

THE MICHIGAN THEATER

1927

In 1927, local businessman **ANGELO POULOS** announced he would add a movie theater to the new retail and office building he was planning on Liberty Street near campus. A “Shrine of Entertainment,” the theater would be operated by **W. S. BUTTERFIELD**’s Michigan Circuit of 75 movie theaters. Butterfield and Poulos hired architect **MAURICE FINKEL** to design what would become Ann Arbor’s first and only “movie palace.”



Angelo Poulos



W. S. Butterfield

Opening night January 5, 1928, featured the film *A Hero for a Night*. Karl Weiderhold conducted the Michigan Theater orchestra, with a gala vaudeville show starring Ida May Chadwick and Her Dizzy Blondes. The “golden-voiced \$50,000” Barton theater organ, “equivalent to a 60-piece orchestra,” inspired the audience with sounds ranging from “the soft, sweet tone of a cathedral organ to that of a mighty band.”



▲ *A team of uniformed employees once ushered the audience to its seats.*



Maurice Finkel

Opening Night program. ➤



Gerald Hoag

Col. Butterfield, whose company controlled most of the movie theaters in town, transferred the entire staff from the Majestic Theater to work at the Michigan. This included manager **GERALD HOAG**, who soon ran all of Butterfield’s theaters in town.

As the largest of Ann Arbor’s theaters, the Michigan screened popular movies from Hollywood. Equipped with a large stage, the theater also presented vaudeville and other live-on-stage performances, including professional, community, and University productions.



In 1978 plans were announced to convert the theater into retail space. A nonprofit organization was formed to “**preserve and restore the historic Michigan Theater for the benefit of the community and the arts.**” Through the efforts of volunteer organist Henry Aldridge and with the encouragement of Mayor Louis Belcher, the citizens of Ann Arbor decided to purchase the theater from the Poulos family. A restoration process begun in 1986 and completed in 2002 has brought the theater back to the glory of its beautiful movie palace origins.

THAT’S A FACT!

THE BARTON ORGAN IS IN ITS ORIGINAL LOCATION, AND HAS BEEN PLAYED LONGER THAN ANY THEATER ORGAN IN THE COUNTRY, EXCEPT FOR RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL’S IN NEW YORK CITY.