

# MOVIES COME TO ANN ARBOR

1906

In late 1906 three storefront movie theaters opened downtown showing short films for a nickel: the Theatorium at 119 East Liberty, soon followed by the Casino at 339 South Main and the Bijou at 209 East Washington. The next year, cashing in on the national nickelodeon craze, the Star opened at 118 East Washington and the Vaudette at 220 South State, the first in the campus area. All were tiny, low-budget operations, though the Star and the Bijou included small stages for vaudeville acts.

The only early theater to survive the teens was the much larger Majestic, which opened on September 19, 1907, in a former roller-skating rink at 316 Maynard. Its large size, full stage, and campus location made it a great success. It was closed in 1940 when the State Theater was built. The Maynard parking structure now occupies the Majestic's former site.



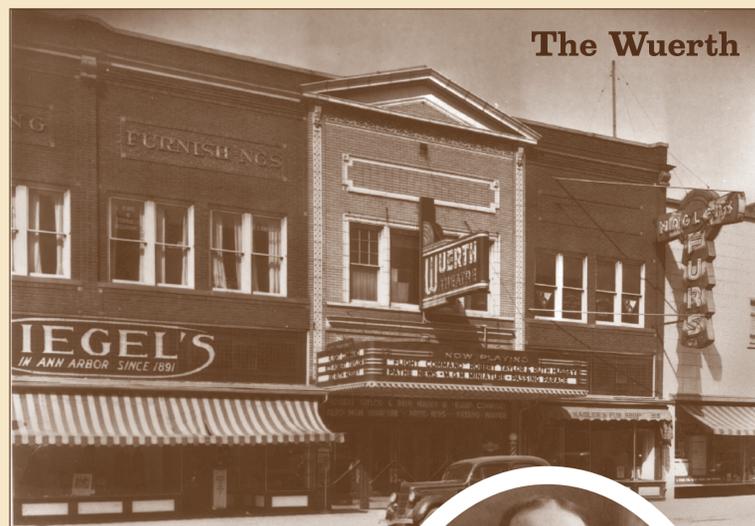
▲ *The Majestic in 1930.*



▲ *The Star was the site of a famous student riot in March 1908. Incensed at alleged mistreatment, more than 1,000 angry students stormed the theater and destroyed its facade. Several arrests were made, but the affair was soon smoothed over. The Star reopened a week later and lasted until 1919.*



**J. FRED WUERTH**'s Orpheum at 326 South Main Street (above left) was Ann Arbor's first theater built for movies, though it included vaudeville acts when it opened in 1913. In the next two years the Arcade opened on North University and the tiny Rae on West Huron. Wuerth then expanded his holdings by building a new business block (above right) next door to the Orpheum. His clothing shop was in the front with another movie theater—the Wuerth—across the rear, reached from Main Street by an arcade of small shops. The two theaters were at right angles to each other, sharing backstage space as well as one theater organ. When they both closed in 1957, the Orpheum was remodeled into a store and both buildings were covered with expanded metal mesh screening. The facade of the Orpheum (later Gratz's restaurant) was renovated in 1985, but the original front of Wuerth's office building remained covered until 2005.



**J. Fred Wuerth**

*In early 1929 J. Fred Wuerth was the first to recognize the importance of "talkies." He figured the cost of the new sound equipment would be offset by eliminating live entertainment. Other theaters had to scramble to catch up.*