

Time caught up with the old place, and with a slowdown in business and mounting debt, the theater closed in 2015. But as has been the case with many theaters in Delaware's history, it wasn't gone for long, although its return took another form. In 2017, after a multimillion-dollar renovation, the Cinema Center was reborn and the three-screener was now a five: Main Street Movies 5, a theater with all modern amenities, including reserved recliner seating, beer and wine sales, electronic ticketing and (some) food supplied by Newark pizzerias and bakeries.

Like Westown, Main Street respects history. In its lobby hangs one of the original Cinema Center signs.

Clayton Theatre | 33246 Main Street, Dagsboro | since 1949

In 2013, the Clayton Theatre faced a crisis. Hollywood was moving away from thirty-five-millimeter and running toward digital. But with this shift—yet another tech advance in a long history of tech advances—the Clayton faced an uncertain future. The community rallied behind the theater it grew up with by attending fundraising screenings, supporting partnerships with other merchants and even writing a book presenting something of an oral history of the theater, all to raise the \$85,000 needed for the upgrade to digital projection in 2014. The Clayton still has its two thirty-five-millimeter projectors, although one is now for display purposes only. The other projector functions, and on those occasions when it rolls thirty-five-millimeter, there is an intermission during the reel change. Keeping true to its roots, the Clayton offers classic film screenings on select Mondays, and the balcony is always open for seating.

The Theater at Dover Air Force Base | Dover Air Force Base,
Dover | since circa 1941

As it has from its inception, the theater at the Dover Air Force Base, now managed by AAFES Reel Time Theatres, continues to provide first-run features to those stationed there. In 2013, the base upgraded its projector from thirty-five-millimeter to digital.

Candlelight Theatre | 2208 Millers Road, Wilmington | since 1931

In 2004, the Candlelight Music Dinner Theatre changed its name to the New Candlelight Theatre, and ten years later, it dropped "New" and became the Candlelight Theatre, a live entertainment and dining venue.

Milton Theatre | 110 Union Street, Milton | since 1919

Three decades after its closing, the Milton Theatre began a restoration project in 2000 and reopened in 2003 as a live theater, but it also screened movies. The recession of the late 2000s put another end to the theater, as it closed its doors in 2010 after a fundraising screening of *Rocky Horror*. But it wasn't done yet. In 2013, the theater came back to life, again with live shows. It is very active today, and live music, comedy and other performances aren't all it offers. Once a month, Revival House, self-described as "A Religious Experience for Film Lovers," screens movies rep-house style, with an eclectic mix of cult faves, rockin' docs and even the chance for local filmmakers to showcase their work.

The Queen Wilmington | 500 North Market Street,
Wilmington | since 1916

The former Market Street movie house known as the Queen remained dormant from 1959 until 2011, when, after a \$25 million overhaul, it reopened as a live music venue (an extension of Philadelphia's World Café Live). In 2017, Live Nation assumed management control.

Playhouse on Rodney Square | 1007 North Market Street,
Wilmington | since 1913

The Playhouse changed its name to the DuPont Theatre in 2003, then to the Playhouse on Rodney Square in 2015. As it has been for decades, the Playhouse's specialty is Broadway fare, offering productions of everything from *Les Misérables* to *Jersey Boys*. It may have flirted with film early in its one-hundred-plus-year history, but it has always been in love with live theater and still is to this day.

Milton Theatre continues to thrive with nostalgic nod to bygone days

The Milton Theatre has a rich and meaningful history. Erected circa 1910, the two-story building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places in Milton's historic district, and it has served, at one time or another, as the town's basketball hall, fire station, social center and community stage. Various retail businesses and restaurants have also thrived there. Of course, its most popular role was as the community's celebrated art-deco movie house in the 1930s, first featuring silent films and later, talkies, until it closed following flood damage from the Great Storm

of 1962. The structure has survived three major fires; weathered many storms and until most recently, suffered decades of neglect.

For the past seven years, the nonprofit, Milton Development Corporation, led by a ten-member, all-volunteer board of directors, has been dedicated to rehabilitating the historic landmark. As a result of an extensive capital campaign, the once-crumbling building is re-emerging as a touchstone and anchor in Milton's Town Centre.

Since re-opening its doors almost four years ago for its first public program in more than three decades, the stage has seen spectacular theatrics, a diverse lineup of individual artists and groups, and a busy calendar of multimedia entertainment, community initiatives and festival events.

Its dedication to being a multiuse performing arts and cultural center, while serving as a classic movie and second-release cinema house and providing a showcase for community programs, festivals and private events, makes the Milton Theatre unique and innovative. No other venue in the immediate Milton or Sussex County region currently has the capability and/or availability to operate at such a multifunctional level, service more than 180 audience members and engage up to



The Milton Theatre is aglow and decked in festive balloons for its annual gala.



The Milton Theatre is shown before renovations.

30 or more artists at the same time.

There is no arts facility in the area that makes itself so accessible to the public, and there is no comparable space that reflects such rich history and creates such an intimate, nostalgic atmosphere.

Milton is developing into a town with multiple dimensions and a diverse network of neighborhoods, civic associations and cultural organizations. Lifelong residents, transplants from major metropolitan areas, students, retirees and visitors from Delaware's northern counties and southern resorts all representing different ages, economic and education levels, depict the vast community that the Milton Theatre now serves.

This diverse community brings with it



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new expectations and needs, expanded resources, varying experience and a broad background. The diversity presents the Milton Theatre with exciting challenges and provides it with new and different opportunities in which to serve and enrich lives.

Programs are made possible, in part, by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Delaware Division of the Arts, a state agency committed to promoting and supporting the arts in Delaware.

Celebrating 200 Years of Historic Events in Milton

Begin Here



2007: Milton celebrates 200th anniversary!

2006: After 16 months of extensive renovation, Milton Historical Society holds rededication ceremony of Lydia B. Cannon Museum.

2004: First Annual Horseshoe Crab & Shorebird Festival

2003: Completion of remodeling of the Milton Public Library.



2000/2003: Milton Development Corporation begins its Milton Theatre renovation project. Theatre reopens with first public program in three decades.

1998: 1st Annual John Milton Poetry Festival
2000: 1st Annual Broadkill River Canoe & Kayak Race



1807: By an Act of the Delaware Assembly, the name of the community, known variously as Osburn's Landing, Upper Landing, Conwell's Landing and Head of the Broadkill, is changed to Milton, to honor the English Poet, John Milton.



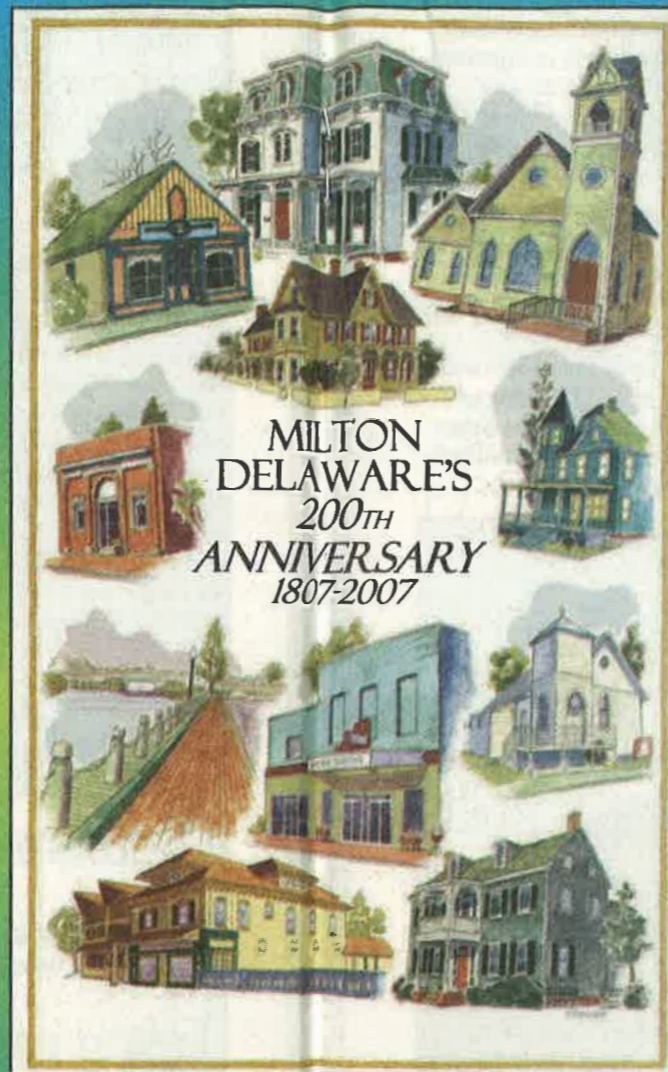
1986: Small rail train donated to Milton, and Milton Lions Club begins operation of the "Clipper Express" in Municipal Park.

1990: First Delmarva Hot Air Balloon & Craft Festival is organized by local physician, Dr. Charles Wagner

1998/2000: Draper-King Cole Cannery stops operation. Property sold to Thomas H. Draper who plans to develop it as a "neo-classical village."

1962: A Nor'easter hits the coastal region and floods downtown Milton - becomes known as the Great Storm

1970/1971: Milton Historical Society incorporates/former Grace Methodist Church on Union St. is donated to the MHS by Lydia Black Cannon to be used as a museum



1812: Broadkill Creek is blockaded by the British, and Milton stores and private dwellings are used as arsenals.

1820-1880: Milton shipbuilding enjoys its heyday. The town becomes well known for its thriving shipbuilding industry.



1887: Sussex County Court House in Georgetown constructed using bricks manufactured from Milton Brick Company.

1901: Milton Volunteer Fire Company organizes and purchases its first piece of equipment.

1904: Telephone lines are installed

1933/1934: Union organizers "chased from the town by police" when they try to organize Milton button cutters. Three button-cutting factories operating in Milton.

1947: Thomas and Mary Hughes begin publication of "The Towncrier"

1911: Joseph Maull Carey, Milton native, elected Governor of Wyoming.



1824: Samuel Paynter elected Governor of Delaware, the first of five men from Milton to be elected Governor.

1828: David Hazzard elected Governor of Delaware.

1846: Joseph Maull elected Governor of Delaware

1865: Milton incorporates as a town

1871: James Ponder sworn in as Governor of Delaware

1874: Waples Lumber Company, owned by Charles G. Waples, operates at Waples Mill Pond.

1909: Great Fire devastates downtown Milton and destroys 18 buildings.

1909: John S. Isaacs Farm Co. is founded and by the 1940s has become world's largest producer of canned lima beans.

The Grand | 818 North Market Street, Wilmington | since 1871

With a focus on live events, the Grand expanded its brand in 2000 by acquiring the lots next door (home of the once mighty Aldine) and opening the Baby Grand. It also assumed management of the Playhouse on Rodney Square in 2015. The Grand presents more than eighty live shows per season, including performances by the Delaware Symphony, Opera Delaware and First State Ballet.

Smyrna Opera House | 7 West South Street, Smyrna | since 1870

After being closed for about fifty-five years, the last four of which were spent renovating, the Smyrna Opera House reopened its refurbished doors to the public in 2003. Its ground floor remained the library it had become, but the auditorium itself was fully restored on the second floor, including a balcony above. Part of Smyrna's opening program included an appearance by Frederick Douglass IV, the great-grandson of Frederick Douglass, who had spoken at the Opera House soon after its 1870 open. The Smyrna Opera House was designed to offer both film and live presentations; the latter is its main attraction.

Everett Theatre | 51 West Main Street, Middletown | since 1868

Finally, and again, the place where it all began.

Over the course of the 2000s, the Everett Theatre has continued to be the hub of arts in MOT, with year-round programming consisting of both live productions and film (including annual participation in the Manhattan Short Film Festival). This hasn't happened without challenges.

In March 2008, hours after 150 patrons left a live Easter production, an eighty-five-by-sixty-foot chunk of ceiling collapsed in the seating area, forcing the theater to close and creating a need for \$500,000 in renovations and upgrades (of which insurance covered about half). It was a tall order, but this was the Everett Theatre, a venue that had already bounced back from two fires (as the Middletown Opera House) and two business-related closures. A fundraising campaign helped get the theater where it needed to be, and in May 2009, the Everett reopened.

In addition to fires and finances and falling ceilings, the Everett had one other hurdle to clear: a foe. In its history, the Everett faced almost no local competition, but in 2013, Westown Movies opened less than two miles away. Because of the rules of film distribution, the new twelve-screen first-run theater changed the dynamic of what films the Everett could show and when, impacting its screening schedule. The oldest theatrical entity in the state's history adapted and placed a greater emphasis on live shows but also upgraded its projection system to digital to stay competitive and to meet the demands of Hollywood (although its twin Peerless projectors still work just fine).

As of late, the theater's film focus has been to partner with local charities to show fundraising family films.

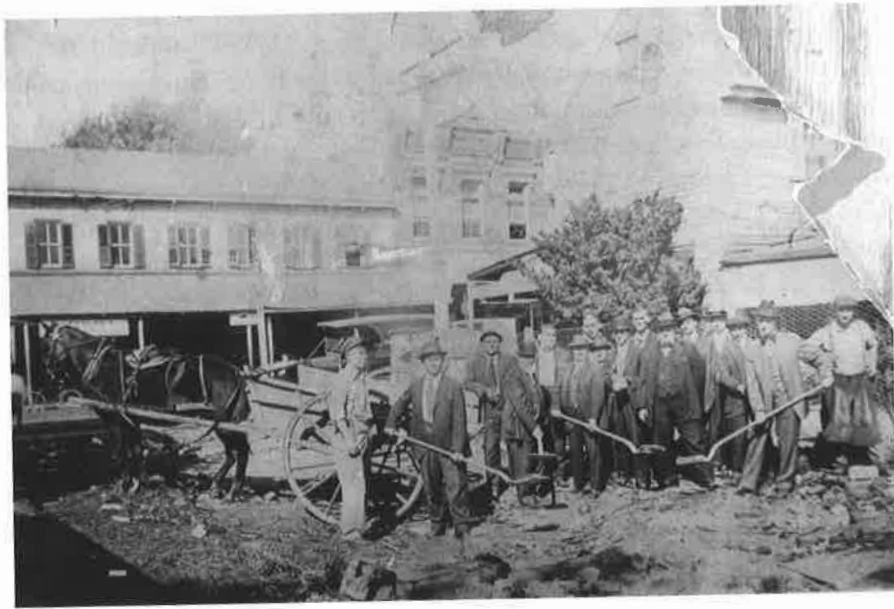
TOMORROW

It's impossible to know what fate 2018 and beyond holds, but given how many theaters in Delaware have come back from the dead, it wouldn't surprise me if others did. In fact, two theaters are trying to do just that.

In Millsboro, Eric Clarke and his wife, Dr. Julie Hattier, purchased the building that housed the Ball Theatre (which was mostly preserved inside) and are slowly renovating it to a venue for films and live events. Also looking to reopen is the recently closed Schwartz Center for the Arts. Community members are organizing to understand how it got into the trouble it did and how to reopen the place.

In new theater news, Arthur Helmick, who has been involved in the creation of Westown Movies and the resurrection of the Cinema Center in the form of Main Street Movies 5, is looking to open his third Delaware theater by the summer of 2019 in Milford. To be located in the old Walmart building on U.S. 113, the nine-screen Milford Movies will be Delaware's first theater equipped with laser projectors.

While two theaters look to revive history and a third theater looks to make new history, a fourth theater is having its history solidified. Slated to receive a formal historical marker from the Delaware Archives is the Milton Theatre. (On a personal note, I had the great privilege to contribute historical information and text for that marker.)



Over a dozen men (and a horse) stopped the groundbreaking of Dover's Temple Theatre to pose for this photo, circa 1917. *Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware.*

government organizations, including a war picture during a 1917 patriotic rally, a six-reel presentation as part of a Victory Loan event in 1919 and a lecture on public health coupled with a health film.

Dodd's Hall | circa 1919–circa 1930
(Millsboro)

While concrete open/close dates are scarce, Dodd's Hall (sometimes called Dodd's Theatre) first appeared in the news in 1919 when it played host to a school meeting. It also played silent films.

Fox Theatre | 1919–circa 1930
Milton Theatre | circa 1930–1969, 2003–2010, 2014–Present
(Milton)

The citizens of Milton wanted a theater, so Ida Fox modified a room above her Union Street store to be used for just such a thing, creating the five-

hundred-seat Fox Theatre. Ida's son, William H. Fox, would run the business until his untimely passing in September of that same year. Ida took over the theater and, in doing so, became one of the first female theater managers in the state's history.

Royal Theatre | 1919–1928
Elaine Theatre | 1928–1930
Colonial Theatre | 1930–circa 1933
Earle Theatre | 1933–1977
(New Castle)

The opening of the Royal Theatre in New Castle is a bit of a mystery. There is a one-sentence announcement in the September 16, 1919 *Morning News* saying the “new motion picture theatre at Fifth and Delaware Streets held its opening [the night before].” However, an ad in the *Evening Journal* announced the “Grand Opening of The Royal Theatre” on February 7, 1920. I've always considered daily newspapers to be real-time diaries of events of the past, and while they certainly aren't infallible, in this instance, and in the absence of further evidence, I'll presume the 1919 open date was what's known today as a “soft open,” with the formal open happening in 1920.

MOVING PICTURES

Screening technology continued to evolve around the state in the decade. At the Grand, the Harrisograph and the Grandograph were used to show moving pictures early in 1910. The Savoy was projecting on the “Wonder Screen,” which management touted as allowing them to show pictures, without negative effect, while the theater was brightly lit. And while movies may have been gaining in popularity, there was still news to be made on the stage, including the appearance of acting royalty Lionel Barrymore at the Garrick.

Fire safety continued to be an important issue in Wilmington early in the decade. The public building committee filed a report with the city council, citing fire concerns with specific theaters, including the Pickwick for having no rear exits, the Avenue for having insufficient exits and the