

“Greater Joliet Week” Heralds Million-Dollar Rialto Opening

New Playhouse Ranks With Country’s Best; Theatre Opening Made Civic Event; Business Men Boost Enterprise

By H. E. HOLQUIST

By CHARLES RAYMOND

JOLIET, Illinois, having a published population of 38,400 today has what is unquestionably the finest motion picture theatre for a city of this size in the country. In fact, the new Rialto Square theatre erected by the Rubens boys, Jules, Maurice, Harry, Lew and Claude, is a playhouse which it takes no stretch of the imagination to place on a par with any of the picture palaces of Chicago or New York.

First of all it cost a million dollars. In addition, it has a seating capacity of 3,000. These two facts alone bespeak the worthiness of the Rialto Square to be placed among the country’s most auspicious theatres. Further, the Rialto was designed by C. W. & Geo. L. Rapp which makes it a foregone conclusion that it can lack nothing in beauty of appointment or modern comfort.

The building is an “L” shaped structure, fronting 131 feet on Chicago street and 284 feet on Van Buren. The theatre occupies the east wing but is entered from Chicago street. The commercial section, the office building, is of concrete and of tile construction with an exterior of terra cotta.

One of the most striking features of the building is the grand niche rising above the main entrance. The niche is paneled in colored terra cotta, in some of which real gold has been fused to bring out certain color effects, and is lighted by five banks of colored flood lights, concealed in coves along the sides.

Thousands of lights illuminate the marquise and the 70-foot electric sign over the entrance.

As one enters he comes first to the ornate ticket lobby and from there passes into the inner lobby which leads into the foyer grande and continues into the theatre proper.

At the west end of the inner lobby is an arch of mirrors and along the walls between marble pilasters are huge mirrors, eight feet wide and 20 feet high, three on each side. The vaulted ceiling, 45 feet in height, is paneled with figures cast in plaster from clay models made by Gene Romeo, a sculptor. All of the figures in the lobbies and theatre were made in the same manner.

The main lobby, or foyer grande, oval in shape, is the idea of Maurice Rubens, general manager of the Balaban and Katz interests in Joliet. Huge marble columns reach to the dome here, and in the center space are two fountains. Women’s writing, rest rooms, with maid service, and men’s smoking rooms opening off this foyer on the street and mezzanine floors, will offer to the public accommodations equal to that of any theatre in the country. Separate rest rooms are provided for the employees of the theatre.

Broad staircases lead from the foyer to the mezzanine. (Contd. on page 45)

THERE has been much talk in the past about the big motion picture houses being an institution in the community. That it is a civic unit. Well, perhaps it is but who would think so judging by the manner in which many theatres are handled, particularly openings. I don’t mean that the programs of the theatre should be made subordinate to entertainment. This has been done in many deluxe theatres where over zealous managers, in an effort to court favor with the home office, make commercial “movies” of local industries which are nothing more or less than advertising subjects and are absolutely lacking in artistic and entertainment value. These subjects may appeal to the one or two hundred employees of the soap factory depicted but bore the other thousands who attend the theatre that week.

The theatre must be theatrical to survive. It must present romance. It must carry the patrons in the chairs out and beyond themselves; it must present them with a new vista, one with which they are not familiar. Art, it is true, is a reproduction of natural conditions, yet audiences are not happy when they see their own drab lives reflected upon the screen of a theatre where they go to be entertained. Who knows but this is the underlying cause of the screen being accused of not appealing to the higher circles of life for the inner workings of the more fortunate in human society. These scenes are familiar to that class but, of course unfamiliar to the more unfortunate group. Thus the appeal to them.

But to get back to the civic angle for the theatre opening. It was used most effectively by Balaban and Katz at the opening of their Uptown theatre. This event was celebrated with a pageant given in the Central Uptown section of Chicago. It was proclaimed the biggest event of its kind ever staged for a theatre opening. The streets were crowded for days and the merchants who contributed to the celebration cashed in heavy in business during that week. Now, since this could be done in a community like the Uptown district why couldn’t it be done in a city with a population much smaller?

Balaban and Katz Great States Theatres were opening the beautiful Rialto Theatre in Joliet.

Jules Rubens wanted to give it the same thrust the Uptown had been given. A meeting was called of the prominent business men of Joliet and Benjamin H. Serkovich, who handled the Uptown pageant for Balaban and Katz went, along with the writer, to the meeting in Joliet. The plans were laid out for the celebration. It was to be called “Greater Joliet Week, celebrating the opening of Rubens’ Rialto theatre.”

First off it must be realized that



Rubens’ Rialto Square theatre building, Joliet, Ill.

C. W. & Geo. L. Rapp, architects.

Transcribed Articles from June 12, 1926 Issue of the Exhibitors Herald

“Greater Joliet Week” Heralds Million-Dollar Rialto Opening (page 13)

New Playhouse Ranks With Country’s Best; Accommodates 3,000 (page 13)
By H. E. Holquist

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One of the most striking features of the building is the grand niche rising above the main entrance. The niche is paneled in colored terra cotta, in some of which real gold has been fused to bring out certain color effects, and is lighted by five banks of colored flood lights, concealed in coves along the sides.

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New Rialto Square Is One of Country's Finest Theatres

(Cont. from page 13)

The mezzanine is carpeted and elaborately decorated and furnished. From this floor one may enter the balcony of the theatre.

The theatre contains approximately 2,000 seats, the chairs used being the same comfortable type as found in the Uptown theatre in Chicago. The aisles are wide and the seats so arranged as to provide ample space between the rows.

(Page 45 Photo Captions, Clockwise from Top Left: 1) One of the finest supply houses and sales rooms on the Pacific Coast is the home of the Theatre Equipment Company, 1956 Vermont street, Los Angeles, of which C. L. Russell is the head. Mr. Russell, who is distributor for the Motiograph line of projectors is a wide-awake business man as he has proven by the many installations he has made. He believes in keeping his sales room up-to-date and strictly orderly fashion. The above photographs plainly indicate that. 2) Auditorium of the recently opened Olympia, one of the Publix chain of theatres at Miami. The Olympia is an atmospheric theatre and was designed by John Ebersson, Chicago architect. It is executed in the Spanish design.)

* * *

According to Oscar Kaiser, of the contracting firm, the Rubens have sacrificed at least 400 seats in building the balcony as it is—with a long gradual slope instead of a steep pitch. By means of this construction one may sit any place in the house and have a clear view of the screen free from distortion.

The orchestra pit can be lowered and raised to a level with the stage.

All of the latest conveniences have been installed, including an automatic cooling and ventilating system. The outside air is taken from the top of the building and shot down through water sprays, passed through a refrigerating plant and then carried up by cork-covered ducts and discharged through the main entrance.

In the winter time the outside air will be warmed before it is sent through the house. In the summer the temperature inside the theatre will be kept at approximately 68 degrees.

Another mechanical feature of the Rialto is the remote control switchboard by which all the lights of the theatre are controlled. This board is located on the stage, in the wings, and is connected with magnetic switches located in a special room in the basement.

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Another mechanical feature of the Rialto is the remote control switchboard by which all the lights of the theatre are controlled. This board is located on the stage, in the wings, and is connected with magnetic switches located in a special room in the basement.

Beneath the stage are rooms for the musicians, stage hands, property rooms, but no dressing rooms. The dressing rooms are on floors above the stage and equipped with all conveniences, including shower baths.

The theatre proper is a decorator's masterpiece. Huge mirrors adorn the east and west walls, and in the top are three domes. These domes and the ceiling in the dome of the foyer grande are suspended from the steel roof beams and trusses by thousands of steel hangers.

Up above the domes and through this maze of steel wooden runways have been constructed. It is through vents in the domes that light bulbs are changed. These bulbs are all concealed from view and in front of each globe is a sheet of glass the same color as light. These glass screens are used that the light may be even and of the same tone.

The chandeliers in the lobbies and the theatre are suspended on chains that are fastened to winches in the space beneath the roof, which explains how they are reached when light bulbs burn out.

The building is of fireproof construction throughout.

The balcony has been thoroughly tested. It rests on a 90-ton steel girder and concrete cantilevers carry concrete beams of the balcony proper. In the test made to determine its strength sand bags were piled into the section to 610 pounds per square foot.



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New Rialto Square Is One of Country's Finest Houses

(Continued from page 45)

One of the features of the new theatre will be a lobby organ, for use in the main foyer. The lobby organ is a separate unit but is played from the keyboard of the theatre organ.

Eighteen marble columns with golden capitals surround the domed circle in the foyer from which depends the mammoth chandelier, the giant of them all. It is 20 feet long and has 250 lights.

It is said to be the largest display fountain type ever attempted, and the foyer grande is one of the largest in America. On either side is the grand stairway, leading to the mezzanine promenade. In the domed ceiling of the rotunda are nine lunettes in delicate bas-relief, illustrating the theme of Mendelssohn's "Spring Song." They alternate with bas-reliefs of the "Goddess of the Eastern Star."

* * *

The arch between the esplanade and the grand foyer has been carefully copied from the Arc de Triomphe, Paris. It is supported by eight marble columns of unusual stateliness, each column topped with a golden capital, ornamented with the scanthus leaf typical of the Corinthian order, with the modification of the head of a sea horse in place of the volute. On one side of the arch is a symbolic bas-relief, "Labor Fighting the Evils of Today," in the form of a dragon. On the opposite side is "Man's Labor." In the center above is a majestic, colossal helmeted head of a woman.

The terrazzo floor is worked out in geometric patterns. Rare marbles of champagne red are used, having been brought from Vermont.

Directly at the left of the grand foyer is the "cosmetic room," a halcyon place, supplied with every decorative solace for the vanity of woman, and her complexion.

The "Harem Corner"

The gorgeous drapings are of silk. On the sounding board of the proscenium arch is shown a large decoration in relief, telling "The Story of Aphrodite," with many figures.

On each side is the ornamental organ grille of hand wrought iron, depicting vines and flowers in prismatic colors.

The Barton organ, with a golden console, is a four manual instrument.

The main stage of the theatre is 105 by 32 feet. This can be increased by means of a movable stage, lifted and lowered by hydraulic jacks, and will give stage room of 105 by 46 feet.

Under the dome of the grand mezzanine are other domes with varicolored lights. And there is no end to the ornament and beautiful polychrome decoration.

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Theatre Opening Made Civic Event; Business Men Boost Enterprise (Page 13)

By Charles Raymond

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The theatre must be theatrical to survive. It must present romance. It must carry the patrons in the chairs out and beyond themselves; it must present them with a new vista, one with which they are not familiar. Art, it is true, is a reproduction of natural conditions, yet audiences are not happy when they see their own drab lives reflected upon the screen of a theatre where they go to be entertained. Who knows but this is the underlying cause of the screen being accused of not appealing to the higher circles of life for most pictures in the past have unrolled before our eyes the inner workings of the more fortunate human society. These scenes are familiar to that class but, of course unfamiliar to the more unfortunate group. Thus the appeal to them.

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But to get back to the civic angle for the theatre opening. It was used most effectively by Balaban and Katz at the opening of their Uptown theatre. This event was celebrated with a pageant given in the Central Uptown section of Chicago. It was proclaimed the biggest event of its kind ever staged for a theatre opening. The streets were crowded for days and the merchants who contributed to the celebration cashed in heavy in business during that week. Now, since this could be done in a community like the Uptown district, why couldn't it be done in a city with a population much smaller?

Balaban and Katz Great States Theatres were opening the beautiful Rialto Theatre in Joliet. Jules Rubens wanted to give it the same thrust the Uptown had been given. A meeting was called of the prominent business men of Joliet and Benjamin H. Serkowich, who handled the Uptown pageant for Balaban and Katz and who is connected with their Chicago office went, along with the writer, to the meeting in Joliet. The plans were laid out for the celebration. It was to be called "Greater Joliet Week, celebrating the opening of Rubens Rialto theatre."

* * *

First off it must be realized that (*continued from page 13*) many of the business men will think the campaign is for the purpose of boosting the receipts of the theatre. This is soon overcome by assuring them that the theatre will be packed to capacity the first month it is open and that is always true. There will be a big overflow and these people are all prospective buyers providing the merchants approach them with the right sales talks. And, as there are going to be so many extra people in town the first week the theatre is open why not spend a little money and get more in and entertain them while they are waiting to get into the theatre.

The first thing to do is secure an executive who can handle obstreperous merchants, who knows something about outdoor entertainment such as fireworks shows and who can write and plant constructive publicity with the newspapers for miles around.

As regards my ability to handle merchants; it rested entirely with the fact that my proposition was sound. I was helping them as well as the theatre and it didn't take much persuasion to convince the progressive merchant that I was right. My extensive experience as an outdoor showman previous to entering

the motion picture branch of amusements, now stood me in good stead. I have always been an alleged press agent so that's how I got in on this proposition. Now here we go.

First I appoint committees.

Administrative Committee: This committee passes on all things and is the last word in all matters. Its chairman is the big man of the affair.

Finance Committee: Headed by the treasurer of the celebration, who is always appointed by the local merchants.

Collection Committee: This comprises the strong arm men who go out and collect the necessary money to carry on the campaign. This is perhaps the most important of all.

Music Committee: Consisting of the men most familiar with musical conditions in the city. They are to provide school, civic and even professional music for the big week.

Parade Committee: This should include automobile men or any army officers available. It may also include labor leaders who are familiar with the lineup details of a procession.

Decorations Committee: This can include all the window decorators as well as any other craft available who are familiar with this work.

Traffic Committee: It is well to appoint the chief of police and any other city official such as commissioner of public safety, etc.

Permit Committee: A group of influential men who can go to the city hall and secure permission to indulge in all the things necessary to put the affair over.

* * *

These are the essential units to put the affair over but others can be appointed as needed. The more committees there are the less friction will be found among the contributors because everybody wants to do something.

Now we are ready for the mayor to issue his official proclamation that the week is sanctioned by him. This is published in the paper and the collectors get to work.

The publicity is now prepared. From here on I will outline just what was done in Joliet.

Stories announcing the big week were sent to 108 papers covering the territory surrounding Joliet for 80 miles. A clipping bureau showed us that these hit everywhere, even running in the Chicago Tribune, News and American.

A full complement of show printing was posted for fifty miles surrounding the city even going into Aurora and Elgin. This carried the following copy:

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BETTER THEATRES SECTION OF

June 12, 1926



Hanging up the special pennants which were an important feature in Joliet theatre opening campaign.

many of the business men will think the campaign is for the purpose of boosting the receipts of the theatre. This is soon overcome by assuring them that the theatre will be packed to capacity the first month it is open and that is always true. There will be a big overflow and these people are all prospective buyers providing the merchants approach them with the right sales talks. And, as there are going to be so many extra people in town the first week the theatre is open why not spend a little money and get more in and entertain them while they are waiting to get into the theatre.

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CHARLES RAYMOND

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Reproduction of full page advertisement in Joliet papers which was part of big campaign in "Greater Joliet Week" for Rialto theatre opening.



Before the theatre was ready to open Joliet had been decked out in Holiday attire as this view shows.

A full complement of show printing was posted for fifty miles surrounding the city even going into Aurora and Elgin. This carried the following copy:

**A MIGHTY EVENT
GREATER JOLIET WEEK**
Pageant of Progress
celebrating the opening of
Rubens
RIALTO THEATRE
May 24-29

Three web banners twenty feet long have been hung across the three main streets lettered on two sides with the above copy used.

One hundred special pennants were hung on the leads running to the trolley wires. These are larger than a one sheet and are made of muslin and printed in blue and red. This is one of the most effective pieces of outdoor publicity available. The accompanying illustration of Mayor Sehring of Joliet hanging the first one proves its value. This incident was photographed by the International Newsreel for their release.

Ten thousand stickers were made up and went out on all mail and packages from the leading stores.

The Joliet News-Herald issued a special section in the edition of Sunday May 23rd. This edition carried the Greater Joliet Week slogan in a cut each side of the mast head on page one. Most of the merchants' ads that day also carried the slogan and a front page story announced the program for the week as well as the theatre program.

The Farmers Review, a weekly with a circulation of 11,558 mailed out 14,000 extra copies at a very nominal cost for white paper and mailing. These went to homes in seven counties which were not subscribers to the paper. This paper gave the theatre a full page of publicity including pictures of the artists appearing there and shots of the interior.

Stories regarding the progress of the big week were sent to the papers every day.

While the writer was working on all this the collectors were out doing their best to collect money and the members of the committees are reporting back to the executive office their success in arranging the parade and securing bands. The most important thing of course is to collect the money.

Inevitably, the opening day arrives and the streets all day are crowded with strangers. The stores report excellent business and they are all prepared to stay open every night throughout the entire week. The downtown section of the city has been lavishly decorated and

(Continued on page 28)

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Inevitably, the opening day arrives and the streets all day are crowded with strangers. The stores report excellent business and they are all prepared to stay open every night throughout the entire week. The downtown section of the city has been lavishly decorated and (*continued from page 14*) at noon the high school band, which is the finest in the state, having won the prize two years in succession, marches to the theatre and officiates at the flag raising thus dedicating the building in a fitting manner.

* * *

Comes night, and the streets are jammed with both auto and pedestrian traffic. There has never been anything like it since the Armistice was signed. The theatre orchestra plays "The Star Spangled Banner" and timed with it our fireworks expert releases a volley of mortar bombs in the air high above the theatre. As darkness comes on a 750,000 candle power searchlight, borrowed from the 202 regiment at the Broadway Armory, Chicago, throws a beam of light into the heavens proclaiming to the countryside for twenty-five miles around that the great theatre is open.

Three bands of twenty men each play band concerts in all sections of

Opening of the Rialto Theatre Is Made a Civic Event

(Continued from page 14)

at noon the high school band, which is the finest in the state, having won the prize two years in succession, marches to the theatre and officiates at the flag raising thus dedicating the building in a fitting manner.

* * *

Comes night, and the streets are jammed with both auto and pedestrian traffic. There has never been anything like it since the Armistice was signed. The theatre orchestra plays "The Star Spangled Banner" and timed with it our fireworks expert releases a volley of mortar bombs in the air high above the theatre. As darkness comes on a 750,000 candle power searchlight, borrowed from the 202 regiment at the Broadway Armory, Chicago, throws a beam of light into the heavens proclaiming to the countryside for twenty-five miles around that the great theatre is open.

Three bands of twenty men each play band concerts in all sections of the city and with confetti and other joy makers the evening takes on the true spirit of the carnival.

About the theatre? It is packed and there were thousands standing outside all night waiting to get in. It was that way the entire week.

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights of the week the Window decorators contest was held in which the windows were viewed by the public and voted on by them. The votes were handed out by Boy Scouts deposited in boxes provided for them. The winner received a cup.

Wednesday night was the night of the parade. There were 187 cars and floats in line with a trophy presented to the finest decorated car or float. This was judged by the parade committee who had a vantage point in the line of march with the big searchlight flashing its rays on the entries as they passed the judges stand.

* * *

Every night was fireworks night and with parades, confetti, the big searchlight, stores all open and many other attractions throughout the week, it gave the Rialto a truly civic touch to start off its new existence.

However in projecting this campaign with a theatre opening everything done should be tied up with the theatre directly. The theatre is the excuse for the celebration. It isn't a celebration for the perpetuation of the thought that the town was neutral on the question of larger or smaller bustles for women in 1892. The theatre is the reason and therefore is entitled to all the publicity it can get. A theatre such as the Rialto in Joliet has every right to be the object of the most extensive community boasting possible.

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Photo Captions, Clockwise Starting from Upper Left:

- 1) Rubens' new Rialto Square theatre, Joliet, Ill, has one of the largest and most impressive lobbies is he found anywhere. The beautiful auditorium has a seating capacity of 3,000. Rapp & Rapp Architects.
- 2) Exterior of Rialto Square showing colorful grand niche in the main entrance.
- 3) Another view of the magnificent lobby of the Rialto Square showing large lighting fixture and a few of the marble pillars.
- 4) The above view shows some of the details of the vaulted ceiling of the foyer which is paneled in figures cast in plaster clay from models by Gene Romen.

New RIALTO SQUARE, Joliet, Ill.



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Exterior of Rialto Square showing colorful grand niche in the main entrance.



The above view shows some of the details of the vaulted ceiling of the foyer which is paneled in figures cast in plaster clay from models by Gene Romen.



Another view of the magnificent lobby of the Rialto Square showing large lighting fixture and a few of the marble pillars.