



RENE BRUNET JR. & JACK STEWART



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*The Carrollton Theater  
in 1917.*

## Carrollton Theater

The first Carrollton Theater was an air-dome at 4040 Canal Street, on the corner of South Carrollton Avenue that operated for five years.

It was subsequently replaced by the second Carrollton Theater at 4710 S. Carrollton, a hardtop building developed by Mrs. Al Shear and designed by architect Moise Goldstein. It opened on St. Patrick's Day, 1917. The opening announcements and reviews proclaimed "a new era in photoplay exhibition," with "every modern accessory," including "running ice water and Typhoon fans" and featuring "a full orchestra" and a "big Hillgreen-Lane pipe organ," a seating capacity of 1,000, and "a pretentious lobby for a suburban house." The Carrollton had musical acts on stage in the 1920s and one of those featured was "The Sunny South Trio," a popular jazz group with violinist Oscar Marcour, banjoist Bill Eastwood, and pianist Buzzy Williams. The Carrollton quickly became part of the Sobel, Richards, Shear group and on June 6, 1930, was merged into United Theaters, Incorporated.

On February 2, 1935, a 2:35 A.M. blaze destroyed the theater, but the very lucrative house



was quickly replaced by a new theater that opened October 1, 1935. United Theaters invited the entire student body of John Dibert School, located on Orleans Avenue and Hennessey Street, to the grand opening, at which time all the students marched from the school to the Carrollton for the special engagement. The beautiful new theater was worth the walk!

This third Carrollton Theater was done in the latest "modernistic" or art deco style by architect H. A. Benson. It was the first theater to open in New Orleans since the advent of the talkie era and was designed for sound. It also had a thermostatically controlled temperature system and a magniscopic screen. It reopened with *Every Night at Eight*, starring George Raft and Alice Faye, along with a



Walt Disney cartoon "Mickey's Garden," and two Technicolor musical shorts "Tidbits," and "Romance of the West."

The theater remained one of the city's most popular and on January 28, 1968, was chosen by United Theaters, along with the Beacon and the Prytania, as one of three theaters to be completely remodeled and to reopen around April 15. United's president C. Clare Woods also announced that the new policy for the three would be to book first-run films whenever available. On April 7, 1968, while construction was underway, a fire gutted the Carrollton at 1:21 A.M. This delayed the reopening until Christmas Day, 1968, when it premiered with *Skidoo*, featuring an all-star cast including Groucho Marx as a gangster named God.

Unfortunately, the Carrollton and all of the other United Theaters began doing poorly, and the corporation went into liquidation in the early 1970s. The Carrollton became an independent house showing double-feature nostalgia films, but this policy eventually became unprofitable. The theater then switched to porn and began a cat and mouse game with police, with one case going to

court March 4, 1976. The theater was ultimately closed and sold at auction in 1978 to architect Val Dansereau who remodeled it into The Carrollton, a reception hall that did well until Hurricane Katrina severely flooded the city and the theater. The Carrollton has been purchased by a medical service facility.



***Ticket from the Gala Premier of A Hard Day's Night at the Carrollton Theater August 20, 1964.***





*The Circle Theater at St. Bernard Avenue and N. Galvez Street opened in September 1939. Though still segregated, the theater provided 900 seats for blacks (in the balcony) and 580 for whites, reflecting the makeup of the neighborhood.*

## Circle Theater

The Circle Theater at St. Bernard Avenue and North Galvez Street began when the first pile was driven at 9 A.M., January 16, 1939. The Circle was very unusual. Segregation was the law of the land, and the neighborhood was predominantly black. So the balcony, reserved for black patrons, was three times larger than the main floor for white patrons.

It was built by Jadel Theaters Corporation, J. A. Dicharry, president and Henry Lazarus, vice-president, at a cost of \$120,000, which included land, building, and equipment. Constructed with a

steel superstructure filled in concrete blocks, it was fireproof but was also equipped with a sprinkler system. Designed in a then-modernistic style, it had a white stucco front and interior seating in a stadium style with stairs leading all the way up to the ceiling. The building was 90-feet wide at the front, tapering to 60-feet wide in the back, with a 150-foot depth, and was air conditioned throughout. As one of the largest movie theaters in New Orleans, its peculiar arrangement seated 580 whites and 900 blacks in blond maple seats and featured elaborate lounges furnished in modern chrome-and-leather style.

The Circle opened at 5 P.M. on September 27, 1939, after 9 months of construction, and was managed at the time of its opening by Jacques Dicharry Jr., son of the president of the Jadel Company. An adjacent parking lot opened a month later. The Circle became a United Theater on December 29, 1963.

After 30 years of operation, the theater was sold to Rene Brunet Jr. on December 22, 1971, who desegregated the seating. He operated it for six years before selling it on October 21, 1977, to

Domio's Restaurant & Caterers. The company used it predominantly as a bingo hall; after payment defaults, Brunet received it back from them on May 29, 1980, and resold it to John M. Bonura two years later on March 30, 1982. It continued operation as a bingo hall but during this period it also had some live performances on stage. Bonura's group sold it to Rally's on November 19, 1990, which demolished it on December 11, 1990, to build their hamburger restaurant that still existed in 2012.

One member of the demolition crew, Wallace Simpson, 63, said in a newspaper interview at the time, "When I was a boy we used to come here out of Gert Town. We come see these Creole girls down here. At one time they didn't like too-black people in this neighborhood. They got all them bright people living around here, you know?"



## Rene Remembers

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### CREATURE FEATURE

When the Circle was showing the film *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, I was fortunate to arrange for the man who played the Creature to come in person with his gigantic green, rubber costume covered with fins and gills. The head alone was about 26 inches high and the man was about 6'6" tall, so in his full regalia, he was a very imposing Creature. I arranged for the Creature, bound in chains around his ankles and wrists, to walk onto the stage at the ending of the picture and flooded the darkened theater with green lights. This was so effective that when he neared the front of the stage, the 1,200 people in the audience were stricken with fear, and they all ran out of the theater screaming! Outside observers stated that they saw every exit door fly open and people running in every direction, apparently in fear for their lives. After everyone had left, at least 800 pairs of shoes were found under the seats, left by the terrified owners.



### SIT ANYWHERE

When I took over the Circle, it was a segregated theater, "colored" in the balcony and white on the main floor. I decided to open the entire theater, 1,700 seats, to all patrons. To my amazement and delight, several black publications described me, Rene Brunet, as "The man who let us out of the balcony." This integration policy remained in effect as long as I owned and operated the Circle Theater.