

# I Remember Old Tuscaloosa

By Fred Maxwell

The first motion picture to be exhibited in Tuscaloosa was one of the feature attractions of a transient street fair or carnival (circa 1905) which set up its tents in the street in the heart of town before these streets were paved. The moving picture tent was located in the middle of Greensboro Ave. between Brown's Dept. Store and what is now Black, Friedman & Winston.

When Thomas A. Edison invented the moving picture camera and the projector (circa 1893) there were no movie studios, directors or producers so Mr. Edison set up to make his own films as the first director and producer. If not the first picture, it was by far the most notable he produced. The name of this picture was "The Great Train Robbery" and was released circa 1903. This was the picture shown in the first exhibition outlined above as Tuscaloosa's introduction to the movies.

Only a short while later a vacant store (about 514 24th Ave.) opened up as Tuscaloosa's first movie theatre. It was named or known as "The Nickelodeon" as were many others over the country that charged an admission fee of five cents. It was not too much later that the fee was raised to 10 cents, but the name nickelodeon remained.

A little later The Nickelodeon moved one block south on 24th Ave. to where Stallworth's meat market had been located. To the best of my recollection Dave Cypress operated this picture show at each of these locations.

The first movie theatre to be built as such was the Diamond which was erected on the corner of 7th St. and 24th Ave. (now occupied by Quinn's Hardware Store). This was a joint enterprise by J.Q. Bush and R.H.

Little and they soon added the Belvedere (next to the Alston Bldg.) and the Princess on University Blvd., where Gray's Men's Shop is now located.

When the Belvedere burned in 1921 it was rebuilt as the Ritz and operated by C.B. Grimes who introduced the first talking pictures in Tuscaloosa. When the First National Bank 10-story building was erected in 1924 the Bama Theatre was built. In 1938 the Bama moved to the new City Hall Bldg. at 6th St. and 24th Ave.) and the Druid took over the old Bama location next to the bank.

A few years ago when the bank extended its building to include the Druid Theatre building, the Druid moved to its present location (2415 University Blvd.) The Capri replaced the Ritz.

Today there are many suburban and/or open air movie theatres in the Tuscaloosa area, however none of these have the personality or individuality of the early local movie theatres (the "flickers"). So I would like to end this article with a salute to Pearl White and the "Perils of Pauline" and the other continued weekly series that held such a captive audience in suspense.

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