

Blakeview: 'Twin Theaters' Hosted Vaudeville and Silent Films on Baronne Street 125 Years Ago

(source: *Gambit*; by Blake Pontchartrain)

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September marks the 125th anniversary of the opening of two historic downtown theaters, the Tulane and the Crescent, pictured here in 1903.

Archive photo by Rivoire, Photo Engraving Co. of New Orleans

September marks the 125th anniversary of the opening of two historic downtown theaters, the Tulane and the Crescent. Known as the “Twin Theaters,” they were lost to demolition decades ago, but for nearly 40 years at the turn of the 20th century, they were important venues for vaudeville, silent films and theatrical productions.

The theaters, both of which were designed by architect Thomas Sully, opened in September 1898 at Baronne and Common, the original site of the college which would become Tulane University — hence the Tulane’s name.

The theaters are remembered for the massive arcade that connected the two showplaces, whose front entrances faced Baronne Street. Inside, the theaters had a seating capacity of about 1,800.

According to a 1963 LSU doctoral dissertation by Sadie Faye Edwards Head, the theaters were built at a cost of \$200,000. The Crescent, which featured vaudeville shows and later "talking pictures," was the first to open on Sept. 26, 1898. The Tulane opened one month later, on Oct. 17, 1898. "It was packed to the doors, with as fine an audience as ever assembled within the walls of a playhouse," reported The Picayune. Among the stars who appeared in shows at the Tulane were Ethel, Lionel and John Barrymore, comic actor W.C. Fields and famed French actress Sarah Bernhardt.

The Crescent became part of the Loew's movie theater chain in 1926, while The Tulane continued staging theatrical productions. Both theaters closed in 1935, and the buildings were demolished in 1937.