

# Theater gone, chandelier lives on

## Lansdale's centerpiece hangs in Oregon cabaret

By DICK SHEARER

Most important buildings have a crowning jewel. The Lansdale Theatre's was its huge chandelier that hung atop the 999-seat auditorium.

Audiences marveled at its commanding presence that cried out, "Look at me". Children refused to sit under it for fear it would crash down upon them.

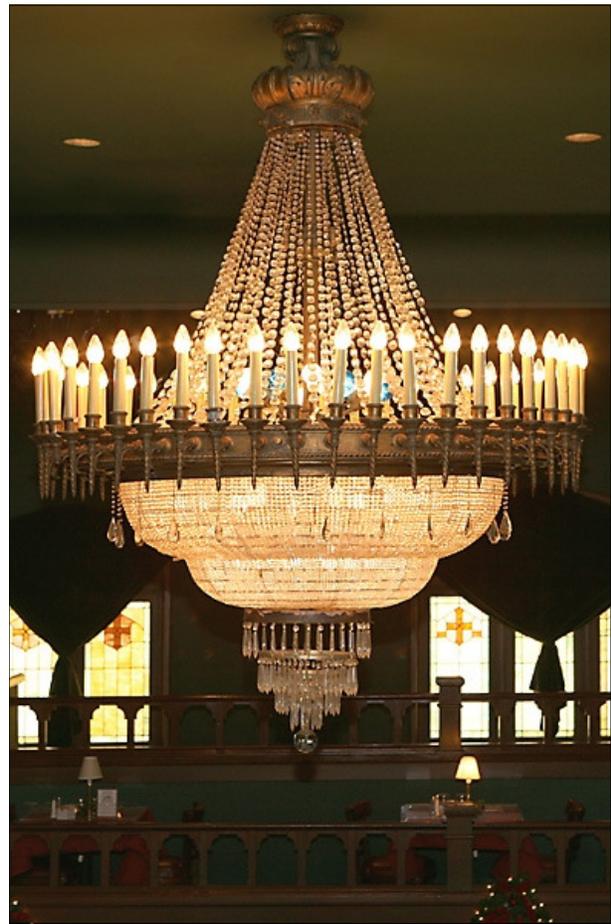
The chandelier was an object of community pride from the day the movie house opened its doors in 1928 until it closed in the late 1970s. Then it was gone, just like the theater.

For years its whereabouts were unknown. Word spread that it was salvaged before the wrecker's ball brought down the walls of the Lansdale. But what happened to it?

Back in the 1990s, a story surfaced that it had been seen somewhere on the West Coast, but where? A woman called *The Reporter* office about that time to say she and her husband spotted it in a dinner theater in Oregon but the conversation was



**CRAIG HUDSON** (in red shirt) is seen with a friend disassembling the main chandelier at the Lansdale Theatre shortly before the movie house was demolished in 1979. At top right, the chandelier in Ashland, Ore.



interrupted. She never called back.

Then a few years ago, thanks to the Internet, part of the mystery was solved. Simply by Googling "Lansdale Theater chandelier", up popped a photo of it hanging in the Oregon Cabaret Theater in Ashland, Ore. There it was, right over the stage of a converted Baptist church.

Since then a number of stories circulated about how the chandelier managed to travel 3,000 miles. One tale suggested it was bought at a flea market in Nebraska.

So in trying to discover the truth, we contacted the cabaret in Ashland where the general manager put us in touch with Craig Hudson, the theater's founder.

As it turns out, Hudson and a few of his friends were the ones who acquired salvage rights and removed the chandelier and other fixtures from the Lansdale. At the time he was a graduate student at Penn State, majoring in theater and a member of the American Theatre Organ Society which held meetings in Philadel-

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# Pieces of Lansdale survive in Ashland

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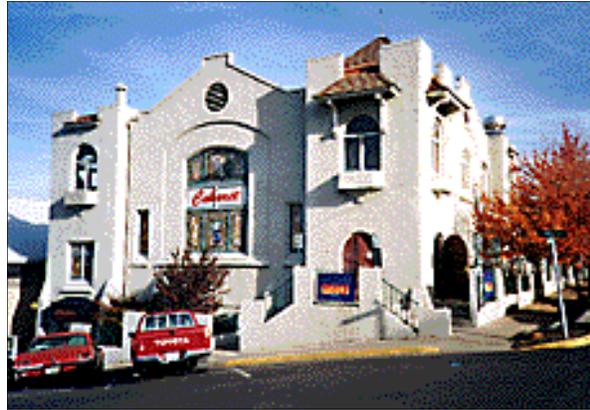
phia. The society learned of the Lansdale's impending demise and alerted Hudson.

"I told them one day I wanted to have my own theater and if they ever knew of a main chandelier (that was available), I would like to acquire one.

"I was able to acquire the salvage rights to the things that remained in the building. The seats and sconces surrounding the auditorium had already been removed

"In addition to the chandelier we removed the four star-shaped lights that surrounded it. They were a smaller version and one now hangs in the cabaret office. The iron spiral staircase that went up to the projection booth is now in a bed and breakfast in Ashland.

"The short Corinthian columns from the orchestra rail have been used in shows and exhibits and are



**THE OREGON CABARET THEATRE** is housed in a former Baptist church in Ashland, Ore. Lower left, the chandelier presides over a performance in the dinner theater.



still in storage, and I also have some of the beautiful doors with their many multi-colored recessed panels. I always think I will design a house around them.

"We removed the fountain from the lobby, a cherub on a dolphin that spits water into a shell. This is now in my garden. We also managed to find a small sample of the beautiful organ grill, a bas relief art deco urn with flowers that I have used as a centerpiece in several shows."

Hudson said it was sad to see the Lansdale follow the fate of so many grand theaters of the era. Over and over as he and his friends went about their salvage work, local residents approached him with the same comment: "What a shame".

Hudson's dream of owning his own theater became a reality in short order. He acquired the former First Baptist Church in 1982 and reopened it as a theater four years later. He still owns the building and splits time between Ashland and Mexico City. At present he is involved in restoring the Holly Theatre in Medford, Ore., which closed 30 years ago.

He said that during his salvage work in Lansdale his friend Richard Schmidt of Lansdale brought along his sound system and played a recording of the last concert in the theater. Schmidt supplied an organ for the encore film series that brought down the final curtain. Two other area residents, Bob and Barbara Molesworth of New Britain, also assisted Hudson.

As a final tribute, they managed to light the marquee one last time. When its lights faded so did the Lansdale Theatre, now reduced to memories.