

John P. Adler

Nominated by the North Wood County Historical Society

John P. Adler, "JP," associated himself with the entertainment industry at an extremely early age and became a prominent member of that business around the state. In Marshfield he was the personification of the entertainment industry, and the success of his theaters reflected the growth and prosperity of the city and its trade area.

Adler, one of the thirteen children of Philip and Margaret (Hoffman) Adler was born September 28, 1887. At the age of nine, he had a hand in hauling the bricks used in the construction of the opera house his father built on East Second Street.

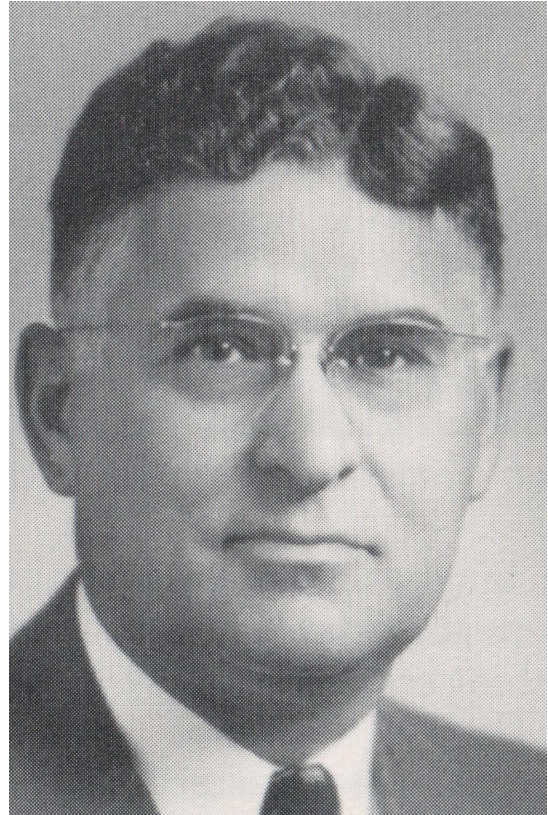
The first "moving pictures" show in Marshfield debuted at the Adler Opera House in 1897. Young JP helped set the chairs for his father, and peddled bills about the city to advertise the big event. Two years later he was captain of the boys who posted advertisements for the attractions brought to the city by the various traveling companies. During this time, he also became stage manager. At the age of twenty-one, he leased the opera house from his father and renamed it the Adler Theater.

During the early years, all the motion pictures of the time appeared on the screens of the Adler Theater, as did the stars of the stage. With Marshfield strategically placed between Milwaukee, Chicago and the Twin Cities, the Adler Theater was a fine "one-nighter" for big city companies in transit. Theatergoers here saw such classics as *The Virginian*, *The Chocolate Soldier*, and *The Cow and the Moon*. They saw such stars as John Barrymore, Boris Karloff, and May Robson.

The old Adler on Second Street operated until 1952. Then, before being razed in 1964 to make way for the new Woolworth's Store, it served as the Reserve Armory and the Marshfield Youth Center.

In June 1921, JP Adler purchased the Trio Theater on Central Avenue between Second and Third streets. In the following years, he remodeled the theater with the best seats and projection equipment and featured the best newly released films. He brought the first part-talking motion picture to the Trio on April 30, 1929.

That same year in June, Adler held a contest to rename the theater. Three individuals suggested the winning name, Relda (Adler spelled backwards). They were A.E. Beebee, Mrs.



M. Rowells, and Madeline Tuchsher. By the end of the month, a huge new electric sign for the Relda, containing 1,280 colored lights, graced the façade of the building. The Relda was a downtown landmark until closing on May 23, 1956, to be remodeled for the Three Sisters Store.

Adler observed his 50th birthday on September 28, 1937, by dedicating the New Adler Theater, today's Roger Cinema. It was described then as one of the most modern theaters in the Mississippi Valley. When patrons entered the lobby they were greeted with a terrazzo floor and crystal chandelier before heading into the carpeted foyer. The area was also furnished with upholstered oak furniture, lamps, sofas, and chairs. JP's idea was to "make it so comfortable at the theater, you would leave your home to go to the movies."

The new theater was one of the first in the nation to have stadium-type seating and reclining seats, and there were double-wide chairs without armrests for couples to sit on. The theater also had an air-cleaning system and air conditioning.

In April 1953, Adler opened an outdoor drive-in theater at the northeast corner of the junction of Highway 10 and 13, south of Marshfield. The outdoor theater accommodated 420 cars on ten granite-surfaced ramps, each with "in-the-car" speakers that could be adjusted for volume in the individual autos.

As Adler's theater interests grew in Marshfield, they also spread throughout the state with the addition of the Rosa and Palace theaters in Waupaca, the Adler and Armory theaters in Neillsville, and the New Badger Theater in Merrill, where he also held an interest in the Badger and Merrill Hotels. He was also invested in partnerships in Milwaukee theaters.

At the time of his death in 1959, four of his theaters were still operating, the New Adler and 10-13 Drive-In in Marshfield, the Rosa in Waupaca and the Adler in Neillsville.

Besides his entertainment interests, Adler was prominent in civic activities. He served four-and-one-half years as an alderman, two years as president of the Board of Education, and six years as chairman of the swimming pool commission.

He was a former president of the Marshfield Rotary Club and served a year as district governor of the service organization. For several terms he was president of the Independent Theater Owners of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan.

At the time of his death, he was vice president of the Citizens National Bank and had been a director of that institution for more than twenty years.

A member of the Second Regiment of the Wisconsin National Guard for seven years during his youth, he organized the local selective service office during World War II and after two years as chairman was named appeal agent to that body. For fourteen years he was active in the Marshfield Volunteer Fire Department.

He was also a former officer of the Marshfield Old Settlers Club. His fraternal and service affiliations included the Elks and the Fourth Degree Assembly, Knights of Columbus and the Catholic Order of Foresters.

Adler understood the entertainment industry and recognized the value of community involvement. Marshfield in multiple ways was a beneficiary of his acumen and service.