



WARNER FAST FACTS

- John C. Scanlon was the first manager of the new Warner Bros movie theatre
- Elmer Schroeder's Black and White Orchestra would play between features
- More than 4,500 bulbs originally illuminated the outside signs. In 2023 the bulbs were replaced with energy efficient LEDs
- It took three tons of coal to heat the theatre
- An orchestra seat cost \$.50 in 1931
- The seats were recreated during the 2002 renovation to match the original design and fabric
- The theatre has been used throughout its history for live community and traveling performances as well as for a variety of local events such as high school graduations

- At its peak, Warner Bros. owned more than 500 theatres nationwide
- The first film shown at the Warner was *The Star Witness* starring Walter Huston (Angelica Huston's grandfather)
- The front ticket booth and will call window located in the vestibule were the original box office
- The theatre is on the National Register Of Historic Places
- The full-service lobby bar was added during the 2002 restoration, as was the elevator
- The original 50ft vertical marquee was removed shortly after opening. The current marquee was installed during the 2002 restoration.



Lobby 1934

1937 Torrington High School graduation ticket



The Warner Theatre 1937 featuring the films "Wake Up and Live" and "A Family Affair"



Newspaper ad from 1939



Ushers in the lobby (year unknown)



Promotional poster from 1934

CONTINUING THE LEGACY

The Warner Theatre relies on the generosity of our community to keep our programs and operations going strong. We offer a number of ways to support our work, along with special benefits for our donors. If you'd like to learn more about how you can make a difference, please visit warnertheatre.org/support or scan the QR code.



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THE BEGINNING



The Warner Theatre was built as a movie house for Warner Brothers Studios in 1931 for \$750,000.

Warner Brothers chose Torrington because, according to the New York Times, they believed that the population "offered a microcosm of New York City."

Thomas Lamb, the famous Scottish-born architect, designed the Warner Theatre along with more than 150 others across the country, including the Roxy and Strand in New York City, the Orpheum in Boston, and the Palace Theater in Waterbury.



The Warner Theatre was the biggest land deal in Torrington at the time. The studio paid \$250,000 for the Smith-Deland-Robinson property, which included the George D. Wadhams homestead.

An average of 100 men were employed daily during construction boosting the local economy during the Depression.

Construction of the theatre included 1,500 tons of steel, 400,000 bricks, 1,200 cubic yards of concrete, 80,000 square feet of terra cotta, six carloads of finishing plaster and 5 carloads of gypsum.



Downtown damage after the flood of 1955

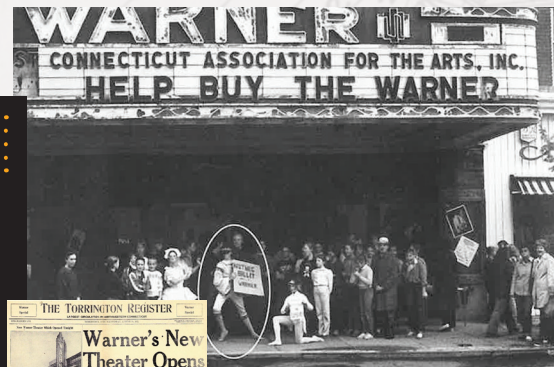
POST-WARNER BROS

In the 1970's and 80's a succession of new owners were unable to keep up with the maintenance and repairs for the theatre and by 1981 the building was slated for demolition.

In 1982 a group of local citizens formed the **Northwest Connecticut Association For The Arts** to save the theatre from demolition.

The organization successfully raised \$30,000 cash to secure a \$100,000 mortgage within a tight 2 month period.

On May 22, 1983 the Warner Theatre reopened as a performing arts center.



Future Warner Executive Director Barry Hughson (at the age of 14) supporting the efforts to save the Warner from demolition in 1982

GRAND OPENING

The Warner Theatre opened on August 19, 1931. The opening red carpet gala featured:

- A performance under the marquee by the Union Hardware band
- A flag raising ceremony featuring gold-star mother Ida M. Harrison

- A screening of the Walter Huston film *A Star Witness*
- A fashion show in the lobby with garments provided by neighboring W.W. Mertz Co.
- An appearance by "Miss Warner" Marceline Dutil
- Governor Wilbur Cross dedicated the theatre

During the flood of 1955 there was extensive water damage in the theatre with water levels reaching row DD in the orchestra.

Warner Brothers sold the theatre in the late 1950's as part of a federally mandated divestment plan after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that major film studios could no longer own their theatres.

(United States v. Paramount Pictures, INC. 1948)



1938

2002 RESTORATION

In 1997, a major restoration began to return the theatre to its original 1931 Art Deco style. The work was led by Evergreene Architectural Arts of New York, a firm known for historic preservation. Over the course of three months, artists stenciled and hand-painted the ceiling using the same techniques that were used when the theatre first opened. To ensure accuracy, they conducted microscopical paint analysis to match the original color palette. With that information, they reapplied stenciling, gilded details in aluminum leaf and Dutch metal, and used glazing, sponge painting, and textured finishes to bring the space back to life.

At the height of the project, scaffolding filled the entire theatre, rising to the level of the control booth - about 45 feet in the air. The design team restored the original carpeting by recreating the pattern from a vintage photo and locating the South Carolina company that originally produced it in 1931. Amazingly, the company still had the original order on file and was able to manufacture an exact replica. The carpet's vertical pattern mirrors the theatre's marquee, tying the interior design back to the iconic façade.

As part of the renovation, the original murals showing scenes from Litchfield County were carefully cleaned using ultraviolet light. They were painted by Alfred James Tulk, a well-known muralist and abstract expressionist.

The dates shown on the murals refer to the founding years of the taverns pictured, not the theatre's opening or the murals' completion. The murals were often covered with large promotional materials for upcoming movies.

By the time of the 2002 restoration, the original wall covering had darkened to a brown with age. When the medallions were removed early in the process, the fabric underneath revealed a bright orange color. This crushed velvet material is commonly known as "monkey fur."

November 23, 2002 restoration work was completed and the theatre reopened.

In 2003 The Northwest Connecticut Association For The Arts purchased the adjoining Mertz Building to create the Nancy Marine Studio Theatre and the Warner Theatre Center for Arts Education.

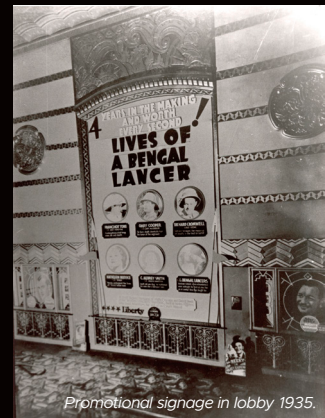


Mertz store front 1946

The Mertz building closed in the early 1980s, marking the end of what was then the oldest department store in the country. The site's retail history dates back to 1803 when it first housed a small general store called Abernathy's. Over time, the store was renamed the Granite Store and later became known as W.S. Lewis Co. In 1907, W.W. Mertz, the son-in-law of W.S. Lewis, purchased the store and changed its name to W.W. Mertz Co.

After six years of planning, fundraising, and renovations, the building was renamed the Carole and Ray Neag Performing Arts Center in May 2008, honoring Torrington natives Carole and Ray Neag, who donated \$1 million to the project.

The Nancy Marine Studio Theatre, named after a patron of the arts whose family donated the original site at 69 Main Street (now home to KidsPlay Children's Museum and the Warner Theatre Costume Shop), seats up to 300 people.



Promotional signage in lobby 1935.



In 2019 Michael's Jewelers, a staple in Torrington for 93 years, closed its doors. The business first opened on Water Street in 1926, later relocating to 80 Main Street to be closer to the newly opened Warner Theatre.

The space became part of the Warner complex and, following an extensive renovation, reopened in 2022 as the re-imagined Warner Club. Today, it serves as both a donor lounge and a rental space.