

# Give my regards to Market Street: theaters as a representation of urban growth in Wilmington, Delaware, 1870-1930

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**Abstract:** Theaters are structures which have existed in cities for millennia. In the last two centuries, their growth in America in the forms of live performance and cinemas speak to their popularity. Within the city of Wilmington, Delaware, theaters can be used to represent the cultural, social, economic and historic changes. Three theaters remain from the historic era studied (1870-1930). The first is the Grand Opera House, the first permanent theater in the city of Wilmington built in 1871. The second theater studied is the DuPont Theater, which was constructed as part of the large urban building and improvement projects by the DuPont Company and the du Pont family, constructed in 1913. The third theater is the Queen Theater, a movie palace opened in 1916 and the last such historic structure within the city of Wilmington. Each of these three theaters offers a glimpse into a historic era of the city and the construction of the theater corresponds to particular trends both locally and nationally. These three theaters were once part of nearly thirty five more theaters within the area of Wilmington. The loss of so many structures can be attributed to numerous factors, but the overall goal in modern times is to conserve these buildings. Whether this is done by reopening the structure as a theater or merely maintaining the building, preservation of theaters is imperative to a city's identity and in certain cases, renewal. With Wilmington being actively revived, the operation of old theaters alongside new structures shows how these buildings are markers to a city's identity and history.

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Dare to be first.



the suburban developments of the wealthier classes also has to be overcome. Urban renewal projects in the 1950s and 1960s cleared entire blocks of housing in the Center City and East Side areas. Riots and civil unrest in the city followed the 1968 assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. On the western side of Market Street, the Piedmont topography is rocky and hilly, rising to a point that marks the watershed between the Brandywine River and the Christina River. This watershed line runs along Delaware Avenue westward from 10th Street and Market Street. The streets in the neighborhood are named after famous American and English authors, including Byron, Emerson, Hawthorne and Milton. It is bounded by Lea Boulevard, Rockwood Road, Miller Road, and Market Street[34].