

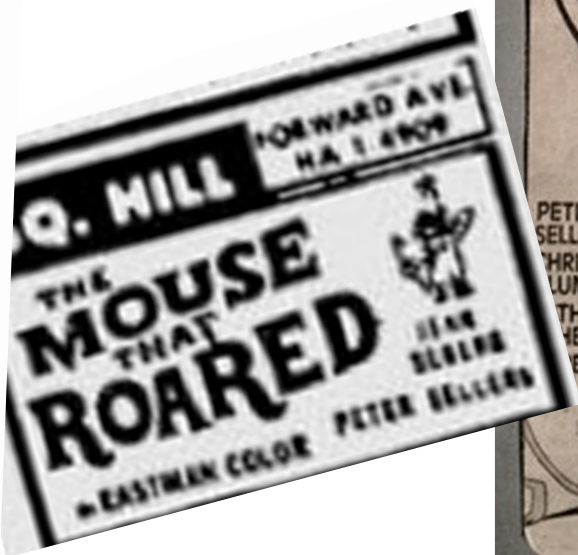
Squirrel Hill Historical Society



Squirrel Hill Goes to the Movies

The story of the movie theaters of Squirrel Hill could be a movie in itself, starring the progression of theaters in the neighborhood. They illustrate the history of movie-making from the very beginning to now. In the process, they portray the development of Squirrel Hill from rural retreat to vibrant urban community.

Enjoy the
show!



Orpheum Theater

The first theater in Squirrel Hill was most likely the **Orpheum**, located on the corner of Forbes and Murray. It was open by 1916 and showed silent films. The seats were just chairs set up in a large room. The Orpheum closed around 1925, probably because of competition from the brand-new and much more ornate Manor Theater, which opened in 1922.

The Orpheum Theater’s major claim to fame in Squirrel Hill is that it was the original meeting place for the congregation that became Beth Shalom, which began holding services there in 1917 and continued until Beth Shalom Synagogue opened in 1923.

Jewish Criterion, 1917

**SQUIRREL HILL MINYAN
HOLDS SUCCESSFUL
SERVICES.**

Orthodox residents of Squirrel Hill observed Rosh Hashana services under most pleasant and favorable conditions. Several young men realizing the need of a convenient place to worship rented a large airy hall in the Orpheum Theater Building, Forbes street and Murray avenue, en-



This 1926 picture of the corner of Forbes and Murray shows the still-remaining marquee of the Orpheum Theater on the far right, although the theater had closed the year before. The building still exists. The marquee was located where Uncle Sam’s Gourmet Subs is now, replacing *Vie de France*.

In the picture, under the curved top of the building, the word “Bowling” can be seen. No information is known about a possible bowling alley in the building.

Manor Theatre

The **Manor Theatre** opened in 1922. It had 1,500 seats in its ornate auditorium, making it one of the most spacious theaters in Pittsburgh at the time. At first it showed silent films.

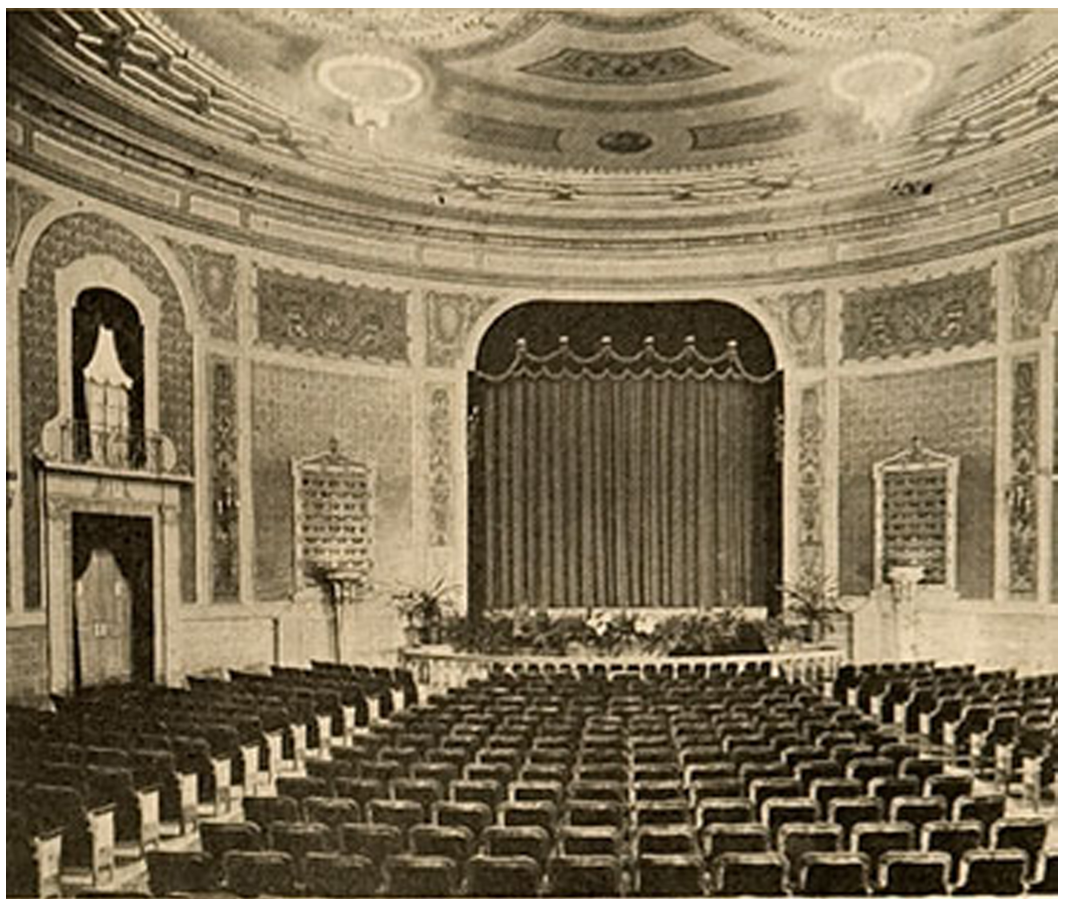
In 1930, the Manor became a Warner Brothers theater. Then it was purchased in 1969 by Ernest and George Stern. Ernest was the father of present Manor owner Rick Stern.

The Manor was divided into two theaters in 1978 and four in 1992. By 2010, the theater had become shabby and the equipment outdated, so Stern embarked on a major restoration project, including the installation of state-of-the-art projection and sound systems and wonderfully comfortable seats.

Right: the interior of the theater when it opened in 1922

Below: This picture from 1937 shows the English Tudor-style exterior of the theater. The owner, James B. Clark, wanted it to “harmonize with the handsome surrounding residences,” many of which still exist on adjacent side streets.

Today a high-tech firm occupies the upper floor, replacing Barnes & Noble, and storefronts line Murray Avenue along the front of the building.



Guild Theatre

Of all the theaters in Squirrel Hill, the **Guild Theatre** has undergone the most changes.

- It was first called the **Princess Theatre** when it opened sometime before 1937.
- In 1937 its name was changed to the **Beacon Theatre**.
- In 1954 it was remodeled and renamed the **Guild Theatre**.
- In 1979 it closed and the space became the **Guild Restaurant and Deli**.
- In 1982 it became **Gullifty's Eatery**.
- In 2013 Gullifty's closed.
- Today the building is the **Friendship Circle**, a Jewish nonprofit organization that pairs teen volunteers with children with special needs.



1965



Early 2000s



2016

FORVM Theater

The **FORVM** had a fairly short run. This jewel of a 373-seat theater opened on July 17, 1963, and closed in 1978. Its style of architecture was Classical Roman. A Roman lectern served as the box office, and the creamy white stucco facade was embossed with Classical roundels.

The theater focused on art films rather than blockbusters, showing such films as *Mouse on the Moon*, *Lilies in the Field*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Marriage Italian Style* and *Zorba the Greek*.

The FORVM was located on Forbes near the corner of Shady, where the Bagel Factory and Coldwell Bankers Real Estate Services are now. Today the front facade of the building is completely different, but the Classical roundels can still be seen on the back of the building.

It might surprise people to know that the Kamin Chevrolet Dealership occupied the space before the FORVM.



GRAND OPENING WEDNESDAY!

THE FORVM
ART THEATRE

IN ALL IT'S ROMAN SPLENDOR

THE FORVM

PITTSBURGH'S MOST UNIQUE ART THEATER
FORBES at SHADY

THE LAST WORD IN LUXURY

Friends, Romans, Countrymen—Lend us your ears . . . The FORUM THEATER is designed, constructed and appointed on the principle that luxury is a personal matter, and that serenity and comfort are vital enhancements to the viewing of entertainment. To achieve this our architects and decorators turned to the building and arts of ancient Rome. As for entertainment, the FORUM is already being sought after as a showcase for the finest films of all continents. Because of its location, the quality of its patronage and its superb appointments, producers the world wide over are excited by the idea of the FORUM. They are as eager to display their finest creations with us as you will be to return again and again to see them all. The FORUM welcomes you! The pleasures of the theater and the hospitality of the house will always attend you.

Inaugural Premiere Attraction

stop shooting at our moon!

margaret rutherford
bernard cribbins ron moody
david kossoff
and terry-thomas

in a walter shenson production

You'll roar
at the further adventures of
"The Mouse That Roared"

mouse on the moon

WITH june ritchie SCREENPLAY BY michael portnoe FROM THE NOVEL BY leonard wilberley DIRECTED BY richard lester PRODUCED BY walter shenson
distributed by laport pictures corporation eastmancolor

In spite of searching in a number of newspapers and other sources, the SHHS has not been able to find a photograph or drawing of the facade of the FORVM theater.

If you have an image of the FORVM, please consider contacting the SHHS and letting us scan it.

Squirrel Hill Theater

The **Squirrel Hill Theater** was located on Forward Avenue near Murray Avenue. The Warner Brothers-owned theater opened in 1937. It was later purchased by Rick Stern, owner of the Manor.

It closed in 2010, to the disappointment of many Squirrel Hill moviegoers. The future of the site is still undetermined.



When the theater opened, it presented a completely different theater concept. It was the first theater in Pittsburgh to be built expressly for sound and projection. Even the Manor showed silent films at first.

The article below stresses the “modern” look of the Squirrel Hill Theater: *“What a refreshing change from the elaborate ornateness of the old type of motion picture theater. What a delightful difference from the gaudiness of the motion picture palace of yesterday.”*

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1937

Ward Ad Headquarters, Court 1937

THE PITTSBURGH PRESS

MODERN SQUIRREL HILL THEATER

Patrons' Comfort First Thought In Planning New Movie

Structure Is First to Be Built in Pittsburgh Expressly for Sound, Projection

Modern theater architecture is well exemplified in the new Squirrel Hill Theater, Forward Ave. near Murray Ave., which opens to the public at 7 p. m. today.

What a refreshing change from the elaborate ornateness of the old type of motion picture theater. What a delightful difference from the gaudiness of the motion picture palace of yesterday.

More than 10 years ago, European architects saw that the heavy, brass picture theater was doomed. In its place was evolved the simple, dignified buildings that now grace the boulevards of the gay capitals across the sea.

Just as the World's Fair of 1933-34 differed from the World's Fair of 1913, so does the new Squirrel Hill Theater differ from theaters constructed as late as four years ago.

Example of Rare Beauty

A rare beauty such as only simple dignity can provide is the poet

Warner Brothers Employees Are All Trained

Promotions Are Made From Ranks

When you enter the new Squirrel Hill Theater or any other Warner Brothers Theater, there is a trained staff on hand to greet you and offer such efficient and courteous service that you may be comfortable and enjoy yourself.

The Warner Brothers organization trains its staff to consider at all times that it is the host and the patron is the guest in the theater.

Many years of successful theater

Technicolor Film

Above is the attractive front of Warner Brothers new, modern Squirrel Hill Theater which opens at 7 p. m. today with one of the season's outstanding films as the attraction.

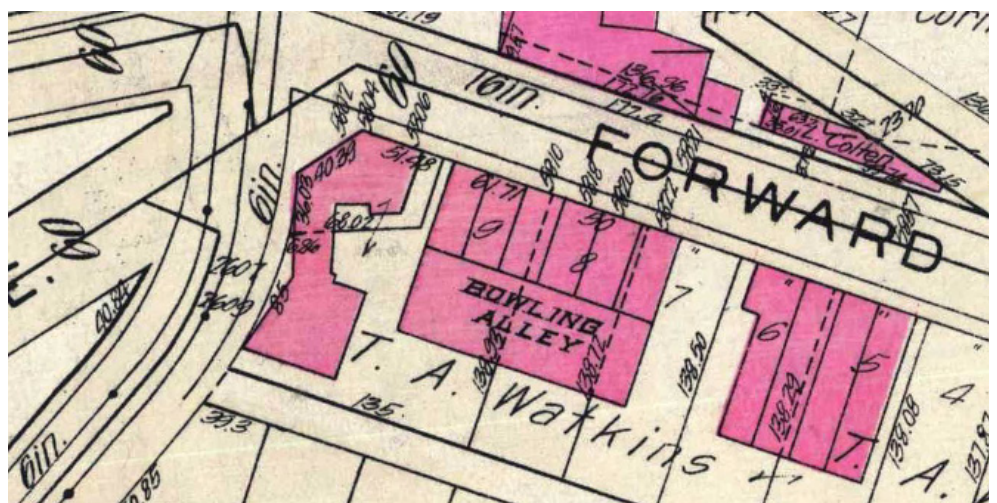
Article about the opening of the Squirrel Hill Theater in the *Pittsburgh Press*, February 21, 1937.

Another Theater?

In 1920, real estate developer Thomas Watkins bought a large tract of land from the Mellons along Murray Avenue, extending from Forward Avenue to Morrowfield Avenue. He envisioned building a community comprised of the imposing Morrowfield Apartment Hotel, a cluster of long-term apartment houses behind the hotel, a five-story indoor parking garage (one of Pittsburgh's first) and additional buildings on Murray and Forward Avenues with stores and other businesses.

One of the buildings is described in an article as having a bowling alley, **800-seat theater**, and a dance hall, "providing an evening's entertainment only a short distance away."

A 1923 plat map shows that the bowling alley was originally in the building that was on the same spot as the later Squirrel Hill Theater. When a fire in 2015 destroyed the buildings at the corner of Forward and Murray Avenues, the side of the Squirrel Hill Theater was exposed, showing what could have been the bowling alley on the second floor. If that is the case, it is likely the theater built by Watkins was replaced by the Squirrel Hill Theater.



Demolition after the fire at the corner of Forward and Murray exposed the side of the Squirrel Hill Theater, showing the upper floors where the bowling alleys were.

Stars in Squirrel Hill

Lights! Camera! Action! From the beginning of filmmaking, Squirrel Hill has played host not only to a number of theaters but also to movie makers, movie sets, and stars.

Many actors stayed at the Morrowfield when they were in town. They included the Marx Brothers, Fanny Brice, Al Jolson, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne.

Morrowfield Edition

THE GAZETTE TIMES.

Morrowfield Edition

PITTSBURGH, PA. SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1934.

MORROWFIELD APARTMENT HOTEL READY FOR GUESTS

SQUIRREL HILL DEVELOPMENT UNIQUE IN SERVICE

New Dwellings Embody Latest Features in Housing Plans

Building of 1-2-3-4-Room Suites in Part of \$3,500,000 Project.

EVERY NEED AT HAND

The new Morrowfield Apartment Hotel, the first part of a mammoth group of apartment buildings occupying three city blocks between Spruce, Pennock, Hoxley and Morrow field streets, Squirrel Hill, is now ready to receive guests.

The large apartment hotel is unique in the type of service which it offers. It represents the latest type of construction, having circular balconies and containing 120 suites of one, two and three rooms each. The guests have every advantage of well-ventilated homes and, not less so, conveniences and the comforts of the modern hotel.

Continued on the event and slide of a



Morrowfield Apartment Hotel

Alderson Unit Built on Hill After Streets Are Relocated

Quarters grouped for families waiting all modern conveniences.

DE LUXE APARTMENTS

the were are placed under private to the conduct and tenants. Central lamp units are used with special effect in the court yards between the houses.

Alderson Apartments.

In the new four-family apartment of the Alderson group the same type of face being also seen used. A small entrance hall opens directly to the apartments on either side on the first floor, and the entrance leading to the second floor.

The apartments on either side are completely lined up and there is no little difference in arrangement between apartments on the first and second

Thomas Watkins, owner of the Morrowfield Hotel, was very happy to see the Marx Brothers leave. “Pretty much louts and vandals were they,” recalled Watkins, referring to an incident in which a “Steinway or Baldwin piano” was moved into the Marx Brothers’ room. When the piano was returned, “at each end of the keyboard the fine wood had been deeply burnt and scarred from crushed out cigarettes.”



Theater Ownership

If you are wondering who owned the theaters in Squirrel Hill, the answer is complicated.

Both the **Manor** and **Squirrel Hill Theatres** started out as Warner Brothers theaters and ended up under the ownership of Rick Stern, whose company was called Cinemagic Theatres and is now Stern Enterprises. The Manor was also run at various times by Stanley Warner, Associated Theatres, Cinemette Corporation of America and Cinema World.

The **FORVM** was run by Associated Theatres and then by Cinemette Corporation.

The **Guild** was run by Associated Theaters, Cinemette Corporation and then by Cinema World.

The **Squirrel Hill Theater** was run by Warner Brothers, Stanley Warner, Cinemette Corporation, Cinema World and finally by Cinemagic Theatres.



Illustration from an article about the opening of the Squirrel Hill Theater in the *Pittsburgh Press*, February 21, 1937.

Squirrel Hill in the Movies

Through the years, Squirrel Hill has been used as a location for a number of movies. The Squirrel Hill Historical Society is in the process of compiling a list of movies with scenes filmed in the neighborhood, to be featured in a future display. Even if it was just a bit part, it's an interesting piece of Squirrel Hill's history. Here are some examples:

Mothman Prophecies featured a few seconds of footage shot at the corner of Shady Avenue and Darlington Road. Some people might remember the non-operational traffic signal that hung there for a few weeks and then was gone.

Another movie was ***Diabolique***, filmed at the old St. Philomena Church and School before it became Community Day School.

And then there was ***Smart People***, filmed in Baker Hall at Carnegie Mellon University.

Do you remember any other movies that had scenes shot in Squirrel Hill? If you do, let us know! Email the SHHS at historysqhill@hotmail.com.

