

The Woodland Theater: Then and Now

by Peggy Mandin

The Woodland Theater was built in 1940 next to what was at the time the Keller Hotel, now Jim's Video. Rumor has had it that the theater was moved up from old Kettle Falls, but this is not so. Research done by Jo Nullet produced the following information from local newspapers:

Construction on the new theater building adjoining the Keller Hotel has progressed until the exterior work is about completed.

Statesman-Index, May 17, 1940

Mr. Woods is rushing work on the Kettle Falls Theater in an attempt to get it ready for business for the Indian celebration to be held two weeks from now.

Statesman-Index, May 31, 1940

The Kettle Theater, in the newly erected building at Kettle Falls adjoining the Keller Hotel, will open to the public on Wednesday evening, July 17, according to H.B. Wood, proprietor.

The building has seating capacity for 300 with 10 loge seats, and is celotex lined and plastered. New comfortable seats and the latest in projection and sound equipment have been installed. Rest rooms will be in the basement.

Late release pictures will be shown with three changes a week. Shows will be given twice each evening at 7 and 9. Popular prices will be charged.

For the opening night, free popcorn will be given all patrons. The opening feature will be "Turnabout", starring Adolphe Menjou and Carol Landis. Friday and Saturday, "Jeepers Creepers", starring the Weaver brothers and Elviry and Roy Rogers, and on Sunday-Tuesday "House of the Seven Gables", starring Margaret Lindsay, Nan Grey and Vincent Price will be shown. During the rodeo celebration July 19-21 shows will be given at 3, 5, 7 and 9pm.

Colville Examiner, July 13, 1940

The Kettle Theater will be CLOSED until further notice.

Statesman-Examiner, January 5, 1962

Howard Woods, who built the theater, ran a combined Volkswagen dealership and movie theater after WWII. When he sold the building the next owner, Ray Strobbe, rented out the two apartments in the building and operated a car wash in the back. At some point it was used for storage, and became filled with a variety of used appliances.

Then, in 1974, a local group of artists formed a non-profit organization, bought the building for \$11,000 with a bank loan and donations, and operated it as The Old Mission Art Gallery. Their mission was multi-fold: to unite people in the area interested in the arts, to bring the arts to "a position of prime importance", to stimulate greater public understanding of the arts, to provide classes in the arts and to give awards and financial assistance to students and others in the community who were involved in or hoped to become involved in the arts. First they had to clean out all those old appliances.

The Old Mission Art Gallery displayed and sold artwork in the barnboard covered lobby and rented the theater out to the public for a variety of events. They also rented out the two apartments; one in the front of the building and one in the back. Some of the many items for sale included pottery, crafts, dolls, leaded glass, woolen goods, quilts, ceramics, cards and stationary. Art classes were held in the lobby area and pottery classes in the basement. Music concerts and dance classes and performances were held in the theater section.

Meanwhile, in 1978, Woodlands got its start. Helen Acorn (mother of Acorn Saloon owner John Acorn) enjoyed playing the drums, and she put an ad in the Statesman-Examiner for musicians who might want to form a band. What she got was a flood of responses from violinists, trumpeters, trombone players, pianists and others. Thus, an orchestra was formed instead of a band, but with Helen as their drummer. This group incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1978 under the name Woodland Community Concerts. Paul King directed the orchestra until the current director, Gail Herbst, took over the position. A choir was added because of the interest in singing, and Ron Bacon became the choir director, a position he still holds. This group rented the theater for their concerts, plays and musicals from the Old Mission Art Gallery. They changed their name to Woodland Productions in 1983 when they performed their first musical "Anything Goes".

In 1988 The Old Mission Art Gallery disbanded and donated the mortgage-free building to Woodland Productions. They were seeking to keep the building functioning for the arts,



The Woodland Theater as it is now

and in the non-profit sector. In the agreement it states that should Woodland Productions decide to vacate the building they will transfer it to another non-profit organization with no fee.

Woodland Productions has faithfully maintained the building and has been committed to keeping community arts alive by providing an outlet for local performers. Remodeling and improvements continue to be done as money allows (building on what was started by the Old Mission Art Gallery); the orchestra pit was put in by this group and the stage enlarged. Improved seating (the theater now has 169 seats) is on the list, as well as recessed lighting and improved fire door exit and ramp. The budget is closely monitored and the organization will "not go into debt" to make improvements. The old apartment in the front of the building serves as costume and prop storage and the apartment behind the stage as a changing area for the performers. Costumes and props are available for other groups to rent.

Woodland Productions is an all volunteer, non-profit organization with 14 volunteers making up the board of directors. Membership is defined by donating hours within a two year period. The group usually performs one play in October, a winter and spring concert with full orchestra and choir, and a large musical in March. Because this is an all volunteer organization they are considered a "club" and as such are not eligible to apply for grants.

According to Marty Kittelson, who directs, choreographs and performs in some of Woodland's productions, \$13,000-\$18,000 is budgeted to break even on a musical. Costs of putting on a production are large and varied. They must consider costs for "rights and royalties" (permission to do a specific show), rent for orchestra music and props, advertising, costumes, set creation, pictures for the lobby and insurance. Money comes from advertisers, sponsors and ticket sales. Reserve seating is required for plays and musicals although music concerts can be more flexible.

While the Woodland Theater is located in Kettle Falls, support comes from all over. Members and audiences come from Canada, Loon Lake, Northport, Spokane, Chewelah and other locations throughout our tri-county area. Cast members have families that come to view the performances from all over the United States. So Woodland Productions brings in a lot of business to the area and they feel that they have a positive effect on tourism here.

Woodland Productions is already working on its lineup for the 2011 and 2012 seasons. The musical "The Drowsy Chaperone", winner of five Tony awards, will be performed in March 2011. For more information about this group contact Marty Kittelson at 509-684-8515 or Nancy Christopher at 509-684-6811.

Many thanks to Marty Kittelson, Jean Woods, Jo Nullet and Jan Weaver for providing the information for this article.

Old Friends Came Calling...After 15 Years

by Peggy Mandin

Well, actually, we couldn't remember exactly how long it had been since we had seen each other, but tried recalling where we were living and what we were doing at the time of our last visit and this is what we came up with. My husband, Steve, and I got a call from David and Colleen out of the blue one day wondering if we were interested in reconnecting and suggesting they come for a three-four day visit. They also wanted a little "sun break" getaway from the weather in Granite Falls, a small town east of Everett in the mountains. We got quite excited.

First of all, I began surveying our house. This upcoming visit gave us a reason and a deadline for some serious spring cleaning. Our inside log walls had not been dusted in a long time; it was a good thing we had two weeks advance notice that they were coming because I did a little each day. I won't go into all the details but we cleaned stove burners, the microwave, toaster oven and refrigerator and wood stove, the windows got washed inside and out, the trim in the bathroom was finally installed. Not all improvements we wanted to make got done before they were to arrive, but we did what

we could. Recipes were chosen and groceries purchased.

As the afternoon of their arrival wore on we came out to sit on the porch and wait for their car to turn into the driveway. And all of a sudden there they were, all of us waving. Hugs in the driveway and then drinks on the porch before getting them settled in. We began to reminisce and we laughed.

Unbeknownst to us Colleen had an aunt and uncle who owned a 400 acre ranch just north of Orient, just two miles up the road. She recalled riding in a roundup there as an adult. We were dumbfounded, since neither we nor anyone we knew had even heard of Orient until we moved here three years ago. As it turned out, our friend Mike had known her aunt and uncle well, and took us on a tour of their property. Colleen's cousin still owns the property but does not live there full-time; unfortunately he was not there when we toured. Mike took us to the old farmhouse and showed us the place where the aunt and uncle are buried. We read the inscriptions on the gravesites and enjoyed the beautiful view from the burial location; a lovely final resting place.

As the visit progressed we

journeyed around the countryside, tasted wine at China Bend, and we laughed. We showed them Kettle Falls and Colville. They met the neighbors, we barbequed, had drinks on the porch, and we laughed. Although the conversation was sometimes sprinkled with talk of calcium supplements, dental implants and health insurance, things that would not have come up 15 years ago, we did not dwell on them; and we laughed some more. While Colleen and I made the rounds of the second hand stores in the area Steve and David went to the top of First Thought Mountain.

I had a new phone and answering machine system sitting in its box on the dining room table. It had been staring at me for over a week, defying me to try and set it up. David, who likes to read instructions, took it upon himself to figure the thing out and install it, a real treat for me. Colleen helped cook and wash dishes, probably lamenting the fact that we do not have a dishwasher.

Prior to this visit I had worried about the dogs. We have one dog, but there are often five neighbor dogs that come and go. Whether the dogs bothered David and Colleen I couldn't tell; they scratched ears, petted heads and put up with dogs underfoot. Actually, the

dogs put on quite a show for "their company", competing in races, nest building and pool antics. Sally, one of our cats, wanted her share of the attention.

The "sun break" never did materialize. This visit occurred in late May when we were having western Washington weather. We all wore layers, watched the rain, and continued to sit on the porch and laugh. The final evening of their stay the power went out, interrupting talk and the Rolling Stones. Colleen and Dave thanked us for arranging a power outage so that they would feel right at home. Gathering lanterns and flashlights we decided to go to bed, remembering to turn off the stereo so Mick Jagger would not wake us up when the power came back on.

Only our old cat, Bear, was glad when the visit was over. (He ran meowing with alarm when he discovered strangers were in "his" bedroom.) Suddenly the place was quiet and all of us, including the animals, were somewhat subdued. But, remembering the laughter has made us vow to visit each other again soon. We won't wait years, not even one.