

**The Queen Theatre**  
Bryan, Brazos County, Texas  
By: Henry P Mayo – November 2011

## I. Context

Downtown districts in American cities are concentrated areas of shops, businesses and entertainment venues, often around a courthouse. When they are young and growing rapidly, the cities' downtown areas are an exciting place for urban and rural residents, some often travelling for hours to spend a day or two "in town." Stocking up on groceries and provisions; buying cloth or new clothes and shoes for growing kids; buying seed; having repairs made; and selling grain, cotton or vegetables; are all common on these trips to downtown. Evidence of the variety of businesses in a single downtown block can be found in old photos and maps. Dry goods, Grocery, Drugs, Confectionary, Millinery, Printing, Saloon, Photo Gallery, Hotel, Post Office, Hardware & Queensware, Tin Shop, Carriage Works, and Theater are typical.<sup>1</sup>

Before the advent of television, watching a movie in a theater was an exciting experience. Since the first public movie theater opened in 1896,<sup>2</sup> the larger-than-life, moving images projected on the screen have transported viewers to another time and place, much more exciting than their real life. It literally opened up a new world to them, much more visual than books and radio programs did. Downtowns often had more than one theater, and the buildings' façades were usually stylish and distinctive to give a good first impression and attract business. Flashy lights, shiny, and sometimes moving, signs were used for this attraction, like peacocks fanning out their tail feathers. As the name states, there has always

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<sup>1</sup> Maps, Bryan, Texas – June 1877, Sanborn Map & Publishing Co., Limited, New York, color prints located at Dolph Briscoe Center for American History – University of Texas, Austin, Texas, accessed online 30 Oct. 2011, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/txu-sanborn-bryan-1877-1.jpg>

<sup>2</sup> Vitascope Hall on Canal Street, New Orleans, Louisiana, opened 26 July 1896  
A second Vitascope Hall opened in Buffalo, New York, 19 Oct. 1896  
from [bestofneworleans.com](http://www.bestofneworleans.com), accessed 8 Nov. 2011,  
<http://www.bestofneworleans.com/gambit/where-was-the-first-permanent-movie-theater-in-the-United-states-located/Content?oid=1278809>

been a lot of flashiness in “show business”. Because of this, often the best examples of distinctive architectural styles are found on movie theaters.

As cities age and spread outward from their downtown core, businesses relocate, competing to find optimal locations in close proximity to the newest residential subdivisions. This usually begins a process of more and more vacancies in the downtown district and the onset of disrepair. The old theaters, once architectural gems, become empty shells, sad reminders of days gone by. The vacant buildings deteriorate, become infested with rodents and pigeons and often are vandalized, becoming havens for homeless people or drug addicts. Unless preservationists intervene, the blight is hard to reverse and often the buildings are razed or burn down.

Fortunately, many downtown districts are now being revitalized, with the help of government grants, private foundations and the work of local historical organizations and volunteers. Old buildings with character are being preserved and often restored to their original glory. Slowly, as sections of the downtowns are restored, the variety of businesses begin to be re-established and ‘everything old is new again.’

## II. Overview

A movie theater has been at the same location on South Main Street, in the middle of Block 256 of Bryan, Texas for almost 100 years, and it has been named “The Queen” since 1914. The block of five lots, measuring 50’ x 100’ each, between Main and Bryan Streets, was created in 1860 on the original plat of the town of Bryan.<sup>3</sup> The original town site measures one mile square (640 acres) and lies in Stephen F. Austin League no. 9, which was never granted to one of his colonists. Austin’s nephew, William Joel Bryan, inherited this land and granted right-of-way through it, to the Houston & Texas Central Railroad, on May 6, 1859.<sup>4</sup> The next year, on April 9<sup>th</sup>, he deeded railroad officials Abraham Groesbeck and

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<sup>3</sup> Plat of the town of Bryan, in back of vol. H (following pg. 72), Deed Records of Brazos County, County Clerk's Office, Bryan, Texas

<sup>4</sup> Deed, vol. F, p. 86, Deed Records of Brazos County

William R. Baker the site for the town named in his honor.<sup>5</sup> The Civil War interrupted the railroad's construction schedule, so until war's end the line was only completed from Houston to Millican, 20 miles south of Bryan. The war and lack of rails on the ground did not stop progress in the new town of Bryan. Town lots were being sold by Groesbeck and Baker, throughout the early 1860s. Wade C. Moseley was deeded the entirety of city blocks 118 and 256 on January 20, 1866,<sup>6</sup> the same day that Groesbeck and Baker also signed the deed giving Brazos County possession of the designated courthouse block.<sup>7</sup> The Moseley family ran the ferry across the Brazos River at the Old San Antonio Road.<sup>8</sup>

"The first hotel in Bryan, the Commercial"<sup>9</sup> was built on Lot 1 of Block 256, where the LaSalle Hotel was built in 1928. The Commercial Hotel was operated by Wade Moseley before his early death in 1870.<sup>10</sup> James H. Batte, administrator of Moseley's estate, sold off portions of the block, mostly in disregard to the platted lot lines.<sup>11</sup> The first Sanborn fire insurance maps of Bryan, dated 1877, show one and two-story brick buildings covering all of Block 256 (mislabeled 265). The businesses in the middle of the block are labeled: "Restaur.", "Sal.", "Post. Off." and "Mill'y."<sup>12</sup> Apparently, these buildings burned in the fire of October 11, 1879, which "originated from an exploded lamp in the saloon of Hearne & Boyett."<sup>13</sup> The next Sanborn maps, dated 1885, show the new, three-story Stoddard Hotel in the middle of the block, with only one-story buildings around it. Also, the buildings on the

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<sup>5</sup> Deed, vol. F, p. 169, Deed Records of Brazos County

<sup>6</sup> Deed, vol. K, p. 280, Deed Records of Brazos County

<sup>7</sup> Deed, vol. G, p. 516, Deed Records of Brazos County

<sup>8</sup> Brundidge, Glenna, ed., *Brazos County History Rich Past – Bright Future* (Bryan, TX: Family History Foundation, 1986); "Crossings and Early Ferries," Walker, Miss Shirlireed, p. 54

<sup>9</sup> "Funeral Service Held Saturday for Bryan Man," Bryan Weekly Eagle, 26 July 1933, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Various Deeds, including vol. M, pp. 133, 167, Deed Records of Brazos County

<sup>12</sup> Maps, Bryan, Texas - June 1877, Sanborn Map & Publishing Co.

<sup>13</sup> Galveston Daily News, 12 Oct. 1879, p. 1

north half of the block, formerly two-story and covering the full 100 foot depth, between Main and Bryan streets, are all one-story and not full depth.<sup>14</sup> One of several newspaper articles of 1884, regarding the construction of Colonel Stoddard's hotel, states, "The new hotel will be completed and ready for business by September 1. The building adds much to the better appearance of the old burnt block."<sup>15</sup>

H.B. Stoddard had purchased 50% interest in a tract, 63 feet in width, in the middle of Block 256, from I.G. Randle for a new hotel.<sup>16</sup> It was designed by Nathaniel Tobey,<sup>17</sup> a noted architect in Galveston at the time. The contractor was Colonel George H. Figh, of Dallas.<sup>18</sup> Construction began in the first week of April 1884, but was delayed in June, due to the supply of brick in Bryan not meeting the growing demand.<sup>19</sup> The Stoddard Hotel was formally opened with a banquet on December 2, 1884. J. L. Hearne supplied "a fine crate of wine."<sup>20</sup> The Stoddard Hotel Company was created for ownership of the hotel, with J.S. Fowlkes as President. Stoddard and Randle also "erected a house on each side of the Stoddard Hotel building,"<sup>21</sup> and ownership of these one-story brick buildings<sup>22</sup> was not transferred to the hotel company.

Henry Bates Stoddard was a highly-esteemed man. He had achieved the rank of Captain in the Confederacy, but after the war he rose through the ranks of the Texas Volunteer Guard to Brigadier General. He served as President of the Texas Cattle Raisers

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<sup>14</sup> Maps, Bryan, Tex. – July 1885, Sanborn Map & Publishing Co., accessed online 30 Oct. 2011, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/txu-sanborn-bryan-1885-1.jpg>

<sup>15</sup> Galveston Daily News, 31 July 1884, p. 2

<sup>16</sup> Deed, vol. Z, p. 252, Deed Records of Brazos County

<sup>17</sup> Bryan Daily Eagle, 17 June 1939, pp. 1, 6

<sup>18</sup> Dallas Herald, 4 Apr. 1884, reprinted in Dallas Morning News, 4 Apr. 1934

<sup>19</sup> Galveston Daily News, 15 June 1884, p. 2

<sup>20</sup> Galveston Daily News, 2 Dec. 1884, p. 2

<sup>21</sup> Common Wall Agreement, vol. 1, p. 142, Deed Records of Brazos County

<sup>22</sup> Maps, Bryan, Tex. – July 1885, Sanborn Map & Publishing Co.

Association, beginning in 1887, where he worked closely with prominent cattlemen including Charles Goodnight. In 1888, he presided over the ceremonies surrounding the dedication of the new Capitol building in Austin. His activities as a Mason and Knights Templar, led to his knighthood by Prince Edward of England. When Stoddard died in 1925, he was the highest-ranking Mason in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

An 1886 ad in the Dallas Morning News stated that the hotel was “the only first class hotel in Bryan.”<sup>24</sup> At three stories, the hotel remained the tallest building in the block, until the seven-story LaSalle hotel was built on Lot 1, in 1928.<sup>25</sup>

In 1889, the Stoddard Hotel was sold to J. S. Mooring, and it was renamed “The Exchange Hotel.” The Moorings resided in the hotel, while they operated it. Their son, J. Seth Mooring, Jr. sold it to J.T. Maloney in 1907.<sup>26</sup> The deed described the property as, “being thirty feet front on Main Street, Bryan Texas, in Lot no. three in block number two hundred and fifty six...and being the ground upon which is erected the Exchange Hotel (formerly Stoddard Hotel)...”<sup>27</sup> “Governors, statesmen, distinguished men and women from every part of the world were guests at the Exchange Hotel in the 1880s and 1890s.”<sup>28</sup> Plans to enlarge the hotel were announced by Maloney,<sup>29</sup> but subsequent Sanborn maps do not show

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<sup>23</sup> “Narrative – Confederate Veterans, Bryan City Cemetery – Brazos County, Texas,” approved for a Texas Historical Commission historical marker, 2011, researched and authored by John P. Blair. The citation for H.B. Stoddard’s biography is as follows:

Roberts, *Confederate Military History*, 634–5; Ray L. Inzer, *Henry Bates Stoddard: Texas Soldier, Cattleman, and Knight Templar*. master’s thesis (Trinity University, San Antonio, 1969); “Brief Life-Sketch Of Our General Henry Bates Stoddard of Bryan”, *Bryan Daily Eagle*, June 25, 1924; “Funeral Services For Gen. H.B. Stoddard on Sunday”, *Bryan Weekly Eagle*, June 4, 1925.

<sup>24</sup> Dallas Morning News, 24 Oct. 1886, p. 7

<sup>25</sup> Maps, Bryan, Texas – July 1925 and July 1938, Sanborn Map Co., New York, accessed online 8 Nov. 2011, <http://sanborn.umi.com/>

<sup>26</sup> “One of Last Landmarks...,” Bryan Daily Eagle, 17 June 1939, pp. 1, 6

<sup>27</sup> Deed, vol. 30, p. 430, Deed Records of Brazos County

<sup>28</sup> “One of Last Landmarks...,” Bryan Daily Eagle, 17 June 1939, pp. 1, 6

<sup>29</sup> Bryan Eagle, 11 Apr. 1907, p. 7

that this ever occurred. In 1912, the hotel was sold to Sam B. Wilson<sup>30</sup> who died while in possession of it. The 54 year old building, no longer “the only first class hotel in Bryan,” was then sold by his estate to the Bryan Amusement Company, in September 1938.<sup>31</sup> The hotel, with rooms on the two floors above a movie theater, was now called the “Hotel Brazos.”<sup>32</sup>

Newspaper notices indicate that a “moving picture” theater was located on the bottom floor of the hotel, beginning in early 1913. Appropriately, this predecessor to The Queen, was named “The Princess.”<sup>33</sup> This was more than ten years before talking movies were beginning to be shown. The silent films were usually captioned and background music was provided by an organ, or “fine Wurlitzer orchestra” as The Princess had.<sup>34</sup> The name “Princess” seems to have only lasted a month or two, before being renamed “The Palace,”<sup>35</sup> until Christmas Day in 1913. [note: this was not the later Palace Theater located in the City Hall] When a new theater manager, Eli Marks, came from Waco in early December 1913,<sup>36</sup> he soon held a contest to rename The Palace. The winner of the \$10 cash (gold) prize was Mrs. C.L. Eden, for her suggestion, “The Crystal”.<sup>37</sup> As with many other movie houses in Bryan, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the owners and names changed often. In April 1914, W.R. Fairman, owner of The Dixie, bought the nearby Crystal and renamed it “The Queen.”<sup>38</sup> Apparently these ownership changes did not involve real estate and the buildings, but only the theater businesses, equipment and fixtures, but these were big investments and required technical expertise to operate. Also, the 35mm nitrate film was highly combustible, evidenced by

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<sup>30</sup> “One of Last Landmarks...,” Bryan Daily Eagle, 17 June 1939, pp. 1, 6

<sup>31</sup> Deed, vol. 97, p. 116, Deed Records of Brazos County

<sup>32</sup> “One of Last Landmarks...,” Bryan Daily Eagle, 17 June 1939, pp. 1, 6

<sup>33</sup> “Princess Theatre,” Bryan Eagle, 22 Apr. 1913

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “The Palace Theatre,” Bryan Eagle, 31 May 1913

<sup>36</sup> “New Manager for Palace,” Bryan Eagle, 4 Dec. 1913

<sup>37</sup> “The Crystal Theatre,” Bryan Eagle, 26 Dec. 1913

<sup>38</sup> “Fairman Buys Crystal,” Bryan Eagle, 7 Apr. 1914

several news items found regarding projector room fires, in the Bryan newspapers. Articles or advertisements for new movie theaters were often heavy with references to safety of the viewers and fire proof projection rooms. Less than two weeks after Mr. Fairman took over The Queen, “a very destructive film fire occurred...there being five films burned.”<sup>39</sup> The theater then closed for a few weeks, while “the old building has undergone a complete remodeling throughout...”<sup>40</sup> Less than two weeks later, the now iconic Charlie Chaplin silent movie, The Tramp, played at The Queen.<sup>41</sup>

Public movie theaters were a new and exciting form of entertainment, since the first one opened in New Orleans, in 1896.<sup>42</sup> A similar technology, still photography, was very popular in the early days of Bryan, as evidenced by two photo galleries located in Block 256, in 1877.<sup>43</sup> Further evidence of the popularity of movie theaters is the fact that The Queen joined at least two others located in the same block on Main Street. The Queen was established only two doors away from The Dixie, and was across the street from The Colonial, which was in the new City Hall. The 1912 Sanborn map also shows a “cheap theater” located on the first floor of the Masonic lodge, next door to The Colonial. The other adjacent businesses in this block were an assortment typical of other blocks along Main Street, with dry goods, grocery, photographer, tailor, barber, pool room and gent’s furnishings, all labeled on the 1912 map.

It was wise business planning to locate hotels, theaters, City Hall and the new Carnegie library in such a concentrated area. The depots of the two train lines through Bryan were located along this southern portion of Main Street. Between 1910 and 1923, The Bryan & College Interurban Railway ran between Bryan and the Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College, located five miles south. Members of the Retail Merchants Association of Bryan,

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<sup>39</sup> “Bryan Has Two Fires,” Bryan Eagle, 20 Apr. 1914

<sup>40</sup> “The Queen’s New Dress,” Bryan Eagle, 8 May 1914

<sup>41</sup> “At The Queen,” Bryan Eagle, 5 June 1914 “At The Queen,” Bryan Eagle, 5 June 1914

<sup>42</sup> Vitascope Hall, Canal Street, New Orleans, Louisiana

<sup>43</sup> Maps, Bryan, Texas - June 1877, Sanborn Map & Publishing Co.

understanding the great advantage to their businesses, chartered the Interurban company.<sup>44</sup> The theaters were certainly among the appealing destinations for the college boys' entertainment. Due to poor roadways and the expense of the new contraptions, it was well into the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century before automobiles became a useful form of travel in Bryan.

W.R. Fairman was serious about entertaining the citizens and visitors to Bryan. Besides his movie theaters on Main Street, he built the Airdome theater a few blocks to the east.<sup>45</sup> It did not have a closed roof and could seat up to 1200 people. It opened in the spring of 1913 as a movie theater, but within a few years it was hosting live matches of champion wrestlers from Houston.<sup>46</sup> A closed roof was constructed in 1914 for church revivals, but it is indicated that this roof was only temporary.<sup>47</sup> At their convention in November 1913, Fairman was elected the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President of the Motion Picture Exhibitor's League no. 18 (Texas).<sup>48</sup> Although he ran his theaters for profit, he often donated use of them for civic and church events. The First Baptist Church Businessmen's Bible Class was given a choice of his venues and chose to meet at The Queen for several years, beginning in 1919. Fairman, being a Methodist, presumably was not even a member of the group.<sup>49</sup>

Father and son partners, Abraham and Morris Schulman came to Bryan from Houston in 1926 and purchased the The Dixie, The Queen and The Palace (in the City Hall) theaters from W.R. Fairman. Their partnership, Texas Amusement Company, contracted to pay a total

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<sup>44</sup> Brundidge, Glenna, ed., *Brazos County History Rich Past – Bright Future* (Bryan, TX: Family History Foundation, 1986); "Community Histories," Walker, Miss Shirlireed, pp. 34, 35

<sup>45</sup> "Bryan's New Airdome," Bryan Weekly Eagle, 24 Apr. 1913

<sup>46</sup> "Wrestling Bouts," Bryan Eagle, 15 Sept. 1915

<sup>47</sup> "Roofing The Airdome," Bryan Eagle, 24 Apr. 1914

<sup>48</sup> "Texas Convention," Moving Picture World, vol. 18, no. 11, 13 Dec. 1913, p. 1283, accessed online 8 Nov. 2011, [http://www.archive.org/stream/movingpicturewor18newy/movingpicturewor18newy\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/movingpicturewor18newy/movingpicturewor18newy_djvu.txt)

<sup>49</sup> Class History – Business Men's Bible Class of First Baptist Bryan, accessed online 8 Nov. 2011, <http://bmbc.fbc Bryan.org/>

of \$25,000 for “all equipment and fixtures pertaining to the three theaters.”<sup>50</sup> Abraham Schulman had worked in movie theaters for almost 20 years, going back to his days on Canal Street in New Orleans.<sup>51</sup> Morris grew up in the business and had managed theaters in Houston, The Strand, The Pastime, The Isis and The Queen.<sup>52</sup> The Schulmans, a Jewish family, operated the theaters under the name “Bryan Amusement Company,” and brought stability to the business in Bryan. On January 2, 1929, the City of Bryan deeded their City Hall, building and real estate to Morris Schulman.<sup>53</sup> It was not an old, vacant building, having been built new in 1909 after fire destroyed the earlier 1888 building. The City Hall had always been a mixed-use building. Besides offices for City personnel, it had the Grand Opera House on the second (top) floor of the original building and The Colonial Theater on the first floor of the new one. It was known for hosting “road shows,” which were live performances, both legitimate theater and comedic, by travelling performers. Edna Schulman lost her husband and both of his parents in the mid-1930s, but kept operating their theaters on Main Street, apparently very successfully. In 1938, when she purchased the old hotel building which housed The Queen, she had teenage sons to help with the work. She decided to invest heavily in a new, modern theater building for Bryan, such as the many going up in all the large cities across the country.

Mrs. Schulman contracted with the young, very popular Dallas architectural firm, Pettigrew & Worley<sup>54</sup> to design a unique building to replace the old hotel. They were quickly becoming the premiere theater architects in Texas, and exposing small towns to the current trends in ‘big city’ architecture. The Art Deco style was evolving into more aerodynamic

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<sup>50</sup> Release of Lien, vol. 13, p. 104, Release Records of Brazos County, County Clerk’s Office, Bryan, Texas

<sup>51</sup> Phone Interview of Mark Schulman, by Henry P Mayo, 8 Nov. 2011

<sup>52</sup> “Deaths, Al Schulman, lawyer, civil rights champion,” The Houston Chronical, 27 Apr. 2004, accessed online 14 Nov. 2011, <http://www.chron.com/news/houston-deaths/article/Deaths-Al-Schulman-lawyer-civil-rights-champion-1512276.php>

<sup>53</sup> Deed, vol. 97, p. 116, Deed Records of Brazos County

<sup>54</sup> Bryan Daily Eagle, 20 Nov. 1939

designs, with curve forms and long lines, known as Streamline Moderne and Art Moderne. Architecture was in its heyday, with two world fairs underway in the United States simultaneously in 1939, each with many architecturally-significant building. Cars, trains and even household appliances were all being streamlined, as if they were expected to launch into orbit.

In June of 1939, the historic old hotel building was demolished<sup>55</sup> and construction on a magnificent theater was underway. The end product differed little from the artistic rendering,<sup>56</sup> with “reeded white plaster walls above the “V” shaped marquee....a vertical “V” shaped sign spells out the name QUEEN which is topped by a neon lighted revolving crown.”<sup>57</sup> The ticket window was centered in front of the building, with a circular poster frame, indirectly lighted with neon, to one side. The rendering showed a smaller crown, on top of the enameled, cylindrical ‘point’ of the marquee, which was not added during construction.

The theater was more than just modern in appearance, built with steel columns and I-beams to support the large balcony.<sup>58</sup> It had 550 “well upholstered chairs...so placed that angle views of the screen are eliminated and a clear view is assured every patron.”<sup>59</sup> In addition to the comfort of the seating and pleasing shades of indirect lighting used throughout, the building included a Carrier theater air conditioning system.<sup>60</sup> The system comprised of a large compressor powered by a six-cylinder, natural gas-powered Continental engine located in a concrete-walled pit under the theater stage.<sup>61</sup> The conditioned air was blown out in the theater from an equipment loft above the stage. In a day when the theaters were touting their large fans and fresh air systems, chilled, dry air was a rare luxury. The Carrier system proved

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<sup>55</sup> “One of Last Landmarks...,” Bryan Daily Eagle, 17 June 1939, pp. 1, 6

<sup>56</sup> “New Theater for Bryan” Dallas Morning News, 28 May 1939, p. 13

<sup>57</sup> Bryan Daily Eagle, 20 Nov. 1939

<sup>58</sup> Tour of The Queen Theater, Henry P Mayo, guided by Ben Hardeman, 30 Oct. 2011

<sup>59</sup> Bryan Daily Eagle, 20 Nov. 1939

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Tour of The Queen Theater, Henry P Mayo, guided by Ben Hardeman, 30 Oct. 2011

to be very reliable<sup>62</sup> and was never replaced.

Opening night, Tuesday, November 21, 1939 was a much-heralded event, with the A&M College band performing and many dignitaries in attendance. The premiere movie was *Fifth Avenue Girl*, starring Ginger Rogers.<sup>63</sup> The Queen gained its deserved reputation as one of the finest theaters in the Southwest. Many residents of Bryan have enjoyed memorable movies there, such as the epics *Gone With The Wind*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Cleopatra* and *Ben Hur*.

For the next 30 years after The Queen was rebuilt, Downtown Bryan remained the community hub for shopping and entertainment. In 1939, the same year that the new Queen Theater building was opened, the City of College Station was incorporated. There were a few cinemas and a drive-in theater in the new town which surrounded Texas A&M College, but families from there regularly shopped and attended movies at the theaters on Main Street into the early 1970s. As with most theaters in the southern United States, The Queen required African-American movie-goers to sit in the balcony.<sup>64</sup>

In the 1960s, shopping centers began to be built along Highway 6, south of the downtown area, as residential subdivisions developed between Bryan and the college. In 1972, Manor East Mall was built in south Bryan. Rapidly, business downtown declined, and the movie theaters struggled to make a profit. Drive-in theaters, as well as modern, multi-screen cinemas, had opened in the neighborhood shopping centers and malls. Most of these were built and operated by the Schulmans. The days of single screen theaters had passed, and in 1985, the Palace was the last of the three theaters on South Main Street to close its doors.<sup>65</sup> The Queen Theater slowly fell into a state of disrepair, like a majority of the buildings downtown.

On May 6, 1991, The Queen was donated by Al and Bill Schulman to Brazos

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<sup>62</sup> Phone Interview with Mark Schulman, by Henry P Mayo, 8 Nov. 2011

<sup>63</sup> Bryan Daily Eagle, 20 Nov. 1939

<sup>64</sup> Phone Interview with Mark Schulman, by Henry P Mayo, 8 Nov. 2011

<sup>65</sup> The Early Years, Schulman Theatres website page, accessed 26, Oct. 2001, <http://www.schulmantheatres.com/company.html>

Beautiful, Inc., a non-profit corporation, for “the respect and affection which we have for the citizens of Bryan and for the betterment of the downtown district.”<sup>66</sup> Four days later, the property was transferred to Bryan Downtown Revitalization, Inc., another non-profit.<sup>67</sup> Later that year, it was deeded to Carrizo Enterprises, with the stipulation, “The façade on the existing building...is to be restored to its original appearance within eight months...the restored façade shall not be intentionally destroyed ... within twenty-five years...”<sup>68</sup> Good intentions were not enough to restore the old theater, and in 1996 it was sold to private owners, without specific mention of restoration or non-destruction requirements.<sup>69</sup> In 2002 it was sold to Queen Theater, L.P.,<sup>70</sup> and the once donated building was increasing in price with each sale, due to revitalization of the downtown streets and many buildings. On June 22, 2010, the unrestored theater was sold to Downtown Bryan Association, a non-profit corporation,<sup>71</sup> for \$185,000. The \$75,000 down payment was raised by donation, mostly less than \$1000 each and many were only the price of a “Save the Queen” t-shirt.

On Sunday, November 21, 2010, 71 years to the day after the grand opening, the crown was removed and restoration finally began.<sup>72</sup> The façade was re-plastered and painted, the enamel marquee was cleaned and fitted with new neon lighting, the front doors and ticket window were replaced, the two Q-U-E-E-N sets of letters were restored with new neon tubing, and the crown was repainted and had its neon lighting replaced and motor restored. The inside of the theater was cleaned out, including the removal of the 71 year old Carrier air conditioning equipment. A substantial amount of new electrical wiring was also done,

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<sup>66</sup> Deed, vol. 1318, p. 73, Official Public Records of Brazos County, County Clerk’s Office, Bryan, Texas

<sup>67</sup> Deed, vol. 1318, p. 78, Official Public Records of Brazos County

<sup>68</sup> Deed, vol. 1391, p. 250, Official Public of Brazos County

<sup>69</sup> Deed, vol. 2593, p. 99, Official Public of Brazos County

<sup>70</sup> Deed, vol. 4905, p. 284, Official Public of Brazos County

<sup>71</sup> Deed, vol. 9693, p. 162, Official Public Records of Brazos County

<sup>72</sup> “A Royal Makover,” The Eagle, 22 Nov. 2010, p.1

especially for all of the façade lights.<sup>73</sup> Finally, on Friday, October 7, 2011, The Queen’s new neon lighting and revolving crown were turned on, while hundreds of eager spectators watched.<sup>74</sup> It is now a shining example of the great revitalization of Downtown Bryan.

### III. Significance

The Queen Theater at 110 South Main Street in Bryan is a grand old lady with a rich heritage. The current building has remained virtually unaltered since construction in 1939, with its stunning Streamline Moderne façade,<sup>75</sup> bright enamel marquee, vertical Q-U-E-E-N in neon and revolving crown. The restoration of these distinctive features was recently completed and presented to the public at the “lighting of The Queen” ceremony, on October 7, 2011.

The Queen is certainly one of the most distinctive of all buildings on Main Street, matched only by the Greek Revival 1903 Carnegie Library, with its enormous Corinthian columns. It has deep roots, reaching back to the founding years of Bryan. The theater served the entertainment needs of several generations, before being shuttered during the dark days of downtown. A silent sentinel, it watched the streets and several buildings around it be restored, while efforts for its own restoration did not succeed. Now, past 70 years old, its façade has been restored to become the shining icon of revitalized Downtown Bryan. The renovations have not ceased and fundraising is well underway to construct four levels of banquet and meeting facilities inside the building, including a theater/performance room. The physical proportions of the building are noteworthy; entirely filling the 30 feet x 100 foot property, and almost twice as tall as its width. The façade rises 47 feet above the sidewalk, and the 7-foot diameter crown adds 9 more feet, bringing the total height to 56 feet.<sup>76</sup> The

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<sup>73</sup> Tour of The Queen Theater, Henry P Mayo, guided by Ben Hardeman, 30 Oct. 2011

<sup>74</sup> Personally attended by Henry P Mayo

<sup>75</sup> “Queen Architecture,” email to Henry P Mayo from professional architect Mike Record, AIA, 31 Oct. 2011

<sup>76</sup> calculated from survey measurements, 30 Oct. 2011, Henry Mayo, Registered Professional Land Surveyor

Queen is the only example of Streamline Moderne architecture on Main Street and deserving of recognition as a Registered Texas Historic Landmark.

## IV. Documentation