



Photo: Jim Ransier, THS postcard collection

PINES THEATRE

4673 West Houghton Lake Drive, Houghton Lake, Michigan

Architect: C. Howard Crane

Style: Rustic

Opened: 1941

Seats: 450

Renovated: 1971; 1973; 1997–present

Website: www.pinestheater.com

THE PINES THEATRE MAY WELL BE THE MOST ORIGINAL AND/or unusual venue THS has ever visited. Built in 1941 for the Olson Brothers theatre circuit in Houghton Lake, one of Michigan's most popular resort areas, the theatre's style is true to its locale. It's been labeled "hunter's chalet style" or "hunting lodge rustic." It's easy to imagine C. Howard Crane, of Detroit Fox fame, having a wonderful time designing a theatre so antithetical to the picture palaces he's remembered for today.

The exterior resembles a large log cabin, but with a small marquee. The lobby, with its 40-foot log cathedral ceiling, doubles as "the trophy room," where some 100 stuffed animals from all over the United States are on display. The auditorium, complete with crying room, also has a log-beamed ceiling, and two original murals on either side of the screen.

Unfortunately, along with many other theatres, the Pines was allowed to decline during the 1960s. But in 1973, Floyd and Ruby Huddy purchased the theatre, and began repairing its seats, roof, full stage lighting and rotting logs. In 1997 Louise Fraser and Les Newton bought the theatre from the Huddys, and restoration began again, and vigilant maintenance continues today. Two large 15-foot wide stone fireplaces were restored, a new roof put in place, and Dolby Digital surround sound installed.

The Pines also claims bragging rights with two crucial necessities for movie theatres: 1954 Simplex XL film projectors, and a late 1940s Cretors Hollywood 48 popcorn popper. Some big-city movie chains could pick up tips for professional presentation from this seemingly out-of-the-way, unique venue.