

TAMPA'S MOVIE PALACE

A CELEBRATION OF HISTORY AND GRANDEUR



TAMPA THEATRE

Welcome To The Show

Tampa Bay
Times
NIE
newspaper in education
tampabay.com/nie

ONCE UPON A TIME...

Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon first arrived in the Tampa Bay area in 1513, but the establishment of Tampa did not begin until 1824, when the U.S. Army built Fort Brooke to protect the strategic harbor at Tampa Bay. Development of the region did not begin until 1845. Until the 1880s, Tampa was little more than a village.

Two significant things happened to change Tampa's destiny. The first occurred in 1884 when railroad tycoon Henry Plant connected Tampa's sheltered port with the outside world. Plant's railroad extension to the Hillsborough River provided access to new areas. In addition, Plant built opulent hotels along his rail line to attract visitors. The first hotel, Tampa Bay Hotel, with its iconic minarets, opened in 1891 across the Hillsborough River from downtown.

During those same decades, cigar magnates from Cuba relocated their factories and workforces from Havana and Key West to a new settlement just outside Tampa. Named after cigar baron Vicente Martinez Ybor, Ybor City was annexed to the newly founded city of Tampa in 1887.

Sources: City of Tampa; Tampa Theatre

THE HEART OF TAMPA: FRANKLIN STREET

From Tampa's earliest days, Franklin Street was the central hub that reflected the city's progress. The Branch Opera House was built near Franklin Street and Lafayette Street, which is now Kennedy Boulevard. Two years later, the First National Bank of Tampa built the city's first brick building at Franklin Street and Washington Street. The Hillsborough County Courthouse went up in 1892; it opened at about the same time as the Tampa Bay Hotel and shared the same Moorish architectural style favored by architect John Wood.

Sources: City of Tampa; Tampa Theatre



Burgert Brothers. Bird's-eye view of the Hillsborough County Courthouse, 1900s. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory



The Strand Theater, located on Twiggs Avenue, was built in 1915. When Tampa Theatre opened in 1926 with air conditioning, the Strand Theatre couldn't compete, eventually closing in 1931. Courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough Public Library System



Tampa Tribune, Oct. 15, 1926



A NEW FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT

In the mid-19th century, photography became popular in public life, especially during the Civil War. Scientists and inventors experimented with different ways to exhibit photographs, and through those experiments the zoetrope was born. The zoetrope was a device that made it possible for a series of pictures to be viewed in rapid progression, creating the illusion of motion. This was the beginning of motion pictures. Since the invention of motion pictures, audiences have been drawn to theaters and the story lines in those movies. Movies spread quickly, making them one of the most accessible and beloved forms of entertainment in the world. In Tampa, this form of entertainment took flight quickly.

Sources: WGBH Educational Foundation; Tampa Theatre

EARLY THEATERS

Nickelodeons, small theaters, began opening in Florida's larger towns in 1897. The name was derived from the admission price.

Before the construction of Tampa's first nickelodeon, residents gathered at Ball's Grocery on the corner of Franklin and Madison streets to watch movies projected onto an exterior wall of the building. In 1904, moving pictures were a regular outdoor attraction in Tampa, especially downtown and in Ybor City.

In 1907, Tampa's first full-time movie theater opened at 315 Franklin Street. In 1910, there were at least two theaters dedicated to movies. In 1915, there were 14 movie theaters, six of them on Franklin Street.

While nickelodeons were popular for the average person, the upper classes tended to view movies as a crude form of entertainment for the lower classes. That gradually changed as vaudeville theaters incorporated movies into their variety shows. Feature-length films in the 1910s announced cinema's arrival as an art form worthy of respect.

Source: Tampa Theatre



The entrance to the New Prince Theatre at 1118 Franklin Street in 1921. Courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System



Nickelodeons (left) and Zoetropes were two early ways people could watch moving pictures. Stock Images: Shutterstock

Going beyond the text: ANALYZING THE HISTORY OF CINEMA

The history of film began in 1827, when the first still photograph was taken using a glass plate technique. From a still photograph on glass to moving images to flexible film, talkies and high-end computer graphics to IMAX three-dimension, 360-degree views, film has come a long way. Research the history of film and the evolution of cinema on the Internet. Also, look through the Tampa Bay

Times to find information about the cinema today. Create a graphic organizer or infographic depicting some of the changes in the industry. Be sure to answer some of the following questions through your research.

- What important dates stand out in film history?
- Who were the important inventors and names in the film

industry?

- What were the important inventions and developments?
- During which decades were important changes made?
- How did the incorporation of sound change the industry?
- How did technology (color process, animation, 3-D, IMAX) change the industry?
- What major changes has the

industry gone through in the 21st century?

- What are the major causes and effects of the changes that have happened in the past few decades?

Share your graphic organizer and what you have learned with your class.

Florida Standards: ELA.612.EE.1.1;

ELA.612.EE.2.1; ELA.612.EE.3.1; ELA.612.EE.4.1; ELA.612.EE.5.1; ELA.612.EE.6.1; ELA.612.F.2.1; ELA.612.F.2.4; ELA.612.C.1.2; ELA.612.C.1.3 ELA.612.C.1.4; ELA.612.C.1.5; ELA.612.C.2.1; ELA.612.C.3.1; ELA.612.C.4.1; ELA.612.C.5.1; ELA.612.R.2.2; ELA.612.R.2.3; ELA.612.R.2.4; ELA.612.R.3.2; ELA.612.R.3.3;

ELA.612.R.3.4; ELA.612.V.1.1; ELA.612.V.1.3; SS.6.W.1.3; SS.6.W.1.6; SS.7.CG.2.8; SS.7.CG.2.9; SS.7.CG.2.10; SS.7; SS.7.CG.4.3; SS.8.A.1.1; SS.8.A.1.2; SS.8.A.1.3; SS.8.A.1.5; SS.8.A.1.6; SS.8.A.4.6; SS.8.E.2.1; SS.8.G.4.1; SS.912.A.1.1; SS.912.A.1.2; SS.912.A.1.5; SS.912.A.1.6; SS.912.A.1.7; SS.912.A.3.13

TAMPA

A THRIVING CITY

In the mid-1920s, Tampa was a booming city. The Port of Tampa was thriving. Cigar City surpassed Havana as the global leader in cigar manufacturing. Local phosphate mines led the world in fertilizer production. The city annexed West Tampa, bringing another immigrant enclave into the community. Combining the boom and annexation, the city's population doubled to 100,000, with another 50,000 residents scattered around Hillsborough County.

Downtown Tampa was the central business district. The post-World War I economy was growing, as was the high demand for property.

The Florida land boom boosted Tampa's fortunes, with real estate and construction reaching a fever pitch. From 1923 through 1926, the city saw the completion of more than two thousand new homes, eighty apartment buildings, and a dozen schools and churches.

Source: Tampa Theatre



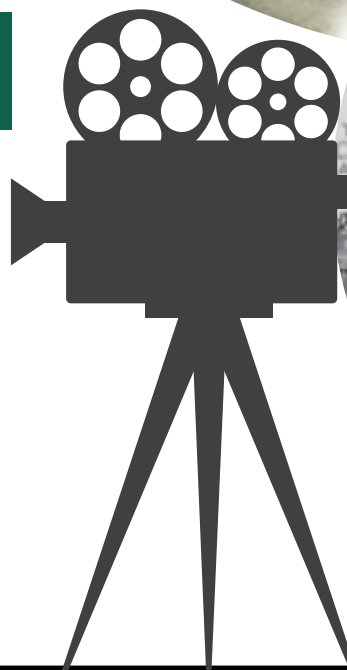
Construction began on Tampa Theatre in late 1925, at the height of the Florida land boom. By March of 1926, the steel structure of the domed night sky was visible above Polk Street. Courtesy of Wolfsonian Archive

MOVIE PALACES

For millions of people, movie theaters became staples of entertainment as well as an important source of news. Theater owners and movie studio moguls built spectacular palaces to draw customers.

Designed by Thomas Lamb, the Regent Theatre in New York City, which opened in 1913, was the first deluxe movie palace, offering an organ and orchestra to accompany films. At the time, 60 percent of American families lived in poverty. From 1914 to 1922, four thousand new theaters opened in the United States. By 1925, movie palaces attracted three-quarters of the nation's spending on cinema.

Source: Tampa Theatre



Billboard announcing the new Tampa Theatre. Courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough Public Library System

A MAN WITH A DREAM

The designer of Tampa Theatre John Eberson, born in eastern Europe in 1875, was a showman at heart. In the early 1900s, Eberson arrived in the United States, settling in St. Louis, Missouri. The self-made architect was introduced to the magic of motion pictures at the 1904 World's Fair.

While working for a construction company, he designed his first theater, The Jewel, in Hamilton, Ohio.

Eberson took inspiration for his buildings from Daniel Burnham, the chief architect of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The world's fairs were designed to evoke visions of timeless grandeur. Eberson wanted to replicate that in his theaters.

Eberson's theaters featured auditoriums designed like massive outdoor stage sets. The open-air illusion was maintained by a ceiling that appeared to be a starlit dark-blue sky with projected clouds drifting over the audience, his signature "atmospheric" style.

The atmospheric concept energized venues with an illusion, incorporating the audience and the entertainment into a fantasy.

Source: Tampa Theatre; Lealman College



John Eberson. Courtesy of Tampa Theatre



"Atmospheric" night sky behind plaster rooftops. Courtesy of Wolfsonian Archive



The Tampa Tribune, Oct. 15, 1926



Student activity: ANALYZING MEDIA LITERACY

Common Sense Media defines media literacy as the ability to identify different types of media and understand the messages being sent by the creators of that media. All media – television, radio, newspapers, magazines, movies, social media, video games and podcasts – share one thing in common. It was created by a person for a specific reason. Understanding that reason is the basis of media literacy.

From the 1920s through the 1960s, newsreels shown at movie theaters

were a popular form of disseminating information. Often the only way an audience might see and hear from a politician or celebrity or learn about current events was through this medium. Many presidents embraced this method of information sharing, especially Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Research the history of newsreels. Below are some helpful sources to begin:

- britannica.com/topic/newsreel

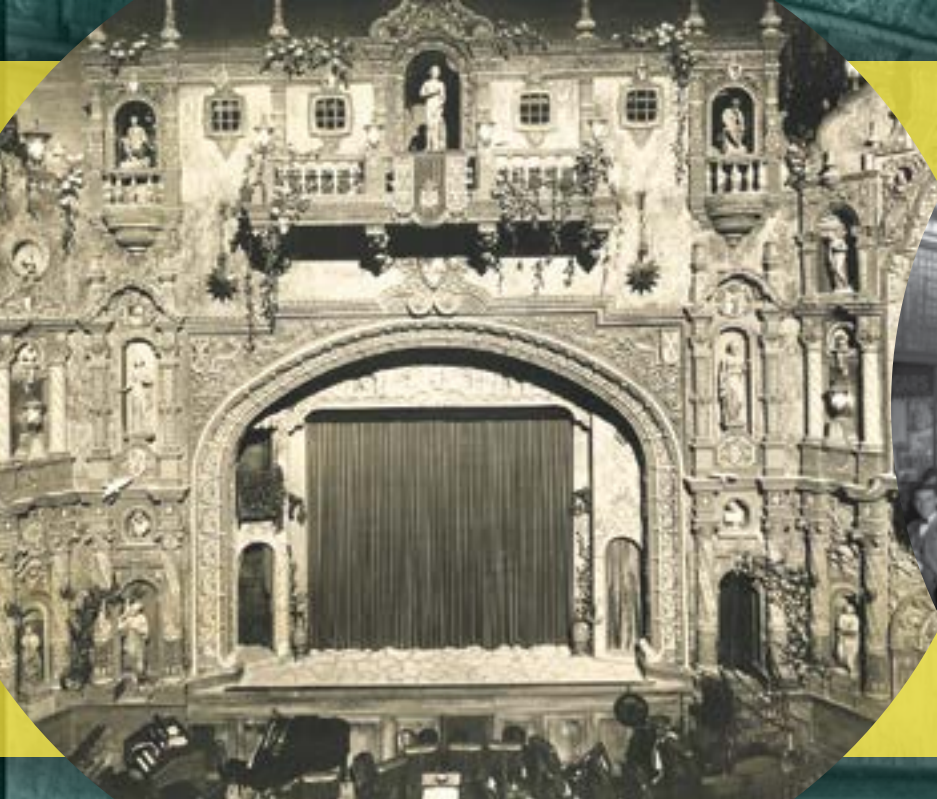
- neh.gov/article/newsreel-or-not-real
- ebco.com/research-starters/communication-and-mass-media/newsreels-and-censorship
- historians.org/perspectives-article-reel-or-unreal-history-teaching-history-with-newsreels-may-2021/
- archives.gov/publications/prologue/2015/fall/united-newsreels.html
- loc.gov/collections/theodore-roosevelt-films/articles-and-essays/theodore-roosevelt-on-film

After researching the history of newsreels, watch some examples of them on YouTube. While doing research, take notes elaborating on specific points. Next, imagine you are a journalist writing an investigative news article focusing on media literacy. For the article, focus on the journalistic questions: who, what, where, when, why and how. Using the notes you took while researching and watching newsreels, write an information article focusing on newsreels and media literacy, modeled

after the articles in the Tampa Bay Times. Share the main points of your article and what you have learned with your class.

Florida Standards: ELA.612.EE.1.1; ELA.612.EE.2.1; ELA.612.EE.3.1; ELA.612.EE.4.1; ELA.612.EE.5.1; ELA.612.EE.6.1; ELA.612.F.2.1; ELA.612.F.2.4; ELA.612.C.1.2; ELA.612.C.1.3 ELA.612.C.1.4; ELA.612.C.1.5; ELA.612.C.2.1; ELA.612.C.3.1; ELA.612.C.4.1;

ELA.612.C.5.1; ELA.612.R.2.2; ELA.612.R.2.3; ELA.612.R.2.4; ELA.612.R.3.2; ELA.612.R.3.3; ELA.612.R.3.4; ELA.612.V.1.1; ELA.612.V.1.3; SS.6.W.1.3; SS.6.W.1.6; SS.7.CG.2.8; SS.7.CG.2.9; SS.7.CG.2.10; SS.7.CG.4.3; SS.8.A.1.1; SS.8.A.1.2; SS.8.A.1.3; SS.8.A.1.5; SS.8.A.1.6; SS.8.A.4.6; SS.8.E.2.1; SS.8.G.4.1; SS.912.A.1.1; SS.912.A.1.2; SS.912.A.1.3; SS.912.A.1.5; SS.912.A.1.6; SS.912.A.1.7



Tampa Theatre in the 1920s and 1930s. Courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library

A STATE-OF-THE-ART PALACE

On Oct. 15, 1926, Tampa Theatre opened to sold out crowds. Not only did Tampa Theatre have fantasyland architecture, but it also featured cool air cycling through the building. The Carrier Engineering Corporation supplied the state-of-the-art air conditioner at a cost of \$78,000. Publix Theatres mandated a constant temperature of 72 degrees and a relative humidity of 55 percent. Another state-of-the-art feature was organ music. Whether accompanied by an orchestra or played solo, pipe organs became the cornerstone of the movie palace experience.

THE MIGHTY WURLITZER THEATRE ORGAN

While Tampa Theatre didn't get wired for sound until December of 1928, sound has always played an important role for audiences. The original organ was Wurlitzer Opus 1429, a Style F, two manual, 8 rank. The current organ is a three manual, 15-rank Wurlitzer Opus 1066 with 1,059 pipes.

Installed to play during silent films, the theater organ brought innovation, with its ability to imitate an orchestra and create special sound effects.

A church organist and head electrician of the National Telephone Co., Robert Hope-Jones electrified the organ and established an organ-manufacturing business in 1889. Hope-Jones created a switching system to allow any combination of pipes and effects to be played at once, so the instruments could

produce a variety of sound effects, including train and boat whistles, car horns, bird whistles and even atmospheric sounds.

Sources: U.S. Department of Energy; Tampa Theatre; Britannica; Smithsonian Magazine

OPENING NIGHT

Tampa Theatre featured first-class entertainment and atmosphere. Tickets for the opening gala went on sale two days before the event. At seventy-five cents each, 1,600 tickets were sold in just two hours.

Publix Theatres placed large ads in the newspapers touting a new cinematic age. On opening night, the large illuminated blade sign and marquee above Franklin Street lit the way for an eager crowd. Once people entered the theater, they were met by uniformed ushers, showing them to their seats.

The opening night's program began with an invocation by Reverend Willis G. Clark, rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. Judge Raleigh Petteway, a popular speaker, was master of ceremonies. Director of public relations for Publix Theatres (and mayor of Jacksonville) John T. Alsop introduced the leadership of Consolidated Amusements.

Hometown Mayor Perry G. Wall spoke about the educational value of movies and accepted the theater as if it was a gift to the people of Tampa. John Ingram's twenty-piece orchestra played Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture." A scenic film was followed by a novelty sing-along, "I'm Betting on You," played by organist Eddie Weaver on the Mighty Wurlitzer Theatre Organ. Soprano Leonora Cori entertained audiences as well.

The program culminated with "The Ace of Cads," a feature film

starring Adolphe Menjou and Alicia, concluded the evening's program.

A SHIFTING

Just as Tampa Theatre opened in 1926, the economic bubble burst. In 1926 and 1927, the citrus industry through the state, and by the time the 1929 depression happened, Floridians had already experienced hardship.

In 1929, the citrus industry suffered from a fruit fly invasion that costed their clients \$10 million. The citrus industry by about sixty percent. In July of 1929, the citrus industry failed, costing their clients \$10 million.

In the mid-1920s, depictions of popularized mass-produced cigar industry saw a steep decline. By 1929, many families were affected by the depression.

With more than 1,200 theaters, Texas, the Publix theater chain closed its last selling outlets in 1933. Jacksonville Company bought most of the Publix theaters, including the Tampa Theatre.

NEW WAYS OF ENTERTAINMENT IN CROWD

In the 1930s, hoping to encourage attendance, the theater implemented bank nights. Bank nights had prize drawings for theater patrons.



Bank Night, 1934. Courtesy of Tampa Theatre

the Joyce. A brief two-reel comedy

ECONOMY

In majestic splendor, Florida's and 1928, severe hurricanes swept the Great Stock Market Crash of 1929. Florida has already been faced with economic

uffered when the Mediterranean Florida's citrus production was cut that year, six of Tampa's banks collapsed.

f smoking in Hollywood movies cassettes. As a result, Tampa's cigar industry, more than 90,000 Florida residents.

mostly in the Southeast and collapsed. The owners began a city-based Sparks Theater and a city-based Sparks Theater and a city-based Sparks Theater

OF BRINGING CROWDS

age more customers, theaters Bank Night was a type of lottery that drew patrons who registered and were

present at the performance. Unfortunately, the popularity of Bank Night led to its downfall. In Tampa and other cities across the country, masses of people crowded downtown sidewalks and streets, disrupting traffic.

To draw people into the theater, management offered children's matinees on Saturday mornings. They worked with parent-teacher associations and the Boy Scouts to plan wholesome programming.

In one promotion, the theater invited the mothers of Tampa to bring their babies to Plant Park's bandshell. There, a Tampa Times camera crew filmed the children to be featured in special all-Tampa newsreel supplements.

With the addition of sound, movies became increasingly popular and helped people forget their troubles. In the early 1940s, some of the great dramas of American film reached theaters.

Sources: Florida Department of State; Florida Center for Instructional Technology; Library of Congress; Merriam-Webster Dictionary; Tampa Theatre

GOVERNMENT AND THE SILVER SCREEN

The United States entering World War II in 1941 brought more changes to society. About a month after Pearl Harbor was attacked, President Franklin D. Roosevelt voiced the need to convey to the American people a more "accurate understanding of six crucial aspects" of the war, according to the National Archives.

To make this happen, Roosevelt established the Office of War Information (OWI) in 1942. The OWI became the official arm of

government news and propaganda. All information about the war had to pass through the OWI.

During World War II, most Americans followed the news of the war through three sources: radio broadcasts, newspapers and newsreels that preceded the movies at their local theatres. Showing newsreels before featured films was standard practice at Tampa Theatre.

Sources: National Archives; Public Broadcasting System

AFTER THE WAR

In the decades after World War II, Tampa Theatre was under management of a private cinema company. The venue fell into disrepair and statues were vandalized.

In 1953, Tampa's annexation of several suburbs such as Sulphur Springs and Palma Ceia doubled the area and population of the city overnight. As the city sprawled into the surrounding areas, the city's heritage quickly began to disappear. Many buildings were torn down in the name of progress or abandoned to damage and neglect. Shopping centers opened around the city, beginning with Britton and Northgate Plazas in the late 1950s, soon to be augmented by countless strip developments. In 1958, only about a quarter of the city's trade occurred downtown.

Like the downtown districts they occupied, movie palaces became relics. The impact of television on the motion picture industry was devastating. In 1953, forty million people attended movies each week, less than half of the peak of ninety million in 1929. The suburban multiplex, a cluster of several small theaters under one roof, was born in 1965.

Source: Tampa Theatre



A sprinkling of adults, including three school teachers, joined the picketing at Morrison's Cafeteria in Tampa. Times staff (1960)

CHANGING SOCIETY

In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation was legal as long as public facilities for blacks and whites were “separate but equal.” The laws that mandated segregation of public places were known as “Jim Crow” laws. These laws kept Black citizens from using the same facilities as white people.

Under Jim Crow, every aspect of life in the Tampa Bay area was segregated. Schools, hospitals, parks, restaurants and beaches were segregated, if Black people were allowed in at all. As a smaller movie palace, Tampa Theatre was not designed to be segregated. It was a white-only establishment. The only Black people allowed inside the building for

close to forty years were janitors.

Things began changing slowly after World War II. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court mandated the integration of the nation’s public schools. The pace of reform was slow, and a new generation of people extended their activism from the courtroom to the public square.

In 1960, sit-ins by Black students at lunch counters inspired more demonstrations across the South. In many cities, chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) formed youth councils to harness the enthusiasm of young adults in nonviolent demonstrations.

Sources: Florida Memory; Florida Holocaust Museum, Tampa Theatre



Tampa Bay Times, June 21, 1963



Black high school and college students participate in a sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Tampa on Feb. 29, 1960. Times (1960)



Black students participate in a sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Tampa on Feb. 29, 1960. They were among 57 black people who sat at a counter reserved only for whites, asking to be served. Times staff (1960)



The Carver was a historic segregated movie theater that operated in the heart of the West Tampa Black community starting in 1949. Courtesy of Tampa Theatre

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

In Tampa, protests and sit-ins, organized by the NAACP Youth Council, were commonplace in the 1960s, especially on Franklin Street.

On Feb. 29, 1960, students from George S. Middleton and Howard W. Blake high schools staged a peaceful sit-in at the F.W. Woolworth lunch counter at 901 N Franklin St., challenging Tampa's segregation laws. Students were escorted from the store by police.

Pairs of Black teens would approach the ticket booth window at Tampa Theatre with a hundred-dollar bill. They would ask for two tickets and tell the woman behind the window to keep the change. As each pair of students was turned away, more students would arrive.

That same year, Tampa Mayor Julian B. Lane agreed to appoint a biracial committee to address the protesters' complaints. By September 1960, Tampa's lunch counters were integrated without the violence that marked desegregation efforts in many other parts of the country. In accordance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, beginning that July, Tampa Theatre no longer excluded people of color.

Sources: City of Tampa; Tampa Theatre

A CHANGING ECONOMY

In the late 1960s, many white families left the cities and headed to suburbia. By 1970, more people lived in the suburbs than in cities or the countryside. Inner cities became impoverished and crime rates rose, which discouraged movie attendance.

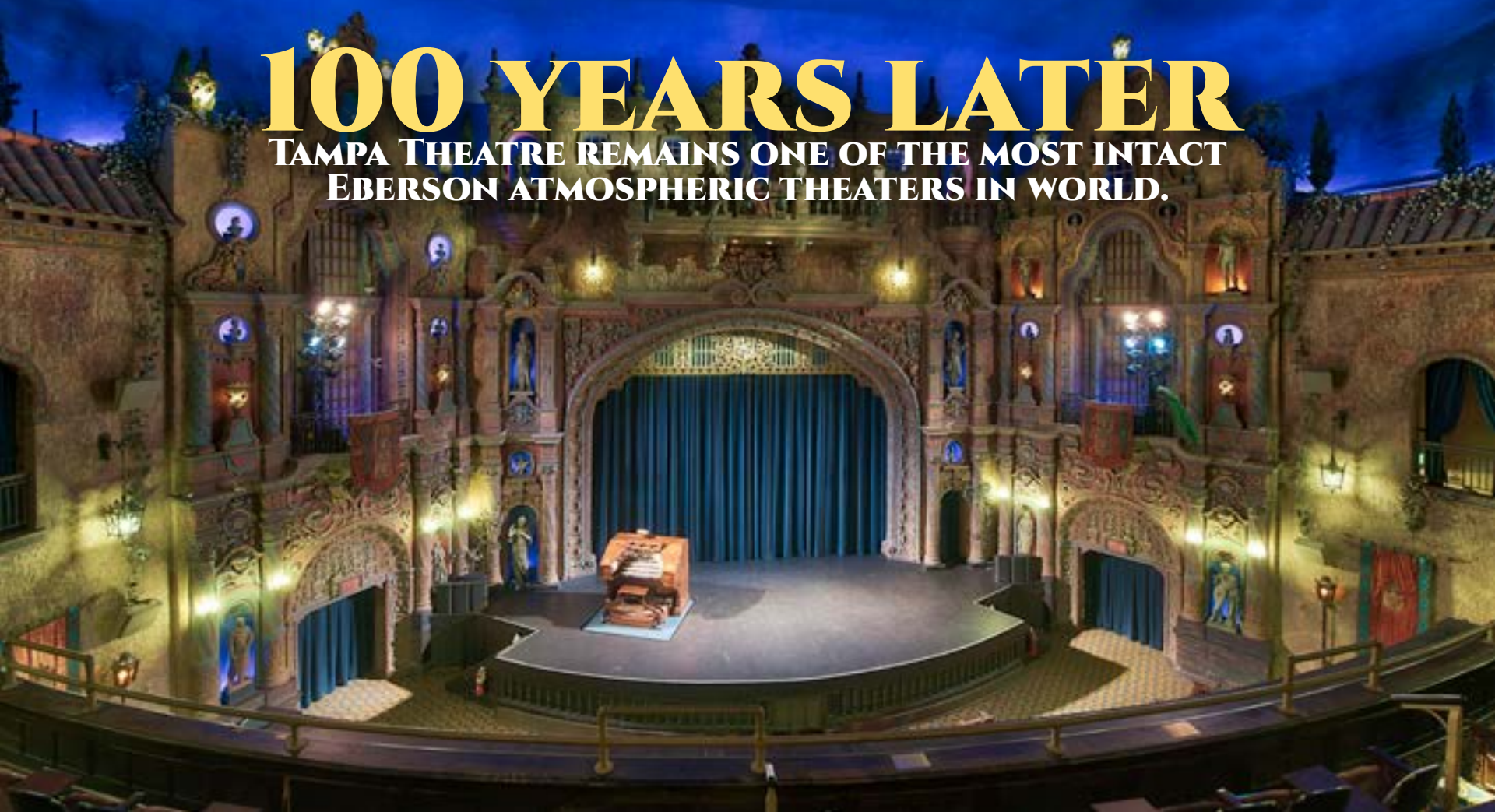
As a result, Tampa Theatre's fortunes declined sharply with the faltering central business district. The closing of Morrison's Cafeteria in 1968 was a big loss to the area and signaled more changes to come. The 1960s and 1970s were especially dark days for Tampa's local landmarks. Urban renewal and interstate highways tore bands through the urban structure, displacing thousands of residents and dislocating communities. Ybor City and West Tampa were hit hard.

In reaction to the destruction of the nation's architectural heritage, Congress passed the National Preservation Act in 1966. It was hoped that citizens would be inspired to save the most distinctive parts of their communities. Many in Tampa answered that call in the 1970s when citizens formed the Tampa Historical Society and Tampa Preservation Inc.

Source: Tampa Theatre

100 YEARS LATER

**TAMPA THEATRE REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST INTACT
EBERSON ATMOSPHERIC THEATERS IN WORLD.**



Courtesy of Tampa Theatre

RESCUING TAMPA THEATRE

Tampa City Council member Lee Duncan was active in many organizations, but he may be remembered best for spearheading the effort to rescue Tampa Theatre. The rescue effort began in the 1970s with planning by Duncan, Mayor Lloyd Copeland and Raymond Mesler, executive director of the Tampa-Hillsborough Arts Council. Duncan networked with the leadership of other preserved theaters around the country.

In April 1975, the Tampa City Council began to formally seek the donation of the theater. The preservation of Tampa Theatre was viewed as a vital and visible first step in reviving downtown Tampa. Duncan spent two years carefully aligning support for the rescue. In January 1976, four City Council

members, wary of renovation costs and unsure the theater could ever turn a profit, voted against the donation, and the measure failed.

However, the issue was brought up again. On April 30, 1976, the City Council approved the purchase of Tampa Theatre from ABC Florida State Theaters of the Smyrna-Halifax Corporation for one dollar.

In 1977, the city, led by Mayor Bill Poe, assumed the long-term land leases to keep Tampa Theatre alive. In 1978, Tampa Theatre was placed on the National Register of Historic Places and became a Tampa City Landmark when the designation was created in 1988. Since the 1970s, multiple restoration efforts have brought Tampa Theatre back to its original glory. Today, the movie palace is managed by the nonprofit Tampa Theatre, Inc.

DOWNTOWN TURNAROUND

During the early 2000s, observers noted an encouraging uptick in weekend and evening traffic downtown. With attractions such as the convention center, Florida Aquarium, former St. Pete Times Forum now the Benchmark International Arena, and the Straz Center for the Performing Arts, Tampa's inner city was becoming a thriving destination again. The business district's changing fortunes seemed to be manifested in the theater's neighboring property, which found more stable tenants beginning with Thai Corner in 2006.

Jeff Vinik will likely go down in history along with Henry Plant and Vicente Martínez Ybor as a transformational figure for Tampa. After buying the Tampa Bay Lightning hockey team in 2010, he aggressively bought up real estate around the arena. His 56-acre Water Street development sparked a much-needed downtown makeover.

THE SECOND SCREEN

In 2019, Tampa Theatre board members voted to convert the small flower shop next door into a screening room. Opened in June 2024, the John T. Taylor Screening Room is a 43-seat theater with its own street entrance, bar and restroom. Its design and decor evoke Ebersson's style without trying to imitate it.

A HUNDRED YEARS OF HISTORY

Tampa Theatre has gone through many renovations during the past few decades. Prior to Tampa Theatre's 100th birthday, the iconic movie theater has been getting some major updates. At the beginning of 2026, Tampa Theatre began the monumental project of renovation and modernization focused on revitalizing the inside and outside of the historic building. This renovation is part of a \$30 million capital initiative called the Second Century Campaign.

During this campaign, the historic Duncan Auditorium has been restored to its original grandeur. The restoration process included infrastructure upgrades, restoration of the decorative paint and plaster, and preservation of its original fixtures and furnishings. The Duncan Auditorium is the main entertainment space in the theater, with a star-studded night sky ceiling, an ornate stage and 1,238 seats.

Creative Contractors, the firm behind the construction of the Taylor Screening Room, has been at the forefront of the project. Outside the historic building, the group refreshed building signage, including enhanced lighting and new paint on the iconic blade sign. Inside improvements include an updated concessions area, a new stage truss system, renovation of first-floor accessible restrooms, and lighting and audiovisual enhancements.

In addition, the second and third floors of the Florida Avenue wing (adjacent to the auditorium) are being updated to accommodate Tampa Theatre's expanding education program. More than 3,000 square feet of underutilized office and storage space on the Florida Avenue side of the building are being cleaned out and revitalized create space for dedicated classrooms and archives.

Sources: Tampa Theatre; Tampa Bay Times

Student activity: PRESENTING AN ARGUMENT

In 1973, Tampa Theatre was slated for demolition. Tampa citizens got together to prevent that from happening: Committees were formed, community leaders got involved, and the City Council struck a deal to purchase and preserve the building. Using this publication, the Internet and the Tampa Bay Times, do some research

about the history of Tampa during the 1970s. What was society like at that time? Include information about the following categories:

- Employment
- Economy
- Population
- Real estate development
- Entertainment

Using the letters to the editor in the

Times as examples, write a letter arguing for or against preservation of Tampa Theatre. Be sure to back up your points with some specific examples from your research. Next, create a Canva or Power Point presentation depicting society at this time and how your points support your argument. Use the rhetorical appeals of

logos, ethos, pathos and kairos in your presentation. Share your presentation and points with your class. Have students discuss the rhetorical appeals you used.

Florida Standards: ELA.612.EE.1.1; ELA.612.EE.2.1; ELA.612.EE.3.1; ELA.612.EE.4.1; ELA.612.EE.5.1; ELA.612.EE.6.1;

ELA.612.F.2.1; ELA.612.F.2.4; ELA.612.C.1.2; ELA.612.C.1.3; ELA.612.C.1.4; ELA.612.C.1.5; ELA.612.C.2.1; ELA.612.C.3.1; ELA.612.C.4.1; ELA.612.C.5.1; ELA.612.R.2.2; ELA.612.R.2.3; ELA.612.R.2.4; ELA.612.R.3.2; ELA.612.R.3.3; ELA.612.R.3.4; ELA.612.V.1.1; ELA.612.V.1.3; SS.6.W.1.3; SS.6.W.1.6; SS.7.CG.2.8;

SS.7.CG.2.9; SS.7.CG.2.10; SS.7; SS.7.CG.4.3; SS.7.E.1.4; SS.7.E.2.2; SS.8.A.1.1; SS.8.A.1.2; SS.8.A.1.3; SS.8.A.1.5; SS.8.A.1.6; SS.8.A.4.6; SS.8.E.2.1; SS.8.G.4.1; SS.912.A.1.1; SS.912.A.1.2; SS.912.A.1.3; SS.912.A.1.5; SS.912.A.1.6; SS.912.A.1.7; SS.912.A.3.13; SS.912.A.6.15; SS.912.A.7.1



Photos courtesy of Tampa Theatre



ENTERTAINMENT THROUGH THE AGES

Tampa Bay Times NIE
The Tampa Bay Times Newspaper in Education program (NIE) is a cooperative effort between schools and Times Publishing Co. to encourage the use of newspapers in print and electronic form as educational resources – a living textbook.

tampabay.com/nie

of newspapers in print and electronic form as educational resources – a living textbook.

NIE serves educators, students and families by providing schools with class sets of the Pulitzer Prize-winning Tampa Bay Times plus award-winning original educational publications, teacher guides, lesson plans, educator workshops and many more resources – all at no cost to schools, teachers or families

In 2025-2026, NIE provided more than 11 million digital newspaper licenses and nearly 200,000 print copies of the Tampa Bay Times to area classrooms.

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Credits

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Florida Standards

This publication and its activities incorporate the following Florida Standards for middle school students.

Florida Standards:

ELA.612.EE.1.1; ELA.612.EE.2.1; ELA.612.EE.3.1; ELA.612.EE.4.1; ELA.612.EE.5.1; ELA.612.EE.6.1; ELA.612.F.2.1; ELA.612.F.2.4; ELA.612.C.1.2; ELA.612.C.1.3; ELA.612.C.1.4; ELA.612.C.1.5; ELA.612.C.2.1; ELA.612.C.3.1; ELA.612.C.4.1; ELA.612.C.5.1; ELA.612.R.2.2; ELA.612.R.2.3; ELA.612.R.2.4; ELA.612.R.3.2; ELA.612.R.3.3; ELA.612.R.3.4; ELA.612.V.1.1; ELA.612.V.1.3; SS.6.W.1.3; SS.6.W.1.6; SS.7.CG.2.4; SS.7.CG.2.8; SS.7.CG.2.9; SS.7.CG.2.10; SS.7.CG.3.11; SS.7.CG.4.3; SS.7.E.1.4; SS.7.E.2.2; SS.8.A.1.1; SS.8.A.1.2; SS.8.A.1.3; SS.8.A.1.5; SS.8.A.1.6; SS.8.A.3.16; SS.8.A.4.6; SS.8.E.2.1; SS.8.G.4.1; SS.912.A.1.1; SS.912.A.1.2; SS.912.A.1.3; SS.912.A.1.5; SS.912.A.1.6; SS.912.A.1.7; SS.912.A.3.13; SS.912.A.6.15; SS.912.A.7.1; SS.912.A.7.5; SS.912.A.7.7; SS.912.A.7.8; SS.912.A.7.12; VA.612.F.1.3; VA.612.H.1.1; VA.612.H.2.2



From the first live performance on opening day featuring opera singer Leonora Cori, to modern times, Tampa Theatre has been a prime location for movie premieres and live performances.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Tampa Theatre was on the vaudeville circuit. It was common to see a combination of singer, accordion player, mystic or trained dog on the stage. In 1928, Jimmie Rodgers, the "Father of Country Music," performed.



When Tampa Theatre reopened in late 1970s, more live entertainment was featured. From B.B. King, Dave Brubeck, Herbie Mann, Richie Havens, John Prine, Melanie and Spyro Gyra to Tom Waits, Blondie, Pat Benatar, George Thorogood and the Ramones, Tampa Theatre became far more than a cinematic experience.

Since the 1980s, many entertainers have stood center stage, including

Kris Kristofferson, Iggy Pop, Night Ranger, Kenny G, Joan Jett, Indigo Girls, Harry Connick Jr., David Byrne, Sandra Bernhard, Carrot Top, John Waters, "Weird Al" Yankovic, Buddy Guy,

Elvis Costello, Lindsey Buckingham, Joan Baez, David Sedaris, Jimmy Fallon, Dana Carvey, Lily Tomlin and Nikki Glaser.

Movie stars Tony Curtis, Linda Blair, Kevin Smith, and John Travolta have discussed their movies at Tampa Theatre.

Many noteworthy films made their Tampa premieres at the venue, including "The Wizard of Oz," "Gone With the Wind," "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," "Dracula," "King Kong," "Citizen Kane," "It's a Wonderful Life," "12 Angry Men," "Vertigo," "Singin' in the Rain," "Dr. Strangelove," "Dr. No" and " Fargo."

"One Hundred and One Dalmatians" had its world premiere at Tampa Theatre in 1961.

Images courtesy of Tampa Theatre



HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Tampa Theatre's grand reopening is scheduled for October 2026. Tampa Theatre President & CEO George Levesque says, "We know as beautiful as the building is now, that when it is restored to its original paint scheme, it's going to be much more vibrant and jaw-dropping than it even is today. Tampa Theatre belongs to this community."

Tampa Theatre's birthday celebration on Thursday,

Oct. 15, will feature a silent comedy with live music, provided by the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra and Steven Ball on the Mighty Wurlitzer Theatre Organ. The program will also include comments from Tampa's Mayor, a few special guests, and a short film recapping 100 years of film programming. Like opening night in 1926, the finale will be a rousing rendition of the "1812 Overture."