

A Kytherian vision



The Roxy Theatre with unfinished facade, April 1936. Between 1915 and 1963, Greeks operated more than 120 cinemas in some 57 country towns across the length and breadth of New South Wales.

Having left a country decimated by war and social upheaval, Peter Feros, George Psaltis and Emanuel Aroney arrived in Bingara in the 1920s.

There the three entrepreneurs formed a partnership - Peters & Co - a generic name popular in the district and previously used by other Greek businessmen.

Soon after they bought the Greek-owned 'Oyster Saloon and Refreshment Room' in the town as their first enterprise. Despite trading through the Depression years they prospered, enabling them to invest in a second cafe - The Golden Bell at Barraba in 1930.

Despite the competition - the Bingara Regent Theatre - by late 1934 they had begun work on the Roxy - an entertainment complex without equal in the region and comprising a 750-seat cinema, a 140-seat cafe, three shops and a guesthouse.

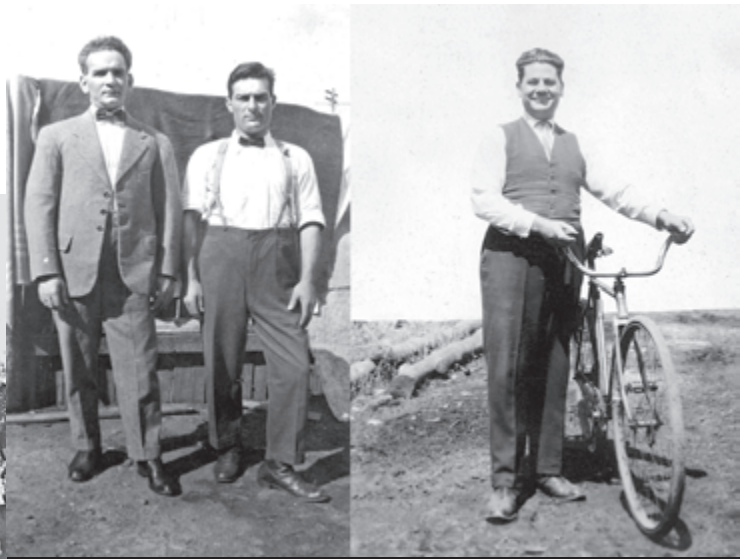
To great excitement the Roxy Theatre opened in March 1936. But the Kytherians had pushed the boat out too far. Within six months the turf war with the Regent - who pointedly advertised its cinema as "100 per cent Australian" - had been lost.

Excessive outlays and costly delays had overwhelmed the Roxy's balance sheet and Peters & Co signed for bankruptcy. The Kytherians' dream had been achieved - but at too high a cost.

Without its founders at the helm, the Roxy continued to operate as a cinema, delighting thousands, until its closure in 1958. For the next 40 years it lay virtually dormant. Meanwhile its cafe continued under a series of Greek owners until the mid-1960s, before becoming a Chinese restaurant.

As the lights came down on the 20th century, the Roxy rose phoenix-like again. Bingara Council purchased the Roxy complex in 1999 and with the assistance of state and federal funding, set out to restore the building to its former glory.

The Roxy Theatre reopened its doors in 2004 and the



Peter Feros (L) and George Psaltis. PHOTO: PETER FEROS COLLECTION

Emanuel Aroney. PHOTO: PETER FEROS COLLECTION

restored Roxy Cafe in 2011. Owned by Gwydir Shire Council, today the Roxy operates as a multipurpose cinema, performing arts venue and function centre. The last piece of the jigsaw - the Roxy Museum opens in April 2014.

Epilogue

After losing virtually everything they had strived to create, Peter Feros, George Psaltis and Emanuel Aroney went their different ways.

Peter Feros moved to Victoria and bought a cafe at Murtoa where his wife and children joined him after the war. He retired to Junee in the Riverina region of NSW where he died in 1954.

Emanuel Aroney stayed in Bingara for a time. For 20 years he managed cafes in the town before retiring to Sydney. Eventually he returned to Greece and passed away in Athens in 1969.

After a stint in the NSW capital, George Psaltis returned to Bingara to manage the Roxy Cafe for a time, before returning to Sydney to establish a cafe in Kings Cross. In the 1950s he moved to Adelaide where he died penniless some 20 years later.

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The beautifully restored cinema, back to its glory.