



## THE ROOF GARDEN

**T**he Roof Garden Ballroom opened for operation on June 23, 1923, in Arnolds Park, Iowa, under the ownership of Dr. A.L. Peck. It quickly established itself as the place to dance, growing in popularity with the rest of the Iowa Great Lakes region, which was becoming known as a midwest vacation mecca. For the next six decades, The Roof Garden Ballroom would play host to a variety of musical talents and cement itself in collective local nostalgia.

During the 1930s and '40s, the hottest big bands in the United States came through and played at The Roof Garden. Count Basie, Glenn Miller, Louis Armstrong, and The Dorseys all made regular stops to play at the ballroom.

In the late 1950s, ownership of The Roof Garden passed on to Darlowe Oleson, Bernie Storek, and Carl Thacker. Darlowe, at one time, owned five different ballrooms in Iowa. Most musicians recognize him as the first man to take the risk of booking bands that played rock 'n roll music, bringing rock 'n roll to the teens of Iowa.

In 1956, The Roof Garden officially went into the rock 'n roll business, booking their first rock and roll band The Crew Cuts. By 1957, weekly Teen Dances were a regular part of The Roof Garden's schedule. The biggest show The Roof Garden



Darlowe Oleson

# 1997 / BALLROOM

**Roof Garden**  
ARNOLDS PARK, IA.

• **JULY** •

Sat. 1 and Sun. 2 - **TOMMY TOMEK**  
Mon. 3 and Tues. 4 - **TOMMY TOMEK**  
Wed. 5 - **Johnny & The Hurricanes**  
Thur. 6 - **GUY DE LEO (Storz Beer Dance)**  
Sat. 8 - **PAT BOFFMAN**  
Tue. 11 - **Roscoe & Little Green Men**  
Wed. 12 - **JIMMY DORSEY**  
Thurs. 13 - **DEL CLAYTON**  
Sat. 15 - **FREDDIE FREDERICKS**  
Tue. 18 - **HIGHLIGHTS**  
Wed. 19 - **LES ELGART**  
Thur. 20 - **ART JENSEN**  
Sat. 22 - **BILLY REDMAN**  
Tue. 25 - **DALE THOMAS**  
Wed. 26 - **BLUE BARRON**  
Thur. 27 - **DALE THOMAS**  
Sat. 29 - **DALE THOMAS**

**BALLROOM**

For Reservations Call 2-2655 or Write Roof Garden, Arnolds Park

hosted was Gene Vincent & His Blue Caps, which drew close to 1,000 teens to the performance.

Over the years, The Roof Garden's well-placed location in the middle of a tour route from California to the large cities of Minneapolis and Chicago brought many big-name acts to Iowa. Darlowe, knowing an opportunity when he saw one, would reach out to performers scheduled for the big cities to stop and perform at his ballrooms along the way, The Roof Garden included. Those who performed at The Roof Garden include Johnny Cash, The Beach Boys, The Yardbirds, Niel Diamond, Jerry Lee Lewis, The Byrds, Gene Vincent, and many more.

Between the years 1956 to 1973, The Roof Garden remained under the ownership and operation of Darlowe Oleson. Unfortunately, Darlowe was lost in a plane crash at the end of 1973. Mary Oleson, Darlowe's widow, ran the ballroom through 1974 until Don "Shakey" Ahrens took over. Operations left Shakey's control for a short period between 1981 and '82. The ballroom was even a disco for some time, until 1983 when the ballroom operations were passed back to Shakey and his son Rick.

The last show at the original Roof Garden Ballroom was on September 26, 1987, with the Litterer Band from Charles City, Iowa. The Roof Garden Ballroom was finally demolished in 1988, due to the ballrooms increasingly deteriorating state and as part of plans to renovate the, at the time, 99-year-old amusement park.

In the mid-'90s, an open-air building, with the name The Roof Garden, was built next to the Majestic Pavilion. The building served the same purpose as the original Roof Garden, hosting concerts, dances, and events such as weddings. However, it would never measure up to the original two-story building at the lakefront.

In 2017, Historic Arnolds Park Inc. announced a \$12 million plan to renovate the park. This plan included tearing down the open-air building and rebuilding a new Roof Garden that closely resembled the original. Construction was finished in August of 2019, and the first concert to christen the new building was Tommy James & The Shondells on August 2.

