

GENERAL NEWS

Lyric Theater spanned generations, history

By Josh Shepherd

CARLISLE — Electricity and light. How its use has so drastically changed our point of view.

I asked my grandmother one time, this was in the seventies, what thing in all her years of living was the most incredible advance she had known. I thought it might be the moon landing in 1969. But without hesitation, she said electricity.

From ions becoming excited on a filament encased in a vacuum envelope, the simple light bulb, to a single controlled beam capable of reading and translating a complex series of ones and zeros encoded on a six inch disc, digital technology, light and electricity are the basic building blocks of a vast network of advances.

In the year of 1914, Electricity was a brain new thing, an extraordinary invention. Night was not night anymore. Carlisle was suddenly not so dark and Saturday night would never be the same again.

But why is light and electricity so important to Carlisle in the year 1914? Answer: The Lyric Theater. Cinema. The world of moving pictures.

Before the Lyric Theater, however, Carlisle was introduced to the miracle of moving pictures back into its other showplace, The Mount Hall, in as early as 1897.

The Magnascope, Thomas Edison's latest and most intriguing invention drew crowds into the hall to watch a light image, a simple photograph, move in sequence to another, producing the illusion of movement, of life in two dimensions.

But that miracle of modern technology, in 1897, just a curiosity. A trick of the light for

onlookers to gaze in wonder at the creative tinkering of a very famous and prolific inventor.

In Carlisle, it took G.A. Duncan and, later, Walter Wyrick to turn this curious wanderer into a profitable business and source for diversion that lasted nearly six decades.

It came to Carlisle first as a silent, grainy, square screen. The projector, Frank Sims, cranked the film by hand. The reels were short, often comedies, and introduced people to such names as Charlie Chaplin, Fatty Arbuckle, and Buster Keaton. A live piano player provided the film's soundtrack.

Business boomed. "The sight of people who lined up around the block in front of the Deposit Bank was something I saw many, many times over," Walter Wyrick, the Lyric Theater's long time operator, said.

Working nights practically every night seven days a week comprised Wyrick's life. People in line, waiting to see the latest Hollywood release. Wyrick saw the history of modern cinema unfold and witness from black and white to technicolor, from square screens to panoramic Cinemascope. He installed the equipment himself.

Years upon years, gently tugging the hair of the kids who talked just a little too loudly, checking the balcony for teens more interested in "jugs" than movies, Wyrick worked the Carlisle nightlife, putting on the shows for generations upon generations in search of an escape.

The theater was big business for a good number of years.

Predictably, the biggest grossing movie ever to spool through the Lyric's wide an-

gle lens was the epic southern drama *Gone With The Wind*. Although it took the film nearly two years to arrive in Carlisle, it was released in late 1939 and shown at the Lyric in the spring of 1941, it still commanded heavy business, Wyrick said.

It cost a little more than regular movie fare, he said. The company demanded he charge 75 cents for children and a whole dollar and a quarter for adults.

It was a high price, but its profits, Wyrick said, were never as great, proportionally, with the exception of, possibly, Cecil B. DeMille's grandiose epic, *The Ten Commandments*.

"The sleeper hit of the time, I recall, was a movie expected not to do very well. It was called *Jailhouse Rock*, Elvis Presley's first movie, I think," Wyrick said.

Business was so good, Wyrick said, that he was able to pay cash for a 1955 Buick, the only time he was ever able to do it.

His highest grossing year was 1957, just before television boomed and slowly pervaded the culture, reeling people back to their homes and away from the silver screen.

During the course of the 1960's, the movie business, especially the theaters, began a slow steady decline. Profits dwindled, becoming scarcer until, Wyrick said, by 1971 he thought the movie business would die. He sold the theater to Luther Hollar, he said, and moved on.

It was not until much later that the cinema rebound from its slump, but by then, Wyrick's interest in movies waned.

The time between World War II and the beginning of television, that was the time of the movies. A good western

would fill the theater several times over. I could never have started again after I left. Besides they don't make movies the same way anymore," Wyrick said.

"I was never home at night which was something of a strain. But if I could go back, just to experience the fun of working that theater one more time, I wouldn't hesitate. It was great fun," Wyrick said.

The Lyric stands empty now, the ticket window collects only dust. But it is a memory only the very young among Carlisle do not remember a time, sitting in the darkened hall, watching electricity and light perform.



The Carlisle Mercury/John Shepherd Photo
Jane and Walter Wyrick took a few minutes of their day to reminisce about the last decades of the Carlisle Lyric Theater. Walter put in several late night hours at the theater, but the knowledge, history, and fun of running and operating a movie theater was something neither one would trade. From the square screen to the development of Cinemascope, Wyrick witnessed the development of an influential



The Carlisle Mercury/Pam Downs Photo
Members of the Kentucky National Guard followed behind the re-enacted raising of the flag on two, Jim Boatman, the American Legion's Blackberry Festival and Tourism Inc.'s Bicentennial Events parade Thursday night.



The Carlisle Mercury/John Shepherd Photo
Gone With The Wind appeared many times at the Lyric Theater and was one of the first films Wyrick brought into the theater when he took over running it in 1941. It stands today as the biggest grossing film in Lyric Theater history.

200 Years of Kentucky GARRETT'S FURNITURE/CARLISLE MERCURY Grand Prize History Challenge

The Final Round

1. In what year did *Gone With The Wind* first play at the Lyric Theater?
2. Name the first Blackberry Queen?
3. What Nicholas County author wrote the novel, *The Bean Trees*?
4. What made an emergency landing on the Boone Clark farm in 1963?
5. In what year did Carlisle become a "Certified City"?

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY
PHONE

Grand Prize — Queen Size Spring Air Mattress and Box Springs. Retail Value \$500
Rules

- No Purchase Necessary
- Deadline for first round July 1, second round July 8, and third round July 15. Each week's winners with the most answers right will be placed in a final drawing for the grand prize on July 15.
- Send your answers to The Carlisle Mercury, P.O. Box 272, Carlisle, KY 40311 or bring the answers to the office at 232 N. Locust.
- No employee or immediate family member eligible.