

SAN PEDRO'S CABRILLO THEATRE

By Tom Owen

Over the years three sizeable theater circuits have chosen to build in San Pedro. In all three cases the theaters have enjoyed long and successful careers which more than justified their owners' faith in the local theater-going public. The first of these chain-owned houses was the Globe which was built in 1912 by a group of Los Angeles businessmen. The second was the Cabrillo, built in 1923, and the third was the still standing Warner, built in 1931. In the case of the Cabrillo and the Warner, these represented capital outlays running into the thousands of dollars made by state-wide motion picture circuits.

West Coast Theaters, the owners of the Cabrillo, came into existence in 1919 and by 1925 was the largest single group of motion picture theaters in California. Although their holdings extended as far north as Oakland, the greatest concentration of their theaters was in Southern California and the greater Los Angeles area in particular. Some of the theaters were held by lease only; others, like the Cabrillo, were owned by the firm which was also a realty corporation. The founders of the chain were four interesting gentlemen: Adolph Raimish, a realtor and owner of the Adolphus Theatre in Los Angeles; the brothers Mike and Abe Gore, who in 1919 were building contractors; and, perhaps the most vital link in their partnership, Sol Lesser. Lesser was the group's theatrical connection. The chain existed as a separate entity until the late 1920s when sales of stock to William Fox brought it into the

nation's largest group of motion picture theaters under the name of Fox-West Coast Theaters. Today, what is left of Mr. Fox's empire is known as Mann Theaters.

The announcement for construction of West Coast's San Pedro house is impressive for a company just three years old:

"Theater and stores—Milwaukee Building Company (the firm of Meyer & Holler, by any other name) are preparing plans for a two-story store, theater and office building at San Pedro for West Coast Theaters, Inc. The theater will be of concrete construction and will seat 1600 people. There will be eleven stores (they were all on the ground floor) of brick construction. The second story will contain 17 office suites."

In round figures, the theater chain was investing some \$500,000 in their San Pedro location. As usual in the 1920s, the expensive concrete auditorium portion of the building was the most costly feature of the structure, with the office portions fronting on the street constructed of less expensive brick.

In the parlance of the twenties, this was to be a "combination house," that is, it would be capable of housing both motion pictures and stage productions with a full working stage. If the opening notices are to be believed, it would appear that the theater opened with 1535 seats and this accounts for the rounded figure of 1600. However, when the theater was wired for sound in 1928, the seating was noted as 1496 by the Western Electric Company who provided the sound equipment. This figure came from the theater seating chart. Over the next thirty years the theater was reseated at least once, possibly twice. In addition to the stores, offices and large auditorium, portions of the roof were to be used as a loggia where an excellent view in all directions was available to those who chose not to view the movie.

In the case of the designers, San Pedro was again highly complimented. Gabriel Meyer and Phillip Holler, in 1922 simply styled as "The Milwaukee Building Company," were in due time to provide the plans for what is often referred to as the famous movie palace of them all—the stellar Grauman's Chinese in Hollywood. In the next few years the firm would design the first of Southern California's Egyptian styled theaters—the Hollywood Egyptian. At Pomona the firm drew plans for a West Coast Theater with an Egyptian exterior and what appears to have been an Assyrian interior. At Fullerton they planned for the Alician Court Theatre—more recently just the Fox Fullerton—designed along the lines of a Greek temple. And across the harbor at Long Beach their plans for the West Coast Theater made use of designs based on the Palladio of Italian fame. For San Pedro, the Cabrillo was planned to reflect the Spanish and Mexican past with a lush Spanish decor.

For a name, San Pedro was once again very fortunate. The West Coast Company showed very little imagination in naming their various theaters, the two favorite cognomens being either the "West Coast Theater" or just the "California." Long Beach and Santa Ana both have theaters which still use the name West Coast; San Bernardino also had a West Coast which in time was changed to the "Crest"; and the San Jose house featured the name "California" as did their Anaheim and Pomona holdings. Eventually these theaters were renamed "Fox." It would appear that the Cabrillo was one of the few theaters where a name specially related to the community and its past was chosen and after the transition of management the Fox Corporation

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The south side of Sixth Street between Beacon and Palos Verdes in 1971. Survivors of more than 70 years, now gone.



The old Globe Theatre on the northwest corner of Sixth and Palos Verdes Streets. August, 1965.