



HARTFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

• HARTFORD, VERMONT 05047 •

HARTFORD • QUECHEE • WEST HARTFORD
WHITE RIVER JUNCTION • WILDER

Volume 7, Issue 2 • SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • May 1994

★ Presenting the Finest Screen Entertainment ★

★ **Interstate** ★

★ **LYRIC** ★

★ WHITE RIVER JCT. ★

★ PROGRAM JAN. 26-FEB. 1 ★

★ Thu-Fri ★

★ THIS YEAR'S 10 BEST LIST WILL START WITH Warners' ★

★ **Hasty Heart** ★

★  ★

★ Saturday ★

★ **ALIAS THE CHAMP** ★

★ GORGEOUS GEORGE ★

★ **GOLDEN STALLION** ★

★ ROY ROGERS ★

★ Sunday ★

★ **WITHOUT HONOR** ★

★ LARAINÉ DAY ★

★ DANE CLARK ★

★ FRANCHOT TONE ★

May Meeting . . .

The Hartford Historical Society will meet on Wednesday, May 11th, at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ. Everyone is encouraged to attend the pot luck supper, which will begin at 6 p.m., followed by the annual business meeting.

Elections will be held for the positions of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer and nominations from the floor will be welcomed. A volunteer is needed to serve on the Board.

The Meeting will begin at **6:00 PM** on

Wednesday, May 11, 1994

Potluck supper followed by the annual business meeting at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ
Route 14, Hartford Village

Our program will be a presentation on the history of the theater industry in White River Junction given by member Jim Kenison. Jim will be using an opaque projector to illustrate his talk and he invites members to bring along interesting photos or memories to share with the group.

As usual there will be a display of memorabilia on this theme from the Society's collection.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

History of the Theatre Industry in White River Junction

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Lyric Theatre listing for week of January 26, 1950. See article inside.

The Theatre Industry in White River Junction

by
James Kenison

The theatre industry was welcomed to the Upper Valley area in the early 1900's. By 1930 most major towns in the area were home to at least one movie house.

The Dreamland theatre of Gates Street seems to be the earliest "moving picture" house in White River Junction. Dreamland had a relatively short life, through the early 1900's.

The next theatre in town was located on South Main Street. This theatre, known as the Crown, opened in the early 1900's and ran until early 1924. At this time, one could view on Monday or Tuesday the latest moving picture, starring Buster Keaton or Will Rogers, for just 25 cents. If you opted against the long line and crowded house, you might have seen an action film on Thursday or the latest news followed by an outrageous comedy on Friday. Saturday brought a western and Wednesday brought drama. While the "big hit" of the week cost a quarter a head, the regular features were presented at the regular admission rate of only 15 cents.

The theatre or "Movie-Palace" of 1908 on Gates Street, White River Junction. Dreamland featured the best in moving pictures.

Historical Society Photo



Theatre Industry in White River Junction *(continued)*

In 1923 Crown Theatre owner Allard Graves purchased a lot on North Main Street from Nathaniel Wheeler, owner of the Junction House. On this land Graves erected what was to be the longest serving theatre in White River Junction. The Lyric Theatre opened its doors in early January 1924, just as the Crown was closed for good.

Allard Graves became acquainted with the movie industry as a teenager when he began working as an usher at the Globe Theatre in St. Johnsbury, which was owned by his father. By 1924 Graves already owned several theatres, including the Park Theatre in Lebanon, New Hampshire and other theatres in Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. At the height of his career, his Graves Theatres Corporation owned close to 15 theatres.

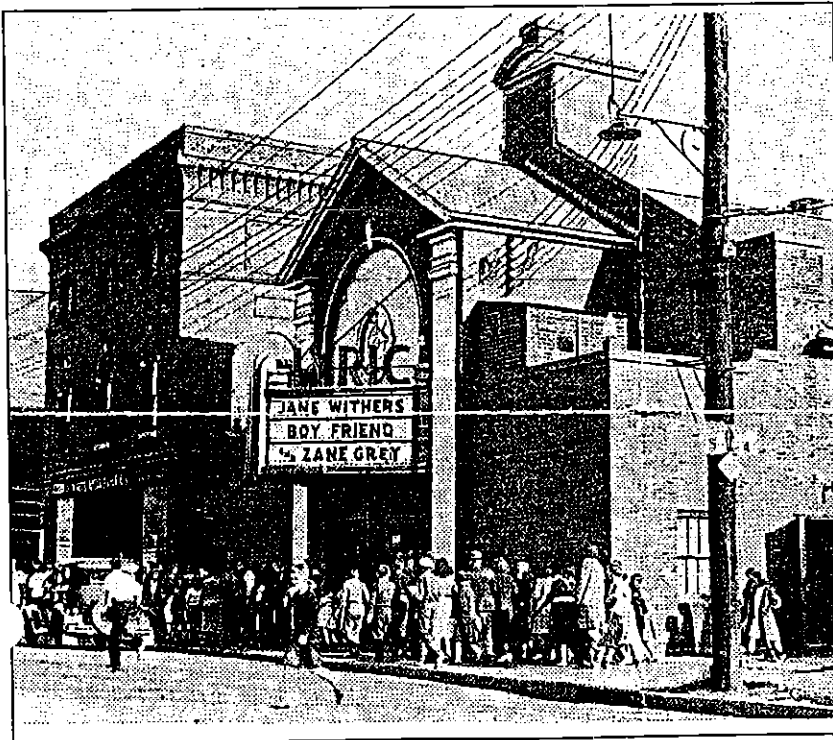
The Lyric Theatre was the "flagship" of Graves' Theatres and Graves felt obligated to keep it one of the finer movie houses in the area.

In 1929 Graves brought sound to White River Junction. He installed new RCA Photophone equipment which enabled him "to bring a new era of entertainment" to the area. Through the years he operated the Lyric, Graves spared no expense to

insure his patrons the very best moviegoing experience possible.

Improvements made during his tenure included new sound systems and the installation of air conditioning. Both of these added to the Lyric's commercial success.

Continued next page . . .



The Lyric theatre, was a popular gathering place in downtown White River Junction.

Historical Society Photo

Theatre Industry in White River Junction (continued)

One major advantage Graves had over smaller or newer theatres was his ability to get the big pictures. Since he was already an established exhibitor, he had no problem getting films from major distributors, such as Paramount and Warner Brothers. Graves' theatre business was thriving until something happened that would affect the motion picture industry nationwide. The introduction of television was felt everywhere.

There was such a decrease in theatre attendance that many did not survive. Theatre owners that did survive needed to work very hard to keep their patrons coming back. Film distributors were looking for ways to attract patrons and increase attendance.

Graves realized the need for something new. In 1952 he, as president of Interstate Theatre Corp., opened the White River Drive-In Theatre on the corner of Route 5 and Sykes Ave.

Drive-ins had become increasingly popular. It was not necessary to dress up for an evening out, patrons could smoke and relax and the whole family could go together. The drive-in theatre was an immediate success.

Graves remained active in the theatre industry until his retirement around 1965. At this time, the Lyric and the White River Drive-In Theatres were sold to a group of local businessmen that formed the Lyric Theatre Corporation.

Continued next page . . .

The Lyric News was a regular publication that gave highlights of coming films. This is the front page of the May 31, 1942 issue.

Historical Society Collection

THE LYRIC NEWS

Issued Weekly by the Interstate Lyric Theatre, White River Jct., Vt.

Vol. 5, No. 40

SUNDAY, MAY 31, 1942

Phone 530

Alfred Hitchcock's 'Saboteur' Hailed As Powerful Revelation

Alfred Hitchcock, long recognized as the master builder of screen suspense, adds another impressive hit to his already extensive list of box office winners with release of *Saboteur*.

Co-starring Priscilla Lane and Robert Cummings, who turn in the finest performances of their separate careers, *Saboteur* will probably go down in Hollywood annals not only as an outstanding picture, but for the vital part it will play in Uncle Sam's defense efforts.



ROBERT CUMMINGS — PRISCILLA LANE

For *Saboteur*, be it known, will perhaps do more to arouse the American public to fifth column perils now existing within this country than anything that has yet been done.

Based on Hitchcock's own original story idea, *Saboteur* provides the famous director with the correct elements for bringing his "touch" into its fullest use. It is a picture that will have audiences gripping their seats from the opening shot to the final "fade."

Both Miss Lane and Cummings, thoroughly established as stars in the light comedy field, assume new and greater importance in the cinematic realm as a result of their work in this offering.

Theatre Industry in White River Junction *(concluded)*


Graves and his wife travelled extensively after his retirement. He died in Pompano Beach, Florida, in August 1967.

The Lyric Theatre Corp. operated the Lyric Theatre for only a few years, closing it by 1970. The building was taken down shortly after.


Thursday, January 29, 1920

CROWN
THEATRE

THURSDAY, Jan. 29th
AL RAY and ELINOR FAIR in
"THE LOST PRINCESS"
A delightful comedy, drama showing how a princess gives up her throne for a man.
Also—The International News

FRIDAY  **Jan. 30th**
H. B. WARNER in "THE PAGON GOD"
Also—A two-reel Comedy

SATURDAY, Jan. 31st
ELSIE FERGUSON in
"THE MARRIAGE PRICE"
Also—The First Episode of "The Fatal Fortune" starring Helen Holmes.

MONDAY  **Feb. 2nd**
ENID BENNETT in
"THE HAUNTED BEDROOM"
Do you believe in ghosts—no—neither does Enid Bennett and this picture will prove to you that there ain't no sech animal.
Also—The Pathe News

TUESDAY, Feb. 3rd
TOM MOORE in "LORD and LADY ALGY"
A drama of sporting life. A swift moving, straight-forward picture, the sort that the whole family loves. A racing romance that will bring cheers to your lips.
Also—The Masked Rider (Final Episode) At last in this episode the masked rider is exposed.

WEDNESDAY, Feb. 4th
VIOLA DANA in "PLEASE GET MARRIED"
Adapted from Oliver Morosco's stage success. The funniest farce since Congress staged "Prohibition." Highly seasoned for the most denuded 2.75 taste.

The White River Drive-In Theatre operated until 1986. At this time, the increasing popularity of VCRs made it difficult to operate a drive-in. It took 30 years, but the drive-in went from a new convenience to an old inconvenience. The pros of the drive-in experience were now outweighed by the cons, including bugs and rain.

People could now avoid these by renting their favorite movies at a fraction of a single admission ticket and viewing the films in the comfort of their own homes.

The closing of the White River Drive-In Theatre marked the end of the 80-year fling Hollywood had with White River Junction.



A Crown Theatre bill from 1920.

Historical Society Collection

From the President:

Pat Stark, our archivist, is still looking for back issues of *The Quechee Times* and the *Hartford Village Voice*.

A volunteer is needed to handle the publicity for our meetings. This would involve writing out about six postcards to area newspapers and radio stations three times a year.

Looking ahead to our fall programs, we are planning a meeting on gravestone carvings and the artwork and symbolism used by the itinerant gravestone carvers and another featuring the history of the Jericho district.

Thank you to Gretchen and Bob Fairweather for offering the Half Penney Inn for our March meeting and for the interesting tour. And thanks to Cameron Clifford for the informative talk on the history of the property and the Hazen family.

Recent Gifts:

The Society thanks the following individuals for their recent gifts:

Richard Steward, Various teaching aids used by Mira Davis who taught for many years at the Hartford Elementary School.

The Calvin Lancey Family, A children's high top shoe, a bottle of witch hazel labelled "F. H. French, Druggist Hartford VT", and several catalogs.

Pat Stark, Aprons, bloomers, shawl, hatbox, eyeglasses, pipe and a sewing and stocking run kit.

Richard Lawrence, Correspondence from Attorney Gilbert Davis, clippings from the Italian newspaper printed in White River Jct., the front page of *The Informer* of February 28, 1931, and "Passenger's Souvenir of the New Streamline Flying Yankee" dated 1935.

Fred Bradley, two Greater Hartford United Church of Christ bulletins, minutes and the treasurer's report from Oct. & Nov. 1987, and Myrtle Lodge #27 IOOF note about closing.

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.