

= Davis Theater =

The Davis Theater , originally known as the Pershing Theater , is a first run movie theater located in the Lincoln Square neighborhood of Chicago . Built in 1918 , the theater has operated in different capacities in its history , showing silent films , German @-@ language films , and various forms of stage performance . In 1999 , the Davis was planned to be demolished to build residential condos , but the plans were cancelled in part due to a negative response from the community . It is one of the few operating neighborhood movie theaters in Chicago . Its building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2016 .

= = History = =

The Pershing Theater was built in 1918 and was named after First World War General of the Armies , John J. Pershing . It is the only remaining theater of five built in Lincoln Square , and one of the few neighborhood theaters still operating in Chicago . The building was designed by architect Walter W. Ahlschlager , who was also responsible for the design of other famous buildings such as the Uptown Broadway Building in Chicago and the Roxy Theater in New York City . The Pershing opened showing silent films , its first being *The Forbidden City* and later *Pals First* . In the 1930s , the Pershing was converted to show talkies at a cost of approximately \$ 10 @,@ 000 and was renamed to the Davis Theater .

The Pershing had some involvement in *The Case of the Ragged Stranger* , an infamous Chicago murder case of the early 1920s . Carl Wanderer and Ruth Johnson , husband and wife , left the theater shortly before Johnson was murdered . Although the murder was initially pinned on a stranger dressed in ragged clothing , an investigation revealed new evidence that suggested that Wanderer was , in fact , guilty of the murder . Wanderer was ultimately convicted and executed .

Starting in the 1952 , the theater attempted to appeal to the cultural influences in the neighborhood by showing German @-@ language films in addition to American films . The theater eventually transformed to a German film house , even acting as host for the Chicago International Film Festival in 1972 where they opened with *Signs of Life* . The Davis continued to show German films through the end of the decade . The theater then transitioned to showing a variety of entertainment including puppet shows , second run films , and revivals through the 1970s . In 1979 , a plan to revitalize the theater by modernizing it and concentrating on movie revivals was supported by film critic and Chicago resident Gene Siskel , but it was unsuccessful within months .

In June 1980 , the Davis hosted the Chicago International Film Festival 's Dance Film Festival , which featured a week @-@ long showcase of dance @-@ themed films such as *Divine Madness* and *Non @-@ Stop Astaire* , the latter of which was a collection of film dance routines featuring Fred Astaire with other notable dancers such as Judy Garland and Ginger Rogers .

= = Planned demolition = =

In October 1999 , the Davis was put up for sale at an asking price of \$ 1.6M with the description , " This ornate theater is waiting to be developed into a shopping mall " . The realtor , Edward Vanek , showed the property to several interested developers who considered turning the complex into condominiums , a mall , or even a theater with food and liquor services . The Davis was eventually sold to developer Jim Jaeger later that year , who was rumored to be planning its demolition and replacement with residential housing .

Soon after , a " Save the Davis " campaign was organized to prevent the theater 's demolition , and included a community meeting at the Conrad Sulzer Regional Library , where over 500 people voiced opposition to the demolition of the theater . Participants in the meeting argued that demolishing the building would be a historical loss and expressed frustration that useful small businesses had been lost to the community in order to build more residential units . The campaign was supported by alderman Eugene Schuster , who refused to rezone the property to accommodate the redevelopment plans .

The property was bid on in December 1999 , and acquired by a non @-@ profit , Davis Theater Preservation Corporation , headed by community resident Mary Edsey . The property was sold to Special Real Estate Services in 2000 , and thereafter the theater began to show first run films once again .

= = Present operations = =

The Davis Theater is currently operated as a first run theater , containing four screens . It also occasionally shows second runs of older films . It is owned by the Value Theater Corporation , which specializes in maintaining smaller movie theaters in the United States . It was renovated to replace its film projectors with digital film . The Davis participated in the Chicago International Children 's Film Festival in 2008 .