

## ORPHEUM THEATER OPENING MARKS EPOCH IN CITY HISTORY

### CITY'S GROWTH SYNONYMOUS TO THAT OF OWNERS

The history of theatrical entertainment in Phoenix is essentially the history of Rickards and Nace. From a modest beginning, as unpretentious as the penny arcades which were the forerunners of today's movie palaces, the firm of Rickards and Nace, growing, expanding, building, has become the unquestionable leader in the Arizona amusement world.

And the history of Rickards and Nace is the history of two persons, each with a life devoted to the show business, blending to produce a combination that has balked at no obstacle in its rapid growth.

When Mary Pickford's first great hit, "Tess of the Storm Country," had begun to reach the outlying hamlets and villages of the country, almost at the beginning of the full length feature picture era in the cinema world, the two men, now the principal forces in the Orpheum, became a part of the state through their extensive holdings, arrived in Phoenix. They had not known each other before. It was one of those chance happenings which, like love at first sight, sometimes develop into a genuine association and sometimes fall by the wayside, another face of fortune.

### Ready Years Ago

Luckily—and those who know the two men say, inevitably—the combination turned out favorably, almost surpassing the hopes of the two principals themselves. Phoenix must have a real show place, an amusement house worthy of the city and of the state, was their first unanimous agreement. They were ready to build the Orpheum years ago. But they felt that Phoenix was not then prepared. When Phoenix is ready, she shall have entertainment of a different order. Last year they felt Phoenix was ready and plans for the Orpheum were begun. When a crowded house tonight views with admiration the theater which Phoenix brings to the state, there will be seen at the same time, the goal toward which the two enterprising showmen have been striving for years, while Phoenix was growing to its present cosmopolitan stage.

Of residents who sat in the little corrugated iron Airdrome—such was Phoenix' first movie house called—some years ago—few were content with the primitive structure such as the Orpheum of today. This open air show, with its rough benches, plain finish, glaring lights, stuttering projectors, and "One moment please while we change reels," was the pedigree ancestor of today's magnificent Orpheum. It has long passed into the limbo of forgotten things and the site is now the center of intense commercial activity.

### Competition Starts

It was at the Airdrome that Harry Nace first became known to movie fans of Phoenix. Since his connection with this early motion picture enterprise, he has been continuously and actively engaged, in Phoenix, and in other cities of Arizona, providing the newest, the most recent, the pick of amusement offerings for the Arizona public.

His first executive position in Phoenix was as manager of the Airdrome, a building which the Savoy later was operated. This stood where the Porter Saddlery company now is located.

Competition developed among exhibitors early in the game in Phoenix, as the public and the showmen far-seeing business men had begun to vision a tremendous future for show business. The Empress, located where the Hotel Adams Annex now stands, was the other leading entertainment house of the town.

Striving to outdo one another in attractions, the shows combed available supplies of talent and entertainment to bring to the local public. The Empress introduced musical comedy, and the great success of this form of entertainment made it evident that the motion picture was not entirely big enough to hold its own against a combined motion picture and stage show.

### Partnership Formed

During this period of keen competition, Joseph Elmer Rickards, who has shortened his name as his interests grew, reached Phoenix. He came as business manager of the musical company brought to the Arizona by Harry Nace, manager. From this business association dates the actual origin of the Rickards and Nace Amusement Enterprises, Inc., now owning, operating, or affiliated with 18 stage and picture houses in Arizona. Rickards is president, and Nace secretary and treasurer of the firm.

The Lamara theater on Washington street, where now stands the annex to the First National Bank of Arizona, was built during the period of intense competition between the Empress and the Arizona. Shortly afterward it was bought by Nace. The Lion theater then contributed a growth on the site where the Newberry store does business today. Rickards, definitely casting his lot with Arizona amusement enterprises, purchased the Lion and changed the name of the house to the Hippodrome.

### Some Fade Out

As the Empress and other show houses, the Airdrome, some smaller places, faded out of the picture field and into the depths of the things that used to be, and as Rickards and Nace expanded, the "show street" of Phoenix definitely was located on Washington street.

A pioneer of Phoenix theatrical history, Nace started with the picture industry and purchased the first films produced by the organization which is today known for its production of Paramount pictures. At that time he bought the franchise for these pictures, and is now recognized as the exhibitor holding the record for the second longest period of continuous Paramount showing in the West.

The Strand, with a seating capacity of 1,000, was the first joint enterprise of the two men who have

### He Is Master Of Ceremonies



**Jo. E. Rickards**  
As president of the Rickards and Nace Enterprises, builders of the new \$750,000 Orpheum which opens tonight, Rickards has been principally responsible for the selection of entertainment features which have been presented at the firm's theaters in Phoenix and other Arizona cities. At the source of supply in Los Angeles, first hand information on latest releases is obtained by Rickards, pioneer figure in the entertainment world. He is to be master of ceremonies at the opening tonight.

### Orpheum Designed By Architects Having Years Of Experience In Construction Adapted To Section

Years of experience in architecture especially adapted to this section of the country and to Phoenix and the surrounding area, is the period of study of characteristic form, has gone into the new Orpheum theater building, designed by Lescher and Mahoney, Phoenix architects who have planned many other prominent structures in Arizona.

Hugh Gilbert, as associate architect, participated in the plans for the Orpheum theater. The architect, Royal W. Lescher, came here from Buffalo in 1916. Leslie J. Mahoney came here in October 1922. In 1914 John R. Kibbey became associated with Lescher under the firm name of Lescher and Kibbey. John R. Mahoney who came from Los Angeles, the partners re-organized under the name of Lescher, Kibbey and Mahoney, and when Kibbey left for Los Angeles in 1922 the firm became known under its present designation.

Outstanding structures erected after designs by the firm of Lescher and Mahoney, who have a staff of 15 architects in their office, include: Phoenix Union High school stadium, Liberal Arts Building, St. Mary's parochial school, St. Joseph's hospital, United Verde Hospital at Jerome, United Verde Extension hotel at Jerome, El Portal Hotel at Mesa, Sacred Heart church

at Nogales, Booker T. Washington school, Phoenix Masonic Temple, Tempe State Teachers college, training school, Phoenix Country club, Delos Cooke residence at Arcadia, Phoenix Central Methodist church.

Under construction, buildings designed by the firm include the Phoenix City hall, First National Bank at Mesa, Tolleson High school, Central Arizona Light and Power company warehouse, Crystal Ice and Cold Storage company plant, Arizona grocery and Vance brothers bakeries, Knights of Pythias building and the Kingman grade school.

advanced Arizona to a leading place in the theatrical scheme of things. Shortly after the Strand was opened the Lamara changed hands and the building was razed to make way for the expansion of Phoenix business. On the site the First National bank's annex was erected.

### East Side Gets Theater

There came the Ramona theater as the enterprise felt that the east side of the city was large enough to be entitled to a theater of its own. The Ramona has changed policies since then but it continues to be the center of activity on East Washington street. It holds 1,000 persons.

In 1921 the Rialto, until the Orpheum was built the largest theater in Phoenix, was completed and opened to the public with a new policy of vaudeville, pictures and road attractions.

The need of a dramatic stock company was filled by the purchase of the Elks theater, the name of which was changed to the Apache. This show house, with a seating capacity of 700, has been the scene of stock productions on the latest Broadway hits for a long time.

### Action Elsewhere In State

George Mauk, who was among the early theater men of Phoenix, operated the Columbia and the Amuzia theaters. Rickards and Nace acquired control of these and their operation has been under the direction of this enterprise since the change. This transaction marked the departure of George Mauk from the amusement world of Phoenix, although he is still associated with such enterprises in other places.

A complete list of the Rickards and Nace amusement enterprises in Arizona reveals, besides the Orpheum, the following: Phoenix—Rialto, Strand, Columbia, Amuzia, Ramona, Apache and the Riverside Amusement park; Tucson—Rialto and the Opera House, Mesa—Nile and Majestic; Yuma—the Yuma and the Lyric; Somerton—the Somerton; Winslow—Rialto and Acme.

### Orpheum Assures Entertainment Of Maximum Variety

Maximum scope of entertainment, ranging from one-reel picture novelties to elaborate road productions, has been assured Phoenix and Arizona theatergoers for the coming year as a result of the opening of the Orpheum, Rickards and Nace super-theater.

Equipped for every known form of entertainment the new theater during its first year will bring a large variety of shows—in picture, talkies, and stage—to the patrons of Arizona's largest and most elaborately appointed theater.

The management has already begun arrangements for booking the outstanding shows of the country, many of which were unavailable for lack of stage space and properties during the past. With the present theater the city of Phoenix is prepared to attract any traveling company, regardless of size.

### Disappearing Organ

Vaudeville, of the Western booking Orpheum and Junior Orpheum acts, and which has been a Thursday and Friday night feature of the Rialto, will make its weekly place on the same nights at the Orpheum will leave the Rialto strictly a motion and talking picture theater with vitaphone and movie-tone installations.

Having the only disappearing organ in the state, the theater is prepared for weekly specialties on this popular instrument. Co-featured

### Lighting Effects At Orpheum Are Latest Product Of Science

Lighting effects comparable only to those of the largest and newest theaters in Los Angeles will transform Orpheum performances into a magic land of color and illusion, giving to patrons of the local theater the utmost that modern theater illumination science and art have developed.

This was assured through the employment of Claude D. Seaman of Los Angeles as the lighting engineer. He supervised the lighting effects installed at the Carthay Circle, all Grauman theaters, the Warner Brothers, United Artists and Loew's State theaters and the Pasadena Community playhouse.

"Lighting in the new Orpheum begins where others stopped," was the comment made by Seaman when he completed the work. "This is not just a perfunctory job, but it means that continued development of these effects still goes on. The newest theater has the advantage of all previous experiment and trial."

### An Outdoor Garden

Regardless of the scientific or experimental angle, the theatergoers of Arizona will realize as they are carried, as if by Aladdin's magic carpet, into a new land, far away from the glare of everyday existence. Designed as a mission garden with the walls extending upward along each side, flowers and vines creeping over the walls, the interior of the theater gradually becomes—not a theater—but an outdoor garden, with bubbling, glittering fountains in arched alcoves. Overhead stars peep—not through a ceiling—but from a pure blue sky, twinkling through the clouds floating into endless space. Over the mission wall, one sees beyond a vast expanse richly colored mountain ranges, canyon gorges, with glowing sand in the foreground, and typical Arizona vegetation.

The magician performing these marvelous transitions will not be visible. He will be seated backstage. His Aladdin's lamp will be one of the most elaborate switchboards ever built for theatrical use. This remarkable board with endless combinations of levers, switches and buttons numbered by the hundreds, costs approximately \$15,000, must more than the entire structure and equipment of the first Rickards and Nace theater built in Phoenix. A second switchboard in the basement is operated from the master board on the stage. Control of power, including the heating and ventilating systems, is directed through the large board in the boiler room.

### Colors Blended and Shaded

Astounding effects produced by the blending of red, blue and amber lights allowing an endless series of combinations and gradations of color and shade, are made possible through the more than 2,000 lights in the theater. With the exception

of a few, placed in handsome fixtures, all the lights are concealed, producing indirect lighting which

### He Keeps Wheels Moving



**Harry Nace**  
In direct contact with the public of Phoenix and other cities where Rickards and Nace enterprises are located, Nace is in large degree responsible for the remarkable expansion of the firm's activities during recent years. He is the "man on the firing line" of the firm, and through his direct management of the exhibition phase of the work, has kept the wheels turning in 17 amusement enterprises. He is one of the first motion picture exhibitors to establish in Phoenix. For years he and Rickards have been awaiting the opportune time for dedication of a de luxe amusement house.

### Special Room In New Orpheum Theater Provides Comfortable Place For Animal Actors

"What do they do with the animal actors that play vaudeville when they are off stage?"

This question is answered by a glimpse into the "animal room" below the stage of the new Orpheum theater.

A plain concrete cell, approximately 12 feet square and nearly as many high, is the home of animal actors when they are not "doing their stuff" before the footlight or being shipped to another "stand."

This room is guarded by a heavy door with a large barred window for observation purposes.

Location of the room is such that animals can be brought to the stage without disturbing performers or stage hands.

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### STATE GREETS MAGNIFICENT NEW PLAYHOUSE

Eyes of the amusement world tonight will focus on Phoenix as thousands from all parts of the west gather for the elaborate dedication program marking the opening of the Orpheum, a \$750,000 structure—sovereign of the region's playhouses.

The greatest array of screen luminaries ever to cast glory on a theater opening outside Los Angeles will shine tonight to bring further splendor to the gem of Rickards and Nace theaters. Official presentation of the Orpheum will go down in Arizona history as the most brilliant gathering of cinema notables ever to appear with city officials, civic leaders and society on any occasion here.

Gene Redewill's atmospheric orchestra, playing the overture, will start the program promptly at 8:30 o'clock. Doors of the theater, however, will be opened to the public at 7 o'clock to give opportunity for inspection of the building and to avoid a last minute rush.

And that which will be dedicated will remain as a tribute to Rickards and Nace, enterprising theater men, who have erected a luxurious temple to Theatris on what something like to a grand gala was a vacant lot at the southwest corner of Second avenue and Adams street. Tonight's opening will be a brilliant epilogue to a story of business romance whose earliest episodes were concurrent with the beginnings of the motion picture industry. It is not too long ago for present residents to have forgotten the corrugated iron "theater" in which the flickers of former days paraded uncertainly. The vision of a worthy playhouse was then born.

### Climax Of Gradual Growth

To hundreds who attend tonight the realization of this vision will seem like a mirage which has been pursued across the desert. To those who know it will be the climax of a gradual growth, each stage surmounting the other, keeping pace with the expansion of civic and social life in the Cold Spot of America.

Leading in the heart of Phoenix' commercial section, the towering structure beckons with a mighty lure. This monument was raised on the site originally owned by the Phoenix lodge of the B. P. O. Elks No. 335. In 1925 negotiations were completed and the transaction consummated, which was the foundation stone for the Orpheum theater as it stands today. A building had been started on the site by the Elks, then abandoned. Before anything else could be done the concrete foundation pillars had to be torn out, then excavations started. The steam shovel clawed into the earth on the corner sometime during July of 1927.

In addition to the land purchased from the Elks, Rickards and Nace acquired a lot, measuring 50 by 138½ feet, on the west line. The two lots combined to make a building site whose dimensions were 138½ by 150 feet. Covering this entire site today is the crowning achievement of Arizona's enterprising showmen—a masterpiece of architecture and construction.

Blending harmoniously Spanish, Italian, Moorish and rococo architectural styles.

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**Orpheum Theater Lighting Effects Offer the Latest in Illumination**

and, of course, it's a

## New State Electric Job

Rickards and Nace have built for Phoenix a beautiful theater, original in its treatment of both color and lighting. The design introduced many lighting problems and the solution is shown in the delicate effects which you will enjoy in this theater.

When Quality and Workmanship are the first considerations in your electrical requirements let us figure with you.

**New State ELECTRIC COMPANY**  
214 W. Washington Phone 7419

--in the new

## ORPHEUM THEATER

Where Quality is the First Consideration

ALL PLASTERING---

including ornamental, acoustic, interior and exterior work --was done by--

# Duncan MacDonald

Phone 6934

ADDING another triumph to our record of achievement on work well done the new Orpheum Theater will stand as a brilliant example to our sincere effort to do the best possible on all lathing and plastering jobs entrusted to us.

We point with pride to some of the major projects completed in Phoenix and the state during the past year and have under construction, at this time, some of the newer improvements to be finished this year, 1929.