

# History of the Avery Theater

Compiled by Jill Blank

Apart from its Art Deco architecture, what makes Garner's movie theater unique is that it was built in the brief snapshot of time when the motion picture industry was literally re-inventing itself. This movie house was the first in the region expressly built for high quality sound movies. Though a musician's pit for the silent films was included, it was known this would soon be obsolete.

To recap the evolution of motion pictures, on August 6, 1926, the "world's first commercial movie with sound," Don Juan, premiered on Broadway. More than a year later on October 6, 1927, Warner Brothers debuted "The Jazz Singer" with Al Jolson. Disney's first sound film, Steamboat Willie featuring Mickey Mouse, followed in 1928. MGM premiered its first "all talking, all singing, all dancing" film, The Broadway Melody, on February 1, 1929.

It was a slow progression. Studios had to sort through then select from among competing, emerging sound technologies. Movie houses then were retrofitted with sound equipment. By 1930 most motion picture soundtracks had become standardized, but it is another five years before speaker systems reach this status. It is in this volatile environment the Avery is designed and built.

## Timeline of Key Avery Theater Events

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## Pre-1929: History of the Property

Mid- to late 1800s — Local resident A.B Cassill owned the land on which the Avery Theater now sits. He built a house the land, which later became one of Garner's early hotels: Cassill House. Sometime in the mid- to late 1800s. Mr. Cassill beautified the property by transplanting an elm tree from a grove located near Clear Lake. That tree is believed to be the first tree planted in the town of Garner. (see also Jan. 30, 1946 entry)

News paper clipping from 1969 Garner Leader shows the 400 Block of State Street in the winter. A horse-drawn sleigh stands in the street with the old City Hall in the background. A portion of the wood frame building originally on the site of the Avery Theater is just visible adjacent to City Hall.

Winter 1901 — The Haes brothers are photographed on State Street in the horse-drawn cutter (open sleigh) in the area where the Avery will ultimately be constructed. The two-story brick building in the upper-right corner of the photo is the former City Hall (current Chamber of Commerce) immediately north and adjacent to the Avery building. The wooden frame home, likely built by the Cassill family, is just visible on the edge of the photo.



March 1905 – The property, owned by Mr. John and Mrs. Catherine Ulrich, contains a private residence, or wood frame building.

Jan. – Feb. 1913 — After the death of Mr. Ulrich, Catherine chose to move to a small house on her son George's property in Klemme. The Estate then sold the property to Mary E. (Mrs. J.H.) Basford, a widow.

Jan. 29, 1914 – A.L. and Bessie J. Cushman, formerly of Oregon County, Missouri, purchased the property. Known about town simply as "Cush," Mr. Cushman opened a billiard hall on south Main, or State, Street. He passed away on July 28, 1923. When Mrs. Cushman chose to move closer to family, the property sat vacant for some time.

Nov. 12, 1924 — According to the published Delinquent Tax list, the property was \$804.98 in arrears.

June 11, 1925 – First National Bank purchased the property from the A.L. Cushman estate for the price of \$50, which satisfied an outstanding debt.

July 14, 1927 – Hancock County Investment Co. under the leadership of O.K. Maben, president; and Chris Jacobs, secretary, gains title to Lots 5-6, of Block 25 Original Town. Already the town was looking for options that would bring a "modern motion picture theater"

to Garner. Silent films were being shown at the Lyric Theater, an older wooden structure located at the site of what is now Garner Public Library, 416 State Street.

## **1930-1939: Building the Avery**

### **Embracing a New Era of Film**

Jan. 20, 1930 – An election in Belmont to determine if the community would support showing movies on Sundays. It passed by a margin of 3 to 1 in favor of Sunday movies. Britt had earlier passed a similar measure by 126 votes. Clear Lake, Kanawha, Algona, Mason City and other nearby towns had already voted in favor of Sunday movies by decisive majority votes.

Feb 3, 1930 – Garner City Council met with various civic leaders to discuss the question of whether to allow Sunday movies. The businessmen's committee stated that Garner needed to "keep abreast of the times" or eventually lose the business they'd been fighting to keep in the community. It was a stated belief that the country people would transact their business in the towns which also provided their amusements. If they were to get in the habit of going a couple miles to other towns, the habit of shopping in those communities would be established.

A strong argument for making the change was the fact that "outside capital could not be procured for the talkie movies unless it was assured the right to put on Sunday shows" as potential investors did not believe that revenues solely from weekday shows would create a "paying proposition."

Strong opinions against the Sunday movies were expressed by the Reverends Lewis, Spole and Van Metre who stated it would be a "desecration of the Sabbath day." Mrs. Charles Tompkins declared herself against the Sunday shows to "protect the children who cannot be controlled by their parents."

In general the businessmen agreed with the argument put forth by representatives of the local churches: merchants would experience no direct gains from a Sunday movie show.

Feb 25, 1930 – A special election was held to consider the proposition of allowing Sunday movies. "Both sides of the referendum were out with automobiles bringing voters to and from the polls," according to the local news story. A total of 592 votes were cast, exceeding the previous voter turnout record by 40 votes. The referendum carried by a vote of 392 to 194.

Sept. 15, 1930 – Plans and specifications for the construction of the new building were furnished to contractors wishing to submit bids for the project. Figures submitted by contractors were within the cost estimates provided by the architects.

November 12, 1930 — Contracts are signed for the start of construction on a "new sound theatre" in Garner, Iowa, with organization and financing of the project credited to the Marks Amusement Company of St. Paul, Minnesota.

November 19, 1930 — Site excavation is finished; the next day cement is poured for concrete footings and basement.

November 29, 1930 — Bricklaying begins; progress moves "along steadily since in the walls of brick and hollow tile."

December 3, 1930 — Garner Leader story recounts building method used during an Iowa winter: Precautions ... necessary in handling the mixtures make extra work in building during the cold season, for all the water and sand are heated so the concrete and mortar are hot when they are used, and retain that heat until they set, after which the freezing does not affect them.

December 8, 1930 — Mr. A.L. Aved, a representative of R.C.A. Corporation, visits the worksite after R.C.A. Photophone sound-reproducing equipment is selected. Mr. Aved declared the interior construction as "being designed with splendid detail for acoustic properties that would add to the sound producing qualities of entertainment."

December 17, 1930 — Theater manager, Mr. Charles Marks of St. Paul, is formally introduced in the Garner Leader: "Mr. Marks is a theater man of many years' experience and understands all the tricks connected with the business of buying pictures..." It then quotes a report from the St. Paul Daily News: "Mr. Marks, formerly operator of the Tuxedo theater, W. 7th Street and Smith Avenue, and more recently affiliated with Publix theaters, will leave St. Paul for Garner, Iowa, to take charge of the new \$35,000 theater in that city. The Theater was designed and is being built by the Sperry Realty Co., Pittsburgh Building, St. Paul."

December 18-25, 1930 — Steel girders supporting the roof are positioned; second story window frames and outside walls anticipate completion shortly after the holiday.

February 1931 — Mr. H.M. Shelton of Shelton Decorating, Co., Minneapolis, visits the worksite and consults with the contracted decorators. His suggestions are incorporated into the design scheme.

February 18, 1931 — Suggested by Miss Miriam Love, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Matt T. Love, the winning entry in naming contest is announced: "Perhaps the only motion picture theatre in the United States to bear the name 'Avery.' It is the name of the first white settler to establish a home in Hancock County, Mr. and Mrs. Anson Avery."

March 17, 1931 — Just four months from start of construction, "The Avery" is inaugurated with a Grand Opening celebration. Billed as "Northern Iowa's Finest Theatre," the movie was Warner Brother's feature Sit Tight starring the "king and queen of comedy, Winnie Lightner and Joe E. Brown."

Apr. 8, 1931 — The Avery Sweet Shop, operated by Mr. L.H. Brown, opened for business in the north retail space of the theater. It offered a selection of ice cream, soft drinks, popcorn, candies, cigars and cigarettes. At the time of its initial opening, the theater did not have a concession area.

Sept. 25, 1935 — The "Miss Garner" beauty contest is held at the Avery Theater. Miss Marjorie Zeigers won the pageant title.

Oct. 4, 1939 — Sale of the Avery Theater is announced. Donald & Edna Gran purchase the theater from Villaume Box and Lumber Company of St. Paul, the official owner of the building property on Oct. 28, 1939. Prior to her Oct. 1 marriage to Donald Gran, Miss Edna Collins Rector operated a theater in Sioux Rapids. Mrs. Gran is the daughter of Mrs. Sarah Collins, while Mr. Gran is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Ed Gran, a businessman of Milford.

Oct. 23, 1939 — A farewell party for Mr. and Mrs. Charles Marks and Miss Mary Nevin was held at the Garner Opera House. A large crowd of friends and civic leaders expressed their appreciation to the many contributions made by the family during their time in Garner. Marks was one of the founding members of the local Chamber of Commerce, and a long-time member of the Garner Lions Club. Mrs. Marks was a member of the Garner Women's Club, and a charter member and longtime president of the Garden Department, which staged annual flower shows. The family returned to their previous home in St. Paul, Minn.

December 1939 — After being purchased by Donald Gran, The Avery underwent a major redecorating project in December 1939, just eight years after it opened. The auditorium was "repainted in powder blue and shades of rust and gray." The foyer and lobby were also redecorated, and all light fixtures were replaced. In addition "two ultra modern mural panels" were added that were painted with fluorescent paint and illuminated with black lights.

Dec. 16, 1939 — The newly remodeled and redecorated Avery Theater's Grand Opening feature picture was "At the Circus" starring the Marx Brothers.

May 1-3, 1940 — "Gone with the Wind" premieres at the Avery Theater. Despite its length of nearly 4 hours, MGM's movie became an instant classic and was a huge commercial success. It would return to the Avery screen almost a year later on April 27-29, 1941; and again Aug. 13-15, 1942.

Late 1940 — "Bank Nights" encouraged attendance at the movies. Patrons would fill out registration slips for a chance to win monetary prizes. Also around this time a 15-jewel Bulova Wrist Watch was given away as a prize.

## **1940-1957: The World at War**

### **A Community, World at War**

April 23, 1941 — John C. & Althea Leora Elbert purchase the Avery Theater from the Grans, who continued to operate their theater in Sioux Rapids. New to Garner, Mr. Elbert was an experienced businessman in mercantile management and with sales organizations.

April 29, 1941 — The historical film "Land of Liberty" was shown at a special screening for civic organizations, schools, churches, and town and county officials. Producers gave all profits of the film to war relief organizations. (Note: the United States was not yet "at war.")

June 14, 1941 — The Iowa State Highway Patrol's Safety Education Division presented the film "On Two Wheels" to help create interest in safe bicycling. Efforts by local Police Chief Aaron Greiman helped ensure that "every boy, girl, and their parents" were invited.

Jan. 14, 1942 — As part of the national response following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Mr. Lowell Mellet to be the government coordinator to work with the film industry. In his statement, the President

said, "The American Motion picture is one of the our most effective media in informing and entertaining our citizens, and must remain free insofar as our national security is concerned...The motion picture, especially as used by the federal government, has a very useful contribution to make during the war emergency."

April 22, 1942 – Owner John Elbert was appointed to be the "county chairman for theater publicity" on behalf of the Navy Relief drive. Due to "unprecedented Navy personnel increase and heavy casualties," the relief program was in need of funding from outside sources. The State of Iowa was asked to contribute \$125,000 for the Navy. Most communities would complete their quotas and provide extra.

April 27, 1942 – Mr. G. B. "Gil" Kirchner purchased the theater from the Elberts. A long-time resident of Lone Tree and owner of that town's theater, Kirchner had 22 years experience in the banking and automotive garage businesses. He also managed the Allison Hotel in Britt at one point.

Sept. 20-22, 1942 – "Tarzan's New York Adventure," starring Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Hara, was playing when this photo of the Avery was taken. (see picture) The Sweet Shop, located in the north retail space, was a fixture for candy, magazines, ice cream and cigarettes. The south retail space was occupied by Stella Krall's Beauty Salon. Later that space would house an insurance company first operated by Charlie Wellik, and later by Al Barz.

September 1942 – War bonds and stamps are available for purchase at the Avery Theater box office. Two free adult admissions were given with each \$25 purchase of war bonds.

Nov 27, 1942 – "The World at War" movie is shown as part of the Women-at-War Week observations. The Bureau of Motion Pictures of the Office of War Information created the hour-long documentary. Former Hollywood writer Sam Spewack produced and edited the movie using footage from newsreels and captured Nazi films documenting the events leading up to the second World War. Admission was free to Hancock County residents with purchase of a war bond.

The movie presentation was also used to help boost lagging war bond sales; Hancock County was significantly behind in raising its quota of \$40,000. Under the guidance of Joint Chairpersons Mrs. Paul Elling and Mrs. C.H. Tompkins, the theater seating was divided into reserved sections for bond purchasers in the amounts of \$1000, \$500, \$100, \$50 and \$25. At the end of the reporting period, the City of Garner had raised \$34,825 from the purchases made at the local banks, the post office and the movie theater; altogether Hancock County raised \$122,475.

Dec. 5, 1942 – About 200 area children made their own contribution to the war effort by participating in a salvage collection. Free movie admission was granted to those bringing iron, copper, lead, rubber or any other salvage scrap material being collected on behalf of the government. Nearly 3,000 pounds of salvage materials were collected, with young Mickey Schoneman earning a \$5 prize for personally bringing in 463 pounds of salvage materials.

Dec. 12, 19 & 23, 1942 – Free matinees were shown on the two Saturdays before Christmas, and on Dec. 23, as well. In what would become an annual tradition, treats were presented to the children following the movie.

Feb. 10 & 11, 1943 – In cooperation with the motion picture industry's efforts to help meet the War Production Board's urgent need for scrap metal, the Avery Theater held Copper and Brass days. Free admission to movies was given to each person who brought in one pound of scrap metal. Proceeds from the sale of the metals collected at the Avery Theater were donated to the American Red Cross.

Feb. 15, 1943 – The Avery and theaters throughout Hancock County showed a 15-minute film about hemp production and processing; the government-produced film educated area farmers about the need for increased hemp crops for rope-making and other products.

1943 – Theater owner Gil Kirchner was appointed Hancock County Chairman for the State of Iowa's annual fund drive against infantile paralysis.

Dec. 18 & 22, 1943 — Children were invited to a free matinee at the Avery while their parents conducted their Christmas shopping. Santa Claus also visited the downtown area and passed out treats to the youngsters after the movie.

Feb. 23, 1944 – A "Free John Deere Picture Show," sponsored by Wesenberg & Son, is shown on Wednesday afternoon at the Avery. The film presented valuable tips on the care and servicing of all tractors, regardless of make or model. (see ad)

March 31-April 4, 1944 – The 20th Century Fox movie, “The Sullivans,” is shown at the Avery to significant fanfare. Based upon the true-life story of five brothers from Waterloo, Iowa, the Sullivan brothers all lost their lives as a result of enemy fire upon the USS Juneau, the battleship on which they served together. (see big ad)

October 1944 – The City of Garner placed four sets of bicycle racks “at various points in the business district to accommodate shoppers” in the downtown. One set was located on the south side of the Avery Theater (see photo). Other locations were near the band shell, the post office and Zeiger drug store.

April 8-15, 1945 – The Hancock County branch of the United National Clothing Collection designated this as “Clean Out Your Attic Week” to help collect usable clothing for war relief. The Avery Theater was one of multiple drop-off locations designated by committee members Mrs. N.E. Brear, Gil B. Kirchner, Verne Pringle, Mrs. J.N. Steil and Chairman Chet Stille. Items collected were intended for distribution to the men, women and children facing hardships in the war-devastated countries.

Jan. 30, 1946 – A historic weeping elm tree, located on Fifth Street just to the east of State Street, was cut down and removed due to concerns about the danger of its overhanging branches. Due to its size, age and majesty, the elm was a significant local landmark. (In some historic photos the massive tree is seen providing shade to the southeast corner of the theater building.)

April 24, 1946 – Henry & Gabrielle Johnson of Westbrook, Minn., purchase the Avery Theater from the Kirchners. Mr. Johnson had operated a smaller theater in Westbrook which he sold prior to relocating to Garner. Altogether the Johnson family had seven children: Kathryn, Irla Jean, Betty Jane, Gerald, LaVonne, Carole and Diane. The eldest three daughters took active roles in assisting with concessions and other duties at the theater.

Early 1947 – Wednesday and Thursday night were “Prize Nites” at the Avery Theater, according to a photo courtesy of Betty (Johnson) Tompkins. The south display case advertises the movie “Two Years Before the Mast” which dates this photo to early 1947.

Feb. 25, 1949 – Mr. Lloyd B Kingsbury, owner of several theaters throughout the Midwest, buys the Avery Theater. While Mr. Kingsbury often travelled between his various properties, Mrs. Alice Kingsbury was a well-known presence at the ticket booth in Garner. John Banks, the couple’s son-in-law and a war veteran, worked as the manager along with Mrs. Kingsbury.

Summer 1955 – The Chamber of Commerce, along with local merchants, sponsored a weekly “Pot of Gold” drawing. Each week the businesses would contribute \$50 into a collective “pot.” Throughout the week patrons would register at participating merchants. Those names would be pooled and a name would be drawn at the Avery Theater each Saturday at 9 p.m. If the week’s “Pot of Gold” was not won, additional funds would be added and the total potential winnings would grow until it was won.

Oct. 31, 1955 – Trick or Treat for UNICEF parties were held in Garner. Children attending the movie “Assignment: Children” received boxes in which they were to collect pennies for UNICEF. The movie was designed to help bring recognition to the relatively young international organization. The documentary followed comedian Danny Kaye’s tour of projects in Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Myanmar and Thailand. Kaye, the original UNICEF celebrity representative, was a Goodwill Ambassador for the organization from 1954 until his death in 1987.

Aug. 2, 1956 – A county-wide “Queen of the Furrow” beauty pageant, sponsored by the Hancock County Soil Conservation District, was held at the Avery Theater. From among the contestants, two girls were selected to compete in the regional contest at the North Iowa Fair in Mason City.

## **1958-1969: Local Management Steps In**

### **Community Rallies to Maintain Avery**

Aug. 7, 1958 – After operating continuously since 1931, owner Lloyd Kingsbury announced the Avery Theater was “closed until further notice due to lack of patronage.”

Oct. 18, 1958 – A group of citizens scheduled a meeting to discuss re-opening the Avery Theater. Held at the Hancock County REC meeting room at 7:30 p.m. on a Saturday, special invitations were issued to “all interested citizens and officials and members of the various civic and commercial clubs.”

Nov. 13, 1958 – Plans to re-open the Avery Theater under a rental agreement with owner Lloyd Kingsbury are announced by James (Jim) Howie, president of the Garner Chamber of Commerce. The theater was redecorated, and it would “run late releases.”

Nov. 20, 1958 – The movie “This Happy Feeling” was announced as the feature film when the Avery re-opened on Thanksgiving “under the direction and sponsorship” of Jim Howie. Mr. Clare E. Moser of Clear Lake, with theater experience dating back to vaudeville days, was hired to act as manager. Mrs. Moser worked as the cashier.

April 1959 – A Saturday afternoon “children’s series” of films “adapted to children and approved by the national PTA Council” sponsored by the local Women’s Club is shown. It’s unknown how long this schedule lasted.

July 8, 1959 – A Miss Garner pageant, sponsored by the Garner JayCees, was held at the Avery Theater. KRIB radio personality Jack Rockefeller served as master of ceremonies. Miss Kay Hampel, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Arnold Hampel, earned the title, along with a scholarship award and the opportunity to compete at the Miss Iowa contest held July 23-26 at Clear Lake. (Miss Iowa and her companion would fly to Atlantic City, courtesy of Ozark Air Lines.)

Aug. 26, 1959 – A new theater schedule is announced, which includes \$1 family nights. Effective Sept. 1, Monday through Saturday’s nightly show began at 7:45 with the feature starting at 8 p.m. Sunday evenings had two performances at 7 and 9 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday nights each week were called “Buck Nights.” An entire family, regardless of size was admitted for \$1, provided they attended as a group.

Jan 15, 1961 – Jim Howie temporarily closed the Avery until a new manager could be located.

Feb. 4, 1961 – Theater re-opens under the management of Virgil Buntentbach.

June 24, 1961 – The Avery Theater business, including equipment and fixtures, was sold to Richard O’Toole, formerly of Mitchell, South Dakota. He and his family would take an active role in its management.

Lloyd Kingsbury retained ownership the building until his death in 1968 when the title transferred to his widow, Alice Kingsbury. Mrs. Kingsbury retained ownership of the building until 1970.

March 13, 1962 – An agronomist for Pioneer Seed Corn Company was a guest speaker at a district meeting related to the use of fertilizers and the growing of corn. The movie “Breeding Corn for Today’s Farming” was shown, while free refreshments were served.

April 1964 – Garner Volunteer Fire Department discuss the possibility of purchasing the Avery Building for expansion of the equipment storage.

~ mid 1960s – Movies are shown only once a week. The Avery is part of a cooperative group of small town theaters who literally shared the movie reels on a specified rotation each week.

Nov. 19, 1962 – The Hancock County Family Living Committee sponsored a county-wide meat-cooking school. Miss Ann Norman, home economist of the National Livestock and Meat Board, demonstrated a “Galaxy of Foods,” with included preparations of Bavarian pot roast, broiled ham slices, cherry meat muffins, jelly glazed lamb chops, stuffed beef log and gourmet Swiss steak.

Aug. 27, 1962 — “Lilies of the Field” was a benefit movie shown to raise funds for the purchase of a school camera. The school’s G Club and Pep Clubs sponsored the event. The camera would be used by the marching band and athletic departments.

December 10, 17 & 24, 1966 — Coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce, free “all-cartoon” movies are shown to children 12 or younger on the Saturdays leading up to Santa Claus visiting Garner on December 24.

June 1968 – after the death of her husband, Mrs. Alice Kingsbury is the sole owner of the Avery Theater Building.

~ early 1969 — According to the Avery’s last trained projectionist, The Beatles’ “Yellow Submarine” was the final movie shown at the Avery Theater. The specific date is unknown.

### **1970-2006: The Pharmacy Years**

Feb 18, 1970 — The building is sold to Robert Nonnweiler & Dale Reichardt for development. The sloped floor is filled and leveled, interior walls are removed; the building reopened as Erickson’s Pharmacy.

May-June, 1970 – Erickson’s Pharmacy moves into its new location, the former Avery Theater building.

Sept. 17-18, 1971 — A Grand Opening is held for Erickson's Pharmacy in its new location at 495 State Street. As a special treat for the children, on Saturday special guest Bart Curran, host of the popular local children's television show "Bart's Clubhouse," will visit with youngsters.

Feb. 6, 1973 – Gus Erickson purchases the building that will continue to house his downtown pharmacy, gift shop and soda fountain.

About 2003 — The business was purchased by pharmacist Tammy Abbas and was re-named Tammy's Pharmacy. Erickson Distributing retained ownership of the building.

Oct. 2003 – The building was purchased by Jason Johnson of Rockledge Holding Co. Tammy's Pharmacy continued to operate at that location through most of 2006.

Fall 2006 – Tammy's Pharmacy moved to its new location and building on Highway 18. The building would remain vacant until interest began to grow about re-opening the location as a downtown movie theater.

## **2006-2013: Re-Discovery & Development**

### **Theater Reappears, Interest Grows**

Late Dec 2006: The former Avery movie theater was "rediscovered" after its 1970s false front was removed.

March 29, 2007 — YIELD Students present a \$521.29 check to Chamber of Commerce President Barb Eisenmenger as the proceeds from their fundraiser among the Garner-Hayfield student body to "Restore the Avery."

April, 2007 — The State Historical Center of Iowa agreed to send an advisor with its Technical Advisory Network (TAN). Preservation Architect Douglas Steinmentz of Cedar Rapids came to Garner in his capacity as a TAN Advisor. With the TAN program the State Historical Society pays for the advisor's time, while the host pays for mileage & per diem charges. The program allows for one site visit by a TAN Advisor, followed by a report of findings.

April 14, 2007 — "A Night in Hollywood" Adult Prom was held at the Garner Country Club as a Movie Theatre Renovation Fundraiser.

June 2007 — State Historical Society of Iowa awards the restoration project a REAP/Historical Resources Development Program (HRDP) grant. The Avery project is one of 30 to be funded with State monies from fiscal year 2008, which begins July 2, 2007. The project was awarded \$13,360 to develop a Master Plan for restoration, as well as create an application for consideration among the National Register of Historic Places.

July 2007 — Deusey Days, Featured on KIMT News at 6 PM; collected personal memories and interviews.

Sept. 10, 2008 — Committee member and theater historian Jill Blank conducts interviews at Senior Citizen Center at Garner Public Library. Earlier interviews were held with residents of Concord Care Center and Prairie View Assisted Living.

October 15, 2007 – The Avery John K & Luise V Hanson Foundation awarded the "Restore the Avery Theater" project \$25,000 for the purpose of replacing the roof.

October 25, 2008 — Beta Sigma Phi sororities hosted two fashion shows at American Espresso Coffee Café restaurant as a fundraiser for the Avery rehabilitation project.

November 12, 2008 — Avery building, located at 495 State Street, Garner, is added to the National Register for Historic Places.

December 28, 2008 — Garner Main Street, Inc., purchases the Avery building from Jason Johnson of Rockledge Holding, LLC.

June 2009: Original red tile of the lobby area is rediscovered after the removal of carpeting during a volunteer workday.

July 8, 2009 – "The Producers," a select group of civic minded individuals and local business owners, made significant contributions to purchase the theater building so that restoration efforts could begin in earnest.

Aug. 31, 2009 – The Hancock County Foundation awarded the Avery Theater project \$7,500 for the purpose of tuck-pointing and repair of the brick façade.

Oct. 2009 – A Chili Cook-off, held in the theater building during Garner’s annual Fall Festival, helped build awareness of the project and raised funds for the overall efforts. Prior to this event, the façade of the building receives temporary “faux storefronts” that are reminiscent of the original retail spaces.

Dec. 2, 2009 – The family-oriented film, “The Muppet Christmas Carol,” is shown inside the theater building as part of Garner’s Holiday Stroll festivities.

Jan. 8, 2010 – The Liberty Bank Foundation gave \$3,000 to the Avery restoration project.

June 2010 – Work is completed on the repair of the exterior of the building, including tuckpointing, cleaning, and the repair or replacement of damaged areas.

November 2010 — The Worth County Development Authority awarded \$14,250 to Garner Main Street, Inc.’s Restoration of the Avery Theater for the purpose of brick façade restoration.

Dec. 14, 2010 – The John K & Luise V Hanson Foundation awarded \$30,000 to Restore the Avery Theater for the purpose of the purchase and installation of a new HVAC system.

Dec. 16, 2010 —The Hancock County Foundation awarded \$7,500 to the Garner Main Street project to restore the Avery theater for the purpose of removal of the theater’s former HVAC system.

Jan. 21, 2011 – The Liberty Bank Foundation gave \$3,000 to the overall restoration efforts of the Avery Theater.

April 2011 – “There’s No Place Like Home” was the theme of Gala Night fundraiser held at the Duncan Community Center. The formal event also celebrated the 80th Anniversary of the 1931 Grand Opening of the Avery Theater.

April 20, 2011 – Drs. Tesene, Maurer and Maurer of Family Dentistry in Garner donated \$25,200 to the “Coming Attractions” Capital Campaign.

April 27, 2011 – Clear Lake Bank and Trust presented a letter of intent, pledging to donate \$12,000 to the Avery’s “Coming Attractions” Capital Campaign.

March 2, 2011 – The Garner Rotary Club made a multi-year pledge over five years of up to \$10,000 in matching funds for the “Marquee Challenge” that was extended to the various reunion classes of the Garner-Hayfield School District.

Sept. 2011 — Friends of Garner Public Library made a donation of \$100 to the Avery restoration effort.

Dec. 21, 2011 – The Hancock County Foundation awarded \$7,500 to the Avery restoration effort for the purpose of installing the electrical system and ductwork for the new HVAC system.

Jan. 2012 – The John K & Luise V Hanson Foundation awarded \$13,500 to the Avery Theater for the purpose of removal of the concrete floor and fill material used to level the floor in 1970.

Aug. 2012 – The Ferrer Endowment Foundation awarded \$3,000 to the Avery Theater restoration effort for the installation of plumbing for theater .

June 2012 – The John K & Luise V Hanson Foundation awarded \$5,000 to the Avery Theater for the purpose of replacing the windows on the front façade.

Nov. 7, 2012 – New Doors and Windows are installed at the Avery building.

Dec. 2012 — Friends of Garner Public Library made a donation of \$250 to the Avery restoration effort. Interior walls begin to be constructed. A public Open House is held during a “work day” to showcase the project’s progress.

Feb. 2013 – The Wa-Tan-Ye of Garner gave \$500 to the theater restoration effort.

March 2013 — Garner-Hayfield YIELD Students presented a \$1,053 check to help purchase theater seats.

April 2013 – The Garner Lions Club gave \$500 to help purchase theater seats.

April 2013 – The Vision Iowa Board awarded the Avery Theater project a \$45,000 Community Attraction & Tourism (CAT) Grant. It was the largest award of three announced at this time.

April 19, 2013 – A Public Open House is held allowing the community to walk inside the building and see the significant restoration that has already been accomplished.

May 29, 2012 – The canopy that supports the new electronic theater marquee is installed on the support beams of the original canopy.

July 2013 – Carole Lemon is hired as the part-time manager of the Avery; Tami Helland is hired as the assistant manager, also a part time position.

July 12-13, 2013 — The 2013 Duesey Days theme is “On with the Show!” An Open House at the nearly-completed movie theater is held on that Saturday.

Aug. 10-11, 2013 – The movie “Iron Man 3” is shown by special invitation to groups of donors during a soft opening of the movie theater. It opens to the public the following week with the movie “Despicable Me 2.”

Aug. 14, 2013 — The Leader publishes a commemorative 2-part tabloid in honor of the completion of the Avery Theater’s rehabilitation and restoration efforts.