

The Historian

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As seen in 2022, the historic old Masonic Hall on Main Ave. Built in 1887, it was Fallbrook's 1st movie theater in 1917.

HISTORIC THEATERS OF FALLBROOK

Since the early days of motion pictures, several historic buildings have served as Fallbrook's movie theater. However, while the big cities were enjoying motion picture shows, Fallbrook had to wait until electricity arrived in the small town that still illuminated buildings by candle or gas lamp.

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In the year 1916, SDG&E was installing power poles and transmission lines from Del Mar to Oceanside.¹ By December, the transmission lines were advancing eastward from Oceanside. SDG&E agents were in Fallbrook signing up many interested subscribers, promising electrical power within 3 months.¹ In anticipation of electricity reaching Fallbrook, Jess Hardy, the owner of Hardy's Rexall Drug Store on South Main rented the downstairs of the old Masonic Hall on North Main Ave. to show silent movies.

Jess Hardy connected the Masonic Hall to SDG&E's electrical power. He put in a sloping floor for better viewing and turned the Masonic Hall into Hardy's Movie.

Opening night was on March 7th, 1917, with the showing of 'It Happened in Honolulu' a recently released silent film comedy 5 reels long (about 55 minutes). Opening night admission was 15 cents for adults, while children under 13 were just 10 cents.

Hardy's Movie was a Fallbrook sensation, regularly showing first run movies with all the famous movie stars of the time. "Just as good as what someone can see in Los Angeles", Hardy advertised in the newspaper. Hardy's Movie in the Masonic Hall gradually settled into a once-a-week Thursday night movie. By 1918, admission prices had increased to be 30 cents for adults and 20 cents for children. Hardy's Movie was so popular that reservations became necessary. Tickets had to be purchased in advance at Hardy's Drugstore.

The end for Hardy's Movie came with the 1918 flu pandemic. In October of 1918, Hardy's Movie had to close for a few months, to prevent spreading the virus. Jess Hardy himself became very ill. He survived, but for health reasons in March 1919, the young Jess Hardy suddenly decided to sell his Fallbrook businesses and retire to Santa Ana.

Ed Myers, who bought Hardy's Movie, moved the business into his own building across the street, which has not survived to present days. There was some controversy about the movies Myers selected to show. He started off by showing war movies, one after another. Some of his other choices were startling to Fallbrook families of 1919.

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You're Invited to:

FALLBROOK HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

OPEN HOUSE

JUNE 11
2-6 PM

All Buildings Open Including:

- Pittenger House
- Museum
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The Woman's Club of Fallbrook decided to address this "movie question" directly and to compete with Myers by opening their own Movie House in June 1919 on their clubhouse property, promising to show clean elevating movies weekly on Thursday nights. Soon after the Woman's Club began showing movies, Myers theater closed.

The Woman's Club bought new projector equipment, raised prices by a penny, and promised that Movie House profits would go into their building fund, so the money would come back to the town as improvements to their community center.¹ The Woman's Club Thursday night movies continued weekly for the next six years.

The Woman's Club movies apparently paused in the late 1920s, perhaps because of changing technology and the need for new equipment. For motion picture entertainment during this period, Fallbrook residents had to go to Oceanside to catch a movie at the historic Palomar Theater, which had opened in 1924.¹



The Fallbrook Woman's Club in 2022. The historic Woman's Club showed silent films here at weekly movie nights here from 1919 until 1925, then started again as the Woman's Club 'Fallbrook Theater', showing talkies from 1931 until 1937 when the Mission Theater on Hawthorne Street opened with daily shows.

In 1931, The Woman's Club 'Fallbrook Theater', as they now called it, reopened showing talkie movies twice per week. Admission was now 40 cents for adults, 15 cents for children under 12.

In 1936, believing that a modern professional theater showing more than one or two movies a week would be a good investment, Henry and Alice Appleford, bought an empty lot on Hawthorne Street and built a large concrete two-story building to be Fallbrook's next movie theater. The Applefords leased the business to an operator who named it the Mission Theater.¹



Dorothea Donath in front of her *new* Mission Theater the weekend of August 3, 1952. Dorothea and her husband Curtis Donath lived in the upstairs penthouse. The Donaths had owned the *old* Mission Theater on Hawthorne St. until they built this larger theater just around the corner on Main Ave. They sold the Mission theater to the Mitterings in 1955.

The Mission Theatre on Hawthorne St., which seated more than 300 people, opened on Saturday December 12th, 1936. Opening night admission was 35 cents, undercutting the Woman's Club. The new theater was open 7 nights a week, with Saturday matinees. The feature movie changed every 3rd day. Curtis and Dorothea, a local family, bought the successful Mission Theater soon after it opened. Dorothea managed the theater. Her husband, Curtis had a contracting business.

In 1947, the Donaths bought another lot on Main Ave to build a new Mission theater with nearly twice the capacity. The New Mission Theater had a soundproof crying room with a window and audio so mothers with noisy babies could enjoy the movie. The lobby snack bar was open to theater patrons and sidewalk customers. The New Mission Theater with 600 seats opened on October 9, 1948.¹ The Donaths lived in the 3-bedroom penthouse upstairs.

by Tom Frew

Historian, Fallbrook Historical Society

Footnotes

- 1) T&D World, Feb 10, 2015, SDG&E Steps Back in Time, by Susan Lakin
- 2) Fallbrook Enterprise November 10, 1916
- 3) Fallbrook Enterprise May 2, 1924
- 4) Oceanside Historical Society
- 5) Fallbrook Enterprise December 6, 1936
- 6) Fallbrook Enterprise October 8, 1949.



The *new* Mission Theater seen here in 2022, opened on this spot October 9, 1948. Recently renovated it is still showing movies.

SUMMER YOUTH CULTURAL ARTS CLASSES

At the
RECHE SCHOOL HOUSE

Saturday, July 16th - Acrylic Painting

Students will learn the art of acrylic painting as they capture the image of the historic schoolhouse

Saturday, August 20th – Basket Weaving

Students will learn the art of Native American basket weaving and explore on-site artifacts. A member of the Pala Tribe will be on hand to talk about her culture and the use of grinding stones on the schoolhouse grounds

Saturday, September 17th – Watercolor Painting

Students will learn the art of watercolor painting as they capture the image of the Myrtle Creek Barn

All classes will be from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

All supplies will be provided.

Youth ages 6 to 11 only.

Call to register: 442-226-6294

Space is Limited

Participation is Free – Donations are always appreciated

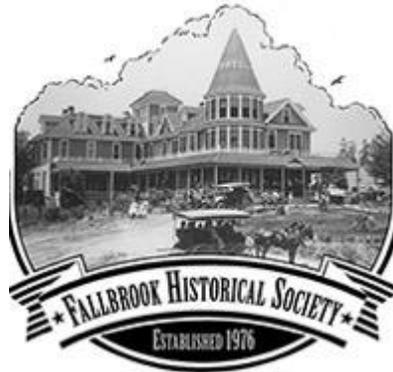
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The Fallbrook Historical Society's mission is to bring history to life by educating the community and others about Fallbrook's rich heritage



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