

Lyric Theater Brings Back Memories For Killian

By Diana Scott

Robert Killian's face relaxes as he responds to questions about Park Street's Lyric Theatre, and the neighborhood he knew intimately as a boy. Seated behind a massive desk, flanked by leather-covered chairs and framed trophies of an active legal and political career, the former state Lieutenant Governor ticks off the names of businesses which once lined Park Street faster than it is possible to record them.

At Park and Lawrence, there was Fisher's Brewery, Hardy's Tavern and Solomon Automotive; and at Mitchell House, Killian's wife, a visiting nurse, had an office where she taught expectant mothers about childbirth. Down the block, where Hartford Federal Savings is today, was the village bank, and Fred Crosby's barber shop, next to the place where Killian's father, Edward F. Killian had his smokeshop. An influential man in the community, the elder

Killian sold foreign language newspapers in addition to nickel cigars—papers in Polish, Swedish...the Irish Echo, the Jewish Forward—to

residents who reserved copies ahead of time. The neighborhood had unusual nationalities: Lithuanians, Armenians; he remembers a friend from the Cape Verde Islands.

On Broad Street, around the corner from the Lyric Theatre (which these days features mostly Spanish language movies, on Saturday at 5:00 and Sunday at 2:00) was the Hippodrome. It was already "a wrecked old thing" used for movies, by the time the Lyric put it out of business. (Vienna Bakery and Ehrlich Upholstery subsequently occupied the Hippodrome site.)

Killian characterizes the old Lyric as "a mecca for kids. You'd go in at 10:00 a.m. when it opened, and parents were digging you out with a flashlight at 5:00." For a nickel admission, you could see the likes of "Zongoo the Ape Man" (not so different, one imagines, from currently billed features).

The Lyric was not exclusively for movies. There were amateur nights and mens' club minstrel shows. Killian recalls that Lawrence Street School had a harmonica band, "and they were good, too," performing at the theater.

Lyric Hall itself was a social center, meeting place of the West

Side Men's Club, of which the elder Killian was a founder. The Club boasted strong athletic teams—"strictly professional" during a period from WW I to 1930; with its heyday in 1926-27-28, it was finished by the depression. For a time, the Irish-American Home Society used the building, and later, the Frog Hollow Club of Robert Killian's generation.

The Frog Hollow Club began as a boys' club around 1930 and at its height of activity (1936-38) boasted athletes like Billy Duffey (who was captain of Villanova when it was a championship team); Bud Mahon (now Hartford's city treasurer) who was manager of teams; and Billy Scully—a well known pitcher at Trinity, and minor league baseball player. Killian's brother, Edward, was a boxer. Club members used the Hall daily; at one time sandwiches were served at lunch, "and even during prohibition, if you tried hard, you could get a glass of beer...a highball, too." The Frog Hollow Club disbanded when WW II sent Robert Killian's generation off to war.

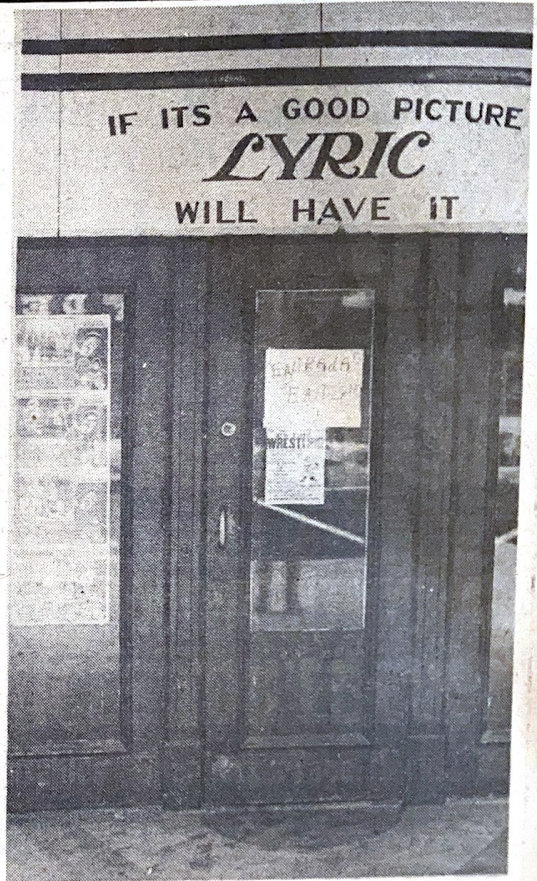
Speaking of Frog Hollow in its golden age (circa 1917), Robert Killian says, "It was a great place to live. People shared a sense of responsibility—to see kids were fed, people taken care of, block by block, house by house." He remembers the day-old loaves of bread—6 for a quarter—that were shared, from the Bond Bakery; he recalls watching the rich people on Washington Street have horse-drawn sleigh races in winter; and that his mother walked on a narrow board path through the "frog pond," to get from Parkville to the Hollow.

Brookside Restaurant

422 New Britain Avenue
Hartford, Connecticut
We Specialize in Italian Food

Grinders • Pizza
Luncheons served 11-2

GENE BIANCO
EUGENE ORSINI Phone
524-0550



The Lyric Theater (Photo by Dan Keiman)