

City of Red Wing

T.B. Sheldon Memorial Auditorium, 443 W. Third Street

This Award of Merit is presented to the City of Red Wing and the Sheldon Theatre for the recently completed renovation and preservation of the T. B. Sheldon Memorial Auditorium.

Background Information: A grain merchant and business leader, Theodore B. Sheldon bequeathed half of his estate to be used for a public purpose. After his death in 1900, his trustees chose to construct the T.B. Sheldon Memorial Auditorium. The 1904 building is believed to be the first municipally-owned and operated playhouse west of the Mississippi River.



Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976, the beige brick building of Renaissance Revival style, designed by Lowell Lamoureaux (who also designed Red Wing City Hall), had an interior described as a “jewel box” with ornate plaster work in ivory and gold set off against the deep red carpets and velvet draperies. Damaged by fire, the building was reconstructed in 1918. Motion pictures, introduced at the auditorium in 1917, became so popular that the building was remodeled in 1936 to provide additional seating. As movie operations became unsustainable, the City considered alternative uses for the auditorium.



In 1984, a special task force decided to restore the building to its original architectural elegance and mission; as a home for live performance. In 1986, the citizens of Red Wing passed, by an 85% majority, a \$1.5 million bond issue to help fund the restoration. An additional two million dollars was raised through private donations. In 1988, the restored T.B. Sheldon Memorial Auditorium opened its doors to the public to showcase the best in local, regional, national, and international arts and entertainment.

The Sheldon is owned by the City of Red Wing, which is responsible for maintaining the structure, planning and making capital improvements to the facility. Maintenance and capital projects are typically funded through the City’s General fund and it’s Capital Improvement Plan. The Sheldon Theatre’s programming is the responsibility of the Sheldon Theatre Board of Directors and its management staff. Programming is funded by an endowment fund, the Friends of the Sheldon (a non-profit organization), ticket sales/revenue, private donations/gifts, and grants.

Recent Project:

In 2018, almost exactly 30 years after the 1988 reopening of the restored theater, another grand reopening took place. This project, which spanned approximately seven years, addressed needed exterior maintenance and restoration, and interior refreshing and modernization which were all accomplished following historic preservation standards.

The project started back in 2011/2012 when the City of Red Wing, with funding assistance from the State Capital Grant-in-Aid program (\$100,000) administered by MHS, completed the repointing/restoration of the south masonry wall to address water infiltration behind the stage and the restoration of the west carriage entrance canopy, which was in an unsafe condition. In the same time period City funding replaced the Heating, Ventilating and Air-Conditioning systems

In 2015/2016 the City of Red Wing utilized the same grant program (\$253,072.35) to help fund the repointing/restoration of the east, west, and north masonry walls, along with the restoration of the east Porte Cochere, and the restoration of the ticket booth windows and associated lintels.

Once the masonry work was completed, the main roof was replaced. This work also included the removal, restoration, and resetting of the terra cotta acroterions. In addition all of the building's windows were rehabilitated.



In 2018, with the assistance of State Bonding dollars totaling almost \$1,000,000, the interior of the building was addressed. This work included refreshing the entire interior of the structure (painting, painting, painting), the replacement of the ticket booth roof and the recreation of its decorative plaster ceiling, the structural correction of the lobby floor and the restoration of its tile floor, updated electrical and alarm systems, new carpet, the creation of a new third floor studio space, the construction of new ADA accessible bathrooms on the lower level, the construction of a new green room, office remodels, and upgraded lighting and sound systems.



In total the seven year project cost approximately \$3.7 million and involved many hours of City and Sheldon staff time. City staff was able to secure nearly \$1 million in grant and state bonding, including the Capital Grants-In-Aid program.

The City's investment of over \$2.5 million in General funding to the project demonstrates its dedication to historic preservation and specifically to the T.B. Sheldon Memorial Auditorium and the Sheldon Theatre. The preservation and continued use of the Sheldon are critical to the City's image and the region's quality of life and economy, as the Sheldon is an important part of Red Wing's growing heritage tourism industry and art based economy.