



Victory at the Victory Theatre in Holyoke

EKelly | Thursday, May 12th, 2011 |

by Michele P. Barker, Circuit Rider

The last surviving vaudeville theater in Holyoke, the Victory was built in 1919, its name commemorating the end of World War I. Although the Victory's exterior is modestly Classical Revival in detail, its interior boasts Vermont marble columns, Brazilian mahogany, floral plaster details, brocaded wall fabrics, and Art Deco murals. For the past thirty years, the theater had been slowly decaying under the onslaught of infiltrating water. Since its closing in 1979, numerous attempts to raise the funds to restore the theater have started and faltered. In 1999, after twenty years of neglect, the theater was named to Preservation Massachusetts' Most Endangered list.

A dedicated group of supporters kept the faith, however. Historical Commissioner Olivia Mausel and Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts Executive Director Donald Saunders envisioned the theatre as the home for the festival and the cornerstone of a downtown revival. Since 1993, the festival has brought world-class theatrical, musical, and artistic events to the Pioneer Valley, with performers from artists like Mikhail Baryshnikov and Vanessa Redgrave.

Last year, Save the Victory efforts began to pay off. MIFA teamed up with Nessen Associates and the Architectural Heritage Foundation to convince the city of Holyoke to sell the Victory to MIFA. The project has already garnered \$1.2 million in state historic preservation tax credits. In addition, the Greater Holyoke Foundation recently released \$240,000 in funds that had been raised to renovate the Victory Theatre through a 1987 exhibition here of paintings (Rembrandt, Van Gogh) owned by billionaire Armand Hammer. Debris is now being cleared from the interior, water has been pumped out of the basement, and historic murals have been removed for restoration. The expected completion date for the project is December 2012; Preservation Massachusetts can hardly wait for the Victory celebration when the curtain rises once more.

But the project has only begun. The entire renovation is expected to cost \$27 million, of which \$19 million has been raised so far. That leaves an \$8 million dollar gap to be filled. We encourage our readers to support this project.

To find out more about the Victory Theatre, [click here](#)

To make a donation to the Victory [click here](#)