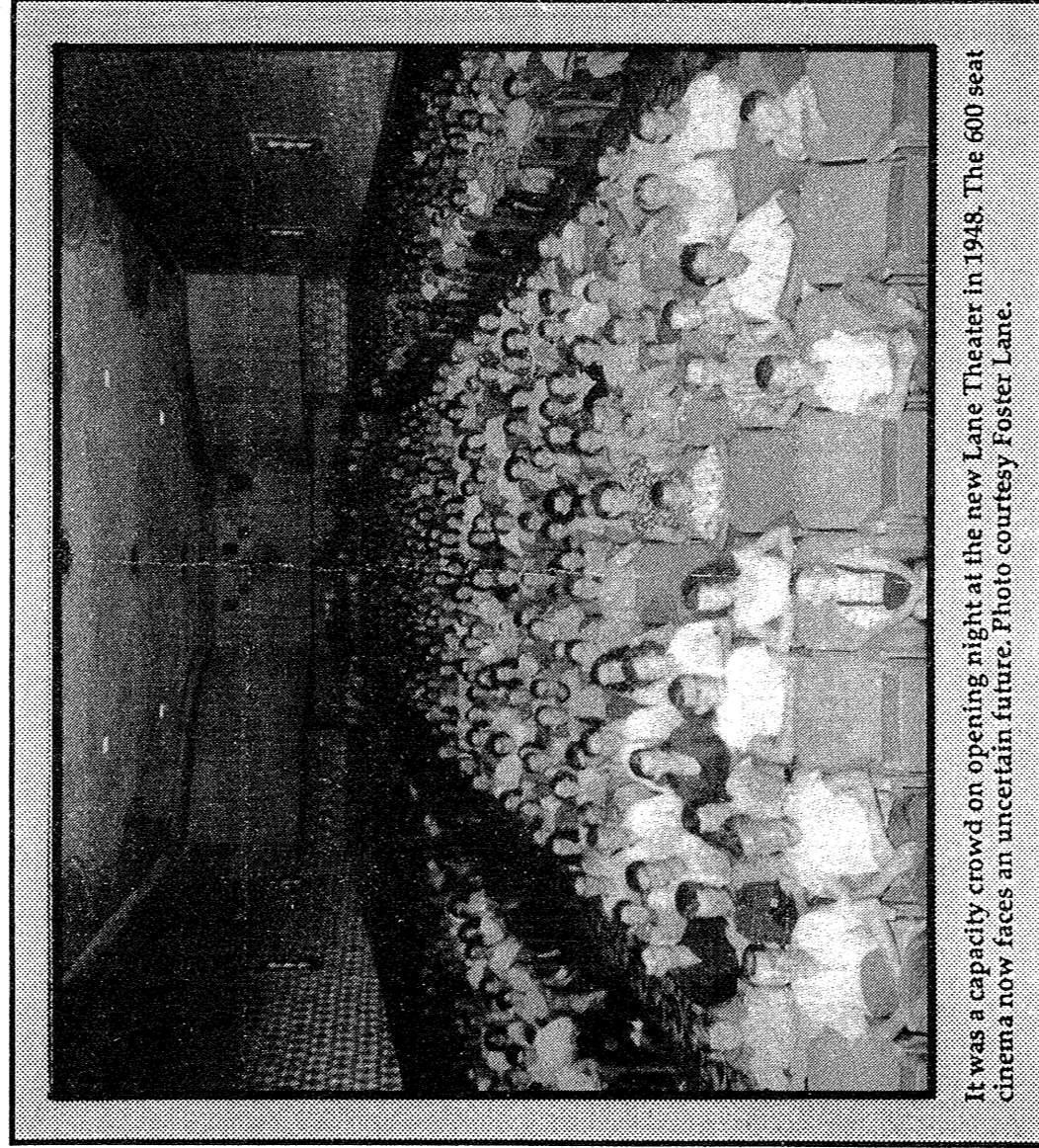


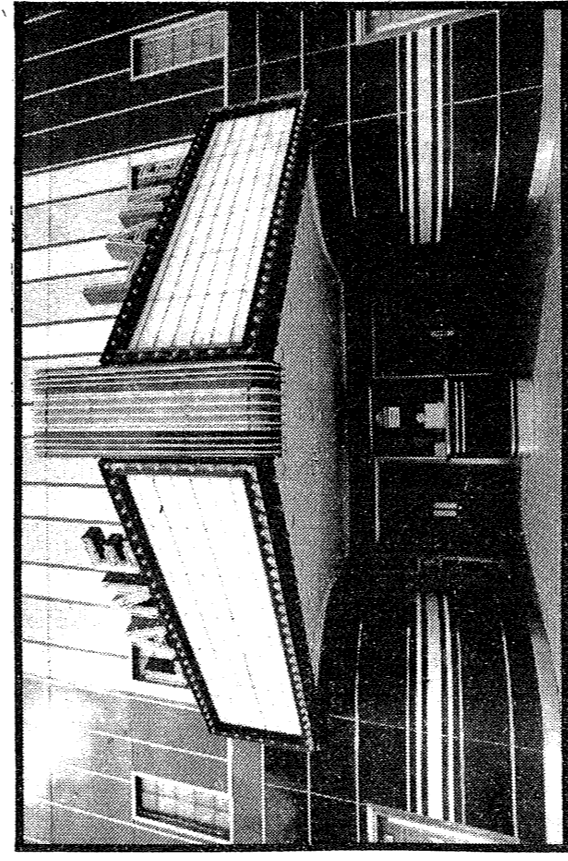
## The show is over

After 68 years in the movie business, Foster Lane says it's time to go home.

Story by Teresa J. Hill  
Photographs by Bill Cox



It was a capacity crowd on opening night at the new Lane Theater in 1948. The 600 seat cinema now faces an uncertain future. Photo courtesy Foster Lane.



It was a hot summer night in July of 1948 when Foster Lane opened the doors. The people were lined up, waiting impatiently. They were a mixture of all ages — young couples, families, high school students — and they came from all areas of the county and across the neighboring state line.

One at a time, they paid a dime for a ticket and then most forked out an additional ten cents for a bag of popcorn. By the time they had all filed into the brand new theater, it was packed, some 600 hundred full.

*Cine Ma. Regards to Broadway* was the first of many hits to light up the Lane marquee in downtown Williamsburg. For almost 40 years, every night, the posters have been up, the sign has been lit, and the people have packed in or trickled in, but they've been there.

But now, Foster Lane has closed the doors. He is 80-years-old, and has had enough. "I hate to leave it. It's a sad time for me," he says, as he stares at the empty theater. "But there comes a time when you have to give it up. All of us."

Lane has always been the one behind the theater adage, "the show must go on." He is a veteran of the movie business since he was 12, some 68 years ago. He recalls that, when he started "I was so little they had to give me a special box to stand on to see out the porthole."

He remembers turning the hand-crank for the generator, and later, carefully lining up the separate reel of film to coordinate with the record for the first "talking pictures." He witnessed first-hand the technological advances that have jumped from the silent pictures of the 30's, to the stereo state-of-the-art equipment of today.

He has noted the change in films as well. "They don't make good films like they used to," he says, shaking his head. "These movies today; I don't see a blockbuster in the crowd."

His clientele, too, has shifted. "Now it's just teen-agers. Before it was families, people in their 30's, 40's, 50's."

"We used to run Elvis movies. They were our biggest attraction. Buddy, we'd pack 'em in. On Saturdays we'd have to run a Western or we wouldn't get no one," Lane reminisces.

But that was then. The nights when a

triple Elvis showing would draw in crowds that would back up traffic onto the highway are long gone. Lane says the real drop started about three years ago, with the affordability of VCR's and take-home movies.

"There's no doubt that they (VCR's) have ruined the movie industry," says Lane. He sounds bitter, but that is understandable. The movie theater has been his life. "They talk about a new bridge for Williamsburg; well they won't need it because there won't be no one to cross it. When this place closes up, this town is dead."

Lane says his greatest wish is that someone will take the time and effort to make a go of the theater. The seats have all just been re-done; the projection equipment is the best that money can buy; the chance to save a piece of history and make money from a Williamsburg landmark is there.

He is looking forward to retirement. No big plans, he explains. "It's time to go home and sit down awhile."

"But who knows?" he adds. "Maybe whoever buys the place will need someone to show them what to do, how to get around the theater." And who knows more about it than Foster Lane?

"I'll miss coming down here every

day," he says simply. "When you've been

coming down here 70 years, it'd be impos-

sible not to. And I'll miss seeing the people.

I've always been among the people."

Lane pauses one last time to look across

the empty room. "It's hard to leave," he

repeats. "You get it in your blood and you

can't wash it out in one day. I've been at it

too long."

Indeed, it is an eerie feeling looking out

at the unfilled seats. Lane opens the cur-

tains that hide the huge screen, but it is

blank, a white shield of silence. There is an

expectation to the stillness; it is hard to

believe that in a moment the lights won't

dim, the speakers start to blast, and the

pre-views of coming attractions fill the

screen.

But it's true. The doors are locked. The

marquee is naked and the displays once

holding posters are bare. The huge theater

is closed; even the familiar shadow of the

occasional bat that often winged its way

across the screen is gone.

The show is over, and as Lane says, "It's

time to go home . . ."



"I hate to leave it. It's a sad time for me...but there comes a time when you have to give it up. All of us."

The empty marquee of the Williamsburg theater is witness to the end of an era. The history of the theater is evident in the front — the "art-deco" style was extremely popular in the 1940's.