

As seen in the Vermont Standard – Feb. 11, 2021

Movies in the Town Hall Go Way Back

This is the time of year Pentangle we would be screening Golden Globe nominated films in advance of the mid-February ceremony, followed shortly thereafter by screenings of Oscar-nominated films. Folks may remember the February 2020 sold-out screening of Parasite shortly after it received 6 Oscar nominations. Ah those were the days! May they return soon.

As I review the 2020 Golden Globe nominations it I feel I lost a year. Streaming is just not the same as meeting friends at the theatre, settling into a squeaky seat, eating popcorn and Twizzlers waiting for the lights to go down and the movie to roll.

While I remember attending films in the Town Hall Theatre for much of my youth, I had no idea that there was a movie operation going back to the 20s!

In an oral history prepared by Kathy Wendling for the Woodstock History Center, Paul Bourdon (1913-2001) recalled his mother Constance playing the piano for the silent films shown in the second floor Opera House. He recalled there were “two machines in a box mounted in the Gallery of the Opera House. It required turning a crank with the light coming from two electrodes pressed together creating a charge and very bright light.”

Sparks flew you might say, no wonder the box was covered in asbestos to protect it from fire. The projectionist at the time was Leland Doubleday, father of long time Woodstock resident, Fred Doubleday (1915-2006) a man who wore many hats earning him the History Center’s first Citizen of the Year Award, in 1992. His son Dave follows in the family tradition of giving back to the community and was recognized this past year as the Rotary Club’s Citizen of the Year.

After the 1927 fire the present-day theatre was built, and the movie operation resumed. The projection booth though much smaller than it is today was in what is now a storage area, reached by a ladder! Projectionists names from over the years are carved, taped, and written on the fire door.

In the early 40’s the operation was run by Peter Latchis of Brattleboro, who ran a series of movie theatres across the state and for whom the Latchis Theatre in Brattleboro is so named. There was quite a squabble about how after many years of operating the movie operation Latchis was refused a lease by the town. There are some hints in the reporting of the time that his film choices were not suitable for the Town Hall Theatre.

In January 1943 Owen Moon, who represented

the Woodstock Associates, took over the movie operation. It was Owen Moon’s widow Margaret Moon who donated \$7,633 for new seats and rugs in husband’s memory. The movie operation eventually was taken over by Frank and Elaine Tracy (the operators of my youth) until 1986 when Pentangle purchased the operation and the limited equipment for under \$8,000.

Paul Bourdon also recalled the enormous canisters that had to be hauled up a little shaft to get them into projection booth. I can, of course, remember reels breaking, waiting for a patch and for the movie to resume.

There are lots of constant’s in the movie operation over the years! Theatre too hot in the summer, too cold in the winter. Another tradition I’m proud to continue is hiring teens to run concession, many for whom it is their first job.

I look forward to the day we can open those doors and safely welcome the community to what is the finest movie theatre in the area.

I’m eager to fill in the gaps in the timeline and hear perspectives and recollections from other folks who worked in the building. Feel free to email them to me at director@pentanglearts.org.

On the Virtual Screen:

Pentangle continues our collaboration with Sustainable Woodstock presenting the Climate and Sustainability Film Series. I urge folks to watch the free streaming of 2040, February 21-23, 2021, online streaming 24 hours.

To Register for the event, go to: <https://pentanglearts.org/event/2040/#content>

The 2040 journey began with award-winning director Damon Gameau. Motivated by concerns about the planet his 4-year-old daughter would inherit, Damon embarked on a global journey to meet innovators and changemakers in the areas of economics, technology, civil society, agriculture, education, and sustainability. It is a positive vision of what ‘could be’ instead of the dystopian future we are so often presented.

To learn more about the Sustainable Woodstock Climate Change and Sustainability Film series visit, www.sustainablewoodstock.org. Hosted by Sustainable Woodstock and Pentangle Arts the series is made possible by our underwriters VERMONT COMMUNITY FOUNDATION and MASCOMA BANK and sponsors Ellaway Group | The Unicorn | Mark Knott DDS.