

Kerrville's Rialto Theater

by Joe Herring



In the parking lot between my family's print shop and Grape Juice there once stood a movie theater called the Rialto.

The Rialto opened on February 11, 1938, 79 years ago, and showed "Hollywood Hotel," starring Dick Powell and Frances Langford as its first feature.

A front-page story in the February 10, 1938 Kerrville Mountain Sun offered this schedule: "One-day runs will be shown on Saturdays, and the theatre will offer four bills each week, three of them on two-day schedules. The first of a regular series of Saturday night matinees is set for 11:30 pm Saturday."

The Rialto was owned by Hall Industries, headed up by Henry W. Hall of Beeville, which also owned the Arcadia Theater a block away on Water Street, and the Rio Theater, one block farther.

I believe Henry W. Hall is from the same family of Halls which own the Rio 10 Theater in Kerrville today.

There were a lot of movie theaters here in the late 1930s!

In fact, the businesses in the 600 block of Water Street took out an ad to celebrate the new Rialto Theater. "The Theatre District is Extended into the 600 Block on Water Street. The following firms Welcome the Modern, New Rialto Theater: F. F. Nyc (public accountant), Miesch Optical Co., Norge Appliance Co., Roland Insurance, Campbell's Lunch Room, the Modern Beauty Salon, Kerr County Motor Co., the Cone Car Co. (and service station), the Sunshine Laundry, and Peterson's Garage (and service station)."

I mention this because the 600 block was once filled with businesses. Now it's just



us two, really: Grape Juice and Herring Printing.

Some remnants of the Rialto Theater still exist. Grape Juice's northwest wall (the wall closest to the print shop) is actually a wall of the theater. If you stand in the parking lot and look at the Grape Juice wall, you'll see several smooth places in the plaster: these are hints of the stairway to the movie theater balcony, and the risers of the theater's balcony.

The Rialto was empty for many years, though for a brief time in the late 1960s it was a sort of dance/ music venue called the Casket. My memories of the building are from this period, when it was empty. We neighborhood children found a way to get inside the place and explore; it was dark and spooky in there.

The Rialto Theater was eventually torn down in the 1970s by the Charles Schreiner Bank, and the land was used to construct a parking lot. In 1990, my family purchased the parking lot from what was left of the Charles Schreiner Bank after it failed.

Sometimes, late at night, you can still hear the old projectors running up in the Rialto Theater projection booth, and occasionally the laughter of an audience.