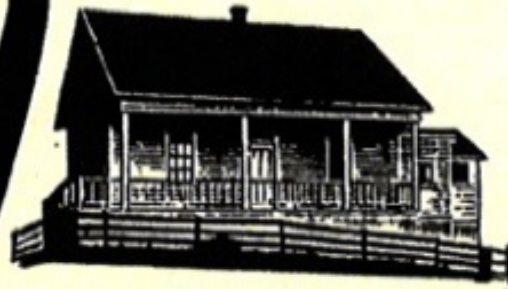


Summer
2024



Arcata

HISTORICAL SITES SOCIETY OF

The Arcata Theater

by Shelley Mitchell

The Arcata Theater is a familiar sight standing strong on G street. Its Art Deco Marquee has been a landmark for nearly 100 years. It is also an interesting building with a fascinating history.

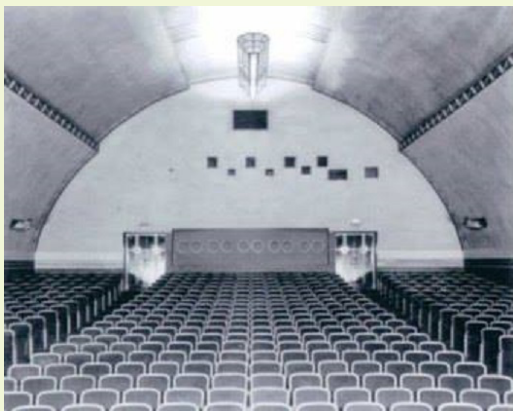
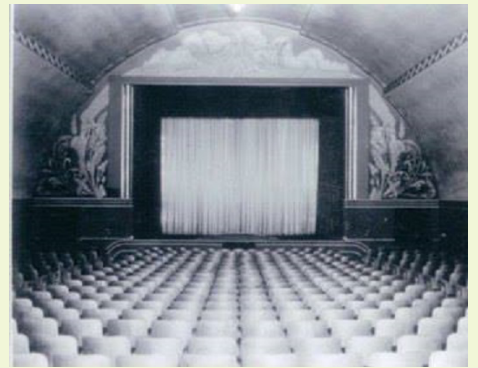
Following the Depression, theatre magnate George M. Mann, who owned and built theaters from Dinuba, California to Klamath Falls, Oregon, correctly anticipated that

Humboldt County was eager for new entertainment opportunities. His shrewd business sense served him well. Confident in Arcata's future and desire for a modern theatre, he built a "luxurious new show house" on the Brizard Block in 1937. Designed by architect William B David and variously reported as costing from \$40,000 to \$60,000, the Arcata Theatre opened on February 5, 1938, with *Thin Ice*, touted as "the picture you've been waiting fo'r,

and starring Sonja Henie and Tyrone

Power. Although Mann did not live in Arcata, he did occupy a beautiful three-bedroom apartment that still exists upstairs from the Eureka Theater. Photos of the apartment can be viewed at <https://eureka-theater.org/eureka-theater-apartment/>.

The Arcata Theater has a facade of stucco with a tiled ticket booth and entrance leading to the lobby through three double doors. Roof levels and arches culminate in the vertical "ARCATA" at the top of the marquee. The chosen design was a combination of Art Deco and Art Moderne. It was highly visible! According to the *Arcata Union* (Jan. 28, 1938) "Best advertising for the town is George Mann's new sign on the G Street Theater



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Mission: Historical Sites Society of Arcata promotes recognition of the cultural heritage of Arcata and its environs, and identifies and encourages the preservation of historical and architecturally significant structures and sites within the Arcata planning area.

HSSA is aware that Arcata stands on Wiyot lands. We acknowledge the original preservers of our community.

PO Box 4521

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President's Message: Summer 2024



This summer I am remodeling an apartment which was once the barn at the Schorlig House, and it is necessary to test the sewer lateral. When checking the existing lateral, here is what it said about the pipe. Orangeburg pipe (also known as the "fiber conduit", "bituminous fiber pipe" or "Bermico" or "sand pipe:) is bituminized fiber pipe used in the United States. It is made of layers of ground wood pulp fibers and asbestos fibers compressed with and bound by a water-resistant adhesive then impregnated with a liquefied coal tar pitch. It was used from 1860-1970's when it was replaced by PVC pipe for water supply and sewer discharge. Nevertheless, I will have to replace it because it's an artifact that will not meet the pressure test required by the City of Arcata. I would imagine there are a lot of them in Arcata.

Then and Now will appear monthly in the *Mad River Union*. Tamara Wolski has provided MRU with several sets of historical images of Arcata that are matched by modern photos..

The Fiber Faire is happening on September 7 & 8 at the Arcata Community Center. Karole Ely manages this fund raiser for HSSA each year. We will have rug hooking items, yarns, weaving supplies all at great prices. If you have yarn or supplies no longer needed or wanted. The date for the Collectibles and Clothing sale is Saturday, September 28 at the Philips House Museum. Jeanette Cooper will once again make this happen. If you have items, please contact Jeanette at 707-498-8112

Arcata Plaza- Before the Fire (c.1888)



Some comedian noted "Arcata Blizzard" on the back of this photo- which is focused on the southeast corner of the Arcata Plaza. Humboldt Historian Susie Van Kirk also noted that this

photo was likely taken just a year or two prior to the November 1889 Plaza Fire, which leveled the east block

Thank you to Lynette Mullen..

Arcata Theater (continued)

which emblazons to the world at large that south-bound tourists are now entering Arcata”.

The auditorium of the theater was originally decorated in a simplified Art Deco tradition with geometric light fixtures, and a wondrous mural design of mermaids surfacing from the sea as legendary Selkies who had transformed themselves into voluptuous human form. The cumulus clouds and fanciful sea garden depicted life above and below the ocean. Geometric border designs edged the ceiling on two sides from front to back as well as around the back and center walls. The center wall featured a row of 10 circular windows where one could peek into the auditorium from the lobby. Generations of Arcata parents remember the “crying room” in the theater. One could take a fussy baby upstairs to a small room with two theater seats and a window and speaker so that not a minute of the film would be missed. The window for the “crying room” can still be seen in the photo of the interior of the theater. Legend was that it was originally Mr. Mann’s private booth.



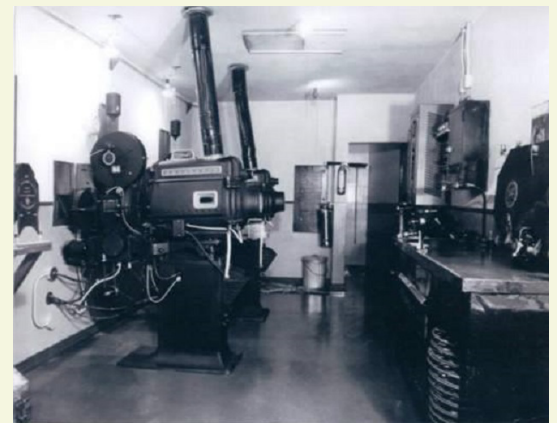
Theater Magnate George M. Mann



In 1948 the theater was expanded an additional 30 feet to the east to allow for greater seating capacity. The length of the auditorium was increased by a third to accommodate a total of 900 seats. The original

proscenium and screen were removed and replaced by a new, cinemascope screen that was larger.

Acoustical plaster

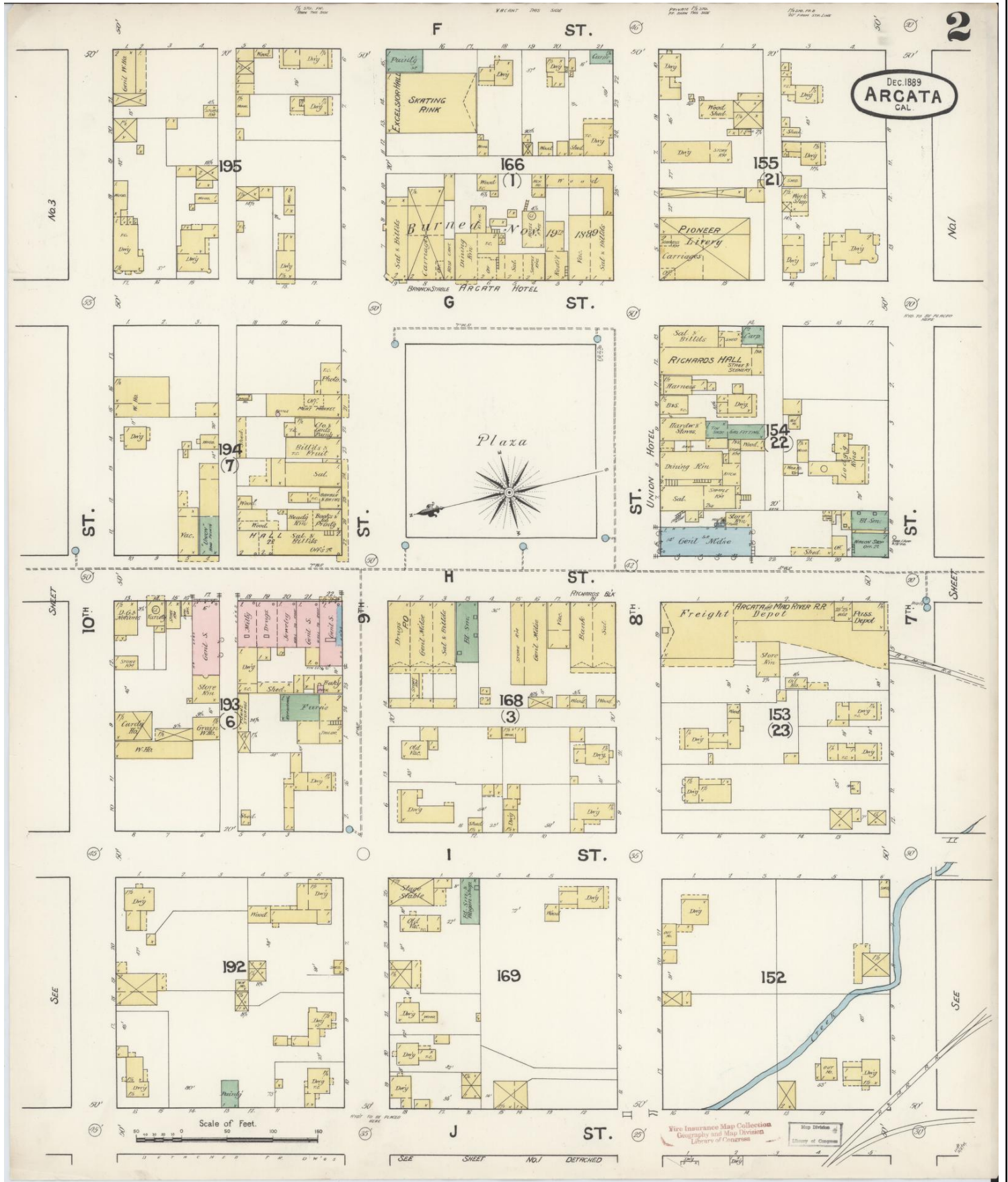


resurfaced the entire ceiling and a significant portion of the walls, thereby covering the Art Deco border designs and mural. New lighting fixtures, carpeting, seats with air cushions, as well as heating were installed to provide greater comfort. At least one person interviewed remembers a police raid around 1971 that focused on a slightly “blue” movie showing there. It was sold in 1982, but continued to operate as a movie theater.

Lara and Brian Cox bought the Arcata Theater in May 2004. All permanent theater-style seating was removed and replaced with platforms that allowed for mixed-used of the space, including comedy shows, concerts, and other entertainment in addition to the regular theater operations. A bar was installed at the back of the auditorium. It reopened as the Arcata Theatre Lounge in April 2009. Photo at right is of the projection room at the Arcata Theater. Sources included

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arcata_Theatre
- Van Kirk, Susie. Reflection of Arcata's History: eighty years of architecture. Bug Press. p. 150.
- "[Arcata Theatre Lounge for Sale](#)". Mad River Union. 2016-08-30.
- "[Ambitious Twentysomethings to Buy Arcata Theatre Lounge; Business Duo Says They Plan to Offer Restaurant-Style Dining, Multi-Screen Sports Days and Bottomless Mimosas](#)". Lost Coast Outpost. 2019-07-12.
- <https://eureka-theater.org/history/>

Sanborn maps are detailed maps of U.S. cities and towns in the 19th and 20th centuries. Originally published by The Sanborn Map Company, the maps were created to allow fire insurance companies to assess their total liability in urbanized areas of the United States. Since they contain detailed information about properties and individual buildings in approximately 12,000 U.S. cities and towns, Sanborn maps are valuable for documenting changes in the built environment of American cities over many decades. This is an 1889 Sanborn Map of Arcata.. You can see it in color and with more detail at our website.



HSSA Annual Luncheon
Sunday, October 13, 2024
Jacoby's Storehouse Plaza View Room
For reservations or more information, please call 707-822-4722



**Speaker: Jerry Rohde: Northern Humboldt
Indians**

Join local historian Jerry Rohde for a full-color illustrated presentation on the early history of northern Humboldt County's seven Indian tribes. All of us are probably familiar with four of them – the Wiyots, Hupas, Karuks, and Yuroks – but what about the other three? These are the Whilkuts, Mawenoks, and Tsnungwe, all of which were leaders in a multi-year armed resistance to the white invasion of their territories.

We'll look at the lands the tribes occupied, the 15-year conflict that led to the establishment of the Hoopa Valley Reservation, and the efforts of the various tribes to reaffirm their individual cultures in a drastically changed world.

Jerry's forthcoming book, *Northern Humboldt Indians*, will be the fifth volume in his "History of Humboldt County Peoples and Places" series.

Other Important Upcoming Dates:

September 7 and 8, 2024: Visit our rug hookers at the Fiber Faire at the Arcata Community Center

Saturday, September 28, 2024: HSSA Annual Clothing and Collectibles Sale at the Philips House Museum



**P.O. Box 4521
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