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The Kiddie Club

Saturdays at the Lyric Theater

Mary Ann Searcy Williams

The Lyric Theater is very much a part of my childhood memories. Anyone who went to Huntsville Junior High and was a preteen in Huntsville, Alabama, in the late 1940s or early 1950s went to the Lyric on Saturday morning. The Kiddie Club was a part of life for most of the kids I knew.

I actually started going to the Kiddie Club at the old WFUN radio station on Holmes Avenue, which is now the H.C. Blake building. My cousin Margaret Belle Mahoney Crow and I got up early on Saturday mornings and would go down to the radio station where John Garrison let us sing on the air. Our favorite song at that time was "Nobody Likes Me, Think I'll Go Eat Worms." Others also came to sing. That was the beginning of the now famous (or infamous) Kiddie Club.

I don't remember the date of the first Saturday that John Garrison came to the Lyric Theater, but it was the meeting place for young people. John was the MC for years, but he did not try to hold order or control any behavior in the audience. Amazingly, I can't ever remember any trouble. It cost a dime to get in and five cents for popcorn. We usually started the morning at Woolworth's five and dime to get a Sugar Daddy sucker. That cost a nickel and lasted for most of the morning. We would meet all our friends and plan our act for the morning. By now, we had graduated to a larger group and our regular song at this time was "We've Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts." No one had told me at this time that I could not carry a tune, so I sang as loud as I wanted without any fear of rejection.

There was an applause meter on the side of the stage, and prizes were given for the best act. I should clarify that by saying that a prize was given to the performance getting the largest mark on the applause meter. I remember one Saturday when Barbara Byrne Ward brought her younger sister, Judy Byrne Heacock, to sing. Judy was barely old enough to talk, but got up on the stage and sang a solo. All of Barbara's friends sat very close to the meter so that she would win, and she did.

The Kiddie Club was just the beginning of a long day at the Lyric. After the club, the movie started. It always began with a serial. We loved the serials. They must have been the forerunners of present-day soap operas. We were always left with the hero or heroine in a terrible situation, so that we had to return the next Saturday to see if the hero or heroine was able to overcome. There were several regular serials. Rocket Man, Flash Gordon, and The Black Whip were all favorites. After the serial, there was always a cartoon, usually Looney Toons, but occasionally we were treated to the Three Stooges or Bud Abbott and Lou Costello. The feature film was always a western. Western stars were popular at this time. Some of the stars of this time were Lash LaRue, Tim Holt, Hop-a-Long Cassidy, Johnny Mack Brown. Of course the stars that remained popular for many year were Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, and Gene Autry. Roy and Dale were, by far, the favorites for most of my friends, but I had to claim that Johnny Mack Brown was my favorite because he went to school with my Daddy at the University of Alabama.

When we got to high school, we did stop going to the Kiddie Club but continued to go to the Lyric. My first date was at the Lyric Theater. The Lyric continued to be the meeting place and social center for Huntsville High teens in the 1950s. It was where we first held hands, had a real date, and sometimes got our first kiss. We grew up there.

Barbara Ward's painting titled *First Kiss* may say what the Lyric meant to a lot of us. The building may not exist at this time, but the memories are still there for many Huntsvillians.

Note: Mary Ann Searcy Williams is a native of Huntsville; her father, the late Robert Benjamin Searcy, Jr., (Speck) was mayor of Huntsville from 1952 to 1964. Mary Ann grew up on Locust Street and attended East Clinton School, Huntsville Junior High School, and Huntsville High School (now the Annie Merts Center), where she was a cheerleader for the Crimson Panthers.

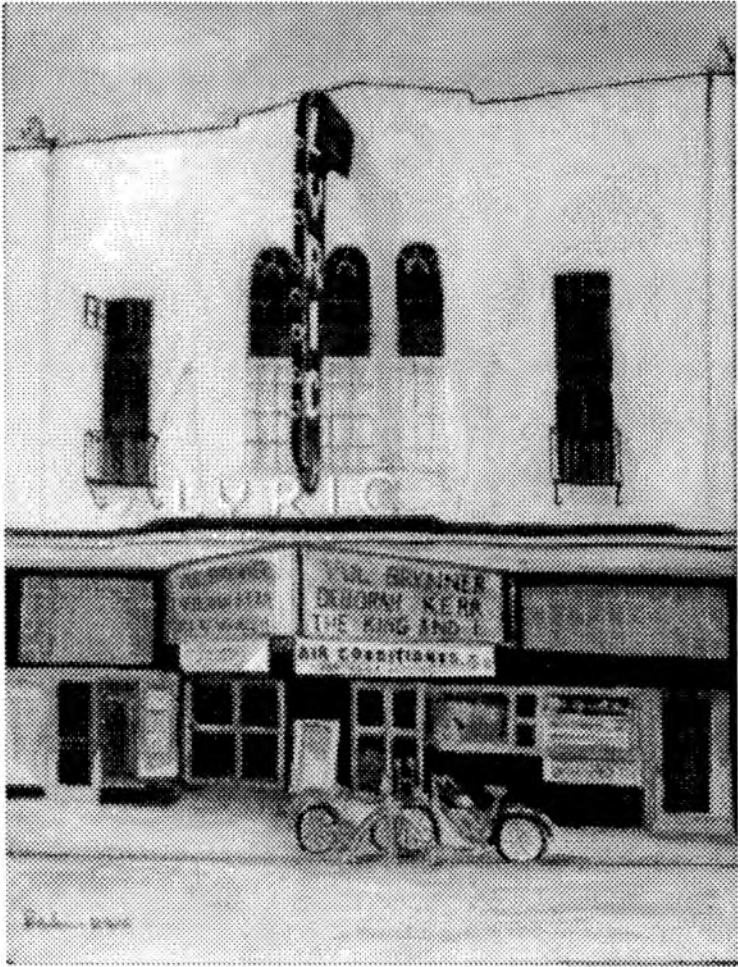


Fig.1 *First Kiss*, painting of Lyric Theater on North Washington Street.

Courtesy Barbara Byrne Ward.



Fig.1 North Side Square looking east, circa 1945. Parking places are filled; one can see that downtown is a busy place. Notice Struve Building on corner of Washington and Randolph Streets. Courtesy Huntsville/Madison County Public Library.