

Paradise Theater, Minneapolis



BY THE TIME this November 1955 photo of the Paradise Theater in north Minneapolis was taken, neighborhood movie theaters were decades beyond novelty status and were firmly entrenched outside the downtown core. For a nickel or a dime, children could spend entire Saturday afternoons watching cartoons, newsreels, and a serial movie episode. Adults were entertained in the evenings by comedies and dramas such *The Left Hand of God*, starring Humphrey Bogart.

When the owner of the property at 2027 West Broadway Avenue, Henry Jeub, hired the architecture firm of Buechner and Orth in 1925 to design a two-story building, businesses had only recently come to the residential area between Penn Avenue and the intersection of West Broadway, Oliver, and Logan Avenues. The movie theater and storefront building was completed in 1926. Named the Logan Theater, the building was part of West Broadway's commercial growth, which, from the 1920s on, followed the streetcars north and west from downtown.

The combination drugstore and movie theater matched other unassuming neighborhood businesses.

Tile and cornice details in the modified Italian renaissance revival facade distinguished the brick movie theater from the store. Originally, the interior of the theater had no balcony, but the Logan's popularity quickly required such an addition to allow for more seats. Sometime during 1929, a new owner, W. A. Steffes, renamed the Logan the Paradise. In 1932, he hired Minneapolis architect Jack Liebenberg, renowned for his theater designs, to transform the simple box marquee to the showier, extensively lit sign and marquee seen in the photograph.

The fate of the Paradise after the 1960s reflects the general trajectory of decline and rebirth for neighborhood theaters. It was renamed the Capri in 1966. Steffes again brought in Liebenberg, who used then-popular outer space imagery as his inspiration for the interior's mirror and lighting design. He also moved the entrance and created a more contemporary marquee to face the corner of Oliver and West Broadway.

Steffes sold the theater in 1966 to Minneapolis businessman Benjamin Berger, who showed hard-core porn. Neighbors resisted; Berger closed the Capri in 1975. Ira

"Smitty" Smith, a local entertainer and businessman, leased, then purchased the theater in 1978 with the aim to provide positive influences for African American neighborhood youth, including serving as a music venue, famous for being the location of Prince's first solo concert in 1979. Since 1993, Plymouth Christian Youth Center (PCYC) has owned and used the theater to cultivate North Minneapolis's youth spirit and development through the arts. As of May 2020, a long-planned expansion was still slated for opening later in 2020.



Paradise Theater, 2027 West Broadway, Minneapolis, 1955. Today it is known as the Capri. (MNHs)

—Anne Drolet



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