

The Elitch Theatre

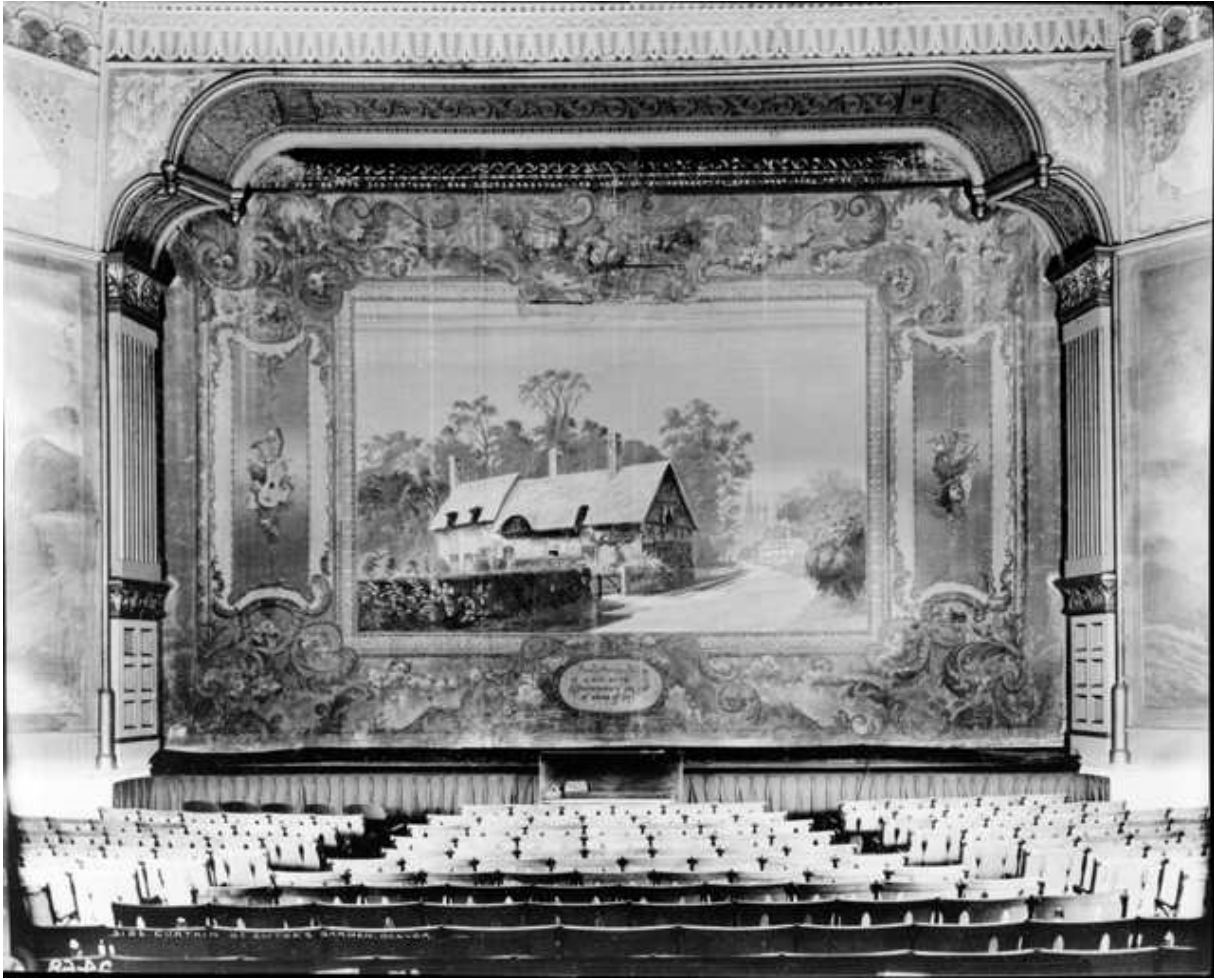


We were contacted to conduct an investigation of the location by the organization in charge of the remodeling and restoration of the theatre. This was to become part of a documentary.

History of the location:

Elitch Gardens was always more than just an amusement park; over time it has had several different faces:

- One of the first zoos west of Chicago
- The home of Denver's first symphony orchestra
- Denver's first botanical gardens
- Colorado's first children's museum and activity center
- The site of the Denver's first motion picture theatre
- Home of the Trocadero Ballroom



The original backdrop for the theater

More than the founder of Denver's famed Elitch Gardens; Mary Elitch Long has a well-earned reputation as a businesswoman. In the male dominated late 19th century and early 20th centuries. Mary served as a powerful role model at the time when women had far fewer non-traditional role models to embrace. At that time, she was the only woman in the world running an amusement park.

Mary Elitch was born in 1856 in Pennsylvania, PA. She died July 16, 1963 In Denver Colorado. She is buried in Fairmount cemetery in Denver Colorado.

Mary spent most of her childhood in California where her father had a fruit and livestock business.



Outside the Theatre in the 1970's

In May 1872, Mary Elizabeth Hauck (16 years old) meets John Elitch in church and elopes to San Jose.



A portrait of Mary

They see the play “The streets of New York” together and immediately become fans of theatre.

Soon they moved to Durango Colorado but John was offered a job at a bar in Denver so they decided to move. In less than one year, John had started his own business. The Elitch Palace dining room was located at 1541 Arapahoe St in Denver. While John was starting his business, Mary was perusing her interests in gardening and became the president of the Denver Art Club.



The 1944 Theatre staff

In 1888, the couple purchased the Chilcote farm and apple orchard five miles north of Denver, intending to grow fresh fruits and vegetables for the restaurant.

In 1890, the apple orchard was transitioned into Elitch Zoological Gardens (Denver's first zoo) A zoo with exotic animals & gardens. They opened to the public with special guests including; P.T. Barnum, Mr. & Mrs. Tom Thumb.



Entrance to the Theatre (unknown year)

In 1891, John invested \$35, 00 in a theatre troupe, which toured up and down the pacific coast. It was while they were in San Francisco that John contracted pneumonia and died on March 10 1891

Mary Elitch continued to run the Gardens and become the only woman in the world to manage a successful summer resort. She was known as the "Gracious lady of the Gardens" and lived on the grounds until the day she died.

Mary was a determined woman who came back to Denver as a 34-year-old widow who was short on cash. She sold the majority of the Gardens stock to a group of Denver investors. By 1894, she had regained total control of the Gardens.

Over the next 20 years, she managed the park and hosted thousands of guests.

In 1892, the Elitch Theatre opens and begins its “Century of first-class entertainment”

Modeled after Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre

Some of the people who appeared at the theatre over the years:

Patty Duke, Edward G Robinson, Douglas Fairbanks, Vincent Price, Sarah Bernhardt, Grace Kelly, Hume Cronyn, Jessica Tandy, Raymond Burr, Darren McGaven, Cesar Romero, Barbara BelGeddes, Kitty Carlisle, Morey Amsterdam, Dick VanPatten, Gorge Goeble, Sid Caesar, Jose Ferrer, Steve Allen, Ginger Rogers, William Shatner, David McCallum, Tyrone Power, Nancy Walker



An early advertisement for the theater

One of the first people hired was a 14-year old Douglas Fairbanks who was hired as a stagehand

In 1905, Cecil B. DeMille stated, “The Elitch Theatre is the cradle of American Theatre”

In 1897, Mary formed the country’s first Summer Stock Company. In 1906, Sarah Bernhardt was brought to Denver to play “Camille” and “LaSorcier” both on the same day.

In 1906, with the death of Mary's second husband Thomas J.K. Mullen and Jim Berger began running the non-theater operations and helping with the financial decisions.

In 1909, the original log entrance is demolished and a New Greek revival style stucco gate is constructed.

In 1916, the property is sold to John Mulvihill. Mary had provided in the sale contract that she would live rent free in her cottage on the grounds and receive \$50.00 per month until her death.



A view of Mary's Cottage

Mary spent the last four years of her life with relatives and died at age 90 on July, 16 1936



Mary's Headstone

In 1917, the Trocadero ballroom opened. Musicians such as Tommy & Jimmy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Guy Lombardo, Gene Krupa and Lawrence Welk all performed there

In 1928, the famous Elitch carousel was completed after three years of work. The Philadelphia Toboggan Company created it

In 1930 John Mulvihill and his son-in-law Arnold Gurtler took over ownership of the location

In 1936, The Ferris wheel is constructed

On July 16, 1944, there was a fire in the Old mill boat ride. Originally built in 1914 and remodeled in 1928, it featured a 200-foot long building displaying scenes of fairytale characters. The fire claimed six lives due to smoke inhalation. The fire inspector cited an aged facility, ignorance, neglect, and carelessness

In 1954, Kiddie Land opens. Popular television star Hop-Along Cassidy conducted the opening ceremonies

In 1958, the stucco entrance is torn down and replaced with an Art-Deco aluminum arch

Mr. Twister is opened in 1965 and advertised as "not having one foot of straight track in it"



An early view of the Roller-Coaster

The Trocodero ballroom is torn down in 1975 due to the lack of popularity of dancing

In 1994, the final proposal is approved and construction of the \$95 million dollar “new” Elitch Gardens begins in the central Platte Valley in downtown Denver. After 104 years of continuous operations, the original Elitches closes.

In 1995, the new Elitchs opens

The restoration:

With a budget of 14.2 million dollars the Elitch Theatre was set for restoration in 2006 by OZ Architecture



Reported Paranormal Activity:

Mary Elitch is said to watch over the location and multiple reports of seeing a woman in a full-length gown and a feather boa being seen in what was Mary's private box.

Shelly Winters said that during a rehearsal she saw someone in the box and said, "Who's the bitch in the boa?" There was nobody in the box.

One of the most recent reports is from Betty Lynne Hull. "One afternoon, in my role as Park archivist/historian. I was working alone in the theatre removing the historic photos from the was of the dress circle. Each time I had an armful carried them down the left aisle of the stage where I placed them in boxes to be transferred to the archive collection. I remember that I was thinking about nothing in particular when suddenly it was as though I had run into a very solid, soft, warm wall. I could not move forward. It was almost as though someone were hugging me. Then after a moment or two, it was gone. I proceeded to the stage with my load. The amazing thing is that I felt no fear. It was not until later that I learned my encounter had taken place below Mary Elitch's box.

Our Investigation:



The stage during our investigation

Setup began at 7:45

Base operations were set up on the main stage.

Monitoring locations:

- Main Stage area
- Mary's box
- Left, Right & Middle balcony

Several areas were determined to be too dangerous for us to access for the investigation.

We scheduled hourly EMF and temperature readings at each location



The base location during the investigation

EMF reading in Mary's box was elevated but consistent (caused by old wiring)



Mary's private box

** NOTE – While taking initial EMF reading we discovered that we had a family of bats that would be assisting with the night's event

The temperature and EMF readings throughout the night were consistent with the surroundings

The temperature dropped slightly as the night progressed; the outside temperature dropping and a combination of bad insulation and missing windows caused this. The average temperature was 77 degrees throughout the evening.

11:55 a loud screaming was heard. It was determined to be a cat across the street

2:40 Smoke alarm went off in the pump room (no smoke)

2:58 what sounded like a woman singing was heard (I was determined to be coming from outside)

2:40 Main fire alarm goes off (no fire)

4:15 during the start of the equipment breakdown Bryan heard an odd banging coming from the north stairs. We discovered a family of foxes that had taken up residence in the stairs

Conclusion:

While this location has some amazing, ghost stories there is nothing that we can confirm based on the reports and the building is in such disrepair it is not possible to conduct a valid investigation

Proposed areas to monitor

