



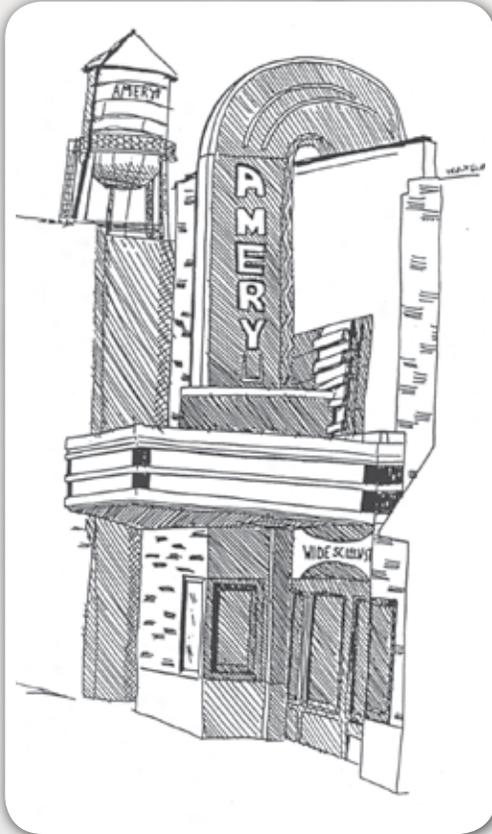
Amery Area Historical Society

Historical Sites



Amery Classic Theatre
1913

Amery Theatre Dedication



Amery's movie going entered a new era with the opening of the Amery Classic Theatre on July 4, 2013, one hundred years after the opening of the city's first theatre, the Gem Theatre.

The latest owners, Chris and Mary Lynn Regnier, spent the prior year renovating the 1936 building, installing new carpeting and repainting, and adding a larger stage to permit live stage drama as well as to screen classic movies. A new outdoor front is installed; the theatre once had an outdoor ticket booth. The new front also replaces a set of doors destroyed by a car that drove from the street into the lobby.

Movie-going in Amery started with the opening of the old Gem Theatre on October 17, 1913. The frame building at Birch Street East (#116) quickly became the site of many community activities in addition to showing silent movies, stage plays, public lectures, community celebrations for holidays, class reunions, and a gymnasium for playing basketball. The first owner, Ray Maxon, even advertised sharpening of ice skates. Subsequent owners and operators were O.H. Steindorff, John G. Heywood, and Alfred Paulson—the latter purchased the Gem in 1934. In the September 6, 1934 Luck Enterprise edition, it stated, "A deal was completed a few weeks ago in which Alfred M. Paulson, former resident of Luck, became owner of the Amery Gem Theatre. The opening show will be given tonight in a midnight show. Skyo, man of 1000 mysteries appears in person. On the screen, the Paulson's are showing "Return of the Terror," starring Lyle Talbot and Mary Astor. Posters for the show advise that you make up a spook party for, 'If you come alone, you will be afraid to walk home alone.'" Paulson wanted to move the Gem to Keller Avenue but was denied permission to do so by state building authorities because it was a frame building.

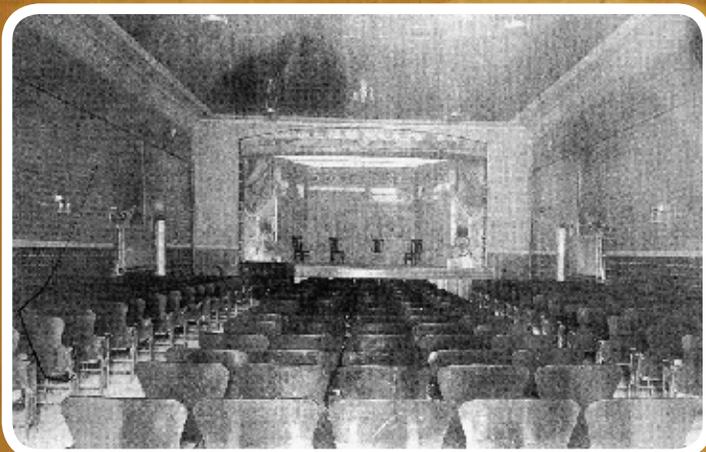
The fate of the Gem Theatre building was sealed by the 1953 tornado that struck Amery's business district. The building had already suffered fire damage on December 29, 1938. It was razed in March 1954.

Paulson built the present attractive Art Deco building in 1936 and renamed it the New Amery Theatre. Emil Klingler (1887-1976), a farm boy from rural Amery, designed the Theatre in 1936. A self-taught architect, he owned a millwork, a sawmill, manufactured church furniture, and designed many local buildings: numerous rural schools and barns, the canning factory, the Redeemer church, and buildings for the Polk County Government including the Highway Building in Balsam Lake. In 1940, he moved his offices to Eau Claire where he established well-known regional architectural offices.

Paulson owned and operated the theatre until 1951 when it was purchased by John Schanon. His sons Mike and Rick Schanon, later operated the theatre until 2000, at which time it was sold to Orville and Connie Flackey of Durand. Flackeys sold to Jim Mays in April 2002, and Jack Sondreal



Research for brochure by JoAnn Hallquist, Karen Schanon, Linda Tempel & Inez Nordahl



GEM THEATRE
"WOMANLESS WEDDING"

operated the theatre from 2008 to 2010. After a period of closure, the Regniers bought the property in July 2012.

The New Amery Theatre opened Friday, December 11, 1936 to a double feature: "Stampede" and "Pride of the Marines," the latter featuring Charles Bickford and Florence Rice. The first film featured by owner John Schanon in 1951 was "King Solomon's Mines" with a cast of Deborah Kerr and Stewart Granger. The Regniers opened to the public July 4, 2013 with "Singin' in the Rain" starring Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor and Debbie Reynolds.

Paulson had a flair for encouraging business. Usherettes with flashlights directed customers to their seats. During the 1930s, bank nights featured drawings for cash prizes to the audience in an effort to bring in customers. During World War II, there were Bond Nights. If you brought a \$25 savings bond, admission to the movie was free.

The theatre was always a place to cool off in the summertime before air conditioning became generally available. An advertisement in the 1935 American yearbook boasted the Gem Theatre is "air cooled in the summer to make you comfortable." The early cooling system featured a fan blowing over water to cool the air. The New Amery Theatre cooled the interior with the same type of equipment.

The theatre employed a lot of young people over the years, selling concessions, running the projectors, and cleaning the premises after movies. One Christmas, Santa was flown to Amery, landing on the ice of North Twin Lake, and visiting the theatre by sleigh to hand out candy to children attending the free matinee.

The same projectors installed in the early years at the Gem are still there and being used. In post World War II, the film companies shipped the reels of film to the Film Barn, which was located in the warehouse district of Minneapolis. The theatre owners could either pick them up or have them shipped by Greyhound bus or truck.

The Gem Theatre became part of "lost Amery" history but the New Amery Theatre has now risen again as the Amery Classic Theatre.



Eighty years ago
November 10, 1932

Startling Picture at Gem

The feature attraction at the Gem Theatre Friday and Saturday is truly an extraordinary attraction.

Not only is Mr. and Mrs. Martin Johnson's "Congorilla" positively the first and only talking picture made in the African jungle, but the fact remains that not a single inch of this thrilling production, which took two long, hard, life risking years to make, was staged. The only part man's hand had in the making of this amazing achievement was in turning the crank and in taking precautions he was not seen by ferocious animals to be photographed and recorded.

It was the most perilous safari attempted by man. Added precaution was necessary because of the presence of the sound equipment.

The eyes of the motion picture camera and the ears of the sound recording equipment missed absolutely nothing. The result is a most remarkable production - one that makes the jungle and all its ferocity an open book.

The New Amery
AMERY, WISCONSIN

FRIDAY - SATURDAY
DECEMBER 11-12
DOUBLE FEATURE
"STAMPEDE"
With Charles Starrett and
Finis Barton

Pride of the Marines
With Charles Bickford
and Florence Rice

SUN.-MON.-TUES.
DECEMBER 13-14-15
MATINEE SUNDAY 3 P. M.
"Dodsworth"
5 Star Picture
with
Walter Huston, Ruth Chatterton
and Mary Astor
A HEART THRILL FOR
EVERYONE!
Added Shorts & News

WEDNESDAY - THURSDAY
DECEMBER 16-17
"Secret Agent"
with
Madeline Carroll and Peter Lowe
"March of Time and
Added Shorts



THE GEM THEATRE (1925)
- ALL MALE PERFORMERS

GEM Theatre

Where you will always
see the best in moving
pictures

O. H. STEINDORF



John & Charlotte Schanon
with sons Mike & Rick

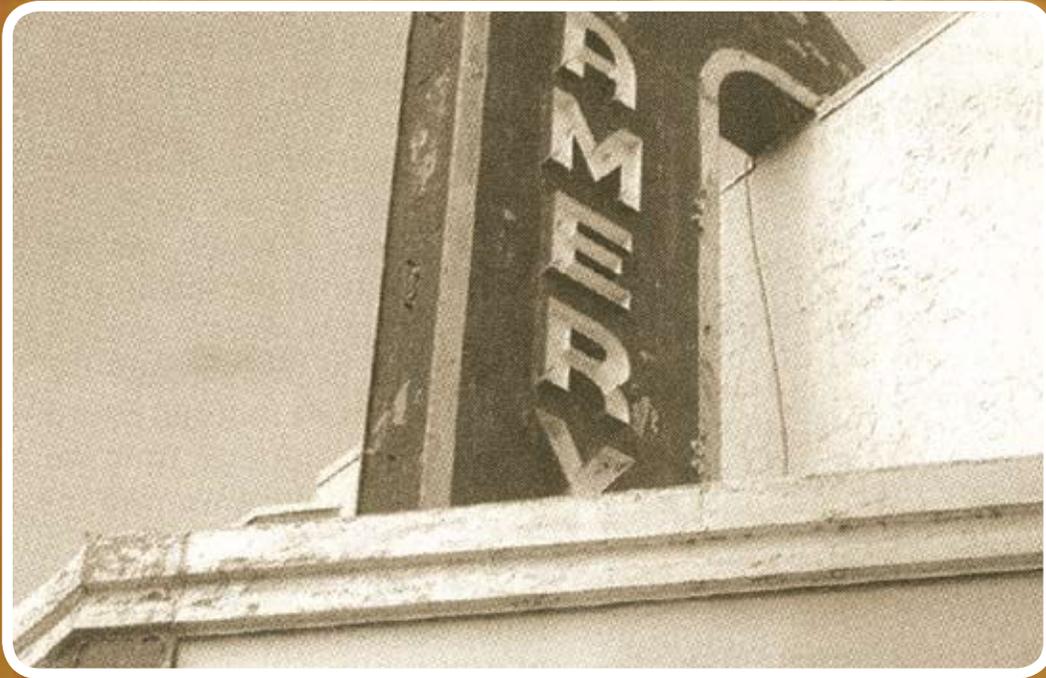
The Amery Area Historical Society (AAHS)
collects and preserves the heritage of the local area.



This historic site brochure is an activity of the
Cathy Haug Memorial Project of the AAHS.



The AAHS welcomes your participation
as donors and members.



Amery Area Historical Society
225 Scholl Court • Amery WI 54001

(lower level of the Amery Area Public Library)