

The Road To Hollywood Ran Through Buffalo

☒ It was back in or around 1989-1990, and I was at my parents house in Amherst New York talking with my Grandmother. She was at that time, around 90 years old, and that day she became extremely talkative. She began to tell me about the history of our hometown of Buffalo, and things relating to the beginning of the film industry. I wasn't really sure if I should believe everything that she was saying, but she was really lucid and went into great detail. Some of the things that stood out most were her mentioning that she used to work for MGM studios in Buffalo, and had personally met Louis B. Mayer on several occasions, and had to purchase gift baskets for him as she worked reception at the small Buffalo office. She also mentioned that many of the amazing mansions on the historic Lincoln Parkway by the Albright Knox Art Musuem had once belonged to movie stars of the day. This was sometime around 1920 I believe, but I I had always kept these stories in the back of my mind, because I just didn't have any way of proving anything. My Grandmother died in 1999 at the ripe old age of 97 just 20 days short of her 98th birthday. I decided to do a little research into these stories recently, and much to my surprise I found this article from 1918 that had recently been re-discovered:

<http://www.buffaloah.com/h/mark/0bit.pdf>

<http://www.buffaloah.com/h/mark/obit.html>

The first ever tour of Buffalo's fabulous motion picture related history was sponsored by the Buffalo International Film Festival on Saturday, September 29, 2009 and guided by Martin Wachadlo, local architectural historian. Twenty awstruck members of the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) from all over the U.S. and the UK were guided to the

site of Edisonia Hall and the Vitascope Theatre and the Regent Theater (1914) which is the birthplace of TODD-AO .

Belonging to such diverse organizations as the Library of Congress, the National Archives (NARA), the BBC, the Academy Award Archives, and the UCLA Film Archive, these highly skilled and prominent archivists were astonished at the sheer diversity of architecture in the city. Beyond such masterpieces as the Guarantee Building and the Darwin Martin House, the number of early 20th Century Movie Theaters still surviving is unique in the world. These include The Michigan (1910), The Savoy (1911), The Sattler (1914 on the foundation of a 1900 theater). Although in need of restoration, the theaters ñ once attended by Mary Talbert ñ still glow with beautiful terra-cotta decorations. One member of the tour remarked that in Hollywood, no movie houses before 1920 even exist! This makes Buffalo truly unique in having preserved a fabulous "Time Machine" peek into the past.

Buffalo was also an important Motion Picture Exchange from the turn of the twentieth century up to the 1960s. Film Exchanges handled and shipped the 35mm prints of all the newest motion pictures and made sure that theaters from Syracuse to Cleveland, from Erie, PA to Toronto had them on time and in perfect condition for each evening's programming. Pathe, Vitascope, Warner Brothers, MGM, Paramount, Universal all had offices in Buffalo along Franklin and Pearl Streets starting as early as 1906. Mr. Wachadlo pointed out nearly a dozen of them still standing, although now used for other purposes. The Warner Brothers' building on Franklin is now a restaurant.

I will continue to delve into this extremely interesting (at least to me) and mostly forgotten piece of US history, and would love to know if anyone who reads this knows any other related antiquarian information on the subject , please feel free to send it my way. I would like to dedicate this article to my Grandmother Cecilia. We miss you.

I'll get back to some more political stuff on my next post, as there is certainly a lot going on right night now, and a few storms may be a brewin. Let's try to look at the brighter side.

More related links including my personal hero of modern technology, Nikola Tesla who also has a large historical tie in to the Buffalo area:

 <http://www.buffaloah.com/h/movie/tc.html>

<http://www.teslasociety.com/niagarafalls.htm>

<http://culturalniagara.com/filmmain.html>

<http://culturalniagara.com/edisonia.html>

<http://www.buffaloah.com/h/movie/07unesco.html>