

Pine Bluff Community Theater

Experiencing a chance at performing in a historical theater was one of the greatest times of my life. The Community Theatre of Pine Bluff has existed since 1889 and I am happy to say that I was a part of history that has actually performed on its stage. It is now being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

The Community Theatre was originally constructed as a furniture store then remodeled and opened in May, 1922. At first, it was un-named, but then a contest was held for a prize of \$100 to give the theatre a name. One-hundred people shared the prize for naming it the Berbig Theatre Company. Later on, it was changed as it went from a community-owned business to a family-owned business. The Bonner family, as the new owners, named it simply, The Community Theatre. It stayed opened for the community until the early 1950s when a fire broke out from the nitrate film in the projection room. After many years of neglect and destruction, the Community Theatre was sold, restored, and reopened once again.

My experiences have been with two different Christmas plays. With a local after-school child care center, we got together and formed a production of "The Nutcracker" one year and "The Best/Worst Christmas Pageant Ever" for another year. The Community Theatre was one of the oldest one-screen theatres in Arkansas. Now it is just a stage that seats approximately 180 people. Some of us got to actually sit in the ticket booth and sell tickets, popcorn, and drinks along with being able to perform. What fun! Our families enjoyed seeing us perform and it seemed so professional. The antique atmosphere was a little eerie, but yet fun at the same time.

On the websites for Historic Preservation, there is a picture of the front of the theatre, and the sign reads, "Mrs.B's presents the Nutcracker, Friday, Dec. 19 at 6pm". This was so neat to actually see one of my plays displayed for everyone to see.

Back when the Community Theatre reopened in 1995, they had what was called "Wednesday off Main" where every Wednesday, anyone could go and show off their talents to the local public. The theatre sold popcorn and drinks, but anyone could bring their lunch. There was even a soundproof room where the moms could take their children that were crying and watch the movie that was showing. Many famous stars have appeared here at the theatre to perform, like Fay Wray, Gloria De Haven, Van Johnson, Jane Russell, Cameron Matheson, and many more. The last movie ever played there was *Phantom of the Opera*.

The Community Theatre of Pine Bluff is a large part of historical Jefferson County. Entertainment shares a big part of this theatre to this day and I am proud to share my experiences with everyone.

Bibliography

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