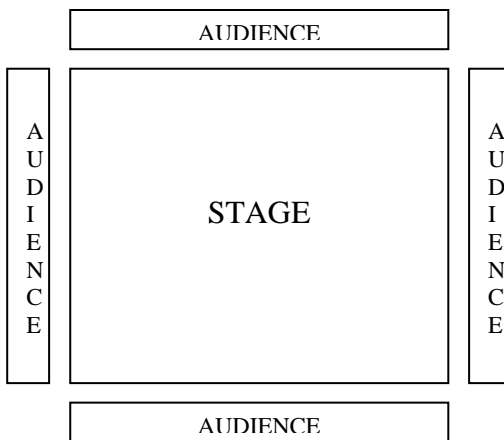


Figure 1.2
 Arena stage design, still seen in modern designs of round stages and sports stadiums.

The next major scholarly era is the Renaissance, specifically the Elizabethan theater in England. The Elizabethan epoch was the age of numerous playwrights, theaters, and acting troupes, such as William Shakespeare, The Globe Theatre, and The Queen's Men, respectively. It impacted modern theater and has influenced English and American drama for centuries, holding to Mackintosh's argument. Yet, the Elizabethan stage owes its origins to previous eras.

The theater of the Elizabethan era combined the stages of Greece and Rome while reflecting their own set of mores and rules. Much like the Roman arenas, Elizabethan theaters were circular in design, polygonal buildings that created a round shape. The stage itself was squared off and jutted into the audience, where the majority of the action occurred, allowing for maximum sight and sound for the audience, creating what is called a "thrust stage"¹⁷ (Figure 1.3).

Perhaps the most famous of these today is the reproduction Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, located in London on the southern banks of the Thames River (Figure 1.4 and 1.5). The design served to allow for maximum occupancy and yet to separate the social classes of the day. The area around the stage, or "the pit", was often packed with standing audience members, mainly the poor, called "groundlings." The richer attendees seating was located higher in the galleries; some chose to pay a premium to watch the show from the stage itself or in a gallery located behind the stage. This trend existed well into the nineteenth century in the form of theater boxes, where much of

¹⁷ Wickham, 125.

the appeal of the theater was not seeing the show but being seen by other members of society.¹⁸

These theaters were shut down during the Commonwealth era, when Oliver Cromwell and the conservative Puritans ruled the country, eschewing any frivolous activities. Restoration theater was the by-product of this ban, when in the 1660s England reinstated the monarchy and King Charles II, an avid theater fan, reopened the theaters in England.

Restoration theater is sometimes noted as a time when then stage design changed abruptly from a thrust stage to a proscenium stage. A proscenium stage is a stage which is behind the curtain, so the audience is no longer sitting around the stage, but rather seated in front (Figure 1.6).

This change to proscenium was not quick. The stages were pushed back in Restoration designs to allow for more seating and to accommodate new aspects of architectural details and ideas. These designs created an entirely enclosed stage. The use of lanterns for lighting instead of relying on sunlight allowed for the performance to take place at any time during the day. This new technological aspect changed theater forever.

¹⁸ Lee A. Jacobus. *The Compact Bedford Introduction to Drama*. (New York: Bedford St. Martins, 2001.) pp. 186-188.

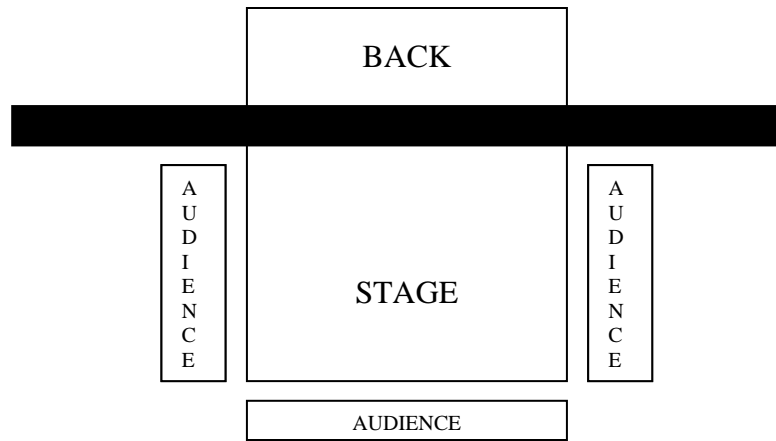


Figure 1.3
Three quarters or “thrust stage”, seen in Elizabethan stage design. The stage is continuing to retreat away from the audience.

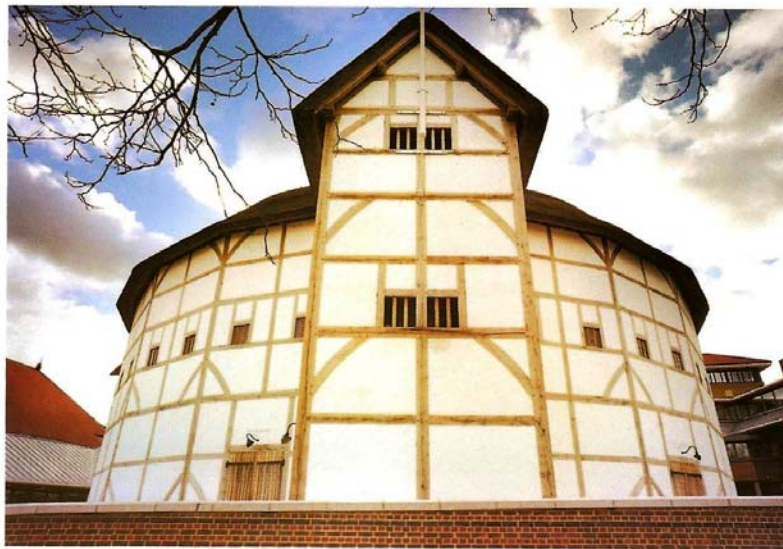


Figure 1.4
Shakespeare's Globe Theatre exterior
Postcard from author's collection



Figure 1.5
Interior of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, with a close up of the thrust stage

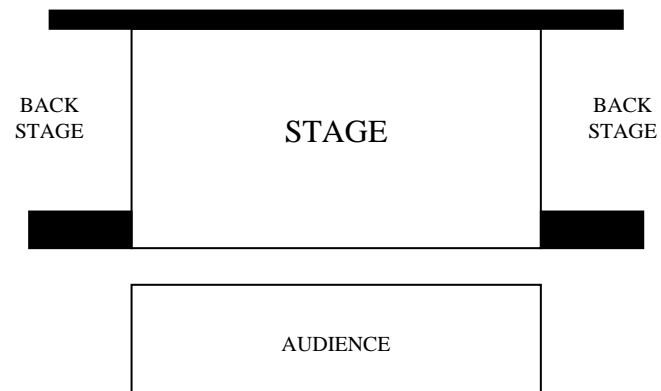


Figure 1.6
Proscenium stage, with the stage behind the “fourth wall” separating the audience from the action on stage. Theater design seen in stages and cinemas.

Theater from 1865 to the Modern Era

This thesis will focus on this time period since this is when many cities across America grew exponentially and theaters became common across the country. With new building technology, buildings grew in size, allowing for larger audiences. The use of metals in construction created stronger structures. Oil and gas lighting was introduced, allowing the stage to retreat further back as the lighting dictated.¹⁹ The cultural implications of the theater changed, with opera and dance remaining in high regard as cultural activities; and by the nineteenth century an acceptance of drama as a cultural endeavor occurred. The last era in the evolution of the stage is the theater boom. The actual time period of the boom varies. Scholars claim that it stopped as early as the 1880's with the building of unique large theaters in larger cities.²⁰ Others argue that the theater boom lasted well into the 1920's, with numerous styles and buildings being built all over the country.²¹ Still, it is agreed that the theater boom started in the United States after the Civil War, around 1870. The boom was a time influenced by multiple architectural styles, numerous performance types and cultures from all over the world. The Paris Opera House (completed 1875), and the German *Festspielhaus* (1876), are both considered testaments to the start of this modern theater movement.²² Their international fame as theaters is used as examples of the design

¹⁹ Mackintosh, 21.

²⁰ Daniel Blum. *A Pictorial History of the American Theatre, 1860-1980*. (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc, 1981.)

²¹ Mackintosh, 23.

²² Mackintosh, 41.

and incorporation of new building techniques. These techniques are seen not only in the great cities of Europe, but in the United States as well.

The boom was fueled by the rapid change and expansion in the United States due in large part to the railroad.²³ The movement west created new communities and cities and potential locations for new theaters. It also encouraged the formation of theater companies which moved from city to city with their shows. This practice is still seen today through national tours of musicals and plays traveling the country from theater to theater. While many shows were well-known full-length plays, called “legitimate theater,” the vaudeville circuit also gained popularity during this time, due in part to the railroad, as performers could move their act to new areas quickly. Vaudeville was for the most part a combination of bawdy acts from the saloons of the West and popular culture in the form of songs, acts about current events, and comedy routines.²⁴ By having the railroad as the means of travel, these acts were immensely popular, serving as entertainment and commentary of the news of the day. Vaudeville theaters were not specific to the art form. Usually all they required was space for the performers, their sets, and an audience. Because of this, theaters were being built in cities, although often time non-theatrical structures were adapted for performances. Much of the theater design and growth of the time was a by-product of the new building technologies and the ability to create larger and more elaborate stages, as well as the movement of peoples and creations of new towns to house these theaters.

²³ Thomas J. Schlereth. *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991)

²⁴ Blum, 7.

Legitimate theater remained popular during the theater boom, offering a more refined alternative to the vaudeville acts. Despite the slowing of theatrical construction by 1900, theater remained popular and the structures that were built utilized the newest techniques in decor to create the most modern experience for attendees. Improvements in seating, lighting and stage mechanisms allowed for more elaborate performances and an enjoyable experience. In 1881 the Savoy Theater in London became the first theater to employ electric lights. Munich housed the first revolving theater in 1896 and hydraulics were used to move scenery by 1905.²⁵ Theaters also gained the distinction of status symbols. City pride often resulted in the competitive construction of theaters as markers of high culture. Though vaudeville remained popular among the masses, the classics in musicals, plays, and operas, were marketed as culturally ideal. These theaters were part of the civic culture, a focal point in the city where the public could gather to be entertained.

Coinciding with modern theater was the invention of the moving picture, along with the cinema and movie palace. Cinemas are often not included in histories of theaters. Many scholars continue into twentieth century theater, but do not include cinema as a genre of drama. Because the medium of entertainment is significantly different, the cinema is seen as its own entity. However, architecturally speaking, cinemas are a continuation of the evolution of theaters and therefore also are included in this thesis. While the actual performers are not in the theater, the set up of the audience in relationship to the screen relies on principles of the proscenium stage. The attention of the audience in a cinema is drawn forward to the action on the screen,

²⁵ Mackintosh, 45.

isolating them from the other audience members. Cinema design alone is often a marker about a city, as David Naylor argues in his book, *American Movie Palaces*.²⁶ His compilation of theater designs across the country shows the similarity in opulence found in both large and small cities.

After cinemas truly became popular, by about 1910-1915, they often outnumbered all other types of theaters in cities.²⁷ Their larger-than-life images, coupled with cheaper tickets and appealing films, spoke to all classes. Many legitimate theater stages were converted and the cinema continues to dominate in popularity today.

Methodology

Attempting to reconcile the history of a city with the history of the theater proved difficult as no work has ever been attempted to cover this topic. Often time works touched on the concept of the importance of theaters to a city's growth and identity were mentioned, as in the general histories of the stage and cinema or in the history of Wilmington and the United States, but they were never explored in depth. Having a research guide in the form of McNinch's overall view of the theaters in Wilmington started the idea of creating a case study that would prove what has been so often mentioned but never truly researched: Theaters represent the changes in a city.

²⁶ David Naylor. *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy*, (New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold: 1981.)

²⁷ McNinch, 14.

Deciding which theaters to study came down to several criteria. Initially, only the DuPont Theater and the era from 1910-1925 was to be studied. It soon became obvious through research that the DuPont Theater's history is so intertwined with the rest of Market Streets theaters and its history is related to many events prior to its actual construction, the choice was made to include other theaters and expand the time frame. The theaters needed to each represent a specific moment in both the evolution of the city of Wilmington between 1870 and 1930 (the dates in which theater production was highest and the bell curve in which Wilmington reached its highest population²⁸ and also represent a distinct style of theater separate from any of the others being studied. It was also important to include structures which still remained in the city to use them as examples of the city's changes. Demolished buildings could be used if necessary, but existing structures were preferable.

For the first theater, the earliest structure was chosen, the Grand Opera House. Pre-dating all other theaters in the city by nearly twenty years, the Grand was the first major theater in Wilmington, essentially serving the city through to the arrival of the DuPont Corporation in the early twentieth century. The DuPont Theater would remain and serve to represent the era of the corporation's growth and influence between 1900 and 1915. One final theater would need to be added to correspond with the new eras created, the final era of 1916 to 1930. As this was the era of the cinema, the theater would be a movie palace.

Going into the city of Wilmington armed with a map, a list of all the theaters ever in existence and a camera, a survey of the locations was performed.

²⁸ US Census Records Abstract,
http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/past_years.html

During this survey, theaters described in McNinch's book which were no longer in existence were removed from the list. Any partial demolitions or theaters which were marked as closed but with no record of when or if they were demolished were searched. A final list of the remaining theater buildings in the city of Wilmington was compiled from this work, the first time it was recorded. The conclusion drawn was that of the thirty two theaters within the city, all but three had been demolished. These three were the Grand Opera House, The DuPont Theater and The Queen Theater. Each matched the criteria for time periods and all three were still in existence, two still being used as theaters.

From this data and looking into the census records of Wilmington a statistical study using SPSS data entry was performed to see how the trend of theater construction and destruction correlated with the population increases and decreases of the city (Table 1.1 and 1.2). For the most part the majority of the closures either coincided with World War I, the anti-trust act of Hollywood in the 1920's or else after 1950, when the population of Wilmington dropped over ten percent.

Organization of Thesis

Somehow the three theaters to remain in Wilmington each fell into a different time period and genre. This is fortunate because they tell the story of Wilmington as a growing industrial center, its eventual downturn, and its recent revival. The three buildings, The Wilmington Grand Opera House, The DuPont Theatre (formerly The Playhouse) and The Queen Theatre are all studied in chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively. Chapter 2 focuses on Wilmington between the years 1870 and 1900, a time in which not only Wilmington, but cities all over the nation, were

Table 1.1 The Number of Theaters open in Wilmington during the decades from 1870-1960

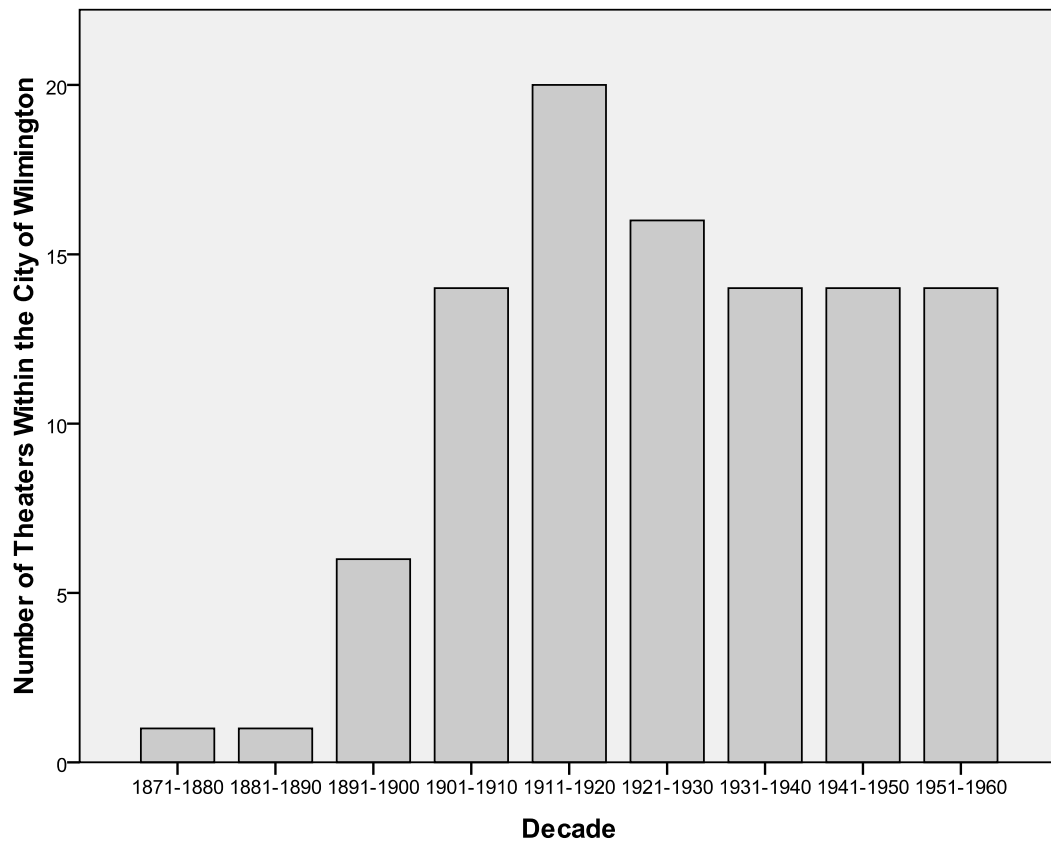


Table 1.2 The Number of Theaters open in Wilmington corresponding with the population of Wilmington, starting with the 1870 census and ending with the 1960.

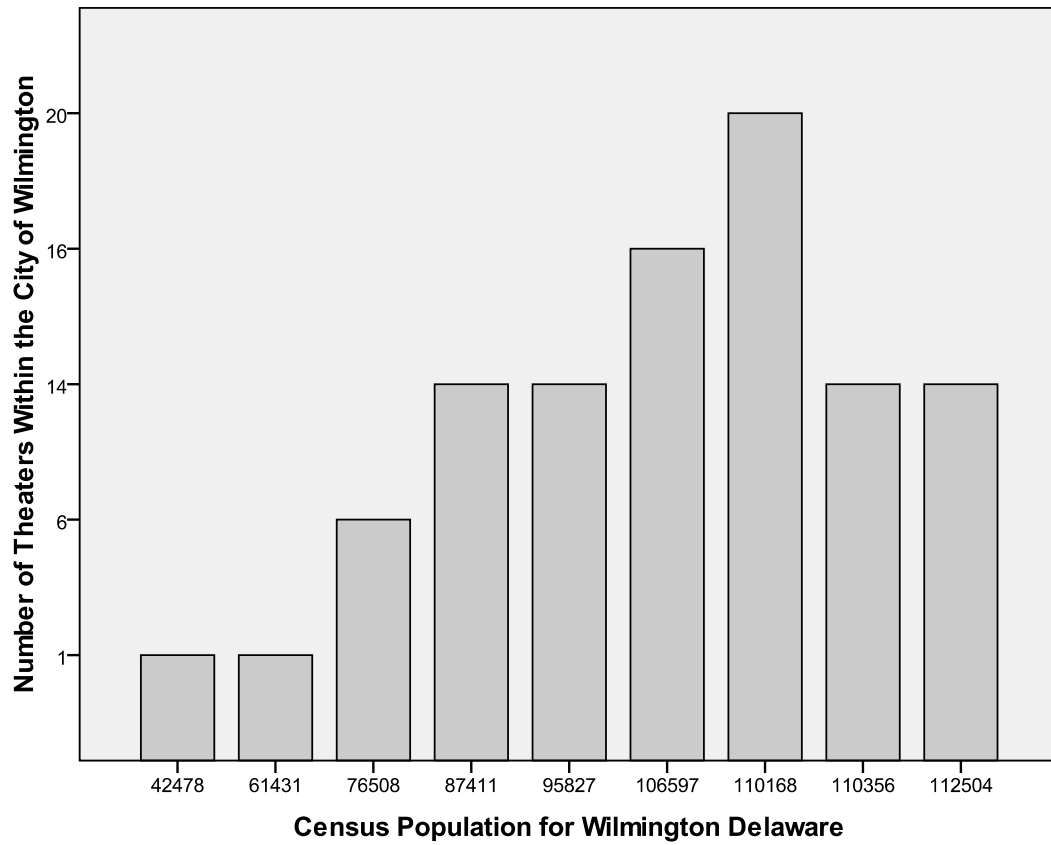


Table 1.3 The total number of new theaters opened, the total number closed and the overall total operating in Wilmington by decade. The decades of 1911-1930, when Wilmington's population was the highest also has the highest total operating.

Decade	Total New Theaters Opened	Total Theaters Closed	Total Theaters Operating
1871-1880	1	0	1
1881-1890	0	0	1
1891-1900	5	1	6
1901-1910	9	2	14
1911-1920	9	10	21
1921-1930	0	3	15
1931-1940	1	0	12
1941-1950	1	0	13
1951-1960	0	3	13

growing due to industry, innovation and other major changes. The construction of the Grand in 1871 was no accident or coincidence. The growth of the city of Wilmington was assured and between the changing downtown structure of the city and the influence of new innovations like gas lighting and the railroad, the Opera House was an inevitable step in the changes sweeping the city.

Chapter 3 looks at Wilmington between the years 1901 and 1915. This fourteen year span seems small, but the magnitude of changes to the city was great. It was during this time that the DuPont Corporation placed its headquarters in Wilmington, Delaware. The story of the city of Wilmington and the du Ponts would be forever linked after this date, as their international corporation grew and people started coming to the city for jobs and to do business. Under the leadership of Pierre S. du Pont, the city of Wilmington was altered through a series of building projects. One of these was the Playhouse Theater, built in 1913. Now called the DuPont Theater, the Playhouse proves a unique theater. In its 96 year history it has only closed three times and has never made a profit, yet it continues to serve the city, acting as “Delaware’s Broadway” and ultimately creating a cosmopolitan city for the du Ponts to entertain businessmen from all over the world.

Chapter 4 focuses on the era between 1916 and 1930 and the last remaining movie palace in the city of Wilmington, the Queen Theater. Today it seems surprising that Wilmington has had over thirty theaters. Many were small storefronts or independent movie houses. The Queen belonged to an entirely different order of

theaters, the movie palace, which combined the experience of attending a live show with that of seeing a movie. Palaces were lavish in their design, inexpensive for audience members and architecturally speaking often “over the top.” By looking at their owners and their location, the reasons behind building them, the types of plays performed, the architectural style and the reasons they still remain the story of late nineteenth/ early twentieth century Wilmington can be told.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis with a look at the recent trend in Main Street Revitalization in Wilmington and the reopening of theaters as a capstone of this trend. Very recently the city of Wilmington has added the restoration and reopening of the Queen Theatre as part of its downtown revitalization plan. The significance of this choice only emphasizes the importance of the building as part of Wilmington’s history. As an adaptive reuse arts center this new development in the Queen’s history shows how these types of buildings are continuing to represent the changes in a city and the importance of the structures.

Chapter 2

SOCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE, 1870-1900- THE GRAND OPERA HOUSE

In the decades leading up to the theater boom the cities across the United States and Europe, including Wilmington, Delaware, saw changes happening in all aspects of life. Not only did the methods of manufacturing and technology transform, but as a result, various aspects of society altered. Populations rose shifting the dynamics of power within cities. New immigration groups arriving to the United States brought with them their varied cultures and mores. The status quo in Wilmington altered and with it so did the details of everyday life. The social change, population growth and technological advances occurring in Wilmington between 1870 and 1900 are evident both physically and intangibly in the Grand Opera House, built in 1871 on Market Street by the Freemasons of Delaware. The Freemasons at that time did not have a Grand Lodge for the state. Masonic temples existed throughout the state, but as is traditional to the organization, there was no main temple where all brothers from Delaware could meet. After several decades of various false starts, the brothers finally purchased land in 1869 and started the Grand Opera House and Masonic Temple's construction. It is in the actual existence of the Grand Opera House, the appearance of the theater both inside and outside and the types of performances shown at the Grand during the first thirty years of its existence that Wilmington during the years 1870 to 1900 is represented.

The Existence of the Grand

One element of the Grand Opera House that characterizes late nineteenth century Wilmington is the actual physical existence of the building. The city in 1871 did not have a permanent traditional theater space. The reasons usually given for this include the overall attitude toward the theater by the ruling elite of early Wilmington, the low population of the city which could not keep a theater running, and the fact that theaters existed in nearby Philadelphia, so those who wanted to attend a show could travel there. Occasionally traveling shows would come into the community and other structures like auditoriums or social halls acted as venues for these events, with one exception. In 1834 Hulley's Hall was built by a theater manager from Philadelphia.²⁹ His plan was to bring tours to Wilmington during the month of June, a time when the theaters in Philadelphia were closed for the season. While the general public enjoyed the performances, Hulley's Hall only lasted until 1836. In his thesis *A History of Theatre in Delaware*, Elbert Chance discusses some of the reasons for the theater's ultimate failure. One of the main reasons: the general dislike within the ruling elite of Wilmington of a theater being in the city, is best understood in the origins of Wilmington itself.³⁰

Wilmington's initial settlement was in 1636 when the Swedish established Fort Christina. In 1656 the Dutch, living in nearby New Amstel, took the Swedish

²⁹ Records also indicate this theater as being called "The Wilmington Theatre" and that it officially closed in 1845, but more records argue for the names and dates of Hulley's Hall and 1836.

³⁰ Elbert Chance, 15.

colony but largely remained in their original settlement. Ten years later the Dutch lost both Fort Christina and New Amstel to the British, led under James, Duke of York, the future James II. Eventually James II gave the land to William Penn as part of the land grant that made up Pennsylvania and the three counties of Delaware in 1682³¹. While Fort Christina still existed, with descendents of the original settlers remaining in the area, the population and growth had dwindled, and by the 1730's its existence was threatened.³²

The ultimate survival and growth of Fort Christina is attributed to the new trade patterns between Lancaster, Pennsylvania and Philadelphia in the 1730's. These trade patterns were made possible by the Fort's location on the Brandywine and Christina Rivers, allowing for the movement of goods to the Delaware River and up to Philadelphia. The most efficient method of transporting agricultural goods from Lancaster into Philadelphia was via Fort Christina, where the goods could be quickly shipped up the Delaware River. Settlers from the outlying regions of Philadelphia saw an opportunity to trade and create wealth and thus moved into the region. What is important about these settlers is not only that they turned the old colony around, but that they were predominately English Quakers. Thomas Willing and William Shipley were two of these first settlers coming into the area from Pennsylvania in the 1730's.

More settlers moved into the area, taking advantage of its location on the rivers, not only as a method of trade, but also as a source of power for mills. The

³¹ John Munroe, *History of Delaware*, (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1979.)

³² Carol E. Hoffecker. *Wilmington Delaware: Portrait of an Industrial City, 1830-1910*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1974.) 3.

Quaker Canby and Tatnall families settled just north of Wilmington, in what they called Brandywine Village, and built gristmills. The new employment brought in laborers and the population began to rise. The Quaker influence on the economy of the city was established and would remain strong well into the nineteenth century.

“The town’s population increased to 5,000 by the second decade of the nineteenth century, but social change came slowly to Wilmington because the economic base of the town remained unaltered for a century. The same Quaker families who had set up the flour mills and established mercantile operations...continued to control these essential activities.”³³

Quaker beliefs follow an idea of simplicity and the eschewing of the flamboyant. The Quaker’s way of life set the tone for Wilmington and the dominance in the economic, political and social strata of the community ensured these values remained. Other religious denominations also had influence in Wilmington, including Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist. The continual influence of these religious groups as the main educational and social influence of Wilmington kept the city relatively unchanged into the mid nineteenth century.

The social order of Wilmington did change, though. In government lists of the 1830’s and 1840’s, a prevalence of Quaker names can be seen, but by the later 1860’s, while the Quakers still existed, their overall power in all aspects of Wilmington had waned. A new class of citizen, one seen all across the United States, emerged from the Industrial Revolution. This group would gain wealth from various industrial ventures. With the industrial revolution work was no longer based on

³³ Hoffecker, 8.

specific trades. The Quaker economic elite status was shaken as factory owners from outside the community began to amass great wealth, and therefore exert influence within the city. This did not mean that the Quakers suddenly disappeared from the city: but by having a diverse group of people acting as the ruling elite, the Quakers were no longer acting as the main rulers of the community. People with wealth were earning their money by investing in and owning factories and the new innovations; and suddenly the ability to earn money was available to more people.

Population Increase Within Wilmington

This change is intertwined with the next reason why the Grand Opera House epitomizes the community between 1870 and 1900: Population changes in the community. Another reason the existence of a theater in Wilmington epitomizes the community between 1870 and 1900 was this large growth in population and its result from the Industrial Revolution. A large population increase between 1840 and 1900 meant not only did the overall number of citizens in the city grow, but the diversity of the population grew also. Citizens in 1830's Wilmington felt the introduction of a theater out of place in a community with a low population. Hulley's Hall only presented shows in June, during the off season from Philadelphia; a lower population was able to sustain the theater. To have a theater which performed shows year round meant the city needed a large number of citizens. Wilmington was able to achieve the population necessary by 1870. The city quadrupled in residents between 1840 and 1870, going from 8,000 to 31,000. The population then doubled between 1870 and 1900 to over 70,000 residents.³⁴ This also meant that the once small community of

³⁴ Hoffecker, 43, 111.

Wilmington was growing into a larger urban center. This growth, which would eventually help to alter the complexion of the elite of the community, actually came about when initially the mills were set up by the Quaker families. Later the growing industrial center of Wilmington grew during the years of the Industrial Revolution. It was around this time, after the Civil War, that the United States began to adopt steam power as the main source of power instead of the power from the streams and rivers. Factories could suddenly be built within the city of Wilmington, away from the areas owned by the Quakers. For both the original mills and the subsequent factories within the city, labor forces were needed for the operations to run. Local workers staffed the initial mills of the eighteenth century; but as the enterprises grew into the nineteenth century, owners began to recruit from overseas. By the time of the emergence of steam power, urban centers around the country found labor forces coming from both the country side of America as well as international locales. In Wilmington, the predominant country of immigration was Ireland, with the other countries of the British Isles and Germany making up the rest of the majority.

The growth of Wilmington into a large urban center meant the city was dealing with changes in the major issues of urban centers of the day. In 1870, while some people still decried the theater as being an abomination, the overall mentality was no longer that theaters were evil vices. The older ideas of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Wilmington elite had changed to focus on other issues of the time. In the 1870's newspaper accounts, festivals and fairs were being used as methods to raise money for churches. Many of these events were to benefit causes such as poverty, temperance and disease.³⁵ The focus of the citizens of the ever

³⁵ Every Evening, December 1871.

expanding population was not about potential evils from the theater, but the need for water systems, sewage and transportation in order for Wilmington to become a competitive urban center with neighboring cities.³⁶ In a large urban center, these issues were the greatest causes for concern, not the theater. Indeed, the Freemason's advertisements were quick to assure residents of the city that the theater would be a venue to the highest class of entertainment. "Special attention will be paid to the *mise en* scene of the stage, the comfort of the auditorium, courtesy and order, essential to entertainments of a high character, will prevail on all occasions."³⁷ Wilmington's changes to an urban setting meant the focus of religious communities was on the causes of the time and not the causes of decades past.

The population increase meant that Wilmington was also attempting to gain prominence among the large cities on the east coast. The population increase was caused primarily by the jobs made available in Wilmington. Starting with the mills in the eighteenth century and moving into the factories created by the Industrial Revolution, the flow of new citizens inspired by the possibilities of jobs raised the population of the city. Technology also caused the city to physically change drastically. In the middle of the century Wilmington had been bypassed by the new railroad system into Philadelphia. Agricultural industry lost money and growth stumbled. A joint venture with local businessmen in Philadelphia, Baltimore and Wilmington created the PB&W Railroad, connecting the three cities and ensuring that Wilmington would remain at the front of the new benefits of the railroad.³⁸

³⁶ Hoffecker, 111-113.

³⁷ Every Evening, December 1871.

³⁸ Every Evening, December 1871.

Wilmington also created a line throughout the state, connecting the farms of the lower counties with the north, increasing a commercial venture which brought money into the state.

The need to maintain trade with these communities was important; but there was also an attempt to gain self reliance away from the larger cities like Philadelphia and Baltimore. Certain industries within Wilmington worked together as suppliers and buyers. The carriage building industry is one such example. Rather than import the necessary parts to create carriages, the individual industries traded with each other. The tanning factories supplied leather to the seat makers.

With regards to theaters, this was actually an argument made in the newspapers of the time.

The management appeal confidently to the local pride and business duty of society and the business men of Wilmington to give to this earnest and worthy attempt to release the city from being tributary to Philadelphia for its amusements and to sustain at home an ambitious move that will result in general benefit (if successful) to social enjoyment and the trade of the city.³⁹

This advertisement ran continually in the days leading up to the opening of the Opera House. The newspaper attention to the theater continued to emphasize three main ideas: the theater would allow Wilmington to compete with Philadelphia and Baltimore culturally, it would give the city a sense of pride as an urban center, and it would bring to the community new business. “The Opera House, will without doubt, be as elegant and attractive a one as can be found anywhere, and

³⁹ Every Evening, December 14, 1871.

we doubt not, we shall be proud of it...we know of no theatre in Philadelphia or Baltimore with which it cannot favorably compare.”⁴⁰

Wilmington’s relationship with other cities on the eastern seaboard had always been one of trade and commerce. With regards to Philadelphia, Wilmington and Delaware in general, had a long relationship stemming from the settlement of William Penn in the seventeenth century. While Wilmington would never come close to the population found in Baltimore, New York or Philadelphia, the city’s residents felt it was as established and important as any of them.

One of the main goals of the Freemasons when they decided to build the theater was hiring as many local firms as possible for the construction. Of the seven various companies employed in 1870, only one of these companies was from outside of Wilmington.⁴¹ Even the choice in architect, Thomas Dixon, who although located out of Baltimore in 1871, had grown up and initially practiced in Wilmington.⁴² Much like the cooperative work effort of the carriage industry, with local tanners supplying leather and carpenters frames to carriage makers, the various local industries worked together to create the structure of the Wilmington Grand Opera House. It should be noted that while the company used local construction, it most likely benefited the Freemasons themselves. The company which won the bid for contract of tin work for the building, for instance, was owned by Henry F. Pickels,

⁴⁰ Every Evening, December 11, 1871.

⁴¹ Young, 26.

⁴² Young, 22.

who was also a city councilman and a member of the Freemasons.⁴³ This project was as much about bettering the city as it was about helping the interests of the men involved. Indeed, Pickels co-councilman for the fifth ward was also a member of the Freemasons as were numerous other members were on the city government.⁴⁴

This spirit of local industry continued as newspapers covered the progress of the construction. The advertisements sent out to assure residents that the theater would be a first class cultural experience also emphasized the boost to local businesses brought in by attendees to the theater. The advertisements also stressed the Grand's superiority to theaters found in nearby larger cities like Baltimore and Philadelphia. This idea of creating an urban center like the nearby metropolises culminated in the continual design of the interior and exterior of the theater. The initial design scheme was modeled after a theater in New York. The scenic designers were hired out of Philadelphia and the first theater manager was from Baltimore. In an attempt to create a theater worthy of competition to other cities, the members of the Grand's committee essentially copied as much from these cities as possible. Since the Grand was being built at a later time than other theaters in cities, the Freemasons were able to pick and choose the best features and create an overall superior theater.

The Appearance of the Grand

It is in the appearance of the theater that is another embodiment of the era of 1870-1900. The four storey building, (often called a five storey if one includes the

⁴³ Charles Earl Green, *History of the M.W. Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Delaware*, (Wilmington, DE, The Lodge: 1956.) 337.

⁴⁴ Green, 337.

cupola on the top) with a mansard roof, cast iron façade and Masonic detailing now seems dwarfed by the larger buildings further north of the block where it sits (Figure 2.1). In 1884 maps show that the building was one of the taller structures within the city, the tallest buildings averaging three stories tall. The total size of the building was the largest on its block. The city pride in the beauty of the Grand Opera House is noted above in the articles from newspapers of the day. The design style was contemporary to the time period. Second Empire design came out of France in the 1850's and in the United States was very popular in the 1870's. In fact, the actual design model for the finalized plans of the Grand Opera House in Wilmington was the Grand Opera House of Paris.⁴⁵ While other homes within the city were designed in the lavish Second Empire design, they were for the most part the houses of upper class citizens. The style was very different from the more traditional classic designs of earlier Wilmington. For citizens of the city, to have a structure so opulent and be allowed to enter it, was an amazing experience. In fact, the design of the interior and exterior were so extraordinary, after the theater's grand opening the managers had to open the building early so event attendees would have the time to look around before the performances began.⁴⁶ "In order to give our citizens an opportunity of inspecting the interior of our beautiful Temple, the doors will be open at seven o'clock."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Young, 39.

⁴⁶ Every Evening, December 1871.

⁴⁷ Every Evening, December 28, 1871.



Figure 2.1
Façade of the Grand Opera House Wilmington, Delaware.

Besides being a design style popular during the era studied, the actual materials themselves embody the time period. The entire façade of the structure is composed of cast iron made to look like marble. Cast iron was a material born during the Industrial Revolution. Cheaper than other materials, it was easily made by pouring molten iron into molds.⁴⁸ Various designs and details were created easily this way and would have not only made the construction of the Grand Opera House easier and cheaper, it made the ability to create the exquisite design lauded by the residents of the city.

The interior, with the ceiling spoken of by the *Every Evening* as being like nothing found in other cities (Figure 2.3), utilized the Greek origins of theater in the decoration. In a twist from the initial disdain for theater, the Grand Opera House was considered the epitome of culture. The American Victorian era fascination with Europe and classical history had made theater a noble pursuit, so long as it followed the classical legitimate style. The advertisements in the newspapers invited citizens to come dedicate the new theater “to the muses” and indeed the interior was painted with representations of Greek muses.⁴⁹

With seating for 1,418 people and standing room allowing for upwards of 1,500 people total, the size of the audience was an average amount for the day (Figure 2.4 and 2.5). With a city population of 70,000 at the opening of the theater, the papers seemed to think the amount too small, but no mention is ever made of there not being enough seats for shows.

⁴⁸ Robin Guild, *The Victorian House Book: A Practical Guide to Home Repair and Decoration*, (New York, Firefly Books Inc: 2008), 90.

⁴⁹ Bond, 13.

The seats were the newest invention for the time, the tilting seats, where the seat flew up to the back, allowing for easy access through the rows (Figure 2.6). The seats were created by one of the local firms hired to work on the Grand's construction, Bartlett and Robbins. It was decided to use these newer inventions rather than more traditional seats because of the recommendation of Thomas Dixon that they use the newest "Opera House style". Using the newest inventions found in other theaters was also the reasoning behind the lighting choice. The president of the committee charged with construction recommended using the same lighting as the Philadelphia Academy of Music and the St. James Hall in Buffalo. This meant that the traditional use of a central chandelier for lighting was not done, rather the use of the newer method of using side lighting and three smaller chandeliers so the house would reach optimal darkness for the show (Figure 2.7). The ability of the Freemasons to pick the best details of theaters around the country for their theater ensured the Grand's success as a state of the art theater for its time.

Problems did arise with the construction, though. While the acoustics were, and are to this day, hailed as some of the best in the country, the original sight lines from the "parquet" or "orchestra" were considered poor. This detail was brought up throughout the construction of the theater, but architect Thomas Dixon felt they would be fine. His concern rested more with achieving ideal acoustics and felt alterations to the floor level would hinder this. After the opening of the show this problem was criticized, people saying the sightlines from the orchestra were poor. Immediately the management company worked to fix these problems. The orchestra was repositioned three times before it was considered to be perfect, showing just how popular and important this theater was to the citizens of Wilmington.

For a management company to continually readjust a technical flaw until it is perfect meant the theater was not going anywhere, like the previous Hulley's Hall. Indeed, for the next fifteen years The Grand Opera House was the only theater in Wilmington.

The types of performances shown at the Grand Opera House also show what changes were happening in the city of Wilmington between 1870-1900. When the theater opened, the initial goal was for the Mason's to run the theater, providing high class entertainment to the citizens of the city. It seems like the first show set the tone for many future arguments to come over what should be shown at the Opera House. The opening night's performance was met with critiques by the attendees to the theater.

“We have nothing to say by way of advice to the noisy crowd of ragamuffins whose demoniac yells and screeches, accompanied by the beating of their hoofs, shocked ears polite last night. They are simply a nuisance to be abated...There is another class of disturbers, not peculiar to Wilmington, who invariably commence the bustle of departure five minutes before the close of any performance, but we never saw such a universal rising to put on overcoats, etc., as there was in the orchestra (parquet) at the theater last evening, to the annoyance of the players and the disgust of all the audience except the offenders. Why cannot people sit still till the close of a performance like ladies and gentleman?”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Every Evening, January 1872.



Figure 2.2
The ceiling of the house of the Grand Opera House



Figure 2.3
Interior view of the house from the house left balcony.



Figure 2.4
Interior of the theater as seen from the stage.



Figure 2.5
Tilting seat used in the audience.

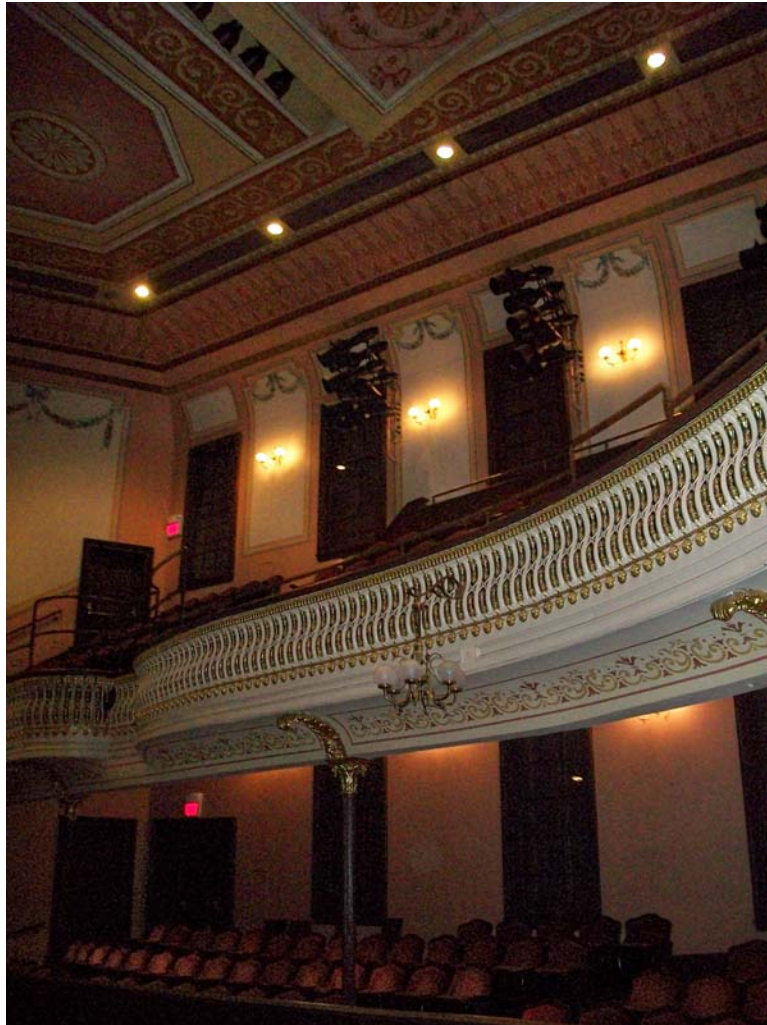


Figure 2.6
Side lights used to achieve ultimate darkness in the house.

The tickets for seats in the orchestra were \$1.00. These seats would traditionally have been the mid priced tickets, as box seats were more expensive and traditionally the balcony seats were cheapest in nineteenth century theaters. This meant that the people who could pay for these tickets were probably a combination of middle and upper middle class citizens of Wilmington, the population which increased during the Industrial Revolution. It was also these citizens whose attendance dictated what shows were the most profitable for the managers of the Grand Opera House. While under the ownership of the Freemasons an attempt to keep the promise of high quality shows was kept. However, a combination of factors caused this to change. The opening of the Academy of Music in 1886, the changing of management of the Freemasons and the popularity of other performances meant that for the Grand to survive it needed to give the audience what it wanted.

Those who were able to go into Philadelphia for shows would have been wealthier than those who were attending only performances in Wilmington. This combined with the fact that the types of shows performed at lower cost were less “refined,” the issue of behavior seems to have come down to one delegated by wealth and social class. Regardless of the high level of affluent citizens in the community, the less wealthy had a larger population. With Wilmington continuing to bring in workforce labor for its various industries, the method of entertainment would be the Grand Opera House. It is often remarked in accounts from the day that the shows best attended by audiences were ones that encompassed spectacles or vaudeville like performances. Next would be those based on famous stories or novels. In fact, the shows which brought in the lowest level of attendance were always the classical

theater shows, mainly Shakespeare, which the Grand managers originally assured citizens the theater would showcase.

The competition from other theaters came to the Grand during the last two decades of the era. It was during this time six other performance venues opened in the city. Of these six, only two performed what could be considered “legitimate” theater, and of those, only one survived longer than three years. The others performed vaudeville or showed moving pictures as their form of entertainment. In Wilmington, the moving picture was popular from the beginning. With such a high worker population the moving pictures offered entertainment at a much cheaper price. The Grand had already begun to try to capture the working class audiences by lowering prices of shows and having vaudeville performances become the main performance type. Though despised as being an uncultured form of entertainment, vaudeville had risen in popularity and rather than lose audience members, the Grand’s management brought the traveling shows to the city. By the time motion pictures had been invented, the Grand was already showing them on a more regular basis. The theater which had started out as a cultural endeavor for the city was becoming more a source of base entertainment for the working classes. The vaudeville and moving picture theaters would come to dominate Wilmington in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and the Grand would alter itself to accommodate this change. Rather than lose the great building which represented the expansion of the city Wilmington, the Grand’s management kept itself aloft by continuously reinventing the theater. By the end of the nineteenth century, Wilmington’s first successful legitimate theater was no longer the same. It would not be until after 1900 and the emerging of a new corporate empire that the city would have another legitimate theater.

Chapter 3

FROM MANUFACTURING TO CORPORATION, 1900-1915- THE DUPONT THEATER

By late nineteenth century Wilmington had become an urban center, with all the necessary trappings to allow its citizens to live the city life comfortably. The industrial and manufacturing businesses were doing well. However, this changed at the turn of the century. New methods of doing business and the expansion of the larger cities on the east coast, especially New York, meant that the manufacturing industries in Wilmington began to wane. The new century could have marked the end of Wilmington's business were it not for the du Pont family. Their interests in the community and their drive to build up the city as the headquarters of their company kept Wilmington afloat. One of these ventures was the DuPont Theatre. Located on 10th and Market Streets, the DuPont Theatre, or "The Playhouse" as it was often called, is hidden amidst the tall office buildings of the DuPont Corporation. Built in 1913 by the DuPont Corporation, the Playhouse was the idea of Pierre S. du Pont, John J. Raskob and R.R.M Carpenter, all three executives of the company.⁵¹ In the eyes of the world, a legitimate theater was needed in the city both for its citizens and for their company. A legitimate theater would ensure Wilmington's place as an international, cosmopolitan city in the eyes of the world. The company's building of it

⁵¹ DuPont Theatre at the Hotel DuPont
<http://www.playhousetheatre.com/aboutus.html>

also continued a long standing tradition within the DuPont Company of stewardship and civic endeavors within the community. From the origins of the theater in the DuPont Company to the meticulous planning of details in design and performance, the DuPont Theater represents the years 1900-1915, the era of the new DuPont Corporation and the civic works of its senior members, most notably Pierre du Pont.

At the turn of the century, Wilmington was facing a critical change in the industrial and manufacturing businesses. The previous century saw the city creating an urban center that was ideal for industrial growth; but by 1900, the old method of doing business had begun to change. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century trusts formed among organizations, such as the U.S. Steel Corporation. The power and wealth these companies had, many of them being based out of New York City, caused smaller industries to shut down. Wilmington's way of doing business was changing and the city needed to accommodate the inevitable loss of manufacturing revenue.⁵²

In the first of future attempts by businesses, the Board of Trade published a monthly journal. The goal was to keep local businessmen aware of Wilmington as a city worthy of investment, especially as a location for industrial factories. These attempts did not generate much new business to the area, for the most part bringing in new mills. The real changes to the city came at the behest of the established du Pont family, occurring nearly one hundred years after the initial founding of the DuPont Powder Company.

The du Pont family's effect on the Brandywine Valley and Wilmington began in 1801 when the family immigrated to the United States from France. The

⁵² Carol Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital: Wilmington in the Twentieth Century*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press: 1983.), p 39.

patriarch of the family, Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours, had two sons, Victor Marie and Éluthère Iréneé. Éluthère Iréneé, or E.I., was a chemist specializing in the manufacturing of gunpowder. Upon his arrival in America he found that the country lacked good gunpowder, and being an expert at the creation of gunpowder, he decided to start a mill for its manufacture.⁵³ After searching for land to set up a powder mill, initially focusing on the area near Washington D.C., he found a suitable location outside of Wilmington on the banks of the Brandywine River. The property was at the time owned by Jacob Broom, one of the influential Quakers in the community. When E.I. tried to purchase the property, he found the laws of the day did not allow him to do so as he was not yet a naturalized citizen of the United States.⁵⁴ It seems that this reminder of his immigrant status shaped the family's own feelings toward their workers in the nineteenth century.

Throughout the nineteenth century the company grew, as did the family. Pierre du Pont grew up at the powder works in a house called Nemours. Until he was twelve years old his world was the mill. Du Pont family members were also friends, including future business partners T. Coleman and Alexis du Pont. While living on the property, du Pont saw how the family treated the workers of the mill. Though they were not necessarily considered equal in status, the family and the mill workers were much closer in their working relationships than other companies at the time. This is different from other worker/employee relationships at the time. In *Black Powder*,

⁵³ B.G. du Pont, *E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Company: A History*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920.) p.11.

⁵⁴ Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. and Stephen Salbury, *Pierre S. du Pont and the Making of the Modern Corporation*. (Washington, D.C.: Beard Books, 2000.)

White Lace Margaret M. Mulrooney categorizes this relationship as *familiar*, as opposed to *fraternal* or *formal*.⁵⁵ Familiar meant that the relationships between the owners and the workers were face to face, as opposed to the separation of the owner from any of the workers as seen in a formal relationship. This closeness came from the physical proximity of the du Ponts to the workers on the mill property. Indeed, many members of the family lived in houses all over the property. Pierre du Pont spent much of his childhood surrounded entirely by cousins, siblings and the family business. His father and mother were both involved in the workings of the company. His father, Lamot du Pont, worked at the mills until 1882 when he was given permission to lead the new mills in New Jersey. Pierre's mother, Mary Belin du Pont, continued the tradition of the women in the family of acting as educator to the children of the mill. Sophie du Pont, daughter of E.I., and her sister, Victorine, were active in the mill's Sunday school. The family's involvement with the education of the workers likely inspired Pierre du Pont later in life when he worked to recreate the public school system in Delaware.

When he was twelve, Pierre's family moved to Philadelphia so that his father could work at the Repauno factory.⁵⁶ Two years later, Lamot du Pont died in an explosion, along with eleven workers. Despite the tragedy, Pierre continued his studies, first at Penn Charter School, a Quaker prep school in Philadelphia, and later at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He entered college at the age of sixteen

⁵⁵ Mulrooney, Margaret M. Mulrooney, *Black Powder, White Lace: The du Pont Irish and Cultural Identity in Nineteenth Century America*. (University Press of New England, 2002.) p.14.

⁵⁶ Chandler and Salbury,

years old, meeting numerous future friends and studying chemistry. Upon graduation, Pierre returned to the Brandywine to work for the family company. He soon became frustrated by one of the emerging problems with the businesses in the Wilmington area: the old fashioned methods of business and the behind the times ways of the companies. Du Pont left the company for a brief period to work at the Johnson Steel company, a much better fit for his modern ideas. He would return to the area again three years later at the request of his cousins.

In 1902, the president of the DuPont Powder Company, Eugene du Pont, died. A crisis ensued surrounding the decision of what would happen to the business which had long been located in the Brandywine Valley. The board decided to sell the family-run company to a firm in New York City.⁵⁷ The board's choice to sell the company did not sit well with family member A.I. du Pont, who insisted the family business remain as such. He recruited his cousins, T. Coleman du Pont and Pierre S. du Pont to buy into ownership of the company with him.⁵⁸ The three soon became the heads of the company and succeeded in keeping the business in the Brandywine Valley.

The cousins, attuned to the dynamics and demands of the new style of business operations, were eager to expand the company's control over the explosives industry and to move into related fields in chemistry. To do this, they needed a large, centralized office staff. In a move that was to have a momentous effect on Wilmington's subsequent development, they decided to make the city the headquarters of their enterprise.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Chandler and Salbury, p.

⁵⁸ Chandler and Salbury, p.

⁵⁹ Carol Hoffecker, *Wilmington, Delaware: Portrait of an Industrial City, 1830-1910*. (University Press of Virginia, 1974.)

What helped the cousins become so successful was the fact that they were the younger, new generation of businessmen. Their ideas for the company fell into the new business techniques which allowed New York to become so successful as a business center. Growth of the company was the first order of the new leadership, with the cousins deciding to expand control over the gunpowder and explosives industry. The next step would be investing in scientific advancement, especially in chemistry. Finally would be the establishment of a central office somewhere to house the necessary staff and offices. The locations of these offices were in a twelve storey building at Tenth and Market Streets in Wilmington (Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2).

This location is part of what is now Rodney Square, an area comprised of public and government buildings built in the early twentieth century. The square reflects the idea of the time period of “city beautiful,” an early twentieth century trend that strove to create aesthetically pleasing structures for cities. The result would be an urban setting where citizens could take pride, a city which increased worker productivity and economics of the city.⁶⁰ Rodney Square in the first two decades of the twentieth century was the location of city hall, the county courthouse, the post office and the public library. Prior to this time the county courthouse was located further south on Market Street, near Sixth Street. The movement north of the courthouse shows how the center of Wilmington was changing. With a group of important public structures all located in one collective area, at the highest point on Market Street, the new center of Wilmington was created and the DuPont office building was located within

⁶⁰ Sarah E. Killinger, *The Foundation of the City: The Role of Public Spaces in Urban Revitalization*.

When the new office building was being built in 1905, the city of Wilmington was growing at a fast rate. The 1900 census shows the population at a little over 76,000 people. City governments were striving to accommodate the higher number of citizens when it added the public works in the mid-nineteenth century, a new concern that was becoming a trend throughout the country. The larger city populations mixed with a high rate of immigration and lack of regulation for businesses meant that the division of classes was becoming more significant, especially between the rich and the extremely impoverished.

The national trend during the years between 1890 and 1920 was towards an urban country. While cities made accommodations for this growth back in the nineteenth century with the improvement of public works, the laissez faire approach to industry and government soon found a major portion of the population of these cities poor and underprivileged.⁶¹ From the social needs of these people came a movement that spanned both grass roots and national government, the Progressive movement. While many of the citizens who began to champion for the rights of the lower and working classes and the interests of the small business and industries were doing so out of a sense of charitable obligation, many people were not so altruistic.

⁶¹ Maureen Flanagan. *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms 1890s-1920s*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16.



Figure 3.1
Construction of the DuPont Office Building in 1905
Courtesy of the Hagley Museum & Library, 76.34.12



Figure 3.2
The continuing construction of the DuPont office building in 1905
Courtesy of the Hagley Museum & Library, 76.34.28

The people these citizens were educating and feeding were the same people cleaning their houses, making their garments and preparing their food. By association, the upper and middle classes could find themselves the victim of an illness passed on by the workers or a mistake made by someone exhausted from long hours of work.⁶²

Pierre du Pont was not so much a political Progressive as he was a man who grew up in a community that fostered a sense of obligation to one's employees. The concept of stewardship is often used to describe the du Pont relationship with the mill workers. The workers were part of the reason the du Ponts were successful and it was therefore their responsibility to educate, clothe, employ and house the workers. This mentality within the family would continue to show itself throughout the various causes, philanthropic endeavors, and civic works the du Ponts would become involved in, especially in the first half of the twentieth century when the Progressive movement was at its height. Stewardship was an important aspect of the daily life of the powder mill and for a man who had a great amount of wealth and influence, the ability to better a community was easier.

Later in his career, du Pont worked as a reformer of the Delaware public school system, a legacy that remains to this day. However, his attempts to better his work community, Wilmington, did not start there. When du Pont built the office and hotel complex on Market Street, he and the partners were creating a new Wilmington.

The need for a new Wilmington was the same as the need the three cousins saw for updating the company. Times had changed and so had the ways business was done. Modernizing the company didn't end with restructuring the inner

⁶² Flanagan, 19.

structure. As the family in the nineteenth century found obligation in keeping the mill yards on the Brandywine running, so too did the DuPont Company see a need to maintain the new center of the business, Wilmington. The first step within the company was building the office building. After that the Hotel du Pont was constructed (Figure 3.3).

The building complex served several purposes. First, the offices were the new modern headquarters for the new DuPont Company. The hotel allowed for a place to stay for the businessmen traveling into Wilmington, while keeping them near to the company offices. The hotel also acted as a new social structure in the city. The only other high end hotel at the time was Clayton House, located further down Market Street near 6th Street. A new hotel in the northern part of the city, where the center of the city had moved, was needed.

Visitors coming to town to conduct business and finding it necessary to stay overnight were hardpressed to obtain accommodations. Some were invited to stay at the homes of company officials; however, this arrangement was not always convenient or desirable. Other visitors had to travel to Philadelphia for lodgings.⁶³

Built in 1912 and opened in January 1913, the hotel soon became the premiere destination for visitors of the city. Its purpose of lodgings for people traveling to the city for business was seen, with forty percent of the guests between 1913 and 1981 being Du Pont Company related; however, people also requested suites and rooms for permanent lodgings. Guests from all over the country and the world stayed at the hotel, including presidents, royalty, generals and numerous entertainers.

⁶³ Henry V. Ayres. *Hotel du Pont Story: Wilmington, Delaware 1911-1981*. (Wilmington, DE: Seredipity Press, 1981), 1.

The hotel was a success in the du Pont's attempts to create a cosmopolitan city out of Wilmington. Next would be a theater.

In 1913 the company had been found in violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890 and was forced to sell off its interests, allowing for control of 50% of the gunpowder industry, rather than the majority the company held prior. The company was also interested in the idea of expanding into foreign industry. A spat between the cousins resulted in A.I. du Pont leaving the company. T. Coleman was getting progressively more ill and Pierre du Pont found himself in the position of head of the company. It was also in this year that du Pont and the company built the DuPont Theatre.

Histories of the DuPont Theatre are specific in that the idea for the theater came from John J. Raskob, future treasurer of the DuPont Company and close friend of Pierre du Pont.⁶⁴ Born to immigrant parents in 1877, Raskob epitomized the American dream, moving up from a stenographer for Johnson Steel Company, where he met Pierre du Pont, to treasurer of the DuPont Company. Upon hearing Raskob's idea for a new theater, and backed by R.R.M. Carpenter, head of the DuPont Company's development department, du Pont agreed to the proposal. The three men would eventually bring the idea to the board, where the plans to create the DuPont Theater were realized.

⁶⁴ Joseph John Simmons. "A History of the Wilmington Playhouse, 1913-1930." (Bachelor's thesis, University of Delaware, 1963), 6.



Figure 3.3
Photograph of the DuPont Hotel and Office Building c. 1912.
Courtesy of the Hagley Museum & Library, 76.34.105

In 1913 Wilmington already had fourteen open theaters. Why did the company feel the need to build another theater? Various reasons have been expressed for the motives behind the construction of the theater. One is that the company looked at the theater as a business venture. While the investors from the board did get the money they invested returned, the theater did not make a profit for the first several decades of its existence. Another reason is that the company saw a need for a legitimate theater in the community.⁶⁵ None of the theaters in the city were presenting what is considered “legitimate” theater, which are essentially shows that are plays, musicals, operettas, etc. that are known as being theatrical and drama pieces. The theaters in the city by this point were predominately moving pictures or a combination of moving pictures and vaudeville. The idea of a need for a legitimate theater in Wilmington is a viable reason for building the structure. As discussed in the previous chapter, when the Grand Opera House opened in Wilmington, the emphasis was on the theater being a cultural attribute to the city. The shows would be of the highest quality and ones that were intellectual and artistic. This idea was soon found failing as the audiences were more interested in what was considered a more “base” entertainment: moving pictures, vaudeville and shows that were more sensational than legitimate theatrical performances. As time went on, with the introduction of the moving picture, the theaters within Wilmington would all operate as vaudeville or motion picture houses.

⁶⁵ Simmons, 6.

The other reason a legitimate theater should be built was what its existence would mean to the city. DuPont was housing the company in a smaller urban setting when they chose Wilmington as the headquarters. With the company having been located in the Wilmington area for so long, added to the fact that the majority of the board members lived in the area, the decision to not move the corporation to another larger city was never made. Still, Wilmington was not in the same league with nearby cities like Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington D.C. or New York when it came to size and business. In order to establish Wilmington as a city worthy of housing a world class business, the community would have to be able to compete with more cosmopolitan locations. This reasoning was behind the building of the Hotel du Pont, the improvements of the roads and rail systems in the state and would also be behind the reasons for building a new legitimate theater.

When looking at the DuPont complex, it is hard to recognize a theater is there (Figure 3.4). The construction in 1913 occurred inside a courtyard, essentially creating a sense of a pre-existing structure, even when the theater was completed. However, though the outer appearance is not a typical theater architectural style, “unadorned with the usual ostentation of neon lights and other outward displays usually associated with theater buildings,”⁶⁶ the interior actually resembles a design more suited to the Victorian theaters in larger cities at the end of the nineteenth century than one constructed in 1913 (Figure 3.5) . The architectural inspiration for the DuPont Theatre was from the New York Playhouse and its appearance is similar to older theaters found in cities like New York, Philadelphia and even London. The design was

⁶⁶ Donald Morgan, “History of Wilmington Playhouse, 1930-1945,” (Bachelor’s Thesis, University of Delaware, 1964), 1.

a three tier house with a proscenium stage, flanked by box seats (Figures 3.6 and 3.7). The decorations were constructed of marble, dark oak and maroon velvet with gilded details like gargoyles and molding (Figure 3.8). The lighting was electric and the use of chandeliers was continued for the house, with crystal ones hung from the ceiling (Figure 3.9). In designing the theater this way the company was creating yet again the sense of a theater that was already established in the community, an illusion of one that had been there since the last century. They were also recreating an image found in the larger cities from important businessmen would be traveling in to do business with the new DuPont Company.

When these traveling businessmen entered the theater, though the appearance was one of an old fashioned style, they were actually entering a state of the art building. The structure was completed in 150 days, a feat almost missed when the structural steel for a girder was not delivered on time. The builders opted to build the girders out of reinforced concrete. Today, the 85 by 7 ½ by 2 ½ feet girder holds up the ceiling. In 1913, it was the third largest girder in the world and took nineteen hours to create. Most notable for its size of 85 feet wide by 30 feet deep, the stage of the Playhouse was one of the largest for its day.



Figure 3.4
The entrance to the DuPont Theater from Rodney Square.



Figure 3.5
Lobby of the DuPont Theater



Figure 3.6
Interior of the DuPont Theater as seen from the front of the house.

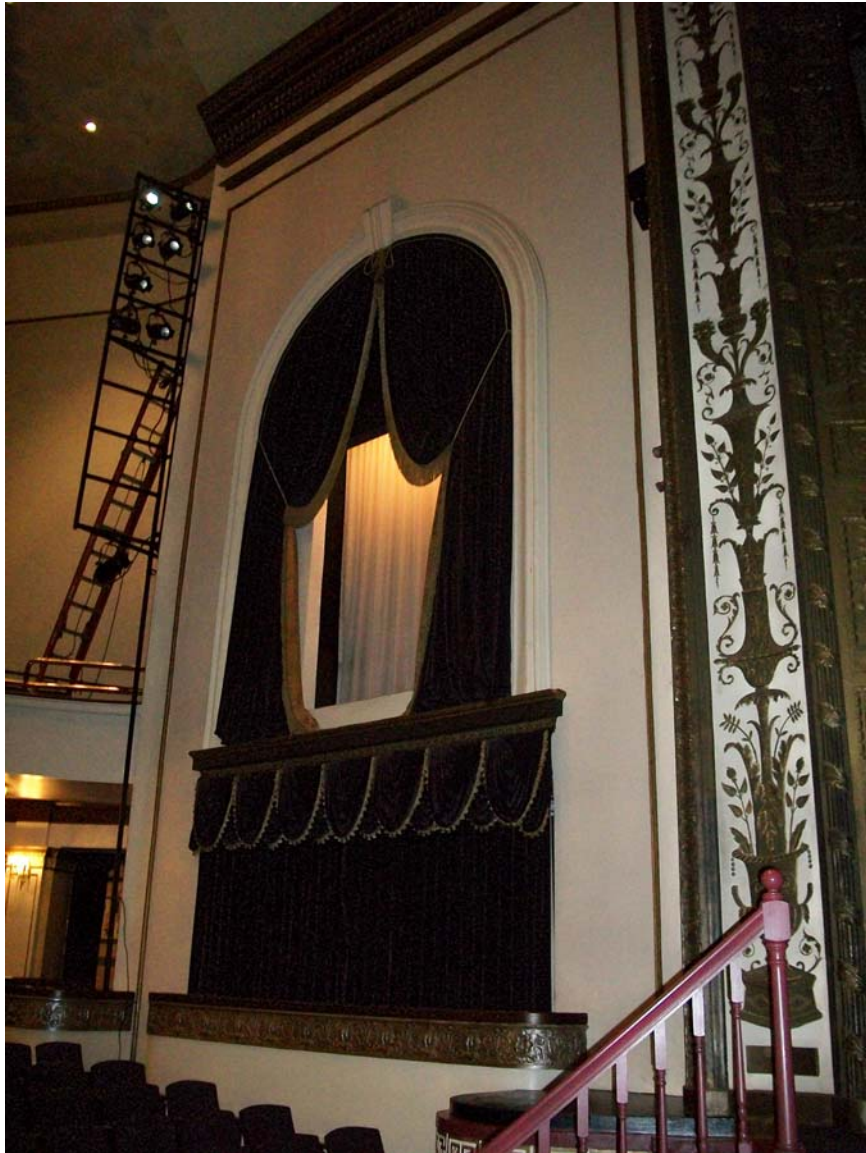


Figure 3.7
Box Seat located on the left hand side of the house.



Figure 3.8
Detail of decorative molding around proscenium arch.



Figure 3.9
Crystal chandeliers, original to the theater.

The Playhouse was not merely meant to compete with its own neighbor, the Grand Opera House or even other small city theaters, but with the most successful and famous theaters of its day. The stage rivaled the New York Playhouse for size, being outdone by only three other theaters in New York.⁶⁷ Audience comfort as well as actor's was important. The seats were twenty-two inches wide, making them four inches larger than the average theater seat and two inches larger than the seats at the Paris Opera House.⁶⁸ Narrow seating, while allowing for more audience members, has in recent decades caused problems for theaters due to the restrictions it causes for some attendees. Due to this choice of wider seats, the Playhouse not only created a more comfortable experience, but also means that the extensive renovations similar theaters are undergoing to remedy narrow seats is now unnecessary. The width of spaces between rows of seats also meant that people would be less likely to have to stand to allow patrons to pass.⁶⁹

While being fire proof in its eschewing of wood in construction, the theater had eleven fire exits and three main exits for the 1300 occupants of the theater. This too alleviates many of the problems older theaters face today with renovations. It also is a reflection of the time, when building technology allowed for fire proofing of buildings, allowing for the structure to remain relatively intact in the event of fire. Having eleven fire exits showed the focus of the fireproofing was about the safety of the guest and not that of the building. In New York in 1909 a fire killed nearly 146

⁶⁷ Simmons, 12.

⁶⁸ Simmons, 12.

⁶⁹ Ayres, 31.

workers who were working in a fireproof building. Due to the lack of multiple exits, the women all tragically lost their lives.⁷⁰ The building survived this disaster, and the impression taken from this was the workers' lives were less worthy than the cost of the building.

The lighting grid also diminished problems with safety. The electric board had safety features which would lessen the problem of shock when switches were thrown. In all there were 3000 connections for the lighting and 816 lights total.⁷¹

Compared to the other theaters in the area, the DuPont Theatre was state of the art, architecturally magnificent and performing almost entirely legitimate plays. Management advertised the high class theater in the newspapers, much as the Grand had done in 1871 (Figure 3.10). While the appearance was used as a method of impressing other cities and businesses, the theater was also a philanthropic effort. By performing legitimate plays almost entirely, the audience attending the shows was experiencing a cultural program that could serve to entertain and also bring a level of cultural achievement to the community.

The theater opened in October of 1913 (Figure 3.11). The shows were attended by most members of society. Of the 1200 seats, 500 were in the balcony. The tickets for the balcony remained 25 cents regardless of what show was occurring. The more expensive tickets could go as high as \$2.50. In modern terms this amounts to about \$54.50.⁷² However, if Pierre du Pont thought a show would be something that

⁷⁰ Flannagan.

⁷¹ Simmons, 13.

⁷² US Bureau of Labor and Statistics, <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>.

would be beneficial to the local school children, he would reserve tickets for them so they could attend a performance.

The theater was also a community service location. Local speakers, performers and artists could use the space as well to perform or meet.⁷³ Even today the company continues to allow the theater to be used for events outside the typical theatrical use. In the first season of the theater, it was host to the Goldey College commencement ceremony and for decades the Du Pont Company stockholder's meeting met at the theater.


The early years of the new DuPont Company saw many changes occurring within the city of Wilmington. The company and its workers would continue with their dominance in the city and would also continue their works within the community. The theater's status as the "Broadway Experience" still exists into modern times; but by 1915 Broadway was competing with a new name: Hollywood.

⁷³ Ayres, 33.

D. & A. 696 **The Playhouse** Automatic 1516
 Wilmington, Del. Direction of WILLIAM A. BRADY Wilmington, Del.

6 Nights and 2 Matinees
STARTING MONDAY, DECEMBER 15
 Matinees Wednesday and Saturday

Nights and Saturday Matinee 25c to \$1.50 **SEATS NOW** Wednesday Matinee 25c to \$1.00
 The Drury Lane \$100,000 Spectacle



THE WHIP
 THE GREATEST MELODRAMA EVER WRITTEN

—SEE—

THE AUTO SMASH UP!
 Madam Tussaud's Wax Works!
 4 Big Acts
 100 People on the Stage

The GREAT TRAIN WRECK!
 The Exciting Race Scene!
 13 Massive Scenes
 10 Horses in the Race
 20 English Fox Hounds
 4 Carloads of Scenery and Effects

WILMINGTON SEES THIS STUPENDOUS PRODUCTION BEFORE PHILADELPHIA

WHY? Because William A. Brady, the owner, is lessee and director of the attraction and he wishes to prove that nothing is too big nor too good for Wilmington.

The audiences are requested to be seated by 8 o'clock evenings; and at matinees by 2. The story of the play starts in the first act, also the automobile wreck and the kennel scene.

Figure 3.10
 Advertisement for the DuPont Theater remarking about Wilmington's importance
 Courtesy of the Hagley Museum & Library, 96.313

OPENING

WILLIAM A. BRADY Announces the Formal Opening and Dedication of

THE PLAYHOUSE

(Wilmington's Theatre Beautiful)

Wednesday, October 15

On Which Occasion, and Continuing the Remainder of the Week, Including Saturday Matinee, He Will Present

A REMARKABLE PLAY OF OUR TIME

"Bought and Paid For"

By GEORGE BROADHURST

SCALE OF PRICES FOR THIS ENGAGEMENT, \$2.00 to 25c

Seat Sale Starts Monday, 9.30 a. m., at Box Office

Some of the Attractions Which MR. BRADY Will Present in This City at His PLAYHOUSE During the Coming Season.

<p>Grace George. "Peg O' My Heart." Maud Adams. "Baby Mine." Billie Burke. "Way Down East." "Within the Law." John Drew. "Little Women." "Oh, Oh, Delphine!" Raymond Hitchcock. "The Blue Bird." Anna Held. "Seven Keys to Baldpate." "Little Miss Brown." Blanche Bates. Frances Starr.</p>	<p>All the Winter Garden Shows Blanche Ring. "Fanny's First Play." "Snow White." "Spring Maid." Sothern and Mariowes. "Officer 666." Fayalova. Quo Vadis Pictures. "Potash and Perlmutter." Gertrude Hoffman, Polaire and Lady Richardson. "The Round Up." Lillian Russell. Doris Keane in "The Romance." Forbes Robertson. Robert B. Mantell. "Buntie Pulls the Strings." Metropolitan Opera House Co.</p>	<p>The Princess Theatre Plays. "Joseph and His Brethren." "When Dreams Come True." George Cohan in "Broadway Jones." "The Five Frankforters." Evelyn Nesbit Thaw. "Zeigfeld's Follies of 1913." Captain Scott's Pictures. "Hop O' My Thumb." Otis Skinner in "Kismet." "The Whip." "The Family Cupboard." "Ready Money." "Ben Hur." "The Old Homestead." "The Sunshine Girl." "Stop Thief." David Warfield. "Milestones."</p>
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ONE SOLID WEEK

Commencing MONDAY, OCTOBER 20, Gala Matinees Wednesday and Saturday

MAETERLINCK'S FANTASY

THE BLUE BIRD

\$150,000 PRODUCTION—100 IN CAST—SPECIAL MUSIC

Figure 3.11
Advertisement for the opening of the theater
Courtesy of the Hagley Museum & Library, 96.313.6

Chapter 4

GROWTH AND EXPANSION. 1916-1930- THE QUEEN THEATER

In the fifteen years spanning 1916 and 1930, the city of Wilmington witnessed many changes and events that would define the city. Starting with the outbreak of World War I and following through the 1920's, the city grew in business, size, and population. The idealistic American life became attainable with the settlement outside crowded city centers and the inexpensive luxuries like the trolley and cinema. Automobiles became more affordable and the ownership of them in Delaware grew in number. This was an era that saw the city reach a high point of growth in size, population, and economy. The high points in the city are reflected in the numerous building projects of movie palaces within Wilmington. Of these structures, The Queen is the only one remaining and acts as the last remaining emblem of this era.

When Europe became embroiled in the First World War, the US government tried to stay out of the conflict. Though the US would not enter the war until 1917, non-combative methods of aid were given to the Allied powers. Being the largest supplier of gunpowder in the United States, the DuPont Company sold its product to France and England at the inflated price of one dollar per pound, thirty cents more than the year prior.⁷⁴ Pierre du Pont explained this as necessary to the

⁷⁴ Carol E. Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital: Wilmington in the Twentieth Century*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983.) 60-63.

company for its growth due to the demands of the war. This meant the factories and the work force grew exponentially. In 1915 the company had grown from over 5,000 employees to 60,000.⁷⁵ The profits tripled for the DuPont Company and people moved into Wilmington looking for jobs.

Even industries that had begun to wane at the turn of the century had a revival due to the war. Ship building companies such as Pusey and Jones and Birmingham Steel offered jobs for workers in the area. The leather industry doubled in employees during this time and the Pennsylvania Railroad was able to supply numerous jobs to citizens as well. By the end of the decade, the amount of revenue generated by the war made Wilmington the wealthiest city per capita for its size.⁷⁶ However, the city was still lacking in basic civic and public works. Much as the war created jobs and a migration into the city, it also created a movement to improve areas within the city. One of the major post World War I improvements was with shipping, which had long been declining in the city. Most of the ports and wharves were too small for modern shipping and missed business opportunities were given to Philadelphia instead. After meeting in 1917 to organize a new port, the Chamber of Commerce funded the Marine Terminal, which was built in 1922. The terminal used the DuPont Construction Company as the builder at a cost of three million dollars. This was one of many investments made within the city by private and public funding.

Nationally the need for new housing was a problem within cities. The influx of workers couldn't be accommodated and in some instances the situation

⁷⁵ Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital* 63.

⁷⁶ Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital* 65.

caused the creation of temporary settlements. Locations within the city were scarce and established residents found their surroundings more and more crowded. However, the benefit of the transportation of the era meant that people were able to escape the overcrowded cities for suburban locations.

The initial settlement outside the main areas of Wilmington started with locations like the Seventh Ward, a predominately wealthy neighborhood northwest of the city center, and the area of East Lake and Price Run, workers' housing located to the north of the Brandywine Creek. These locations were still within walking distance of the city center, although trolley cars supplied service throughout the city. During the end years of WWI, two major worker neighborhoods were created in the western side of the city. Union Park Gardens was built by the U.S Shipping Board. Wawaset was another worker neighborhood created by the Du Pont Corporation, but its focus was not on the workers of the company but the executives. Because of the fact that it was connected to the trolley system and that it was still within walking distance to the city center, Wawaset and even Union Park Gardens can be qualified as "a suburb set within the city."⁷⁷ However, the growth outside the city lines continued as transportation improved in the area. With the automobile industry growing in the early twentieth century, many citizens of Wilmington purchased cars. By 1917 the average was one car for every twenty-eight residents. Statistics for the time show that much of these owners were using their autos for commuting to and from the city center for work from outlying neighborhoods.

⁷⁷ Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital* 70.

The higher ownership of cars meant that the outdated road system needed to be improved. While the city worked on plans to improve the roads around Wilmington, it was once again the du Ponts who stepped in to make the process faster. Pierre du Pont, who was commuting from Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, gave 200,000 dollars to the city to repave Delaware Avenue, the main corridor from the more populated and affluent areas outside of the city into the main business district. Eventually he broadened the project and even purchased Kennett Pike outside his home to improve that as well. The continued improvements and dominance of the DuPont Company continued through the 1920's and into the Great Depression. With Pierre du Pont's influence much of the city's changes reflected the ideals of the upper classes and powerful men who worked for the major industries in the city.

The privately funded improvements show that the white collar commercial workers and employers of the city of Wilmington not only saw promise in the future of the area but also wanted to improve it for their benefit and the benefit of the employees and other residents. Other aspects of du Pont's improvements to the city, such as education reform, the construction of lecture halls and libraries and of course the construction of the DuPont Theatre began to be echoed in various other forms throughout the city as the possibility of commercial gain became obvious.

As the population in the city was rising due to the jobs provided by the war, other aspects within the community were growing to accommodate the citizens as well. The theater building population was rising steadily, with a combination of vaudeville theaters and music halls as well as newer movie houses and palaces. The emergence of the moving picture cannot be placed in one specific time period. Different elements and definitions relegate the cinema to a creation spanning two

centuries and even moving into today. While the theater's evolution through the centuries has been gradual, the moving picture's history has been relatively short and fast. Still despite the shorter history, the impact on cities the cinema has had is significant.

Initially the first motion picture machine was an invention by Thomas Edison in 1884 called the Kinetoscope. The Kinetoscope involved a stop start motion of viewing and could only be viewed by one individual at a time, Improvements in its movement and how the film was viewed by a large audience came from the Lumiere brothers with their *cinematographe* in 1895. This technique was experimented with, creating numerous short films of everyday events. These shorts were often shown as part of live theater performances like Vaudeville, as well as in specialized picture houses and Nickelodeons.⁷⁸

With no precedence for movie houses, licenses began to be issued so owners could open and operate cinemas in cities. In Wilmington the moving picture was an instant hit, as mentioned in previous chapters. The novelty of the moving picture never wore off and films grew longer and more involved as filmmakers experimented with technique and technology. These longer films were viewed individually apart from live performances and motion picture houses cropped up across the United States. Owners soon started to use the basic concept of the stage theater in designing specific buildings for movies, called Movie Palaces. These opulent structures turned the act of watching a film from entertainment into a whole experience.

⁷⁸ Mark Cousins, *The Story of Film: A Worldwide History*. (New York: Thunder Mouth's Press, 2004.

The number of theaters built within Wilmington by 1915 was twenty.⁷⁹ However, many had closed by the end of World War I (Table 4.1). These closings coincided with several trends in the entertainment industry. One of these was the beginning of the industrialization of Hollywood, with the film industry continually evolving and creating a following that would ensure moving pictures were not merely a passing trend.

With the advent of the moving picture, the demand for films increased and soon an industry began to form. In Hollywood, film making became a full fledged business and not merely a novel approach to entertainment. Production companies were created including 20th Century Fox, Universal, United Artists and Columbia. By the 1920's these companies were joined by Warner Brothers, MGM and Zukor, the precursor to Paramount. Most of these companies exist to this day. The era between 1918 and 1945 is called "The Golden Era of Hollywood"⁸⁰ and it coincides with the era of the movie palace.

When compared with a typical motion picture house, a movie palace has several attributes that make it very different. Usually the seating is greater, about 1,000 to 5,000 people. Movie palaces had stages similar to a live theater, with stage houses, fly lofts, rigging, dressing rooms and an orchestra pit. Balconies and mezzanines were typical features as was the location in downtown areas

⁷⁹ McNinch

⁸⁰ Cousins

Table 4.1 Theaters constructed between the years 1871 and 1915 in Wilmington and years they closed.

THEATER	YEAR OPENED	YEAR CLOSED	TOTAL YEARS
The Grand	1871	----	---
Wonderland	1896	1903	7
Shellpot Park	1897	1917	20
The Auditorium	1897	1897	1
The Brandywine	1898	1916	18
The Academy	1899	1914	15
The Garrick	1903	1930	27
Hyrup	1906	1914	8
11 th Ward	1906	1907	2
Bijou	1906	1916	10
Nickelodeon	1907	1967	60
Lyric	1908	1988	80
Pickwick	1908	1919	11
Connell	1908	1916	8
Palace	1909	1914	5
Hopkins	1911	1914	3
Majestic	1911	1927	16
The DuPont	1913	-----	----
The Rex	1914	1917	3
The Victoria	1914	1920	6
The Polonia	1915	1971	56

Perhaps most notable of all, for the era and into today, the theaters were lavishly decorated, a tactic used as part of the spectacle of attending the cinema.⁸¹

“Palaces frequently surpassed in flamboyant virtuosity what was shown on the silver

⁸¹ Joseph M. Valerio, *Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse*, (New York, Educational Facilities Laboratories Division, 1982.)

screen.”⁸² Hollywood at this time was using these decorated palaces as locations for premieres or “first runs” of new films.⁸³

Essentially movie palaces were created and designed as a means of generating revenue and creating an experience for audiences to ensure the continued attendance to the cinema. This experience was one of opulence and lavishness that allowed people from all stations of society to take part in an experience which took place in a location that was unlike anything else.⁸⁴ With society already changing across the country through the use of automobiles and the settlement of the suburbs, the movie palace was another aspect of the “have all” lifestyle of the 1920’s.

Based on the defining factors by Valerio, of Wilmington’s thirty-four theaters, about five qualify as movie palaces (Table 4.2). Three truly epitomize the idea of the movie palace, these being The Aldine, The Arcadia and The Queen. Of these theaters, The Queen is the only remaining movie palace in Wilmington and therefore is the last remaining example of this era of growth and change within the city.

The Queen Theater opened at the beginning of the movie palace era, in 1916. Uniquely, the theater was an adapted structure; however, unlike the smaller storefronts that became the new homes of small movie houses, The Queen took over the building that was the location of Clayton House, a large hotel on the corner of Fifth and Market. Clayton House had long been the major hotel of the city; but, due to

⁸² David Naylor, *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy*, (New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981.) 11.

⁸³ Valerio

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

the shift of the city center north to Tenth Street and the competition from The Hotel DuPont, Clayton House closed in 1915. The location on Market Street was the ideal place for the theater to be as Market was the central business district and main thoroughfare through Wilmington. Out of all the theaters built in Wilmington, fifteen of them were located on Market Street.

Opened by the Topkis brothers, Charles and William, The Queen was a theater that was part of the growing circle of local theater owners and operators. These men had connections throughout the city in the business world. The Topkis family owned and operated Topkis Brothers Underwear. The DuPont Company had management involved as well. John Raskob was one of the investors in The Queen Theater and felt it was a safe investment for his money. The Topkis family dominated the entertainment and amusement industries of Wilmington in the early twentieth century. Their family was among an influential group within Wilmington, taking part in construction and real estate development around the city. In 1911 Charles and William Topkis purchased St Paul's church on the 700th block of Market Street and built one of the finer movie houses in Wilmington, The Majestic. David Topkis purchased properties in the Ninth Ward, foreseeing the settlement to that area. He also designed and opened two theaters, one of which, the Strand, was located in the Ninth Ward. David was president of the Wilmington Amusement Company in 1914 and Charles was the president of the Wilmington Amusement Company in 1916. Together with their brother William and brother in law James Ginns, the family owned and operated three other theaters in Wilmington and several in other states.

Much as the du Pont's held a monopoly on much of the business ventures within the city of Wilmington, so too did a select group of men with regards to

theaters of the city. The Topkis family and James Ginns were joined with William Brady, the original manager of the DuPont Theatre, as being the managers of several of Wilmington's larger and more modern theaters, including the DuPont Theatre, The Arcadia, The Majestic, The Victoria and The Queen.⁸⁵ These theaters, all opened between the years of 1911 and 1920, were among the largest theaters in the city, seating over 1,000 people each. As every one of them was constructed as a theater, with the exception of the Queen, and all meet the qualifications for movie palaces, the Topkis-Ginns partnership owned some of the most spectacular theaters in the city of Wilmington between 1916 and 1925. "Their success in the theater business was attributed to Topkis' attention to business details, straight dealing with the public, and unlimited faith in Wilmington."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ McNinch

⁸⁶ Toni Young, *Becoming American, Remaining Jewish*.

Table 4.2 Theaters of Wilmington and characteristics of Movie Palaces they do or do not meet

THEATER	YEAR	LOCATION	SEATS	BALCONEY	ORCHESTRA	OPPULANT?	Built as Cinema?
The Grand	1871	Market St.	1,400	Y	Y	Y	N
Wonderland	1896	Shipley St.	-	N	N	N	N
Shellpot Park	1897		N/A	N	N	N	N
The Auditorium	1897	Madison St.	-	-	-		N
The Brandywine	1898		-	N	N	N	N
The Academy	1899	W. 10 th Street	-	-	-	-	N
The Garrick	1903	Market St.	-	Y	Y	Y	N
Hyrup	1906	Market St.	-	N	N	N	Y
11 th Ward	1906	Maryland Ave.	-	-	-	-	N
Bijou	1906	Market St.	-	-	-	-	Y
Nickelodeon	1907	Market St.	-			N	Y
Lyric	1908	Market St.	-				N
Pickwick	1908	Market St.	-				N
Connell	1908	Connell St.	800	-	-	-	Y
Palace	1909	Market St.	400	-	-	-	Y
Hopkins	1911	Orange St.	-	-	-	-	
Majestic	1911	Market St.	1,000	Y	-	Y	Y
The DuPont	1913	Market St.	1,300	Y	Y	Y	N
The Rex	1914	Lincoln St.	-	-	-	-	Y
The Victoria	1914	Market St.	1,000	-	-	Y	Y
The Polonia	1915	Maryland Ave	-	-	-	-	Y
The Queen	1916	Market St.	2,000	Y	Y	Y	Y
The National	1916	French St.	-	Y	-	Y	Y
The Strand	1920	Market St.	1,000	Y			Y
The Victory	1920	W 4 th Street	-	-	-	Y	Y
Park	1920	Union St.	1,100	-	Y	-	Y
Liberty	1921	Heald St.	-	-	-	-	Y
Arcadia	1921	Market St.	1,300	-	-	Y	Y
Aldine	1921	Market St.	1,586	Y	Y	Y	Y
Parkway	1921	Delaware Ave.	1,024	-	-	-	Y
Warner	1939	W 10 th St.	1,761	Y	-	Y	Y
Edgemoor	1941	Gov. Printz Blvd.	-	-	-	N	Y
The Crest	1942	Maryland Ave	-				Y
Hopkins	1951	French St.	-				Y

The faith in the city that the brothers had can be seen in the amount of money they invested in the construction of the theater. Paying \$150,000 for the property, they then invested \$250,000 in renovations to make it one of the most lavish of movie palaces. In 2009, this amount would total nearly eight million dollars.⁸⁷

The Queen's decoration at the opening of the theater is described as a combination of inspirations and materials.

The walls along the lobby and the ramps were ornamented with Alaska marble...The auditorium and balcony together could accommodate 2,000 people in seats arranged so as to give every moviegoer an unobstructed view...The stage was sixty four feet by forty feet...Murals above the proscenium arch and on the side walls depicted Science, Music, Painting, Lyrics, Beauty, Sculpture and Dancing. A Japanese garden formed the backdrop of the stage...There was a large gold dome in the ceiling above the auditorium measuring thirty feet in diameter...A Moehler Organ costing \$10,000...,plus a ten piece orchestra was also used.⁸⁸

While the interior today has been modified and is in poor condition due to lack of use, the colors of the walls and size of the auditorium speak to the lavishness The Queen presented (Figure 4.1). In addition the upper floors served as two ballrooms, with a placement between the floors for an orchestra so that both floors could be used for dancing simultaneously (Figure 4.2 and 4.3).

Many movie palace architects used a particular theme in the design of their theater. Often these were focused on other countries. The Queen combines several of these plus the original inspiration for movie palaces, the French playhouses,

⁸⁷ www.usinflationcalculator.com

⁸⁸ McNinch

with the colors of the theater being “the bluish gray and old ivory of the Louis XV period.”⁸⁹

The popularity of the movie palace in cities and towns across the nation was not lost on Hollywood. Production companies saw the possibility of revenue increase if they not only controlled the films being created but the distribution as well. Soon large companies were buying up the theaters around the country.

Warner Brothers was one production company that purchased several properties in Wilmington, four of the theaters having previously been owned by the Topkis-Ginns partnership. Warner Brothers held a large influence within Wilmington because of the ownership of so many of the theaters within the city. Pierre du Pont actually owned stock with the company and in 1925 The Queen was the property of the Warner Brothers Company.

The 1930 census shows a decrease in the population of the city of Wilmington by about four percent (Table 4.3). This coincides with the continuing migration to the outer areas of the city and the suburbs as well as the end of jobs provided by the First World War. Even though people were living outside the city center, the population was still traveling into the city for work and leisure. The Queen’s ownership by the Warner Brothers Company meant that the theater would serve as a first run theater. Theaters were tiered as to what movies they showed. First run theaters showed new releases, while smaller second or third run theaters showed movies that had been released for some time. Being a first run theater meant the theater would be used for premieres, and the Queen hosted one in the 1930’s.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*



Figure 4.1
Interior of the Queen Theater in 2008
Photograph by Jessica Bratton, Spark Magazine
Reprinted with permission of the photographer and Spark Magazine



Figure 4.2
Exterior of The Queen. The upper two floors were used as dance floors and the theater was located on the lower levels.



Figure 4.3

Right elevation of The Queen showing the size of the theater reaches back a full block.

Table 4.3 Census population for Wilmington between 1870 and 1930

Year	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930
Population	30,841	42,478	61,431	76,308	87,411	110,168	106,632
Amount Increase or Decrease	+9,583	+11,637	+18,953	+14,877	+11,103	+22,757	-3,536

By this point in the movie palace history the theaters were becoming more subdued. The stock market crash in 1929 which led to the Great Depression affected Hollywood as well. While the film industry continued, the lavishness of the 1920's was seen to be too much for the more somber times of the 1930's. The Queen continued to reign as one of Wilmington's premiere theaters for the next several decades, but the opulence of the fifteen years between 1915 and 1930 weren't seen in the city again. Over the next twenty years, the movie palaces and cinemas within the city continued to close. By continuing to be a live performance theater, the DuPont Theater was able to remain open, with no competition like cinemas found in new multiplexes outside the city. Even the Grand Opera House, which was operating as a cinema during this time and shut its doors temporarily in 1967, would find salvation in the 1971, when community activism would return the Opera House to its original splendor and it, too, would become a live performance venue again. It was the urban cinemas and movie palaces of Wilmington that, though thriving in the first few decades of the twentieth century, would one by one close their doors, and except for the Queen, eventually be demolished.

Chapter 5

THE LAST ACT

During the decade of the 1930's and the era of the Great Depression, the city of Wilmington, like much of the country, faced economic turmoil, with the city being caught unawares by problems like unemployment and homelessness. Various charitable agencies, both national and local, worked to provide residents with the necessary items to survive. Theaters continued to operate within the city, although modern data shows that people did not attend the theater at a rate higher than before the Great Depression.⁹⁰ The price of admission overshadowed the escape films provided. Hollywood began to restrain the more frivolous aspects of films like those in the 1920's and business there slowed too.

With the election of Franklin Roosevelt, the New Deal era opened and the citizens of Wilmington began to find relief from the troubles of the Great Depression. In an effort to provide employment throughout the country, Roosevelt created government agencies like the Public Works Administration that combined necessary public improvements with employment for citizens. The PWA helped Wilmington by creating new jobs that would also improve the city. Among these was the collaboration with the State Highway Department.⁹¹ It was during this time that the larger state highways were constructed, creating better roads that would connect the

⁹⁰ Valerio

⁹¹ Hoffecker

cities and towns of Delaware. Route 13 was built during this time, making the commute between cities like Philadelphia and Baltimore less congested by circumventing the city of Wilmington rather than going through the city itself, down Market Street.

The housing and road improvements that started as general improvements for the workers and their employers in the city had in turn aided in the survival of the city during the Great Depression. Unfortunately, these two major improvements would ultimately become the downfall of the theaters within the city. With the construction of Route 13, the number of travelers stopping in the city center of Wilmington dropped. Coupled with the fact that the suburbanization housing trends begun in the early twentieth century continued after World War II, the population within the city dropped. With the popularity and affordability of the personal automobile and the aid of FHA and new suburbs, the population of the city of Wilmington was decreasing while the outer areas of the city were growing in size. The drop in population itself was not the only reason that the theaters closed within the city center. Another major factor contributing to the closing of theaters was the by-product of the movement away from the city. When the citizens moved, so too did the businesses and entertainments of the city. Market Street was not accessible easily by automobile, since the roads were being used by the trolley cars and other public transportation. The ease with which one could attend the theater at locations in the suburbs rather than head into the city center was appealing.

Between 1947 and 1955 the rise of television led to a series of attempts by Hollywood to reinvigorate its product and recoup audiences lost to suburban sprawl. America's flight to the suburbs had a catastrophic affect on urban theaters and between 1948 and 1970 the number of indoor screen in use in the United States dropped nearly 50 percent.

CinemaScope, 3-D movies, Cinerama and even "Sensurround" were among the devices introduced to do battle with TV and conversion to 70mm projection is responsible for the stage modifications (including widening the proscenium arch to accept new and wider screens) found in many older theaters.⁹²

Add to this the continuing improvement in the entertainment industry and the need to adapt small screens to larger sizes to accommodate things like CinemaScope, the overall cost to continue to run smaller individual theaters rather than larger multiplexes or the novel Drive In was not feasible.

It was also at this time that Hollywood production studios were forced by the Supreme Court to divest themselves of some of their theaters.⁹³ Major studios like Paramount and Warner Brothers not only produced films but owned and operated numerous cinemas around the country. Warner Brothers was the dominant studio in Wilmington, as stated above, with the purchase of several theaters in 1925 including the Queen. These cinemas would show films from the particular studio in question, with rankings based on whether the film was a new release or one already out. Having this monopoly meant not only other studios wouldn't be able to show their films in certain theaters but also smaller theater companies couldn't compete with the larger cinemas.

Warner Brothers studios was among those forced to sell off their cinemas, among these was the Queen. With the city already losing its population and the main thoroughfare changing to Route 13, the cinema now faced the new ownership of the

⁹² Valerio, 35-36.

⁹³ McNinch, 78.

Avon Motion Picture Company. Despite the purpose of the Supreme Court ruling, the smaller theater owners weren't able to compete with the larger ones. Only seven years after Avon took over the Queen closed.

The Queen was one of several theaters which closed in the 1950's and over the next three decades, nearly every theater in Wilmington shut down. Even the Grand Opera House closed in 1967, before reopening as part of a large restoration project in 1971. By 2009 only two original theater structures, The Grand Opera House and the DuPont Theater, still operated as theaters in Wilmington. The Queen Theater remains as a structure, but is currently not in use as a theater. Why the building remained owes much to several factors. The location is farther away from the central business district near Rodney Square, so as theaters closed farther north on Market Street, their lots became desirable real estate. The fact that the theater closed earlier on also helped, as its closing was less to do with mega-plexes and being unable to be renovated as a theater. Since its closure was before these major issues, the building owners were able to adaptively reuse the structure right away. Finally, despite the attempts to purchase the property for sometime, the owner of the Queen for the last few decades chose not to sell the property.

Sometimes the drastic measure of demolition is taken, and on occasion it may be necessary, such as the building is too deteriorated to survive. However, alternatives to demolition exist. Looking at several local theaters in the Delaware and Pennsylvania areas, five alternatives were compiled. These are adaptive reuse, maintenance of the façade or parts of a structure, renovation and restoration and adaptive reuse as a performance space.

Adaptive Reuse

With adaptive reuse, the theater structure remains but the use is no longer a theater. The Ardmore Theater in Ardmore, Pennsylvania is now a gym, coincidentally one of the reincarnations of Wilmington's Queen Theater after the cinema closed. (Figure 5.1) Though the structure no longer acts as a theater, the building remains and retains elements of a theater, including the marquee.

Maintenance of the Façade or Parts of the Structure

The Warner Theater in West Chester, Pennsylvania is an example of this method of preservation. Due to neglect and water damage, the interior was completely gutted and most of the theater demolished. The stores on either side of the original building are original, but the only element of the theater that remains is the façade. (Figure 5.2) The Art Deco design and reduced marquee keep an element of theater architecture.

Restoration and Renovation

In some instances a theater is restored to its original use. Examples of this are the Grand Opera House, with a complete historic restoration and The Anthony Wayne Theater in Wayne, Pennsylvania, an example of a small theater renovation. The Wayne is a small movie house that was renovated after a campaign by the town to restore the only cinema on the main street. Initially a one theater building the structure now has several small screens to meet with the demands of multiple movie choices (Figure 5.3). The exterior has original detailing with an Egyptian/ Classical feel and the marquee with its neon lights maintain the sense of an older movie house.



Figure 5.1
Ardmore Theater, now the Philadelphia Sports Club, still retains some of the aspects
of a theater such as the marquee.



Figure 5.2
The last remaining detail of the West Chester Warner Theater is the façade of the structure, seen here.

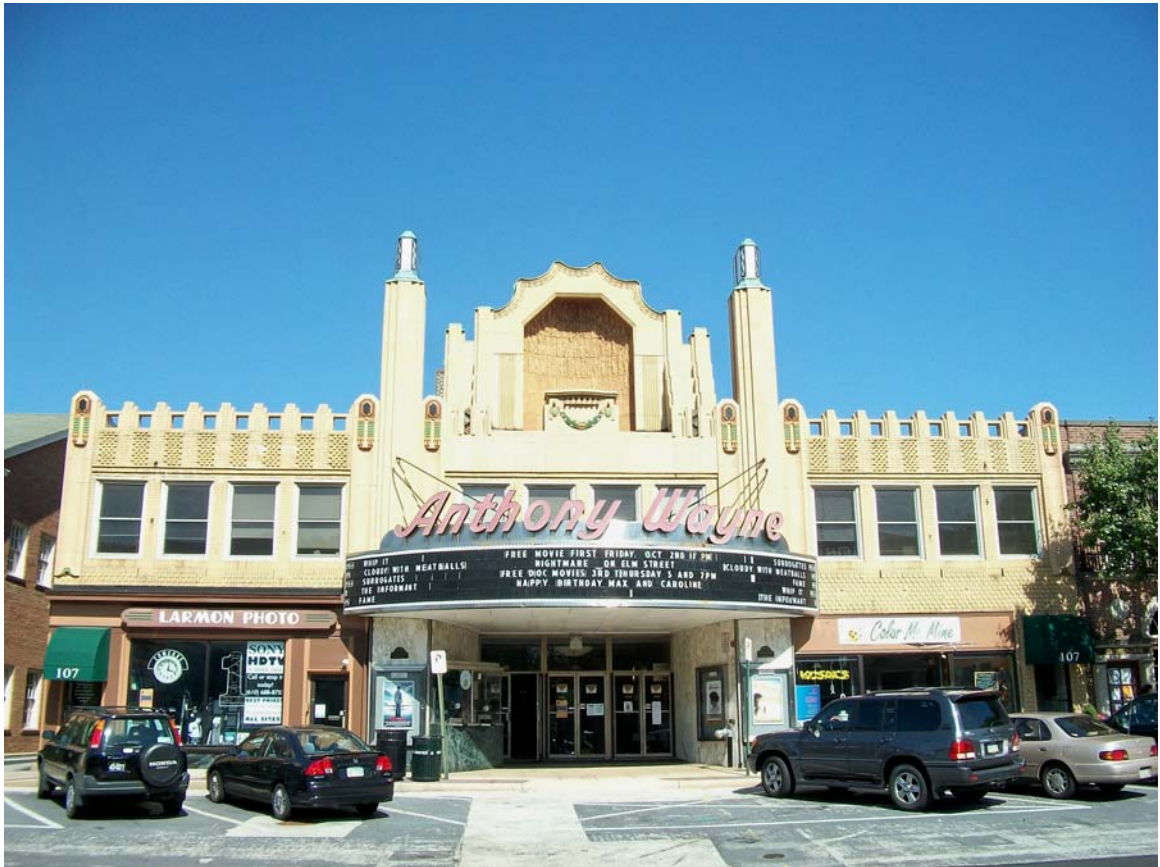


Figure 5.3
The Anthony Wayne movie theater in Wayne, Pennsylvania

Adaptive Reuse as Another Performance Space

Opened in the early twentieth century as the Dover Opera House and changed into a cinema within a few decades, the theater closed in 1982. However, The Friends of the Capital Theatre, the name of the cinema, managed to raise the necessary funding for a renovation and in 2001 the theater reopened (Figure 5.4). Now serving the community of Dover, the Schwartz Center for the Arts showcases local theatrical groups, independent and limited release films and traveling shows from the state and the national level. The attempt to restore the only theater within the state capital was a part of the desire to reopen a facility that had been closed for a relatively short period of time and create a cultural center that would cater to the community. This situation is similar to the Media Theatre in Media, Pennsylvania. The Media Theatre has been an established performing arts venue after starting as a cinema (Figures 5.5 and 5.6). Both the Media Theater and the Schwartz Center also act as community theaters. The Schwartz Center is often used by local high schools for their drama performances and the Media Theater offers classes and spaces for drama and competitions for local schools.



Figure 5.4
The Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts in Dover



Figure 5.5
Exterior of the Media Theater



Figure 5.6
The original ticket booth from the Media Theater when it was a cinema

All these theaters in their various forms demonstrate the importance within a community to retain the theater structures; and as in the cases of the last two theaters, sometimes keeping the building is enough to act as a reminder of the eras that the theaters represent. All of the structures that are being utilized as theaters are seen as emblems of community pride by the various towns. By maintaining these structures, communities are not only providing a source for the arts or keeping a historic building alive, but are maintaining a crucial marker in their community's history. As discussed in thesis the issues of urban growth, social change with regards to class shift and economic and political ideology are all tied into the theaters of Wilmington. Further study into the elements of race and theaters is necessary to gain a full picture of the attitudes towards these buildings. Historically speaking in Wilmington, there were multiple theaters that catered to particular racial and cultural groups. African American theaters existed, but this study found that the basic rule was that all the theaters were legally desegregated, although minorities were forced to sit in different sections. Whether this was the actual practice is something that bears further investigation, perhaps through oral histories of residents of Wilmington.

Theaters are also necessary as elements of a growing urban center. As argued in the second and third chapters, the construction of theaters in Wilmington in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's occurred because of the growth in size and international and national prominence. Even today within Wilmington, modern theaters are opening alongside the historic structures. Professional venues, such as the Delaware Theater Company, located in a converted warehouse near the Riverfront, and Theater N, located in the Nemours Building next to the DuPont Hotel, are offering live performance and independent and international films for residents of

the city. The structures housing them were not originally built as theaters and they both opened in the last few decades, but their existence is important in that they represent the modern era of Wilmington. This is the era of urban renewal, growth in population and a new sense of community pride.

The Future of the Queen

After the Queen was sold in the early 2000's, plans were made to demolish much of the structure and build an office building. However, in 2008, through the help of an organization called Light Up the Queen Foundation, plans for the building have changed. As of the writing of this thesis, attempts are underway to restore the Queen Theater through adaptive reuse as another performance space. The goal is to reopen the Queen as a live music performance venue (Figure 5.7).

The decision to create this new venue ties in with a trend occurring nationally. As part of urban and community revival more and more cities are restoring, maintaining or at least retaining their theaters. The decades between the end of World War II and the twenty-first century saw Wilmington's population drop from 120,000 to less than 80,000. The main drag of Market Street became run down in sections. In the area near the railroad station, close to the riverfront, I-95 still acts a barrier, causing a disconnect between those three blocks and the central business district. For the area north of this barrier, a revitalization movement began in the later twentieth century, starting with the construction of the Ships Mews on south Market Street, gradually moving northward to Rodney Square. Located between these two areas are the three remaining theater structures in Wilmington. Reopening the Queen as a

working performance space poses no major competition with the Grand or the DuPont Theatre, but instead places another essential aspect of community at a spot on Market where one currently does not exist. By reopening the Queen, the center of artistic pursuits is no longer located in solely northern section of Market, but also further south where the revitalization efforts are strongest. Wilmington's three remaining theaters are a reminder of the era of major growth and expansion that the city experienced between the years of 1870 and 1930. By maintaining them, the memories of the thirty other theaters that once existed will also remain. The fact that over an eighty year span, from 1870-1950, nearly thirty five theaters existed in or around Wilmington is a little known fact to many and often instills a sense of both surprise and pride that the city once was a large urban center. These crucial years to the development of the city remain evident in the architecture and history of these three buildings and keeping theaters in any community will help Wilmington and, indeed, any city retain its sense of history and past.



Figure 5.7
Exterior of the Queen while under construction in 2010

GLOSSARY OF THEATER TERMS

Amphitheater- An oval or round structure having levels of seats rising outward from an open space or arena

Arena Stage arena stage/theatre-in-the-round -Theater space where the audience sits on all four sides of the auditorium and watches the action in an area set in the middle of the room

Backstage- Stage area beyond the acting area, including the dressing rooms

Balcony- Second tier of seating

Box seats- Expensive seats located in front of and to the right of the balcony and separated from other seating areas

Fly loft (flies) - Space above the stage where scenery may be lifted out of sight of the audience

House- rows of seats in which the audience sits to watch a performance

Mezzanine- Lower section of the second tier of seating

Orchestra- Main floor seating area of the auditorium

Pit- Area immediately below the stage which is usually lower than the auditorium level; used primarily by the stage orchestra

Proscenium Arch- An arched structure over the front of the stage from which a curtain often hangs. The arch frames the action onstage and separates the audience from the action.

Scenery- The backdrop and set (furniture and so on) onstage that suggest to the audience the surroundings in which a play's action takes place.

Sightlines- A series of lines drawn on plan and section to indicate the limits of the audience vision from extreme seats, including side seats and front and back rows. Often marked in the wings as a guide to the actors and crew.

Thrust Stage- A stage extending beyond the proscenium arch, usually surrounded on three sides by the audience.

Vaudeville- The common name used in America for the traveling variety shows that became popular forms of entertainment in the nineteenth century. The name is credited with France, where the association was with street theaters.

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