

OLD TOWN SACRAMENTO

The Eagle Theatre

The Eagle Theatre is located at 925 Front Street in Old Sacramento. It is between the CM&T Company and the Tehama Block, directly across from the Central Pacific Railroad Passenger Station – just north of the intersection of Front and J Street. The facility is owned by California State Parks and is administered by the California State Railroad Museum as part of the Old Sacramento State Historic Park.

The 4,890 sq. ft. building is an accurate reconstruction of the original Eagle Theatre, which was built on the site in 1849, and was the first legitimate theater building in California. The entrance to the building is on Front Street. A lobby area contains a service bar, artifacts, and reproduction items. The theater area has a sloped asphalt floor, wooden bench seats for approximately 150 people, a raised stage with proscenium arch, draw curtain, small wing and back stage area. Downstairs there is wardrobe/dressing area, restrooms, and a scene dock. A small balcony provides is used for lighting and sound equipment; access to the balcony is from the outside of the building.

The State provides audiovisual programs to school groups from September through mid-June. Each program lasts approximately 40 minutes, involving a docent-lead talk and a 12-minute audiovisual presentation on Sacramento history entitled “City of the Plain.” Call 916 866-240-4655 to make reservations for 4th thru 12th grade classes. Free.

The Eagle Theatre is available to outside theater groups and groups other than class visitations by contacting Cheryl Meyer, Facility Rentals Mgr., at 916 445-2560. Permission will be granted based on the group’s compliance with policies for acceptable uses of the facility.

A Short History...

Mr. Zadock Hubbard and Mr. Gates Brown, owners of the Round Tent Saloon located on J St near the corner of Front St., financed the construction of the Eagle Theatre in 1849 to provide entertainment for the hordes of miners and emigrants coming to Sacramento during the Gold Rush. Construction began in July 1849 and the building was completed by September.

Building materials were scarce in the rapidly growing city of Sacramento. The rough-cut wood frame and the canvas sides reportedly were salvaged from abandoned sailing ships along the Embarcadero. The stage was made from empty freight packing boxes. There were four drop curtains painted depicting: a scene from an incident in the Republic of Texas during the Mexican War, a forest scene, a street scene and an “Interior” scene.

The first performance in the theater was on September 25th when the Stockton Minstrels performed *Ethiopian Concerts*. Dramatic productions began on October 18, 1849, with a three act performance of *The Bandit Chief or the Forest Spectre*. The orchestra consisted of a conductor, a violin, a flageolet (similar to a recorder), a large drum, and a triangle.

The Eagle Theatre closed on November 1, 1849 and was sold to S. Clinton Hastings and Samuel C. Bruce. The theater reopened on November 13 with the play *Douglas*. Several violent wind and rain storms causing serious flooding interrupted performances during the month of December. The final performance was on January 4, 1850. Shortly thereafter, the flood-damaged building was sold and torn down.