



Left: *Cubi XII* at David Smith's studio, New York State. Photo by Joseph Pettick.

Facing page: *SaskPower* building, still *Smithless*. Photo by Don Hall.

the *SaskPower* building. These are some of Regina's monuments to caution.

When architect Joseph Pettick's design for Regina City Hall was approved, it included two sculptures to frame the courtyard fountain. After the triangular concrete sculpture platforms were put in place, City Council withdrew the budget for the artwork. Three decades on, the platforms still await their sculptures.

This was not Joe Pettick's first experience of public art falling victim to the counting of beans. His *SaskPower* building is the site of a legendary, lost opportunity to have a major piece of public art in the heart of the city.

In January 1963, the influential art critic Clement Greenberg wrote from New York to Ken Lochhead, head of Regina's College of Art, to tell him that "David Smith has told me he's willing to do an 18-foot piece for the SPC building at cost — because it's a socialist enterprise!"

David Smith, the subject of a 1957 retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art, was considered by many to be the most influential American sculptor of the twentieth century. Smith was to American sculpture what Jackson Pollock was to American painting — a big deal — and he, along with a number of prominent American artists of the period, knew about the political and cultural developments taking place in Saskatchewan.

A selection committee that included Lochhead and Pettick visited Smith's studio in Bolton Landing, New York, and chose *Cubi XII*. A base was prepared for the sculpture east of the fountain on Victoria Avenue, but the



Smithless

by Mark Wihak

You see them as you wander through Regina, Russell Yuristy's *Rusty* by the central library, Kim Morgan's *Antsee* crawling over a tree in Victoria Park, *Reginald the Grasshopper* by Wilf Perrault on Albert Street, *Four Seasons* by Doug Bentham near the Centre of the Arts, Joe Fafard's *Askana ka-asatekion* on Scarth Street and his *Le jardin de l'esprit* on the U of R campus just to the west of Lionel Peyachew's *Four Directions*. These are some of Regina's public sculptures.

As you move through the city, you may also notice two triangular concrete platforms that frame the fountain in City Hall courtyard or a blank wedge of grass in front of

final arrangements were put on hold by SaskPower General Manager David Cass-Beggs.

With the province going to the polls, Cass-Beggs was concerned that buying a large piece of American abstract sculpture — even from a major artist at a bargain price — might become an election issue. After the 1964 election of Ross Thatcher's Liberals, Cass-Beggs was relieved of his position at SaskPower. The arrangement for *Cubi XII* fell apart.

The following year, David Smith died in a car crash. *Cubi XII*, which SaskPower could have purchased for \$15,000, entered the collection of Washington's Hirshhorn

Museum. In November 2005, a Smith sculpture from the same series, *Cubi XXVIII*, set a record for post-World War II art, selling at auction for U.S.\$23.8 million.

Forty years after the squandered opportunity of *Cubi XII* and almost thirty years after the City Hall sculpture platforms were built, Regina finally did acquire some New York-influenced "sculpture." Milton Glaser's 1976 logo "I ♥ NY" was adapted as a marketing slogan for Regina and a metal structure (technically not a sculpture because that would have required the approval of the Regina Art Commission) was erected — though not on the sculpture platforms — in the courtyard of Regina City Hall.

Mark Wihak is a filmmaker and former SPC employee.

Margaret Bessai is a visual artist who examines the humour of everyday life. She has documented the snow people of Regina since 1991. She has hosted Radio del Arte on CJTR and Splice TV on Cable Regina, and created the sock puppets in “Life is Like Lint” (1999), a film by Gerald Saul.



What are we in line for? Canada's first bank machine!

by Margaret Bessai



Left: The “second” Rex Theatre (no longer open), 1784 Hamilton Street, 1962. Courtesy of the City of Regina Archives, E-5.154. Far left: Allie Wihak, in Victoria Park, 1944. Photo by Lennie Wilson. Capitol Theatre sign can be seen in the background. Photo courtesy of Mark Wihak.

Going to the movies was very much part of my¹ life in the 1930s and '40s. It was quite normal for children from the age of nine or ten to find their own way to Regina's downtown theatres on a Saturday afternoon. Of the five or six located in a four-block radius, **The Rex**² was the favourite destination for the younger crowd because it featured wild-west serials with lots of noise and action. It also had **Mr. Harry Bercovich**,³ who was a genius at handling the unaccompanied youngsters. To clear the seats at the end of the first matinee to make room for the impatient crowd waiting to get in, he would announce there was candy for everyone as they left the theatre. He was just as creative at dealing with adult audiences in the evening. Competition for patrons was stiff among the theatres and, generally speaking, on a cold winter's night what movie was playing was a secondary consideration to just getting into the theatre. I recall being in the line-ups at *The Rex* when Mr. Bercovich joined the shivering prospective patrons on the sidewalk, charming us into staying “just a little bit longer.”

Going to the Movies

by Allie Wihak and Mark Wihak

- 1 Alice (Allie) Margaret McDonnell, born December 15, 1923, Grey Nuns Hospital (the Pasqua Hospital since 1973), the second of three daughters born to Grace and Frank McDonnell. Allie grew up on the “north side,” at 1308 Queen Street. At the time, there were only three houses on the west side of the 1300 block Queen and the wooden sidewalk ran south from 7th Avenue only as far as the third house. On wet, muddy days, to reach the streetcar stop on Dewdney Avenue, Allie would have to walk up to 7th and cross over to the east side of Queen, where the sidewalk ran all the way to Dewdney.
- 2 *The Rex Theatre* — built 1912, destroyed by fire 1938, and re-built in 1939. It closed November 7, 1959. *The Rex* was located on the west side of the 1700 block Hamilton. The apartment building now on that site, The Palliser, was for a period during the 1980s, the home of filmmaker, mentor and leading bohemian Jean Oser. Jean started his film career in Berlin in the 1920s. He appeared in the Dadaist classic *Ghosts Before Breakfast*, directed by Hans Richter, and was the film editor for GW Pabst on films including *Three Penny Opera* and *Kameradschaft*. With the rise of the Nazis, Jean moved to France and then to the United States. In the 1970s he arrived in Regina, where he helped get the film program going at the University of Regina and inspired a couple of generations of “film nuts.” Jean was an exhilarating teacher. He'd worked with some of the greatest directors in the history of the medium and directed an Oscar winning short film about Vermeer. Every film was a vivid experience for Jean, worthy of his focused attention and enthusiasm, whether it was the latest Kurosawa or a student's first two-minute effort. From his apartment in The Palliser, Jean would make a weekly circuit that included taking in a film or usually two at the RPL film theatre, followed by a Cognac and a piece of cheesecake at the Copper Kettle on Scarth Street, where he'd sit beneath a painting by another of Regina's leading artists and bohemians, Arthur Fortescue McKay, and tell stories about Jean Renoir and Bertolt Brecht and his six-decade love affair with moving pictures.
- 3 For more on Harry Bercovich, see “Broadway Scottie Bercovich” by Christine Ramsay, pages 102 and 103.



Left: Capitol Theatre decorated for NWMP premiere;
Bottom left: NWMP premiere parade down Scarth Street;
Inset: Madeleine Carroll in parade; Bottom right: Regina

“other” long-time popcorn stand, Cudmore’s, ca. 1940s, located on the north side of 12th Avenue, near Rose Street. The building seen behind the stand is the Alexandra School building which was demolished in 1955.



Allie Wihak has traveled on five continents and lived in Calgary, Edmonton and Sydney, Australia. She has also lived in Regina for almost 8/10s of its history. In addition to raising seven kids, and being an active volunteer in the community, Allie is a master of the art of the handwritten letter.

Mark Wihak is a filmmaker who grew up in a pink house on the west side of Regina.

In 1940, the **Capitol Theatre**⁴ hosted the world premiere of the film **North West Mounted Police**⁵. The studio sent the female star, **Madelaine Carrol**,⁶ and several supporting actors for the occasion. They were **paraded**⁷ through the streets of Regina in open cars, without any sort of barrier in between them and the excited movie fans. I got right up close to **Robert Preston**⁸ – he was wearing a beautiful camel hair coat – and I blurted out, “Would you like to have my autograph?” He rewarded my impudence with a big smile.

Like all the theatre lobbies in Regina, **The Metropolitan’s**¹⁰ was small and utilitarian, but beyond a set of French doors, a broad stairway led down to a spacious, carpeted lounge. It was lit by wall sconces and furnished with upholstered chesterfields and chairs, which were reflected in mirrored pillars. It was very little used and one evening in the 1960s, a group of six women were the only occupants, as we waited for the early show and intermission to end. The six, known as “**Club**,”¹² had been friends since childhood, and it was a mystery to our families how we continued to find so much to talk and laugh about. Predictably, in the comfort of the Met lounge, we lost track of the time and the nine o’clock show was well underway when an usher was sent down to ask the ladies to please come upstairs to the movie or go home.

Margaret’s Mitchell’s **novel**¹³ *Gone with the Wind* had been widely circulated among the teenagers at Regina Beach that summer of 1939 – mostly for the racy bits. That fall, the film version opened in Regina at the *Capitol Theatre* on a glorious September afternoon. High school classes in Regina were missing more than a few students as we filled the pavement on Scarth Street outside the *Cap*, reminiscing about the summer and wildly anticipating seeing Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh bring Rhett Butler and Scarlett O’Hara to life on the screen. They did not disappoint – but even as we watched Scarlett’s world of wealth and privilege being destroyed by the American Civil War, our own youthful world of long and carefree summers was coming to an end with the outbreak of the Second World War.

4 Capitol Theatre — built in 1921 at the corner of Scarth Street and 12th Avenue, capacity 1500. It was divided into two auditoriums in 1975 and if the movie in the adjoining theatre was a loud one, you could hear it through the walls. In the film *The Ballad of Don Quinn* shot in the fall of 1990, Don Quinn and Ziggy Panzer are walking to Don’s job at a parking lot on Rose Street. They pass the boarded up train station (now Casino Regina) and walk down the alley behind the then closed *Cap* theatre. By the time the film was released in 1992, the *Capitol* had been demolished.

5 *North West Mounted Police*: Directed by Cecil B. DeMille. Starring Garry Cooper, Madelaine Carrol, Paulette Goddard, Robert Preston and Lynne Overman. Shot in California, the film tells the fictional story of a Texas Ranger who finds himself in Canada during the North-West Resistance. The film received five Oscar nominations in the craft categories and Anne Bauchens won the Oscar for best film editing. It is not available on video or DVD.

6 Madelaine Carrol, Robert Preston, Lynne Overman and associate producer William Fine traveled by train from Los Angeles for the premiere and were greeted by 5,000 fans on their morning arrival at Regina’s train station. They spent three days in Regina and pushed WW II⁹ off the front pages of the *Leader-Post*. The world premiere was hosted by four theatres, *The Capitol*, *The Grand*, *The Metropolitan* and *The Rex* and the stars made appearances at all the theatres on opening night, Monday, October 21, 1940. The Premiere Ball was held at the armories on Elphinstone.

7 On October 21st, an estimated 35,000¹⁰ turned out to view a parade featuring the stars that wound through the downtown and past the *Capitol Theatre* whose façade was done up like a western fort. In the parade were Jocko Robinson of the NWMP who cut the fetters off Louis Riel before he was hanged and the first class of 300 airmen from Regina’s No. 2 Initial Training School on College Avenue, now the home of the Canada/Saskatchewan Production Studios. Allie’s future husband, Fred Wihak, would be a recruit at No. 2 ITS before heading overseas with the RCAF.

8 Robert Preston played Ronnie Logan in *North West Mounted Police* and would go on to greater fame as Harold Hill in *The Music Man*. Allie would go on to own several camel hair coats.

9 Madelaine Carroll was mourning her sister, killed that autumn in a German bombing attack on London. She would put her acting career on hold to work as a nurse in field hospitals in Italy and France. France awarded her the *Legion d’Honneur* for her wartime service.

10 The Dominion Bureau of Statistics listed Regina’s 1941 population as 58,245.

11 *The Metropolitan Theatre* at the corner of Broad and 11th opened in 1918 as the *Allen*. It closed for a week in 1923 and re-opened as *The Metropolitan*. It closed for good on November 29, 1981, and was converted into a parking lot in 1987.

Just south of the *Met* was the tiny popcorn stand owned and run by John Alecx and his sons, Harry and Tom. Established in 1938 and in business for over 40 years, the Broadway Popcorn Stand was a popular stop for movie patrons heading to the nearby *Met*, *Roxy*, and *Broadway*. The windows of the small booth would be fogged, one of the Alecxes barely visible behind the cascading pile of popcorn next to the chipped enamel kettle full of melted butter. As you walked away with your popcorn, steaming in the winter air, the butter would turn the edges of the brown paper bag translucent.

12 *Club*: Eileen Brewer, Agnes Campbell, Rita Keith, Kay King, May McFee and Allie met when attending Sacred Heart School on Elphinstone during the 1930s. In 2005, four of the surviving members are still having “Club.”

13 The last movie I¹⁴ saw at the *Capitol* was based on a best selling novel, Tom Wolfe’s *Bonfire of The Vanities*. Brian De Palma’s much hyped film version starring Tom Hanks and Melanie Griffith opened at the *Cap* on Friday, December 21, 1990, in the midst of a week-long cold snap. The high that day was minus 29, and it was much colder that night. I decided to go to the film at the last moment, and because there wasn’t time to wait for a bus, my friends and I ran from the Crescents through the empty streets. We arrived minutes before the film started to find an almost empty theatre. The theatre was probably empty because of the cold, but it could have been an omen as well. Unlike *Gone with the Wind*, *Bonfire of the Vanities* was a critical flop and did miserable business in cities much warmer than Regina.

14 Mark Frederick McDonnell Wihak, born March 26, 1962, at the Grey Nun’s Hospital, the sixth of seven children born to Allie and Fred Wihak.