

## East Falls Past-- Midvale Ave. as a Source of Entertainment: The Two Theaters

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Efforts have been underway recently to make improvements to Midvale Ave. and this article explores some history of the street with respect to two theaters that were “hip” places of entertainment during two periods of the 1900s.

The Falls (or “Midvale” or “Middie” to some locals) Theater was located at the southwest corner of Frederick and Midvale (formerly 120 Midvale) and was open during 1919-1929. Based on movie trends of the time, silent films dominated this period and the Falls likely had musical accompaniment in the form of a piano, an organ, or a small orchestra. A local senior citizen interviewed by gerontologist Cherie Snyder in 1981 recalled going to the theater for dates. According to theater historian Irvin Glazer, the theater had a capacity of 480 and served as a last-run moving picture theater. After 1929, the building was utilized for warehousing and light manufacturing and currently is the home of non-profit groups, with only the exterior giving some resemblance of what once was there.



The Alden existed much longer and many of our neighbors fondly remember it. It was located at 3641 (now 3617) Midvale, was open during 1932-1965, and had a capacity of 750. The Alden had a huge marquee that covered the very wide front and, as local resident Jim Klusman, Jr. recalls, the building took up the entire lot so patrons driving in had to park on the street. According to Irvin Glazer, the art deco exterior theme was carried out in the interior with plaster forms painted in many colors. The theater served as a second-run movie house and the Saturday matinees (for 15 cents plus popcorn for 25 cents) were very popular, with children staying for hours. Former patrons recall acting out scenes from “King Kong,” “Godzilla,” and “The Seven Gladiators” on the rock garden across the street. One former patron recalls the manager was Rube Shapiro. Local resident Ellen Sheehan recalls Benny Goldfine and his brother as owners and Mary Mondimore as ticket lady.

Another local resident, Dave McClenahan, recalls his parents saying that the theater management paused the shows in order to feature Amos and Andy live on the radio. The picture from December 28, 1955 shows the theater featuring “The Desperate Hours” with Fredric March and Humphrey Bogart. The closing of the Alden could be attributed to social changes (e.g. television).

After closing, the building was dark until its demolition in 1967-8, followed by the construction of a Gino’s Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant that eventually became a Roy Rogers franchise in 1982. Eventually, that building was demolished and replaced

with Chestnut Hill National Bank (now National Penn Bank) in 1989. What's interesting is that the theater and library were the only two sources of music, movie, and reading entertainment on a block otherwise known as "Gasoline Row" or "Gasoline Alley" with gas stations in every spot!