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PALACES

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From the 1920s to the 1960s, motion picture theaters enlivened the city of Hartford. Main Street glowed from the luminous marquees of the Loew's Poli, the Poli Palace, the Crown, and the Strand. The Allyn and E. M. Loew's stood on Asylum Street, the Colonial on Farmington Avenue, the Lenox on Albany Avenue, the Princess and the Regal were on State Street, the State Theatre on Village Street, the Webster on Webster Street, and others. In addition to the double features these theaters screened cartoons and newsreels, and some included Wurlitzer music.

Signs of the times, 1964. The marquees of the Loew's Poli and Loew-Poli Palace on Main Street announce their imminent destruction.



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The Hartford Theater, the Wise Smith Building, Main Street, 1914. Originally the Hartford Opera House, where Yiddish plays were performed, the Hartford Theater was also a stage theater prior to and during the silent-film era.

Hartford's motion picture theaters were magnificent. Their designs reflected architectural trends of the day. For example the Poli (which later became the Fox Poli and still later renamed Loew's Poli), designed by Thomas W. Lamb in 1920, exhibited the influence of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Its lavish façade featured gigantic fluted columns with Ionic capitals. Gracing the top of the vertical marquee were sculpted allegorical figures of horn players summoning all to enter. In its early days the theater presented acts such as the Great Houdini before becoming a first-run motion picture house affiliated with MGM. In 1964, it was demolished to make way for the Bushnell Towers.

The Colonial Theater, designed in 1925 by James A. Tuck, exemplified a period of renewed interest in this country's earliest architectural styles. Its façade featured full-arch windows with keystone lintels, pilasters with acanthus capitals supporting a wide frieze decorated with swags and rosettes. The Colonial was another local theater that originally offered vaudeville before making the transition to motion pictures. It later retooled for Cinerama.

Then there's the Webster Theater. Designed by George Zunner, Jr. and Paula Shulman in 1937, the Webster illustrates how the streamlining of automobiles and airplanes entered the architectural world as Art Moderne. Its sleek



Fox Poli, Main Street, 1933. An impressive façade featured gigantic fluted columns with Ionic capitals supporting a cornice line accented by a wide frieze. A massive central arch with a recessed window achieved a three-dimensional presentation. By the early 1930s the Fox circuit had taken over the Poli chain; Fox would later be taken over by the Loew theater chain.

curved façade, composed primarily of glass blocks, features a stainless steel marquee that stretches the entire length and supports a neon “WEBSTER” sign. Also contributing to the Webster’s horizontal effect are ribbon windows with metal casement (analogous to those on the Hartford Public Library) appearing on side elevations. The Webster withstood urban renewal, but not the economics of film distribution. It now offers live music. Its proscenium includes a stage where musicians perform. In back, however, the screen remains.

(Editors note: The printed photo essay contains numerous images and captions not available in this online sample article.)

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