

Deerpath and The Deluxe Theaters

Newcomers to Lake Forest and Lake Bluff may be unaware that long ago there was a movie theater located in downtown Lake Forest. People who remember the Deerpath Theater on Deerpath, located just a block west of Walgreens, may not know that in the late 1920s there were two movie theaters in Lake Forest, one in Highwood, and two in Highland Park. If the discerning movie fan couldn't find a film he or she wanted to see, there was always Waukegan with its magnificent Genesee Theater.

The 1920s was the era where movies ruled the entertainment world. The names of the films changed several times a week, and there was always something new to see. The first movie house in Lake Forest was called The Deluxe. It was situated on Westminster, approximately where the old O'Neil Hardware Store once stood. However, the dominance of the Deluxe was to be challenged in the fall of 1928 when it was announced that a grand movie house would soon be built a few blocks away.

Much publicity was raised about the new project. The architect was Stanley Anderson. In 1928, one of the ads in the Lake Forester discussed the opening of the Deerpath Theater by saying, "It is the intention of the management to set a standard in entertainment that is worthy of the people of Lake Forest and adjacent territory." The curiosity of the public was fed as the construction of the building continued. One article exclaimed, "The new theater is one of the finest on the North Shore, equipped with every modern facility including a splendid pipe organ." An organist was hired and touted to be among the finest. These were the days when the 'talkies' had not yet become the rule, so it was important for an organist to play as an underline to the on-screen action.

Then on September 1, 1928, the somewhat delayed opening finally took place. The occasion was marked with the filming of the crowds attending the event. Whetting the appetites of the town, the grand opening was preceded with large ads in the Lake Forester. After the first night, a review of the theater said, "Architects are to be congratulated on achieving a theater that lacks the ornate embellishments of the usual movie houses. ... The furnishing has been reserved as the theater itself demands." The featured film for the opening was "Glorious Betsy." Joseph Emma of Lake Forest was the manager of the theater for nearly all of its existence in town.

The Deluxe fought hard to maintain its place, and urged people to come to the *original* theater where they would find the best programs, with no increase in prices. Both theaters offered children's matinees with a weekly serial such as Tarzan and a cartoon. Eventually, the Deluxe closed, and the Deerpath outlived all of its competitors in the surrounding towns. Its doors closed in 1985.