



Exploring Plain Township

Piecing the Puzzle
Together

Unit - North Canton
Drive-In Theater

Exploring the History of Plain Township
(Stark County, Ohio)

A Publication of the Plain Township
Historical Society



Let's Get This Show On
The Road!!

North Canton Drive-In Theater

When was the last time you and your family went to see a movie? Did you go into the theater and sit in air-conditioned comfort on individual seats with lots of other people? Did you know that it was and still is possible to drive to an outdoor theater, sit in your car, and watch a movie on a very large screen? If you lived in North Canton, Ohio in the late 1940s until 1981 you could have done just that.



These outdoor theaters are generally called "drive-ins."

Here is what was necessary to develop a drive-in theater: a huge parking lot for cars, a screen

on which to project the movies, a projection booth, a way to get the sound to the cars, and generally, a concession stand for food and drinks. The first drive-

in theater was opened in 1933 in New Jersey. It held up to 400 cars and had a 40-foot by 50-foot screen.



In the earliest drive-ins the problem was with hearing the movies. At first there were huge speakers behind the screen that broadcast the sound

part of the movie to all the cars in the parking lot. Later, speakers were placed in front of each row of cars to transmit the sound towards the cars. Neither of these methods was very good because the booming sound from the movie tended to bother the neighbors who lived near the drive-in theater. Finally, RCA invented speakers that hung on individual stands. The driver pulled into a parking spot by the stand, rolled down the window slightly, and hooked the speaker over the top of the window. Each speaker had an adjustable volume control. Sometimes at the end of the movies, the driver of the car forgot to unhook the speaker and started to drive away, pulling the speaker out of the stand!

Soon Ohio had 11 drive-in theaters spread across the state. It was decided that North Canton, Ohio was a good spot for one of these outdoor theaters. On Friday, September 26, 1947, after about two months of construction that involved erecting the screen, blacktopping the parking lot, and putting in sloping ramps so each car had a clear view, the "Auto

GRAND OPENING
TONIGHT
AUTOMOBILE THEATER
 1 BLOCK NORTH OF NORTH CANTON ON ROUTE 8
Featuring
IN-A-CAR SPEAKERS
 with finger-tip control

2 SHOWS NIGHTLY—RAIN OR CLEAR
 First Show Starts At 7:30
TONIGHT AND SATURDAY, SEPT. 24-25
 Elizabeth Taylor — Tom Duke
"Courage of Lassie"
 Rehearsals
 and
 Selected Shorts

DRIVE-IN COMFORT

Special Midnight Show Every Saturday

New RCA Sound Equipment

Delicious Refreshments Available

Children Under 12 Admitted Free

Enjoy a Good Movie Under the Stars

Come Free
 Come and Enjoy the Entire Family

* The Drive-in has the most perfect reproduction of motion picture sound yet discovered, because each has its own speaker which can be individually tuned by the audience. The sound also can come from horns built on the screen, but is piped directly from the film to the car. There are no echoes.

* The Drive-in screen can be clearly seen from any car. The annoyance of having a very tall person in front of one is absent.

* Don't stay home on rainy nights—there's always a show at big theaters, 10:00 or 11:00. If it is too bad for seeing, drive in. It's a real joy not being disappointed. No walking to and from the box office. Take your car as home, you needn't leave it at the Drive-in.

* Dress informally and comfortably. There is no need for you to leave the car.

* Children are most welcome at the Drive-in.

* Elderly people or invalids especially avail the opening of the Drive-in because they can enter the car at their home and stay there until they return. There are no parking worries, no walking to the box office, or waiting for seats.

* There are no problems of "sitting together." Parties of three, four and five and an entire carload remain together and come and see the show without being split up.

We Thank the Following Firms for Their Cooperation:

NORGE PAINT CO.	STANDARD PLUMBING CO.
MELBOURNE BROS. CONSTRUCTION CO.	GARAUX BROS. CO. INC.
HELSCHER-CLARK CO.	OHIO TAC AND ASPHALT CO.

Theater" opened by Pfeiffer, Neale & Co had its Grand Opening. The advertisements published in The Repository indicated that the theater was one block north of North Canton on Route 8, which is what Cleveland Avenue/Main Street was originally called. The theater had a 538 car capacity, used RCA in-a-car speakers and children under the

age of 12 were admitted free. Two movies were shown each night, with the very first movie ever shown there being "Courage of Lassie," with Elizabeth Taylor. Every few days the movies changed which also included cartoons or short news programs.

Drive-in theaters in Ohio generally are open from April until the beginning of December because of the weather. The starting time of the first movie varied according to when sunset was, since the best viewing was after dark. Because the movies could start fairly late at night, parents sometimes brought their children already dressed in their pajamas in case they fell asleep during the movie.

Traditional indoor theaters and drive-ins were in competition with each other to get as many people to attend their venue as possible. The Auto Theater of

North Canton published several ads in local newspapers listing some of the advantages of going to the drive-in rather than to a regular theater. Here were some of the advantages mentioned but read them carefully and see if you agree they were all "advantages:"

- 1) In car speakers --- the driver of the car could adjust the sound the way the occupants wanted
- 2) Because you are in your car, you don't have to worry about tall people sitting in front of you
- 3) Two shows nightly, rain or shine
- 4) No need to dress up - "come as you are"
- 5) Bring the children with you so there was no need for a baby-sitter
- 6) Since you were in your own car, you could smoke if you wanted



In 1949, the theater was renamed the "North Canton Auto Theater" and in addition to a refreshment stand, a miniature train ride and playground facilities were built on the premises for children to use before the

movies started. It was quite common for drive-ins to try to increase attendance by having contests, animal shows, and visiting actors or singers to do live performances before it became dark and the movie began. In 1950 the ownership changed and was operated by Meyer Fine DBA Associated Theatres from Cleveland, Ohio

Drive-in theaters became more and more popular through the 1950s because the number of people having cars was increased. The population of the country was growing and people were looking for new forms of entertainment. The height of the drive-in craze was in the 1960s, at which time it was estimated that there were 4,000 drive-in theaters across the United States. The largest theater in New York during this time could hold 2,500 cars.



Attendance at drive-in theaters started to decline in the 1970s and 1980s for several reasons. One reason was because of the growing popularity of color

television sets and more options for viewing a variety of stations at home, which included cable channels. Also, drive-in movie screens were very vulnerable to the weather, especially high winds. The North Canton Drive-Ins' screen was destroyed in April 1974 by extremely strong winds. The theater was closed until Memorial Day when a new steel screen could be put up. In 1977 the drive-in theater was "twinned" where another screen was added to attract more people. This addition of a second screen was an attempt to compete with the multiple screens being put in many traditional indoor theaters at this time. Probably the biggest reason for the decline in outdoor theaters was the growing interest in building shopping malls, apartments and residential homes, and industrial areas. These construction projects all required large amounts of land. With the number of people attending drive-ins going down, it was easier and more economical for the theater owners to close their theaters and sell the land to developers. This interest in using the land for something else is eventually what happened to the North Canton Drive-In Theater. In 1981, the North Canton Drive-In closed and was torn down to make room for the Beckford Place Apartments that were built at 1113 N. Main Street in North Canton. These apartments still are in existence at the time of this writing.

Surprisingly, drive-in theaters have seen a rise in popularity since the beginning of the 2020 Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic. People are encouraged to "social distance" from others to

prevent the spread of the virus unless they are family or people that were around each other already. Many businesses, including indoor theaters, have had to close during the outbreak because of the problems of seating people far enough from each other and constantly sanitizing surfaces to sterilize them. However, at a drive-in theater you never have to leave your car so social distancing is not a problem. In addition to the increase in viewing movies, people are using the large parking area of the drive-ins, in some parts of the country, to have activities that cannot currently be held in smaller spaces, such as weddings, concerts, graduations, and parties. It remains to be seen whether this increased interest in drive-ins will continue in the future, but drive-in theaters are certainly an interesting part of American cultural history.



How do I hear the movie at the drive-in?

Almost all drive-in theaters have converted to using FM Radio to broadcast the audio for the movies shown. So if you plan to sit outside your vehicle, take a portable radio. Some drive-ins still use the traditional car stand speakers, but even those drive-ins generally have the FM broadcast and just keep the speakers for nostalgia's sake.



Fun Facts

(www.driveinmovie.com)

- 1) The second drive-in to open was Shankweiler's Drive-in opened in Orefield, PA in 1934. Amazingly, it is still open today and is the oldest operating drive-in theater in the world.
- 2) The most popular name for currently operating drive-in theaters is "Starlite Drive-in." There are currently ten drive-ins in the United States named the Starlite Drive-in (including those that spell it Starlight.) So if you are looking to visit the Starlite Drive-in and you are looking at their website, make sure you are looking at the correct location. The runner-up name is "Skyview" including its several spellings of "Sky View," "Sky Vu," "Skyview," "Sky-Vu" and "Sky-View."
- 3) Currently, New York has the most operating drive-ins of any state with 28. A surprising fact since the drive-ins in New York are only open seasonally due to the cold winters. Most people guess there are more operating drive-ins in California, Texas or Florida but the fact that the drive-in theater was invented in nearby New Jersey probably helps. Not unexpectedly neighboring state Pennsylvania comes in at number two with 27 drive-in theaters. Ohio is third with 24, Indiana is 4th with 19 and Texas and California are tied at 5th with 17 each.

- 4) The largest operating drive-in in the United States, measured by car capacity, of which we are aware, is the Ford Wyoming Drive-in in Dearborn, MI. It can hold around 3,000 cars. And surprisingly, the Ford Wyoming is open year round. It can get awful cold in Michigan in the winter, but the drive-in offers in car heaters to keep you warm.
- 5) The Ford Wyoming is also the northern most drive-in that is open year round.
- 6) The largest operating drive-in theater in the United States, measured by number of screens, is the Swap Shop Drive-in located in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. It has 14 screens and is open year round.
- 7) The smallest drive-in in operation in the world is the Jericho Drive-in located in Jericho, Queensland, Australia. It only holds 36 cars. Yes, that is correct, 36. The smallest drive-in in the United States is the Spud Drive-in in Driggs, ID. It can hold around 75 cars.
- 8) While the United States has by far the largest number of drive-ins still in operation (about 325), others have drive-ins as well. Canada has the second largest population of operating drive-ins with about 50. Australia is third with about 15. There are also a few scattered throughout Europe, Asia and Africa.
- 9) The cost of the new digital projectors that drive-in operators must purchase to show today's first run movies averages about \$60,000 per

screen. This has created an undue hardship on smaller theater owners.

10) June 6th is National Drive-In Day.

Definitions

Broadcast - To send audio and/or visual to a device for people to hear/see.

Concession Stand (a.k.a. Snack Bar) - A place where people can purchase food and drink.

Drive-in Theater - A facility consisting of a large outdoor movie screen, a projection booth, a concession stand and a large parking area for cars. Within this enclosed area, customers can view movies from the privacy and comfort of their cars.

Movie - A type of video that tells a story through moving images.

Projection Booth - A room or enclosure for the equipment required to display movies on a screen.

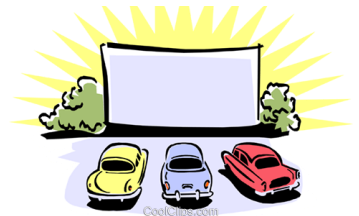
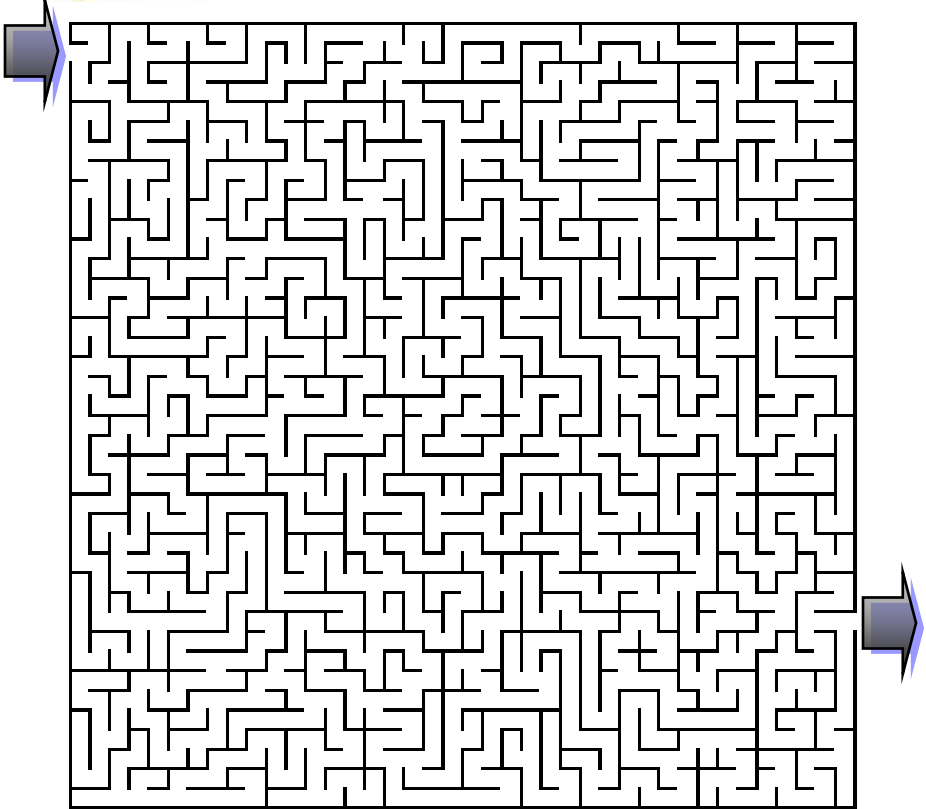
Projection Screen - A surface used for displaying movies for an audience to view. Projection screens may be permanently installed, as in a movie theater, painted on the wall, or portable with tripod or floor rising models. Another popular type of portable screen is the inflatable screen for outdoor movie viewing.

Speaker - A device for people to use to hear sound through.

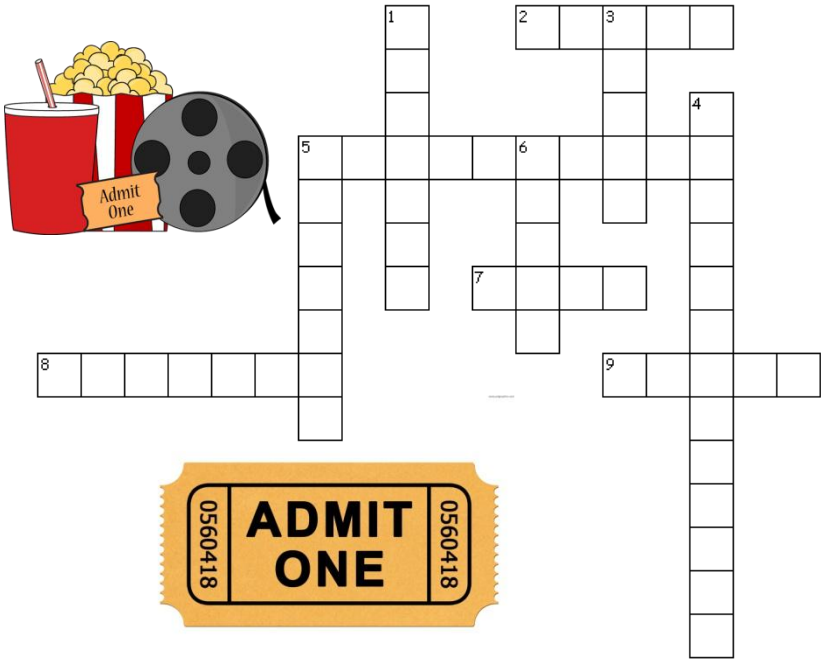
Puzzles



Maze



Criss Cross



Across

2. What is displayed on a screen?
5. Place for kids to play
7. What is shown through a projector?
8. A place to view a movie
9. Something to quench your thirst

Down

1. Used to hear sound
3. A place for an event to take place
4. Used to show what is on sale
5. Comes from corn, salty snack
6. AM/FM device to hear music

Word Bank

Advertisement
 Drink
 Film
 Movie
 Playground
 Popcorn
 Radio
 Speaker
 Theater
 Venue

Word Search

S L M N M J A P M D S T X O R
N H P V M O D M A R I T O E J
O Z Y S Z I V V S C F C F K Q
O T V I R P E I K B S R N U F
T C D A V O R E E Q E N A L J
R X K X G T T V F S U T D P B
A A C O X M I C H C R I J L K
C D E H G W S M E H H Q A U K
S G A J X L E L F J I N Q W H
C J A S C N M B R S O G I G C
R A O V T Q E T R S B R N R G
E M B S U Y N I A L J H P O I
E V P Q Y R T E P A R K I N G
N R C U P M S A M Q N U M S C
S E L I B O M O T U A V O G M

Advertisements

Automobiles

Cartoons

Movies

Parking

Projector

Refreshments

Screen

Seasonal

Ticket



Activity - Make Your Own Movie Ad



Ads appeared frequently in local newspapers promoting the movies that were going to be playing in order to encourage people to come to the theater. The ad often contained a drawing of some significant scene from the movie. Pick a movie that you have seen and liked and illustrate an ad to try to get people interested in coming to see the movie. Draw the ad yourself or use pictures cut out from magazines.



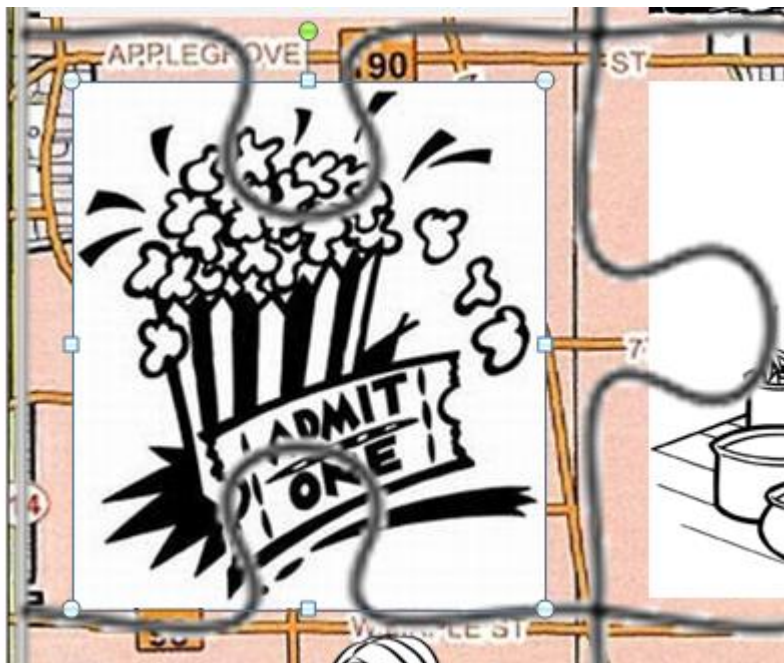
Field Trip

Ask your family to go to a drive-in theater so you can experience what it is like. One of the oldest drive-ins in the country is still operating in Strasburg, Ohio, which is in Tuscarawas County. The Lynn Auto Theater, originally opened in 1937, continues to use the slogan "Come as you are in the family car." Other drive-ins remain open in Ohio in the following cities: Barberton, Ravenna, and Wadsworth. After your visit, what do you see as advantages and disadvantages of going to a movie at a drive-in theater as compared to going to an indoor theater?

Color Your Piece of the Puzzle

Instructions:

- Color the puzzle piece.
- Cut out carefully with scissors (ask for help from your parents.)
- Collect all 36 pieces.
- Assemble into a puzzle showing where each of the topics is/was located in Plain Township.



- See "Exploring Plain Township - Piecing the Puzzle Together - Additional Information" booklet for answers to the puzzles, sources, contributors and additional