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Spring 1975

No. 1



ESCAPE WITH ME

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When the motion picture was introduced in 1895 the American public was ready for it. Social change and economic growth in the late 19th Century had created a mass audience with means, however small, to pay for entertainment. Showing simultaneously through the country and sharing production costs with a low unit-price, motion pictures emerged as a truly democratic form of amusement. This mass popularity was enhanced by a sense of reality and immediacy in film which could not be duplicated by vaudeville or legitimate theater.

Fantasy, romance, adventure, and comedy were the film devices for satisfying the public need. In turn, motion picture theaters themselves reflected these forms of escapism. In place of remodeled theaters or meeting halls there appeared dream palaces, rich structures to be seen as well as places to lapse into a personal fantasy world.

By 1930 Portland, Oregon, had nearly 60 motion picture theaters, one for every 8,000 persons. The names of these entertainment palaces reinforced the escape function of motion pictures, suggesting lofty vagueness—The Liberty, The Majestic, The Dream—or romance—The Oriental, The Egyptian, The Bagdad, The Hollywood.

The buildings, with ornate interiors featuring statuary, murals, subdued lighting and soft carpets, provided an elite atmosphere for the mass audience, an atmosphere that had been available before only in legitimate theaters or mortuaries.

The baroque style, which reached a climax and conclusion in 1929 with the opening of the Fox Theater in San Francisco, gave way to a more sober plushness in the 1930s. Though the number of theaters decreased, the public demand for escapist entertainment during the Depression, coupled with the great popular success of sound film, developed in the late twenties, supported the motion picture industry at a time when other businesses failed.

The photographs in this essay are from the Angelus Studio Collection, University of Oregon Library. They document the physical features of Portland motion picture theaters from 1925 to 1935. They show the changes in style, the rise of the "Talkies," and the relationship of theater to patron. On another level, the photographs document the popular pastime of "going to the movies," the crowds under the marquees, the ornate lobbies and auditoriums, and the private darkness of the movie itself.

DAVID FEATHERSTONE
CURATOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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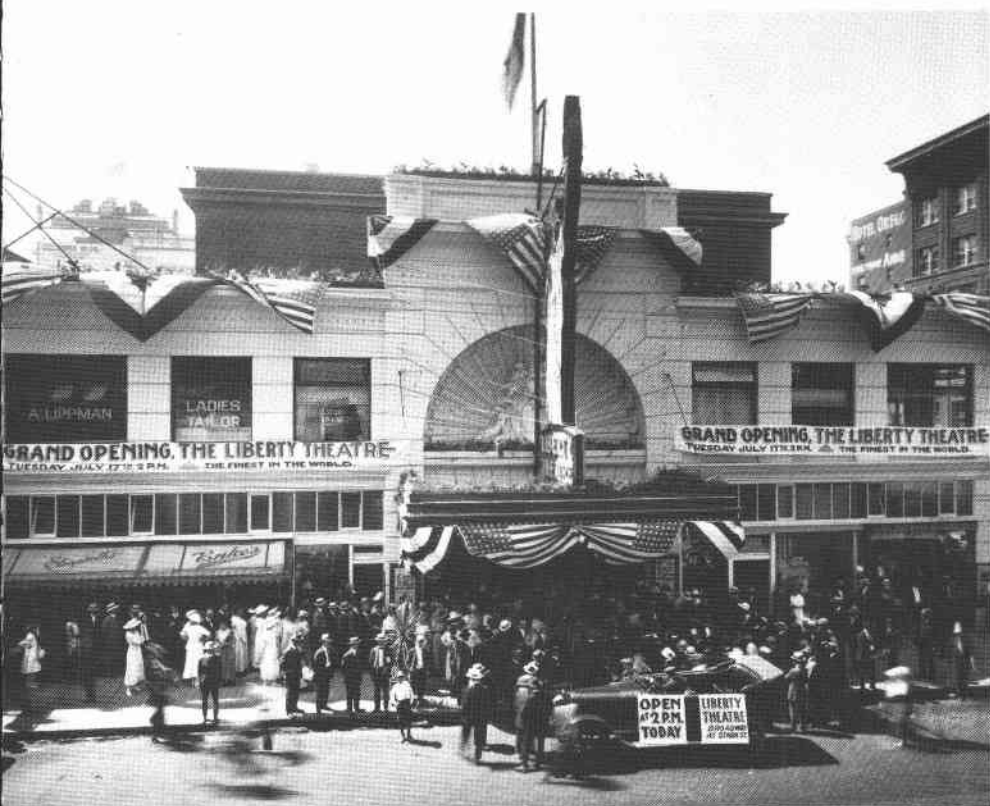
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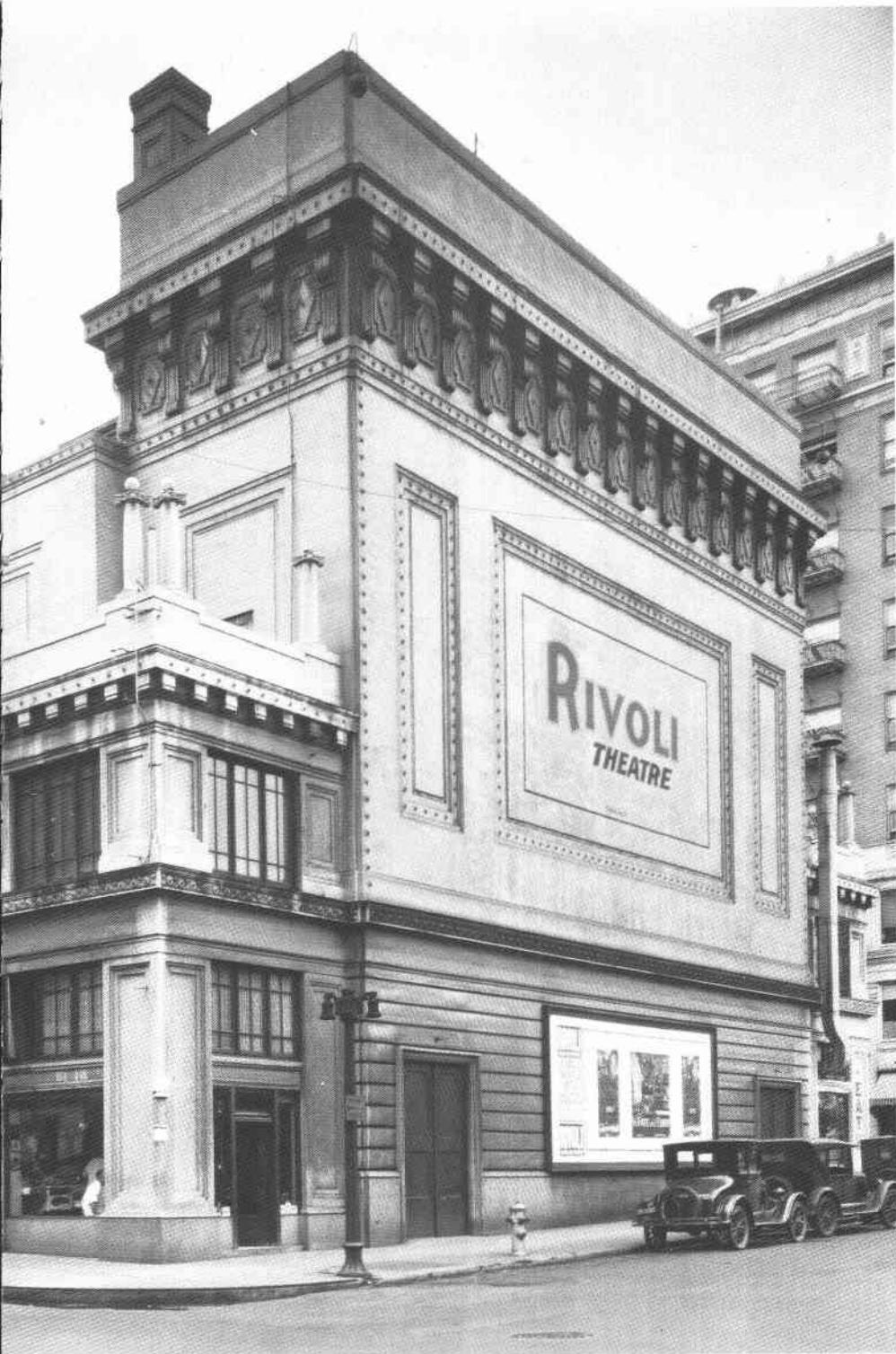
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ESCAPE WITH ME

PORTLAND MOVIE THEATERS
1925-1935
A PHOTO ESSAY





ADMISSION PRICES

ADMISSION TAX TOTAL

ADULTS 31¢ 4¢ **35¢**

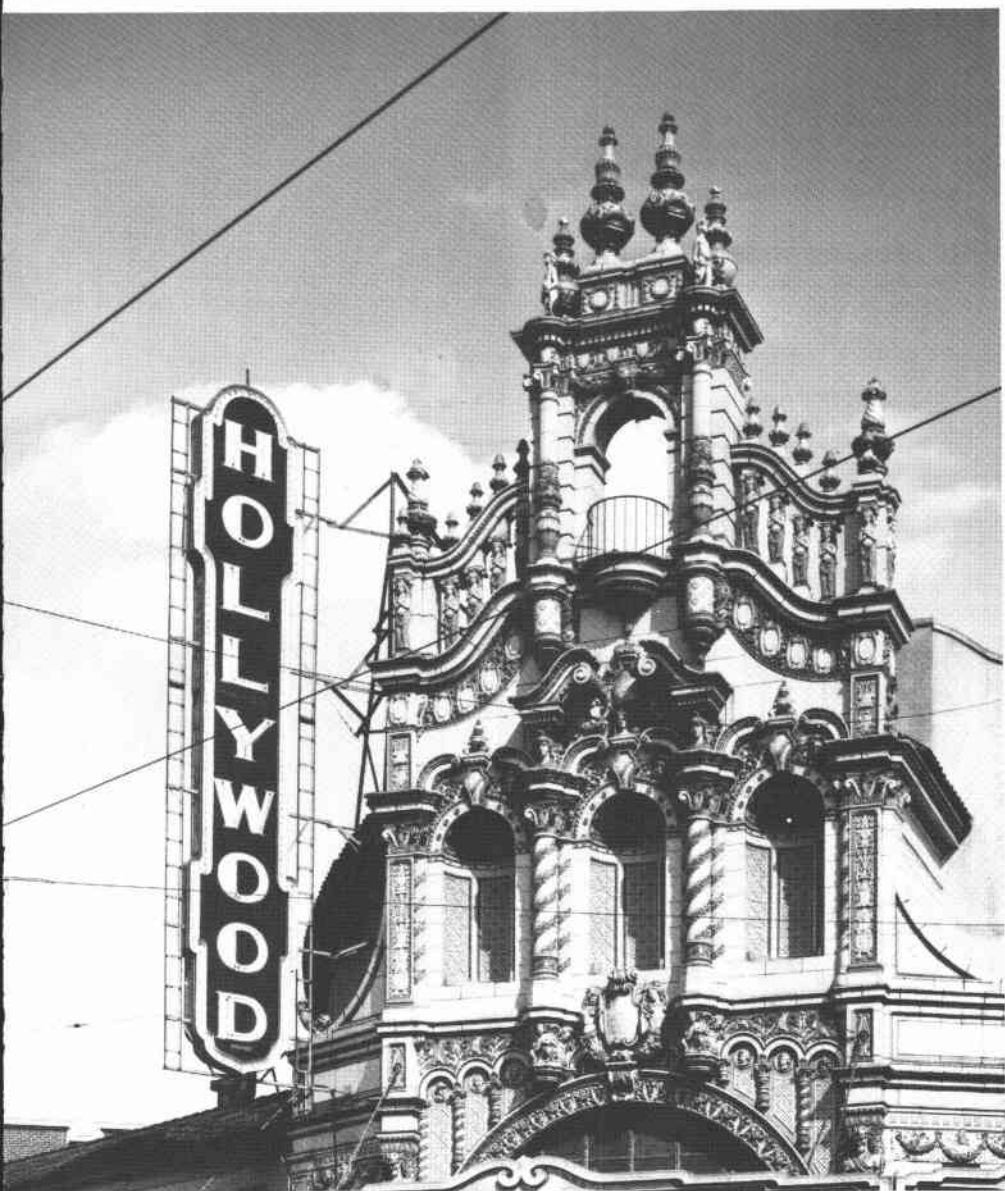
CHILDREN **10¢**

LOGES 54¢ 6¢ **60¢**

ALL CHILDREN NOT IN ARMS
MUST HAVE TICKETS

Cont
FROM

OPEN
10⁴⁵ A.M.



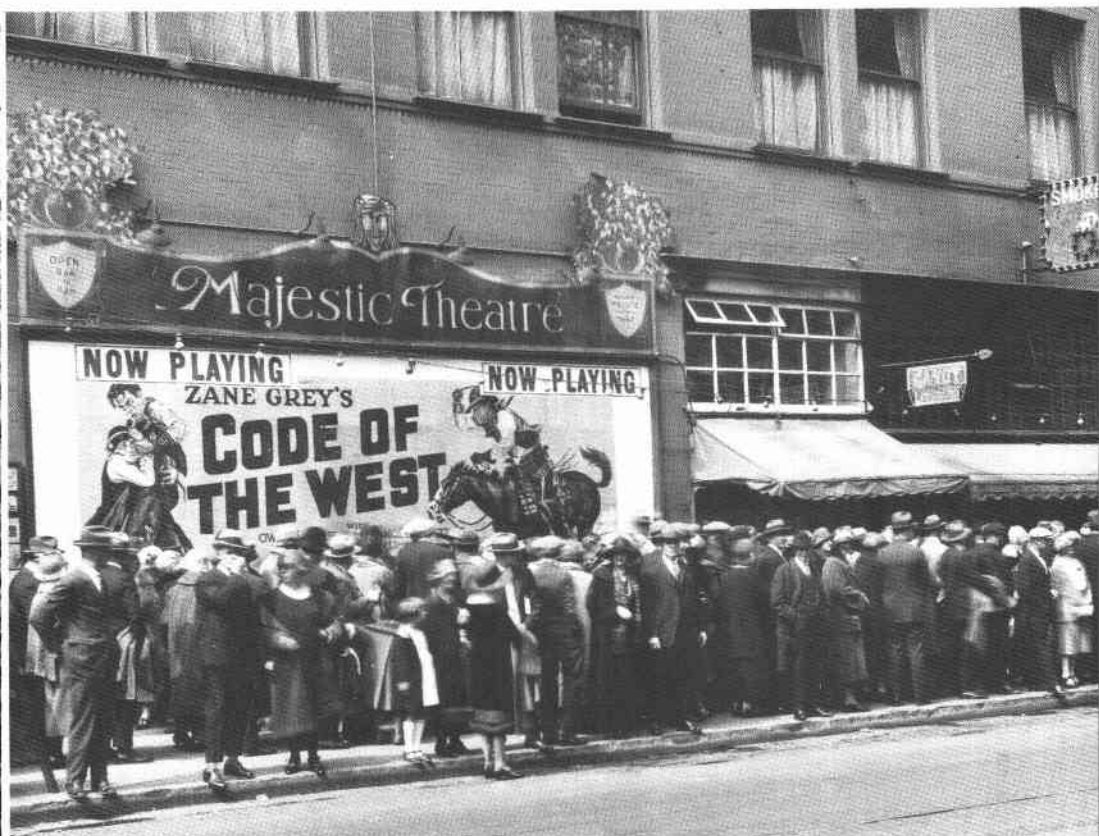














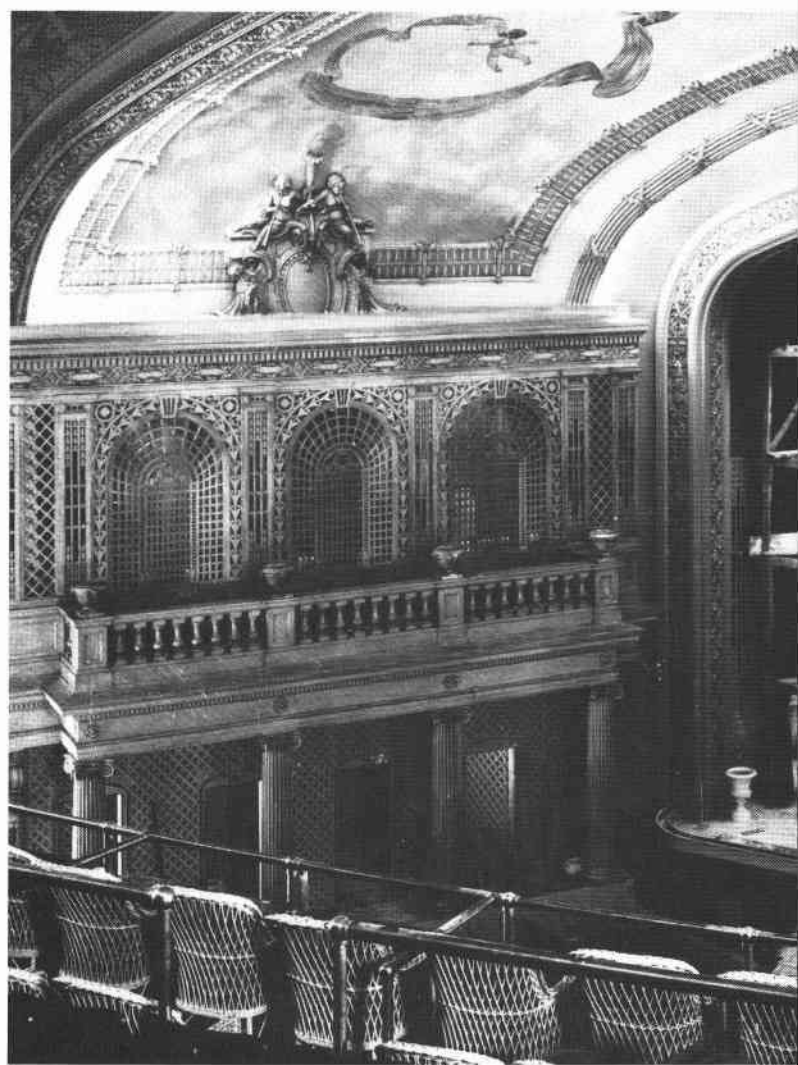


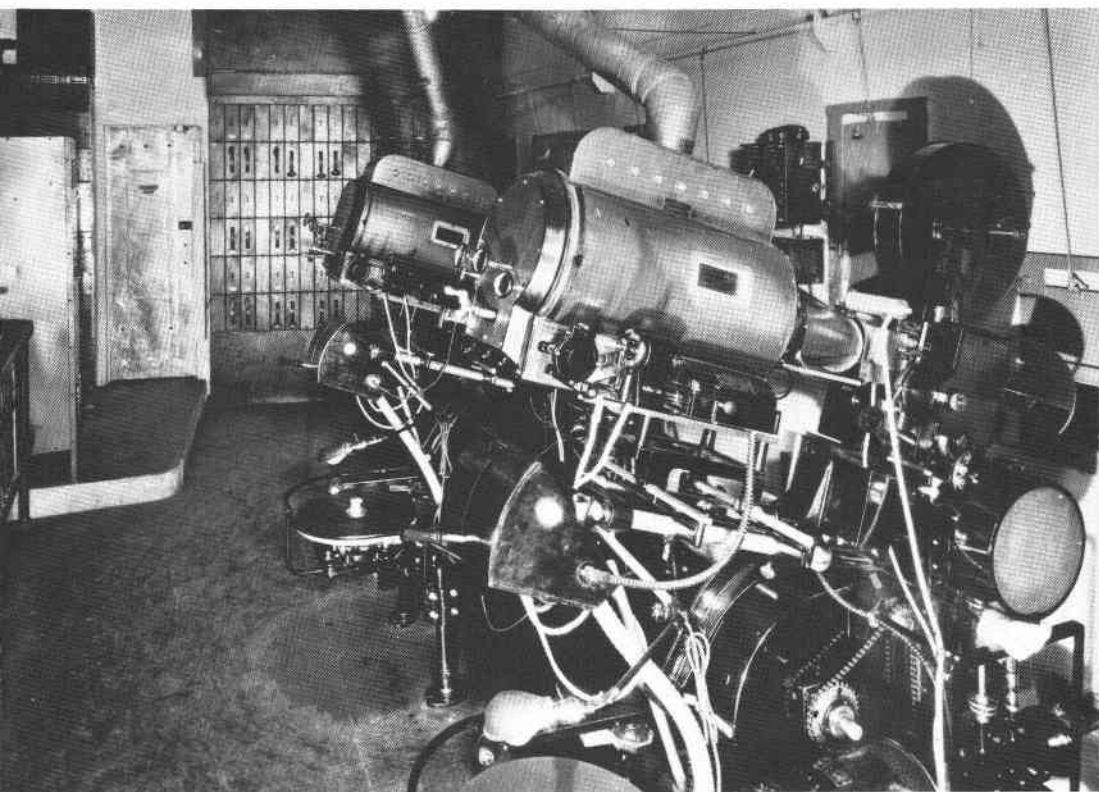














ERNIE RUSSELL



Executive
Wagon
Scored to
the Pictured
Presentations

SUNDAYS
AT 10:45
Liberty
Song
Contest

Outlet of Plan
Music by the Sea

WHEELING

Known From Coast to Coast as

THE LAST WORD IN
THEATRE LUXURY AND
ENTERTAINMENT





**G SUBJECT
DELICATELY
HANDLED**

**A
VITA
PICTUR**



The Sensation
of Hollywood

— the gorgeous
water revel scene —

The Screen's Newest *and*
Most Sensational *"Find"*

The most magnetic of all
the Screen's lovers —

Alder Theater

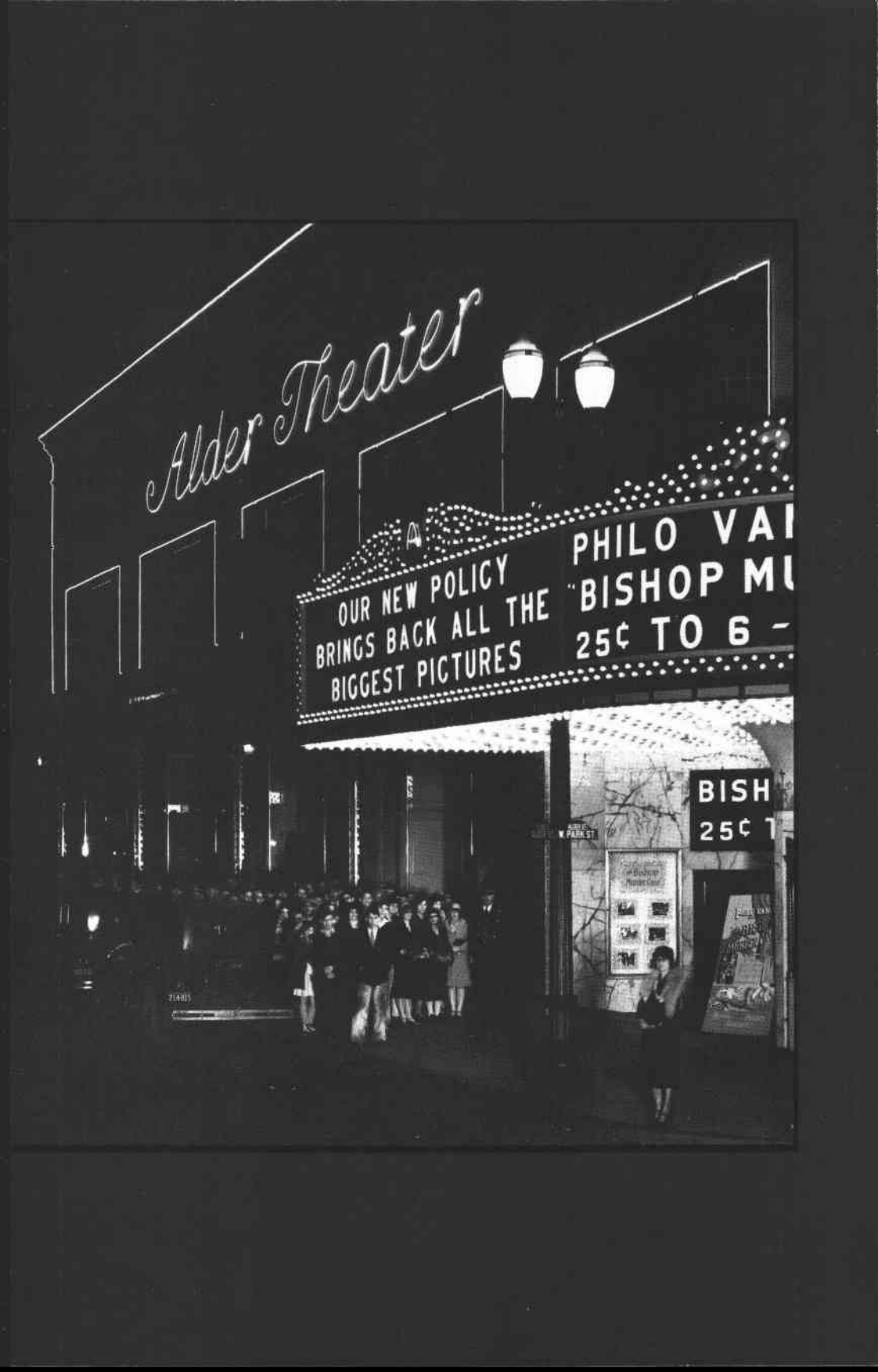
OUR NEW POLICY
BRINGS BACK ALL THE
BIGGEST PICTURES

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"BISHOP M
25¢ TO 6 -

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25¢ T

JOSE
PARK ST

71401



The Angelus Studio Collection, housed in the Special Collections Division of the University Library, contains over 25,000 photographic negatives from Portland's Angelus Commercial Studio. An extensive visual record of the development of Portland and western Oregon from 1900 to 1940, the negatives are only partly the work of photographers from the Angelus studio. Fred N. Clark, owner of the studio, recognizing the historic value of photographs beyond their initial commercial use, purchased the negative collections of two other Portland studios, the George M. Weister Company, and Arthur M. Prentiss' Oregon Commercial Studio.

Weister's photography began in 1895 as a sideline to his photographic supply business, but by 1914 he had become a full-time photographer. He traveled widely, and by 1907 he had photographed in many parts of the west coast from Los Angeles to Alaska. In later years he traveled extensively in Oregon, leaving a view of life in the state without strong commercial overtones.

Arthur M. Prentiss was a partner in Benjamin A. Gifford's studio until he started his own business in 1920. Even though he traveled often to the Oregon Coast and in the Columbia Gorge, he was much more associated with activities in Portland than was Weister. The negatives at the University of Oregon follow Prentiss' work through 1925, although the Oregon Commercial Studio continued to operate for eight years after that.

Fred Clark's Angelus Studio, established in 1911, took a much more commercial approach in its work. Photographing primarily in the city, these negatives document the growth of Portland, its buildings, transportation, industry, and indirectly, its cultural life.

This combined body of photographs spans 40 years of Oregon history. The original purpose of most of the images is not known, but as important visual records they provide valuable insight to the past. Because the collection has never been adequately indexed, public accessibility has been difficult. In addition, the inherent instability of photographic materials, combined with years of inadequate storage conditions, has been responsible for the loss of a number of negatives through spontaneous decomposition and decay.

A 1937 WPA project collated the three collections, dividing them into broad but unhelpful categories such as "Buildings," "Agriculture," and "Scenic." In 1940 the Oregon Historical Records Survey, another WPA project, more completely described and indexed 600 of the negatives, but this smaller group was never separated from the body of the collection. A current Library project is in the process of creating a computer generated index for the Angelus Studio Collection, as well as other important holdings in the Library's photography collection. At the same time, the negatives are being cleaned, copied when necessary, and archivally repackaged in order to insure their continued survival as resource material.