

BELASCO THEATER TO BECOME CHURCH

Playhouse, Started During Prohibition,
Bought for \$200,000 by Immanuel Gospel

The Belasco Theater, scene of many a dramatic triumph in the boom days just before talking pictures arrived, was sold yesterday to be converted into a church.

The Immanuel Gospel Temple bought it for \$200,000. The church will dedicate it at 11 a.m. Sunday.

Down will come the signs of the last motion-picture double bill: "French Nudists" and "Girls for Sale."

These marked the lurid end of a dramatic trail which began in the heyday of the legitimate stage in Los Angeles.

The Belasco was built by the Doheny interests at 1050 S Hill St. and opened Nov. 1, 1926, with a glittering premiere of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes."

Cream of Society

Beneath its old gold luxuriance and beside its churchlike jade windows were the cream of Southland society and theatrical circles. Bert Lytell made the dedication speech. Anita Loos, who wrote the book, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," was there with her husband, John Emerson, co-author of the stage version.

The story about the gold-digger set the pace for a series of hits at the Belasco in the late prohibition days when the city seemed moving southward, down Broadway and Hill St. The Chamber of Commerce Building, the Western Pacific Building, the Orpheum Theater, the Petroleum Building and others were there.

Draw Stage Stars

The Mayan Theater was beside the Belasco and they drew stage stars who drew the crowds in the boom era.

David Belasco, Edgar Selwyn and other eastern producers sent their successful productions here.

The Belasco on Hill St. was a successor to another Belasco at 337 S Main St., which flour-

ished when show-going in Los Angeles was in its infancy. On its boards trod such stars-to-be as Lewis Stone, Marjorie Rameau, W. C. Fields, Hobart Bosworth, Paderewski and even Schumann-Heink.

The first Belasco became a strip-tease house known as the Follies.

The second never changed its cherished name, but it hit the same burlesque pattern in its final years.

The Doheny estate sold it to Belco Properties, Inc., in December, 1948, and the stage and screen titles since tell the story: "Hop, Strip and Bump," "Good Nudes for All" and finally, "Girls for Sale." They rarely filled the 1500 seats.

The Immanuel Gospel Temple, which has been leasing quarters at 927 S Flower St., bought the house with gifts from its congregation. The \$29,000 down payment includes one \$10,000 donation.

To Be Redecorated

Dr. A. Earl Lee, pastor, said it will be redecorated and partly rebuilt. Paul Schreiber, who heads Belco Properties, Inc., will continue operating the Las Palmas and Coronet theaters in Hollywood.

Mrs. Rhoda Lee, wife of the pastor, will operate a commissary with food, clothing and other necessities for the poor in the Immanuel Gospel Temple's new quarters.

It will be a strange contrast to "Abandoned Dances," blackouts, "Lysistrata" and "Streets of Shadow."

There will be church services at 11 a.m., 2:30 and 7 p.m.

And June 25 a 10-day national Bible convention is expected to draw 1000 delegates from throughout the United States and Canada.

The curtain will be down on the old Belasco.