

Collecting Drive-Ins

I often happen to write various articles where it becomes necessary to point out that the Golden Age of matchcovers was in the 1940s-1950s...long ago in the past, sighing inwardly at the thought that I was too young at the time and missed it. But not so with Drive-In Theaters! There, luck was with me, for I can look back on my younger days and know that I was at the drive-ins when they were in their prime, during the 1950s-1960s.

Those were the days! Drive-in theaters are the great survivors of the entertainment world.. Some say they will never die. When I was a teenager, it seemed as if there was an entire “culture” that revolved around the local drive-ins, both the theater drive-ins and the A&W drive-ins. Come the weekend, that’s were it was all happening. In the words of film critic Joe Bob Briggs, who has written books on the subject and is viewed by many as the patron saint of drive-ins, “They can churn us up. They can knock us down. But they can’t close the drive-in in our heart.”

Drive-ins reached their peak in 1958, when there were a total of 4,063 screens around the country. Today, there are less than 830, according to the National Association of Theater Owners, but experts believe they will endure because of nostalgia [*that’s where I come in*]—and novelty. Drive-In researcher Richard H. Jackson, a cultural geography professor at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, said that the behemoth outdoor screens are to America what steeples are to Europe. “The drive-in represents the halcyon era when kids played in the yard, before gangs and AIDS and drive-by shootings—a much more peaceful time,” he stated.

Other elements that have historically set drive-ins apart from indoor screens include very informal dress, no need to get a baby-sitter, greater food selection (in fact, many people bring their own “supplies” from home), less distraction from others, etc. Drive-ins have also offered a myriad of other attractions, from playgrounds, shuffleboard, gas stations, and coin-operated laundries to lakes, swimming pools, Ferris wheels, and even mini-zoos.

I can’t see drive-in theaters disappearing all together, but, just the same, it’s certainly not the same anymore. When I was in high school, there were at least six drive-ins here in the Sacramento area; now there are two (although one is a multi-screen complex that shows several movies at the same time). I haven’t been to a drive-in, myself, since before my kids were born. Now, one is in high school and two are in college, and none of them have ever been to a drive-in.

This is also a good example of the “ripple” effect in collecting. I originally started collecting VIPs, many of whom were movie stars, of course. That, in turn, led me to become interested in Movie covers. The Movie covers led me to Theatre covers, especially since some advertised movie stars and movies, and from there it was only a short, inevitable, hop to Drive-in covers.....so now I collect them all!

No one has ever reported in on the numbers in their Drive-In collection, so I can’t give you an idea of how many there are, and there’s no listing, but this is definitely a small category. There can’t be that many (but, even as I say that, I keep thinking about those 4000+ drive-ins in 1958!), and they certainly don’t issue them anymore. I currently have four such covers. All are from the 1950s - early 1960s, and all are 20-strikes. The particular ones that I happen to have aren’t any great works of art, but they *are* packed with lots of nostalgia. What about you? Do you have any? How many? I’d love to get some additional information. on these covers.

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