



## DOWNTOWN MOVIE THEATERS

**W**hen the Orpheum opened in 1913 at 326 South Main Street, the event drew such a crowd that people had to be turned away. Constructed by clothier J. Fred Wuerth, it was the first theater in town built to show movies. Earlier, one-reel films were shown in storefront nickelodeons like the Star at 118 East Washington Street (lower right). Advertised as “family entertainment,” many shows included live acts.

In 1917, behind his clothing shop next door to the Orpheum, Wuerth built a second theater. Moviegoers entered below the Wuerth’s Main Street marquee (shown above in the 1940s) and passed through a two-story, skylit arcade that led to the theater. The L-shaped plan allowed the two theaters to share backstage space and a single theater organ. In early 1929 the Wuerth was the first local theater

to convert from silent films to “talkies.” While the Orpheum specialized in more high-toned productions, the smaller, cozier Wuerth showed children’s serialized matinees and gave away china to attract viewers. After both theaters closed in 1957, the interior spaces were remodeled for new uses. By 1927 Wuerth’s menswear business had become Fiegel’s. It survived until 1997.



ONE OF FOUR EARLY STOREFRONT THEATERS DOWNTOWN, THE STAR – “COOL AND COMFORTABLE” – FEATURED VAUDEVILLE ACTS IN ADDITION TO FIVE-CENT FILMS. IT WAS THE SITE OF A FAMOUS 1908 RIOT WHEN MORE THAN A THOUSAND UM STUDENTS STORMED, LOOTED, AND SACKED THE THEATER. THE COMBINED EFFORTS OF THE POLICE AND FIRE DEPARTMENTS, EVEN UM PRESIDENT JAMES ANGELL, FAILED TO QUELL THE DISTURBANCE.



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