



HARTFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

• HARTFORD, VERMONT 05047 •

HARTFORD • QUECHEE • WEST HARTFORD
WHITE RIVER JUNCTION • WILDER

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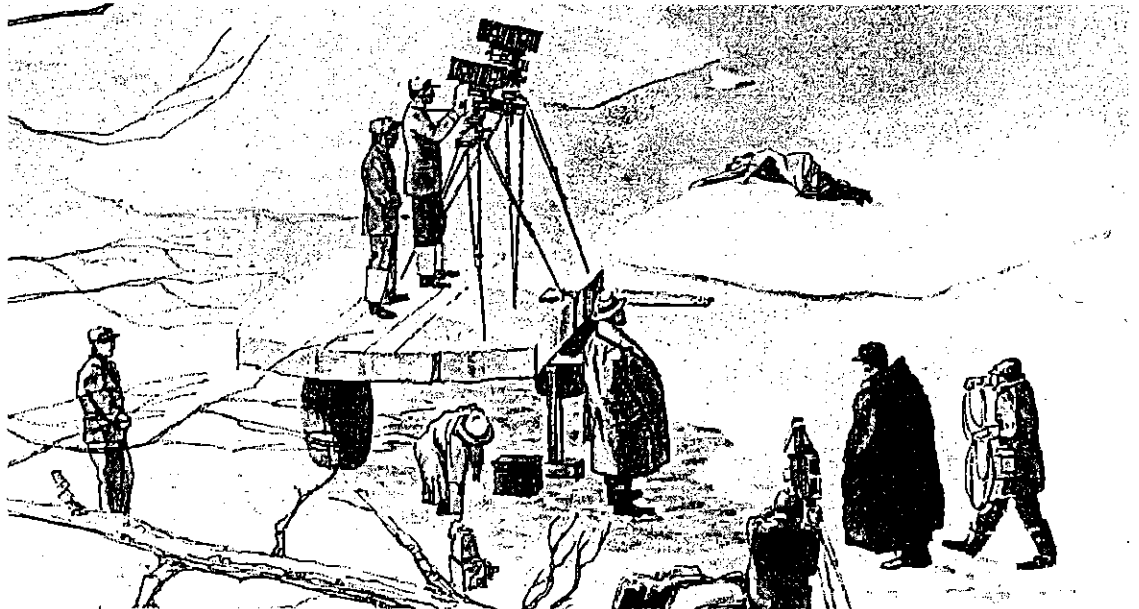
March Meeting . . .

Our March meeting will feature a showing of the film *Way Down East*. Part of the filming for *Way Down East* was done in Hartford in March and April of 1920. The film is about two hours in length and will begin at 7:00 pm sharp, so come early to get a seat. Since the presentation is of the original film, it is "silent", but music has been set to the film as it would have been when originally presented.

The Meeting will be

Wednesday, March 22, 7:00 PM
at the Hartford High School Auditorium
White River Junction, Vermont

*Please take note of the Date and Place
of our March meeting!*



From The President:

Our March 22nd meeting will be held at 7:00pm in the auditorium at Hartford High School in order to take advantage of the large screen and comfortable seating. For those of us who have never seen a silent movie, this is a great opportunity! Since *Way Down East* was filmed in White River Junction in 1920, there are townspeople who remember the event and some may have even participated in the effort. Those people could enrich our meeting by sharing their recollections or family stories after the film. Please plan to attend and bring guests.

I would like to thank Jon Appleton and the Dartmouth Film Society for making the film available to us, David Lutz for his assistance in making the arrangements with Dartmouth, Tom Ostler for handling the logistics of the meeting, and our Superintendent of Schools Carl Mock for the use of the High School auditorium.

Our annual business meeting will be held on May 10th at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ. Following a potluck supper, we will conduct our annual business meeting which will include election of officers. Anyone who is interested in running for an office may contact one of the present officers or a member of the board of directors. The evening's program, to be presented by Jim Kenison and John Gates, will take a look at the many neighborhood schools which existed throughout the Town of Hartford.

Mary Nadeau



Notice:

The Hartford School History Project is currently researching the history of Hartford's schools and school system. It is the goal of the H.S.H.P. to publish a history of Hartford's school system.

Information is sought from anybody having documents, photographs, or memories dealing with: Village and Rural Schools, Students, Teachers, School Superintendents, School Transportation Providers, Subjects Taught, Textbooks used, School Buildings and Property, and Parent-Teacher Associations.

If you have suggestions or anything to share with the project please contact Jim Kenison at 296-0744.

Cover: Filming of ice scene for *Way Down East* on the White River, White River Jct., Vermont. Illustration by Robert Kirwan from period photograph.

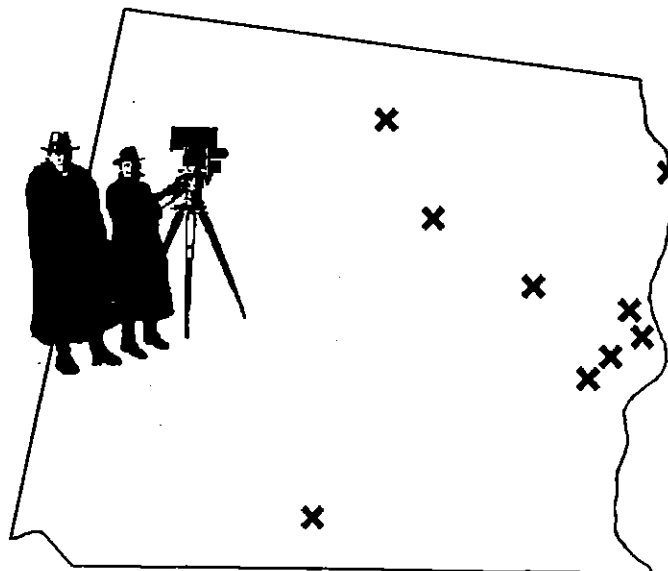
The Filming of "Way Down East" in Hartford, Vermont

by
Cameron Clifford

In March of 1920 D.W. Griffith's movie company came to Hartford, Vermont to do filming for the movie *Way Down East*.⁽¹⁾ Excitedly, area residents expected the resulting film to include local scenery easily recognizable to themselves and appealing to audiences in general. Their enthusiasm was premature though. While Griffith's coming to Hartford may have entailed filming local scenes, his main purpose for coming was to perfect one scene for the film. Though some familiar scenes found their way into the film, they were hard to identify as specifically "local." Many of the other local shots ended up on the cutting room floor. Thus local residents got their first lesson in movie making; editing and perfecting a story often included subordinating and eliminating much of what was filmed locally.

That locals expected much out of the movie is not surprising. Audiences had been treated to faraway places in the films they had viewed locally since the early 1900s. Many of these films used artificial scenery, but some did not. The films which integrated natural scenery into their story familiarized audiences with the locality shown. Griffith planned to use real exterior scenery; not studio-contrived scenes for *Way Down East*.⁽²⁾

Excitement was rampant. The local newspaper heralded the filming by saying that "in the near future moving pictures of the White and Connecticut river valleys will be shown the country over." Excitement was also shown by the "many spectators" who gathered to witness the filming. On the Saturday after the movie "troupe" arrived in White River Jct., a barn dance was held in the dining room of the Junction House where the cast and crew of the movie were staying. The dance



Map of Hartford, showing sites where filming for Way Down East was done during March and April 1920. One other site unidentifiable.

"prompted the interest of a mass of people" hoping to rub elbows with the people associated with the film. The next week a reception was given to a noted actor and writer from New York by the manager of the Junction House and was attended the "representative men and women of White River Jct." Movie fever had struck everyone.⁽³⁾

Some of the excitement shown was for the fact that filming a movie was interesting to people and also that the cast and crew spent a lot of money for local supplies and services.⁽⁴⁾ But in the background there still was the expectation that the White River Jct. region would appear on film throughout the country. In the first week of April the newspaper kept this expectation alive by maintaining that "Pictures in variety have been taken of scenes in both the White river and Connecticut river valleys..."⁽⁵⁾ Apparently Griffith did not set them straight.

Griffith's crew did take pictures of local scenes. Street scenes were shot in White River Jct., farm scenes were filmed around Quechee and the Jericho district, and other shots around town were also taken, but the main focus was on the ice of the White and Connecticut rivers.⁽⁶⁾ Griffith's dedication to natural scenery for *Way Down East* included a real ice flow. In the climax of the story, the heroine is saved after falling exhausted on the ice of a river just as it is breaking up. It was this scene which Griffith specifically came to Hartford for; most of his efforts were directed toward that goal.

Griffith's concentration on the ice scenes were glibly reported in the local newspaper. The paper reported on March 18th that Griffith inspected the ice on the White River "near the Universalist church" and that a decision was made to do filming there. Workers were dispatched to cut the ice into sizable pieces for the desired scene. The next week a change of location along the river was apparent. The paper related that "plans have been perfected" for doing filming "just below the Hartford Mills dam." Griffith was still at it a week later. The April 1st notice in the paper said that the "studio troupe" was "still in town and active" in making the film.⁽⁷⁾ Griffith's leading man in the movie Richard Barthelmess neatly summed up the work when he was later quoted as saying: "Not once, but twenty times a day, for two weeks, Lillian [the heroine] floated down on a cake of ice, and I made my way to her, stepping from one cake to another, to rescue her."⁽⁸⁾

Once the rescue scenes were secured, the filming around Hartford was essentially done. By the second week of April Griffith's "troupe" was back in New York. Charles Cummings wrote that the community "really felt lonesome" after the troupe was gone. But the anticipation of viewing the finished film led Cummings to speculate there wouldn't be an empty seat in the local theatre when the film came to town.⁽⁹⁾

PARK, - - Monday

D. W. Griffith's

Way Down East

First Time at Popular Prices

Scenes laid in Windsor County
Vermont, and
Grafton County, N. H.

Special Singing with Picture

*Advertisement for Way Down East that appeared in
the October 3, 1924 Granite State Free Press*

laid in Windsor County, Vermont and Grafton County N.H.⁽¹¹⁾ Local audiences enjoyed the film, but surely were disappointed at not seeing extensive scenes of the region as was expected.

In later years when talk ensued about the film, reminiscences revolved around the filming of the ice scene and celebrating the efforts of the actors and actresses.⁽¹²⁾ A local historian who probably spoke with local residents who were present at the filming and original showing of *Way Down East* set down the mood of many: The film "was directed in such a manner that there were no familiar landmarks in the scenes to identify the location of the filming."⁽¹³⁾ Though *Way Down East* was disappointing to those who sought to identify local scenes; D.W. Griffith had Hartford to thank for helping his film become a reality.

In the process of putting together the film, Griffith made use of other locations for scenes; integrating some into the familiar Hartford scenes and supplanting the rest of them. Snowstorm scenes filmed earlier in Mamaroneck, New York were used. Part of the climax in the finished film was actually filmed in Farmington, Connecticut later in the year with painted wooden ice cakes. Much was also filmed at company studios. A barn dance scene originally shot in Hartford was replaced by one filmed in the studio.⁽¹⁰⁾

By the time the film was released very little readily identifiable within Hartford was left. The local newspaper carried the announcement that the film's "Scenes [were]

The Lyric: White River Jct.'s Theatre

by Cameron Clifford

White River Jct.'s Lyric Theatre provides an example of the fate of many of northern New England's in-town movie theatres built before 1950. Built on North Main St. in 1923, the Lyric was adapted over the years to suit changes in local viewing audiences expectations in film entertainment. With the 1950s however, the Lyric could not adapt to subsequent changes and went into a steady decline culminating in its closure by 1970.

The Lyric was not the first theatre in White River Jct. As early theatres made their way across the country in the early 1900s, White River Jct. proved an excellent spot for one with its concentration of population. Dreamland became the villages first theatre before 1910 in the regions first wave of theatre building. White River Jct.'s next theatre, the Crown, superseded Dreamland. Built in the 1910s; the Crown operated until the start-up of the Lyric in 1924.⁽¹⁾ Both the Dreamland and Crown theatres served their purpose in providing entertainment for early viewing audiences. But they were deemed unfit to upgrade for contemporary audiences as technological and esthetic changes swepted the film and theatre industries during the early twentieth century.

Unlike the Dreamland and Crown theatres, the Lyric was able to adapt to changes to suit viewers demands. This was accomplished by listening to viewer comments. An advertisement the Lyrics rival in Lebanon posted at its grand opening asked viewers to let the management know if anything was lacking in the quality of the film presented.⁽²⁾ Surely, comments on the theatre's atmosphere were sought also. Undoubtedly the Lyric sought the same responses from its own viewers and duly implemented changes deemed necessary.

One of the demands of the viewing public was for a safe and comfortable viewing atmosphere. Early theatres were notoriously unsafe. There was a real danger from fire because of the use of nitrate film by the film industry. Nitrate film was highly flammable. It could self ignite during projection at 300 degrees Fahrenheit and once it got going it was impossible to stop. The film burned much faster than wood and could continue to burn under water. There were several major theatre fires in the early 1900s which brought the issue to the forefront of viewer concerns.⁽³⁾

As a result of viewer concerns about fire safety in theatres, the Lyrics owner instituted a solution popular at the time. Since the film industry relied on nitrate film, the answer was sought in the theatre itself. The Lyric had a fire proof projection booth built so if fire broke out it would be contained in the booth without danger to the viewers.⁽⁴⁾

Another concern of the viewing public was that their viewing experience be comfortable. Apparently there was no problem with keeping the theatre warm during the win-

ter months, but the summer saw the temperature of the theatre rise to uncomfortable levels. Since the technology existed, the Lyric's owner installed an "Arctic Nu Air Cooling System" which it was proclaimed would give "Enjoyable Hours of Cool and Helpful Entertainment."⁽⁶⁾

Along with safety and comfort the Lyric's owner instituted changes dealing with the presentation of films. The first had to do with sound. Up until the late 1920s most films were "silent" Actually, the films were accompanied by music provided by the individual theatres; usually by piano and a singer.⁽⁶⁾ The technology of providing sound with film existed previously, but it wasn't until Western Electric's Vitaphone system made the film *The Jazz Singer* a huge hit that sound was eagerly sought after by the viewing public.⁽⁷⁾



The Lyric Theatre in downtown White River Junction.

Lyric owner Allard Graves as well as his viewers was swept up in the hype following the release of *The Jazz Singer*. As a result, in early June of 1929 it was announced in White River Jct.'s weekly newspaper that "Vitaphone Talking pictures" was "coming soon". Sure enough, by the twentieth of the month "Progress" toward that goal was underway. By the last week of June the installation of the new sound equipment at the Lyric was complete.⁽⁸⁾ Advertisements for the theatre proclaimed that through the "marvel" of the new sound system one could "...hear with thrilled senses..." and that it was "realism beyond the power of words to describe."⁽⁹⁾ Over the next year advertisements for the Lyric touted the theatre as the "House of Talkies." By the end of October, 1930 sound became an assumed expectation for films by the public. Accordingly, reference to the Lyric's sound system and its designation as a "House of Talkies" disappeared from its advertisements.⁽¹⁰⁾

Along with sound as an instituted part of the moviegoing experience, the Lyric used a scheduling formula for presenting films throughout each week which proved successful. This formula included showing two films over four days while the other nights saw a different film each evening. Thus Monday and Tuesday March 10th and 11th, 1930 found

the film *Happy Days* playing with *Peacock Alley* playing Wednesday and Thursday, and different films on the remaining evenings at the Lyric. Nine years later *Artists and Models Abroad* played on Thursday and Friday evenings in the first week of January while the next Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday found *Sweethearts* playing. Indeed, this formula of showing films consecutively persisted so that the 1950s included Thursday-Friday and Monday-Tuesday showings of films.⁽¹¹⁾

Another presentation issue effectively dealt with by the Lyric's management was giving viewers additional opportunity for seeing a film. This had to do with showing films on Sundays. Traditionally, Sundays were days of worship and rest; not days of entertainment. Many theatres thus did not show films on Sundays. By the depths of the Depression in the mid-1930s however many theatres began showing films on Sundays; donating the proceeds of the day to charity. In this way theatres provided entertainment under the auspices of righteousness.

The Lyric was "the last theatre" in Windsor, County to offer Sunday performances. With evident hesitation the management of the Lyric put off providing the Sunday shows. However, by April of 1937 with other theatres having provided Sunday shows "For months" and local audiences demanding them; the Lyric joined the bandwagon.⁽¹²⁾ Initially instituted as a temporary phenomena; Sunday shows became routine. By 1950 the Lyric had seen over twenty-five years of good business and local audiences had seen the Lyric adapt to their viewing demands.

Whereas the years before 1950 had seen the Lyric able to provide what its patrons wanted, the years afterwards proved difficult. Challenges and competition stymied the efforts of the Lyric's management to adapt to changes thereafter so that by 1970 the Lyric closed its doors.

One central change taking place throughout the country which worked against theatres in downtown locations such as the Lyric was the influence of the automobile. People were more mobile. With increased mobility, former villages like White River Jct. lost their importance as central gathering places. Service oriented businesses moved to the outer edge of former central places where access was easy and parking plentiful. This trend ultimately meant trouble for the Lyric.

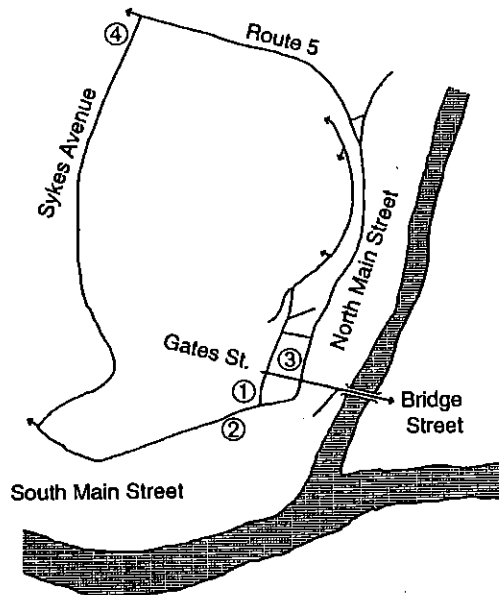
Increased use of the automobile resulted in parking being a problem for patrons who drove to see a movie at the Lyric. White River Jct had a set amount of parking spaces: not enough. Whereas previously, internal problems were handled successfully by the management of the Lyric, challenges outside their immediate sphere of influence such as parking were impossible to solve.

Another problem faced by the Lyric after 1950 was competition. Television proved a fierce competitor to movie theatres everywhere, but more serious competition specifically for the Lyric came from new theatres built in the region. There were other theatres in the

region in previous years, but they were spread out far enough among the regions central places so each was able to attract sufficient viewers. Also, the theatres were basically of the same vintage; one was not perceived as significantly "better" than any of the others.

The first serious competition to the Lyric came ironically from within. Lyric owner Allard Graves opened a new theatre near White River Jct.: a drive-in theatre.⁽¹³⁾ Graves, always astute in perceiving trends knew that the theatre business as he had previously known it was in deep decline. His research revealed that the area of film presentation coming into vogue was at drive-in Theatres. After a slow start following the first drive-in in 1933, the post 1945 years saw drive-in theatres expand dramatically. Nationwide there were 743 in 1948, 1000 in 1949, 5000 in 1956, and an all-time high of 6000 by 1961.⁽¹⁴⁾ Graves opened the White River Drive-In just south of downtown White River Jct. in June, 1952 during the phenomenal growth of drive-in theatres between 1949 and 1956.

The impact of the new White River Drive-In on the Lyric was immediate and profound. Summer attendance at the Lyric dropped dramatically; "everyone was at the drive-in" one local resident recalled.⁽¹⁵⁾ Though clearly on its way out, the Lyric was kept open by Graves throughout the remainder of his active years in the theatre business.



White River Junction Theatre Locations:

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| ① Dreamland | ③ Lyric |
| ② Crown | ④ W.R. Drive-In |

By the mid to late 1960s however, the situation at the Lyric was acute. Winter months saw movies offered sporadically because of the expense of heating the theatre. Even during warmer weather the theatre provided less entertainment than previously. Tuesday nights, notoriously slow business nights for theatres, found the Lyric closed.⁽¹⁶⁾ "Come-ons" were tried with little success. Ads were put in the newspaper announcing two tickets for the price of one to patrons. All that did was give a break to the few regulars who attended; no one else came. A film star was brought in in hopes of attracting attention and bringing people into the theatre. At the presentation of the star, there were so few people attending the star felt so sorry for the theatre's management that he reduced his fee he normally charged for such events and said he'd come back at a later date. The next time he came; even fewer people showed up.⁽¹⁷⁾

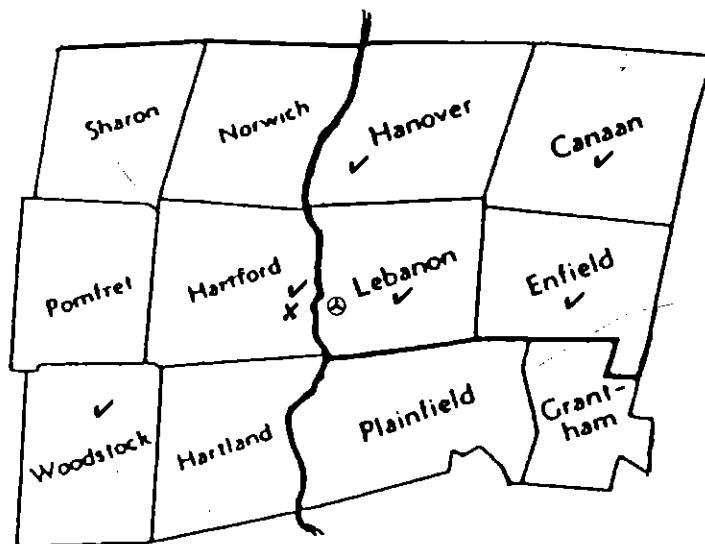
With Allard Graves retirement from the theatre business interest in the Lyric theatre came from a group of local businessmen who had formed themselves into "Lanco Corpo-

ration." Their immediate interest was in keeping the Lyric operating, but their long term interest lay in the real estate. Lanco had purchased other parcels in the Upper Valley for investment purposes and the Lyric was only one piece of their holdings. While waiting for future opportunity for the Lyric property, Lanco did its best to keep the theatre operating, but the end of film entertainment at the Lyric was at hand.⁽¹⁸⁾ In 1969 a new strip mall "plaza" was built in nearby West Lebanon, N.H.; including a brand new "Cinema" movie theater. For a few months the Lyric struggled to stay open, but the Cinema took the remaining patrons the drive-in didn't. The Lyric's last advertisement for a show was in December, 1969.⁽¹⁹⁾

The Lyric theatre subsequently was demolished to make way for a building leased to the New England Telephone Company. For close to thirty years the Lyric Theatre had provided what viewing audiences wanted when attending a film. After 1950, changes in the Lyric's management could not control led to the theatre's decline and caused its eventual closing. White River Jct.'s theatre thus became history.

Theatres in the Towns of the Central Upper Valley Region

Moviegoining in the region included attending films shown on an irregular basis in many towns during the 1920s and 1930s in grange halls, libraries, or town halls under the auspices of youth or civic groups. This map includes only bona fide theatres.



Central Upper Valley Region

✓ Pre 1950 theatres; converted buildings and new theatres (multiple theatres existed in both Hartford's White River Jct. and Lebanon).

X Drive-in theatres; one operating in White River Jct. 1952-1986.

⊕ Post 1950 multiple screen theatres; two located in West Lebanon and Lebanon's strip malls (Hanover's Nugget Theatre was converted from a single screen to a double screen theatre).

In Sympathy:

We would like to extend our sympathy to
the family of Conrad Adams.

Notes to Articles in This Issue:

The Making of "Way Down East" in Hartford, Vermont

- 1 *Landmark*, March 18, 1920
- 2 Iris Barry, *D.W. Griffith American Film Master* (New York: 1940), 29; hereafter cited as Barry.
- 3 *Landmark*, March 18, 1920; March 25, 1920; April 1, 1920.
- 4 *Vermont*, vol. 25, no. 11-12 (White River Junction), 205; hereafter cited as *Vermont*.
- 5 *Landmark*, April 1, 1920.
- 6 *Vermont*, 194-205.
- 7 *Landmark*, April 1, 1920.
- 8 Barry, 29.
- 9 *Vermont*, 205.
- 10 Barry, 29; *Vermont*, 199.
- 11 *Granite State Free Press*, October 3, 1924.
- 12 *Valley News*, April 5, 1979; *Rutland Herald*, April 5, 1979.
- 13 John St. Croix, *Historical Highlights Of The Town Of Hartford Vermont* (Hartford: 1974), 161.

The Lyric: White River Jct.'s Theatre

- 1 James Kenison, "The Theatre Industry in White River Junction", *Hartford Historical Society Newsletter* vol. 7 issue 2, May 1994, 2-3; hereafter cited as *Kenison*.

- 2 *Granite State Free Press*, April 21, 1916.
- 3 Anthony Slide, *The American Film Industry A Historical Dictionary* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 247; hereafter cited as *Slide*.
- 4 *Landmark*, July 4, 1929.
- 5 *Ibid.*, July 18, 1929.
- 6 *Granite State Free Press*, January 26, 1912; March 15, 1912. Music became a given for accompanying film entertainment and so later was not specifically advertised.
- 7 *Slide*, 373.
- 8 *Landmark*, June 6, 1929; June 20, 1929; June 27, 1929.
- 9 *Ibid.*, June 27, 1929.
- 10 *Ibid.*, October 20, 1920.
- 11 *Ibid.*, March 6, 1930; January 5, 1939; June 5, 1952.
- 12 *Ibid.*, April 1, 1937.
- 13 *Kenison*, 4; *Landmark*, May 29, 1952.
- 14 *Slide*, 96.
- 15 Conversation with Peter Flanagan, February 4, 1995; hereafter cited as *Flanagan*.
- 16 *Landmark*, January 8, 1965; March 4, 1965.
- 17 *Flanagan*, February 4, 1995.
- 18 *Ibid.*, February 4, 1995.
- 19 *Valley News*, December 27, 1969.

Recent Gifts

The Society thanks the following individuals for their recent gifts:

Herbert Adams; Early twentieth century receipts from local businesses.

Helen Aher; *Illustrated Eagle Primer* #5 by J.S. Denman.

William Beattie; Photographs of interior of St. Anthony's Church.

Mrs. Fred Bloetshcer; Material Bills, Sketches, and House plans of 12 Norwich Ave house in Wilder from 1895.

Fred Bradley; Lucy Smith 1921 Bankbook from Newport Savings Bank.

Priscilla Gadzinski; Photographs of gravestones in local cemeteries.

James Kenison; 1895 Bible of Mira Davis containing cards and personal papers.

Marine Lawrence; Seraph Spaulding Pease (1847-1928) Memorium booklet.

Ralph Lehman; Dartmouth Film Award Poster signed by Lilliam Gish with photo and citizen award.

Charles McKenna; Color negative of Sketch of 12 Norwich Ave house in Wilder.

Elwin Phillips; Back issues of the *Quechee Times* 1972-1978.

Richardson Family; Poem by Geroge Menut about Wilder Village c1915.

Smith-Thompson; Old 494 and Gates Block Commemorative Medals.

Philip Spillane; Local business employee handbooks, directory of Vermont Silversmiths and Watch and Clock Makers, and various yearbooks and programs from local organizations.

Pat Stark; Photographs of White River Jct. circa 1913.

Evelyn Stevens; Booklet of North Hartland Dam & Reservoir Dedication Ceremonies 8/2/1961.

HARTFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Office: Room 110, Municipal Building, White River Jct., VT 05001

Hours: By Appointment

Mary Nadeau, *President*, 802 295-2123 • Dorothy Jones, *Vice President*, 802 295-2701

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of March, May, September and November at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ, Route 14 in Hartford Village.