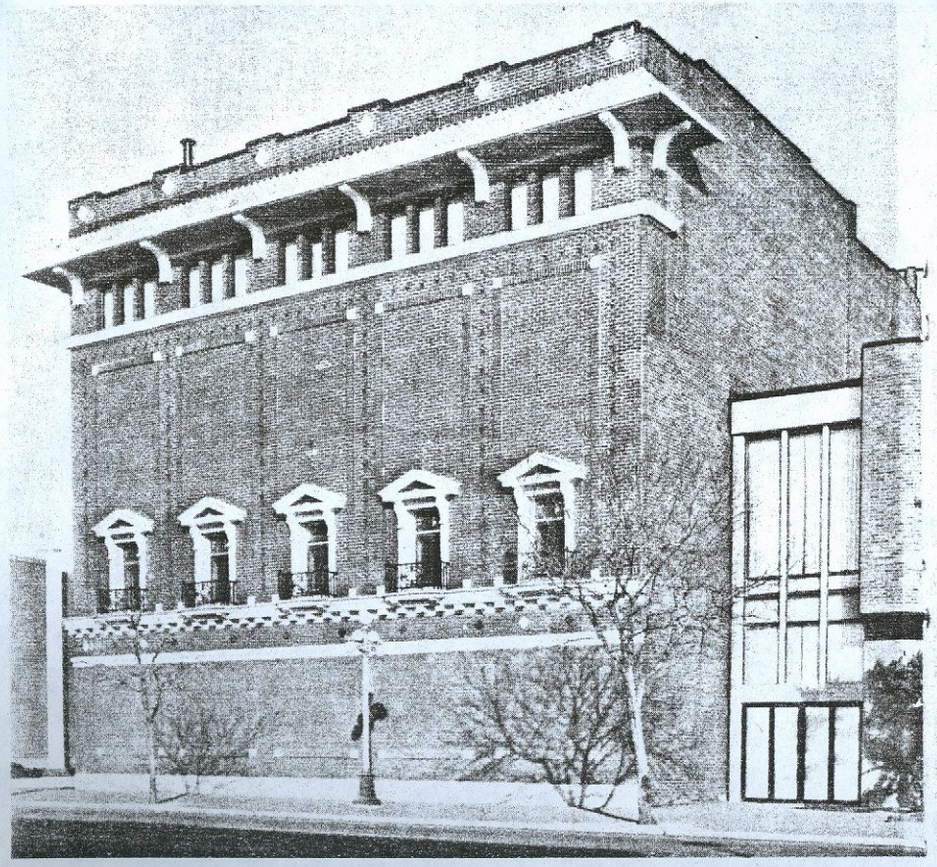

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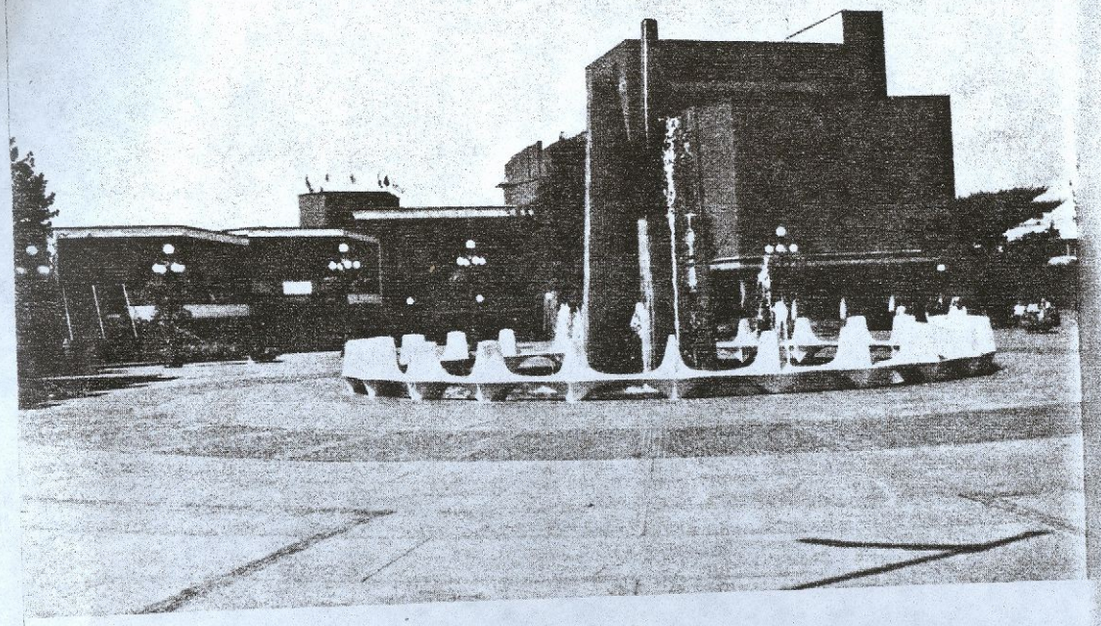
PANTAGES THEATRE (McPHERSON THEATRE)
[1914]
Three Centennial Square
ARCHITECT: JESSE M. WARREN

Alexander Pantages, a West Coast theatrical promoter who operated a chain of playhouses, including ones at Seattle and Spokane, leased this theatre from Messrs McPherson, Fuller, and Elliot. A previous theatre on YATES had been unpopular since Madame Sehl's lion act. During her performance a miscreant child yelled that the lions were loose; the audience stormed the exit at which point the entire front wall collapsed. The Vaudeville Circuit acts which Pantages brought to the West Coast were very popular in Victoria, and the stage with its scenery hanging system and deep wings was designed with these in mind. Compared with the Royal Theatre it was relatively small; but this was deemed necessary to promote the actor-audience intimacy that was important to Vaudeville.

Structural materials are steel and concrete with a local red-brick facing. The exterior features a modest Renaissance Revival façade with five bays outlined in brick. Windows capped by small pediments and fenced by iron railing suggest truncated balconies. Above a shallow attic floor defined by a thin cornice is a pantiled finial cornice (a reference perhaps to archt Warren's San Francisco training) executed in galvanized tin.

The high point of what is now The McPherson is its Baroque Revival interior: marble half columns dividing the foyer from the auditorium, balcony boxes grouped under wide segmental arches topped with full relief plaster cherubim, the bas relief decorated proscenium arch, and the elaborate consoles supporting the balcony boxes. But the building was designed for physical as well as æsthetic comfort. A ventilation system that was capable of changing the air every three minutes was equipped with an automatic ice feed for warm weather. Electric wiring enclosed in concrete, extra wide aisles to accommodate speedy evacuation, and 400 fusable sprinklers fed by a 7,000 gallon pressurized tank on the roof were more than the usual number of fire precautions. Other features were the built-in vacuum floor cleaning plant, an electric intercom, and for the performers, electric curling irons and grease paint heaters.



CENTENNIAL SQUARE

The success of Pantages was hampered by the WW I though this was temporarily solved by running film serials. By the 1920s, however, other theatres built for film projection spelled the demise of the small theatre and Vaudeville itself. After a somewhat irregular career which saw it re-open a number a times under such names as the Empire, Totem, and York, it was willed by Thomas McPherson along with a substantial part of his estate to the city. In 1964-1965 the playhouse was restored and the PANDORA addition constructed. The scheme, designed by local architect Alan Hodgson, bricked up the GOVERNMENT entrance and altered the original layout to an asymmetrical plan which provided a large intermission foyer and entrance. These connect the theatre to an aboveground restaurant on the upper level and CENTENNIAL SQUARE behind on the lower. The addition is successfully related to the original structure through the sympathetic use of similar materials. Included in the renovation programme was the installation of an Elizabethan Revival Knot Garden which can be seen from CENTENNIAL SQUARE.

February 1965 Opening Program

Centennial Sq.

"A HUNDRED THOUSAND CURTAIN CALLS . . ."

By JAMES NESBITT

The glamour of the footlights has always cast a spell over this city of Victoria, from the days when this place was Fort Victoria and entertainments were held in Bachelor's Hall.

Most of the drama in those long-ago days was staged by the blue jackets of Queen Victoria's Navy stationed at Esquimalt. Usually the first hospitals were the beneficiaries, and always at Naval concerts His Excellency the Governor, and suite, occupied the Royal Box. Always there was a Royal Box, even in the days when a barn-like structure served as the theatre.

The first professional theatre, as far as can be learned, was opened here in 1859, when Victoria was filled with hordes of gold seekers come from California, bound for the Cariboo. It was natural that the theatre people came here from San Francisco, even then a good theatre town. And so Victoria did its best to pattern itself after San Francisco, not London, though most people here were British to the core.

The first professional theatre advertisement here appeared in the Victoria Gazette in the autumn of 1859 and it read this way: "Victoria Theatre, Assembly Building, Broad Street, C. B. Lovell, Manager".

"This evening will be presented the elegant comedy of the 'Young Widow' after which the Taylor Brothers will perform in a variety of songs, duets, banjo solos, etc. Fancy dance by Miss Caroline, comic song by Mr. G. Chapman. To conclude with the laughable farce of 'The Limerick Boy'. Tickets $1 each, front seats reserved for ladies. Doors open 7 o'clock, curtain rises at half past seven. Strict order enforced. No smoking allowed." There was nothing about a bar).

Lulu Sweet and Belle Divine, the Pixley Sisters, Minnie and Annie and Madame Anna Bishop were some of the most popular of Victoria's early-day singers and dancers came here from San Francisco. Lulu Sweet (Lulu Island on the mainland was named for her), enraptured the stagedoor Johnnies, all loaded with Cariboo gold, and out for a time; they called her "Sweet Lulu Sweet", and they threw flowers to her over the footlights of gas and candles, and she blew to them kisses from her ruby-red, warm lips, though it was said she was the stand-offish kind.

John McCormack sang in Victoria, and Irish tears flowed and the Irish pride of Victoria was that proud: John Charles Thomas brought laughter and sobs when he sang about the three small boys who built a boat in their backyard and went off sailing pirate seas. Paderewski played on a darkened stage "Claire de Lune" and those who heard him were limp for days. Schumann-Heink enthralled Victorians and so did Marguerite Matzenauer, Anne Case, Amelita Galli-Curci, Rose Bampton. Harry Lauder had the Scots of Victoria in stitches and weeping when he sang "Keep Right On To the End of the Road".

Pavlova danced the "Swan" on a Victoria stage, Sir John Martin Harvey played here often and Sir Henry Irving and Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson too, they loved this town, as the audiences loved them. The beauteous Maxine Elliott did "Camille" in Victoria, and those who saw here never forgot her. The most prized compliment a young lady of the day could be given was to be told by a handsome young man, that she looked like Maxine Elliott.

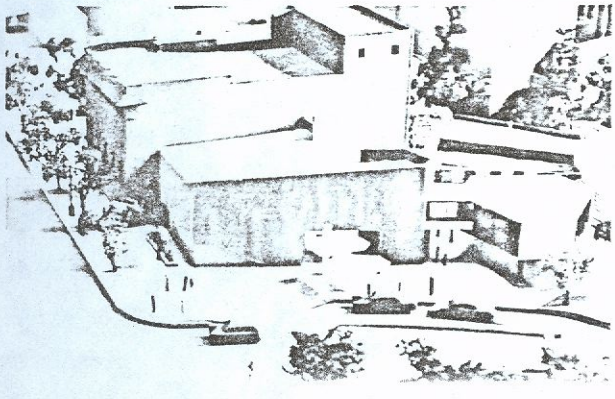
The amateur drama and music of Victoria were famous throughout the Northwest and Seattle people actually came here to see it. There were the Sehl Sisters, Dolly and Emma, and their brother Frank, A. T. Goward, Major Ross Munro for whom Miss Belle Roberts played the piano; there were Laura Loewen, who sang so beautifully, and her sister Gertrude, a piano artist, and Mrs. Harry Dallas Helmcken, and the Dunsmuir girls, and Edward Gawlor Prior and Chief Justice Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie and before them Martha the youngest of Governor James Douglas' five daughters, wife of Alderman Dennis Harris.

Who can recall theatre in Victoria without thought of Mrs. J. O. Cameron, who brought so many big-time artists here, and sometimes, financially, she lost, but always she gave receptions for them in her Moss Street home. So many, so many, professional and amateur, that so many must be left out of a short article like this, and forebearance is asked in this regard.

We think of two lovely ladies who yet live in Victoria who did their bit to make the Victoria stage colourful and artistic . . . Eva Hart (Mrs. John Q. Gillan) and Gertrude Huntley Green (Mrs. Jay I. Durand), the former who could sing anything at all, and the latter a piano artiste of the first water, whether she was playing a Brahm's concerto with symphony orchestra, or Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. Eva and Gertrude will never be forgotten.

As the McPherson Playhouse opens, one wishes it the enthusiastic support given drama and music through all the years in Victoria; one hopes there'll be no flops, but if there are, that they'll not bring discouragement, but only the old spirit of the "Show Must Go On".

A hundred-thousand curtain calls to all those who will bestride the stage of the McPherson Playhouse, may they merit the cheers accorded the "divine Sarah".



THE McPherson Playhouse

ON CENTENNIAL SQUARE, VICTORIA, B.C. TELEPHONE 386-6400

"Dedicated to the Betterment of the Arts of Greater Victoria"

McPHERSON PLAYHOUSE

OPERATED BY McPHERSON PLAYHOUSE FOUNDATION, A NON-PROFIT SOCIETY, McPHERSON PLAYHOUSE PRESENTS AN IMPRESSIVE ARRAY OF MUSICAL AND THEATRICAL EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, AND SERVES AS THE CULTURAL FOCUS OF VICTORIA.

McPHERSON PLAYHOUSE WAS A WINNER OF THE B.C. ARCHITECTURAL INSTITUTE DESIGN EXCELLENCE AWARD AND IS LOCATED IN THE HEART OF VICTORIA IN BEAUTIFUL CENTENNIAL SQUARE - ITSELF NAMED THE FIRST PROVINCIAL WINNER OF THE PARK & TILFORD TROPHY, GIVEN FOR OUTSTANDING CIVIC BEAUTIFICATION.

McPHERSON PLAYHOUSE RESTORATION AND EXPANSION WAS CONCLUDED IN 1965. THE DRAMATIC MODERN ADDITIONS BLEND GRACEFULLY WITH THE ELEGANT DESIGN AND RICH ORNAMENTATION SO CHARACTERISTIC OF THE LUXURIOUS BAROQUE STYLE OF THE ORIGINAL THEATRE.

McPHERSON PLAYHOUSE

Situated in the heart of Victoria on beautiful Centennial Square, McPherson Playhouse restoration and expansion was concluded in 1965, the opulent baroque splendor effectively combining with new additions carried out in dramatic modern style.

The building satisfies a multitude of community and professional needs and serves as the focal point for local theatre, musicals, concerts, exhibitions, and meetings. In addition, ballet, touring professional and amateur dramatic and musical productions, travellogues and recitals are held here.

General Features:- 837 fixed upholstered seats. Conventional seating, sight line distance from stage front to back row on main floor - 75 feet, to motion picture projection booth at rear of upper balcony - 100 feet.

Backstage:- Four solo dressing rooms and two large chorus dressing rooms, shower, coffee room, green room.

Stage:- 58 feet wide by 26 feet deep. Stage to grid 70 feet. Proscenium 32 feet wide by 28 feet high. Pin rail, counterweight rail (18 lines) and leading bay - stage right. 54 circuit lighting board - stage right. Risers, acoustical shell, grand piano, chairs.

THE *McPherson Playhouse*

ON CENTENNIAL SQUARE, VICTORIA, B.C. TELEPHONE 386-6400

"Dedicated to the Betterment of the Arts of Greater Victoria"

McPHERSON PLAYHOUSE

ORIGINAL BUILDING:	Pantages Theatre (Renamed McPherson Playhouse - February 27th, 1965)
LOCATION:	Corner of Government and Pandora Streets; Victoria, B.C.
ORIGINAL ARCHITECT:	Jesse M. Warren
COMPLETED:	May 18, 1914; Officially opened by Sir Richard McBride, Premier of British Columbia
ORIGINAL OWNERS:	Mr. R.T. Elliott and Messrs. McPherson and Fullerton
ORIGINAL CONTRACTORS:	B.C. Construction and Engineering Company under the direction of Mr. John Hastie. Superintendent: Richard Jones
ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS:	NePage-McKenny under the direction of Louis Van Inwegen.
ORIGINAL COST OF BUILDING:	$150,000
LESSEE:	Mr. Alexander Pantages
1965 RESTORATION	
ARCHITECT:	Alan Hodgson
SPECIAL PROJECTS ARCHITECT:	Roderick Clark
RESTORATION COST:	$650,000
PRESENT OPERATOR:	The McPherson Playhouse Foundation - A Non-Profit Society

LEASED AND OPERATED BY McPHERSON PLAYHOUSE FOUNDATION
A NON-PROFIT SOCIETY

SYNOPSIS

In 1913 R.T. (Dick) Elliott, K.C., who, through investments and his assistance in the sale of Canadian Collieries Ltd., (of the Dunsmuirs) had made a considerable sum of money, commenced the construction of an office building on the site of what is now the McPherson Playhouse.

Shortly after commencement of construction, Alexander Pantages, who was operating a chain of vaudeville houses in Canada and the United States, with a small theatre on Johnson Street, approached Elliott. He wanted a theatre to be built for the use of the Pantages Circuit which he would lease for a period of years. After some negotiation, Elliott agreed and, with his partners T.S. McPherson and Fullerton Brothers, real estate developers in Victoria, changed the plans for the business block to suit Pantages' requirements.

Designed by Jesse M. Warren in the then very popular baroque style, the Theatre was opened on May 18, 1914 amidst great fanfare and was rated at that time as being probably the finest, and certainly the most modern, vaudeville house on the Pacific coast.

The Theatre prospered for a number of years, playing two performances a night to mostly packed houses. In those days the show usually consisted of a motion picture, a cartoon and newsreel, followed by Vaudeville. Many of the people who became famous throughout North America as entertainers, such as Al Jolson and probably George Burns, played in this house.

The difficult times resultant upon the First World War and the heavy unemployment sealed the fate of this very nice theatre and it went steadily downhill. It was at times used by Evangelists, by resident stock companies and motion picture houses and steadily deteriorated. At an early date in its history, Dick Elliott who, as a very patriotic Canadian, equipped a cavalry regiment for the Canadian Forces, found himself in strained circumstances and had to back out of the partnership, McPherson and Fullerton retaining the title.

By dint of fighting with City Council continuously over assessments and taxes on the property, Tommy McPherson stoically

held on, he having in the meantime bought out his partners, Fullerton Brothers. When he died, he bequeathed the major part of his estate to the City he loved so well and the value to Victoria was something in the neighbourhood of $4 million, part of which was the old Pantages Theatre and the property adjoining it to the south. This enabled the designers of Centennial Square to build on the adjoining property the modern downstairs and upstairs lobbies and the contiguous restaurant.

The Theatre has undergone five changes of name from the original PANTAGES to the present McPHERSON PLAYHOUSE. It was called THE COLISEUM then THE EMPIRE then THE YORK then THE TOTEM and finally in 1965 it became part of the City of Victoria Centennial project as THE McPHERSON PLAYHOUSE in honour of Thomas McPherson.

In the early 1960's the Citizens of Victoria received the Pantages Theatre as a gift from the late T.S. McPherson. It was officially named McPherson Playhouse by City Council on Thursday, July 24, 1964. It was planned to integrate the theatre into the city's $2,000,000 Centennial Square Project, commemorating Canada's Centennial in 1967.

Architect Alan Hodgson spent seventeen days in Britain studying theatres in which time he found that one of the principle causes of theatres losing business is that they are functionally limited. Therefore it was decided by City planners to spend $370,000 in adding a restaurant, large public spaces and rehearsal rooms to the permanent structure. The new McPherson was reborn February 27, 1965, with an increase in seating from 782 to 837 which alone cost $12,000. In the end the total cost of the renovation was $650,000.

The McPherson Playhouse as it stands today is the final realization of the dream of Thomas McPherson. The dream of a bachelor whom nobody really knew; a tough but kind business man who wanted his city to prosper. He was once asked why he didn't give his money away while he still lived so he could see the good it would do; to this he replied that he wanted to use it to make more money so he could do even more good.

McPherson didn't really think the film industry would last any more than horse and carriage owners thought the automobile would last. He was right in the long run about vaudeville though, it did come back, but was a bit longer in coming than he expected.

Yet he kept the theatre; he fought with government tax people and city politicians, but he was a brilliant man and usually got his way. He was a man of millions and yet it has been said he probably didn't spend more than $150 a month on himself for living expenses. The McPherson Playhouse now stands as a memorial to this humble and very generous man, still in its old glory but with new additions carefully integrated into its character.

EARLY HISTORY

In the year 1914, the City of Victoria was obviously quite impressed with its new theatre. The new building really put the City (Victoria Times, Feb. 24, 1965, p.21) "on the Map" for it was probably the most modern theatre in North America at the time. In fact the ultra modern features were so well done that most of them are still being used today. The local papers gave the new theatre complete coverage and spared no space in praising it. "It was to the safety features of the house that the builders were instructed to pay special attention, and it is certain that, in this respect, no theatre on the continent can equal the Pantages house here. The most modern system of heating and lighting and a fire protection service far in advance of the civic requirements have been provided at a cost running into many thousands. The exits are numerous; the aisles capacious and the seats will be so placed as to give ample space between the rows. Wherever possible, stairways have been eliminated and inclined passageways substituted".

"The theatre will be practically fireproof. Throughout, steel and concrete has been used. But for the still greater protection of the public, an automatic sprinkling system has been installed, which, fed from a 7,000 gallon pressure tank on the roof, will reach to every nook and corner of the structure. Four hundred automatic, fusible spraying heads, will be distributed everywhere (in most theatres this system was applied only to the stage) and ready for immediate service the instant the temperature reaches 160 degrees. The system is operated over the whole house, and in every section where fire is possible, and in an instant will drench the building without in the least interfering with the exit of the patrons or injuring their clothing. In addition special

width, is twenty-eight feet in depth and fifty-eight from side to side. It will be duly equipped with every accessory and will be of a size adequate for the production of the largest vaudeville acts or other productions."

"With a total seating capacity of 1,000, 450 on the lower and 550 in the balcony, there will not be a seat from which a full and free view of the stage cannot be secured. Fourteen boxes in two tiers, three boxes in each tier, have been provided, and also eighteen loges, the latter running around the front of the balcony".

The paper goes on to describe the theatre..."The foyer extending across the rear of the lower floor, is wide and with its rich decorations forms a fitting entrance to the beautiful auditorium proper. The foyer is separated from the main body of the house by a richly paneled parapet, supporting marble columns reaching to the floor of the balcony. Commodious retiring rooms for ladies have been provided and, in fact, everywhere attention has been paid to the convenience and comfort of the public. The main entrance to the house is semicircular in shape with rich marble paneling on the walls. On the right hand side is the box office in a convenient location."

"There has even been a telephone system of modern type put in, giving a complete inter-communicating system throughout the theatre, and public telephones have also been installed at all necessary points."

"Much credit is due to Mr. Jesse M. Warren, architect for the new building, the owners of which are Mr. R.T. Elliott and Messrs. McPherson and Fullerton. Mr. Warren was given carte-blanche to design what the owners were confident Victoria would demand--a theatre of most modern and artistic design. Patrons of the house will readily agree that this end has been amply attained by the builders, the B.C. Construction Company."

The Architect: Jesse M. Warren

Mr. Warren began his profession in San Francisco in 1907 and completed his training in New York. Before coming west to live in Seattle, he travelled for three years through the United States and Eastern Canada. While in Seattle he designed what were then some of the largest apartment buildings in the city. He had lived in Victoria for three years before he was commissioned to do the

Pantages Theatre. During this time he designed and supervised the construction of such structures as the Central Building, Murphy's Hotel, B.C. Hardware Company building, the Comus Hotel, and in competition with many local and outside Architects, his plans for the First Baptist Church won him that contract also.

In being awarded the contract for the Pantages Theatre the owners gave him a free hand in building the most modern playhouse money could buy and intelligence could build, with a strong emphasis on the safety and comfort of patrons.

In 1952 Warren retired from Architecture in Seattle and moved with his family to Santa Barbara where a year later in 1953, he died suddenly at the age of sixty-four.

The Contractor:

The contract for the Pantages Theatre was awarded to the B.C. Construction and Engineering Company. The firm had completed many of the largest local and provincial jobs, such as the Central Building, Jones Block, Union Club, B.C. Permanent Loan Building, the Provincial Jail, and after completion of the Pantages Theatre started on the construction of the Hudson's Bay department store.

The Company was under the direction of Mr. John Hastie, a man of wide reputation in the contracting business. Mr. Hastie was born in Ontario and was a resident of the Pacific Coast for over twenty years prior to the building of the theatre.

The construction Superintendent was Mr. Richard Jones who was with the company only three years prior to the building of the theatre. Although a young man at the time, he had a wide experience in building construction throughout the United States as well as many other countries.

Electrical Installation

The electrical installations in the Pantages Theatre were handled by the NePage, McKenny Company. This firm had practically a monopoly throughout America on this kind of theatre work. The electrical work was one of the chief features of the Pantages structure. The company's representative in Victoria who directed the work was Mr. Louis Van Inwegen. It was under his direction that the company completed the electrical installations in the Royal Victoria Theatre. Mr. Van Inwegen stated after the completion

of the Pantages that everything pertaining to electrical installations was the most modern on the American continent.

Besides these two theatres the firm also installed the electrical work in the Central Building, B.C. Permanent Loan Building and Union Club.

Theatre Manager

The management of the new theatre was put in the hands of a well known local man, Mr. James H. Rice. Previously he served as manager of the Crystal Theatre from May 1911 to October 1913 after which he took over the Variety Theatre as manager. He continued his management of the Variety Theatre until his appointment as manager of the Pantages. Prior to his stay in Victoria, Mr. Rice spent years in the field of theatre management, in several of the leading United States cities, and much time on the road with vaudevill and circus companies.

Alexander Pantages

The life of Alexander Pantages was certainly an interesting one. He started out selling papers in Panama and by 1920 at the height of his career, he owned twenty North American theatres and had amassed twenty million dollars. In 1946 an employee of "Pan" for twenty-two years, related that Pantages used to pay some of his star performers as much as $2,000 a week and yet kept admissions at ten and twenty cents.

According to legend he gained his initial capital by sweeping sawdust from Klondike saloon floors and separating the gold dust from it. The March 15th, 1958 edition of the Vancouver Sun states that in 1908, Alex Pantages started a new trend in entertainment--"Because of lagging interest in live vaudeville entertainment his theatres added one-reel flickers to the bill. With this he laid the foundation for a West Coast Theatre empire." One of the chain's show places which first opened on June 18, 1917, was called The Pantages, later the Beacon, which was changed to Odeon Hastings, then called Majestic Theatre. This was the third and last theatre in Vancouver with the name Pantages. The original Pan House was a converted store on Cordova street which was replaced about 1905, by the theatre currently known as the Avon.

The Victorian papers, however, relate how around the turn

of the century when the first movie houses were opening up in Victoria, Alex Pantages was a cook in the Maryland Cafe. Jim McConahy who first brought a moving picture machine to Victoria and set up the Searchlight Theatre built on Fort Street, was Pantages' inspiration to escape from serving hash and sandwiches. He started a show of his own in the theatre just vacated by McConahy, and called it the Orpheum. Here he staged the first real vaudeville bill to be seen in Victoria.

Sunday, July 1, 1917 edition of the Daily Colonist gives us some background on Pantages' first steps in show business; and although they may not give us a better understanding of Pantages' later career, they seem more comical than his short films ever could have been.

"His company consisted of Kate Rockwell, a versatile actress, singer and dancer; (Vancouver Sunday, March 15, 1958 p.25) Fred Tracey a singer, and Charlie Johnson, who did the stage shifting, took the money at the door and made himself useful in whatever other capacity he could.

Moving pictures had gained a good deal of popularity then, and Pantages soon saw that he could not do without them. He made a systematic search for an operator, and finally secured Maynard MacDonald who had worked under both McConahy and Boyd. But after getting the operator, Pantages discovered that a machine was still wanting. Fortune favoured him, however. There was a shoemaker here at the time who had also forseen the profits in the picture business, and had bought the necessary equipment to work on his own account. Lack of finances was the shoemaker's stumbling block, so that when Pantages made him an offer he was glad to accept it.

His company intact and having secured his pictures, Pantages set himself to the task of improving his theatre. For several days the whole company was engaged in building a new stage, arranging chairs, and an elaborate proscenium of white muslin, enhanced in appearance by wallpaper of a gaudy hue. The stage lights were set by MacDonald. There was no scenery. The front of the theatre was built of rough boards and a doorway was cut through them. Approximately fifty chairs were distributed about the room and in the centre was a wood stove. MacDonald recalls that no matter how thrilling might be the scenes enacted on the stage at the time, Johnson never failed to go about the laborious task of stoking up--

an operation which was invariably attended by a good deal of noise, to the discomfiture of both players and the audience.

The performances at the Orpheum were continuous from 2:00 to 5:00 in the afternoon and from 7:30 in the evening until everyone in town had gone home. One New Year's Eve the show lasted until 2:30 in the morning. Besides the pictures, the program consisted of an illustrated song by Tracey and an act by Kate Rockwell who was billed as Madame Lotus, the Serpentine Dancer. The operator's job was no sinecure in those days, MacDonald testifies. The pictures shown had no title and no explanation or guide to them was flashed on the screen as today. The producers surmounted this difficulty by sending along printed circulars with the pictures. The operators were supposed to learn this literature by heart and while they turned the crank were obliged to use all the vocal power at their command to tell the audience what the film illustrated. After an all-day session, the operator usually felt that he had earned his salary. The films even then were still sent out in twenty five foot lengths and after running through the projector fell in a heap on the floor, or into a gunnysack which was often provided at the rear of the machine to catch them as they emerged. When the show was over, the whole film had to be re-wound in preparation for the next. Pictures showing the antics of the two colored comedians, Williams and Walker, as well as Weber and Fields, were then the most in demand.

The Pantages Company did well at the Orpheum, but it proved to be a better spender than an earner. Salaries were paid every day; otherwise they probably never would have been paid at all. After two months of operation, when the rent on the theatre became due, the company found itself bankrupt. One afternoon the sheriff entered the theatre and was about to seize the properties for rent. After some debate, the sheriff was forced to concede that the assets of the company were not even of sufficient value to seize, with the exception of the films and the lens in the picture machine. Mr. MacDonald was the only actual employee of the company; the others divided the profits so he was appointed a deputy sheriff, with the condition that each night he should take the lens and roll of films home with him as security for the Government. In the meantime, the company was instructed to go ahead with its performances in an effort to make a full settlement as soon as the necessary cash had been taken at the box office.

Madame Sehl and her troupe of trained lions came to the rescue of Pantages, and just at the most opportune moment....." and so it goes, for there certainly does not seem to have been a dull moment in the life of Alex Pantages.

The Victoria newspaper, the Daily Colonist, printed a rather good summary of this man who was responsible for bringing the most modern playhouse in North America to the proud city of Victoria.

"PANTAGES LEADER IN WORLD OF VAUDEVILLE"

Head of Great Theatrical Circuit has had Romantic Career---

Perseverance Led to Fortune

"A leader among the theatrical interests of America, a position he had reached in a few years while still a young man, Mr. Alexander Pantages, Lessee of Victoria's magnificent new playhouse to be formally opened tomorrow afternoon, has had a career which forms a romantic chapter in the history of the Pacific Northwest. Mr. Pantages got his start right here in Victoria years ago, just before the gold rush to the Yukon commenced. It is with interest that many Victorians have followed a career which has landed him at the very top of the theatrical profession; proprietor of a string of theatres which extend as far east as Cincinnati, south to San Diego and north to Winnipeg and Victoria; possessor of a fortune running into seven figures and with an influence which is growing year by year."

"Mr. Pantages is the biggest man in the vaudeville game. He personally superintends his own affairs and has every feature down to the minutest detail at his fingertips. Certain it is, in his own chosen sphere, he has proved himself a genius."

Sought Fortune in America

"As a boy of nine years he left his native Greece to make his fortune in the Americas. Young Pantages ran away from home, working his passage on a French liner to Panama, where French gold and brains were making a futile effort to cut through the waterway which today is just completed by Yankee perseverance. The lad's first job in this hemisphere was selling papers at Panama. Many hard knocks were his portion in those early years. He traveled up and down the Pacific Coast, perfecting himself in the languages of the various countries visited and always learning from the best of

teachers--experience. After three years of strenuous life, especially for a lad of his years, he arrived at San Francisco where his artistic temperament led him. His wanderings continued for some years and he visited all the leading Coast cities."

"It was some time prior to the rush to the Yukon that Mr. Pantages landed in Victoria. Like thousands of others of adventurous spirit he was lured to the North, and in Dawson he was interested in what was known in miners parlance as a "show shop". He prospered in the North, and on his return to Seattle, he put into execution the plan he had long contemplated. He opened the first 10-20-30 cent vaudeville house. It was a small beginning in mean quarters, but the idea has prospered and expanded. It immediately "caught on". Pantages was soon on the high road to success and fortune. With an eye to business he quickly branched out, first with a house in Portland and then with one in Victoria, the old Crystal, located on Yates Street. Tacoma, Spokane and Vancouver were entered and the Pantages circuit began to assume proportions. Within three years he had sprung into prominence and was a figure in the theatrical interests of the East, his string of eighteen theatres permits him to give full time to every act that goes over the circuit. In consequence he is in a position to get the very best attractions and yet present them to the public at popular prices. Mr. Pantages claims he is the pioneer of cheap vaudeville in the West, the first in America to adopt the 10-20-30 cent scale of prices. His judgement has been proven correct, the public has given him its hearty support."

"Mr. Pantages who recently refused an offer of $4,000,000 for his theatrical properties by another vaudeville interest, makes his home in Seattle where he is now completing a magnificent $350,000 theatre in the central section of the City."

Time eventually caught up to Alex Pantages. As motion pictures appeared, his empire, built on stage entertainment started to collapse. This, plus personal troubles, led to the gradual closing down of his circuit. Pantages loved music; his wife Louise Mendenhal was an accomplished violinist. After his empire crumbled, Pantages, overworked and run down, remained in a semi-darkened room for many months and used to have a violinist come and play for him.

Pantages made one last try at a comeback but unfortunately his health failed him.

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE PANTAGES THEATRE, VICTORIA

By EILEEN ALLWOOD

My first experience of the old Pantages theatre was in late 1919 and early 1920, when vaudeville was still being played there. Soon afterwards it closed and the theatre was rented out to amateur groups. On July 19th & 20th Major Prideaux produced "Dandy Dick". September 20th & 21st the Victoria Dramatic Society put on "Charlie's Aunt" with Bruce Bredin as Babs, who was excellent. (Bruce was later killed in the war.) In November there were 4 performances of "The Yeomen of the Guard" with Herbert Kent as musical director, Eva Hart and Bobbie McKenzie and Harry Davis in the lead roles. February 28th & March 1st it was "Message from Mars" with Stewart Clark as the Messenger and Frank Allwood as the tramp. This was so successful that it was taken to Duncan and then to the Avenue Theatre in Vancouver. During the last performance a white stocking came down with the snow - it was the hit of the evening !

There was an interval of three years or so when nothing much happened at the Pantages. The Dramatic Society had its own Little Theatre in Oak Bay - the old Princess, its name changed to "The Playhouse", was operated by Reg Hincks, Stewart Clark, Archie Fairbairn, Bob Webb and Frank Allwood. Many of us gained a semi-professional experience there and received moderate rates of pay.

In 1925 Reg, Frank and I took over the Pantages, christened it "The Coliseum" and ran tab shows and silent movies. We had Eva Hart, Ernie Petch, Peggy Lewis and Will Marshall with us, all popular with Victorians; but in June of that year Reg Hincks went back to the Playhouse to work for Ralph Calldine and took Peggy and Ernie with him. This was a blow to us as Reg had always produced and condensed plays for us while Frank looked after the business. We had no intention of giving up so Frank got busy adapting and writing plays, and looking round for another producer. Soon after that we hired Ruth and Ole Olsen, and American couple. Ruth was a good comedienne and Ole experienced in Producing. Gertrude Burton (now Mrs. Fred Ball, living in Victoria) joined us then as did Jack Cassidy and Gordon Nelson. We still

had Eva Hart, Vangie Beilby, Will Marshall & George Brydon; altogether quite a versatile cast.

The following spring - 1926 - Ed. Redmond arrived from California. He was a man of much theatrical experience and was looking interested in a repertory company. This sounded like a good idea and we were all for it - a change from 1 hour shows and movies.

Gertrude and Vangie starred in our opening 3 act play:- "So this is London" March 1926. Billy Tickle led a three piece orchestra with Malcolm Moore at the piano and we were a real success. Advanced productions (for those days) "Getting Gertie's Garter" - "Up in Mable's Room" - "Why Men Leave Home" and other hilarious farces went over big. A few suspense plays "The Bat" - "Seven Keys to Baldpate" and some musicals:- "45 Minutes to Broadway" etc. were all well received. I remember in 'Baldpate' when Legge-Willis was holding forth about "...cold blooded murder" the Coliseum Cat walked on stage with a kitten in her mouth. Legge-Willis blew up and the audience loved it.

That fall we had trouble with the unions. The stage hands who worked with us were not complaining but the union heads demanded another man on the job, even when there was no change of scene. We did not comply as we could not afford the extra pay cheque so they were all pulled out from the job. We had a meeting with the cast and rather than give in they all agreed to do the work. Sundays were wonderful but hectic. Most of the boys were good carpenters and some could paint scenery quite well. The girls could do the flat painting and Gordon and Ole added the highlights. No one minded a little paint splashed on his sandwich or a drop in his coffee. We organized the performances, the girls looked after the props and the light connections; the boys moved flats and looked after the heavier chores and we changed scenes in 10 seconds less than usual. The next thing to hit us was the Musicians Union and they pulled out Billy Tickle and his orchestra. Mrs. Clifford Warn took over for awhile until she was told to quit - Union orders. We got a young student musician to fill in and even I had to play a couple of times when she was late or sick.

Talkies were now beginning to come in and our business dropped off. We

decided to try musicals again and brought in a girl from Seattle to teach and lead a chorus line and hired snappy costumes, also from Seattle. All went well till pay night then the leader got so tight she fell flat on stage just at the start of Act 2.

January 1927 was depressing but the company was as good as ever. All agreed to a cut in salary if we could carry on and we worked like dogs. Ed Redmond left us and we got Joe Kemper to replace him, but we could not hold out much longer. Salaries were owing all round and we paid some of them off with props, costumes and even some personal jewelry. This was the end for us at the Coliseum, but in spite of being broke I don't think anyone regretted the time we had spent there. The sense of humour and the spirit of co-operation in that group was exceptional.

Gertrude went down to San Jose to play in Ed. Redmond's new company. The Olsens, Jack and Gordon returned to the States, Frank went back to his profession of surveying and the rest of us did odd jobs in town. The Coliseum was dark until Mr. G.L. Nichols went in as manager and Alec Fraser produced for him. I worked there occasionally in sketches and in a pantomime with the Bennett sisters, who had both done concert work and had good voices. The talkies were too great an opposition and so the old Pantages went dark again until .....

There were the usual number of funny incidents that all companies have, but one I remember was when Peggy Lewis was still with us. She fainted just as the curtain was going up. Hincksie told me to put on her dress and hat and go on (as we were not on stage together). I changed my make-up and put her dress on over mine not noticing that mine had panels that dipped below and dangled. Peggy fortunately recovered by the second act.

KNOT GARDEN IN CENTENNIAL SQUARE

Adjacent to McPherson Playhouse

The modern flower garden had its origin centuries ago in the kitchen garden associated with monasteries and castles. Here a selection of herbs was grown to flavor the products of the kitchen and provide medicants. Gradually, the herbs were planted in some sort of orderly arrangement, and paths were lined with discarded soup bones, stones, or brick. Finally, lavender and boxwood became the favorite edging materials and flowers were substituted for the herbs. To provide a pleasant appearance in winter, the beds were constructed in intricate designs or "knots" and the paths were lined with boxwood and surfaced with stone of various colours.

During the Elizabethan period the floral Knot Garden reached its peak of popularity. Probably, the best samples of these gardens have been preserved at Hampton Court in England. They are identical in every way with the original design except that gardeners have taken full advantage of the modern range of colourful dwarf flowers which were unavailable in the time of Queen Elizabeth.

The Knot Garden in Centennial Square in Victoria, B.C., is a direct replica of one in Hampton Court gardens except that it is compressed slightly into a wedge shape to conform with the layout of the Square.

Flowers have been selected not over ten inches in height. They include the following:

> Fibrous rooted and tuberous rooted begonias, alyssum, tagetes, dwarf marigold, lobelia in summer, and English daisies, dwarf wallflower, viola, pansy, primrose, forget-me-not and dwarf bulbs in the spring.

This is probably the only garden of this kind in Canada.

DEC 6/69 TIMES

McPherson Best Building

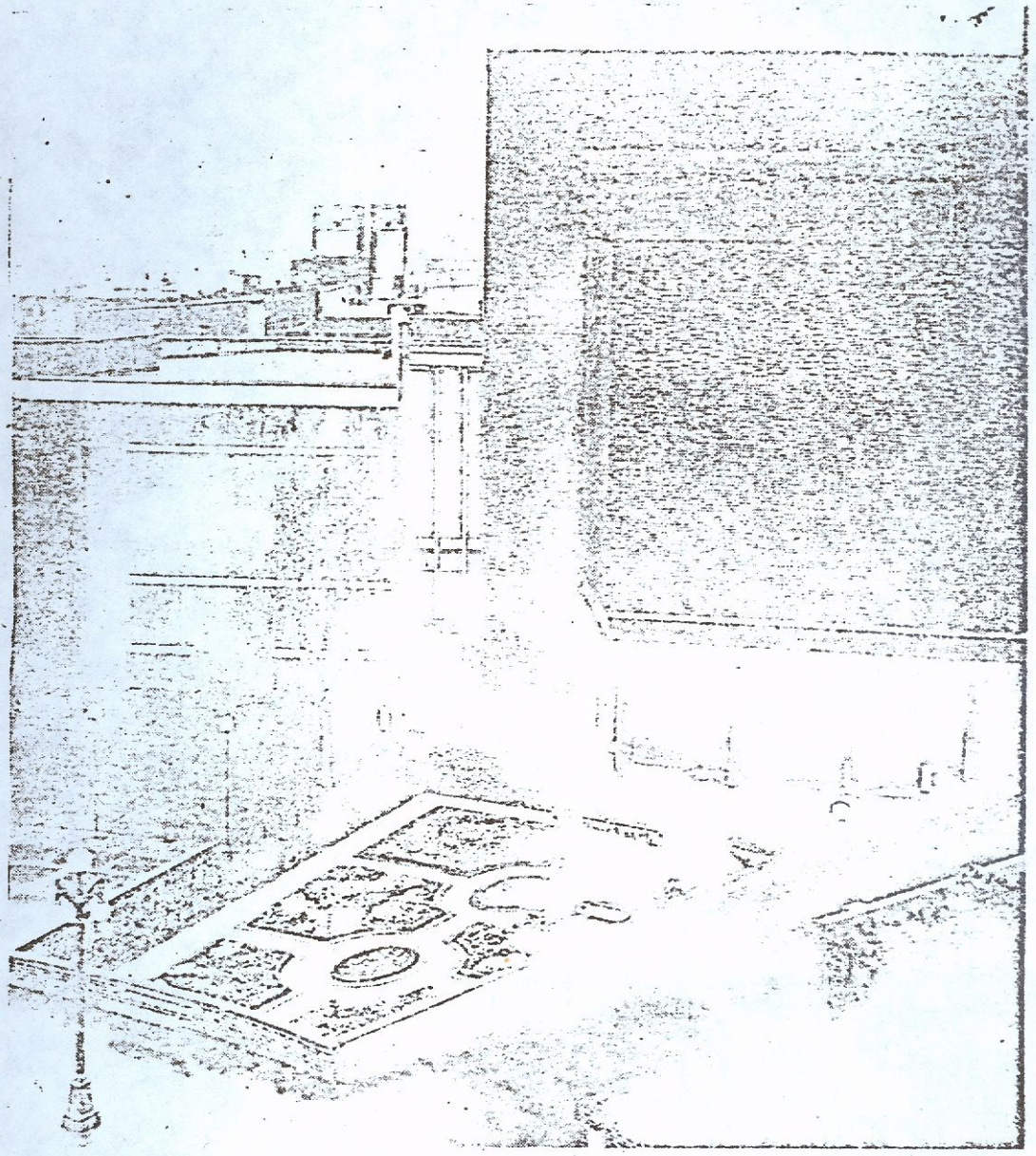
McPherson Playhouse Friday was chosen as best building designed on the Island in the last five years by a panel of Vancouver architects.

An Architecture Institute of British Columbia design excellence award went to Victoria architect Alan Hodgson, 404 Henry.

In the judges' assessment McPherson Playhouse was called "a bold simple statement."

The architect "was uninhibited by the existing structure (the old playhouse) in his design."

Judges for the award, presented for the first time, were: Ray Toby, chairman of the Vancouver Design Panel; Wolfgang Gerson, head of the University of British Columbia school of architecture; and Vancouver architect Richard Archambault.



McPHERSON THEATRE, - award winner for Alan J. Hodgson.

The Daily Colonist.

(ESTABLISHED 1858)

VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1971

Centennial Square Wins B.C. Prize

Outstanding Civic Display

Victoria's Centennial Square Thursday was named first provincial winner of the Park and Tilford trophy, given for outstanding civic beautification.

Announcement of the award was made in Vancouver.

The panel of judges selected the Victoria square as provincial winner over five other regional winners. Centennial Square had been previously named leader in the Vancouver Island region.

Other regional winners: Lower Mainland, Pacific Palisades, Vancouver; Central Okanagan, Vernon civic centre complex; Kootenays, Cominco Ltd., Trail; Central Interior, Kamloops city hall; North-central Interior, provincial government building, Quesnel.

The beautification competition, which began in 1968, received a record 159 nominations this year from B.C. communities, the first year the contest has been open to all of B.C.

In previous years, it had been confined to the Lower Mainland area.

Architects for Centennial Square were Clive Campbell, Allan Hodgson, Rod Clack, J. C. Wilkinson, Clive Justice, Wade Stockdill Armour and Partners, R. W. Siddall Associates, John di Castri and Donald Wagg.

Architect Rod Clack, Victoria's planner for special projects when the square was built, said in an interview from Ottawa Thursday he was "delighted and happy" the project had won a prize but added he was "disgusted with the present state of planning in Victoria."

Clack said he "feels very sad at the lack of direction shown in looking into the character of Victoria. I am sure the Reid project is a serious detriment to the city."

The architect stressed the special nature of the city, saying "It's in danger of going if people copy Vancouver or Toronto."

Clack suggested it was time Victoria city planners carried through the total concept of Centennial and Bastion squares by building the pedestrian walkways that were planned to link the squares.

"People seem determined to destroy what is a beautiful city. I blame it on a lack of political and professional leadership."

Clack said it was not good enough that citizens should be forced to adopt a negative attitude toward developers.

"An effective planning department at city hall would be and should be in a position to offer the public alternatives," said Clack.

Clack was appointed chief architect to the National Planning Commission in Ottawa, Jan. 1, 1968, and he is still in that position.

Victoria's Acting Mayor Percy Frampton accepted the award Thursday night at a ceremony in Georgia Hotel from R. G. Bentall, who last year accepted the award for the Bentall Centre, Vancouver.

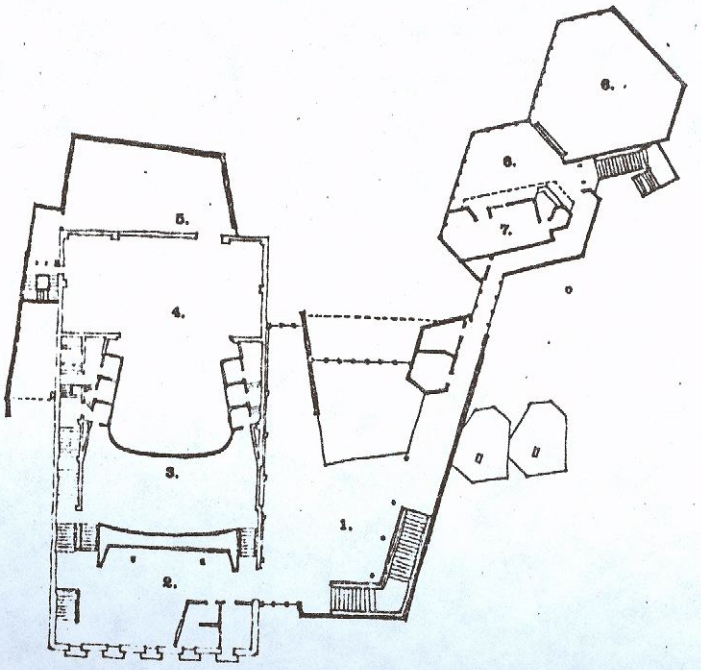
Judges for the competition included Fred Hollingsworth, president of the Architectural Institute of B.C.; Prof. Sam Lipson, president, Professional Engineers' Association of B.C.; Guy Spencer, executive director, B.C. division, Community Planning Association of Canada; Clive Justice, president, B.C. Society of Landscape Architects.

Any project or building that was thought to enhance the beauty of a community was eligible.

Completed in 1965, Centennial Square includes the senior citizen centre, the McPherson Playhouse and restaurant, a fountain and plaza, remodelled city hall, police station, parkade and shopping facilities.

It was built to commemorate Victoria's centennial year in 1962.

VICTORIAN REVIVAL



Balcony floor plan shows new construction in heavy black lines. 1, 2: Balcony lounge. 3: Balcony seating. 4: Stage and curtain loft. 5: Scene storage, Green Room, etc. 6: Restaurant. 7: Kitchen.

MORE and more, in this modern era, we are learning to appreciate the elegant design and rich ornamentation which was popular in the early years of this century. We still have a few remnants of this charmingly opulent period left in the older sections of our West Coast cities, but they are sadly neglected and seldom admired.

An exciting exception is Victoria's McPherson Playhouse, a wonderfully appropriate feature of the new Centennial Square in the heart of the city. Built in 1913 by Alexander Pantages, the Klondike concert-hall waiter who became one of America's leading showmen in the heyday of vaudeville, it was designed by Victoria architect Jesse Warren in the luxurious baroque style characteristic of the time.

In later years it became as outdated and neglected as vaudeville itself, its elegant decor lost in the grime of time. Eventually the building was bought by Victoria businessman Thomas Shanks McPherson, who willed it to the city on his death in 1962, along with nearly $700,000 to pay for its restoration and expansion. The original building has been faithfully restored by architect Alan Hodgson, and effectively combined with new additions carried out in a dramatic modern style.

Operated by the City of Victoria, the McPherson Playhouse now presents an impressive array of theatrical events throughout the year and serves as the focal point for a very active local theatre movement including such outstanding groups as the Bastion Theatre Studio, which is staging several excellent productions in the Playhouse this season.

EARL THEATRE IN VICTORIA

1859 Earliest theatre, located in the Assembly Building on Fort Street.

1859 March: 1st touring company (Chapman Touring Company) came from San Francisco.

1859 Old Block House (Reid's Wharf) ...storehouse for salmon, converted into ballroom. 2 or 3 dramatic presentations by officers of HM Fleet.

1859 Colonial Theatre (afterwards Lyceum) Government Street (later, site of Victoria House).

Hall in Royal Hotel, Wharf Street (later Earle & Stemmler spice factory).

Moore's Hall (later Omineca, on Yates).

The New Idea ...basement, corner Government & Johnson St.

Theatre Royal (converted HBC Warehouse on Government St.) seated about 500. Demolished 1882.

1862 City's first Amateur Drama Club organized October 30.

1862 Touring Dillon troupe played 'Othello'.
1st Shakespeare performed by Charles & Ellen Keane of San Francisco in Theatre Royal. 11-year old St. Louis College student recruited by the company for role of Duke of York in Richard III (student was David Belasco).

1885 Cornerstone laid for 'The Victoria' at Douglas and View (Eaton's now on site). 1000 people attended Opening-Monday, October 19, 1885 - 'Pirates of Penzance' by an amateur company. Conductor: Prof.E.Pferdner. S.M. Mrs. S. Wootton. Leader of Orchestra Prof. Lintott.

1885 Daily Colonist of Oct. 17, 1885: First Theatre in Upper Flat of large wooden building called 'The Star & Garter Hotel', later the Masonic Hall, Government Street.

1894 A.O.U.W. Hall, 808 Yates St. opened, later Princess Theatre, then Playhouse (1923), then Plaza. (As Plaza, had 15-piece orchestra, at the cottage piano, Gertrude Huntley Green.)

1895 Thomas Keene played in Hamlet, Romeo & Juliet, Richard III at Victoria Theatre, Jan 11, 12.

1899 Vaudeville in Victoria for 1st time, when Searchlight Theatre was built by Jim McConahy on Fort Street. Alexander Pantages called it the Orpheum later.

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1913 Royal Victoria opened in December, with Kismet, starring Otis Skinner.

1913 Pantages opened, later called the Empire, the York, then Totem. (Another report says Pantages opened May 1914).

1910 1st Pantomime in Old Victoria Theatre.

SHOWS AND ARTISTS

Old Victoria Theatre:

Sir Johnston Forbes Robertson: The Passing of the 3rd Floor Back.

Constance Collier & William Faversham in Julius Caesar.

Ethel Barrymore
Josef Hoffman
Fritz Kreisler
Marie Lloyd
Anna Held
Sir John Martin Harvey
Richard Mansfield
Alexander Salvini
Maurice Barrymore
Joseph F. Sheehan: Il Trovatore (November 1912)
Jan Paderewski

Royal Victoria:

(Colonist, Sun. July 1, 1917) Commencing Mon. July 9 for 1 week: Sarah Bernhardt in Mothers of France.
Forbes Robertson: The Light that Failed.
Martin Harvey: The Only Way
George Arliss: Disraeli
Robert Mantell, Gertrude Hoffman: The Whip
William Faversham: Shakespearean rep.
De Wolf Hopper, Nat Goodwin, Henry Irving, Marie Tempest.
Peg O'Neill: Peg O' My Heart
Billie Burke, Anna Pavlova, Maude Adams, John Drew, Rose Stahl, Ruth St. Denis.
Gilbert & Sullivan operas.

Pantages:

Al Jolson: Honeymoon Express
Robert Mantell: Richelieu
Peggy's Follies.

...3