

The Lansdale was Barrow's passion

By DICK SHEARER

It's fairly easy to pinpoint the beginning of the end for the Lansdale Theatre.

On Jan. 7, 1964, Edward F. Burrow, was found dead in his Hilltown Township home at age 82. He had been in failing health for several years.

E.F. Burrow was the face of the Lansdale Theatre from the early 1920s when he assembled a partnership to finance the first movie house by that name on Courtland Street before erecting the beloved landmark on Main Street in 1928. Eventually, he bought out his partners and became sole owner.

While Burrow poured his heart and soul into the theater, it was certainly not his first career calling. Born in Erie, he was crippled by polio as a child and went to Canada to be trained as a watchmaker.

From watchmaking he entered the world of invention. He designed a device that was used on delivery wagons in New York City to record the distance they traveled, much as a car's speedometer does today. The business became very successful and it expanded to Philadelphia where Burrow relocated.

While in Philadelphia, he invented the first spring-motivated grease cup for use on wagon and machinery wheels. Burrow formed a business based on his invention that evolved into Hunter Pressed Steel Co. (later Hunter Spring). The firm's first plant was on Pierce Street in Lansdale.

When the theater bug bit, Burrow sold his interest in the company and the Lansdale Theatre became a reality.

Burrow never married. Ironically, he also served as treasurer of First Federal Savings and Loan Association from the time of its formation



until his death. Fifteen years later, it was First Federal that owned and demolished the Lansdale Theatre.

Another mainstay at the theater was projectionist John Comfort, who worked there from opening night in 1928 until 1967 when the Lansdale's best days were behind it.

Comfort, who died in 1999, lived to age 97 and was the last living person to have worked for the Betzwood Film Studio near Valley Forge, one of the first movie studios in the country.

Comfort was responsible for preserving many of Betzwood's artifacts and donating several rare, original Betzwood films to the Library of Congress.

EDWARD F. BARROW in the lobby of the Lansdale Theatre. He owned and operated the movie house until his death in 1964.

