

A grand place for a theater

(Continued from Page 21)

more impressed with the architecture and will feel better about the show before it starts" because of the openness and grandness of the building.

The actors will go from cramped dressing rooms at the Placer to more spacious quarters in the new building. They will warm up in a rehearsal area downstairs where the former children's library was, and they will not have to warm up on stage as they did at the Placer, Darchuk said. He added that the availability of a warm-up area will allow playgoers to enter the auditorium at 7:15 p.m. instead of waiting outside closed doors until 7:45 p.m. as in the past.

The structure's design itself will help the actors, said their director, a Montana native from Scooby.

"This (proscenium) arch will complement sets and will frame you mentally as well as physically," Darchuk said. "You get a feeling of quality just standing here."

"And we'll be able to build sets higher than eight feet," he said pointing at 10-foot-high steps that will be used in "The Man of La Mancha," the theatre's first production in its new home.

BALLET is even a possibility in the new home. "At the Placer it was impossible. A dancer would have done a leap and hit the ceiling," Darchuk said.

The new facilities will allow the theatre to experiment with different forms of entertainment.

"With a decent facility we can invite someone in and feel good about it," Darchuk said as he described future visions of hosting community theaters from other towns and perhaps a ballet company.

One act already scheduled is a mime from Portland. The theatre, in cooperation with the school district, has arranged for the mime to perform sometime after "Man of La Mancha" closes in late November.

"We hope to sponsor more things like that — bringing in things we don't do," the 28-year-old director said.

The Grand Street Theatre's cooperation in sponsoring other performances comes not only from a desire to provide a well-rounded scope of entertainment for Helenans. Part of the agreement for leasing the building from its owners, the City of Helena, is that the theatre will cooperate in using its facility for the betterment of the entire city.

However, the major provision of the five-year, renewable lease is a token payment of \$1 a year and rehabilitation of the building to meet city building and safety codes.

THE CITY has agreed to reroof the building, and Darchuk hopes the roofing will be complete before snow begins flying, since the roof is in bad shape.

The theatre's cost for rehabilitation and renovation will run more than \$50,000.

And, thanks to one couple, W.J. "Wib" and Esther Harter, owners of the former Green Meadow Ranch, the theatre had \$50,000 to do the job. Other donations will be sought later to complete non-structural remodeling and add niceties, Darchuk said.

The \$50,000 has had to go toward a \$6,300 for plumbing and a sprinkler system and more than \$10,000 for new wiring.

In addition, some of the money has gone into theater costs such as a \$10,000 lightboard and \$2,500 for carpeting. The remainder of the funds has gone toward construction costs, Darchuk said.

Although volunteers have done much of the work on the renovation, carpenters had to do the structural work.

The director, who has spent long hours not only working on the building but also preparing two shows — "La Mancha" and a children's production to be offered at Electrum — said about \$6,600 in construction costs was saved by volunteers hammering and painting.

For a man accustomed to getting much done under his own steam or being able to direct others to do the work, the exigencies of working with professional electricians, plumbers and carpenters has added a strain.

The theatre plans to open "La Mancha" to the public on Oct. 23.

TIME became valuable with that deadline and the inability of the theatre volunteers to do any work on the building until after the library had moved out during the last week of August.

"If you don't do it yourself, you don't have control over the time," said Darchuk, who worked with volunteers from before 7 p.m. Tuesday until 4:30 a.m. last Wednesday to prepare the auditorium for the carpet-layers.

Many participants from former productions, their families and some friends have lent hands, muscle, paintbrushes and ladders to Darchuk in recreating a theatre.

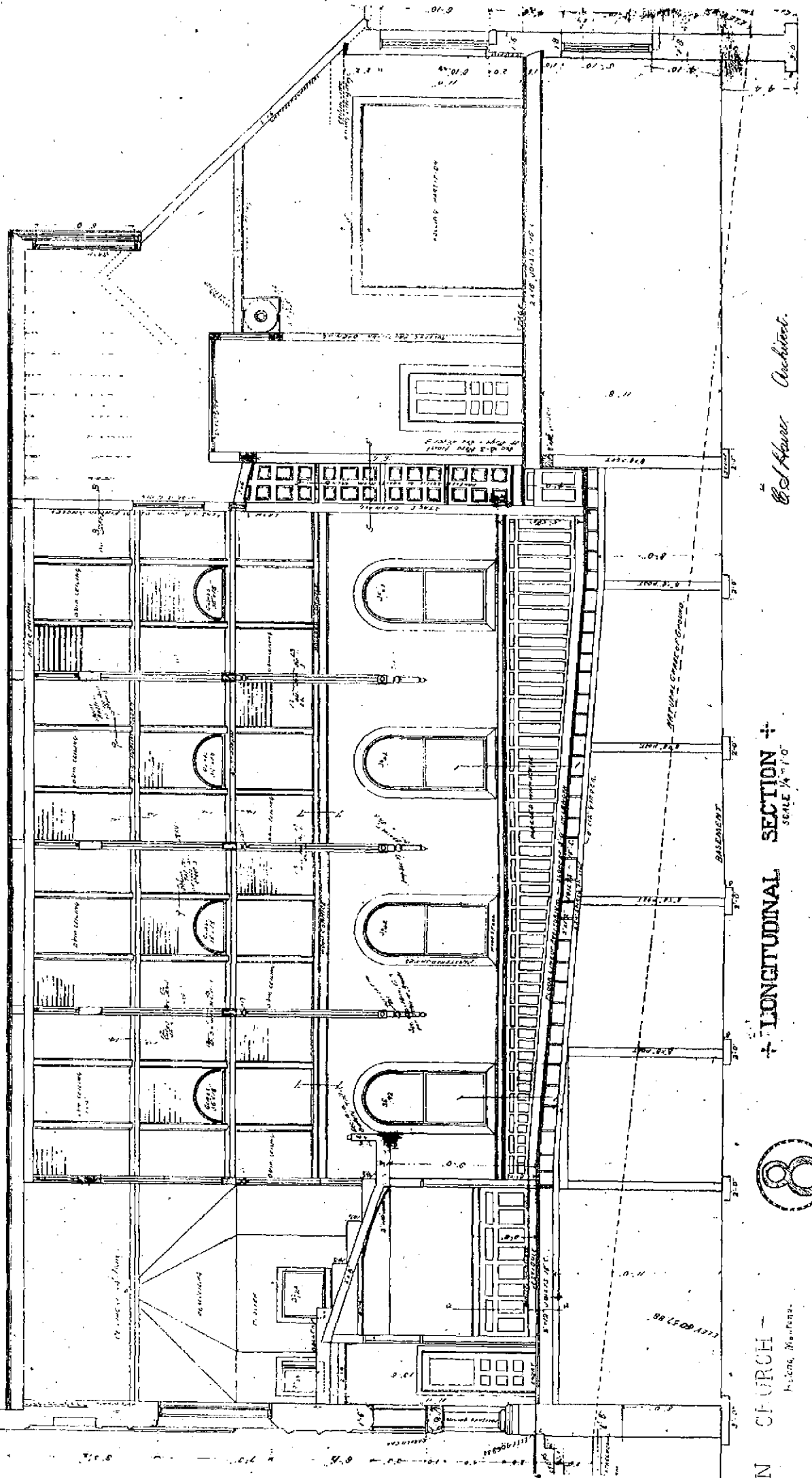
Volunteers did most of the demolition, taking out the main and mezzanine floors board by board so the wood could be reused.

Following the demolition, carpenters laid the foundation for the new floor, which the volunteers then pounded into place.

The myriad of details has seemed overwhelming. Architects, city inspectors, the Montana Power Co., the water department, city street crews — all had to be consulted and times arranged for them to complete their work on the building.

But regardless of the hours spent at the theater instead of at home, this has been, Darchuk said, "the most exciting event" in his life.

"How often do you build a theater?" he asked.



E. J. Hoover Architect.

LONGITUDINAL SECTION
SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"



N. STURCH
Helena, Montana

New life for a grand old theater

The longitudinal or side view of the theater is shown in another of the original architect's plans, above. (Turn page sideways for proper view) The original theater floor was on a slope, as shown. It was later raised and leveled when the building was used as a library. And now the old floor has been uncovered, refinished and carpeted. The original box office was to the left or front end of the building and later became the checkout counter for the library. Stage and dressing rooms were originally at the back of the building on the right side of the plan above.