

Holland offers unique theater experience

By **BRIDGET EARLY**
Staff Writer

The Holland Theater, in Bellefontaine, is entering the second phase of a possible five phase renovation project, with plans for replacing the roof before winter, according to Marge Brundage, chairman, public relations, for Logan County Landmark Preservation, Inc.

The preservation purchased the building in December of 1999 for \$135,000 with the help of benefactors Dick and Peggy Knowlton, Logan County residents who have fond memories of the theater.

The Holland is a one-of-a-kind atmospheric theater designed and built in 1931 by architect Peter M. Hulsken who was born and educated in Holland. The design reflects 17th century Dutch architecture depicting existing buildings in Holland, including the house in which Hulsken was born at Arnhem, built in 1643, according to records.

Working windmills whirled beneath the ceiling which was originally dark blue with twinkling stars and rolling clouds. The design also incorporates Dutch cross bond brick, typical of Holland, Brundage said.

The auditorium is 64 feet wide and 112 feet long and originally had seating for 1,000. In addition, the balcony originally seated 400. A large stone arch presents the 23 foot stage designed for live theater.

The theater was one of several theaters built in New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio that were owned by Schine Enterprise Inc. To ensure that the theater would not be copied, Hulsken patented the design.

The attached 5,000-square-foot office building housed the offices of Schine Enterprise Inc. for a time, Brundage said. In subsequent years a number of business offices have come and gone.

One unique quality to the building was that it was built of steel and concrete and was considered fire-proof. The original picture screen was 40 feet wide, the largest in the state at the time of construction, according to historical accounts.

Construction took only four months to complete and was one of the few projects going on in Bellefontaine at the time, according to Brundage.

During the 1960's and 70's the government anti-trust laws broke up the Schine Enterprise Inc. group and the building was put up for sale.

While the building has deteriorated in subsequent years the preservation is fortunate that the building is basically sound. Necessary repairs include a new roof, spouting repairs and some tuck pointing. The interior needs major cleaning and restoration.

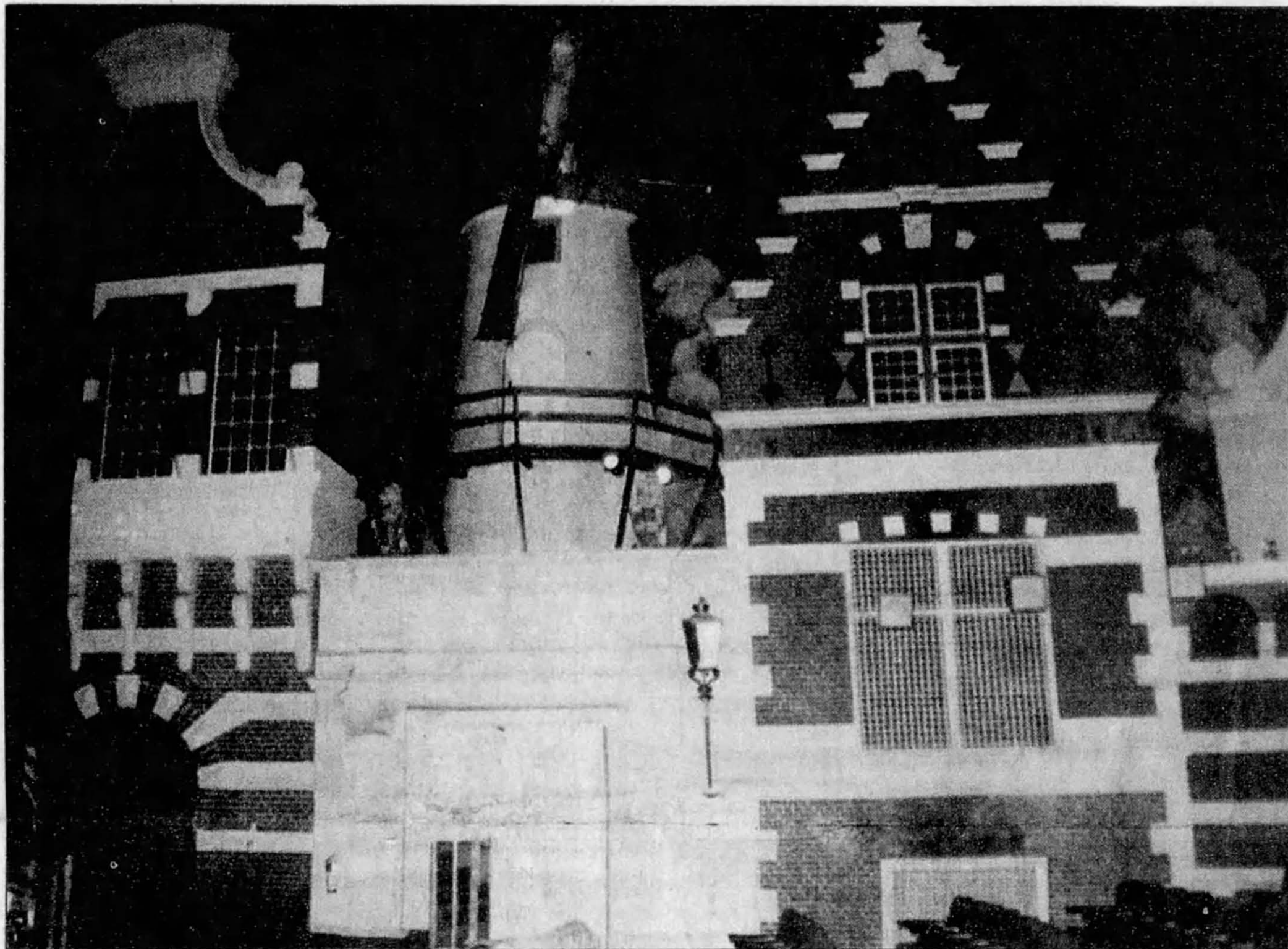
The theater was divided into several smaller theaters in recent years. Fortunately, great care was taken not to damage the original facade. There are also many of the original chairs in the theater, Brundage said.

She also said that when the theater was divided, steel beams and concrete were poured over the stage. Once the concrete is removed the original wood stage will be revealed.

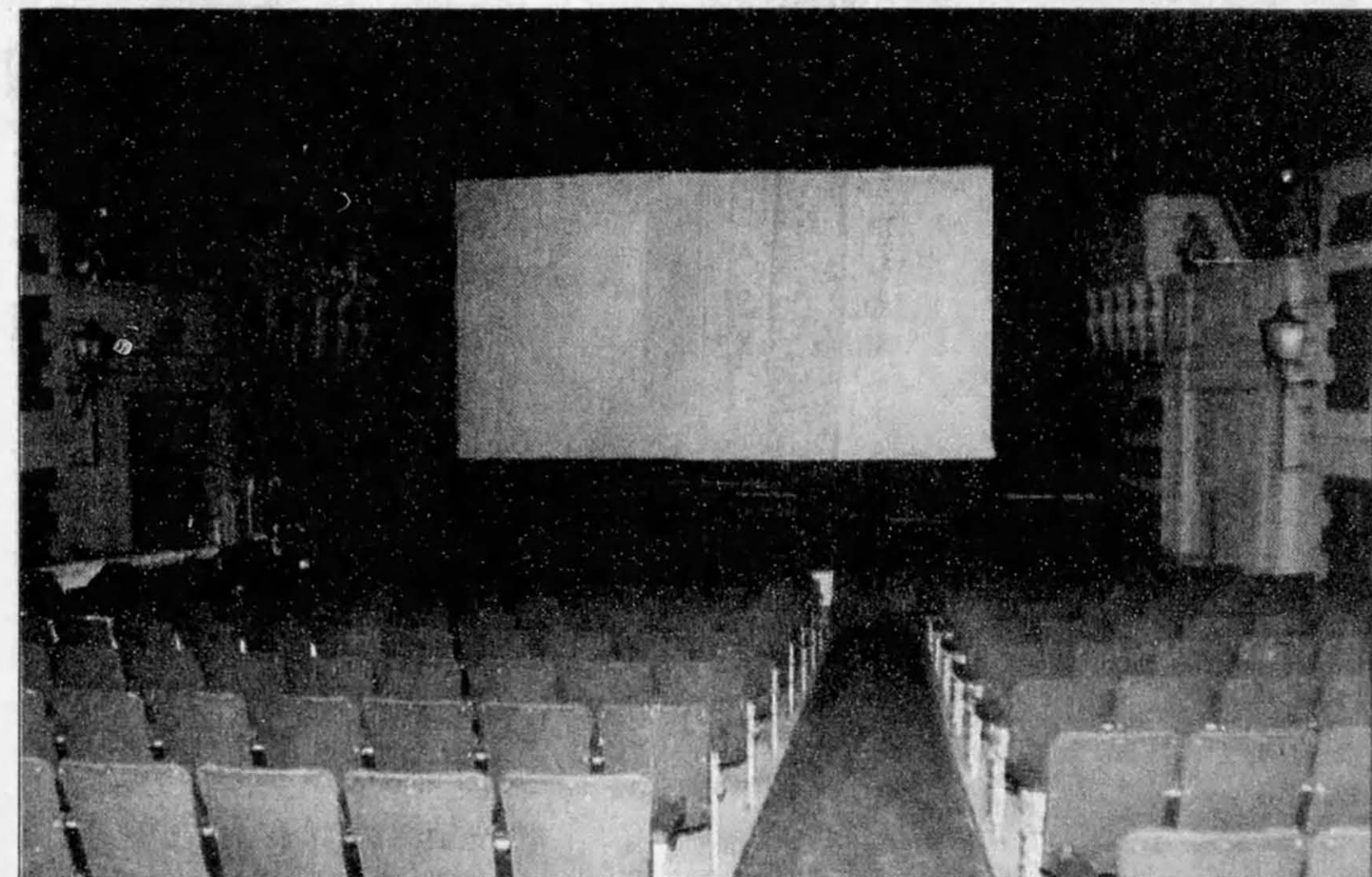
Complete renovation could cost as much as \$4 million to \$5 million and a lot of hard work, according to Brundage. The preservation is currently consulting with several restoration experts.

A 15-member board of trustees has spent five to six months in strategic planning. They meet two to three times a month and have an open meeting the fourth Tuesday of the month to inform interested community members about their progress, Brundage said.

Cleaning crews removed three
See 'Holland' on Page A-7



Unique cinema experience: The Holland Theater in Bellefontaine, with its Dutch architecture facade, is one of a kind, according to the group that has worked toward its preservation.



Submitted photos

Holland

Continued from Page 1

truck beds of junk to be hauled away. Crew members swept and mopped floors, cleaned restrooms, replaced light bulbs, checked wiring and replaced defective wires. They have also made repairs to windows and doors to stop drafts, according to Brundage.

Plans include renovating the office space to use for studios, conference rooms, art classes and meeting rooms. The building could also serve as a conference facility to fit into the Retention and Expansion Logan County '98 Objectives, according to Brundage.

Professional theater and touring acts are also expected.

Groups and organizations expected to benefit from the space available include the Cultural Arts Commission, the Logan County Art League, local theater groups, the Logannaires, Bellefontaine and Logan County Schools, the West Central Ohio Community Concert Band, the Genealogical Society, Dance Studios, Logan County Convention and Tourism and other groups.

The preservation group also suggests many new programs could be developed such as amateur and professional entertainment, film festivals, educational programs for the arts, teen conventions, parenting classes, community/county service projects and numerous others.

The preservation has heard from individuals as far away as Calif. who wish to support the renovation and who are sharing fond memories about the theater. Brundage said that people have reminisced about getting engaged at the Holland, had their first dates and received their

first kisses at the theater.

The memory of accompanying her father on a "date" to see "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea," holds a special place in Brundage's heart. She also saw many Roy Rogers movies with her aunt at the Holland.

"Anyone who lived here has memories of the Holland," She said.

The Logan County Landmark Preservation, Inc. newsletter, The Projector, relates a memory from Rose Donovan

"It was the best job I ever had. All fun. I was in high school (1943), got out before last period and worked at Woolworth's till 5:30, went home, ate, changed clothes, and went to work at the Holland Theater at the candy counter," Donovan wrote, adding that she remembered her mother winning \$250 in a drawing. Her parents bought ice cream cones for the whole neighborhood.

Space is already being put to use in the building. The Logan County Art League, after 47 years in existence, has realized its dream of having a gallery. The gallery is currently located in the west annex of the theater. When the renovation is complete, a permanent art gallery will be incorporated into the plans.

The preservation is actively seeking old photographs that may help identify original artwork or architectural design located in the foyer, behind the main lobby.

Those interested in more information, supporting the Holland Theater Renovation or becoming members of the Logan County Landmark Preservation, Inc., should contact the preservation at their office located in the Holland Theater at 592-9002.