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## Baton Rouge's First Cinema 'Louisiana Theatre' Still Stands on Third Street

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Baton Rouge's first movie theater still stands on Third Street more than a century after opening its doors. The Louisiana Theatre, which first welcomed audiences in 1913, now serves a different purpose but remains a notable landmark in the capital city's downtown.

Long before modern blockbusters filled theaters, residents of Baton Rouge gathered at the Louisiana Theatre for silent films featuring screen legends like Clara Bow, Buster Keaton, and Rudolph Valentino. Located at 336 Third Street, the venue was the first building in the

city constructed specifically for showing films, a departure from the common practice at the time of converting retail spaces into makeshift cinemas.

Today, the building is home to The Basin Music Room, but its history remains visible. The facade still bears the original name “Louisiana” and the year “1913” etched into the structure, a reminder of its early role in the city’s entertainment history.

The Louisiana Theatre opened as a state-of-the-art venue for its time, equipped with its own electrical generator and a ventilation system. With seating for 600 people, it was considered a significant addition to Baton Rouge’s cultural life in the early 20th century.

While the Louisiana Theatre was the city’s first purpose-built cinema, it was eventually overshadowed by the more lavish Paramount Theatre, which opened in 1920 at 215 Third Street. The Paramount, remembered for its grandeur, attracted large crowds and became a central part of Baton Rouge’s movie scene for decades.

The Paramount’s location is now occupied by the Baton Rouge Police Department after the theater was demolished in 1979. For many residents, its removal marked the end of an era.

Despite the Paramount’s dominance in its heyday, the Louisiana Theatre has endured. The Paramount Company even purchased the smaller theater during its years of operation, but unlike the grand movie palace, the Louisiana Theatre building remains intact more than 110 years after its debut.

Its survival stands in contrast to the fate of many early cinemas, which were either torn down or heavily remodeled beyond recognition. The building’s original architecture and distinctive engravings have made it a recognizable part of the Third Street streetscape, connecting present-day visitors with Baton Rouge’s early entertainment history.

For local movie enthusiasts, the Louisiana Theatre holds a special place. Baton Rouge native Mark Jeffers recalled his own movie-going experiences in the city, noting, “I was thinking about all of the theaters I’ve watched movies in during the years. I remember going to movies at the old Gordon and Hart theaters when I was a kid. I even went to the Paramount, which started showing movies in the 1920s.”

Jeffers also pointed out that while the Paramount was a highlight for many, it was not Baton Rouge’s first cinema, a fact confirmed by the Louisiana Theatre’s earlier opening date.

Today, instead of silent films and newsreels, The Basin Music Room hosts live performances and events. While its purpose has changed, the building continues to serve as an entertainment venue, maintaining a link between Baton Rouge's cultural past and present.

The Louisiana Theatre's longevity is a rare example of historic preservation in the heart of the city's downtown. Even as the skyline and streetscape have evolved, the theater's facade continues to bear witness to more than a century of change in Baton Rouge.