

The Lyric Theatre and Me

by Third Place winner, 4th/5th grade bracket, Harrison, AR

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!! I'm at the Historic Lyric Theatre in Harrison, Arkansas, my hometown!

The original Lyric Theatre was built for silent movies about 1919. But as movies with sound became more popular they shut it down and never used it again. The current Lyric Theatre in Harrison was built by a man named J.W. Bass in 1926, which could play movies with sound.

The first movie with sound shown in Harrison was a movie from Universal Pictures called *Broadway*, shown at the Lyric Theatre on November 7, 1929. The theatre continued showing movies until 1977. But then, a modern theatre opened in town, so the Lyric was no longer needed for movies. The Lyric was empty and gloomy inside for ten years when the owner put it up for sale. One business wanted to demolish the Lyric and make it a parking lot. But a lady named Glenna Ragan did not want that to happen, so she bought the theatre and used it for special events.

Let's go back to the time of the Great Depression. Hobos, people who traveled from town to town on the railroad, asked the people at the Lyric for a deal: if they painted murals inside the theatre, they would receive food and shelter in return. Nobody knows the names of the Hobos who painted these fabulous murals. Eventually, the paintings had almost faded away; yet they were restored in the last decade!

The *Ozarks Art Council* bought the Lyric Theatre in 1999 and decided to fix it up. The theatre was in very poor condition; it had a stage too small to act on, a small heater, holes in the walls, and several other problems.

The first few plays at the Lyric had terrible conditions! They had to use temporary lights and sound systems, a parachute as the curtain, and for the bathroom they had to go to the building next door.

The Ozark Arts Council raised money to buy new materials to build with, and had volunteers come and donate their time to help restore the Lyric Theatre.

So I bet you're thinking "how is the Lyric used now?" Well, it got completely demolished by a wrecking ball. JUST KIDDING!!! For several other downtown historic theatres in Arkansas, that happened -- but not for the Lyric Theatre! Currently, the Lyric is a place where people act and perform in musicals, watch movies on special nights, compete in contests, and several other community events.

I have had several good experiences at the Lyric Theatre. Two times, I have participated in the annual Boone County Spelling Bee. I also performed in a special children's play. And now, once a week, my brother and I rehearse at the theatre with the new Ozark's Children's Choir. In a few weeks, we will perform our first Christmas concert there!

I can't believe I can be a part of history with this over eighty-year old building. The Historic Lyric Theatre is definitely one of Arkansas' great historic places.

Reference Document: "Restoring the Lyric Theatre", www.thelyricharrison.org.