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Catlow's willingness to gamble gave him edge

Wright Catlow knew how to work hard, but what gave him an edge was his willingness to take a chance.

"He always said to me if you want to make money you have to take a gamble," said his niece Marian Bauer of Lake Zurich.

Catlow died Sept. 14 in Sarasota, Fla. and is survived by a family that includes four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. His legacy to his hometown of Barrington is the Catlow Theatre, an architectural masterpiece that was included in the Historic Sites Advisory Council of Illinois' 1977 survey of buildings for possible inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Catlows were one of Barrington's earlier families. Wright's grandfather came to Barrington directly from England because he had married Elizabeth Kitson, whose family had already settled here, Bauer said. They first settled in a log cabin and later moved to Countyline and Ela Roads where they built a house that still stands. Wright was raised on a farm. His father moved his family first to a farm on Sutton Road and later to a house across from the present Catlow Theatre when Wright's sisters were old enough to go to high school, Bauer said.

In the village Wright grew up with Earl Schwemm, who lived next door in a red brick house that was later torn down to make way for the gas station. "He was always a hard-working fellow," Schwemm said.

Wright was a large man and competed as a shot-putter on Barrington High School's track team the year it won the conference championship, Schwemm said.

Wright's father built the first theater in Barrington, on Station Street across from the Barrington Historical Museum. Upstairs in the old theater were meeting rooms and in the basement were public showers where people could get a towel and shower for 25 cents, Bauer said. The old theater, which has been torn down, was a movie house, but also the site for dances and plays.

"Uncle Wright was in many plays," Bauer said.

Schwemm was the assistant projectionist at the old theater, but took over the job completely during World War II. His wife, Eunice Butler, played the piano music which accompanied the silent movies of that time, he said.

Wright drove a truck for his brother John's sand, gravel and coal business also helped his father deliver ice, Bauer said. Prompted by his father, Wright took his gamble and borrowed thousands of dollars to build a bigger and better theatre for Barrington. (See the accompanying article.) It was a proud moment later in his life when he was informed the theater was being considered as an historic site, Bauer said.

"He worked hard to get where he did. That was the thing. The Catlow family was a hard-working group," Bauer said.

(An obituary appears elsewhere in this issue.)