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**Ottawa movie theater named world’s oldest by Guinness**

OTTAWA, Kansas --- The Plaza Cinema in Ottawa, Kansas, which opened May 22, 1907 has been named the Oldest Purpose-Built Cinema in Operation by Guinness World Records. The deco-styled downtown movie theater opened at 211 S. Main St. on May 22, 1907 and still shows current-run movies.

The Plaza’s record beat the previous record holder, the Korsor Biograf in Denmark, which opened in Aug. 1908, by more than a year.

Owner Rita “Peach” Madl has spent years collecting evidence to secure the record ever since archivist Deborah Barker, who recently retired from the Ottawa Historical Society, uncovered a trove of photographs that indicated the theater was already operating in Ottawa’s early horse-and-buggy days.

Madl, Barker and film historian Bill Shaffer compiled and authenticated evidence using documents, news reports and photographs from the Franklin County Courthouse, Franklin County Historical Society and Ottawa Library, all in Ottawa, Kansas, and [newspapers.com](http://newspapers.com/), an online database.

Convincing Guinness was a daunting task that required submitting documentation in the form of articles, movie ads and photographs for every year in the cinema’s 111-year history. “It was a real eye-opener how thorough and professional the Guinness staff were,” Madl said.

The extensive evidence required by Guinness led Madl to discover daily ads that listed the titles of the movies shown in the cinema’s earliest years.

Over the years, the theater changed names and owners and expanded but never moved. It opened as The Bijou and for a time was called The Yale and The Crystal before opening as The Plaza in 1935.

When the cinema opened, tickets cost five cents and usually included two moving pictures and an “illustrated song” performed by a live singer.

Many of the moving pictures were made in France and distributed out of Kansas City. Titles of some of the first movies shown include: “Bad Mother,” “Pay Day Target,” “Nihilist’s Revenge,” “Blind Man’s Dog,” “Rival Brothers” and “Horse of Another Color.”

Behind the current twin screening rooms at the Plaza, in the original stage area, Madl has created the Movie Memorabilia Museum. Exhibits include a numbered original Edison Kinetoscope, one of the earliest motion picture devices, movie scripts, posters and props.

Madl is planning to launch a new “Walk Through Time” experience March 12 featuring a photographic timeline of the cinema’s history, screenings of “The Great Train Robbery” and a changing lineup of films shown in the cinema’s earliest years, and admission to the Movie Memorabilia Museum.

She hopes the Guinness World Record will bring new visitors to Ottawa, population 12,000.

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