

# QUINTESSENTIAL BARRINGTON BY BARBARA L. BENSON



## THE SHOW GOES ON!

BARRINGTON'S ICONIC CATLOW THEATER TO REOPEN IN STYLE

FOR BRIAN LONG, the date is remembered without hesitation: "Wright Catlow opened his theater on Main Street on his birthday—May 28, 1927." And Brian, with his wife Julianne, as the new and 4th owners of The Catlow, are looking forward to a great celebration for the 100th Anniversary of this downtown icon.

They have taken on the mantle of history, not only the fond memories of many residents, but the mementoes and memorabilia that fill dozens of dusty boxes in the nooks and crannies of backstage and the upstairs apartments. One memento found is a decades-old check book belonging to Wright Catlow.

For a dozen years before the Main Street theater opened, Joseph Catlow's Auditorium on West Station Street had given the community a venue for public and private events with local and professional entertainers for basketball, dancing, dining, and plays. It was a somewhat utilitarian building.

His son Wright's new theater on Main Street was designed by the Chicago Architectural firm of Betts and Holcomb in the English half-timbered medieval style popular then in residential and suburban downtown architecture. The interior design by Alphonse Iannelli, a well-known associate of Frank Lloyd Wright, is a surprising mixture of Medieval, Prairie, and Art Deco styles. This surviving heritage helped

to place The Catlow on the National Register of Historic Places.

At its opening, stage performances were the main attraction, but gradually Catlow became focused on movies, and took pride in obtaining the latest projection technology. Eventually he closed the stage to accommodate the largest screen possible. And that is how it remained. Low ticket prices and recently released movies drew audiences from Barrington and neighboring communities to this classic American single screen indoor theater.

The goal of the Longs is to preserve and restore. As Barrington residents and business owners, they are planning to turn The Catlow into a multi-purpose venue, restoring the stage and installing a new, retractable screen. But when patrons enter the Grand Atrium, the Longs want them to feel they have stepped back in time. Some of the memorabilia will be exhibited museum-style throughout the theatre to enhance the nostalgic experience.

This is another exciting chapter in the story of The Catlow Theater and adds renewed vibrancy to the history of Main Street in Barrington. And thanks to Julianne and Brian Long, unlike the fate of many small, older local theaters, this theater across nearly 100 years of Barrington's history will stay home grown. 