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## A "Roxy" retrospective



The Acton Roxy 1955

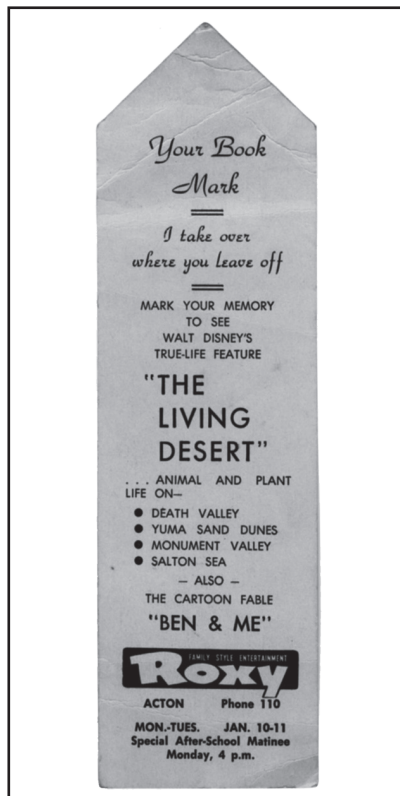
By: Harry Rudolfs

The Roxy is part of Acton's modern history. The building at 6 Mill Street East has been a cinema, dance hall, pool room, barber shop, tavern, nightclub and finally a cafe owned by the Crossings Church.

The Roxy started its life as a quonset hut erected on the site in 1946. Shaped like the top half of a cylinder and wrapped in corrugated metal sheets, the building operated as an army surplus store for a short time. But it was in 1948, when Russel Gregory decided to relocate his movie house from across the street, that the Roxy Theatre earned a place in the hearts of townfolk.

It wasn't the first movie house in Acton—one had operated here as early as 1909—but it is the only one within living memory and those memories are long. Shows ran every night of the week, except Sundays in those days. The cinema brought in two current first or second-run movies per week. Townsfolk got their first look at classic films like the Ten Commandments, Old Yeller, Ben Hur and Bridge on the River Kwai. But it was the Saturday matinees that were hugely popular with the young folks of that era.

Fred Dawkins recalls those magic afternoons in the 1950s. "When I was growing up it seemed like every kid in town was at the Saturday matinee. My allowance was 25



Roxy Theatre Bookmark 1953

cents a week, which got me into the Saturday show (10 cents) bought a box of popcorn (5 cents), and afterwards a Little Golden Book at Hinton's (9 cents) follow by three Blackballs at Willes (one cent). Every week the air in that building was filled with flattened flying popcorn boxes with a rollicking full house screaming for the show to begin. It was the centre of the universe for most kids in Acton."

Ron Henry also has fond memories. "It was mayhem. Some of the older guys had pen knives and they would slit the seats to get at the sponge piece and they'd be throwing that around. They'd usually show the Three Stooges, a cartoon and usually a western or something. You could sneak in the side door but you had to be quick about it. I only did it a couple of times. You didn't want to get caught because then you'd get barred."



Roxy Christmas Party 1948

The Roxy was also the focal point for many community events—including Beardmore's Christmas parties—over the years. But by the early 1960s, as the public's entertainment preferences were changing, attendance was way down in small-town cinemas and the Roxy was no exception. It closed its doors permanently in 1961.

After the movie house closed, the building was purchased by Jack McMullen who raised the floor and turned it into an eatery and dance hall called the Rainbow Room. It was a popular spot on weekends for teenagers, but eventually morphed into Mac's Pool Hall, which for a time also doubled as a barbershop run by Norm Humenick.

The Roxy spent most of the last few decades as a bar/night club and had many names and owners. The Meeting Place, 747 Lounge, Sit N Bull, Club Bedroxx, and Manny's Roadhouse were among its titles. During the bar era, it was often known as a "rough" and "crazy" place with tough bouncers. Many famous bands performed at the location over the years including Rush, Nazareth and April Wine. A near-riot occurred one night after a performance by David Wilcox.

Things calmed down after the structure was bought by the church in 2007. The non-profit Roxy Cafe opened up in 2010 and has continued to be an important community landmark until now. The Roxy has seen its share of changes over last 50 plus years. One wonders, what could be the next manifestation for the iconic building.

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