

Moving Pictures Have Been Entertaining Houlton People 50 Years; First Theatres in 1907

In addition to having the distinction of being a Sesquicentennial year of a newspaper, the year of 1957 also has the honor of being a semicentennial year of that popular institution which was known as the moving pictures when the first performance was made here in 1907.

It was late in the fall, during the month of October as far as can be learned, that Houlton was invaded by two competing moving picture interests which began performances within a few weeks of each other.

FIRST ADVERTISEMENT

The first recorded advertisement for a moving picture show in a local newspaper appears in the Aroostook Pioneer for October 10, 1907, for the New Pastime Theatre in the Mansur Block. The advertisement set forth that the program would consist of moving pictures and illustrated songs by Mr. Davidson.

There is a slight mystery about this advertisement because it appeared in the same newspaper with exactly the same text for the ensuing three weeks and then was absent for a week or two. Each of the first advertisements promised the program "next week" would consist of these popular subjects: "The Billboard Fever", "A Boar Hunt", "The Chef's Revenge", "Dogs Used as Smugglers", "The Belle of the Ball", "Dog Snatcher" and "Forty Winks".

During these performances, which were advertised to open at ten in the morning and run until ten at night, Mr. Davidson would sing "Way Down East", "Somewhere", "In the Valley Where the Sunshine Never Leaves".

BIJOU AD APPEARS

It was in the issue of Nov. 7, 1907, that the first advertisement of the Bijou Theatre appeared in the local newspapers, also listing moving pictures and illustrated songs but with a shorter program period, between two and five in the afternoon and seven and ten in the evening. Both theatres ad-

vertised an admission price of ten cents for adults and five cents for children.

The amazing thing about this first appearance of such a revolutionary influence in the world of entertainment was the scant attention given to it by the local press. Neither newspaper took great pains to herald the arrival of a completely new kind of theatrical presentation that was eventually to cause the death of the stock companies that had made the Houlton Opera House a popular place for many years.

STOCK COMPANIES HURT

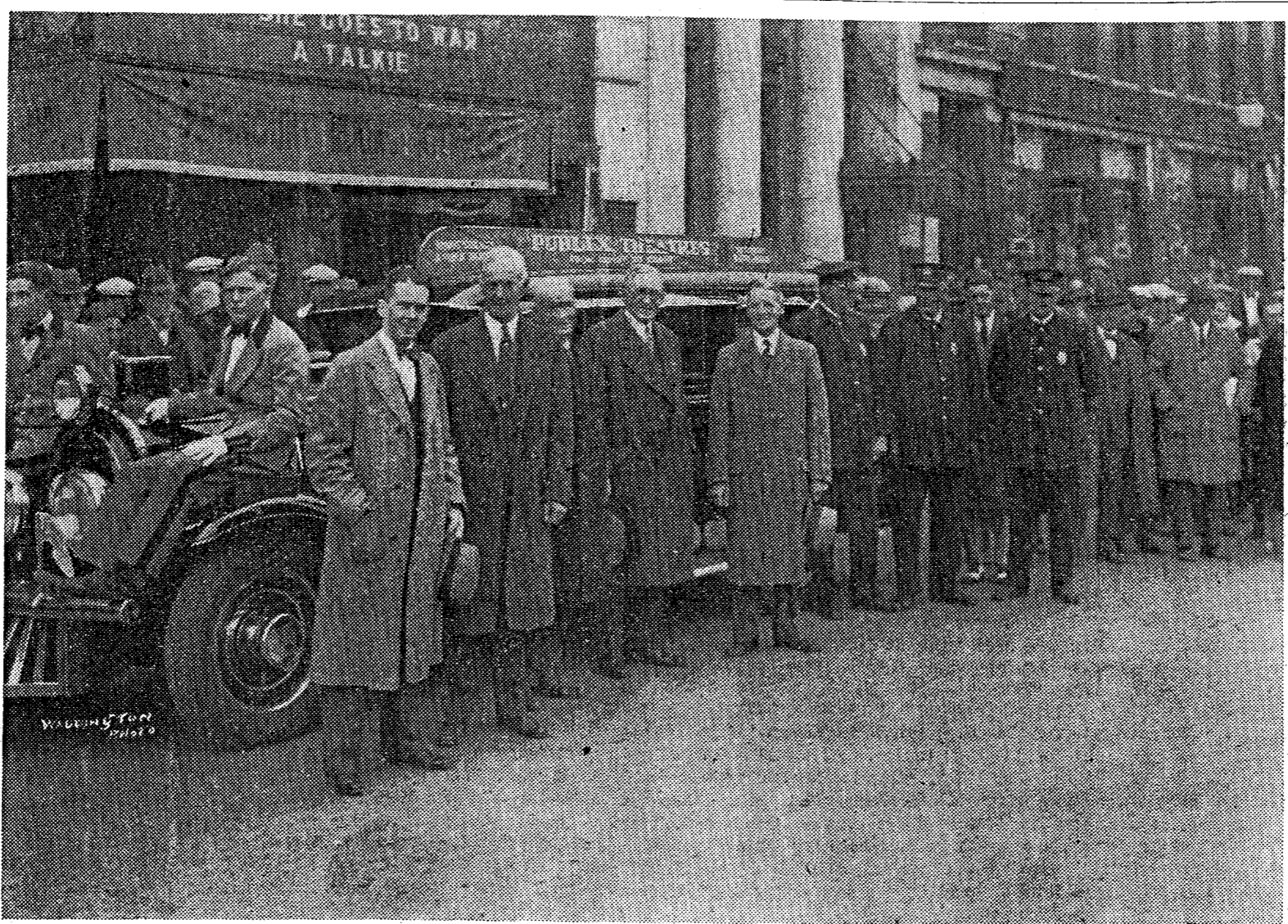
The Clark-Urban Company, H. Price Webber, the Gladys Clark Company, H. Wilmot Young and other traveling stock companies were gradually forced to discontinue their annual tours as the popularity of the movies grew steadily.

In regard to the opening of the Bijou, the Aroostook Pioneer did note that, "The Bijou Theatre, which was formerly Society Hall, is to be opened as a continuous moving picture theatre next Saturday afternoon. The management informs us that this is the 6th city in which they are operating these entertainments and that all their theatres are doing a capacity business. The public can rest assured that they will receive as good an entertainment as is being presented in any of the larger cities and these entertainments are at present so popular in other places we have no doubt but what the people of Houlton and the surrounding towns will greet this new venture with good patronage."

OPENING REPORTED

The following week the same newspaper reported that "The Bijou Theatre opened at Music Hall Saturday under the most prosperous conditions. The company has two excellent machines for throwing their pictures on the canvas and their films are the clearest and brightest that it is possible to secure. The Bijou company has an excellent singer of illustrated songs who daily

The Day That Talking Pictures Came To Houlton



The official family of the town turned out to welcome the first talkie to be shown in the Temple Theatre in 1928. Johnny Hassett, then manager of the theatre, stands at the left, hat in hand. Next are, left to right, Fred N. Vose, then first selectman, Samuel Webber, Justin C. Rose, L. Rupert Ervin, Patrolman (now chief of police) Lincoln Magaw, Chief Frank Hogan, Patrolman Vernon Sterritt, Charles G. Lunt and William Thibodeau. Usher Walter Wakefield is sitting on the left bumper while Usher Claude York stands by the right side. Charles H. Fogg watches between the two.

pleases the large audiences present . . ."

The Aroostook Times did a little better, noting that "Miss MacDonald is an artist at the piano and the illustrated songs by Mr. Griffin are a feature as he has the finest baritone voice that has been heard here for some time.

"We predict a successful run for the Bijou".

In his report of the event, Editor Lyons of the Aroostook Pioneer took a somewhat dimmer view of the future of the movies as a source of entertainment. His closing line commented that, "They give a first class performance and will undoubtedly receive

a liberal patronage during the winter months."

ENTERTAINMENT PRAISED

Both papers also noted that the Pastime in the Mansur Block was also drawing a fine patronage. The Aroostook Pioneer commented on the fact they had heard very favorable mention of the pleasing entertainment at this (Pastime) Theatre, the picture being "The Fair and Holy Week at Seville". We are pleased to note an increasing attendance and certainly know of no better place to spend an hour or so in witnessing splendid pictures and listening to a good musical program."

Neither paper apparently took

enough interest in the sponsors of the theatres to note that the Bijou was managed by Charlie Seymour who came to Houlton from Biddeford or that Mrs. Seymour acted as the first local ticket seller. Nor was there mention of those hard funeral directors chairs on which the audience was obliged to sit, arranged neatly in rows at the start of the show but shoved around in complete disarray before the first reel had been completed.

These historians who failed to note that a lad by the name of Archie LeDoux, who also did a little boxing, was the first moving picture machine operator at the Bijou and that, later, Arthur

Hagerman officiated in the booth for many years.

There was a failure also to comment on the skill of Doc Reimer at the drums, whose sound affects added great realism to the picture unfolding on the screen or the music of Jack Thomas who always managed to set just the right music for the scene.

Reimer almost wore himself out trying to keep up with the pistol shots that filled almost every foot of film during the presentation of The Great Train Robbery, with Broncho Billy Anderson.

SOUGHT LOCAL BUSINESS

The Pastime Theatre made a

bid for more local business by acquiring the services of Miss Lucy Grant and Frank McLaughlin, both popular local singers, and advertising them.

As the year drew to a close there occurred the first incident of possible objection to movies of certain types. The Pioneer reported that "A protest was registered with the Selectmen, Wednesday against the penny theatre on Kendall street. We know nothing about the 'penny theatre' but no sane man can find anything objectionable 'about the Bijou and Pastime Theatres. Their pictures are entertaining and instructive and the best of order is maintained at their respective places of business that are patronized by the most respectable people in town."

The same issue also bragged that "The Bijou continues to grow in popularity with the people of Houlton as the crowds that nightly wend their way to this popular play house grow larger every day and the management has already been obliged to enlarge the seating capacity and it is no wonder, for the show is as good as any city show."

PUT RECORD STRAIGHT

The following week the local ministerial association sought to put the record straight by saying they had known of several resorts bidding for local patronage and had requested that "these be put under official control as there was reason for the concern on the part of parents and teachers that their shows might be improper.

Revs. Kenneth McKay, president and T. P. Williams secretary, denied that their association had made any requests to have theatres in the town discontinued, but had only asked that all such places be put under "official, competent and reliable supervision so that the rights of youth and childhood to safe and wholesome amusement and entertainment shall be properly safeguarded."

The Pioneer promptly endorsed this stand and regretted any misunderstanding that may have been aroused by their item.

A STRONG INFLUENCE

The last issue of the Aroostook Pioneer for 1906, issued on the day after Christmas contained a gem that is either an early masterpiece of the press agent's art or a tongue-in-cheek bit of spoofing. The paragraph reads, "One of

our popular townsmen who had lately bought a nice little home a few miles from town, was obliged to dispose of the place as his wife refused to live there in account of it being so far from the Bijou Theatre that it made it hard for her to visit the Bijou for each change of pictures and her husband also acknowledged he had been thinking of moving back, as he could not get along without visiting the Bijou at least three times a week."

The Pastime reported that its manager, Mr. Aiken had taken as an associate, T. C. Heywood of the National Amusement Company and that great things were in store for its patrons. A 1907 Powers machine was soon to be installed "which will greatly improve the service."

The Heywood Opera House was by no means to be counted out of its share of Houlton's theatre dollar. Manager Walter T. French had announced as a big Thanksgiving attraction the versatile Harry La Marr of Cobb's Corner, as Mrs. Partington, together with "all the latest songs, dances and musical numbers" and "moving pictures between the acts."

A milestone on Houlton's movie history was reached in the early teens when that great epic by David Wark Griffith, The Birth Of A Nation, came to town. This was no ordinary moving picture. It was the first multiple reel production ever to be made. Thus it had to have a special showing and was presented in the Heywood Opera House.

The company brought its own orchestra along and also its own sound effects crew with the result that the historic production was shown with great realism to capacity crowds who flocked to see it.

In the meantime the Pastime had not progressed as well as its sponsors had hoped and it was taken over by the management of the Opera House, the merger being accompanied by an announcement that even better movies and vaudeville were to be offered to their patrons.

ANOTHER PALACE

Another moving picture palace of that era was the Orpheum which was started up in the location vacated by the Pastime in the Mansur Block but had a comparatively short life. In 1911 the Dunn Furniture Company vacated its quarters on the street floor of the Heywood

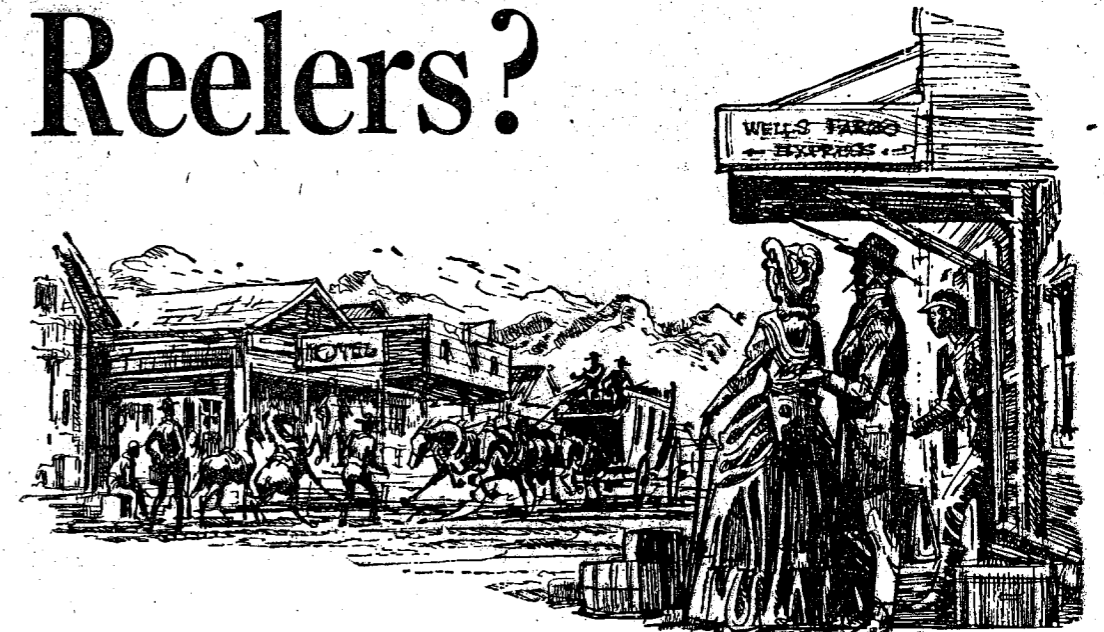
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Remember The Old Time Two Reelers?

HOULTON HAD THEM . . .

. . . . and . . . Thru the years Houlton has had the finest in Movie Theatres, both indoors and out of doors, equipped with the latest and best in sound and projection and showing the newest Hollywood releases.

We congratulate Houlton and the Houlton Pioneer Times on their Anniversaries, and pledge ourselves to continue to bring to Houlton the finest in Motion Pictures.



**"LET'S TAKE THE
WHOLE FAMILY TO THE
MOVIES TONIGHT"**

