

THE MATHIESON FAMILY AND THE RESERVOIR CINEMA

The establishment of a cinema in Reservoir had its beginnings in the settling of the Mathieson family in George Street in 1918.

At this time Reservoir had none of the facilities we take for granted today. The streets were unmade, there was no water supply, the nearest doctor was in High Street, Thornbury and the nearest school in Regent.

Because of his concern at the lack of community facilities Robert Mathieson with Jack Murray, Willy Fyfe and "Woody" Irwin (who ran the local wood-yard) built, in their spare time, a church hall on land in Edwardes Street that had been purchased by the Presbyterian Church. It was in this hall that Robert Mathieson first screened pictures with a "magic lantern" slide projector.

Frank Luxton from Thornbury suggested to Robert that they show moving pictures so they arranged for a "bio box" to be built on the church hall to house the projection equipment they purchased.

After some time pressure was put on them to move to another venue so they transferred their operation to the Church of England hall in Byfield Street, and had to build a bio box on that hall for their equipment. They continued to screen pictures there until 1933.

Frank Curzon - Siggers, who was employed as an electrician at the Government Printing Office during the week was employed as the projectionist and Keith Mathieson (one of Robert's sons) as his assistant.

In contrast to the work environments of today, these two men had to climb a ladder attached to the outside of the building to get into the projection box. So much for safety with the highly inflammable celluloid film of that time.

Because of the popularity of the pictures it was not possible to fit everyone into the hall on a Saturday evening so a matinee session was begun on Saturday afternoons. It cost three pence to attend the matinee and one shilling and three pence, or one shilling and six pence, (depending on where you sat) in the evening.

After the evening performance, Robert and his son Keith had to clear the hall and make it ready for Sunday's church services before they had finished for the night. And this after their normal week's work.

Realising that they had outgrown the church hall Robert Mathieson rented an old hay and grain store on the site of what was to become in later years Cinema North. Seats and curtains were purchased from an old Hoyts theatre (in Fitzroy?). Another of Robert's sons, Alex, who was a trained cabinet maker, built a foyer for the theatre, complete with ticket box and sweet bar, in the evenings when he returned home from his day's work. He was assisted by Willy Fyfe in the construction of the screen. Frank Curzon - Siggers provided the expertise for all the electrical wiring and also continued as projectionist.

Projection equipment was purchased second-hand from established theatres who were upgrading their equipment.

So in 1933 this converted hay and grain store, with a seating capacity of 450 was ready to be opened.

On opening night, the queue of eager patrons stretched well down the still unmade High Street. When all the seats were filled Robert threw open the side doors and let people stand and watch the film from the doorways. Admission was one shilling and eleven pence in the back seats and one shilling and six pence in the front.

Molly Mathieson (Robert's daughter) was employed to run the ticket box. With no previous experience in this role she was overwhelmed by the crowd waiting to be admitted. Fortunately for her a Paramount film was to be screened and a representative from Paramount Distributors came to the opening night and he helped Molly attend to the ticket sales, and also to the preparation of triplicate dockets - one copy for the operator of the theatre, one for Paramount as the film distributor, and one for the taxation department.

One can only wonder why Robert Mathieson continued to operate this business with its lack of profitability after all expenses were paid. In fact because of his limited finances to operate the theatre he had to borrow money from the bank against a mortgage on his house to pay for replacement equipment as it wore out.

To advertise the films Robert would make up a bucket of paste and tramp around Reservoir each week to put up posters to let the public know what was being screened the following Saturday.

On Friday evenings, with his daughter Molly, Robert would clean and prepare the theatre for Saturday's shows and put up new posters in the foyer.

Films were sent out by rail to Reservoir station and Frank Curzon - Siggers, the only one who owned a car, would pick them up each Saturday on his way to the theatre.

There were two other employees in these early years, Mr Heinz, who was the door keeper, and Mrs Thelma Spillard, who ushered people to their seats. Each were paid five shillings a week. With Thelma's husband unable to find regular employment through these Depression years the five shillings virtually fed the Spillards and their three children.

Supplies for the sweet bar were delivered to the Mathieson's house during the week by the local distributor for Allans Sweets and the trays for the "lolly boys" would be made up in readiness for Saturday.

Robert Mathieson continued to operate the theatre until the mid-1940's, now with three shows each week, Wednesday and Saturday evenings and a matinee on Saturday. He was getting older and feeling the cold during the winter months, and, although he had not told his family, he had informed the film distributors of his intention to sell out. This became known among the bigger theatre groups and it was Plaza Northcote who was first to make an offer to purchase.

Mr Mink, the owner of Plaza Northcote, took Robert with him to negotiate the purchase of the building and site from the lady who owned it. This necessitated a trip to Healsville to meet with her at her home. Robert received in the vicinity of five hundred and seventy pounds for equipment and "good will". Most of this money went to the bank to clear the on-going mortgage held on his house to finance the purchase of projection equipment.

Mr Harwood, manager of the Plaza Northcote, took over the management and the theatre was named Plaza Reservoir. With new ownership came new operating procedures. While Robert Mathieson was owner/operator the theatre bookings were very casually organised often on a first name basis with the local patrons, the Plaza management established a box plans with numbered tickets and seats. This was a whole new system for Molly Mathieson to learn as she continued on as the ticket seller for the new owners.

In time the theatre was sold to Rossiter and Emsley of the Surrey Hills theatre group. Mr Emsley moved to Reservoir to manage the theatre and he also fulfilled the role of doorkeeper.

The theatre was sold again to Village Toorak, however throughout all these changes there remained one constant element, Molly Mathieson continued to run the ticket office.

Mr Sloban was the driving force for Village and under his leadership the theatre was rebuilt and extended to seat 800 people. Mr Burleigh was appointed to the position of manager by Village Cinemas, and in fact continued in this position when it was later sold to Hoyts.

The investment Village Cinemas made in the renovations of the theatre was recouped many times over with "Full House" often being the happy situation they experienced in those pre-TV days. However this did not last and the situation was reversed in the late 1950's to where it was not unusual to have only five people in the whole theatre. Only an exceptional good film would bring a crowd.

In 1971 when Hoyts purchased the theatre, Molly Mathieson decided that at the age of 65 years she would hand over her role to somebody else, and so the long association of the Mathieson family with the theatre came to an end.

Hoyts renamed the theatre Cinema North and converted it to two small theatres, but like so many other theatres throughout the suburbs an era had passed and could not be recaptured.

Cinema North finally closed its doors in 1991.

Addicted to the Cinema North pictures



9TS ADVANCE SCREENINGS!
Today, Sunday & Tuesday!
From the makers of 'Twins' & 'Kindergarten Cop'
Beethoven
The Difference FOREST HILL, HIGHPOINT, CHADSTONE & NORTHLAND

ACADEMY AWARD WINNERS!
Winner of 5 Academy Awards
BEST ACTOR, BEST ACTRESS.
ER OF 2 ACADEMY AWARDS
OF 2 ACADEMY AWARDS
HOME

019 (24 CENTS PER 20 SECONDS PREMIUM) * No Free List

HIGHPOINT	
1.15	HOOK (PG) Today & Mon: 10.00, 12.50, 3.40, 6.30, 9.25. Sun: 1.00, 3.50, 6.40, 9.30.
(M)	THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (M) Winner of 5 Academy Awards! Today, Sun & Mon: 9.20.
3.20	STOP OR MY MOM WILL SHOOT (PG) Today & Mon: 11.00, 1.00, 3.00, 5.00, 7.00, 9.00. Sun: 1.00, 3.00, 5.00, 7.00, 9.00.
0.	DANCES WITH WOLVES (M) Special Extended version Today & Sun: 2.15, 7.00. Mon: 11.00, 7.00. (sessions include an intermission)
9.20	FINAL ANALYSIS (M) Today & Mon: 10.45, 1.15, 3.50, 6.30, 9.05. Sun: 1.15, 3.50, 6.30, 9.05.
(M)	ANOTHER YOU (M) Today: 12.00. Mon: 4.00.
7.10	BUGSY (M) Winner of 2 Academy Awards! Today, Sat & Mon: 10.25, 1.05, 3.50, 6.35. Sun: 1.05, 3.50, 6.35.
15.	BLACK ROBE (M) Today, Sun & Mon: 2.00, 9.10.
7.00	MEDICINE MAN (PG) Today & Mon: 11.30, 1.45, 4.00, 6.30, 8.50. Sun: 6.30, 8.50.
9.30	DEAD AGAIN (M) Today & Sun: 5.05. Mon: 7.00.
(M)	THE PRINCE OF TIDES (M) Today & Mon: 10.30, 1.10, 3.50, 6.30, 9.15. Sun: 1.10, 3.50, 6.30, 9.15.
6.20	J.F.K. (M) Winner of 2 Academy Awards! Today & Sun: 1.30, 8.30. Mon: 10.45, 8.30.
15.	SPOTSWOOD (PG) Today: 11.10, 6.20. Sun: 6.20. Mon: 2.30, 6.20.
30	CAPE FEAR (M) Today: 10.30, 9.20. Sun: 9.20. Mon: 11.00, 1.40, 4.20, 9.20.
30	FATHER OF THE BRIDE (G) Today & Mon: 11.40, 4.10, 6.50. Sun: 4.10, 6.50.
	SPECIAL ADVANCE SCREENINGS!
	BEETHOVEN (G) Today: 10.30, 10.7.20. Sun: 10.30, 10.7.20.
A (M)	
00.	

CHADSTONE NORTHLAND	
	HOOK (PG) Today & Mon: 10.15, 1.00, 3.45, 6.30, 9.15. Sun: 1.15, 4.00, 6.45, 9.30.
	THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (M) Winner of 5 Academy Awards! Today, Sun & Mon: 9.30.
	STOP OR MY MOM WILL SHOOT (PG) Today & Mon: 10.45, 12.45, 2.45, 4.45, 7.00, 9.00. Sun: 1.25, 3.15, 5.10, 7.00, 9.00.
	FINAL ANALYSIS (M) Today & Mon: 11.15, 1.50, 4.30, 7.05, 9.35. Sun: 1.50, 4.30, 7.05, 9.35.
	BUGSY (M) Winner of 2 Academy Awards! Today & Mon: 10.30, 1.15, 4.00, 6.45. (No 1.15pm session Sat at Chadstone) Sun: 1.15, 4.00, 6.45.
	BLACK ROBE (M) Today & Mon: 11.10, 4.15, 9.30 Sun: 4.15, 9.30.
	MEDICINE MAN (PG) Today & Mon: 11.15, 2.00, 4.30, 6.50, 9.10. Sun: 2.00, 4.30, 6.50, 9.10.
	THE PRINCE OF TIDES (M) Today & Mon: 10.30, 1.15, 4.00, 9.30. Sun: 1.15, 4.00, 9.30.
	J.F.K. (M) Winner of 2 Academy Awards! Today: 2.30, 8.30. Sun: 8.30. Mon: 10.45, 2.30, 8.30.
	FATHER OF THE BRIDE (G) Today, Sun & Mon: 6.45.
	CAPE FEAR (M) Today, Sun & Mon: 1.25, 6.40.
	SPECIAL ADVANCE SCREENINGS!
	BEETHOVEN (G) Today: 10.30, 12.30, 6.30. Sun: 1.30, 3.45, 6.30.
	Chadstone Shopping Centre Administration. Ph: 563 1988
	Northland Shopping Centre

THEY swung the wrecker's ball through one of my old dreams the other day. Cinema North. Not a very flash name I grant you. But you get the idea. In Reservoir it was (and a bit still is).

It used to be a grotty old picture theatre. I went cross-eyed in it. As a child, I observed Hopalong Cassidy ride on his old horse at what seemed 100 miles-an-hour around the same rock every week.

It was the time of "The Goods", and "The Bads".

Hoppy wore a big white hat. The Bads wore big black ones.

You "Hoorayed!" and "Boooooed!" almost simultaneously; sometimes mistakenly booing poor old Hoppy, who was doing his darndest to pursue justice out in Reservoir, where "The Pictures" were (and a bit still are).

My brother John and I were picture-addicts, and our Mum and Dad gave us "a zack in and threepence each for jaw-aches" (as lollies were known). John loved a Canadian lolly that had maple syrup in it somehow, and you even got a card of a Mountie stuck on it.

I liked Choo Choo bars and Space bars, which were as tough as old bootleather, and lasted 18 cartoons. Your eyes throbbled at the incredible color of Heckle and Jeckle. When the cartoons were over, you still had trouble seeing in the lanes on the way home.

We went most Saturdays, even when TV came in. Your stomach used to turn over with excitement, anticipation and Fantales.

"I've got Doris Day. Who've you got?"

"Jack Dyer".

"Big deal".

I still recall the aroma of the Reservoir "Pictures". The theatre smelled like best clothes and Brylcreem. Musk sticks and Mum Rollette. Ice cream and new socks. Mothballs down your boots. New Nugget on.

You whirled round and half the town were at the pictures, trying to make out they weren't. But they were. You saw them.

Old ladies barracking for Hopalong to come round that rock just one more time. "After him, Hop!" they used to gargle. "Do him".

Perhaps they were barracking for something else. The need for goodness to overcome the bankruptcy of Reservoir. No matter how many churches there were, no one was as positive as that heroic cowboy on the screen.

There were lots of old rubbishy

divers who got their flippers snagged inside a giant seashell; or else a giant swordfish or big squid with one eye hanging out was after them.

I must have watched the flipper caught in the giant oyster 100 times. I used to have nightmares where it was my slipper on my way to the kitchen caught in a similar giant oyster shell.

I remember crying for Lassie the Scottish dog. Again, the colors of that golden dog made my mind throb like crazy, even the dew on his snout gave me a headache.

When Lassie swam across a raging highland lake during a hurricane with a note in his paw for his master, I cried buckets.

God, Lassie was a hero!

There was a newsreel on first, and the trouble with that was it was too real. The kookaburra with the grub in his beak at the start was so real you wanted to pat it. The men on motorbikes seemed 3-D. Cinesound News. The Queen Mary right on your knees.

The phenomenon of the pictures was hard to come to terms with. After all that noise, with every sound in history coming at you, the squish of beheadings, the crunch of wooden wagon wheels on rocks and mud, the laughing jackass and Davy Crockett's blazing rifle: You went deaf.

ESPECIALLY when The Three Stooges were on; the sound was always up too loud. When one of them ran a rasp over the other's skull the effect of it went right through you. When a giant wrist tipped jam over a crumpet you wanted to scream.

Like miniature armies, we formed-up for our dose of films. Laurel and Hardy in Ireland. Jack Benny smoking an exploding cigar. Talking mules. Hopalong Cassidy at the age of 800, still going around the rock with "The Bads" still after him.

Now video has stolen our hysteria, and Choo Choo Bars and Space Bars. Video is cheap at \$1 per evening, and Mums buy pizzas or have them home-delivered, and everyone is on heroin or depressed.

Bring back the home-cooked lamb. Bring back the fair-dinkum gravy, even Gravox is fair-dinkum; in fact I can think of nothing more fair-dinkum than the homely pong of fresh brewed-up Gravox. It is as friendly as Hopalong Cassidy.

But you can't go back. You go fast-forward into a frantic world. We live in a careless time. A time of high-speed boredom. I long for Hopalong Cassidy. I need the White Hats. There are more than enough Black

