

Movie Houses Showing Gains

By REYNOLDS KNIGHT
Motion picture theaters, once the victims of television blight, are enjoying a renaissance.

In the past two years, attendance at the "movies" has increased considerably; last year's box office receipts of \$1.5 billion were the highest since 1948, and are still climbing. Until recently, however, the theaters had fought and lost every battle against television. Moviegoers dropped from a postwar high of 80 million to less than 40 million as television became popular.

The biggest factor in the rebirth has been the recognition by theater owners of several consumer trends: the shift toward suburban moviegoing, the growth of specialty rather than mass movie markets, and the effectiveness of high quality audio and visual equipment in attracting and holding audiences.

Responding to these factors, owners have been building theaters in the heart of heavily populated suburban areas; houses that specialize in art and foreign films are being opened; older theaters are being remodeled and the most modern projection equipment installed. In one city, a group of theater owners contracted to debut a motion picture at several suburban theaters simultaneously to stimulate box office sales. In addition, the theaters have merchandised themselves hard to the consumer.

With their programs picking up steam, the owners face only one big problem: will they be able to provide consistently high-quality movies to returning patrons?

FROZEN ASSETS — The billion-dollar-a-year domestic liquor industry — burdened with high liquor taxes and brisk competition from foreign distillers — is pressing for revision of antiquated tax laws that freeze an estimated \$500 million in tax money paid on liquor before it can be sold at retail.

In a recent petition submitted to the Treasury Department, 500 liquor wholesalers, representing all major domestic distillers and 70 per cent of the sales volume of domestic distilled spirits, called for the establishment of regional non-tax-paid bonded warehouses in which bottle and cased spirit beverages could be stored. Under the present system the tax on spirits is paid at the time of bottling—which is 90 or 120 days before the spirits reach retailers' shelves. This 3-to-4 month lag ties up millions of dollars in needed revenue, the industry contends, figuring that, at six per cent, it is needlessly paying an estimated \$30-million-a-year interest, which of course adds to the cost of the liquor you buy.

Foreign producers are not required to pay taxes until goods are delivered at retail. Thus they have an unfair competitive advantage over U.S. distillers, says the petition, which was provided to wholesalers as a service to the trade by Schnley Industries, Inc.

SNUFF SALES STEADY — Dipping, not sniffling, is the accepted way of using snuff, a product which had its heyday in the royal courts of 18th Century Europe and still enjoys a six-million-user following in the U.S., according to a recent report by the Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp.

Snuff sales, which reached their domestic peak of 43 million pounds during the cigarette shortages in World War II, now total about \$58 million annually. Volume has remained relatively steady at about 34 million pounds per year for the past several years, the B&W report notes. That's a volume equal to nearly half the total amount of tobacco consumed by all the country's pipe smokers.

Biggest snuff users are in Minnesota, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Texas, in that order. They include factory workers, farmers, miners, bakers, baseball players, laboratory workers and even judges. Of the 70 different types of snuff available, most popular is sweet dry snuff — such as B&W's Tube Rose — a plain, powdered tobacco often flavored with sugar, licorice, clove, cocoa and cinnamon.

Replacing the pinch-sniff-sneeze method in common use for 200 years is the modern method of tucking a "dip" of snuff under the lower lip,

and allowing it to dissolve gradually. The "dip" is very popular with U.S. snuff users. All of which, B&W concludes, means that the snuff market will continue to be a healthy one. The company also makes billions of Viceroy, Kool, Belair, Kentucky Kings, Life and DuMaurier cigarettes.

THINGS TO COME — An electronic piano that can create special musical effects in addition to standard piano tones is on the market; the 81-pound piano is slightly larger than a suitcase, can be packed for convenient travel . . . Italian food lovers can now purchase one-cup packets of instant espresso coffee . . . Also new on the food market: mayonnaise packed in five-ounce aluminum tubes for the picnic set.

ELECTRONIC CONVENTIONS — Closed-circuit television is coming as an important addition to time honored patterns of sales meetings and trade conventions. Several manufacturers have devised systems that permit organizations to hold meetings without calling in men from the field. Tuned to the TV circuit top management can discuss important developments with regional personnel, sales groups can merchandise wares to nationwide distributors, and conventioners can receive personal messages from key spokesmen from thousands of miles away. Hotels and motels, eager to capitalize on the newest development, are installing the closed-network TV and similar systems in increasing numbers.

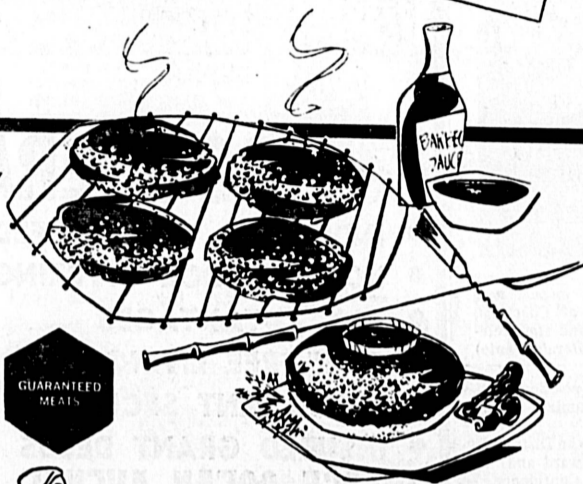


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