

New Bedford's Forgotten Theaters: The Capitol Theatre

Capitol Theatre in 1973 (Spinner Publications)

Here is the second installment of the "New Bedford's Forgotten Theaters" series. In the inaugural article we covered the series introduction and [Allen's Theater](#) on Acushnet Avenue the street that was simply jam packed with theaters. What made the Avenue financially strong was its showcase-style layout. One didn't need to go down the side streets to any depth since all the businesses were along the length of the "strip."

If this wasn't the case and the theaters that were spread out along the length of Acushnet Avenue were placed in a smaller area, it would have been dubbed a Theater District. There are records of no less than 25 theaters throughout the city's rich theatrical history going back 1824 with Cole's Tavern.

Capitol Theatre

Built/Opened: Nov. 29, 1920

Location: 1418 Acushnet Avenue

Seating Capacity: 1,000-1,200

Demolished:

The Capitol Theatre opened in the "heyday" of cinema in 1920. At this period in theater history Vaudeville – the style that launched greats like George Burns, Buster Keaton, The Marx Brothers, Judy Garland, Jack Benny, etc. – was incredibly popular, but beginning to wane. With the advent of radio and television, the industry's best started to jump ship. As the Great Depression approached and people tightened their purses and wallets, they went out on the town less.

After World War II, plays put theater into a revival that

lasted a few decades. Playwrights like Tennessee Williams (*The Glass Menagerie*), Eugene O'Neill (*Long Day's Night*), Edward Albee (*Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?*) and Arthur Miller (*Death of a Salesman*) changed the landscape of theatrical entertainment and the Capitol Theatre thrived.

The standard at the Capitol Theatre through the 1950s and 1960s would be to showcase two back-to-back movies (often Spaghetti Westerns) and five *Looney Tunes* cartoons making it extremely popular with the neighborhood youth. Admission was a whopping 12 cents on Saturday and a whole quarter on Sundays. Today it is \$8.50 for a ticket to the movies. To further lend perspective, popcorn was 10 cents – today it averages \$5! Yeah, yeah..."When I was your age I walked 5 miles in the snow to get to Kindergarten class, whippersnapper!"

At some point there was a fire at the Capitol Theatre. I had some trouble confirming the date and the extent of the damage – in spite of the fact that images of the fire exist. Perhaps a more knowledgeable reader could fill in this void!

What are your memories of Capitol Theatre? What shows did you see there?

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Photo Guide

1. *Capitol Theatre in the 1950s (Spinner Publications)*
 2. *Unknown date of fire at Capitol Theater (Spinner Publications)*
 3. *"Capitol Theatre" today*
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