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# Clark Patriot



'A Voice for All, an Echo for None'

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## County cultural 'palace' can live in your backyard

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The following story was submitted to The Rahway News-Record and The Clark Patriot by Daniel M. Costigan, the publicity coordinator of Rahway Landmarks, Inc., the group seeking to purchase the Rahway Theatre so it can be turned into the Union County Cultural Center.

Some say it is Rahway's great misfortune to be identified mainly with a recreational institution that is actually located in an adjoining municipality. If that is, in fact, its image, first-time visitors are likely to be pleasantly surprised by the many picture-postcard faces this city displays. The beautiful old homes on quiet, tree-lined streets, the tastefully modern City Hall, the many churches and historic landmarks, the friendly people, the restful parks and festive annual events.

Even if the name "Rahway Prison" were to change (efforts in that direction have so far failed), the stigma would not disappear overnight. So it is something Rahway has learned to live with while taking the positive approach of improving its image in other ways.

A short time ago, when the fate of another local institution—one that is within city limits—became cause for concern, some local and nearby residents sensed an opportunity to further enhance the positive side of Rahway's self-image. That institution is the Rahway Theatre (often called the "Old Rahway"), which was last used as a showplace for X-rated films. Built in 1928 as a combined vaudeville/movie facility, the Irving St. landmark began life as something that had by then become commonplace in cities throughout the country. Whether the prefix was "film," "movie," "picture" or "entertainment," the suffix was invariably "palace" — and for good reason.

These were the closest to a monarch's residence one was likely to find in America. Interior walls and ceiling abounded with delicately-sculptured friezes. Thick carpeting absorbed the more mischievous echoes. Expensive brocaded curtains were framed within a triumphal proscenium arch and a huge crystal chandelier hung from the center of a towering arched ceiling. Patrons were served by a platoon of uniformed ushers, and, while anticipating the "features" awaiting them behind closed curtains, were entertained by an adept musician at the console of a magnificent built-in pipe organ. The managers of these lofty enterprises were regarded with special reverence within the local business community. Beginning in the 1950's with television increasingly dominating the entertainment scene the glamour of

the picture palace rapidly diminished and these marvelous structures, some having already begun to decay with age, increasingly became victims of the wrecking ball. Today only a few remain relatively intact. The Rahway, though tarnished physically and in reputation, is one of them. As for its perceived fate and the positive vision it has inspired, we have to venture back for a moment to the 1960's when a small group of volunteers received permission to restore the theatre's neglected pipe organ. With that accomplished and the instrument now playable at intermissions and in concert by volunteer musicians, the Old Rahway had regained a dimension that had been lacking for some years.

Robert Balfour, the Plainfield radio broadcast engineer who led this initial restoration effort, has both a sentimental affinity for

movie palaces and a pragmatic perception of the potential they still have as entertainment centers. When it became evident in the late 1970's that the Old Rahway was a probable candidate for "burning" (conversion to multiple cinemas), demolition or some other cruel fate, Mr. Balfour and nine others who shared his sentimental and prophetic views formed Rahway Landmarks. The sole purpose of this non-profit entity was to preserve the Old Rahway as a local landmark by acquiring and restoring it for operation as a non-profit arts center. Gradually local citizens of various persuasions and interests joined with the original nucleus group to build an organization that today consists of the directors, four of whom officiate, three trustees from the city's professional community and 200 dues-paying members.

Succeeding Mr. Balfour as the presiding officer was Sandra Sweeney, a young alumna of Rahway High School who operates a furniture-restoring business. Eric Rickes, the immediate past president of the Rahway Chamber of Commerce, who co-ordinates fund-raising efforts under the voluntary management of Union County Manager Arthur J. Grisi. In addition it could be the home base for a symphony orchestra, repertory company and other performing groups. Part of the plan is also eventually to integrate the store front and main lobby areas into an exhibition facility for local painters, sculptors and other artists and craftspeople. Rahway Landmarks anticipates running its own film series and occasionally presenting live events.

The antique Wuritzer organ will continue to make its presence known from time to time as a reminder of what started it all. The big obstacle to all of this is money! So far, Rahway Landmarks, with all of its impressive backing, has been able to raise only about a third of the \$175,000 purchase cost, and, under present agreements, has only until Sunday, March 4, of this year to raise the rest.

**Offices closed**  
In observance of the Presidential holidays, the administrative offices of the township of Clark will be closed on Mondays, Feb. 13 and 20, reports Mayor Bernard G. Yarusavage.

**Library sets Story Time**

Winter Story Time for four-and-five-year-old preschoolers will be held at the Clark Public Library each Tuesday in February at 10:30 a.m. Story Time will consist of stories, songs, games and finger plays. Parents who wish to register their children may do so in person at the library or by telephoning 388-5999.

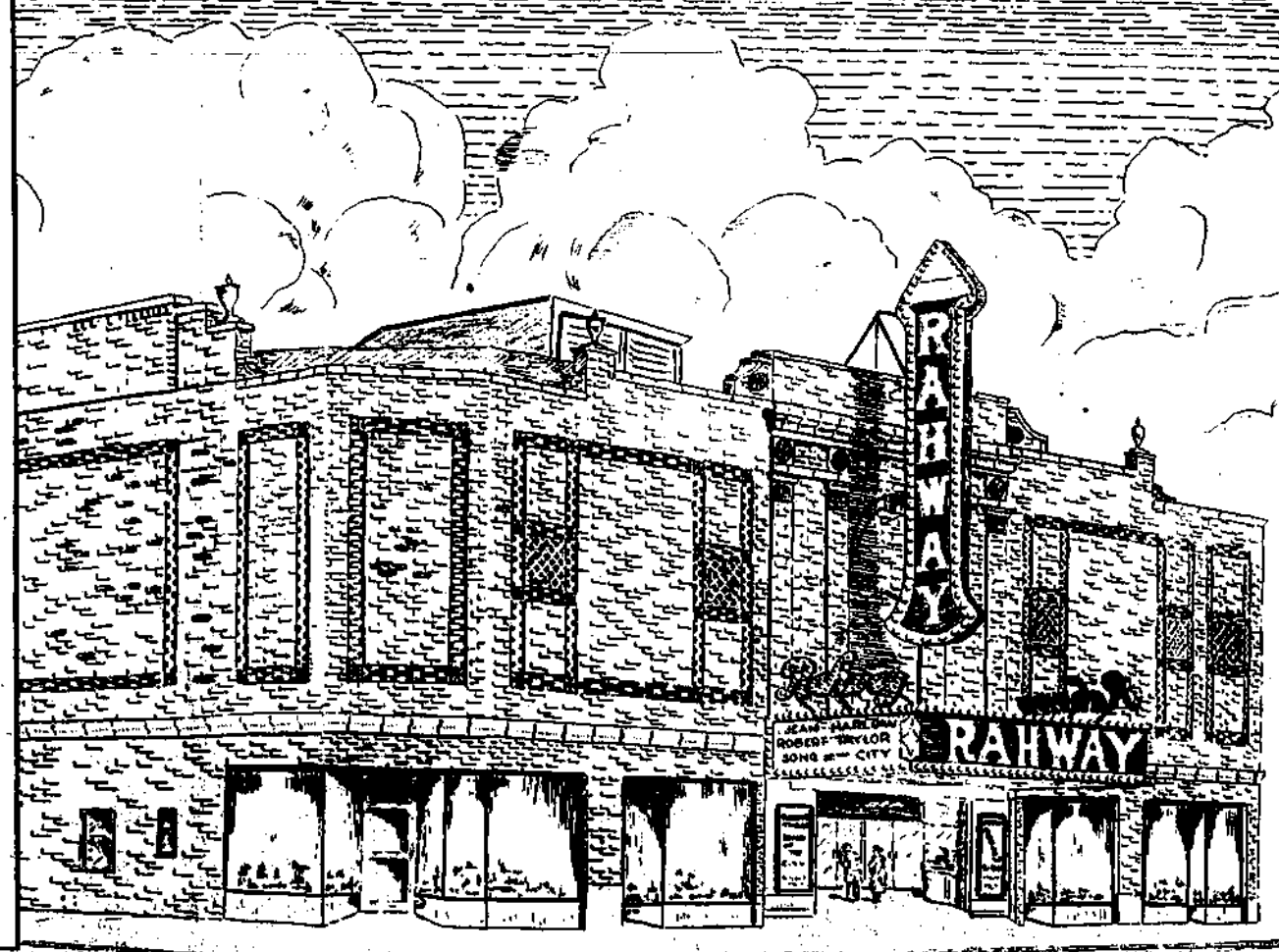
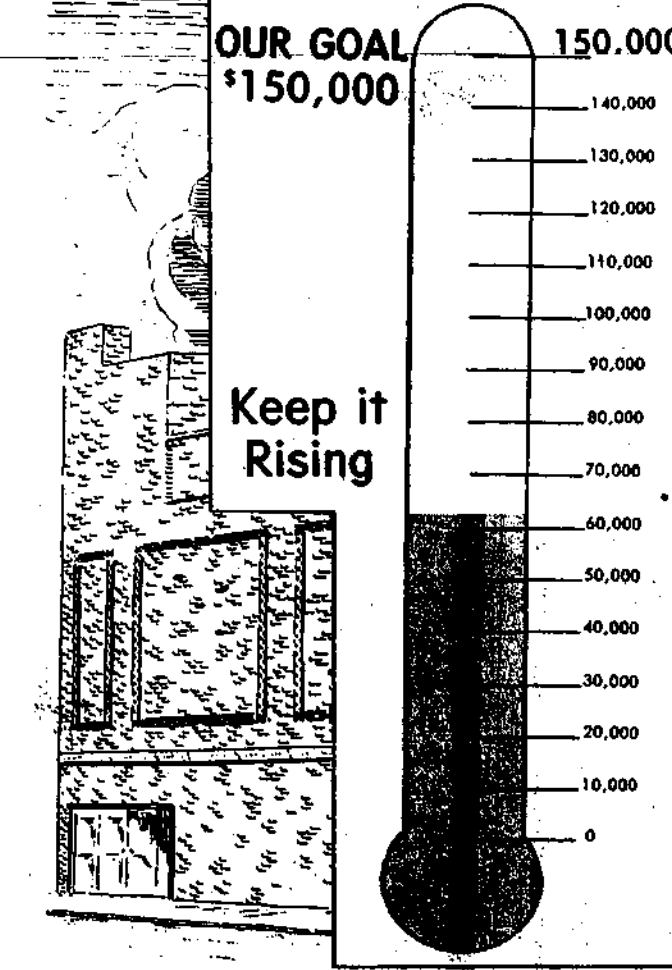
Valentine's Day FEB 14

is as tarnished as some would have us believe. Then there is the question of whether the glowing picture of the 55-year-old Rahway Theatre as a vibrant, modern day arts center is realistic. Only time—and a successful fund-raising effort—will tell.

## PHONE YOUR PLEDGE NOW

Nothing short of a miracle will help save the Rahway Theatre. So we are again seeking the help of all our readers. If in fact the theatre is not saved by a group called "Landmarks" it will become public saleable property, to be used for whatever reason the buyer wants. Think about it. Do you want a theatre that will be used as a great asset—not only to the city but to all surrounding communities? Think about the Great Shows, the Super Name Stars, and yes, movies the whole family would be able to enjoy! Just think. People will come from all over to see the type of entertainment that is promised by Rahway Landmarks. It will bring new business into the city and create more business for those storekeepers and firms already here.

OR DO YOU WANT A SITUATION THAT WILL POSSIBLY INVITE PORNOGRAPHY? REMEMBER... YOUR CHILDREN, YOUR BUSINESS, YOUR HOME AND YOUR LIFE ARE ALL AFFECTED BY THE TYPE OF SITUATION THAT CAN EXIST IN YOUR COMMUNITY. What do we need from you? We need DOLLARS... \$150,000 to be exact, by Thursday, March 1. NO... THERE IS NOT MUCH TIME LEFT ONLY YOU CAN CREATE THE MIRACLE... REMEMBER... NO COMPLAINING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS IN YOUR COMMUNITY... BECAUSE YOU CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN... ONE WAY OR THE OTHER...



PLEASE, PLEASE... LET'S MAKE UP OUR MINDS THAT WE'RE TIRED OF THE FILTH WE SEE, NOT ONLY ON TELEVISION, BUT IN THE MOVIES AS WELL... LET'S WORK TOGETHER TOWARD A UNION COUNTY ARTS

CENTER THAT WILL ENHANCE ALL OUR LIVES. CALL NOW 574-7200 FEB. 9, FROM 3 TO 6 P.M. AND MAKE YOUR PLEDGE, NO MATTER HOW SMALL YOU THINK IT IS. WE NEED TO MAKE OUR GOAL... LET'S FIGHT AND WIN.

Mail or Call in Your Pledge To: Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Pledge \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Landmarks Inc.** A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION  
P.O. Box 755D, Rahway N.J. 07065