

# Theater buffs

## Wichita's Orpheum gets another chance

**W**hen Wichita's Orpheum Theater had its grand opening on Labor Day 1922, the crowd — despite no air conditioning on a hot day — enjoyed the organ recital, feature pictures and vaudeville acts. But after the show, patrons discovered that perspiration mixed with the red upholstery on the theater seats had stained their clothes. The management quickly agreed to get patrons' garments cleaned or replaced as necessary.

Despite such an inauspicious beginning, the ornate Orpheum for many years featured a wide array of artists. But in 1975, after trying to keep the crowds with X-rated and Kung-Fu movies, the doors finally closed. Local history buffs have refused, however, to let the last of Wichita's theatrical palaces be destroyed.

They made certain it was designated as a National Historic Landmark. Now, after years of effort, "Save the Orpheum" stal-

warts own the Orpheum Theater free and clear! That's the good news. The bad news is that they need \$250,000 to make repairs needed to get the place up and running so that it can, once again, become a big part of downtown entertainment.

There is a need in Wichita for a theater its size — it seats 1,045. And it would be a shame if such a fine building, designed by John Eberson, considered one of the nation's top acoustical engineers in the 1920s, was not restored to its full glory.

Think about the pleasure of once again looking up at the elaborate ceilings while waiting for the beginning of a play or enjoying the lovely carvings and other appointments during a concert intermission. How nice it would be for downtown redevelopment and for historical preservation to have the Orpheum regain its glory — without those red upholstered seats, of course.