

1920

1930

1940

1950

1960

1970

1980

1990

2000

2010

Act One

★ The stage is set...

In 1926, a local industrialist named Arthur Darman invested nearly one million dollars to build the Stadium Theatre and the adjacent office building in downtown Woonsocket, Rhode Island. He called the theater the Stadium in reference to its stadium style seating; which uses elevated rows to give every patron the luxury of feeling that they have the best seat in the house.



Arthur Darman, a successful Woonsocket industrialist, built the Stadium Theatre in 1926 and guided it through its first three thriving decades.

Not only did Mr. Darman fund the theater project, he also influenced its design. He chose an elaborate but stylish look that set the theater apart from what he felt were the gaudy movie houses of the day. His preference was the eighteenth century neoclassical style, and it is evident throughout the building. Arthur Darman loved vaudeville and entertaining audiences. It was through his determination that the Stadium Theatre first thrived.

★ The curtain rises...

In its early years the Stadium hosted three shows a day, seven days a week, and featured a twelve piece orchestra, a Wurlitzer organ, a vaudeville act, plus a newsreel and feature film. Stars of the day such as Charlie Chaplin, Al Jolson, and Will Rogers graced the Stadium stage and many acts from New York made their way to Woonsocket. Darman proudly noted his theater's capabilities to present the brightest stars of the day. He said, "If there's anything in the world that is good in theater and Woonsocket wants it, we can get it."

Through the decades, Arthur Darman continually enhanced and invested in the Theatre. He made improvements to the building, including a new angled marquee (which is still in use today, but has been further updated with two LED panels) air conditioning, and luxurious new seats.



Next time you visit the Stadium, make sure to notice the eighteenth century neoclassical style murals and reliefs that can be found throughout the Theatre. The 1,088 seat Stadium is a majestic example of vaudeville splendor.



Darman once enticed audiences by staging a grand spectacle with searchlights. He also had a military band play in the Square. His steadfast efforts continued into the early 1950's, making the Stadium one of the last places in the country where vaudeville still appeared on a regular basis. In 1976 the Stadium Theatre was placed on the National Registry of Historical Places.

★ Enter the villain...

The escalating expenses of live entertainment and the advent of movie multiplexes led to the Theatre's decline. It reached its lowest point when it was leased to a Boston group that showed X-rated films. Due to the massive decline in revenue, the Stadium Theatre was forced to close its doors in 1985. By the 1990's the Stadium was slated to face the wrecking ball.

Intermission...

Act Two

★ Enter the heroes!

In 1991, even as the Theatre was a boarded-up relic facing impending doom, a small group of citizens could still envision the Stadium's beauty through the years of decay and graffiti. This group, led by former Woonsocket Mayor Francis Lanctot, came together to form the Save Our Stadium (S.O.S.) Committee. Their first task was to raise funds for the purchase and restoration of the Theatre.

On a dreary, rainy day the S.O.S. Committee held a radio-thon under the dimly lit marquee. They hoped to raise their first \$1,000 towards the restoration, but were completely unprepared for the generous outpouring of community support that followed. In less than 24 hours, individuals from all over the region had come to the Theatre and collectively donated over \$25,000! Thus the Stadium Theatre's rebirth began!

In 1996 the S.O.S. Committee was renamed the Stadium Theatre Foundation, and by 1998, the non-profit foundation had raised over three million dollars. Their mission was a labor of love and persistence. Without a single paid staff person, the numerous volunteers worked countless hours cleaning, fund-raising and operating the Theatre while hosting concerts and performances during the restoration. Paint peeled and plaster fell to the beat of many a rock concert!

As years passed, the movement rapidly gained popularity and attracted the attention of some very

successful and influential individuals. These individuals included the Farrelly Brothers, movie producers who hosted the world premieres of their films *There's Something About Mary* and *Stuck on You*. Hollywood stars including Cher, Ben Stiller, and Woody Harrelson were in attendance.

★ Set changes...

By 2001, the Stadium Theatre Foundation had completely restored the Grand Hall as well as the elaborate lobby to its magnificent historic stature. Due to popular demand and activity, in 2009 the Stadium expanded its ownership of the surrounding properties by purchasing the arcade Main Street entrance, the alley entrance, additional office spaces and the second floor space above

the arcade. In 2010, almost 20 years after the first funds were collected to save the Stadium, area individuals, local foundations and businesses showed their continuing support by once again contributing financial support, labor, materials and furnishings for this expansion.

★ Dramatis personae...

In the eight years that followed the completed restoration, the Stadium's staff gradually increased from one paid staff member to seven full-time employees. Today, an essential and diverse force of over 200 dedicated volunteers come together every year to help keep the Stadium operating. Subsequently, the newly purchased office spaces were completed and presently accommodate the expanded staff.



The Stadium Theatre lives up to its name with multiple tiers of stadium-style seating, ensuring that each and every guest has the luxury of feeling that they have the best seat in the house.

Don't forget to look up! Meticulous, hand painted murals can be found throughout the Stadium, such as these paintings that adorn the Grand Hall's ceiling.



The plot thickens...

During this time of structural and personnel expansion, the event calendar was busy growing as well. In 2001, the first season since the Stadium had been restored, the Theatre hosted 37 shows. Today the Theatre's calendar is bursting with over 160 events annually!

Programming features a diverse selection of live entertainment genres including drama, musicals, concerts, dance, illusion, comedy and educational events. Not only have international celebrities such as Liza Minnelli, Patti Page, Gallagher, and Chuck Mangione graced the Grand Hall's stage, but most importantly, many talented local performers in various community theatre, dance, and musical groups have also performed on the Stadium's stage.

The Stadium Theatre would have never become one of the largest performing arts organizations in the region and a pivotal anchor to the revitalization of Woonsocket's downtown district without the tireless efforts, passion and commitment of over 200 dedicated volunteers!



The Theatre also presents classic movies and silent films, featuring the authentic sounds of its vintage Wurlitzer organ.

The most recent program addition is the Theatre's entertaining Dinner Cabaret Series which is held in the lobby and features intimate performances along with dinner.

Education programs also play a large role. The Imagination Series features shows geared toward school aged children. These shows are performed during school hours. A summer theater Kids Kamp, School Vacation camp, and the Young Actors Academy are also offered to young children so they can learn to perform and shine on stage. In addition, throughout the year the Stadium offers a series of theater workshops to children as well as adults.

The plot unfolds...

Over the last season the Stadium Theatre engaged over 80,000 patrons from all over Southern New England. It is the largest performing arts organization in Northern Rhode Island and is a pivotal anchor to the revitalization of Woonsocket's downtown district.

To be continued...

"With your support the Stadium Theatre Performing Arts Centre may continue enhancing the quality of life for all those who participate in our educational programs, perform on our stage, take part in our volunteer program, or attend any one of our outstanding performances. We hope that you would consider supporting the Stadium Theatre. Please become a part of the family, and help to continue the Stadium's Legacy!"

*— Cathy Levesque,
Executive Director & CEO*



STADIUM THEATRE
PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE

Our History

The story of the Stadium's birth, renovation, and its future...

