



Nickelodeon City: Pittsburgh at the Movies, 1905-1929

Michael Aronson

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From the 1905 opening of the wildly popular, eponymous Nickelodeon in the city's downtown to the subsequent outgrowth of nickel theaters in nearly all of its neighborhoods, Pittsburgh proved to be perfect for the movies. Its urban industrial environment was a melting pot of ethnic, economic, and cultural forces—a “wellspring” for the development of movie culture—and nickelodeons offered citizens an inexpensive respite and handy escape from the harsh realities of the industrial world.

Nickelodeon City provides a detailed view inside the city's early film trade, with insights into the politics and business dealings of the burgeoning industry. Drawing from the pages of the Pittsburgh Moving Picture Bulletin, the first known regional trade journal for the movie business, Michael Aronson profiles the major promoters in Pittsburgh, as well as many lesser-known ordinary theater owners, suppliers, and patrons. He examines early film promotion, distribution, and exhibition, and reveals the earliest forms of state censorship and the ensuing political lobbying and manipulation attempted by members of the movie trade. Aronson also explores the emergence of local exhibitor-based cinema, in which the exhibitor assumed control of the content and production of film, blurring the lines between production, consumption, and local and mass media.

Nickelodeon City offers a fascinating and intimate view of a city and the socioeconomic factors that allowed an infant film industry to blossom, as well as the unique cultural fabric and neighborhood ties that kept nickelodeons prospering even after Hollywood took the industry by storm.

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