

Around Cheyenne Magazine article

Lincoln Theater

By Jill Pope

(currently called Lincoln Popcorn Palace, 1615 Central Ave)

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Francis E. Warren is well known for his political roles in Wyoming spanning over a 50 year period. He served in the capacity as President of our City Council, member of the Territorial Senate, Mayor of Cheyenne, and Territorial Treasurer before becoming a two term Governor of the Territory of Wyoming. He was then elected as Wyoming's first State Governor. Following this he was elected as Wyoming's first US Senator. In 1930 the President renamed the Fort "Francis E Warren" to honor the memory of Wyoming's 37 year US Senator who had gallantly served in the Civil War. With all of this on his plate its hard to imagine that he also dabbled in real estate, banking and was a merchant, owning the large Warren Mercantile Company located in front of the Depot. The Terry Bison Ranch located 7 miles south of town was purchased by Francis Warren in 1885 and became the Warren Livestock Company. He also had a ranch east of town, known as the Belvoir Ranch today. The last building that Francis had built in Cheyenne was none other than the Lincoln Theater. It still stands today at 1615 Central Avenue. Warren felt a need for another theater in Cheyenne, and the Lincoln, built in 1929 has done him proud. The formal opening featured the film "Peer of all Vaudeville".



There have been three world movie premiers staged at the theater. The first was for the movie "CHEYENNE" which opened in May of 1947. Many scenes for this movie were filmed in Cheyenne. The Lincoln, the Paramount & the Princess Theaters all had special appearances by the movie stars Dennis Morgan, Janis Paige and Jack Carson. The actors were escorted into town by the Wyoming Highway Patrol to attend a glamorous reception put on by Governor Hunt, The reception was followed by a parade that included our Frontier Days Queen, and many Sioux Indians who were led by Princess Bluewater. The entourage went to the post office to greet the Deadwood Stage on its return from a special historic run. A huge barbeque was catered by the Trails End Coffee Shop in the roped off block directly in front of the Lincoln Theater.

In July of 1947 Cheyenne hosted its second world movie premier for the film "WYOMING". The stars that attended were Bill Elliott and Vera Ralston. They arrived in Cheyenne on Denver Post train to a warm welcome. Both stars rode in the 51st Annual Cheyenne Frontier Days parade. The movie ran at both the Paramount and Lincoln Theaters. Bill Elliott and Vera Ralston participated in the prestigious ceremonies held at each of the theaters.

Some local residents may remember the world premier of "CHEYENNE AUTUMN" which occurred October of 1964 at the Lincoln. Over 1,100 people attended the event. A bridge was constructed across Central Avenue for the celebrities to be staged on. The big name movie stars appearing at the premier were Jimmy Stewart-who played the part of Wyatt Earp, Carroll Baker, Karl Malden, Ricardo Montalban, Patrick Wayne and Mike Mazurki. Media from as far away as London & Paris came to cover the premier.

In 1990, the Lincoln Theater building was restored to its 1953 art deco glamour, including a vintage neon marquee. Research has not yet uncovered any deaths that have occurred at the Lincoln Theater, but the paranormal happenings here continue to unfold. Conversations with the manager, *Roxanne reveal that while she's not personally seen a ghost, she has witnessed some unusual experiences. One Halloween Eve she was closing the Theater; the rest of the staff had already left for the evening. Roxanne needed to fax in the candy order for the week so she went downstairs to the basement where the fax machine was set up. Knowing that all of the staff left immediately when their shift was over, she was unnerved to hear footsteps directly overhead in the lobby. Thinking that maybe a staff member had come back to play a Halloween trick on her she tentatively ascended the staircase, saying "OK, whoever's playing the joke on me it's not going to work!" Much to her dismay there was no one else in the building. Then a cold chill engulfed her as she entered the lobby where the footsteps were heard.

There was a young cleaning lady on staff who occasionally brought her 5-year-old son to work with her at the theater. One day she noticed her child holding a conversation while seated alone in the Theater. Granted he was young, but this was unusual behavior for him. She asked him who he was talking to and the child said "that guy" as he pointed to the seat beside him. Then he also pointed above the movie screen and indicated there was a man sitting up there. After this his mother noted other times that her son conversed with the "men" in the theatre. He never did this at other locations.

The popular movie Forrest Gump had been playing at the Lincoln for a while. During this particular showing, the storyline had just gotten to the scene where Forrest was having a death bed conversation with his mother. Suddenly, the movie went out of focus, a very unusual thing to happen. Roxanne hustled into the projection room to see if someone had tampered with the projector, but no one could be seen. Rattled, she manually refocused the movie.

On another occasion Roxanne was again alone in the theater, she headed to the basement to investigate a problem with the boiler. As she entered the area she flicked the light switch, but it did not turn on. She retrieved a new light bulb, but just as her hand was nearing the old bulb to replace it, the lights flooded back on.

While in high school *Phil took a job at the Lincoln Theater. He spoke of a young woman spirit who the employees often saw seated in the balcony. They didn't have the second upstairs theater yet; and the balcony level was not open to the public at that time. By her hairstyle and dress they assumed her to be from the 1950s. She would sit in one of the seats and appeared to be watching the movies being played. If they spoke to her, she acted annoyed like they were interrupting her. Not wanting to antagonize the ghost, they quit speaking to her altogether. The staff continued to see her in the balcony on a regular basis. One minute she would be there, the next she would be gone. They also noticed that it would be chilly around her.

Many of the historic theaters built before 1950 have been demolished or converted to other uses, there are only a few hundred independent movie theaters left. We are fortunate to have this treasure left us by Francis Warren himself.

*Names have been changed for privacy reasons

If you have any ghost stories from the Cheyenne area to share please send them to jill@cheyenne.org or call 778-3133.

