

# **Clanton Theatres**

## **By Derric Scott**

From newspaper research and other sources.

COPYRIGHT © 2023  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED  
*Revision 1.2, May 14, 2023*

# Clanton Theatres

## By Derric Scott

The information in this article is from online Union Banner newspapers. I welcome any additional information or corrections. The focus is on movie theatres, however in the early days buildings would often double as venues for live entertainment. The first mention found was for a play in a new theater in 1909. Later articles or advertisements indicate dual-use facilities.

**1909 April** – a new (stage) **theatre** opens in Chandler's building with the play "*A Terrible Tinker - A Farce in 1 Act*" by Thomas J. Williams, 1867). The Chandler Building was the 2nd store east of the railroad on the south side of 2nd Ave.

**1911 August** – "Clanton now has a new **Moving Picture Show**." This may be the first reference to a movie theatre.

**1913 July/August** – "the **Picture Show** is drawing good crowds."

**1913 September** – "the **Lyric Theatre** will be moving into the Mullins building on 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave N, with opera chairs and other improvements."

**1913 December and 1914 February** – the **Lyric Theatre** presenting concerts and other live entertainment, including "Baby Athlone" – a ten-year old singing star, Montevallo Minstrels, and vaudeville acts.

**1915 May** – **Dixie Theatre** manager, Brit Allen, called home at Athens, Alabama due to death of his father. A couple weeks later he sold it to W. L. Stapleton of Bay Minette. He "will continue using the Mutual service" (one of the first movie distribution companies).

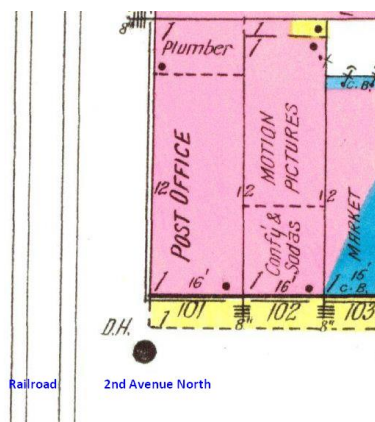
**1915 June** – "electric fans has been placed in the **picture show**." In August it is "drawing good crowds."

**1915 October** – Ed Driver sold the **Dixie Theatre** to Rowe and Odom of Prattville.

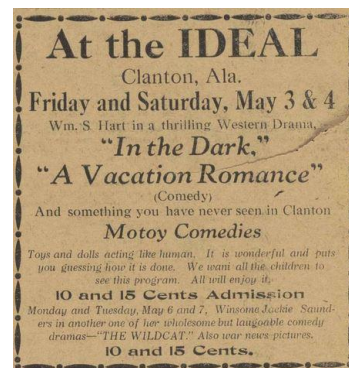
**1916 April** – **Dixie Theatre** tickets are for sale by John Teel.

**1916 August** – **Dixie Theatre** re-opened, Sept 2, 1916, under new management of P. C. Smith "at the **Candy Store**." It was advertised in March 1917 as the **Ideal Theatre** so it seems likely it was renamed by the new owner.

**1917 March** – Mention is made that people are happy that the "picture show" (**Ideal Theatre**) ("in the rear of the **Candy Store**") has been reopened by Mr. P. C. Smith. Advertisements appeared for the **Ideal Theatre** that month.



1917 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map



Union Banner - May 2, 1918

**1921 June 13** – P. C. Smith, owner of the **Candy Store** and later the **Ideal Theatre**, died suddenly.

Buried in Pinehill Cemetery, Jemison. Paul C. Smith 9/8/1872 – 6/13/1921 with:

wife Mamie C. 12/29/1873-12/24/1966, daughter Mary Owen Smith 11/4/1892-3/14/1903, son Douglas C "Billy" 10/21/1909-7/23/1971.

1910 US Census – Clanton - Paul C, Sr., wife Mayme (35), Paul C, Jr. (15), son Frank C (11), son Milton C (8), dau Mamie C, Jr. (6), son Kenneth (3), James C (0.5).

1920 US Census – Thorsby - Paul C, wife Maime (38), son Milton C (18), dau Mamie (16), dau (son?) Kenneth (13), son Douglas (10), son Dan C (2.5).

## Clanton Theatres

**1921 October** – apparently after P. C. Smith's death, the **Candy Store** was closed and the **Ideal Theatre** was sold (in December). In October, W. A. Reynolds is running a general store in "the old **Candy Store**."

**1921 December** – **Ideal Theatre** bought out by Frank Hardee of Anniston, will be named **The Strand**, renovated it to be a "first class amusement house." **The Strand** would be short-lived, as C. W. Wade would buy it out in about 6 months.

**1922 June** – Charles William "C. W." Wade (1862-1946) of Calera opened the Clanton **Wadesonian Theatre**. He had bought out the **Strand Theatre** a few weeks before and was "making a new home for the show." He remodeled the old **Baptist Church** building: "the windows have been stopped up, a large stage built with dressing rooms on either side, a balcony built for the colored people, inside painted and varnished, equipped with several electric fans, and for seating there are nice opera chairs. Soon he will have two shows a week, on Tuesday and Saturday." In January 1923 Mr. Wade bought the church property. Unfortunately, this location was short-lived and the old **Baptist Church** burned at 1:30 A. M. on Sunday morning, August 5<sup>th</sup> 1923. Shows were temporarily run in the **Miles Garage Building (Downs Warehouse/Gowan Warehouse)** on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, which Mr. Wade had recently purchased. After the building burned, Mr. Wade intended to rebuild in brick at the same location, however "some legal complications changed his course."



Clanton First Baptist Church, ca 1915 (location is currently Clanton City Hall). Old jail in background.

**1924 February** – "Mr. C. W. Wade has moved his picture show from the Downs Warehouse building into the building on the west side of the railroad recently vacated by Mr. B. L. Jones." This was known as the Woodward building and was next to Littlejohn's Grocery. New seats were installed. He also ran theatres in Thorsby, Calera, Montevallo, and Columbiana.



Wadesonian near opening, ca. 1924 (likely after 1927 "new electric sign" installed?)

## Clanton Theatres

**1927 Feb 24** – a new “large and beautiful” electric sign erected by The James Sign Shop for the Wadesonian.

It should be noted that “adult” films were shown at the Wadesonian on occasion. One was in March of 1928 called “The Red Kimono” by Mrs. Wallace Reid about “the amazing story of the traffic in girls” which had a special “brutally frank sex lecturer” from “The Bureau of Moral and Hygienic Education.” Another one was “Life Begins” in December of 1932 “taken mostly in a maternity hospital in a large city” limited to 12 years old and above “due to the frankness of the picture.” Also in the 1940s the controversial “Mom and Dad” was shown, which was about a young girl becoming pregnant and had graphic scenes of live births, etc. and had separate show times for men and women.



Controversial “Mom and Dad” showing – men only in this photo, ca 1946.

**1929 Nov 9** – Vitaphone equipment was installed in the Wadesonian in October and the first talking movie was shown at the Wadesonian on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

**1931 Feb** – the Wadesonian presented a film of the National Championship Rose Bowl football game – Alabama vs. Washington St.

**1932 March** – new and improved sound system was installed in the Wadesonian.

**1932 October** – the Wadesonian raised the question of Sunday movies to the community... Apparently it was voted down, as the first Sunday movie was shown in the “New” Wadesonian on April 26, 1936.

Frankenstein was shown on October 28-29 1932 and King Kong on July 28-29 1933.

**1934 April** – once again, a new and improved sound system was installed in the Wadesonian – “Photophone” by RCA.

**1935 August** – apparently there was an apartment upstairs occupied by Charles Wade because it was broken into and \$55.30 was stolen.

## Clanton Theatres



**New Wadesonian ca 1950s**

**1936 April 15** – C. W. Wade and son Charles (Jr.) opened the **New Wadesonian Theatre** on April 15<sup>th</sup> with all new equipment. Admission was \$0.10 and \$0.25. It is arranged for pictures and vaudeville and has a main floor and balcony. “The old theatre west of the railroad will continue to be operated also.” J. D. Bell of Murray-Bell Hardware Store was the first person to purchase tickets for the New Wadesonian.

**1936 July** – a new cooling system was installed in the New Wadesonian.

**1946 October 22** – Mr. C. W. Wade died at the age of 84 years old.

**1949 October 15** – **Clanton Drive-In** theater opens.

**1954 April 01** – **New Wadesonian Theatre** – closed temporarily on Tue, Wed, Thur.

**1956 February 2** – **New Wadesonian Theatre** closed indefinitely. **Old Wadesonian** in Clanton and **Wadesonian in Maplesville** will continue operation. **1956 March 01** - CINEMASCOPE to be installed in both.

**During 1957** plays and concerts are held in the **new Wadesonian** building. **1957 October 17** – Sherwin-Williams will be opened in the **new Wadesonian** building. Grand opening was May 29-31, 1958.

**1976 January 16** – **Bowie Mart 1 and 2** opened in the Chilton Mart Shopping Center.



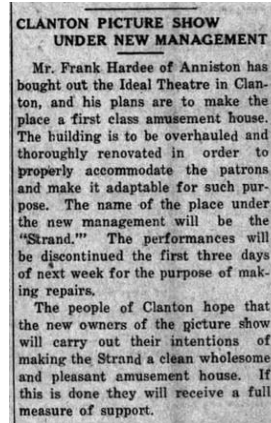
## References

Facebook groups “U know u lived in CLANTON as a kid,” “WE GREW UP IN CLANTON, ALABAMA” and others.

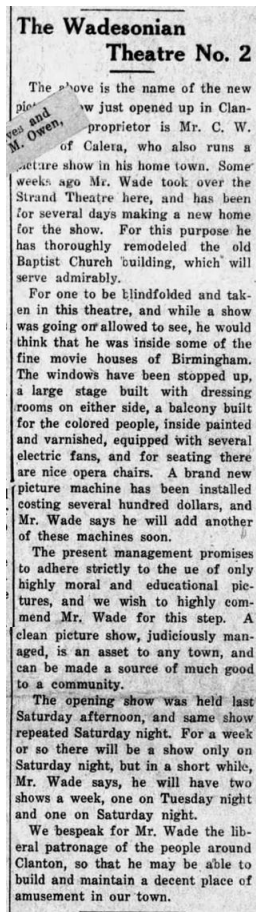
Union Banner:



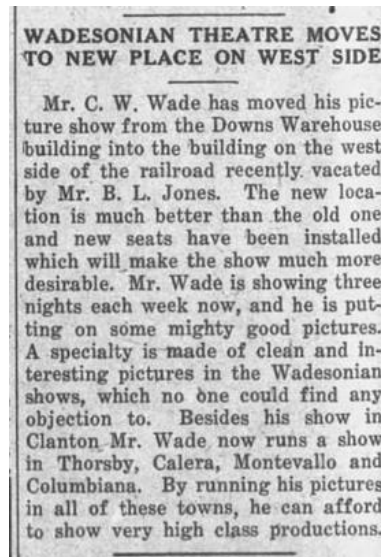
Union Banner - May 2, 1918



Dec 29, 1921



Union Banner Jun 8, 1922



Feb 28, 1924

# New Theatre Opens Here Wed. April 15

**Visiting Hours From 12 to 4:00  
For Inspection of House  
And Equipment**

Mr. C. W. Wade and son, Charles Wade, announce the opening of the new theatre in Clanton for next Wednesday, April 15th. From 12 o'clock until 4 has been set aside as inspection time for the fine new play house. During these hours the public will be shown through the beautiful new building and explained the intricacies of the brand new equipment, how it works, etc.

Then the box office will open about 6:30 o'clock, and the sales of tickets for the opening performance begun. The first picture will be Harold Lloyd in "The Milky Way".

This new theatre is one of the finest buildings in Clanton, and is arranged to a "T" for pictures and vaudeville. The big Neon Electric front presents an appearance that is really a commander of attention.

The Messrs. Wade extend an invitation to their friends to come to their inspection on opening day. They will take great pleasure in showing you through the fine new play house.

Among the modern equipment are 600 cushion back and bottom opera seats, in the balcony and on the main floor. All the sounding and projection equipment are the most modern to be had.

Mr. Charles W. Wade, Jr., will be house manager of the new place, which will be known as the New Wadesonian Theatre. The price of admission will be 10c and 25c. The old theatre west of the railroad will continue to be operated also.

## The Opening Picture

In the opening picture Wednesday night, Harold Lloyd, without leaving his estate, can play golf, tennis, table tennis, squash, handball, croquet, or any of the aquatic sports. These amusements should make any man self-sufficient.

Lloyd keeps in good condition with these sports, plus daily roadwork over the spiral trails of his twenty-acres of wood-covered hillside.

The spectacled comedian was slim and wiry on presenting himself at the Paramount studio, for the making of "The Milky Way."

The evening pastimes of this farce king are mild. Once or twice each week he screens some of the new films for his household and guests. When he wants a quiet evening, he paints in his study, assembles slides for his microscopes, or reads in his library.

Occasionally some of "the boys" drop in and repair to the pool hall for a bout with the cues, or a go at the pinboards, which Lloyd introduced to the West Coast.

A favorite amusement of the comedian is to get out some of the kid games owned by the Lloyd children—especially those that require mental agility—and play them with his offspring, Harold, Jr., Gloria and Peggy.

There is a cache of such games in the library which the funmaker keeps for the entertainment of adults. The guest who really finds pleasure in Bingo, Lotto, Parchesi, or the many crossword-puzzle games, is sure of a repeat invitation.

"The Milky Way" brings Harold Lloyd to the screen as a timid milkman who ducks a prize fighter's blow, and then keeps on ducking his way into fistic fame. His supporting cast of players is headed by Adolphe Menjou, Verree Teasdale, Helne Mack, William Gargan, Dorothy Wilson, George Barbier and Lionel Stander.

Union Banner April 9, 1936