



Welcome to the Deckchair Cinema

Darwin Film Society, a community-based volunteer organisation, established the Deckchair Cinema in 1994 to show short runs of films that would not otherwise reach Darwin audiences. Deckchair Cinema is a not-for-profit organisation that attracts a weekly audience of 1000 people during peak season. Most of the films each season are contemporary, especially Australian films, with a selection of classics. Deckchair Cinema also hosts special events for community groups and takes part in local events such as the Genti, the Writers' Festival and Darwin Festival. Every year Deckchair Cinema co-presents the Fist Full of Films, the annual Northern Territory short film-making competition run by the Darwin Fringe Festival. Darwin Film Society are a major sponsor of the competition and provide cash prizes to local film-makers.

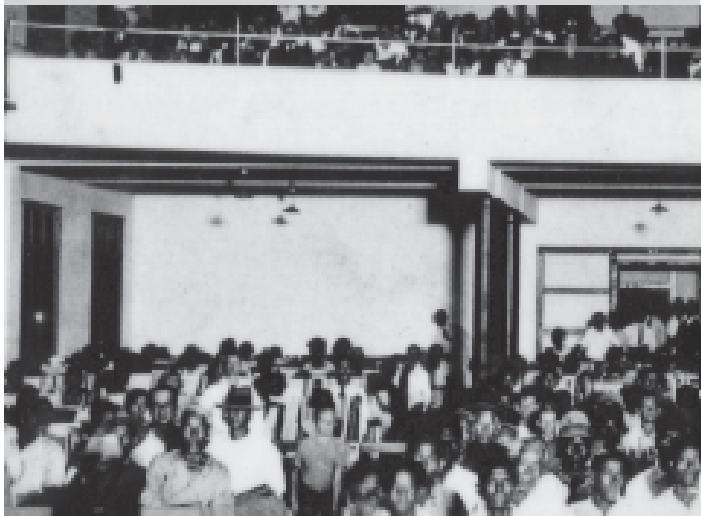
When the Deckchair Cinema opened, there were few options in Darwin for people to have a different movie experience; the Parap Cinema and the Nightcliff Drive-Inn had closed with the advent of video in the 1980s, and so there was a noticeable absence of outdoor cinema in Darwin.

Since opening, Deckchair Cinema has found a place in the hearts of Darwin residents and visitors alike. The open, casual atmosphere, eclectic choice of films and view of the harbour with its stunning sunsets is very appealing. Visitors also appreciate relaxing in a deckchair with a glass of wine or bringing along a picnic dinner and star-gazing. Even the frogs in the toilet and resident flying foxes are part of the attraction.

Originally intended as a temporary measure, the Deckchair opened its doors at the Stokes Hill site in June 1994. During the next nine years, locals and tourists became familiar with the cinema, business picked up and it is now considered a Territory icon and a not-to-be-missed Darwin attraction. Over time, the cinema had obviously outgrown its site, with regular sell-outs and the need for a larger, permanent site became urgent.

In 2003, with the assistance of the Northern Territory government, Deckchair Cinema moved to a permanent site in the Wharf Precinct. As well as providing a wonderful waterfront location, the government also assisted with a grant — the remainder of the cost of the new building was met by the Darwin Film Society.

Below: The Star in the 1930s, courtesy of the State Reference Library, Darwin.



A Site with a Long History

The new site of the Deckchair Cinema, at the edge of Darwin Harbour, has a long history.

To the local Larrakia people it has always been a place of great social and cultural significance as well as providing a plentiful source of fresh seafood. The nearby Lameroo Beach has long been a popular camping, fishing and swimming spot for the Larrakia and other residents of Darwin and was the location of the once popular all-season swimming baths.

The baths were built to keep out crocodiles, but were less effective at excluding box jellyfish, which caused a number of deaths to bathers. The baths fell into disrepair during the 1950s. During the 1970s Lameroo Beach was home to a large hippy commune until Cyclone Tracy wreaked havoc and destroyed the site in 1974.

In the early days of European settlement, most people arrived by sea at Stokes Hill Wharf and quite a large settlement grew at the Fort Hill camp township after the thick natural vegetation was cleared. Later a more substantial town, including Chinatown grew on top of the hill, where Cavenagh St now stands. Many of these features have changed — the Hill was flattened during the war years and Chinatown was damaged and later cleared during World War 11.

On the Esplanade directly above the Deckchair Cinema — opposite the now demolished Hotel Darwin — Australian Rules football was regularly and enthusiastically played at the oval, which consisted of sand and gravel. Men of all races took part in these football games - in fact an Aboriginal man, Reuben Cooper is credited with introducing the game to the Northern Territory following schooling down south.



Darwin's Tradition of Outdoor Cinemas

Outdoor cinema has been part of Darwin for nearly 80 years. In fact, there have been more outdoor cinemas in Darwin than there have been indoor ones. The first picture-house operated at back of Gordon's Don Hotel, on the site of the current ABC studios in Cavenagh St. It was little more than four walls of corrugated iron open to the weather, with a screen at one end. The Don closed in 1932 because of competition from the purpose-built Star, which opened in 1929 and showed Darwin's first talkie in May 1933. The Star screened movies until it was severely damaged by Cyclone Tracy in 1974.

The Star, managed by Tom and Heather Harris, became a well-loved part of Darwin. Heather Harris (nee Bell) played the piano while her husband operated the projector. An acrobat, dancer, and teenage owner of one of the first Harley-Davidson motorbikes in the Top End, she scandalised the small community with her pranks before marrying Tom in 1932. Wednesday was 'Western' night, and it was particularly popular with the Aboriginal population, who would come from everywhere, paddling from Mandorah and even the Tiwi Islands in canoes. Apart from the Star, there were several other outdoor cinemas operating in Darwin during the 1940s, most of them rudimentary affairs, operated by the Defence Department for the benefit of Defence Force personnel. The Parap Cinema (also operated by the Harris family) and the Nightcliff Drive-Inn further broadened the options for cinema-goers in Darwin. However, both establishments closed in the 1980s, suffering a downturn in business as videos became popular.

MOVIE CHARACTERS

Clyde Fenton, the Flying Doctor, was a well-known character in Darwin in the 1930s. In 1935, flying in from Katherine, he was overcome by an irresistible temptation to find out what was playing at the Star, so he buzzed the cinema. He liked what he saw, so circled a couple of times to catch the dramatic finale before landing at the airstrip.

Writing in his memoirs, Dr Fenton recalled the incident: "The first person encountered on our coming into town was Tom Harris, the cinema proprietor. He demanded 5s, the price of two seats in the dress circle. We objected to this and offered 2s, on the grounds that we had been in the pit most of the time."

From "*Discovering Darwin*" by Eric Sager, 1993



DARWIN



SOCIETY

Darwin Film Society was established in 1964 as a community-based volunteer group to bring to Darwin films that were not likely to be picked up by the mainstream cinemas.

Before opening the Deckchair Cinema, the Darwin Film Society was instrumental in bringing Sydney's Travelling Film Festival to Australia's far north, and presented a wide range of classic films from around the world and screened a large proportion of Australian films when they were rarely seen in mainstream cinemas.

As well as running the Deckchair Cinema, the Darwin Film Society helps community groups and other organisations screen films and organize special events at the Deckchair Cinema.

Darwin Film Society receives support from the Australian Film Commission and the Territory Government for specific projects, most of our funding comes from ticket admissions and film society memberships. Darwin Film Society is run by a committee made up of volunteers, whose main reward is to be able to watch quality movies in an outdoor setting at members' prices.

Deckchair Cinema is open every night of the week from April to November during Darwin's dry season.

We hope you enjoy your Deckchair Cinema experience.

Darwin Film Society members receive considerable benefits including free tickets, discounts to the Deckchair and other local venues as well as special offers.

Details available from: www.deckchaircinema.com





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