

Midway Theatre Rockford, Illinois

The Midway was constructed in 1918 with its grand opening on August 3, 1918. The architect was J. E. O. Pridmore of Chicago. The building is 102' wide, 240' long and includes a theater space designed to seat 2,000 people. It was the largest motion picture theater in northern Illinois at the time it was built. As originally constructed, the structure also included 21 apartments on the upper level, space for 4 retail establishments on the main floor, and a bowling alley in the basement (a great attraction for soldiers stationed at Camp Grant on Rockford's south side). The original lobby was 30' by 64' with walls paneled from floor to ceiling with Tennessee marble. The building is in the Spanish Renaissance style with a carved stone façade and a 90' clock tower that serves as a visual landmark on East State Street, the primary east-west street in Rockford's downtown.

The Midway was originally leased and operated by the Ascher Brothers of Chicago as part of their 16-theater chain which showed "only the biggest and best" silent films of the era. It functioned as a movie house until August 1980 when a fire almost destroyed it. Fortunately, the auditorium and lobby were unharmed. The storefront level of the front of the building was completely gutted and rebuilt at that point so that original features of the lobby no longer survive. The original retail space was converted to commercial office space while the upper story apartments were converted to a mix of uses. The main theater auditorium was home to the Rockford Symphony Orchestra until the Coronado Theatre - a much larger and grander atmospheric theater - reopened following its renovation in 2001. The Midway has seen only sporadic use after the RSO moved away and has been vacant for several years.