Motion pictures in the reading room of Ventspils Museum

The exhibition entitled Motion Pictures. History of Cinema in Ventspils is currently on display in the Exhibition Hall of the Livonian Order Castle, where the historian Māra Dāvida provides an insight into the history of cinema in the interbellum period in Ventspils.

The World War I has just ended, and the population has endured both the Red and White Terror. Despite the modest opportunities, the residents of Ventspils are eagerly trying to restore the pre-war life. The *Koloseum* cinema also resumes its work, where already in May 1919, a not very entertaining documentary film about the controversial former Minister of Defense of the former Russian Empire, General Vladimir Sukhomlinov, is screened, who was accused of the low level of preparedness of the Tsarist army at the beginning of World War I.

Cinemas in Ventspils

In the early post-war years, the right to cinematography in Ventspils belonged only to the owner of the *Koloseum* cinema, Mrs. M. Rutšinska, who paid a monthly fee of 60 lats for this privilege to the city. However, the situation changed when Kārlis Krievs was elected as the city's mayor. He began a fight to revoke the monopoly rights and to increase taxes. From then on, cinema owners had to pay the city 20% of each ticket sold. As a result, instead of the previous 60 lats, the city treasury received 700–800 lats per month. However, the Rutšinskis family's troubles did not end there. The city mayor discovered that the owners of the cinema had illegally granted "honorary guest" status to 120 people and issued unlimited free tickets. As if that wasn't enough, it turned out that no one in the cinema administration spoke Latvian. "Such disrespect for the country and the majority language is unacceptable!" said the city mayor Kārlis Krievs through the press.

Soon enough, the *Koloseum* cinema lost its monopoly in the city. In October 1924, a new cinema, *Pasaciņa*, was opened almost next to the *Koloseum* cinema, which was located at Pils iela 18 (now Pils iela 28). The owner of the new cinema was a city councilor and merchant, Ādolfs Stūre. The cinema, with 200 seats, was located at Pils iela 25 (now Pils iela 27). From then on, Ventspils residents had many film options. Films were shown every day in both cinemas. The new cinema offered many different films. For the first time, it was possible to watch the Women's Beauty Contest in Latvia in the cinema.

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In 1926, Ādolfs Stūre, together with Indriķis Grickus, Ella Bērmans, and Kārlis Geruckis (the projectionists of the oldest feature film made in Latvia, Kur patiesība? (Where's the Truth?)) established the company Sabiedrība kino "Koloseums"– A. Stūre and merged both cinemas. In the following years, each cinema had its own distinct film schedule.

In 1929, the third cinema, *Moulin Rouge*, also locally known as the 'Red Mill', was opened in the former '*Družba*' hall (now Ventspils Cultural Centre at Kuldīgas iela 18). The entrance to the new cinema was on the corner of the building above which decorative rotating mills were installed. Shows were only held here on weekends.

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Film schedule

The *Koloseum* cinema, also known as the *Coliseum* cinema, was the favourite cinema among film enthusiasts, where mostly melodramas featuring the most famous movie stars of the 1920s were shown. Here, one could see masterpieces such as *Casanova* with Russian actor Ivan Mosjoukine in the lead role, *Anna Karenina* with Greta Garbo, as well as the world-famous The *Blue Angel*, which elevated the 29-year-old actress Marlene Dietrich to new heights of fame. It should be noted, however, that unlike the rest of Europe, the Latvian Ministry of Education banned films that did not conform to certain moral standards, although not for long. The film, albeit "censored", eventually made it to Latvian cinemas.