

WEST PARK TIMES

A Nostalgic Look Back at the West Park Neighborhood of Cleveland

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Remembering the Riverside

by Peggy Calvey Patton

THE RIVERSIDE THEATRE once stood on Lorain Avenue. It opened in 1938 and operated under various owners until 1992. For 54 years, the Riverside's marquee was a beacon at Kamm's Corners, signaling everyone to enter and forget the real world for a few hours. It was a haven, a place where dreams were born. The building was demolished in 1994 and replaced by Walgreens drug store.



Riverside Theatre, 16901 Lorain Avenue, 19 June 1978. Photo by James L. Smith

Until the mid 1970s, there was only one screen and projector. The admission price for kids was ten cents for a double feature of two full-length films, a newsreel, and cartoons. A favorite among the kids was the weekly serial installment, a short continuing “cliff-hanger” about some good guy or girl eventually prevailing over an evil villain.

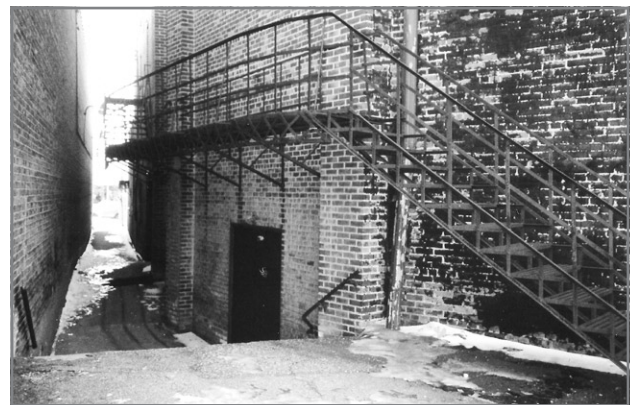
Back in the 1940s and '50s pre-television days, kids would go to the movies on Friday nights, or Saturday and Sunday afternoon matinees. We'd arrive in groups, watch the movies, newsreels and cartoons until one of us would say “this is where we came in” and then we'd all get up to leave. We loved westerns and war movies, tolerated musicals, but we absolutely hated love scenes.

For ten cents admission and six cents for candy, mothers could get rid of their kids for hours at a time for small change. The Catholic kids took seats at the show the same way we sat in church — girls on the left side of the theatre (Blessed Virgin Mary's side) and boys sat on the right (St. Joseph's side). The Protestant kids sat in the middle.

The Riverside had display cases outside with posters and still photographs of the current features. The inside lobby's glass display windows advertised the coming attractions. Each image was staged showing glamorous movie stars on cliffs, staircases, boats or horseback that made us want to see the movie.

The concession counter was on the right side of the lobby next to the girls' john and the boys' lavatory was in the basement. Smoking was allowed in the lobby behind the upholstered half-wall behind the last row of seats. On the first floor were two loges with several movable chairs. The balcony was large and dark and usually closed during the kids' matinees.

Walking to the Riverside often involved navigating the narrow passageway along the west side of the building. We called it “the alley.” Several steps descended from the parking lot behind the theater and a narrow walkway led to the sidewalk on Lorain Avenue. The lone overhead light bulb was always burned out and it was very dark. If the theatre's exit doors opened while you were in the alley, the burst of light and sound from the show was startling. The iron fire escape above cast eerie shadows on the walkway and surrounding brick walls. It was scary. Nobody ever walked down the alley alone, not even on a double dare!



Riverside theatre building walkway, looking north to Lorain Ave., circa 1993. Photo courtesy, Margot LaRosa & Murray Evans

Thursdays were “Banko” nights, meaning you could win money and “bank it.” With great fanfare, the lights were turned on and the manager came onto the stage. He would

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pull ticket stubs from a box and call out the lucky numbers. If your number was called you went up on stage and chose an unmarked envelope containing cash. The prizes ranged from \$5 to \$100 and only four winners were allowed per night. The state of Ohio later ruled this was gambling and outlawed the practice. Some theatres gave away pots and pans, dinnerware, even detergent. Every theatre had a prize night and it was a big attraction for moviegoers. Many of the housewares given away back then are collectibles today.

As we grew older and left grade school, the Riverside became a great place to meet someone. We all went to neighborhood high schools, so it was easy to find out about that cute guy in the fifth row. Friday nights were stag night, Saturday night was

date night and Sundays were for the adults and really serious couples who went steady.

When my children were old enough, we went as a family to the Riverside. But the kids rarely went to matinees, because by then, television and other activities diminished the popularity of daytime movies. Everyone had a car, so going to suburban malls with first-run movies seemed more appealing.

Somehow life, work and family duties have a way of taking priority and robbing us of those quiet afternoons that we so loved during our youth.

Thank you, Riverside Theatre, for the wonderful memories.

— Peggy Calvey Patton

Discovering Our Past is a Team Effort

Join the team and help us discover West Park history! Talk to your parents. Share your memories with us. Look through family photo collections for local scenes and events. Copying photos is easy — many drug stores can do it in minutes. We'll reimburse you. If you live in the area, we'll pick up your photos, scan and return them along with copies on a CD to be shared with your friends and family. You'll have peace of mind knowing your photos are preserved. And having your contribution recognized by others is fun!

Your photos of houses, streets, schools, businesses, or your local ancestors, are historical treasures to us. Don't wonder if we'd be interested. We *definitely* are!

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A Nostalgic Look Back at Kamm's Corners area in 1938



Retail stores at 17008-16942 Lorain Avenue (left to right), north side of Lorain just east of Kamm's Corners. Built in 1937. Stores include Kaase's Bakery, Standard Drug, Fisher Foods, Scott's 5&10. *Gary Swilik Collection*



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