



COMING ATTRACTION—Film titles no longer grace the marquee of the Park Theatre in Highland Park which is to become part of People's Department Store. The theatre opened in 1936 and symbolized the faith of a country recovering from the depression.

Trolleys and Park Theatre; now they are both gone

By Frank Whitaker

Like the demise of the trolley car and the corner cigar store, another famous Highland Park landmark faded from the modern scene last week with the closing of the Park Theatre here, and announcement that the 27-year-old cinema house will become part of People's Department Store.

Born just six years after the '29 crash that sank this country into its worst depression in history, "The building of the Park" became more or less a symbol of the renewed hope and faith that characterized the recovery period through the late '30s and into the booming '40s.

The year was 1936. Franklin D. Roosevelt was in the third year of his first and crucial term as president; Karl's Shoe Store at 5709 N. Figueroa St. was advertising Mule Skin work shoes at \$1.99 a pair and Boys Market at Ave. 56 and Monte Vista was selling bread at 7 cents a loaf and butter at 30 cents a pound. Up in the 6000 block on N. Figueroa St. you could buy a three-bedroom home for \$2250

with little or no money down. A 1935 Ford, less than a year old and "almost like new" could be had for \$500 total cost.

THEATER

That's the year David L. Cantor and his partners sold their chain of theatres in Washington state and moved to Highland Park, because "There are more indications of present and future improvements here than in any place we have seen in Southern California."

For their new theatre adventure they picked an empty lot on N. Figueroa near Ave. 59, which at that time was owned by F. G. McNamara and Walter Dibben, and began construction of a movie theatre or cinema that had no name. That came later.

The March 13, 1936 issue of the Highland Park News-Herald described it this way: "Excavation for the foundation is completed and actual construction is expected to begin today or tomorrow . . . The new structure will be of modern intimate type with a seating capacity of 650 and with all the latest equipment and furnishings. There will be a lobby on

Figueroa Street through one of the store buildings fronting the new building on that street." It was to cost \$50,000.

NAME CONTEST

On March 27 of the same year, new theatre owner Cantor launched a community-wide "name the theatre" contest, with the person submitting the best name for the movie house to receive a life-time pass to the theater. Said Cantor in announcing the contest: "We want a short name, easy to remember . . . that will identify with Highland Park as a community-family theatre."

More than 1000 entries came pouring in within two weeks, and 1500 were received before the contest closed on April 17, 1936.

There were so many entries

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that contest chairman J. W. Ivers had to delay announcing of the winner for two weeks while he and his panel of businessmen-judges picked the winner. Amazingly, 17 people sent in the winning name "Park Theatre."

Top prize in the contest, a life pass to the theater, was awarded to the first to submit the name "Park" for the new theater — Miss Joanna Bartley, who at that time lived at 5050 Almaden Dr.

Mrs. C. A. Smith, then 80 years old and living at 401 N. Ave. 61, received a year pass for submitting the same name accompanied by a letter pointing out that "Park" was especially suitable because it was easy to remember and because the theater "is in the center of Highland Park."

The other 15 persons who also submitted "Park," each received a one-month pass.

GRAND OPENING

Street decorations, banners, bright spotlights and Hollywood celebrities marked the opening of the new Park Theater on May 29, 1936.

To go to the new movie house cost you 20 cents if you got there before dark (6 p.m.), and 25 cents evenings. The children got in for 10 cents, day or night. The theater stayed open from 1:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m.

Strangely enough, but unknown at that time, a Highland Park boy was staring in the movie that played on open-

ing night. Joel McCrea, who used to play in Sycamore Park and visit one of his favorite aunts who lived just across Figueroa St. from the park, starred that night with Miriam Hopkins and Merle Oberon in "These Three." Second film on the double feature bill was "The Return of Jimmy Valentine" with Roger Pryer and Charlotte Henry.

GABLE AND HARLOW

Clark Gable and Jean Harlow opened the second week at the "Park" in "Wife Versus Secretary," and the theater was on its way to a colorful 27-year career in Highland Park.

The "Park" endured and prospered, while other theaters in this area were born and died in the span of a few years. Among those that have folded were Franklin Theater, Ave. 55 and North Figueroa; York Theater, 4949 York Blvd.; Sierra

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Theater, Eagle Rock Blvd.; Arroyo Theater, Ave. 26 and N. Figueroa; and Glassell Theater, Ave. 35 and Eagle Rock Blvd.

The Park Theater, where housewives escaped a few hours from dull chores, where young girls waited for the war to end and loved ones to come home, where teenagers worshipped their movie idols and children were dropped off Saturday while Mom went shopping, is gone now.

Walls that have heard laughter and seen tears, that have reverberated to the crash of cannon and thundering cattle herds and soft words of love spoken by the greatest screen lovers of all time, will be stripped of the rust-brown drapes; fluted columns will come down; bands of peach and gold will be erased.

The old theater has served its purpose well — to entertain

millions of people living or just passing through Highland Park.

Work will begin on the structure this week to convert it for use by People's Department Store, which is expanding into the building.

When remodeling is completed, some 6000 square feet of space will be added to People's store, making it nearly twice the store's present size.

The old is expected to give way to the new in a growing community like Highland Park, but many will remember happy hours spent in the "Park," and will feel a moment of quick, nostalgic pain at its passing.