

Remembering when movies cost a nickel

When a fellow walks up to the ticket booth of a theater and finds that seats are now \$3.50, it is difficult to believe that the admission into a motion picture theater at one time was only a nickel.

Yet, if you look back to the early days of what then were known as "the flickers," the very buildings in which these moving pictures were shown were known as "nickelodeons." It seemed the price of admission was reflected in the name of the building.

And before that, when The Stroller was a mere youth, the first movie to be shown to the public came along each year just as regular as the Barnum & Bailey circus.

This movie was "The Great Train Robbery," and if memory serves properly, it looked more like a snow scene than a dramatic robbery along the railroad yards. And like all kids in those days, The Stroller arose with the sun on the morning of the showing and worked around the tent to get a free admission. And he thought that was great.

It seems wondrously strange now, in these modern times, that the original movies were silent. To break up the silence inside the "nickelodeon," there was a piano player who took over between reels of the movie and played for illustrated songs.

Meanwhile, on the screen was flashed the words to songs and the entire audience took part in a sing-along. You can imagine the fun when all these voices got together and few of them were in tune.

In our little town back home we had two of these movie houses and one tried to outdo the other to attract attention. They couldn't both be "nickelodeons," so one was called the Bijou Theater, and it was named in such a way as to attract the class-



sier folks in town.

When the voice was added to the movies and they became known as "talkies," it was the miracle of the time. Folks gathered in large numbers — at a nickel admission — to hear these folks on the screen talking. (Television wasn't even a dream in those days.)

Many of the dramas portrayed on these talking movies do justice to the films being offered today. They were real dramas and often the viewers become so wrapped up in the play they wept in the saddest scenes.

The great step in this sort of entertainment came in the mid-'20s when color was added to the scenes. It was almost unbelievable that you could witness Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor in living color.

The first of these movies was shown in the Fox Theater in downtown Detroit. The Michigan Theater was built in such stylish fashion as to attract folks.

Then came the day of the organ recitals as added attractions to the movies at the price of admission seemed to rise. At the time the Michigan Theater organ was rated tops in the country.

But the once famous place is now a parking garage and the Fox is open only on special occasions. The grand movie houses gave way to television — living color in your own living room.

But, it is difficult, even in memory, to believe that it all started with "nickelodeons" and a five-cent admission.

Words of wisdom from our legislators

We're stealing this from the Lapeer County Press, which in turn took it from the Wall Street Journal, which took it from who knows where. It's a collection of statements made by Michigan legislators. They were culled from the wall of the Capitol press room. To qualify for the list, the statement must have been made in a public forum and heard by at least two reporters. Each statement was voiced by a different elected official.

• "Before I give you the benefit of my remarks, I'd like to know what we're talking about."

• "There comes a time to put principle aside and do what's right."

• "I don't see anything wrong with saving human life. That would be good politics, even for us."

• "This bill goes to the very heart of the moral fiber of human anatomy."

• "It's a step in the right direction, it's the answer, and it's constitutional, which is even better."

• "Some of our friends wanted it in the bill, some of our friends wanted it out, and Jerry and I are going to stick with our friends."



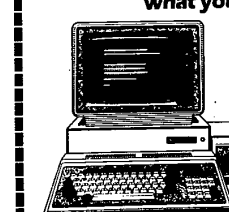
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Despite shortcomings

Freedom of press is not debatable

BEING CORNERED BY people who want to tell me what is wrong with newspapers is nothing new. I find that just as people who eat out often know the best way to run a restaurant, people who read newspapers carefully often claim knowledge of how a newspaper should work.

Often the self-styled experts are those who are in the public eye because they are elected, spend public money, enact legislation which affects the public, or are charged with protecting the public's welfare.

Most often they think that there is too much bad news about their endeavors and not enough good news.

And often they believe there is a tendency on the part of reporters or newspapermen to try to sensationalize events, to distort in order to make more provocative stories, to make facile innuendoes of corruption in situations affected only by stupidity, incompetence or errors of judgment.

Why should the government, the police, or whatever, cooperate with these people? Why not just refuse to cooperate, to provide no information — living color in your own living room.

But, it is difficult, even in memory, to believe that it all started with "nickelodeons" and a five-cent admission.

HAVING WORKED in government and for newspapers, I understand the position of those reporters who think that newspapers have an inalienable right to any and all information pertaining in any way to the expenditure of public funds and the position of those officials who would rather feed reporters a bare bones diet in the hopes that the harried reporter's mind won't become unduly burdened and confused and that

the best and truest version of the facts will appear in the newspaper.

What brings this to mind are recent events — Coleman Young saying that stories dealing with the Magnum Oil Co. are only racially motivated attempts by sensation-mongering newspapers to discredit his administration; a concerted effort by a local police department to cut a reporter off from a source of news that the reporter hitherto had been privy to; a scandal involving a township treasurer accused of coming back to work loaded and verbally abusing several women employees, one of whom was propositioned.

IN ALL THREE instances, public officials involved decided at some point that there should be no free flow of information between the local government and the local press and, by projection, the public. They decided for better or for worse that they would not talk to the press; they would stonewall it anywhere from a day to several weeks to longer.

Granting that newspapers generally and some more than others have faults and deficiencies, such a decision is invariably wrong because it excludes not newspapers but the public.

FREQUENTLY I find myself at philosophical odds with a friend, a government employee, who feels that newspapers and newspaper reporters should have to prove that they are responsible before being entrusted with information which many court decisions and the Freedom of Information Act has deemed to be public.

What right do officials have to determine on their own that they know best what the public should or shouldn't know? What right do they have to decide that a particular reporter or newspaper is not going to handle an issue responsibly and therefore will not be told anything about an issue?

comment

Clearly, they have no inherent, legal, or philosophical right although they often have the capability of refusing to come forward with the facts.

To my friend who tells me that newspapers and reporters first have to prove they are responsible before they can be entrusted with information, I ask, "Who is going to determine when they have proven their responsibility?"

IF WE WERE to leave it to the governments to decide, I am sure that over a period of time each and every government would decide that a particular newspaper or reporter is not responsible enough to have access to what previously was public information and after a time no reporter or newspaper would be considered responsible enough to have unfettered access to information. We would end up with a secret government and, sooner or later, a secret police and system of justice.

And I say this about the best of governments and government leaders.

DESPITE THEIR failings, despite the tendency of many reporters and some newspapers to seek the most provocative, sensational and attention-grabbing stories, newspapers have served this country well, probably better than the framers of the constitution even imagined when they created the amendment which guarantees freedom of the press.

The institution has proven to be time and again an important part of the system of checks and balances which has worked to ensure the freest nation and most open government in the world.

They system has worked because no government branch or agency has the authority to determine when a newspaper is acting responsibly or in the public's best interest. We should work to keep it that way.

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