

# BEHIND THE SILVER SCREEN OF THE COOPER THEATRES



Ute Theatre, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Famous for its design based on Native American motifs.

## THE 1996-97 BIENNIAL REPORT OF THE COOPER FOUNDATION

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# BEHIND THE SILVER SCREEN OF THE COOPER THEATRES

The Cooper Theatres, Inc. chain of motion picture theatres was assembled in the era of Art Deco theatres, many with huge capacities (1,200 to 2,000 seats) that often sold out. In a June 26, 1998 article, Steve Rosen of the *Denver Post* said of those times:

...they were more like live theatre. The best films were shown in large, ornate urban movie palaces and featured narratives with natural, dramatic breaks for intermission. Patrons had time to visit the spacious lobby and lounges before the movie restarted.

In spite of the opulence of the setting, the depression of the 1930's and 1940's took its toll on attendance, as did radio, a growing new form of entertainment. Later television, cable television and videocassettes would have an impact as well.

Theatre design and concession management became increasingly important as theatre attendance in downtown areas, the traditional entertainment center of a community, began to decline while that in suburbia grew. Newly designed, smaller auditoriums featuring two or more screens in the same structure began to displace the grand old theatres. And the popularity of drive-in theatres "...skyrocketed after World War II, fueled by the baby boom and America's burgeoning love affair with the automobile. By 1958, there were 4,063 drive-in theaters. That number has shrunk to 815..." today. (William Porter, *Denver Post*, 1998) Later, automation would alter the economics of the business as new projection equipment drastically reduced the number of positions for projectionists.

For a time the arrival of new, large screen technologies helped rescue the industry. One of those technologies, Cinerama, was important to Cooper Theatres' resurgence in the 1960's and 1970's.

Recently the *Omaha World Herald* described the theatre business at the end of the 1990's. In 1996, the Douglas Theatre Company, which operates all but two of the 33 screens in Lincoln and 51 of the 99 screens in Omaha, opened the 20 Grand Theatre, Nebraska's first "megaplex" of 20 screens in Omaha. AMC, the national pioneer in megaplexes, followed that with the 24 screen Oak View. Fifty-six of the 189 theatres built nationwide in 1997 were megaplexes. Aside from movie selection what do they offer? "The latest in technology and amenities—stadium seating, high-back chairs, digital sound, multiple concession stands, even self-serve butter."

But for those who love older, single-screen theatres there is still the Dundee in Omaha, one of the properties given to the Foundation by the Esther and Hermine Goldberg Foundation. According to the article the Dundee still "...has a loyal, older clientele of independent-film aficionados who seem drawn to its big screen, historical ambiance, and personal touches."

The staff of Cooper Theatres played key roles in the evolution of the business over five decades. Many of them worked for Joe Cooper in the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's to create the chain. Others were employees of the Foundation during the 30 years following Joe Cooper's death until Cooper Theatres was sold. We would like to thank each of them, but cannot because of the passage of time and memory and the loss of records.

A list of all the employees of whom we are aware follows this history. If you know of any to add to our list, or if you have corrections, we would appreciate receiving them. We would also like any pictures, articles, or other material pertaining to the Cooper Theatres.

We are indebted to Chuck Kroll, former assistant vice-president of the theatres. It was his idea to honor our

theatre employees through the publishing of this history. Chuck, who had one of the longest tenures of any employee, was also vital to the writing of the history. His understanding of the theatre business, technologies, and people made it possible to place people and events in the proper context.

We are also indebted to these former employees for their memories and memorabilia about the people, the theatres and the business: Constance Wubbenhorst, Ivan "Ike" Hoig, Robert Quinn, John Schafluetzel (posthumously), E.N. "Jack" Thompson, Leora McGrew, Les Burgess, and Marg Edholm. To attorneys John Mason and Wallace Richardson. To the sons of John Schafluetzel, Dennis and John Schafluetzel. To Dennis P. McIlroy, professor of management at Saint Francis College in Loretto, Pennsylvania who has published extensively on the history of foundations. And to Jim McKee, historian and owner of Lee Booksellers in Lincoln, Nebraska, and expert on the history of Nebraska.

George Round, longtime head of public relations for the University of Nebraska, interviewed people associated with the University to create an oral history. His interview with professors H.P. Smith, and Phil Cole and with E.N. "Jack" Thompson gave new dimension to what we know about Joe Cooper and his interest in the dairy industry.

In 1973, the managers of the Cooper Theatres selected a slogan to be used by all employees as a tribute to our patrons, past, present and future. With their thought in mind this history is dedicated to all the people who made Cooper Theatres a success, and who, in the process, added greatly to Joe Cooper's philanthropic legacy.

THANK YOU,  
IT'S OUR PLEASURE!



# JOE COOPER

Joseph H. Cooper was born to Wolf and Brina (also called Bertha) Coopersmith in 1885. Although Joe Cooper and his mother claimed Russia as their birthplace, two people who worked for him, Ivan "Ike" Hoig and Robert Quinn, had always understood he was Polish. Vilna, now known as Vilnius, was his mother's home. The confusion about his birthplace stems from a lack of records and the fact that Vilnius has been under Russian, then Polish and now Lithuanian control. The family immigrated to the United States sometime after 1885.

Not much is known of Joe Cooper's family. However, his will dated in 1930 lists his mother living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He also listed four brothers and three sisters: Jack Coopersmith, Charles Coopersmith, David Coopersmith, Saul Coopersmith, Etta Coopersmith Cohen, Bessie Coopersmith Cohen, and Anna Coopersmith Girsh. Anna married Joseph Girsh, and lived in Havertown and later Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



**Joseph H. Cooper, Founder of Cooper Theatres, Inc. and the Cooper Foundation.**

Joe Cooper suffered from myopia, which made reading a wearisome process physically and mentally. That condition may have led to the belief that he was self-educated. In any

event, he learned much to prepare him for success in the movie theatre business and in life.

He found his opportunity in the era of silent films...a time when it seemed almost any theatre that could get films, made money. According to Ike Hoig, who started his career as an usher for Joe Cooper: "...of course he came up the hard way. One of his Jewish friends had a theatre in Missouri, I believe it was Joplin, and he (Joe Cooper) came out and worked for him. He saved his money and put up (probably leased) a theatre in Joplin." He began to buy and lease several more theatres and discovered that a "pool" of theatres, as they were called, had greater film buying power than a single theatre. So he began assembling several theatre interests in partnership with other individual theatre owners, and with two behemoths of the industry, Paramount Publix Theatres, and Warner Theatres. He eventually operated (owned or managed) 23 theatres in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Pueblo, Colorado Springs, Grand Junction, and Greeley, Colorado; Wichita, Kansas and in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Colonel Barney Oldfield had ushered at the Lincoln Theatre while attending the University of Nebraska in the early 1930's. He later worked as a reporter for the Lincoln Star where he often wrote reviews and stories of theatre openings and became acquainted with Joe Cooper. Barney said of Joe Cooper in a January 14, 1981 *Variety* article:

...He was nearly blind, wore glasses as thick as the bottoms of Coca-Cola bottles for distance, and took them off to look at menus or contracts, which he literally held against his eyeballs in order to read...

...he bought the pictures at the right, or bottom, price, so if the public was not entranced enough to come in droves, it had to be the fault of the city manager in residence...

...The ordeal of the city manager working for Joe Cooper was not pretty to watch. The ritual was

nightly, and wherever Joe Cooper was, he knew when the box offices closed and that a half hour later the counts would be toted...The city manager would sit at his desk and wait for Cooper's inevitable call which came from any time zone in which he happened to be. He would want the figures—not the weather, the competition, general state of business—just the figures, and few were the times that he was happy with them, even when business was good.



**Ivan "Ike" Hoig, long-time City Manager**

Ike Hoig recalled that when he was:

...city manager in Oklahoma City he (Joe Cooper) called every night to ask the gross. What he really wanted to know was the anticipated gross. One time I gave him my best guess of the anticipated gross and it turned out to be right. Joe Cooper said if you are so good why don't you do this for all the theaters? It was actually the opposition that he was interested in.

Ike would send counters that would stand (or in cold weather sit in a car with a heater) or sit in a restaurant or barbershop nearby and count the people going into the competition's theatres. The counters would note the time of the first and last purchase as well as the number of patrons. Thereby Joe Cooper could compare his grosses with the competition.

...He was a real friendly man. Everyone hated to talk to him at night because he was curt; he could fire you on the spot. I used to pick up astrology magazines to see if I could predict the way he was going and then I would go with him.

When Joe Cooper traveled to Colorado Springs he stayed at the luxurious Broadmoor Hotel. Because Joe Cooper was Jewish, Ike had to get special permission for him to stay there. As luck would have it, the assistant manager, a friend of Ike's, helped him out. Ike said:

The arrangement was that Joe Cooper could not go down to the lobby and he had to take his meals in his room. That worked out fine for him because he could not be out

One time Joe Cooper asked Ike what he thought of the remodeled Trail Theatre in Colorado Springs. The theatre had been a horse barn originally. Ike said something flattering and Joe Cooper said, "I have barns better looking than that." Of course he did have great barns for his dairy herds.

Professor H.P. Davis, who was chair of the Dairy Husbandry Department at the University of Nebraska, recalled Joe Cooper in a 1978 interview with George Round, professor emeritus at the University of Nebraska. He was:

...probably about 5' 3" tall and not "...too heavy. I wrote him a letter. Told him about it. (A request for support of the Dairy Husbandry Department at the University) No answer. By that time I was getting a little bit perturbed and I went to Sam Waugh who I believe at that time was the Secretary of the Cooper Foundation. He said: Well you don't ever write a letter to Mr. Cooper. I said, well how do you get in touch with him? He said: You call him up long distance...Mr. Cooper puts letters in the wastebasket.

...I've been at his place there at Verbank (New York) when the mail came in, and when he looked at anything, he took off his glasses. He wore glasses. Why, I don't know. And he would put the letter right up close to his face and if it wasn't from one

of his staff, it wasn't even opened; it went into the wastebasket...And Mr. Cooper's habit was to wander around that place at night. He was a night owl, as you probably know, and, of course, having poor vision

didn't make any difference whether it was day or night. He could get around just as well.

Robert Quinn said Joe Cooper was:

...short, heavy-set, balding, and wore very thick glasses...He had a slight accent. I would say a middle European accent...His eyes were very distorted behind the glasses from your point-of-view. When he tried to read something he would take his glasses off and put the paper right up to his right eye I believe it was. One inch away... He got up late and stayed up late till about midnight. He was a very nice guy...I was very fond of Joe Cooper, and admired a man who could run a large business, as he did, when he was almost blind. I admired his charitable work, especially his desire to help children. He was a good man, for my money.

George Round met Joe Cooper "...when he came to Lincoln several times. He always worked at night. Even then, he was very much interested in youth, and that's how I got to know him, because of his interest in 4-H and youth..."

Joe Cooper and Gertrude J. Gillespie, the daughter of Thomas and Julia Gillespie, married on July 21, 1925 in New York City. They had one



**Robert Quinn tutored Joe and Gertrude Cooper's son, Joe W. Cooper, and then became manager of the Trail Theatre in Colorado Springs. Robert is shown in front of the Trail Theatre in about 1943.**



**Trail Theatre, Colorado Springs, Colorado**

during the day because of his eyes. The light bothered his eyes. He had to have a contract a half an inch from his eyes to read it. He and I would walk around Lake Broadmoor in the evenings discussing plans for the theatres.

child, Joseph William Cooper, born on February 22, 1929. The Coopers separated on March 10, 1936. Although they lived apart for the rest of their lives, they never divorced. And he supported Gertrude and young Joe until his death and thereafter through the terms of his will and a trust fund for his son. Mrs. Cooper died in 1947.

Robert Quinn said he:

...met Mrs. Cooper on the rare occasions when I escorted their son, Joe W. Cooper to visit her at her apart-

ment in New York. She was an attractive woman...[and] had a pretty luxurious apartment...

One of J.H.'s (Joe Cooper) doctors was trying to find a tutor for his son (Joseph W. Cooper) and for a boy named John Plummer. At first I thought he (John Plummer) was adopted, but he wasn't. He lived with J.H. The doctor was a friend of my family's and I heard about the job and applied and was hired in 1941. I tutored the boys that summer at J.H.'s estate in Dutchess County, New York... I used to read to J.H. at

night after I was done tutoring the boys. I read him correspondence, letters from the managers, books, magazines...In 1942 I traveled with J.H. and the boys to Lincoln, Oklahoma City and Colorado Springs. He took them on a trip...When I first saw Joe W. he was 11 or 12 year old. When I last saw him he was a couple of years older. He was devoted to his father.

It was then that Ike Hoig met "young Joe", as he called him to his father's delight. Ike, who was city manager in Colorado Springs, showed young Joe and John Plummer Pikes Peak and the other sites around Colorado Springs. But he drew the line when young Joe wanted to use Ike's car. Young Joe was only 15 at the time and did not have a driver's license. Ike said young Joe "...was tall and very handsome. He was polite, courteous...He did not give a damn about the theatre business."

H.P. Smith said of young Joe: "...He was a nice looking boy. His father...let him do anything he wanted to and gave him everything."

Mr. Cooper located his theatre management office in Lincoln in the 1930s when he purchased Eli Shire's half of the Lincoln Theatre partnership with Paramount Publix Theatres. Eli was also president of Mayer Brothers Clothing Company and owned the Lyric, Liberty and Lincoln theatres. Eli placed two conditions on the sale of the Lincoln Theatre: First, that he could maintain his office on the mezza-



Lincoln Theatre,  
Lincoln, Nebraska

nine, and second, that his nephew Charlie Shire, would have a job in the Lincoln theatres as long as he wished.

Charlie Shire and his wife had been accountants for Joe Cooper prior to the Lincoln Theatre transaction. Charlie became city manager and was one of the signers of the papers of incorporation for the Cooper Foundation. After Joe Cooper's death Charlie managed the Nebraska Theatre until retirement.

Joe Cooper lived in New York State although earlier in life he listed Philadelphia as his residence. When in New York City he stayed at the Essex House Hotel, located just south and across the street from Central Park. But his home was near Verbank in Dutchess County, New York.

Robert Quinn was at the estate in 1941 and 42:

First of all it was on two levels. It was built of wood logs. It was a huge property. It had a forest on it and a stream. It had at least two formal dining rooms and two formal kitchens. It had eighteen rooms... He had a good library in his house and had a good collection of classical records...He also owned the farm next door where he had dairy cattle. He had a maid and a butler and a chauffeur working for him. He had a permanent cook. His secretary was Burt Turgeon. He lived in a separate house on the property with his wife and two children. Burt later became assistant to the branch manager in Salt Lake City, Utah for Paramount in their distribution office there.

Today his home and part of the land is the site of Camp Young Judea on Sprout Lake, a youth camp sponsored by Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America.

Joe Cooper created the Cooper Foundation on December 14, 1934. According to Dennis P. McIlroy, Professor of Management at St. Francis College in Loretto, Pennsylvania, there were only 185 foundations nationally in 1938 [based on foundation data published by the Russell Sage Foundation]. In 1999, that number had grown to 41,500.

The board minutes of June 2, 1937 illuminate Joe Cooper's thoughts about the Foundation's purpose:

...he had originally intended for the Foundation to purchase and build homes in which worthy boys could be housed and provided for, but the more he thought about the plan, the more he realized that this was not as feasible nor would it care for as many boys as it would if the Foundation worked through some local organizations which provide homes for boys where they not only have the conveniences and environment of home life but the direction of individuals who are interested in their future...The Foundation would then be more flexible and the Trustees could determine from time to time what they thought best for the Foundation to undertake.

Although none of Joe Cooper's family was ever involved directly in the affairs of the Foundation, his sister, Anna Coopersmith Girsh did play a continuing role in grants, and one of Joe Cooper's nephew's, Harold Cohen of Wyncote, Pennsylvania, worked for the company in the 1920's either in Lincoln or Oklahoma City.

Joe Cooper funded certain charities through the Foundation as early as 1942. From his death in 1946 until hers on October 27, 1978, the Foundation sent checks to Anna, who would forward them to the charities.

The charities included: Uptown Ladies Home for the Aged, Philadelphia; Deborah Tuberculosis Sanatorium and Hospital, Browns Mills, New Jersey; Yeshiva University, New York City; Congregation Tifereth Israel of Parkside, Philadelphia; Yeshiva Torah Vodaath Mesivta, Brooklyn, New York; and Queen Chapter 259 O.E.S., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.





# THE PIONEERS

Louis Finske was general manager of the theatres in Denver during the 1930's. Although Cooper Theatre's office was in Lincoln, the general manager's office was located in Denver until 1956. Louis was a Paramount Publix employee at the time Joe Cooper went into partnership with them in selected theatres, and later, after leaving Cooper, became president of Florida States Theatres. He hired Connie Wubbenhorst to be his secretary in 1931. Connie continued as secretary for Pat McGee when he became general manager after World War II. She also booked short films for him and was treasurer at the Cooper Cinerama at the time the Denver management office was closed. Connie said:

I started in 1931. It was Paramount Publix then, before Cooper bought the theatres. I worked for Louis Finske, he was the general manager at that point. He was a big shot, Mr. Cooper's right hand man. A swell fellow incidentally, a wonderful boss, everybody liked him. He was still around in 1940. Mr. Cooper used to walk him [Lou Finske] around the lake at Washington Park, every morning early, for exercise. Mr. Cooper wanted to get out and get fresh air. I am guessing [Joe Cooper stayed at] the Brown [Palace Hotel in Denver].



**Constance Wubbenhorst, secretary to general managers Lou Finske and Pat McGee and film buyer and booker, Denver, Colorado.**

Connie was active in Women of the Motion Picture Industry, an association of women who worked for theatres and film distributors. There were 30 to 40 women in the Denver group and Connie served as president. Connie, who still lives in Denver, worked for Cooper Theatres for the next 37 years until her retirement in 1968.

Pat McGee had begun his career as an usher in Joe Cooper's Oklahoma City Regal theatres. The *Rocky Mountain Screen Club News* reported in its January 1949 issue, "Few people know too that Pat McGee was an usher when Joe Cooper opened the flagship of the circuit, the Criterion in Oklahoma City, on April 24 in 1921, and Pat was an usher on the second balcony." By 1935 he was the general manager of Oklahoma City when the remodeled Criterion Theatre was reopened to great fanfare.

Connie Wubbenhorst said: "All the time Pat was in the army [a corporal during World War II] he would call me and discuss business and I would carry it out...When Pat McGee would contact me from his Army post in New Orleans, it was often by phone, but there were letters...McGee was not in [the army] very long because of his age so that did not go on very long."

Pat and his wife, Marie, lived in Denver. He went on to become active in Theatre Owners of America (TOA), a national trade organization. He and another employee, Bob Livingston, were instrumental in the rescission of the Federal and State amusement taxes that had been applied to theatre tickets during the war. Elimination of these costs helped many theatres weather times of dwindling attendance. When automobiles, evermore plentiful after the war, were not taking potential customers elsewhere, patrons were staying home in increasing numbers to watch more and more television.

Bob Livingston arrived in Lincoln as a young man and rented a room at the Royal Hotel. He was active in the management of many Lincoln movie theatres: the two Elite Theatres across from each other at 1329 and 1330 O

Street; the Orpheum, which later was acquired by Joe Cooper and became known as the Nebraska Theatre; the Strand Theatre, later known as the Wonderland; the Lincoln Theatre, which Joe Cooper owned by then in partnership with Paramount Theatres in 1931; and the Capital Theatre. The Foundation bought the Capital Theatre in 1946 and hired Bob as a consultant.

Bob made a crusade of saving money. Once, when he accompanied the trustees on a tour of the Colorado theaters, everyone prepared to register at Denver's elegant Brown Palace, except Bob. He said when he heard the price: "Well, I didn't want to buy the joint!" and carried his suitcase down the street to another, apparently less expensive, hotel.



**Interior of the "Old" Ute, Colorado Springs, Colorado**

Ralph Ayer, originally from New York, was Cooper's city manager in Colorado Springs when the Ute Theatre was opened in 1935. Joe Cooper had commissioned architects from Kansas City and New York City to design and build the Ute. They researched Native American design and history in the Pikes Peak, Colorado and Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico areas to create the theatre's famous Indian motif. At the opening of the Ute, Ralph Hubbard, a nationally known authority on the Indians of the Colorado Springs Region gave a series



of lectures in the theatre. Ralph moved to Lincoln as city manager in 1940 when the Stuart Theatre was being remodeled. In 1946, after Joe Cooper's death, he was promoted to assistant general manager under Pat McGee. He was responsible for theatre management, construction and renovation with offices at Cooper Theatres' headquarters, 325 Stuart Building.

Frank Roberts was appointed comptroller in 1946 under Pat McGee and Ralph Ayer. He had been an accountant with Paramount Publix in its Denver office when Joe Cooper purchased Eli Shire's half interest in the Lincoln (Nebraska) Theatre. Frank, his assistant Vincent DiFiore, and four staff members moved the accounting office to the space vacated by Charlie Shire in the Lincoln Theatre. When Ralph Ayer resigned soon thereafter to become an executive in the garment business in New York, Frank took over concession buying and moved the accounting office to the Stuart Building. Later Darlene Cjeka Woodward was appointed head of accounting.

Ivan "Ike" Hoig began his five-decade career at age 19, 28 years of them with the Cooper Theatres. He had been "jerking sodas at 13th and N Streets but they were in bad straits. So I got a job as an usher at the Lincoln Theatre in February of 1932...I also did artwork, posters and newspapers, in the basement of the Lincoln Theatre." Herman Rumpeltes was in charge of the artwork for the theatres. "...After the Lincoln I went to the Orpheum (later called the Nebraska) as hatchet man. They could not trust the doorman and the cashier and I was supposed to straighten them out. Then I was a ticket taker at the Stuart." At that time Joe Cooper managed the Stuart, Liberty, Orpheum, Lincoln, Colonial, Sun, and Capital Theatres in Lincoln.

Ike also enrolled at the University of Nebraska in the art department because he wanted to become a commercial artist. But "Jobs were hard to come by so I quit school..." and filled

in as advertising manager until they hired a replacement. "...Then I began the job of assistant city manager and treasurer under city manager Jerry Zigmund. Jerry was "...a tough task master. I learned a lot from him. If there was a dirty job, I had to do it..."

Robert Quinn worked for Ike as manager at the Trail Theatre in Colorado Springs. In 1942, after the trip west with Joe Cooper, young Joe and John Plummer, Joe Cooper offered Bob a job with Cooper Theatres.



**Broadmoor Hotel, Colorado Springs, early 1940's. Second from right, Tommy Tompkins, owner of Tompkins Theatres and a partner of Joe Cooper's; sixth from right, with glasses, E. Kelley Baione Jr., manager, Tompkins Theatre, Colorado Springs; eighth from right, far end of table, Robert Quinn, manager, Trail Theatre, Colorado Springs; eleventh from right, with glasses, Ivan "Ike" Hoig, city manager, Colorado Springs.**

Ike transferred to Colorado Springs as manager of the Trail Theatre, then to Pueblo as city manager of the Main and the Upland Theatres. He was appointed city manager in Oklahoma City, then Colorado Springs, before returning to Lincoln in 1951 as city manager. In 1959 Louis Finske hired Ike to manage the ABC Paramount development near Brooksville, Florida called Weeki Wachee, Florida's Underground Grand Canyon. Paramount ran an underwater mermaid show there. But Ike was not happy in Florida and by 1960 had returned to Cooper Theatres as city manager in Oklahoma City. In 1961 the lure of Lincoln's then four-year-old Pershing Auditorium brought him home as its manager. Ike too is retired and living in Lincoln with his wife Elleanor.

...He sent me to Lincoln to be a management trainee at the Lincoln theatre under city manager Ralph Ayer. I took tickets, learned to cashier and to usher. I became an assistant manager, then a swing manager (filled in for managers at various theatres). Finally I became a manager at the Lincoln Theatre. Then I went to Oklahoma City where I managed the five suburban houses (theatres). Then I managed the Criterion downtown. The War (WWII) was on so I managed the Midwest Theatre as well.

I got married in Oklahoma City. I had met Harriet (Carter) while I was in Lincoln. Her father was with the Lincoln Journal. I proposed to her and she came to Oklahoma City. I had to open and close the three theatres on my wedding day. The managing director was named Ed

Kidwell. He would not give me the time off.

Later...they sent me to Colorado Springs to manage the Trail Theatre. J.E. "Tommy" Tompkins had his office in the trail...I recall one conversation I had with Joe Cooper in front of the Trail Theatre. I asked his permission to repaint the front, which was a bit shabby-looking. I volunteered to paint it myself, with the help of a few staff volunteers, if he would pay for the paint. He agreed. I asked him if he had any color preferences. He replied: 'Paint it any color you like, as long as it's red.' That's why the Trail, when I left Colorado Springs, was a bright barnhouse red.

There was a meeting at the Broadmoor Hotel. Joe Cooper had annual meetings with all his managers there. J.H. asked if I would be interested in returning to New York to head a new foundation he was starting to help boys. I said of course. J. H. told me to turn in my resignation to Pat McGee and we will pay your expenses back to New York. But he told me not to tell Pat why I was resigning. He did not want Pat to know his plans.

I did resign and was training my replacement in Colorado Springs when J.H. died at the Essex House Hotel...where J.H. stayed when he was in New York City.



**Employees in front of the Trail Theatre, early 1940's, Colorado Springs, Colorado.**

**Dad Turner, front row with cane; to the right of him, Rueben Farr, janitor, and his wife and child.**

Paramount hired Robert almost immediately in the advertising department. A few days later Paramount offered him the job of field representative for the Western U.S. headquartered in Denver. After that Robert worked for United Artists, Columbia, Warner Brothers, and National Screen Service in England for eleven years. When he returned to the United States he free lanced for various studios, mostly for Walt Disney. While there he made documentaries and trailers and helped put the Disney Channel on the air. Robert and his wife live in Portland, Oregon.

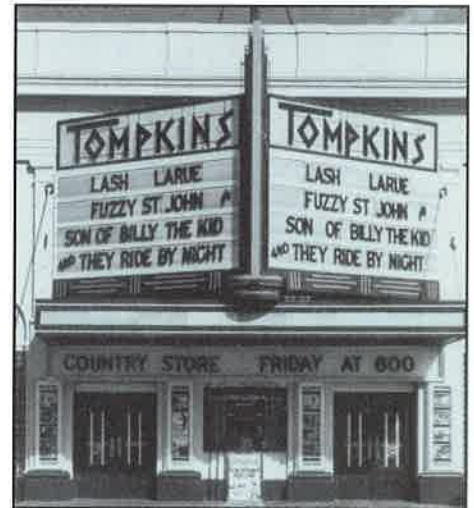
Dad Turner, Rueben Farr and Marcus Green were all employed at the Trail Theatre in the 1940's. Dad Turner had worked in the building when it was a livery stable. When it was converted to the Trail Theatre, he became the boiler man, responsible for the heating and air conditioning. Rueben Farr and Marcus Green were janitors at the Trail.

J.E. (Tommy) Tompkins, once a partner of Joe Cooper, built the Tompkins Theatre in Colorado Springs. Joe Cooper had purchased the Tompkins Theatre in December of 1943, before Ike had moved to Colorado Springs. Connie Wubbenhorst said of Tommy Tompkins: "...I think he enjoyed coming up to Denver to our office and just sitting and talking. One of his favorite dishes was cheese rarebit made with beer..."

Ed Thorne was manager of the Tompkins Theatre prior to World War II and E. Kelley Baione Jr. managed it during the War. Ed went on to become city manager in Oklahoma City. Ike remembers that Kelley, who was Italian, spoke "...Italian, Mexican and even sign language". Tommy Tompkins died in May of 1953.

Klara Cook served for many years as secretary in Joe Cooper's Lincoln headquarters. After his death she became secretary and booker of short films for Ralph Ayer. Later she sold tickets at the Stuart Theatre until retirement.

Up until the time Ike Hoig replaced Ralph Ayer as city manager in Colorado Springs, Joe Cooper would not permit popcorn stands, or apparently any kind of concessions, in his theatres. He would not even allow candy machines. Ike said he had one anyway at the Ute, but turned it around when Joe Cooper came so he would not know what it was.



**Tompkins Theatre, Colorado Springs, Colorado**

He came to Colorado Springs one time and asked if Phillipson had told me I was supposed to put in a popcorn stand...I said yes he had, but Mr. Cooper you don't want one here. (Ike thought the Ute was the finest of all theatres.) Joe Cooper put his arm around me. He often did that. I don't know if it was to get me close to him so he could see me. And he said: Do any patrons bring popcorn into the theatre? I said yessir, about 90.0%. He said: Then that answers your question.

Joe Phillipson was Joe Cooper's assistant. Phillipson had worked for Paramount and was, during Cooper's partnership with Paramount, their "policeman", as Ike put it, looking after their interests. Then Joe Cooper hired Phillipson.

Johnny Schafluetzel began his career in 1943 at the Nebraska Theatre

in Lincoln, Nebraska. According to a January 12, 1978 Greeley Tribune article, John got into the business more or less by accident.

I managed five laundry and dry cleaning stores in St. Louis. The boss bought a football team-the St. Louis Gunners-and the sportswriter who came with the team had been a newspaperman and had been in show business all of his life... When the general manager of the Cooper Foundation had to go into the army, they called him to be general manager...After he was in Lincoln for awhile, he called me and asked if I wanted to go into show business. I told him I did not know anything about it, but I went to Lincoln and started at the Nebraska Theatre. Later I went to the Lincoln Theater. I was in Lincoln for five years, then I was transferred to Greeley. [Colorado as city manager] ...I took over the Sterling and Park theaters, which are both gone now, Eventually I got the Chief Theatre and ran that for a long time and then the Colorado Theatre was built. I ran the Colorado for a long time until we turned it over to the UNC [University of Northern Colorado] Foundation...We built the Cooper Twin and the Wilshire Twin...

[Although John was responsible for all the above theatres, the sequence of ownership and construction is different than as stated.]



**John and Ethelyn Schafluetzel.**  
John was a long-time manager and city manager primarily in Greeley, Colorado

John retired in 1977 after 36 years in the entertainment business, 32 of them with Cooper Theatres. The Greeley Tribune said that at his retirement dinner the Rocky Mountain Motion Picture Association named him their "Honored Showman". Those in attendance saluted him "...as having more ideas in a half hour for promoting films than most managers have in two years." In retirement, John and his wife Ethelyn remained in Greeley where they had raised their three children. John passed away in Greeley in 1986.

In 1947 the Avalon Theatre in Grand Junction, Colorado was being remodeled and renamed the Cooper Theatre, the first to be named in honor of Joe Cooper. Connie Wubbenhorst said: "The Grand Junction theatre remodeling was necessary because a chunk of ceiling plaster fell down-during the night fortunately so nobody was in the theatre and nobody hurt." According to the Sunday Morning, August 24, 1947 Daily Sentinel of Grand Junction, the Avalon was dedicated on January 5, 1923.

"...the little adobe and log building, which stood on the site of the Avalon and now the site of the new Cooper Theatre, was used by him [the founder of Grand Junction, George A. Crawford] as a combined office and sleeping quarters...The little building was demolished when the Avalon Theatre was erected...In the years that followed, many of the famous theatrical and musical productions of the day, embracing many of the most distinguished stars...were presented on the stage of the Avalon...In 1933 it was leased to the J.H. Cooper Company and was managed by this company for a number of years; then the Avalon Theatre property was sold by the Grand Junction Theatre Company to J.H. Cooper and his associates and they continued the direction of the big amusement center."

Connie Wubbenhorst covered the grand opening for the September 1947 Rocky Mountain Screen Club News.



**Joe W. Cooper, son of the founder, Pat McGee, General Manager, and Rex Howell, KFXJ Radio during the live broadcast celebrating the grand opening of the Cooper Theatre in Grand Junction, Colorado. August 27, 1947.**

The opening of the new Cooper Theatre in Grand Junction August 27 proved once again that show business can surmount not only the ordinary problems but also those created by the war's aftermath. In this day of shortages of both labor and materials the Management Group of the Cooper Foundation carried thru the complete re-building of this theater without a single day's delay for lack of either labor or materials and that in exactly one hundred days, a feat which compares favorably with pre-war days.

The Cooper, which replaced the old Avalon, is to all practical purposes a brand new house of fourteen hundred seats, since of the old building only the rear and two sidewalls were retained. Everything else is of new construction from concrete floors to modern roof, from stage wall to the streamlined front, from the last word in rest room facilities to the finest in sound and projection.

The opening itself was a marvel of organization by Ralph Ayer, assistant general manager, and Vern Austin, city manager in Grand Junction. All equipment items were in place and functioning, the advertising cam-



Charles "Chuck" Kroll, City Manager, Colorado Springs, Colorado, throwing dollar bills from the marquee of the "Old" Ute to promote *Its Only Money* starring Jerry Lewis

paign was most effective and the two premiere showings at 8 and 10 p.m. were sellouts. The presentation was a model of smoothness and the new National Theatre sound and projection was perfect and never faltered. Radio station KFXJ's lobby broadcast blanketed the whole Western Slope and reminded the folks that a new house of entertainment was available."

George Erven was assistant to Vern Austin. When Vern resigned in the 1950's, Harvey Traylor replaced him



Usher from the Lincoln Theatre, Lincoln, Nebraska dressed as "Pa Kettle" to promote *The Egg and I* starring Claudette Colbert and Fred McMurray

as general manager. In the 1980's, the Cooper Theatre, then under different ownership, was closed and the city of Grand Junction reclaimed it. Now an historic landmark, and once again known as the Avalon, it is used for a variety of plays, concerts and entertainment.

Ralph Ayer had taken a new employee, Charles "Chuck" Kroll, to

Grand Junction to assist with the final preparations for the grand opening. Chuck had just graduated from the University of Nebraska with a Bachelor of Science degree in business when Ralph hired him as house manager of the Stuart Theatre in Lincoln. Chuck's interest in the movies started in high school as a volunteer at the local theatre, and continued at the University, where he ran weekend movies at the Student Union. As an Ensign in the Navy, Chuck had the added duty of Movie Officer on the troop transport ship, APA 169. He operated the Stuart Theatre sound system for traveling plays and musicals, developed training manuals for the circuit, and wrote daily newspaper ads.

In 1948 he became manager of the Lincoln Theatre where he mastered the art of exploitation, the movie theatre term for promotion. To entice the public to see *Dear Ruth*, a good film but not well known, Chuck used comments recorded after the sneak preview in radio and newspaper advertising. The picture grossed unexpected amounts and was held over. For Twelve O'Clock High veterans paraded in new convertibles while the Offut Air Force Base Band played marches under the marquee. And for

The Egg and I an usher and cashier walked the streets dressed as Ma and Pa Kettle.

Ralph Ayer also hired Mildred Unser, another 37-year employee, as cashier at the Ute. She also cashiered for city managers Ted Butterfield, Ike Hoig, Charlie Freeman, Chuck Kroll, Larry Louis and Carl Rolfes. Millie sold tickets at the new Cooper 70 Theatre in Colorado Springs from 1963 until retiring in 1972. Her husband, Louis Unser, known as "old man of the mountains", was famous for racing in the Hill Climb up Pikes Peak every Fourth of July. According to the Associated Press, he started the race 36 times, the first in 1926 and the last when he was 72, and won nine of them. Millie and Louis's nephews, Bobby and Al Unser from Albuquerque, New Mexico, are both winners of the Indianapolis 500. In the summer of 1998, Millie's grand niece, Jeri, daughter of Bobby, started her first race on the mountain. The occasion marked the first time for an Unser woman, and the 113th time an Unser has raced up the 14,705-foot peak. Millie still resides at the foot of Pikes Peak in Cascade, Colorado.

Dean Zietlow managed Cooper Theatres for forty-three years. He managed the Lincoln, Stuart and Plaza 4 theatres in Lincoln; the Indian Hills, the Dundee and Cooper Theatres in Omaha, was the managing director of the Cooper Cinerama Theatre in Minneapolis, and was city manager in Lincoln. Later in his career, Dean and district manager, Mike Gaughan,



Dean Zietlow, long-time City Manager

developed a popular travelogue series in which the cinematographer often narrated the film and local civic groups shared in the proceeds. At one time they were so popular that patrons packed the 810 seat Cooper Theatre in Lincoln on East O Street on each of the two successive afternoon screenings. Dean continued in the theatre business after the Foundation sold its theatre business and retired a few years ago in Lincoln. Dean died in Lincoln on March 18, 1998.

There were at least three employees of the Cooper Foundation who did not devote their time to the business of movie theatres: Chris H. Sanders, Joan Berg and Joyce L. Ediger. Chris was born at Lindsay, Nebraska on April 28, 1914 and graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1938 with a Bachelor of Science degree. He worked on his Masters degree over the next few years, doing pioneering research on artificial insemination. Then he served in the Field Artillery in the South Pacific for 38½ months, participating in five major landings. Chris left the service on Thanksgiving, 1945. In early 1946 Sam Waugh introduced Chris and his wife Bonnie to Joe Cooper at the Cornhusker Hotel. Joe Cooper invited them to meet him at his estate near Verbank, New York. However, the day they were to meet him in Poughkeepsie and travel to the farm, Joe Cooper died.

The board of trustees asked Chris to move to the estate as farm manager. He and Bonnie lived there for about a year in 1946 and 1947. Then, in 1947, after the dispersal sale of the Holstein herd and the settling of the estate, Chris joined the Foundation as its agricultural representative and extension associate in dairy husbandry. His responsibility was "...to work on development of the 4-H Club, particularly dairy activities, within the State of Nebraska on a trial basis for one year." Chris responded enthusiastically, but cautioned "...it



From left: E. Frank Roberts, Controller; Peter J. Huendling, Breda, Iowa, President of the Brown Swiss Cattle Breeders Association of America; Fred Idtse, Beloit, Wisconsin, secretary-treasurer of the BSCBAA; Sam Waugh, Trustee; Martin N. "Mutt" Lawritson, Extension Dairyman, University of Nebraska; R.E. Campbell, President of the Board of Trustees; Chris Sanders, Extension Dairyman and 4-H Program; with one of the Brown Swiss cows purchased to start a Brown Swiss herd at the University of Nebraska.

is going to take more than one year to make too much of a showing in Dairy Club work."

When Chris started in 1947, he helped increase the number of youth in the dairy program from 957 to 1167. By his last full year, 1958, that number had grown to 2,688 annually. That year Chris took 4 days of vacation, traveled 27,125 miles and visited 280 farms in 53 counties. Chris and Bonnie's daughter, Christine Rae, was born on May 18, 1958. She was only 18 months old when Chris died from leukemia on September 4, 1959 at the age of 45.

Phillip L. Kelley, Chair of the Dairy Husbandry Department at the University, wrote the Foundation after Chris's death. He said: "It takes a long time to build momentum behind work of this type. As you know, from a fair start, so far as numbers is concerned, enrollment in 4-H dairy projects has almost tripled (sic) in the past 12 years. Many dairy herds are being started,

or continued from a previous start. Directly or indirectly this is making a real impact on the dairy industry."

The programs with which Chris was involved included 4-H Leader's Training, the Annual Dairy Calf Sale, District Dairy Shows, the Nebraska State Fair Dairy Show, the Artificial Insemination Program, and the University Dairy herd. Chris was well known in the dairy industry. He served as superintendent of the Aksarben Dairy Show, secretary of the Nebraska Brown Swiss Breeders, and as a member of the Production Awards Committee, the Sire Selection Committee, the Scholarship Committee of the Dairy Husbandry Department, the Omaha Chamber of Commerce Dairy Committee, the Nebraska Interbreed Dairy Council, and the American Dairy Association of Nebraska.

Joan and Joyce both served as his secretary at different times. Located at the University, they were paid by the Foundation.



# CHANGING TIMES

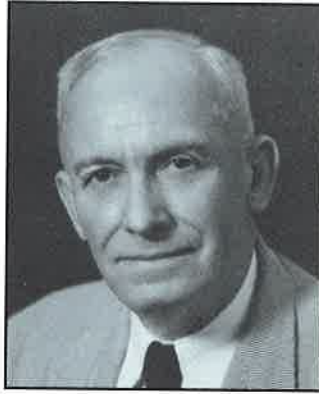
For years Joe Cooper had worked toward purchasing Paramount Publix interest in certain of his theatre properties. His opportunity to acquire several theatres was enhanced by the federal government's anti-trust litigation that forced major Hollywood motion picture producers to sell chains of theatres they controlled. In June of 1937, about two years after that company, then known as Paramount Pictures, Inc., had come out of bankruptcy, he reported to the board of trustees that he expected a deal shortly. However, it did not happen and finally in 1943 he filed suit to dissolve his association with Paramount.

He was not to see the result of that action. Joe Cooper died on March 20, 1946. He had already decided that the business should pass to the Foundation. The primary responsibility for managing the business and settling these matters fell to the Foundation's executive committee and to the management team of Pat McGee, general manager; Ralph Ayer, assistant general manager; and E. Frank Roberts, comptroller. Two members of the executive committee were original trustees selected by Joe Cooper: R.E. Campbell, president of the Foundation, was chair of one of Lincoln's leading department stores, Miller & Paine; and Sam Waugh, vice-president and treasurer, was president of Lincoln's First Trust Company.

The third member of the executive committee, J. Lee Rankin, secretary, had served as counsel and was elected



**R.E. Campbell, President of the Board of Trustees**



**Max Beghtol, senior partner, Beghtol, Foe & Rankin**

a trustee after Joe Cooper's death. He was a member of the law firm of Beghtol, Foe & Rankin, now known as Knudsen, Berkheimer, Richardson, & Endacott. That firm provides legal counsel to the Foundation today as they did for Joe Cooper then. Lee, who later was appointed Assistant Attorney General of the United States and then Solicitor General, assisted senior partner Max Beghtol in extensive litigation on behalf of the Foundation, litigation which had become characteristic of the motion picture industry. From 1954



**J. Lee Rankin, Secretary of the Board of Trustees**

until 1971, John Mason, then senior partner, handled the Foundation's legal affairs. In recent years, managing partners Richard Knudsen, Wallace Richardson and Robert Routh have provided counsel.

Sam Waugh spoke on behalf of the Board to the theatre managers in their first meeting after Joe Cooper's death.

His remarks reflect Joe Cooper's legacy and the trustees' ongoing commitment to it.

What we want you men to do is to manage the theaters and we will try our best to manage the money and we will see to it the distributions of the money are made in accordance with the original conceptions of the foundation of the Trust. Naturally we are going to look to each and every one of you to get recommendations to us, not direct but up through your management group, so we hope to be able to make contributions to the



**John Mason, Counsel**

communities from which this money is being taken. You men managing these theaters must broaden your outlook as to social problems that are going on right in your community. The Trustees of the Cooper Foundation are not interested alone in operating the most successful theaters financially in your communities. They are interested in operating the very best theaters in your communities. Of course, we want to make money, but we don't want to make it at the expense of the Foundation or the reputation of the Foundation, which is going to endure long after all of us have passed out of the picture.

Sam was also clear about the roles of the trustees and of the staff.

...you are working for a financially sound organization, and ...with the men directing this organization who have had a great deal of broad experience in the business world, but let me hasten to add no experience in



**Dick Knudsen, Counsel**

the theater world...For that reason we are determined not to have anything to do with the management of the theaters.

However, minutes of subsequent board meetings suggest the theatre business commanded much of the trustees attention.

A January 1949 article in the Rocky Mountain Screen Club News chronicles an early success by the new management group, one of which Joe Cooper would have been proud. "...By some prying you can find that the

Foundation was the first theatre group to buy out its distributor partner under the recent court rulings. Paramount sold its interest with the Cooper Foundation last February [1948] and no longer holds any stock..."

Pat McGee, in his remarks at that same June, 1946 meeting, spoke of the early years with Joe Cooper.

...Looking around the table I think there are five or six men here who



**Wallace Richardson, Counsel**



**Bob Routh, Counsel**

started with Joe Cooper as ushers. Roy Anderson is one, Ike Hoig is two, Ted Butterfield is three, Harvey Traylor is four, Kenneth Mead is five and myself makes six. I started 25 years ago as an usher. I must tell you that Joe Cooper raised me. I considered him as more than a father. I think to some degree the rest of you men feel the same way. We learned how to do certain things in his fashion. We acquired knowledge through his experience...





# NEW LEADERSHIP

In February 1954, a report of the Audit Committee indicating a lax and ineffective administration, recommended stronger internal controls, a survey of insurance contracts, the use of checks rather than cash for payroll, and centralized purchasing. In March of 1955, trustees Wheaton Battey and Jack Thompson, counsel John Mason, and Bob Livingston inspected the Colorado properties on behalf of the board. Their report confirmed the Audit Committee's findings and subsequently Ken Anderson, a partner in Max Beghtol's law office, was engaged as assistant to the president of the foundation responsible for theatre operations.



**Wheaton Battey, Trustee**

By January of 1956, Ken Anderson had been appointed general manager. He hired George Gaughan in February as a film buyer and booker, telling the board: "...too little attention has been paid to the booking of pictures (which is a vital part of the business) with the result that theatre grosses in many of our houses have not been as great as they could have been..." Ken also hired Norm Prager as city manager in Oklahoma City in February. He "...had over 25 years experience in the production and exhibition fields and comes to us well recommended. At one time he was employed by Mr. Cooper..."

Pat McGee left in February and the general manager's office was moved from Denver to Lincoln. All theatres now reported to Ken. By October, Frank Roberts was no longer with the company and Charlie Shire was

preparing for retirement in January.

Ken hired Herman Hallberg in June of 1959 as Lincoln city manager. By February of 1960, both Herman and George Gaughan had assumed major responsibility for theatre operations with the title of department head.

George had been Executive Secretary of the Theatre Association of America (TOA) and its successor the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO). After leaving Cooper Theatres in 1965 George became president of a new company, Continental Roadshow Theatres, Inc. Headquartered in Denver, but owned by the Barton family of Oklahoma City, the new company built theatres in Denver, Tulsa and Oklahoma City, all with the name "Continental", featuring large-screen, D-150 technology.

Herman had served four years in the Air Force, one of them as a prisoner of war during World War II. He joined Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation in 1945, became manager of its poster department in Indiana, and then became their branch manager in Omaha. He became vice-president for operations (general manager) after George Gaughan left. When Cooper-Highland Theatres, Inc. of Cheyenne Wyoming bought the theatre operations in 1975, he moved to Denver as vice-president and general manager. The next year he joined the Wolfberg Theatres as general manager and film buyer. Subsequently, he formed a booking and theatre consulting company for independent theatre owners. He is now retired and lives with his wife, Evelyn, in Lawrence, Kansas.

George bought the films and directed the general promotion including group sales. Herman managed the concession business and instituted new purchasing procedures. Marguerite Van Horn (now Edholm) and her company, Advertising Services of Lincoln, took over promotion, publicity, and placement of newspaper, radio and television ads, all of which had been the responsibility of each manager. It was a new mode of operation for the theatres.



**Herman Hallberg, Vice President for Operations**

In 1958 the Foundation began extensive remodeling after acquiring certain of the Goldberg Theatres. Ralph Goldberg, who had operated six theatres in Omaha and one in Council Bluffs, Iowa, died in 1956. He divided the properties between his widow, Hermine, and the Esther and Hermine Goldberg Foundation, a private foundation established along the lines of the Cooper Foundation. Hermine sold some of the Omaha properties to the Cooper Foundation and the Esther and Hermine Goldberg Foundation donated other properties in Omaha and Council Bluffs. The downtown Omaha Cooper Theatre, once a burlesque house, and the then suburban Dundee were converted to wide screen, 70mm projection with reserved seats.

In the late 1950's new programs aimed at students and senior citizens were instituted in Lincoln, Greeley, Omaha and Colorado Springs: Student Discount Clubs and Golden Age Clubs. These clubs provided members discounted movie tickets (usually \$.50 each) while generating added revenue during slow times and an excellent mailing list for other promotions. Of the special events developed by the theatres, the Golden Age Christmas Party appealed most to patrons. The theatres showed a special holiday movie, provided cookies and punch, and sometimes gave away flowers. And admission was free! Dean Zietlow recalled how grateful patrons were. Many told him, with tears in their eyes, that this would be their only celebration because they could not be with their families.





For years the standard size of the movie image was a ratio of 1:33 wide x 1.0 high, the current ratio of television screens. Then Paramount released *Shane*. It had been filmed in the standard ratio, but was projected in an enlarged, 1:66 wide x 1.0 high, ratio on a large screen. *Shane* was a great hit with movie fans nationwide as it was at the Lincoln Theatre on an enlarged screen. It was followed closely by 20th Century Fox's CinemaScope production of *The Robe* in a ratio of 2.55 X 1.0. It played Lincoln's Stuart Theatre and then throughout the Cooper Theatre circuit as new projection equipment and large screens were installed.

Having seen the success of these large screen movies, the studios began to issue feature films in other large screen processes known under the names Panavision 70, D-150, TODD-AO, 70mm, VistaVision and Super VistaVision, and large screen 3-D. All these technologies with their large screens and multiple stereophonic sound tracks added to the excitement of the movies and rekindled the public's interest. Many of these same processes are still in use today. In fact the 1997 production of *Titanic*, in Panavision, broke the all-time box office gross, and was still playing in theatres in 1998.

Cinerama, an impressive but complicated large screen process, was key to Cooper Theatres growth in the 1960's and 1970's. Three cameras filmed the action simultaneously while the sound was recorded on eight tracks to provide for directional stereophonic sound. Although the first Cinerama roadshow, *This is Cinerama*, had opened September 30, 1952 in New York City, in the late 1950's there was renewed interest in Cinerama travelogues and in new Cinerama productions from MGM with story lines and well-known stars.

Cinerama productions ran as "roadshows" rather than "regular run" films. Roadshows played only one theatre in a market, had reserved seats, were limited to one or two performances a day,

and were often long, so long that an intermission was needed. Film distributors sometimes provided music to be played as patrons entered and left the theatre and during intermissions. Regular run movies often ran simultaneously at several theatres, did not have reserved seats, and offered as many showings daily as made financial sense.

Roadshow bookings required different financial arrangements and concession procedures, as well as group ticket sales involving extensive direct mail and advertising. For regular run films the distributor received a percentage of ticket sales each week, on a declining basis, until reaching a floor after about four weeks. For roadshows, however, distributors took 90% of ticket receipts after a mutually agreed upon overhead target had been reached.

The late Mel Glatz was head of purchasing, construction and real estate for Fox Intermountain Theatres in Denver when he became the Cooper Theatres design consultant on the famous round Cinerama theatres. Later he founded his own theatre design firm



**Mel C. Glatz, noted theatre design consultant, elected Honorary Trustee for his work on many Cooper theatres including the famous round Cinerama theatres.**

there, Mel C. Glatz & Associates, which provided theatre design, development and construction services. Richard L. "Dick" Crowther, owner of

Crowther, Kruse, Landin & Associates Architects, designed the Cinerama theatres. Dick lives in Denver, has published extensively, and continues his research on electromagnetics, electrophoresis and solar energy for his next book. Maynard Rorman was the architect with Mel on the Ute 70 and Cooper 1-2-3 in Colorado Springs, the Cooper Twin and Wilshire Twin in Greeley, and on the Cameo additions to the Cinerama theatres. The Berglund-Cherne Company built all three Cinerama theaters as well as the Cooper 70 in Colorado Springs.

Mel's movie theatre career began as an 18-year-old when he worked for Rudy Savage, a painting contractor in Denver. They painted murals inspired by Native American designs in the 1935 Ute Theatre in Colorado Springs. Then, in 1967, the Cooper Theatres hired Mel to work on the new Ute, which also included Native American design elements. He consulted on the circuit's other new theatres and on the modernization of the older ones. Mel and Rudy remained friends and business associates throughout their lives.

The circuit expanded to Denver in 1960, breaking ground for the first Cooper Cinerama Theatre on May 17, 1960. It was to have a capacity of 814, including the balcony, and was located at what were then the outskirts of Denver on Colorado Boulevard. Soon thereafter construction began on our other round theatres in Minneapolis and Omaha. The estimated cost, \$750,000 each, grew by completion to \$1,000,000.

The Denver Cooper Cinerama had ticket offices in seventeen other cities as far away as Grand Junction, Colorado and North Platte, Nebraska. Norm Nielsen was managing director; Jack Klingel, manager; Mary Williams, treasurer; and Jack Marshall, director of special services and group sales. In 1965, Norm resigned to join George Gaughan as vice-president and general manager of Continental Roadshow Theatres, Inc. in Denver. Norm later became general manager of the Dickensens theatres in Kansas City,



**Groundbreaking for the Cooper Cinerama Theatre on Colorado Boulevard in Denver, Colorado. Left to right: Unknown; Unknown; Kenneth Anderson, president; Cecil Hart, construction superintendent, Berglund-Cherne Company; Buck Winans, sound engineer; unknown. Denver Post Photo.**

Missouri. Jack Klingel went on to become city manager in Omaha before joining another theatre company in Kansas City.

The control room of the Cinerama theatres was connected by earphone to the three projection booths. The control-room operator, Chuck Weber in Denver, synchronized the work of the three projectionists and kept the light even across the huge screen. He also controlled the eight tracks of stereophonic sound for the five stage speakers and surround speakers on both sides of the back wall of the main floor and balcony. Each projector cast images on one-third of the screen, which, together, made the full image 38 feet high and 105 feet wide. The screen consisted of more than 2,000 individual vertical ribbons which, when properly adjusted, kept the light from reflecting across the deep curvature of the screen.

The Cooper Cinerama's premiere was March 9, 1961, featuring the venerable roadshow, *This is Cinerama*. Lowell Thomas, the film's famous on-screen narrator introduced the film in person. Many of the residents of Cripple Creek, Colorado, his birthplace, journeyed by bus to Denver. Television channels 7 in Denver and 11 in Colorado Springs carried the premiere live in prime time from 8:30 to 9:00 PM and Channel 11 broadcast the bus caravan on the late news.

The prologue, which was shown in the old, small 20' x 20' ratio,

reviewed the history of the movies beginning with silent films. Lowell Thomas added his comments and, as he closed with "THIS IS CINERAMA", the 105' wide curtain parted revealing the now giant image of a rushing roller coaster. The patrons, twisting and turning with every move, sensed the thrill of actually riding the roller coaster.

Among the dignitaries present were Governor Stephen McNicols and Nicolas Reisini, president and chair of the board of Cinerama, Inc. The Cooper Foundation was represented by Kenneth Anderson and trustees W.W. Putney, Ed Van Horn, Wheaton Battey, Ted Sick and Jack Thompson, and by John Mason, attorney.

When the Denver Cooper Cinerama opened, only ten theatres nationwide were showing Cinerama features and

they were constantly sold out. Yet the final true Cinerama production was released by MGM only two years later after Cinerama ran into financial and management problems. How *The West Was Won* featured a multitude of stars including Jimmy Stewart and Thelma Ritter. She appeared for the premiere on March 7, 1963 that began a still standing record of 88 weeks. The theatre was then modified from the Cinerama format to 70mm with one projection booth. It's *A Mad, Mad World* opened October 30, 1964 in Denver and followed in Minneapolis and Omaha.



**Three usherettes, names unknown, in front of the Cooper Cinerama Theatre on Colorado Boulevard in Denver, Colorado. Denver Post Photo.**

Of the three round Cinerama theatres only the Indian Hills remains. Denver's, which Lowell Thomas called "...a gem" in a letter to trustee Ted Sick, was demolished after 30 years to become the site of a Barnes and Noble bookstore. The Cinerama theatre in Minneapolis was razed to make way for a shopping center and office tower. The Cooper Cinerama Theatres had ushered in a new, albeit temporary, era in movie-theatre development, operations and economics.



# THE COOPER 70

Kenneth Anderson resigned soon after the Cinerama theatres opened to pursue a career in film production in Hollywood. In September of 1963 Roger Dickeson, also with the Knudsen-Berkheimer firm, became acting general manager through the end of that year. Almost immediately the Foundation broke ground in Colorado Springs for the new Cooper 70 Theatre, the first new theatre there since the original Ute opened 29 years earlier in 1935. The Myron Stratton Home Foundation, which owned the lots next to the old Tompkins Theatre, would build an 832-seat theatre on this combined site and lease it to the Cooper Foundation. They also would operate the adjoining parking lot for which the theatre gave patrons a \$.25 parking refund. Mel Glatz designed the theatre with a large front window marquee, a huge screen, a new style of plastic chair mounted on risers, and a projection system for both 70mm and 35mm film with full stereophonic sound.

The Cooper 70 premiere in Colorado Springs turned out to be one of the most memorable in the circuit's history. It was common to promote grand openings as benefits for non-profit agencies. Chuck Kroll, who had moved to Colorado Springs as city manager in 1956, arranged for the March of Dimes to sponsor the event and in turn to receive \$1.50 of each \$2.50 admission.

The premiere film was *Take Her, She's Mine*, starring Jimmy Stewart and Sandra Dee. The Officers Wives of the 9th Aerospace Defense Division, which sold tickets and handled the arrangements, asked Jimmy Stewart to attend. He was eager to support the benefit because of his strong ties to the area and to the Air Force. He had served in the Air Force in World War II and was still a Brigadier General in the Air Force Reserve. His wife, Gloria, was from the Broadmoor area of Colorado Springs and her mother, Mrs. E.B. Hatrick was still living there.

An early sell-out did not allay the suspense of the grand opening. The day before the premiere, 200 seats were missing because of production problems with the new design, and the carpet had still not been laid in the lobby. Dick Lutz of National Theatre Supply had arranged with the factory in

Indianapolis to ship the seats on the Rock Island Rocket for arrival the morning of the premiere. Not trusting to luck, Chuck called Jack Klingel, who by now was city manager in Omaha, to ask him to check the baggage car when the Rocket stopped in Omaha. At 9:00 PM Jack spied the shipment and the next day Nils Swanson and his crew finished the installation, just before noon.

Marg Edholm was in Colorado Springs to manage the publicity and arrange for what promised to be an elegant dinner at the Broadmoor Hotel. Her company, Van Horn Art & Advertising in Lincoln, managed newspaper, radio and television advertising, promotional materials, logo and stationery design, illustrations, news conferences and special premier arrangements. She and her husband, Shel Sukoff, now live in Yalaha, Florida.



**Marg Edholm, owner, Advertising Services of Lincoln**

Les Burgess (then Scofield) began working with Marg in the 1960's. She moved to the Foundation in 1964 and was secretary to the president, E.N. "Jack" Thompson, for the next five years. Since then she has returned many times and is currently assistant to the chairman, the same Jack Thompson. Les and her husband, Clyde, live in Lincoln.

The morning of the premiere Jimmy Stewart, George Gaughan and Chuck Kroll met at the Broadmoor Hotel to review the evening's events. They traveled to the theatre in the Broadmoor's limousine so that Jimmy could see the theatre and the stage layout for his appearance. He pronounced the theatre to be "...beautiful...".



**Les Burgess, Advertising Services of Lincoln, now Assistant to the Chair of the Cooper Foundation.**

Meanwhile, Marg, who had forgotten her white gloves, a necessary component of the evening's wardrobe, had gone shopping for a new pair. As she left the theatre workmen were finishing installation of the lobby carpet. But, upon her return, they were sitting outside the Cooper 70 listening to the radio.

Shortly after noon, they had heard the news that shocked the country: President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated in Dallas, Texas. It was Friday, November 22, 1963.

Jimmy returned to the Broadmoor where the local media engulfed him. Before departing for Hollywood on an Air Force jet he called Marg at the theatre, dictated a message, and asked her to field the media inquiries. His message read:

The death of this young, vital, intelligent man by a sniper's bullet at this time when our country desperately needs leadership with youth, vitality and intelligence is a tragedy of terrifying proportions.

By this time the premier had been cancelled. The theatre honored the premier tickets at future performances and the proceeds still benefited the 1964 March of Dimes Fund.

The Cooper 70 Theatre was not alone in honoring President Kennedy by closing. For the first time in memory theatres throughout the nation would be dark that Friday. The Cooper 70 did open the next day and became very successful. In fact, in 1966 *The Sound of Music*, in 70mm format and reserved seats, played for 45 weeks, still a record in Colorado Springs.



# A NEW ERA

Jack Thompson followed Roger Dickeson's interim service as president of the Cooper Foundation and Cooper Theatres, Inc. Jack was president of the First Trust Company in Lincoln when he was elected a trustee of the Foundation in 1953. After its merger with the National Bank of Commerce (NBC) in 1961 he was elected senior vice-president of NBC's Trust and Savings Association and a member of NBC's board. In 1963 he was elected to the newly created title of president, denoting the chief executive officer of the theatre business, to assume office in January 1964. At the same time, R.E. Campbell was elected to the new title of chairman of the Foundation and Cooper Theatres.

Although a neophyte in theatre management, Jack's business experience proved pivotal in the fortunes of the Foundation. And along the way he became a respected member of both the entertainment and philanthropic worlds, serving on the board of the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) and as treasurer of the Council on Foundations. He was twice asked to be president of NATO, but declined because of the press of Foundation business. In 1990 he became chair of the Foundation, a position he continues to hold.



**E.N. (Jack) Thompson,  
President of Cooper  
Theatres and the Cooper  
Foundation and now Chair  
of the Cooper Foundation**

One of Jack's first actions was to appoint George Gaughan and Herman Hallberg to the newly created positions

of vice-president and assistant vice-president for operations. And he hired Leora McGrew, a native of Seward, Nebraska, to head all computer and accounting operations.

Leora learned to do a lot of things well as a teenager. She was book-keeper, secretary, grain weigher and tester, and janitor for a local farm elevator. Then she worked for the O'shea Rogers Ford Tractor Division in Lincoln for 22 years. When she joined the circuit it consisted of seven corporations and each theatre had a separate bank account. At one point it was reported that Cooper Theatres had 45 different checking accounts spread throughout its territory. With assistance from A.T. (Thurm) Hinds of Peat Marwick & Mitchell (now KPMG), Leora reorganized the entire accounting system, consolidated the multiple bank arrangements, and developed accounting and reporting systems, which kept managers and trustees fully informed. In 1971 she was recognized by the Administrative Management Society for her outstanding leadership as president of the Nebraska chapter. Leora was the first woman to serve in that capacity. When the Cooper circuit was leased to Cooper-Highland, Inc. Leora joined that company as accounting administrator for a short time, first in their Cheyenne offices and then in Denver. She soon returned to Lincoln as the accountant for several firms until her retirement. Leora continues to live in Lincoln.

The movie theatre business was, and still is, volatile. Cooper Theatres prospered in Colorado and held its own against the competition in Lincoln and Omaha. However, losses in Oklahoma City had steadily grown to serious proportions. Several lean years had reduced the company's net worth to \$2,380,000, half of which was later charged off as obsolete. The time was right to sell the Oklahoma properties, but finding a buyer for only part of the theatres in a declining downtown market was always difficult. So the Foundation followed the sort of business plan Joe Cooper had pursued



**Leora McGrew, Head of  
Accounting and Computer  
Operations**

years earlier: assuring market control. The Foundation acquired, at bargain prices, three additional theatres in downtown Oklahoma City that had been closed by Warner Brothers due to heavy losses. As a result, the Foundation was able to sell all the Oklahoma properties in 1964. The Barton family bought the Midwest Theatre and office building and the Sooner Theatre, and I.H. Gardner purchased the three Warner Theatres and the others owned by the Foundation.

Also, in April of 1964 the Grand Junction and Pueblo theatres were traded to Westland Theatres for control of all the theatres in Greeley. Larry Starsmore, another long-time theatre owner in Nebraska and Colorado, owned Westland Theatres and Aircadia Investment Corporation. With the losses in Oklahoma City eliminated, the major remaining hurdle was financing. The circuit needed operating capital to regain ownership of the Cinerama theatres, to remodel existing theatres, and to purchase land and construct new theatres.

In 1961 the circuit had entered into a sale and leaseback arrangement under which the Bankers Life Insurance Company of Nebraska (now Ameritas) would purchase the Denver Cinerama Theatre and lease it to the Foundation. Bankers Life also agreed to finance construction of the Minneapolis and Omaha Cinerama theatres on the same basis. The Foundation's purpose in selling its crown jewels was to "...eliminate the

outstanding indebtedness of the Cooper Foundation and invest the balance in a diversified investment program, to add to the securities presently owned by the foundation." However, as time passed, it became clear the terms of the lease could not be supported by ticket and concession receipts.

Although the Foundation had approached local lenders, those requests were declined because of concerns about the business's net worth and future prospects. Jack Thompson and trustee Ted Sick met with similar, disappointing results in their conversation with an insurance company representative in Los Angeles.

Help finally came from the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York. In the 1940's Jack Thompson had worked with David Rockefeller, then a rising young officer with the Chase Bank. The First Trust Company also had a long-term banking relationship with the Chase. But in spite of these existing relationships, a case had to be made for the circuit's credit-worthiness. Tom Schearer, then senior accountant of Peat Marwick & Mitchell (now KPMG) developed a business plan based on our cashflow rather than assets. This plan proved pivotal in obtaining the loan that made possible the next growth phase.

In February of 1966, Jack Thompson announced to the board that the Chase Manhattan Bank had proposed a loan of \$1.5 million over six years. The loan provided \$1.275 million to acquire the Denver and Minneapolis leases from Bankers Life with the remainder for general corporate purposes. Bankers Life generously allowed the Foundation to repurchase the leases without financial penalty.

By this time the Foundation operated eleven theatres in three states: Nebraska, Colorado, and Minnesota. Barney Oldfield had noted in a March 3, 1965 Variety article that the number was greatly reduced from a high of 23, but "... the important difference was that today's theatres are all winners."

Although the circuit needed to reno-

vate some theatres, close others and build new ones in better locations, the Cinerama theatres were winners and continued to lead the renaissance of the circuit. In fact the Cinerama theatres in Omaha, Denver and Minneapolis were selected for the simultaneous U.S premiere of Khartoum on June 20, 1966. Charleton Heston, the star of the film, attended promotional activities in all three cities.

In 1967 Jack appointed Chuck Kroll assistant general manager responsible for theatre construction and equipment and for concessions. He, Jack and Herman had the major responsibility for new theatre construction as well as renovation of older properties. The Cooper/Lincoln on East O Street opened May 25, 1967 with The Sound of Music. It was the first theatre built outside of downtown Lincoln since the old Joyo that is still operating in the Havelock neighborhood. The Cooper/Lincoln name capitalized on the reputation of the original Lincoln

Theatre, which had been a long-time favorite.

The New Ute 70, which replaced the old Ute Theatre in Colorado Springs, opened just five days later, May 30, 1967, with The War Wagon starring John Wayne and Kirk Douglas and again benefiting the March of Dimes. Larry Louis, who had succeeded Chuck Kroll as city manager in Colorado Springs, had worked in Omaha in group sales and reserved seat management and as city manager in Lincoln.

One of his first responsibilities in Colorado Springs was the grand opening of the new Ute 70 Theatre. The premier was a major event including the singing Trailriders, a covered wagon campsite with Native American dancers, the mounted Sheriff's Posse, and the 1966 March of Dimes poster girl. Eugene McCleary, the mayor of Colorado Springs, Jeannie Waymire, Pikes Peak or Bust Rodeo Girl of the West for 1966, and Jack Thompson and his wife, Katherine, rode in the



**Opening of the Cooper Twin in Greeley, Colorado.**

(Left to Right) John Schafluettel, City Manager; Mrs. Mike Johannes, wife of the Cooper Twin manager; Ethelyn Schafluettel; Chuck Kroll assistant vice-president of operations; Sally Kroll; Mel Glatz, theatre designer; Bev Glatz; Robert Dobson, Trustee; Lucy Dobson; E.N. "Jack" Thompson, president; Katie Thompson; Herman Hallberg, vice-president of operations



**Cooper Plaza Building, 12th and P Streets, Lincoln, Nebraska**

Wells Fargo stagecoach. Larry resigned in 1972 to pursue other business opportunities.

The Foundation began construction of the new Cooper Twin Theatre 1 & 2 in Greeley in September of 1969 and it opened in February of 1970. The lot next to the Nebraska Theatre in Lincoln was purchased in 1969 and the lot next to the Colorado Theatre in Greeley was purchased in March of 1970. In May of 1970 the circuit announced the construction of new twin auditoriums to be built by the Myron Stratton Home, and completed in December, attached to the Cooper 70 in Colorado Springs. The completed complex, to be known as the Cooper Theatres 1,2 and 3, would become the first three-theatre complex in the state of Colorado.

In December of 1970 the Foundation donated the State Theatre in Omaha to the University of Nebraska Foundation. The gift, valued at \$175,000, helped launch the Merit Scholarship Fund to attract outstanding students to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Recently the Foundation made an additional \$100,000 contribution to that fund.

In November of 1972 the new Wilshire 1 & 2 Theatre was opened in Greeley. In February of 1973 the circuit purchased land in Loveland, Colorado for the site of a new theatre. In April of 1973 the Foundation completed construction of the Cooper Plaza Building in Lincoln on the corner of 12th and P Streets. That five-

story building, constructed on the site of the old Nebraska Theatre, still houses the Plaza 4 Theatres, Lincoln's first four-plex theatre, the Foundation's offices, and two floors of office space that the foundation leases and manages. In moving to the Cooper Plaza Building, the Foundation left the office Joe Cooper had selected in the Stuart



**Trustees and Dr. Darrell Holmes, President, Colorado State College, Greeley, Colorado in 1966. Back row from left to right: Wheaton Battey, E.N. "Jack" Thompson, W.W. Bill Putney, R. Erle Campbell, Robert A. Dobson. Seated from left to right: Edwin Van Horn, Dr. Darrell Holmes, and Theodore A. Sick.**

Building (now University Towers). The Foundation took over the lease on the parking lot east of the new Cooper Plaza in May of 1973 to provide parking for tenants and patrons.

On January 1, 1975 the Foundation sold its theatre business to Cooper-Highland Theaters Inc. of Cheyenne, Wyoming. Under the agreement



**Chuck Kroll Assistant Vice-President of Operations**

Cooper-Highland acquired all of the personal property and the use of the Cooper name for theatres then using it.

However, the Foundation retained ownership of the real estate and Cooper-Highland retained the headquarters and management staff. For the first time a person other than Joe Cooper and an entity other than the Cooper Foundation would operate the Cooper Theatres. Later that year, Cooper-Highland added single auditoriums, each called "Cameo", to the Minneapolis, Denver and Omaha Cinerama theatres.

In May of 1975 the Foundation transferred the Colorado Theatre in Greeley to the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) to become a concert hall. UNC paid \$75,000 and the Foundation donated the balance of the property's book value, \$123,641.43.

Initially, Chuck Kroll continued to work out of the Lincoln office for Cooper-Highland but later became a division manager for them in Denver. He continued with them and their successor, Commonwealth Theatres, retiring on October 23, 1987 after one of the longest terms of service of any manager. During those years he was very active in the Colorado Springs and Lincoln communities. He was awarded a life membership by the Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce, and served on the boards of the Pikes Peak Sertoma Club and the March of Dimes. In Lincoln he served on the boards of Cedars Home for Children, Goodwill Industries, and was the president of Lincoln Sertoma. In 1973 he was elected Governor of the Sertoma Southeast District. He and his wife Sally live in Littleton, Colorado.

Chuck and Herman brought many talented people into the circuit and retained others who had worked for Joe Cooper and the Foundation in the early years. Hundreds of other young men and women worked their way through school selling tickets and concessions and as ushers. Many projectionists started their careers in Joe Cooper's theatres and continued with the Foundation through the myriad of technical changes. A partial list includes: John Miller, "Buzz" Dewey, Pat O'Shea, Roy Warner, Woody Woodhead, Tony Polanka, Earl Wise, Dale Mace, Al Cooke, Wayne Lemle, Jack Armstrong, Ron Aubuchon, Chuck Weber, Dick and Tom Bateman, Joe Lewis, Lou Cobb, William Thomas, Milton Behm, Lloyd Farley and John Rabe.

Carl Rolfes, a native of Cincinnati, joined Cooper Theatres in Colorado Springs in 1965. Prior to that he had



**Mike Gaughan, District Manager**

served with the U.S. Forest Service in Southern California and had completed four years in Air Traffic Control with the U.S. Air Force. Carl rose from assistant manager to manager of the "old" Ute, the "new" Ute, and the Cooper 1-2-3 before being named city manager in Colorado Springs. He continues actively in the business in Denver.

Mike Gaughan, no relation to George Gaughan, graduated from St. Benedict's College in Atchinson, Kansas and studied at Creighton University in Omaha. He worked for the R.D. (Ralph) Goldberg Theatres Inc. before joining Cooper Theatres as manager of the Cooper 70 Theatre in downtown Omaha. Mike was named managing director of the Indian Hills Cinerama Theatre when it opened in 1964. In 1967 he transferred to Lincoln as city manager and in 1970 was appointed to the new position of district manager responsible for both Lincoln and Omaha. He too joined Cooper-Highland as director of publicity and advertising. He then founded his own publicity and advertising firm in Denver and became chairman of MGA/Thompson, a public relations firm there.



## MANY OTHERS HELPED

Others too, although not employees, played important roles in the fortunes of Coopers Theatres, Inc. National Theatre Supply and National Screen Service provided advertising accessories and a variety of equipment. When equipment emergencies struck they saved us from “dark theatres” and no customers. In addition to Dick Lutz, others included Joe Stone, Glenn and Cathy Slipper, Bill Davis, Bob Tankersly, Iz Sokolof, Jack Lustig and Jack Winningham. Sound service engineers included Jimmy and Leland Seay and Buck Winans. Bill Crowe of Coca-Cola and others such as Norm Prucha and Jerry Touhey supplied concessions. Max Worley of Lincoln, and his company Worley Printing, supplied most of the letterhead, envelopes, forms, and other printed products over many years.

Robert Hastings, one time executive director of the Federal Housing Administration in Omaha, and later a leader in the commercial real estate business, counseled the Foundation on prime locations for theatres in Nebraska, and on property values.

Herbert Brownell, originally from Lincoln, had served as U.S. Attorney

General under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and was a senior partner of the New York firm of Lord, Day & Lord. Herb, Lee Rankin and John Mason testified before the House Ways and Means Committee on behalf of the Foundation in regard to the Tax Reform Act then under consideration. The Act as eventually passed included a section, authored by Bob Routh, favorable to the Foundation. John and Herb also represented the Foundation concerning the Internal Revenue Service’s renewed inquiries into the Foundation’s tax-exempt status. The theatres had always paid income, property and other taxes as required. So, after fruitless meetings in Washington between John, Jack Thompson and the Internal Revenue Service, the Foundation brought a “friendly” lawsuit to obtain a decision. William Hastings, Judge of the District Court of Lancaster County, Nebraska, granted a directed verdict reaffirming the Foundation’s non-profit status and ending years of expensive litigation.

Several members of the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) offered invaluable advice to Jack Thompson as he assumed respon-

sibility for the theatre business: the late Julian Rifkin and Arthur Lockwood, both of Boston, and John Stembler of Atlanta. They advised about the economics of the theatre business and on plans to simplify the organization, realign staff, sell, trade and upgrade real estate, and to develop an operating manual and staff training.

NATO designated Jack and Julian Rifkin to assist in developing a code and rating system that would help parents select films suitable for their children (under 18). The industry hoped that such a system would reduce the threat of censorship that had been brought on by excessive sex and violence in films. Although controversial, it was a successful system. Jack Valenti, CEO of the Motion Picture Association of America and formerly President Lyndon B. Johnson’s press secretary, represented the filmmakers. He was aided by Barbara Scott Preiskel, his legal counsel, who now sits on corporate boards as well as that of the New York City Community Foundation. More recently, Jack Valenti has been involved in development of a rating system for television.







# THE FINAL CURTAIN

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Cooper-Highland, Inc. sold the former Cooper Theatre business to Commonwealth Theatres, Inc. of Kansas City, Missouri in 1978. Subsequently, the Cooper Foundation sold its theatre real estate to Commonwealth. Commonwealth sold the entire circuit to Cannon Theatres of New York, New York in 1987. Cannon then sold to United Artist Theatres which continues to operate some of the theatres, although none in Lincoln.

The Foundation realized \$5 million from the sale of its theatre business and real estate, four times its value just eleven years earlier after obsolete assets had been charged off. In early 1997, the Foundation sold its last piece of commercial real estate, the Cooper Plaza Building and Cooper Plaza Parking Lot, to Swanson Russell

Associates. The Foundation's remaining real estate holding is Joe Cooper's one-acre gravesite near Verbank in Dutchess County, New York.

Today the Foundation's net worth is over \$17 million and it has made grants totaling almost \$10 million in the fields of education, the humanities, the arts, and the human services. Much of the credit for the Foundation's ability to fund these grants goes to the employees of Cooper Theatres. Perhaps John Schafluetzel's thoughts, as reported in a January 12, 1978 article in the Greeley Tribune, suggest the unique relationship between the employees, the business and the Foundation that created the wealth that made these grants possible.

I knew Mr. Cooper ...what he did influenced my outlook on life and made my job very enjoyable. I've

loved every minute that I have been in show business. The Cooper Foundation and Mr. Cooper never wanted us to go out and seek publicity for the things he offered in the way of scholarships and grants for educational purposes for the young. He said he preferred to keep his 'sunshine under a basket.' In those 32 years of working for the foundation, we had no stockholders. We had trustees. The money that was made in the theaters in Lincoln, Greeley, Denver, Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Grand Junction, Omaha, and Oklahoma went into the foundation and the trustees would award it to such things as the 4-H. The money came back to the community...The foundation meant much to me personally, and I was motivated by the things they were doing, only on a local level...

## THE END