

Jacob Alford's State Theater

Based on an undated article by Jack Ryan in the *McComb Enterprise-Journal*: "Group to restore State Theater to heyday"; and an article in the 30 June 1993 edition of that paper by June Gilbert: "The State Theatre, A Dime and An Egg."

The State Theater on State Street in McComb, MS, was opened by AAFA Board Member Julius "Pooley" Alford's father Jacob Alford on Christmas Day in 1926. In its heyday, it had a neon marquee and sidewalk canopy.

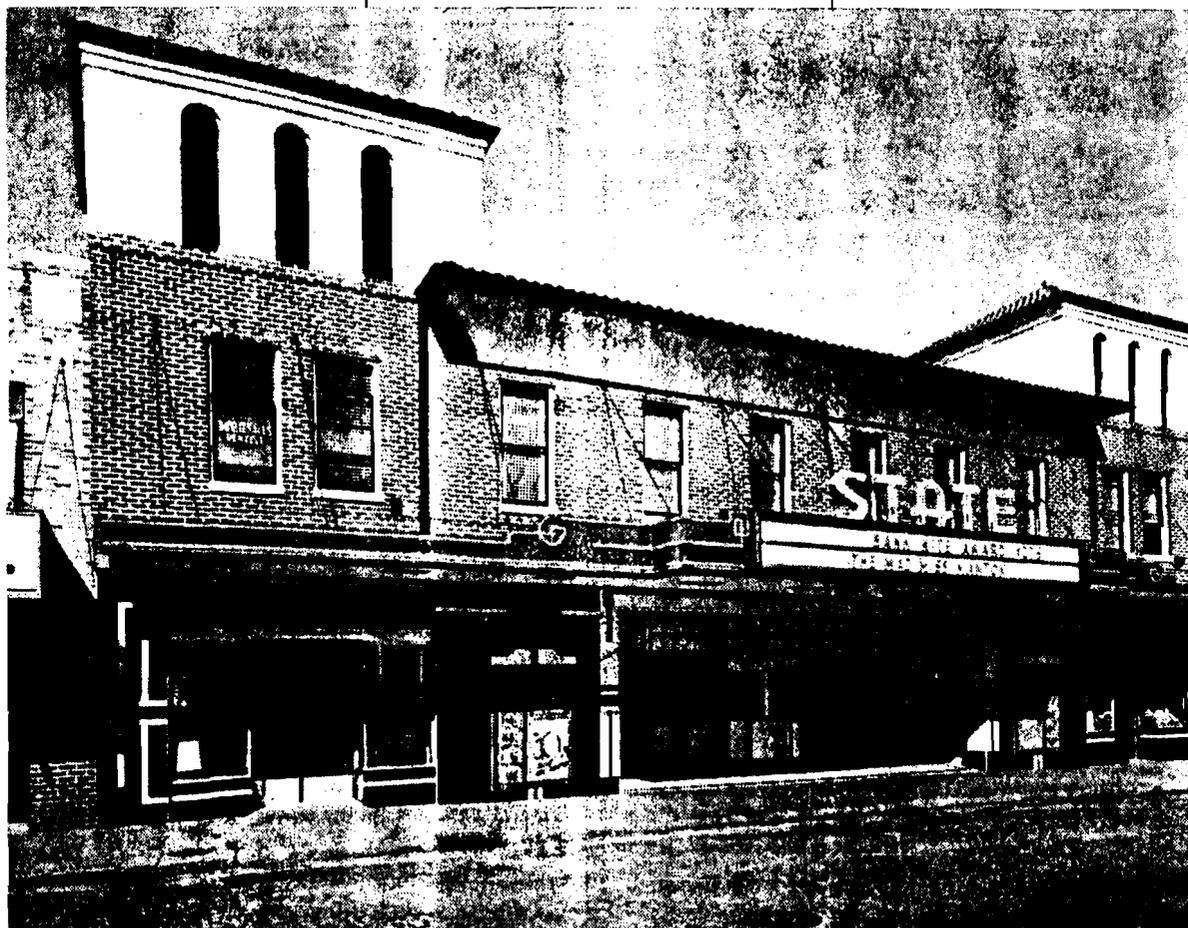
Now a 13-member restoration committee, of which Julius is co-chairman,

plans to raise \$216,000 to give the building a thorough restoration. Exterior work will include repairs and chemical cleaning of the facade's masonry, replacement of broken art deco-style carrara glass, new doors to match the original ones, and a new tile roof. The interior will be rewired and will receive new aisle carpeting, new light fixtures in the foyer, and a new air conditioning system.

The committee plans to raise money by selling \$50 and \$500 personalized bricks that will be used to pave the sidewalk in front of the theater. The city of McComb will also be asked to contribute \$100,000 over 10 years.

A Texas restoration specialist was called in for advice. "He said it was extremely well-built. I was real proud of that," said Pooley Alford, who was one year old when his father opened the State. He later worked there as an usher.

Movie exhibitor T.G. Solomon, who leased the State from the Alford's and later bought the theater, donated it to McComb in 1974. Currently, the city leases the theater to the Pike County Arts Council for \$1 per year. In 1992 the State was in use 168 days and houses the Pike county Arts Council, Pike county Little Theatre, and McComb Main Street Project. More



This photograph shows the State Theater [opened in 1926 by Jacob Alford, father of Julius Alford, AAFA #13] in the 1930s or 1940s, when State Street was still paved by bricks. A Barbara Stanwyck movie, "The Mad Miss Manton," was playing. A committee hopes to raise \$216,000 to restore the building to its old glamour.

than 30,000 people attended events at the State in 1992.

In 1979 the State underwent its first restoration, which was handled by the Arts Council. At that time, more than 200 seats were removed from the 700 seat theater to make room for the orchestra pit and stage.

Some long-time McComb residents shared their memories of the old theater:

Agnes Louise McGehee—"Cost of admission was 11 cents [10 cents and a penny tax]. I remember the football players didn't have 11 cents. They'd bring a dime and an egg and Miss Alma Brasher (the cashier) would put a penny in the till for them and take the egg home."

Gloria Dudding—"I remember when sometime after the war Eddie Baker had a date with Lillian Simmons and Pooley Alford had a date with me. This date consisted of Pooley taking us to the movie (which was free since his father owned the theater), getting us a bag of popcorn (also free) and then going to Twin Oaks where we would each order a nickel coke. The total date was 20 cents. Pooley said, 'Aaaah, isn't it good to be back in McComb and have these cheap dates?' Years later, Pooley hasn't changed a bit."

Julius "Pooley" Alford—"those days serials ran 10-15 chapters. All the films, particularly when delivered to small town theaters, came in large metal cannisters, containers from a central distribution center like Jackson or new Orleans. These centers would make up the program for that theater for that day—the whole package, including the feature, comedy, etc. It was all on the reel in the order it would show.

"People would complain about the movies sometimes, but one thing that would cause almost World War

II (kind of like leaving the crossword out of the newspaper) was a distribution center forgetting to deliver the next chapter in a series. If a feature film didn't come, the theater could substitute. But, if you're going to the theater to see Chapter 7 of Flash Gordon and Emperor Ming, that's what you wanted to see. The previous chapter would always end with someone in a grave, life-threatening situation—Ming about to disintegrate Flash or someone about to go over a cliff. The audience was left wondering all week how ... Flash was going to escape and then they'd walk into the theater, see a cartoon, go through the first of the package and then the projectionist discover he didn't have Chapter 8. That was one time when there would almost be a riot."

Peggy Thompson—"During the first part of WWII Jake Alford, who owned and managed the State Theater at that time, got into some kind of disagreement with MGM, or whoever was his mail booking agency, and lost MGM pictures for a year or two. He showed only PRC pictures (Producers Releasing Corporation) featuring such major stars as Ann Florio and Jack LaRue. I remember one particular movie with Ann doing a semi-strip tease on stage and there was a wind storm coming in behind her. The little leaves kind of floated across the screen and all of a sudden the camera went a little too far and you saw the fan, the electric fan that was behind the stage during filming to blow the leaves for the film. that was PRC."

Julius Alford—"I miss] the family feeling. My father took over the theater when I was one year old. I sat on the counter as Miss Alma took up money. I made popcorn. Everybody knew everybody. People would come to the theater and ask if someone they were looking for had come by. Everybody knew everybody by name." ♦

(Queries.... cont. from p. 1)

Now, if I have convinced you of the wisdom of using queries, you better give some careful thought as to how one is to be worded. Try to give the reader some idea of what you know already and what you need to know. But be specific and ask just one question at a time. A lot of questions in the same query will only serve to further confuse everybody.

For example, if you indicate in your query that you need to know when and where Lodwick Alford b. 1710 died, you are likely to get dozens of replies giving you the dates and places of death of Lodwick, Jr. his two grandsons of Wayne County, NC and Troup County, GA and his nephew James Lodwick Alford of Wake County, NC. All will be blissfully unaware there were four or five different Lodwicks, each correspondent thinking he has helped you a lot.

You need to give more identifying data for the Lodwick you're asking about. But multiple questions in the same query will most likely scare off a reader who sincerely wants to help. He may have a query himself in the same issue. A lot of questions in one sentence can be overpowering. But whatever response you get from a reader who wants to help you, reply to him/her immediately even if only a post card promising a fuller reply later. Believe me, sooner or later you will hit pay dirt. Trust me. Good hunting! ♦

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