

It Will Be

FEB 15 1969

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'Elegance' W

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The old Shea's Theater building at Pine and East Second Streets, a landmark in the city since its construction 88 years ago, has undergone several faceliftings in keeping with the finest traditions of the theater.

Built in 1881, about 15 years ahead of the present City Hall, the structure was known as the Allen Opera House. The horse and buggy trade beat a path over dirt roads to its door until the house suffered extensive fire damage.

Elisha E. Allen was the first opera house manager in this community, establishing an excellent reputation with vaudeville companies for "general high character of attractions."

The building was refurbished and later opened as the Samuels Opera House, carrying on a tradition of high theatrical standards.

Fifty years ago (in 1919), the famed old Samuels Opera House became known as Shea's Theater.

Just six years later, one of the most elegant, expensive, breath-taking rebuilding and refurbishing projects was undertaken, and required nearly two years to complete.

The then staggering sum of \$200,000 was spent to create a plush atmosphere of ornamental grandeur, typical of the times.

Lavish, formal dedication ceremonies were held Nov. 1, 1927, with the late Mayor Samuel A. Carlson serving as official greeter to Broadway stage dignitaries, outstanding performers, architects and designers from a wide area and leading citizens from communities all over the country.

Described as a "scene of rare beauty," the magnificent interior reportedly had people gasping in awe. The opening attraction at Shea's Theater 41 years ago was a "Keith-Albee Vaudeville Review," and distinctive photoplay, "Broadway," and "The Drop Kick."

"Broadway," starring Ned Harris, was a saga of cabaret life, and "The Drop Kick," was a thrilling and spectacular football feature film "whose cast included Hedda Hopper."

area residents for many years.

Color scheme for the renewed theater, you may recall, was cardinal red and gold with touches of light blue and tan. Beauty was reflected in every corner of the 1,700-seat auditorium. Five exits were built on each side of the playhouse.

The lobby was encircled in marble wainscoting, meeting a tile design floor of exquisite ornamentation. Massive bronze chandeliers of antique design provided light. Two ticket-selling windows were installed to accommodate comfortably the crowd that thronged to the theater.

Two beautiful five-foot wide staircases led from the lobby to the balcony with elegant designs on the ceilings and walls. The 800-seat balcony was fashioned to allow viewing from every seat. Silk panels stood out in soft relief to stone facings on the walls and detailed ornamentation was featured on the side balconies.

In the ceiling of the protruding balcony was a dome, 50-feet in diameter, lighted indirectly from lamps set beneath an ornamental cresting. The dome's interior was covered of perforated plaster through which any color of light of any intensity could be directed to suit the mood of a play. A massive cut-glass chandelier, 8-feet in diameter and weighing several hundred pounds, hung from the center of the dome.

Scarlet red draperies enhanced original oil paintings set in panels along the wall of the main floor. Giant candelabra with huge candlesticks originally hung on each side of the main floor to provide lighting in areas not reached by the center dome.

The stage curtain was of gold braid and brocaded work finished on a red plush base. Very comfortable seats of red leather upholstery were installed, and special provisions were made for a large stage to accommodate road shows, so popular in this area. The 40-foot stage, built in 1925, was one of the few in the country that could handle a showing of the theatrical version of "Ben Hur."

Steel construction was used