

# Women "Movie" Owners of St. Louis

### Feminine invasion of new field of industry turned to success through business energy and tact—Women managers and proprietors say they try to make atmosphere of playhouses home-like and give audiences the kind of films they want

**T**HE voice of the moving picture has opened still another field to women of business acumen and executive ability, and a number of St. Louis women, alert to seize the new opportunity by the forelock, have won success as owners or managers of cinema theaters. They have their sisters in enterprise by the hundreds all over the country, and the popularity and financial profits won by these playhouses seem to prove that women are peculiarly adapted to the management of picture houses.

This appears to be true because, in perhaps the majority of cases, moving picture theaters are neighborhood stores, patronized largely by women and children. For such audiences women managers are able to provide a homelike atmosphere, and are also expert in mistaking to their tastes. To these women is due the removal of much of the ill-repute which, at the beginning of the new amusement, attached to movie theaters in the minds of many persons.

Five popular and profitable theaters in St. Louis are managed or owned by women, and all of them say that their ability as women to pick the films which will please other women, and to give the theater a homelike air, is the source of their success. "I try to make my theater as homey as possible," says one woman manager. Another says, "I am the mother of several daughters, do you think I would conduct my theater in a manner that might influence my girls, or the daughters of other mothers, in anything but a right direction?" The woman-managed theaters of St. Louis are without exception "all-picture" houses. The vaudeville, with his "double-entendre" jokes and shoddy songs, is barred.

The stories of the women moving picture impresarios of this city afford a number of unusual romances of business, which are well worth the reading.

For instance, there is a theater called the Pantheon, at 615 Franklin avenue, which looks small from the outside, but which, as one can see when once he has passed the door, seats 700 persons. Through its portals streams of persons are continually coming and going from 10 o'clock in the morning until 11 o'clock at night. The proprietor and manager is a young girl, Miss Tillie Schwartz.

There used to be a store where the playhouse stands, and Miss Schwartz's father owned the property. The premises were often sold, as it was difficult to find a good tenant. Schwartz sometimes complained at home of his "white elephant," as he called the property. One day his daughter assailed him by stating:

"Father, if you will turn that store into a movie theater, I'll manage it and guarantee that it will pay better than if you had a regular tenant."

This was a revolutionary proposal in those days, when the new amusement business was just getting firmly established, and it took some time to persuade Schwartz to grant his daughter's request. But finally the experiment was attempted. A new front was built for the store, a projector machine, screen and benches were installed, and the girl took her proud place at the box-office window.

That was four years ago. This spring it was necessary to enlarge the theater, and every night a big black touring car waits outside to whirl the girl proprietor what capital she home after the last show. It was bought with nickels had in a small that streamed through the wicket at the box office. theater. The

Miss Isabel Spear, who manages the Europa Theater, Monroe, one of the first arch woman exhibitor of St. Louis. She has presided over her own business for more than seven years. Formerly an actress, she will not leave her theater, which is one of the best patronized in the city. Miss Spear is a young woman of pleasant personality, and knows every man, woman and child who regularly attend her playhouse near the entrance or in the box office, and has a pleasant word and smile for everyone. Mrs. Stoddard transmits her films to a large audience around the corner from big theater on California avenue during the summer months.

She is an expert moving picture operator and operated her own projecting machine for several months. One night as you enter and her parting nod and day she went to the operators' union headquarters and smile and oftentimes a solicitous question as to whether you enjoyed the show, as you go out, you feel as if studied her operating booth



**MRS. MOLLE MATTHEWS.**  
you had been making a pleasant call on a charming hostess, who had so many guests at her reception that she could not entertain them all personally, and had provided a program of moving pictures for their amusement."

The Monroe Theater is owned and operated by Mrs. L. B. Stoddard, at 216 Chicago street.



**MISS ISABEL SPEAR.**  
country at that time, and she decided to leave what capital she had in a small theater. The first arch woman exhibitor of St. Louis. She has presided over her own business for more than seven years. Formerly an actress, she will not leave her theater, which is one of the best patronized in the city. Miss Spear is a young woman of pleasant personality, and knows every man, woman and child who regularly attend her playhouse near the entrance or in the box office, and has a pleasant word and smile for everyone. Mrs. Stoddard transmits her films to a large audience around the corner from big theater on California avenue during the summer months.

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of her theater every night and can talk humorously about losses, "throws," "compensars," "reheats" and other Greek terms of the projecting artists' vocabulary. She has just completed arrangement for enlarging her theater so as to double the seating capacity.

The McKinley Theater, at Jefferson avenue and Acorn street, was built up into a neighborhood playhouse through the efforts of Mrs. Bernada Klingler. Several years ago she was employed as cashier of the McKinley. When a change was made a short time afterwards, she was promoted to the office of manager, which she has held ever since.

In the summer she shows her program on the roof of the house, which is reached by two wide stairways. She gives extreme care to the selection of her films, always aiming, she says, to give her customers the kind of photographs they like to see. The owner of the theater says that the house has been very prosperous since she assumed its management.

Mrs. Mollie Matthews, who manages the Plymouth Theater at Hamilton and Plymouth avenues, went into the moving picture business in order to have something to occupy her time. Her husband was busy, her daughter was away at college, and the keeping of the home was not enough work for her energy. She often attended motion picture theaters and found some of them woefully mismanaged, according to her ideas. In talking over the subject with her husband and some friends, a suggestion was made that she try her plan of theater management out.

Her first venture was an alldome at Seventh street and Russell avenue, called the Fern Lee, which proved consistently that her scheme was practicable. After the all-dome season closed Mrs. Matthews is looking for winter quarters, found the Plymouth. It was a good building, but had proved a "Jehus," as she was told, to every exhibitor who tried to run the place.

She began by studying the tastes of the neighborhood, and says she has been repaid many times over by the keen appreciation shown of her efforts in trying to please her customers by giving them the kind of films they like to see. Mrs. Matthews is considered one of the ablest women exhibitors in the city.

Mrs. Nellie Stoddard, who manages the Criterion, at 2644 Franklin avenue, was her husband died two years ago when the Criterion was opened seven years ago. Mrs. Stoddard helped in managing the place, and when she was left to make her own living she was as capable of handling the business as any exhibitor. The crowds which attend her shows prove her skill in selecting popular programs.

Many women are partners with their husbands in managing picture theaters. Mrs. John W. Gonsalus is probably one of the best known of these partners, as she gives her whole time to helping her husband manage the three Lutz theater, one downtown and two in the West End. Mrs. D. T. Williams of the firm of D. T. Williams & Wife, who manage the Ashland Theater; Mrs. Charles Warren, who runs the Queen Alldome, while her husband devotes his time to the North Grand Theater; Mrs. Roseberry, who assists her husband in the management of the Fairy; these and many more women may be only slight partners to the general public, but their routine and artistic touch-care has been potent in the development of the city's motion picture industry.

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**HOLDS BREATH TEN MINUTES.**  
THER longest period of voluntary suspension of respiration on record has been achieved by a student named Horner at the University of California Medical School. He held his breath for more than 40 minutes, and was none the worse for the experience. He is a swimmer and has participated in under-water contests.

Horner lay on a table, with a special belt about his chest communicating with a sphygmograph, as the instrument for taking the record is called. As a preliminary, slow, deep respirations were taken for two minutes. Two minutes after the test began, a slight relaxation of the respiratory muscles was indicated. No desire to breathe was experienced until six minutes had elapsed. Then an involuntary twitching of the muscles of the abdomen was apparent. At the expiration of 10 minutes some vertigo occurred and the first inspiration was taken—10 minutes and 10 seconds having elapsed.