



Moviegoing in Black and White

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Abstract

Through archival research, community crowdsourced histories and synthesis of scholarly articles, we discuss how filmgoing becomes both a commonplace social activity for young adults and an intellectual endeavor for students and cinephiles between 1927 and 1959. Extensive investigation in specific filmgoing sites, including the Standard Theatre, Hollywood Theatre, The Pick, Valley Drive-In, Parkvue Drive-In, the Varsity, and the Carolina reveal rich histories of filmgoing within the Carolina community.

Introduction

From the late 1920s to the late 1950s in Chapel Hill, there was much development as far as moviegoing in the community. Drive-in theaters such as “The Valley Drive-in” opened and of course as it is so memorialized in movies set in the 1950s, this was most popular in the 1950s. Foreign film societies were also being formed at this time which is interesting culturally speaking as well. It cannot be ignored that UNC-Chapel Hill was at this time being progressive as is characteristic and appreciating foreign films for the art that they were. Historic black theatres opened at this time although as interestingly researched by one of the members of our group, the accounts of this black theatre as well as others were erased from history somehow. Though this period of time saw the progressiveness of foreign allowance, shall we call it, there were also drawbacks that remained during this time, shown by the moviegoing of the time. Thankfully, as found in our images, there is a bright light in Chapel Hill even to this day, and his name is Hammy the squirrel.

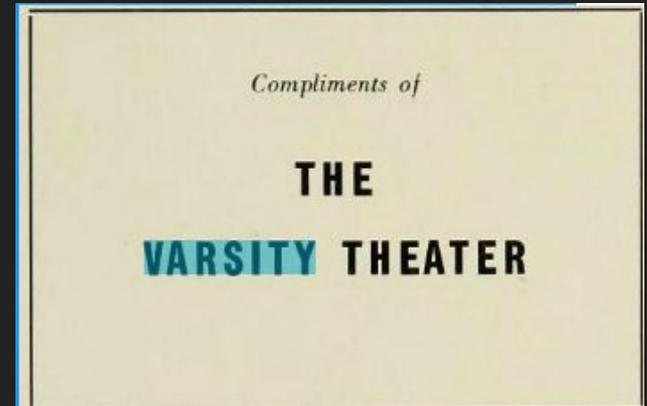
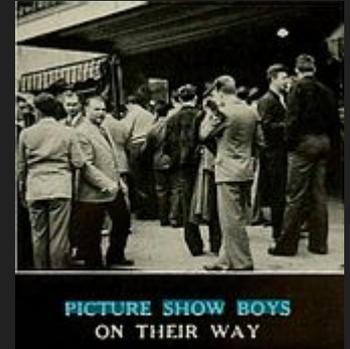
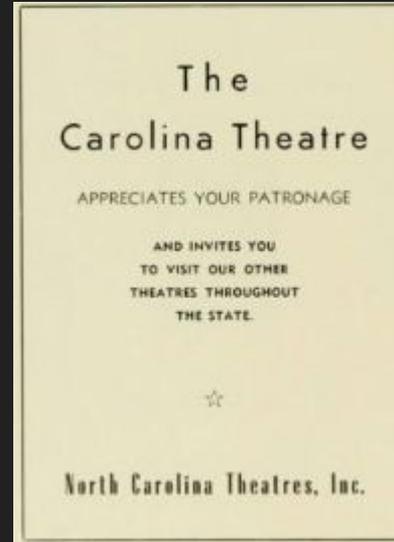
Methodology

→ primary sources

- UNC yearbooks
 - Yackety Yack
- Newspapers
 - The Daily Tar Heel

→ secondary sources

- Community crowdsourced histories
 - OpenOrange
- General synthesis of history
 - scholarly articles



Discussion

- Through our research, we discovered seven theaters and drive-ins that were open in Chapel Hill during the years 1927 to 1959:
 - The Standard Theater (1924-1939)
 - The Hollywood Theater (1939-1955)
 - The Pick (1909 “The Pickwick” rebranded in 1938-1950)
 - The Valley Drive-In (1940s-1960s)
 - The Parkvue Drive-In (1950-1952)
 - The Varsity (1926 as The Carolina-Present as The Varsity)
 - The Carolina (1942-2005).
- The Standard and the Hollywood Theaters were both Black theaters, the only ones we found record of in Chapel Hill. There is very little information about either of them aside from their opening and closing dates and locations. This lack of information is likely due to the predominantly-white media’s attempt to erase signs of black progress in the American south during this time period.
- The local drive-ins died with the fad, and the The Varsity is the only theater left from this period to survive the transition to the modern cinema experience.



Conclusion

Between 1927 and 1955, filmgoing started to be more recognized as a legitimate medium as a social activity and, to a lesser degree, an intellectual engagement. The creation of Radio, TV, and Motion Picture major in 1955 marked the solidification of film as a ubiquitous form of education and entertainment. At the same time, theaters were used as a point of congregation for social groups, not just a spot for seeing a movie. Black theaters like The Hollywood and frequent fraternity meeting spots like the Pick represented a place for groups to socialize (as in the case of The Hollywood) and make trouble (in the case of The Pick) in equal parts.

Hammy

