

## THE CIVIC AUDITORIUM

The location of the Civic Auditorium had been the site of several Hanford schools over the years. In 1891, the last of these, known as Central Grammar School was constructed at a cost of \$20,000. When this school was moved, the site was sold to the city in 1924 for \$80,000. This money was used to finance the construction of the original Woodrow Wilson School, located on Park Street.

In the meantime, the local board of trade had the conception of a building, a civic center building. As a result, in 1923, a bond for \$190,000 was passed to build the civic auditorium.

The building is a one story Classical Revival style building with a high central hall. The front porch, with eight plain ionic topped columns is topped with a stepped parapet containing a large clock. The building presents a monumental appearance facing a park area across from which sits the Kings County jail and courthouse buildings. The interior of the auditorium has a hardwood maple floor for dancing, a large stage, and a sloped floor balcony.

The building has been the center of cultural, social and government activities for the community ever since. It currently houses the city offices in the east wing and until 1977, the Hanford Police Department was located in its basement level.

In 1928, John Phillip Souza and his marching band appeared on stage as a part of a tour commemorating Souza's 50th year as a conductor.

A little more than a month after the lend-lease agreement to provide Great Britain with military aid, the nation's first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, spoke here. It was on April 29, 1941, during her tour to help prepare the country for our entry into the war in Europe.

Other notables have included Art Linkletter who was invited by a friend, Stan Beaubaire, co-publisher of the Hanford newspapers, to give his first preview of his "People Are Funny" Show. Art Linkletter also appeared on our auditorium stage in 1941. When the local radio station was dedicated in 1948, Art Linkletter was invited once again. Local residents were entertained by amusing interviews patterned after the format of his, by then popular radio show.

During the "Big Band" era, and especially during WWII, dances were held here every Saturday night with an appearance by the Dorseys, Artie Shaw, Stan Kenton, Benny Goodman, Harry James and others about every three months. This was probably made

possible in those days by the proximity of an Army Air Corps Base in nearby Lemoore.

The old clock that sits atop the building did not work for at least 35 years. A local citizen, Bob Marcellus, and a Visalia clock collector, Frank Kiler, restored it to working order.

Many years ago, when the old school was removed, members of the community pushed to save the old bell which had been in the school tower. The bell was kept in storage for many years and was recently placed up in the roof area. It remained inoperable, due to the fact that it was on too deteriorated a base. Hanford High School recently completed an agreement with the city to purchase what was referred to as "the original school bell for \$1.00. (The school which was on this site, remember was Central Grammar School.) School officials plan to build a tower near Neighbor Bowl (the high school athletic field) for the bell and ring it whenever a student group or team wins an event.