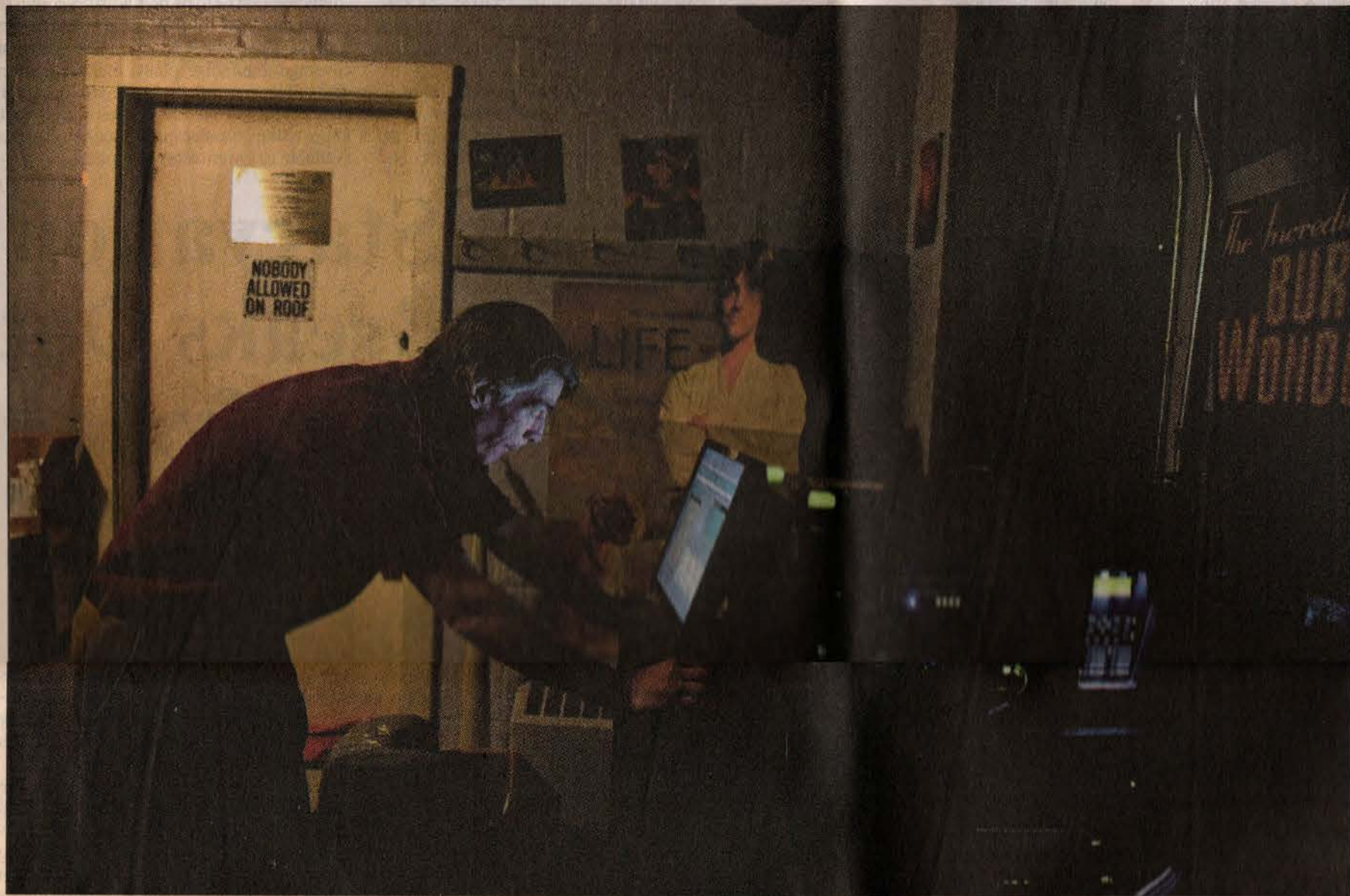


JANUARY 24, 2016

\$2.00

Volume 64 — Number 230

VALLEY NEWS



Russ Brady builds the previews for the next day's movie with the Nugget Theater's digital projector on Wednesday. Brady has worked at the theater for 31 years. VALLEY NEWS — JENNIFER HAUCK

Nugget to Celebrate Centennial

Hanover Theater Steeped in History, Along With a Bit of Comedy

By JAIMIE SEATON

For the Valley News

HANOVER — In September 1916, the Allies turned back the Germans at Verdun, John D. Rockefeller became the country's first billionaire, and the Nugget Theater opened in Hanover.

The town's only entertainment establishment at the time was far different from the four-screen theater on Main Street celebrating its centennial this year. The brand-new, yet modest building — built on what is now a parking lot behind Murphy's on the Green — was described by its first manager, "Texas Bill" Cunningham, as "austere but practical."

That didn't deter the patrons who flooded the small lobby on Nugget Alley, paid their 10 cents, and filled the 571-seat theater to capacity on opening night. They hooted and hollered as the lights went down and the film — *An Alien*, starring George Beban — flickered on the 12-by-15-foot screen. Cunningham himself sat in the small pit at the front of the house and accompanied the silent melodrama on a new Merrill piano.

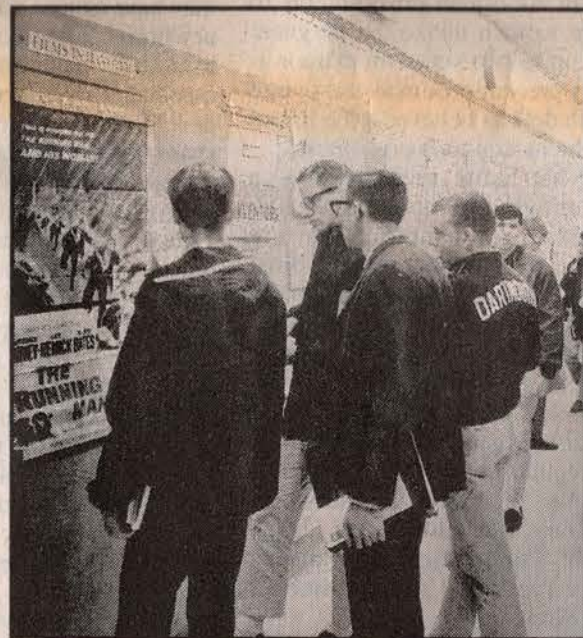
The town owes a great debt to the young man tickling the keys. Cunningham was instrumental in establishing a movie theater that over the next 100 years would survive rioting, boycotts, booms and busts and, through it all, provide a space where people could share the communal experience of watching a movie. Cunningham, who would become a prize-winning sports reporter for *The Boston Post* and *The Boston Herald*, served Hanover in another way: He recorded the Nugget's early history for posterity.



"Texas Bill" Cunningham was the first manager and piano player of the Nugget Theater.

COURTESY HANOVER IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY

The idea to erect a motion picture theater in town gained traction in 1914, when The Hanover Amusement Co. was formed by people from Dartmouth and Hanover residents to build a modern theater. Enter Cunningham, who arrived at Dartmouth in 1915 on the dime of some wealthy alumni who wanted the Texan to play football. Their largesse went only so far, however, and the freshman took odd jobs to make ends meet. One day in 1915 Cunningham saw an ad in *The Dartmouth* announcing that F.W. Davison, president of the Dartmouth Savings Bank — and purported first cousin of John Davison Rockefeller — was going to



In the Hopkins Center, Dartmouth students look at a poster for the 1963 film *The Running Man*, which was showing at the Nugget Theater.

COURTESY HANOVER IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY

build a parking garage in the center of town.

Cunningham was familiar with rumors that the cautious Davison had also toyed with opening a movie theater, but had abandoned the idea as too risky. See-

SEE NUGGET — A6

The Nugget's Rich History Is Also Peppered With Peanuts

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A6

Cunningham left Hanover to fight in World War I, the Davisons donated the theater to the town, with the stipulation that all net proceeds be used for town improvement. With the Town Charter prohibiting such an arrangement, the solution was to form the Hanover Improvement Society, which was incorporated in July 1922 to run the Nugget Theater. It has operated the theater to this day.

In the ensuing years, the Nugget kept pace with the changing times. In 1927 it was remodeled; the entrance was moved from the alley to West Wheelock Street, a lobby was added and seating capacity was increased to 616. One month before the stock market crash of 1929, "talkies" finally made their way to Hanover. During the 1928-29 season, nearly a quarter of a million tickets were sold.

Movies changed daily, and students rarely missed a show. Night after night the undergraduates continued to supplement the action on the screen with bawdy comments and peanut hurling. The unruly atmosphere was so integral to the Nugget experience that an advertisement from the 1930s promised patrons "Good PICTURES, Active PEANUTS and plenty of puns."

By the end of the decade, however, the Improvement Society was no longer touting the carnival atmosphere at the Nugget. Flying peanuts had given way to flying fists — first in 1932, when Dartmouth freshmen stormed the theater and brawled with management and Palaeopitus, the Dartmouth senior society charged with keeping security, and then in 1935, when ticket prices rose from 25 to 35 cents. Yet another riot broke out in 1937 and a Palaeopitus member was seriously injured by a flying tear-gas canister thrown by the harried manager.

During the war years, the Nugget and the antics of its student clientele were an obsession in the local press. Hitler and Mussolini marched across Europe, and the Depression still held the country in its grip, but the Nugget stole the attention of townspeople.

Speaking from his home in Enfield, Tom Byrne, manager of the Hanover Improvement Society from 1991 to 2006, said, "If there are letters to the editor today about Donald Trump, back then you'd have 10 about the Nugget, the behavior of the students or how bad the movies were."

The Improvement Society embarked on a major renovation in 1938, adding a balcony (increasing seating to 900), carpeting, a larger screen and state-of-the-art projectors. More significantly, uniformed ushers were introduced, and discipline became the order of the day.

Bill Davison remembers going down to The Nugget from his home on North Park Street in Hanover. By then his grandfather and parents had passed away.

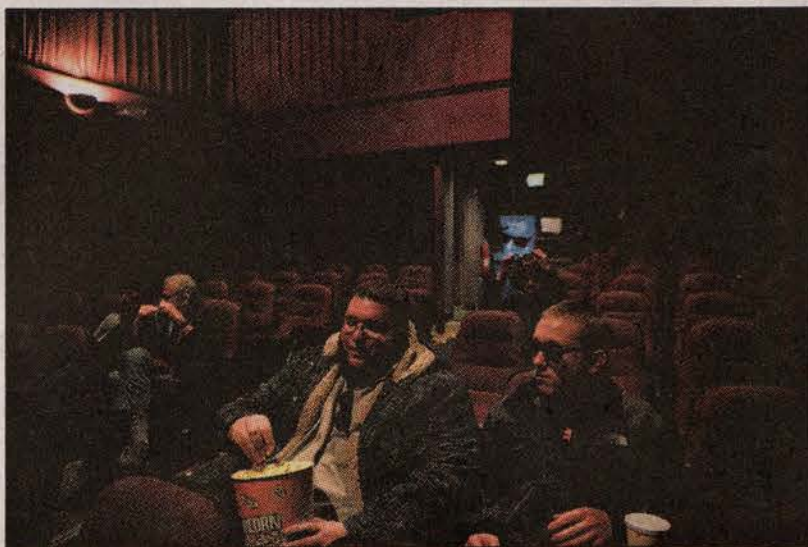
"It had a nice lobby," recalled Davison from his Durham, N.H., home. "I think tickets for children were around 15 cents, but I got in for free. I brought a nickel with me and bought a Milky Way bar at the concession stand. There were always newsreels before every feature; that's how we got the news of the war."

ADJUSTING TO COMPETITION

On Jan. 28, 1944, an explosion ripped the roof off the Nugget, and the theater that had been built with the assurance of "absolute fire



Peter Christle, left, of Etna, buys his ticket at the Nugget Theater on Wednesday. Selling him the ticket is M. Kaufman, a manager at the theater. VALLEY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS — JENNIFER HAUCK



Brothers Jeff Jackson, left, and Steven Griswold, both of Enfield, wait for the showing of *Star Wars — The Force Awakens* in 3D at the Nugget on Wednesday.

protection" burned to the ground. Cigarette butts were found among the peanut shells in the ruins, but the exact cause of the fire remains a mystery. It took the Improvement Society only six days to have the Nugget up and running again, albeit at Webster Hall on Dartmouth's campus.

During the seven years the Nugget was housed at Webster, the change in venue, coupled with stricter rules on campus, a more serious-minded student body and a more disciplined approach introduced by the V-12 Navy College Training Program gradually brought about a more sedate movie-going experience.

When the new 900-seat Nugget debuted on South Main Street on Sept. 24, 1951, Bill Cunningham returned for the grand opening and took his familiar place at the piano to accompany a silent Chaplin film. Congratulatory telegrams poured in from stars of the day, including Bob Hope, Bing Crosby and Betty Hutton. The flying peanuts and punches were gone. The student witticism was not. "I came to town in 1951 as a Dartmouth freshman," said Tom Byrne. "Everybody went to the movies

then. I used to go two to three times a week, which is why I was a C student."

"The highlight was what the undergrads would say about the film, and some of the comments were so funny. They would have just the right remark at the right moment. The audience was just as much a part of the experience as the film. The lousier the film, the better the remarks," Byrne said.

When the 1950s dawned, television was a mere blip on the horizon. By 1953, the new medium had made such rapid advances — and cuts into ticket sales — that the Improvement Society temporarily halted donations to the community in order to repay the Nugget's debt.

The 1962 opening of the Hopkins Center gave the Nugget its first competition in town. A decade later, declining ticket sales were blamed on the arrival of the Dartmouth Film Society and what some regarded as inferior films at the Nugget. Under increasing pressure to turn the Nugget around, the Improvement Society divided the 900-seat theater into two 325-seat cinemas in 1975.

The Nugget held on through the 1970s and '80s, and in 1991 celebrated its 75th anniversary with a lavish screening of *Billy Bathgate*. In keeping with the multiplex revolution of theaters across the country, the Nugget once again divided itself in 1997, adding two additional screens and more seating. Two years later, digital surround-sound and automated projection equipment were installed.

'HOMETOWN FEEL'

The spirit of Bill Cunningham has survived into the 21st century beyond providing entertainment. The theater started by a young man who needed a job has, over the years, employed thousands of people.

"It's the heart of the town," said Ginger Vieira, 30, who began working at the concession counter in 2000 as a high school student, and came back to work during college breaks. "It's one of the best jobs you can have as a teenager," she said.

"The manager Donald Babcock was a mentor to me. His ability to teach me to do each job all the way up to assistant manager was a special part of my education."

She recalls selling tickets in a Chewbacca costume.

"I couldn't breathe, but my cash box still came out even."

Vieira's co-worker from the time, Valerie Haines, 32, recalls the exhilarating period.

"I remember people sleeping on the sidewalk outside the theater for tickets. They lined up the way people today line up for the new iPhone," Haines said.

On Dec. 17, 2015, following months of negotiations by film booker Bill Pence (who also heads the Dartmouth Film Society), *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* opened at the Nugget. Ticket sales were robust throughout the holidays, and during a three-day period the theater broke its all-time concession sales record three times. The fact is not insignificant, because movie theaters make the bulk of their money from concessions, while most ticket revenue flows to the studios.

Sitting in his office above the theaters, Michael Kaufman, who became manager in 2007, reflected on his 20 years at the Nugget — a period that included the 2013 conversion to digital.

"I saw what happened to other theaters when they were forced by the studios to go digital. So many small town theaters closed their doors because they couldn't afford the technology; it made me sad. The little hometown feel that we have has been lost in many communities."

"Having the Improvement Society own us and operate us, allows us to adapt and change with the industry," Kaufman said.

"We're always talking about ways to enhance the theater, and we're looking at trends in the industry," said Kaufman when asked about the future of the Nugget. "Even though attendance tends to be volatile industry-wide, the Nugget is as stable today as it was 20 or 30 years ago."

In 2015, new carpeting was installed throughout the entire theater, and the Nugget upgraded the sound system in two of the four cinemas so that it can handle visually impaired and hearing-impaired equipment. The other two cinemas are slated to be upgraded this year.

"We consider the Nugget to be an important cornerstone of downtown Hanover," said Jeff Graham, manager of the Hanover Improvement Society. "By attracting over 100,000 'guests' annually to Main Street, I'd like to think we are helping all downtown businesses, as visitors dine and shop while in town to see a movie."

To date, the Hanover Improvement Society has given over \$2.5 million for "good works" in and around the Upper Valley. In addition to underwriting the operations of Storrs Pond and Campion Rink, the Improvement Society has provided funding to the Howe Library, The Main Street Project, Black Community Center, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, Whaleback Ski Area, The Outreach House and the Hanover Garden Club.

The theater business has changed a bit since the Nugget first opened and was the only game in town. The Nugget faces competition not just from other theaters and the film society, but also from the wide availability of entertainment available via livestream. But even with national movie theater attendance hitting a two-decade low last year, Kaufman isn't worried about the future of the Nugget.

"On Christmas Day 2014, we sold so many tickets online that we almost sold out before we opened the doors. The lobby was completely crammed and people were anxious to get in to their movies. All of a sudden someone in the middle of the crowd started singing a Christmas carol. Everybody joined in, and I'm not ashamed to say that I started to cry. That's what it's about," Kaufman said.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN GIVING YOUR OPINION?

Our agency is recruiting for focus group participants in multiple New Hampshire areas.

We are seeking adults ages 25 and older, who are New Hampshire residents, and who are currently or are thinking of becoming engaged in their local community.

Focus groups will be conducted in late February and March, 2016. Participants will be compensated for their time.

Transportation is not provided.

Please contact Sarah at the Community Health Institute for more information at: 603-573-3347

42277

Save the Date!



Annual Meeting

Lake Sunapee Region VNA & HOSPICE

Thursday, February 18, 2016
4:00 p.m.

Wilmot Community Association Red Barn
64 Village Road, Wilmot

- My first year in review: **Jim Culhane, President & CEO**
- Awards
- Board Recognition
- Special Announcements
- and More!

Refreshments by Peg Andrews Catering

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42289



WE

The Nugget Gives a Nod to Film Classics of Decades Past

By DAVID CORRIVEAU
Valley News Staff Writer

HANOVER — Well, here's to you, Mrs. Robinson. And Dorothy. And Indy. But where's Bonnie? And Clyde? And Scarlett? And Rhett? And E.T., for heaven's sake?

What particular film best captures, reflects or sums up each of the 10 decades that has passed since the Nugget opened is something viewers can argue about between screenings over the next 10 months as the Hanover theater shows movie classics from each decade to mark its centennial year.

It all starts this afternoon at 1:30 with D.W. Griffith's 1919 melodrama of Asian miscegenation, *Broken Blossoms*, and continues every fourth Sunday afternoon through September, crossing the finish line with 1994's *The Shawshank Redemption*.

And courtesy of a committee of cinematic Solomons that started narrowing the field last October, Harold Lloyd's *Safety First!* will hold down the 1920s in February, *The Wizard of Oz* the 1930s in March, *Casablanca* the 1940s in April, *Singin' in the Rain* the 1950s in May, *The Graduate* the 1960s in June, *American Graffiti* the 1970s in July and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* the 1980s in August.

"The breadth of American filmmaking that has occurred during these 100 years is pretty incredible, almost the entire history of American film," Bill Pence, director of film at Dartmouth College's Hopkins Center and booking agent of movies for the Nugget, said last week. "We had a lot of tough decisions to make."

Take the 1970s, from which the committee plucked *American Graffiti* from a pack ranging from *The Godfather* (Parts 1 and 2), *M*A*S*H* and *Cabaret* to *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Graffiti* director George Lucas' own *Star Wars*.

"One of the things we tried to do, we wanted a series that was first and foremost entertaining," Pence said. "The primary *raison d'etre* is to entertain."

Another aim was to showcase movies that didn't necessarily fill the seats in the opening days and weeks, but built a following over time. In 1994, for example, "*Forrest Gump* was probably one of the most successful films to play at the Nugget," Pence said, "something like 12 to 14 weeks."

In contrast, "*Shawshank* was not a box office hit at all, and became in video the No. 1 picture to see," Pence said. "It's a reference to the video revolution, one of the most seen of all time. And talk about entertaining."

If any decade's choice approached a slam dunk for the series committee, it was probably 1942's *Casablanca*, the noir-love story-thriller starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman that Wikipedia describes as

"a solid if unspectacular success in its initial run, rushed into release to take advantage of the publicity from the Allied invasion of North Africa a few weeks earlier."

"I can't think of a film," Pence said, "that would be more representative of its time."

If *Casablanca* is Exhibit A, what pushed *The Graduate* to the head of a 1960s chorus line that includes groundbreakers such as *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Easy Rider*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *Rosemary's Baby*? "It was (co-)written by Buck Henry, a Dartmouth graduate," Pence said. "In a way, that was an easy pick."

At some point during the centennial celebration, Pence said, it wouldn't surprise him to see the Nugget show 1978's *Animal House*, based on early-1960s fraternity life at a certain Ivy League institution. "It's already a classic for a lot of people," he said. "With a Dartmouth audience, it plays a little differently." In October, the 21st-century classic will be

chosen a little differently, under the category of "Patron's Choice."

"I would like to think this gives people in the community a chance to pick their favorite," Pence concluded. "Given that it covers 15 years, it's a lot harder. My list is very, very long. *Avatar* would have to be close to the top. And *Gladiator*."

Lights!
Camera!
Reaction!

Editor's note: Starting today, the Nugget will celebrate its centennial by screening a classic movie from each decade from the 1910s through the 1990s. Passes for individual tickets are \$5, and a pass for the full series is \$50. For more information, visit nugget-theaters.com/coming-soon or visit the box office. David Corriveau can be reached at dcorriveau@vnews.com and at 603-727-3304.

1916

2016

Celebrating A Century Of Great Movies In Hanover

The newly renovated Nugget Theater on Wheelock Street in Hanover in 1938. Seating capacity was expanded to 900. "Nugget Exchanges Peanuts, Fights, and Apple Cores for Lounges and Air Conditioning" said one newspaper article.

COURTESY HANOVER IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY

The Nugget: A Timeline

APRIL 1916

F.W. and F.F. Davison petition for permission to erect a theater, promising at least three presentations a week; six evening shows and three matinees weekly while Dartmouth is in session.

SEPTEMBER 1916

The 571-seat Nugget Theatre opens with *An Alien*, starring George Beban. Admission 10 cents. "Texas Bill" Cunningham is manager and piano player.

JULY 1922

Davisons donate Nugget to Hanover, with proceeds to be used for town improvements. Hanover Improvement Society formed to operate theater. Admission 25 cents.

OCTOBER 1932

Dartmouth freshmen storm theater, brawl with management and Palaepitus senior society.

OCTOBER 1938

Major renovation brings new seats, carpeted aisles, larger screen, new projectors, new sound and balcony. Contest to find new name for Nugget generates no interest.

JANUARY-MARCH 1944

Explosion tears off roof and theater burns to ground. Cause is never determined. Six days later, theater resumes operations at Webster Hall. Admission: Adults 44 cents; servicemen 30 cents; children 20 cents.

SEPTEMBER 1951

New 900-seat Nugget opens on South Main Street. *Cyrano de Bergerac* is opening show, along with a Chaplin film and Bill Cunningham at the piano. Admission 50 cents for adults.

AUGUST 1954

"Cinemascope" installed to reverse decline in attendance.

1960

Annual attendance drops to about 121,000, 40 percent below 1953 figures. Six television stations serve the Upper Valley. Air conditioning installed.

NOVEMBER 1962

Dartmouth dedicates the Hopkins Center — a \$6 million performing arts center for plays, concerts, films, and art exhibits. The Dartmouth Film Society is rejuvenated.

JULY 1965

Six screens in the Upper Valley show 11 film titles on a typical weekend.

NOVEMBER 1969

Valley Cinemas 1 & 2 have a grand opening, with screening of *Yellow Submarine*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *Battle of Britain*. Lyric Theatre in White River Junction runs *Gone With the Wind*. Nugget shows *Midnight Cowboy*.

OCTOBER 1972

Declining attendance attributed to "inferior films" and competition from Dartmouth Film Society.

OCTOBER 1975

Nugget divided into two 325-seat theaters. Projection equipment modernized; smaller lobby given over to retail space.

MARCH 1986

Six-theater cinema opens on Miracle Mile in Lebanon.

MAY 1997

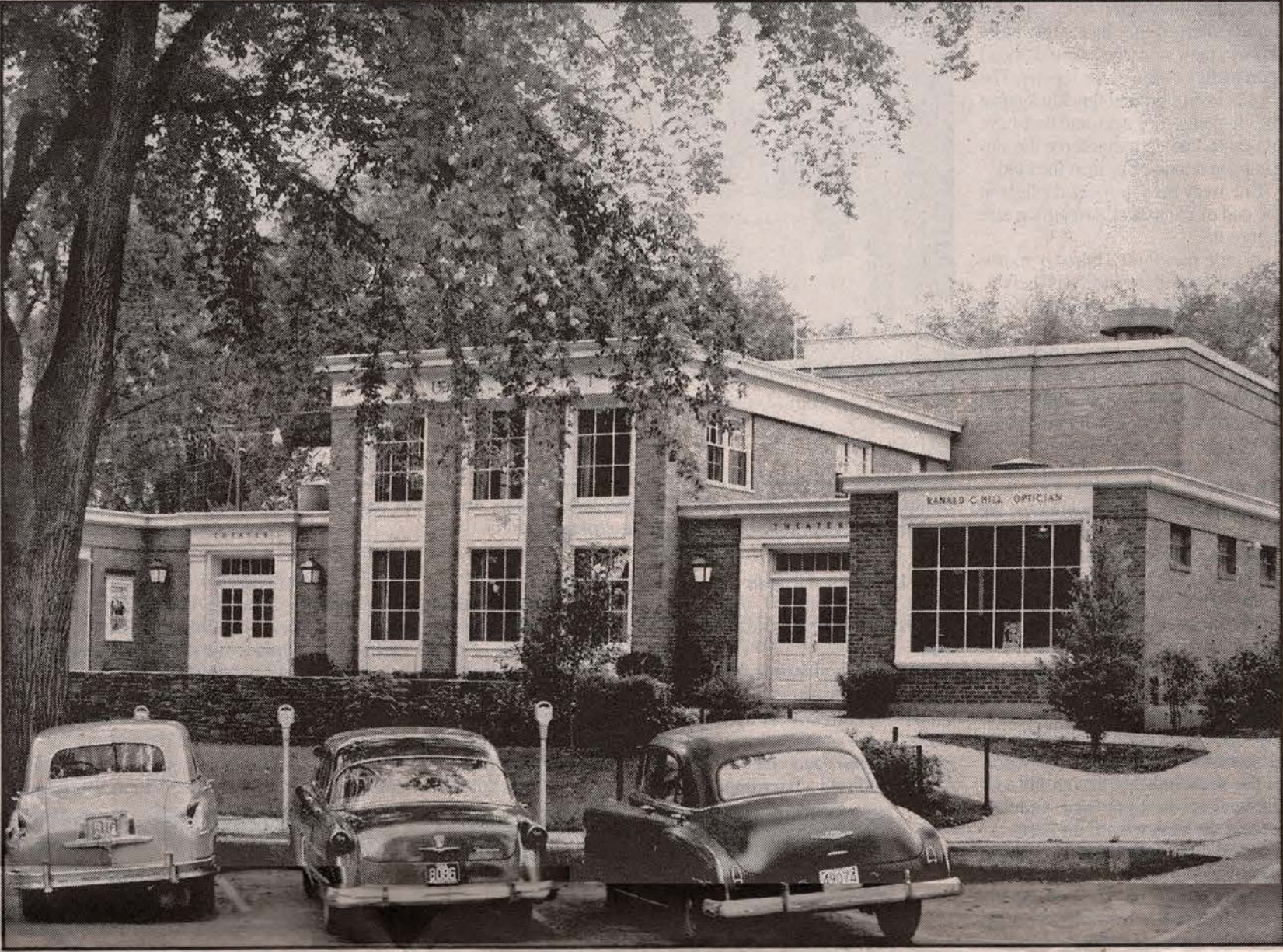
Two new screens added at Nugget, which becomes a "four-plex," which has 671-seat capacity. New automated projection equipment and surround-sound installed.

MAY 2013

Theater becomes fully digital, ending the use of 35mm films.

2016

Theater marks 100th anniversary. Adult admission \$9.75, \$12.75 for 3-D.



After its predecessor burned down, the Nugget Theater opened in its current location on Main Street in Hanover in 1951. COURTESY HANOVER IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY

Ahead of Its Time, The Nugget Was an Instant Success

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

ing a job opportunity, Cunningham, who had worked in movie theaters in Texas, hurried to Davison's office to try to convince him that a local movie house could be profitable.

"Cunningham said that movies were the coming thing," recalled Bill Davison, the 83-year-old grandson of F.W. Davison. "I don't know how Cunningham knew this, but he managed to convince my grandfather."

Writing in *The Boston Post* in June 1938, Cunningham remembered that he was given "about the same reception a bum gets at a bank," and described Davison "outwardly as 40 quarts of shaved ice."

Cunningham spent the better part of a month turning old Davison toward the movie theater idea. Cunningham proposed that if the movie theater didn't work, Davison could turn the property back into a garage, to which Davison replied that he would be stuck with two projectors and 556 seats.

Cunningham went on to write, "I finally offered to bind myself out to him in the good old New Hampshire way to work out the difference in his store or on his farm, or, in fact, anywhere, in case things didn't work. I hung on to him like a fever germ, and although he wouldn't say no, he wouldn't say yes."

In the end, Davison said yes because, according to Cunningham, he wanted his son Frank Jr. to come home from Montana, and the young man needed something to do. There is some dispute about this, but whatever the case, the project moved forward. Cunningham signed on as manager and piano player, and Frank Jr. returned home and named the theater "The Nugget."

Meanwhile, various other parties had petitioned authorities for a license to open a theater. By the spring of 1916 only two petitioning groups were left: the Davisons and "The Petitioners," backed by the fledgling Hanover Amusement Co., and led by prominent resident F.A. Musgrove, who promised to share profits with the town.

The Davisons won the day, in part because they promised to erect the theater immediately — the Petition-



The original Nugget Theater, on Wheelock Street in Hanover, was destroyed by fire in January 1944. COURTESY HANOVER IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY

ers had proposed two years — and officials regarded the profit-sharing plan as having "doubtful value."

IMMEDIATE SUCCESS

Most greeted the decision with enthusiasm. No one was more optimistic than the editor of *The Dartmouth*, who wrote in one editorial that a local theater would make "the dullness of the Hanover winter less dull."

He tried to reassure his more skeptical readers that "Dartmouth has long outgrown that spirit of vandalism which would once have been a cause of fear to such a project."

According to Cunningham, he and the younger Davison lobbied for a "luxurious theater in the style of the big-city opera houses," but the elderly Davison had no illusions about his clientele. He constructed a building where "everything was nailed down." The walls were sheet metal, the floor concrete and the iron and wooden seats were indeed bolted to the floor. A news release printed in the *Hanover Gazette* assured "absolute fire protection."

It was an immediate success, raking in enough money in the first year to recover the cost of the building and turn a tidy \$17,000 profit — more than \$387,000 in today's dollars.

True to their reputation, Dartmouth students — all males at the time — were a raucous bunch. They arrived for the first evening show with a bag of peanuts — not for eating but for throwing. Students razed latecomers, and anyone wearing a necktie or sporting a haircut could count on being pelted by peanuts, jellybeans and even apples.

In his 1938 recollection in *The Boston Post*, Cunningham took credit for the tradition, writing that he and some classmates had decided to make a little extra money by selling peanuts and popcorn in the alley outside the theater. One night he planted some of his business partners in the theater to pitch peanuts at him as he made his way to the piano pit, and the rest of the audience joined in with gusto.

"After the show, we carefully and painstakingly swept up the ammunition, dusted it off, sacked it up, and sold it again. A good tough peanut would last sometimes as long as five or six weeks."

The rowdy atmosphere notwithstanding, the Nugget became Hanover's center of entertainment. Dartmouth students laid claim to the early show of the evening. Townsfolk, including ladies, attended the late show to avoid the college men and their peanuts.

ROWDIES AND RIOTS

In July 1922, three years after

SEE NUGGET — A7