

SUNDAY MOVIES

Just as the coming of the railroad to Utah had brought with it the beginning of the end of Church control over the social and economic life of the people, so the showing of motion pictures on Sunday marked the end of an era in Briham City. Mormonism had encouraged strict Sabbath observance since the days of its inception, reflecting the puritanistic, New-England background of its founders and early converts. Some of the earlier interpretations of what constituted proper activity on the Lord's Day border on pharisaism, and in fact, some second and third generation Brighamites grew up wondering if they had not indeed been made for the Sabbath instead of the other way around.

Nevertheless, the general spirit of the Sabath law had contributed to the development of a life style and a tradition that lent to some degree of dignity, and imposed a religious atmosphere on the community on any given Sunday.

As a member of the state house of representatives, Clem was co-sponsor of a bill restricting motion picture theater entertainment on Sundays. The bill was meeting heavy resistance from the motion picture industry and the theater owners, who supported a strong lobby at the capitol building in Salt Lake City. At the height of the controversy and at a time when it appeared there might be enough support to get the bill passed in spite of the lobby, Clem sought an appointment with the governor to determine whether or not in that event he could be expected to sign it into law.

It soon became clear after a few attempts that the governor was trying to avoid him. Finally, after being been told by the secretary at the governor's office for the third or fourth time that the governor was in conference or otherwise occupied, he said to her, "I guess the governor is a very hard ma'n to get to talk to."

"Yes, sir, he certainly has a busy schedule. Perhaps you could call back again tomorrow."

"No, young lady, I don't intend to come back again tomorrow. Now you go in and tell him that I manage to talk to God at least once every day. Surely I can talk to the governor for ten minutes."

Within five minutes Clem was discussing the bill with his Excellency, Who expressed regret that a heavy appointment schedule had been a cause of such inconvenience. Since no one had gone in or out of the office for more than hour, Clem amused himself with the thought that the governor must spend a lot of time talking to himself.

The meeting was cordia, however, and the governor assured him that he had followed the progress of the bill vary carefully and had already made up his mind when it was first reported favorably out of committee, that he would sign it if it -passed on the floor, as the expressed will of the people. His parting comment made it clear that he felt reasonably safe in giving such assurance. "My floor observer tells me, however, that your opposition has enough votes lined up to kill the bill."

It was true, the gentile influence combined with the indifference of many new generation Mormons toward the traditions of their fathers would thenceforth make sabbath observance free of commercialized entertainment a thing of the past for most Utah communities.

Back in Brigham City at the close of the legislative session, Clem found the local theater was showing regular movies on Sunday, running continuously from afternoon until late at night. The situation was somewhat complicated by the fact that the theater owner was a long-time friend held in high esteem by Clem and other prominent and reputable citizens.

He hastened to give assurance that there was nothing personal intended in his new policy, but rather he was sincerely convinced that it was better for otherwise restless people to be quietly sitting in the theater on Sunday than wandering around the streets or causing a rowdy commotion in the town.

Clem's reaction to this was just what might be expected when two friends were involved in such an impasse. "Now Vasco," he said, "don't try to soft soap me. No amount of fancy talk will change wrong to right. You have your views and I have mine". We'd better let it rest there. But, I wouldn't give continental for the church standing of those who patronize the show house on Sunday. You can be pretty sure they'll either be outsiders or inactive Mormons of questionable religious reputation."

"Well, there'll be plenty of time to go to church and see the picture too, either before or after. We'll see who goes and who doesn't. You may be in for a few surprises, Clem."

Clem had no inkling of just what kind of surprises Vasco had in mind. In fact, he didn't give it another thought until two months later when his sister Louise talked to him about a matter she thought ought to be brought to his attention before someone else gave him a distorted version of the truth.

It seems that Lou and her dear friend Hattie, also a middle-aged spinster, had taken a little stroll uptown after church the previous Sunday evening. As they approached the theater they saw Vasco standing out in front. In his very friendly yet aggressive manner he greeted them with great enthusiasm, explaining how he had hoped they might come by since he had procured this picture just especially for them and was very anxious to have them be his guests. Before they realized what was happening, and without time to protest he had the two old maids by their arms and had ushered them through the forbidden doors. Lou and Hattie felt as though they had broken all the ten commandments at once.

"We didn't enjoy one minute of it," she said to Clem. "It was the most miserable two hours I ever spent in my life. I was looking around all the time in every direction but the screen. We were both slumped down in our seats fearful of being seen and recognized. When the show ended and the lights came on I felt like I wanted to be swallowed up in the floor."

The two of them had hurried out looking straight ahead, speaking to no one, not even to each other until they were a safe distance away from the theater and had turned the corner where the shadows of Forest Street provided a sort of comforting incognita.

Clem's next meeting with Vasco was almost a farce. He found it difficult to show forth the necessary and appropriate righteous indignation while all the time he was admitting to himself some degree of amusement over the whole incident. He expressed surprise that his friend would resort to such an indiscretion to prove his point, and protested that the two girls had been innocent victims of such shenanigans.

"Girls," Vasco protested. "Those two old maids are ancient enough to be grandmothers, the two best examples of ministering angels for the next world we've got in the Church. Besides, it didn't hurt them and it'll give them something to talk about for a month."

"As far as I'm concerned we'd best call a truce" said Clem. "You may be right about changing times and feelings but just the same, as much as I like the films you'll never see me in the picture show on the Sabbath as long as I live."

And he didn't.