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# Movie-going in New Zealand, 1950-1980

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## Abstract

While historical film audience research has flourished internationally since the 1980s, New Zealand's historical movie-going audiences have largely been ignored. This thesis seeks to increase our understanding of this once phenomenally popular pastime by investigating the movie-going habits of New Zealanders during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Using a multi-methodological approach, I draw on 600 survey responses, official statistics and reports, and archival material to ascertain changes in movie attendance and preference over these three decades, and the reasons for those changes. The examination of film exhibition and its practices is key to the investigation.

These decades were ones of significant societal change, not least because of the introduction of television in the 1960s, which saw a rapid decrease in the number of movie-goers and led to a change in movie-going culture from 'going to the pictures' to 'going to a picture'. Movie-going ceased to be a habit for many New Zealanders and instead became more of an event, assisted by a change in Hollywood production from hundreds of movies a year, to a few 'blockbuster' event-status films. The 1960s also saw a continuation of the high marriage and birth rates of the 1950s, and television fitted this period of domesticity. Hollywood increasingly focused on making films for young adult audiences, which further assisted in reducing audience sizes in New Zealand as some of the more popular genres with audiences here, such as the Broadway-inspired musical, were no longer being made. Another potential audience, children, were also neglected as films became increasing 'adult' in content, and were censored accordingly. Exhibitors were required to work hard to source appropriate material for children, many of who, given the late arrival of television here, and the even longer wait for transmission at child-friendly viewing times, still relied on the movies for entertainment. A further barrier to retaining audiences was the ever-increasing cost of admission tickets. By the end of the 1970s, these factors had coalesced to see New Zealand audiences at an all-time low, and the cinema business in New Zealand facing a most uncertain future.

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