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MARIN
HISTORY
MUSEUM

Bulletin

LET'S GO TO THE MOVIES



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The Marin History Museum

Founded in 1935, the Marin History Museum celebrates the traditions of innovation and creativity of the people of Marin County. Through exhibitions and educational programs, the Museum inspires honor for the past, an understanding of the present, and an imagination of the future.

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The Bulletin

The Bulletin is a publication created by the Marin History Museum.

Contributors:

Joan Capurro
 Scott Fletcher
 Jo Haraf
 Claire Hendren
 Michelle Kaufman
 Jean Mansen
 Marcie Miller
 Ed Remitz
 Alice Tanner

Advertising: Jeff Craemer

Editor: Jo Haraf

Layout/Design: Ann Batman

Copy Editors: Ed Remitz and Betty Von Glahn

Marin History Museum
 PO Box 150727
 San Rafael, CA 94915
 415-382-1182
 Email: info@marinhistory.org

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Collections & Research Center, Novato

The Marin History Museum collects and preserves a wide range of artifacts, photographs, and archival materials chronicling Marin County's rich and diverse history. In total, the Museum cares for over 25,000 artifacts and 200,000 photographs in the Craemer Family Collections & Research Facility in Novato. Objects in the collection are conserved for their historical and educational relevance and serve as the cornerstone of the Museum's exhibitions.

This facility also houses the Museum's Research Library where visitors may make an appointment to research any aspect of Marin's history. The Research Library contains rare manuscripts, newspapers, directories, ephemera, maps, and a reference collection of over 300 books.



To make an appointment, email research@marinhistory.org or call 415-382-1182



A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Hello fellow historians and museum supporters,

The Museum continues to grow thanks to your support through memberships and donations.

We are reaching out to the community with two pop-up exhibitions. The Museum staff collaborated with the Mission San Rafael Arcángel's to produce an exhibit celebrating the Missions' 200th anniversary. Stop by the Mission's gift shop to see the display. The other exhibit is in collaboration with the Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society and celebrates the schools in Kentfield and Greenbrae. That exhibit can be seen at KGHS's exhibit space at Bon Air Center in Greenbrae.

Our new Collections Manager, Heather Powell, has been working very hard these last six months to bring the artifact, photograph and library collections into order. She and two interns from John F. Kennedy University's graduate Museums Studies program have completed the re-inventory of the collection.

Additionally people are again donating items to the Museum. In the last few months we received these outstanding items: a black & white photograph of Tamalpais Forest Fire District motorized vehicles all lined up, c. 1940s. This image includes the pumper that was donated by Sue Smith last fall! Also, we received a 1886 leather-bound bible engraved with "Henry Augustus Du Bois" and a wooden egg shipping crate from the ranch of Charles Buehn, who owned a poultry ranch in Indian Valley, Novato.

Our Speaker's Series continues through October. See page 8 for details about the remaining lectures in 2108. Also, thanks to a grant from the Marin County Supervisors we will be creating traveling history trunks for the schools so kids across the county can learn about their own history. Please support our efforts by donating, becoming a member or volunteering your time.

We have come this far. Please help us continue to grow.

Al Boro, President



To all our Loyal, Talented Volunteers

Thank You!

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THE CALIFORNIA MOTION PICTURE CORPORATION

BY SCOTT FLETCHER

When talking about early motion-picture filmmaking most people would not think, “Oh, yeah, San Rafael!” But in 1914, San Rafael’s Sun Valley neighborhood became the home to one of the premier movie-making studios of the young film industry. The California Motion Picture Corporation was the brainchild of Comstock mining heir, Herbert Payne, a self-described “clubman,” “capitalist,” and early automobile enthusiast. The previous year, Payne had driven from San Francisco to Los Angeles filming the beautiful landscape and historical attractions of the Golden State. He produced a film series titled, “The Golden Gate Weekly” that played in the Pantages and Orpheum theaters throughout the United States and Canada. Payne understood the unique opportunity that film could provide in reaching a national audience to promote tourism and business opportunities in California.

A partner in the firm and prominent San Francisco automobile dealer, George Middleton, became a manager of the company and directed a number of the studio’s films. In 1907 he met, courted, and married Beatriz Michelena, a beautiful and exotic opera prima donna of the San Francisco stage. It was Michelena’s star power that transformed the studio from a promotional and advertising firm to one of the earliest and most prominent feature-length film studios.



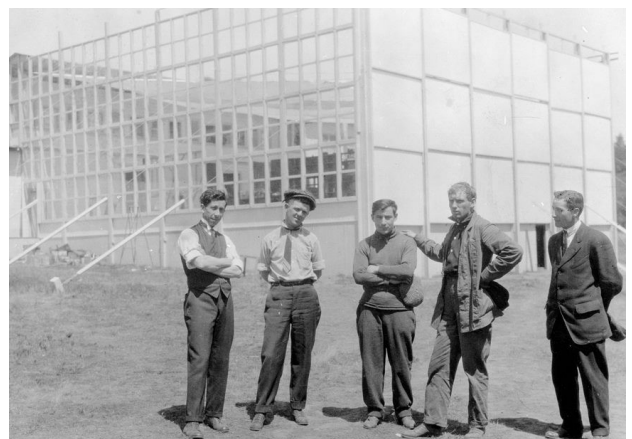
Beatriz Michelena, second from the left, in a promotional photograph for the 1914 film: *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. Source: MHM

house, a film processing laboratory and vault, and a “cooks” building that served as both the kitchen and lunchroom for employees. Most impressive, and quite unique for the era, was the large, glass-walled and roofed film stage that let in light but not wind. This meant that the filming of interior scenes would not be plagued by gusts of wind that blew the actor’s clothing and hair or lightweight props such as tablecloths and curtains.

Another innovation pioneered by the company was the filming of interior scenes at remote locations. The studio constructed the shell of buildings minus a roof and one side that were covered by white sheets and “light diffusers” so that interior filming could be done without traveling back to the studio.

Moving from their San Francisco offices, Payne and Middleton chose San Rafael as a prime location to build their studio. Not only was the site close to numerous natural environments in which to film, there was also ample sunlight throughout year; an absolute necessity in the early days of film before interior lighting technology had been developed. The studio was built on land between present-day Forbes and 5th Avenues and J & K streets.

There was a large two-story building devoted to offices and dressing rooms, stables for horses and stagecoaches, a carpenter shop and prop storage ware-



CMPC crewmembers outside glass-walled film stage in San Rafael Source: MHM

They also used an expensive Bell & Howell movie camera that held two reels of film along with another camera to film from a different direction, distance, or angle. Payne and Middleton along with their glamorous leading lady wanted to produce high quality, historically accurate movies based on classic tales and early California stories.

They chose for their first “filmatization,” a Bret Harte short story, “Salomy Jane’s Kiss,” a western romance that was released as *Salomy Jane*. Michelena’s natural beauty and acting experience gave her the tools to make the transition to silent film and, for a time, rival the popularity of silent film star Mary Pickford. Michelena was also an accomplished equestrian and strong swimmer, two skills that would prove invaluable, and often dangerous. *Salomy Jane* was released in late 1914 to a limited, nationwide audience having first screened at the St. Francis Hotel.



CMPC built this entire western town set in the Santa Cruz Mountains to film *Salomy Jane*
Source: MHM



Beatriz Michelena mounts the horse of her leading man, House Peters, in 1914’s *Salomy Jane* .
Source: MHM

Josephine Clifford McCracken, a noted California writer and contemporary of Bret Harte, wrote, “... a girl with a wealth of artistic tradition behind her, Michelena's gifts do not stop there. She has rare beauty, vivacity, wit, intellectual attainments and athletic grace.” The film was an artistic and critical success for the studio but did not turn a profit due to its limited distribution. Michelena herself garnered praise for her acting and her ability to perform most of her stunts. Incredibly, she was knocked unconscious twice during her film career, once falling from a horse and once as she was being “rescued” by her male co-star and was dropped, hitting her head on a tree stump. She also survived two near-drownings when swimming in the flood-stage Russian River and the Santa Cruz Mountains near Boulder Creek. Adding to her fame, she wrote a newspaper advice column titled, “Talks with

Screen-struck Girls,” for her younger fans and newspaper articles on film production and screen acting.

Between 1914 and 1916 the studio released eight more films including *Mignon*, a story based on three Brett Hart poems: “The Lily of Poverty Flat,” a Bret Hart story filmed mostly in the Santa Cruz Mountains near Boulder Creek; *A Phyllis of the Sierras*, filmed along the Russian River; *Salvation Nell*, a popular Edward Sheldon Play; *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, from a popular novel of the era; *The Unwritten Law*; and *The Woman Who Dared*.

Newspapers at the time gave most of these films rave reviews for their authenticity of character, sets, wardrobe, and action sequences. However, the company could never cover the costs of their extravagant productions. The studio declared bankruptcy in early 1917 after a failed attempt to bring the German drama, *Faust*, to the screen. Movie audiences were beginning to prefer the shorter, fast-paced comedies and westerns that were being churned out in Hollywood. The studio could not compete with their Southland competitors whose films were being distributed widely throughout the United States.



SAN RAFAEL 4TH STREET MOVIE THEATERS

By Jo Haraf

Marcie Miller, a ten-year Marin History Museum volunteer, recently shared details about her popular San Rafael 4th Street Walking tour.

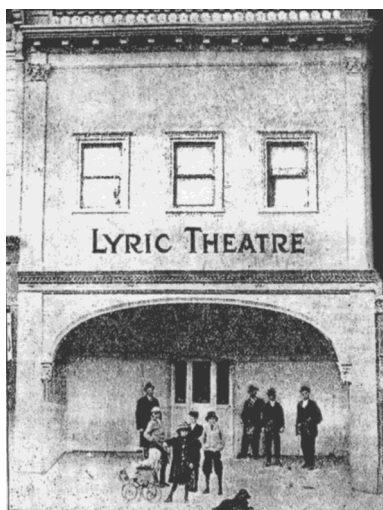
- Q. Marcie, while your tour spans decades of historical events on 4th Street, much of your talk is about the theaters.
- A. Absolutely! From 1900 into the 1930s, San Rafael hosted a dynamic theater scene showing live vaudeville, silent-films, and eventually talkies in those theaters profitable enough to upgrade to sound. Venues opened and closed in rapid fashion with some only open a few months. If I had to count the number of theaters in San Rafael over that period, eight is a good guess.
- Q. Why didn't Marinites simply go to San Francisco for entertainment?
- A. The Golden Gate Bridge didn't exist until 1937. A trip to San Francisco required an hour in a stage-coach on muddy roads from San Rafael's B Street Station to San Quentin where you caught a ferry to the city and then a cable car to the movie house. After the film, you played the whole trip in reverse. Ugh!
- Q. Take us for a walk down 4th Street to visit some of Marin's theaters past and present.
- A. Sounds like fun! Don't forget your sunhat and water bottle.

Let's start at 4th and D Streets, where Gordon's Opera House opened its doors in 1879 to concerts, political rallies, high school graduations, and lectures. The *Marin Journal* reported on the opening party: "The widest public interest is felt in the opening of the new Opera House and to see it filled with the beauty and the chivalry of Marin and the metropolis will be the season's grandest event. Tickets \$5 including supper."

By 1908, the Opera House was renamed The Lyric Theater. Admission was 10 cents. Children got in for a nickel. After The Lyric moved, the theater was renamed The Star. When The Star couldn't keep up with the glut of movie houses, the location became in turn a live performance venue, the Moore-Dalman apartments (early 1950s), and finally its current incarnation as "Art Works Downtown," a non-profit arts organization.



1906 newspaper ad Source: *Marin Journal*



1912

Source: MHM

A couple of blocks down and across the street, at 1122 4th Street, you'll find the Aroma Café. In 1912, The Lyric Theater moved from Gordon's Opera House to this location as the first purpose-built movie house in Marin. The Lyric closed when the next-door Orpheus opened. Although the building has been greatly modified, two front windows and some roofline details remain intact.

Next door, at 1118 4th near A Street, The Orpheus Theater (now the Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center) amused patrons until it burned down in 1937. See our article on page 16 about the theaters that called this site home.

As we continue east, look across the street to the alleyway next to Rafael Joe's (931 4th Street). In September 2002, the path was renovated and dedicated to Lauren Catuzzi Grandcolas who perished on United Airlines flight 93 on September 11, 2001.

Originally topped by a neon marquee, the alleyway provided ready access for 4th Street visitors to The Garden Theater's less convenient location at 914 3rd Street. Opened in 1903, the 150-seat theater began as a skating rink and offered movies starting in 1907. It ceased showing films in 1912, perhaps closed due to the success of the 4th Street theaters, but continued as a popular destination into the 1920s, hosting balls, dances, concerts, lectures, prizefights, plays, and school graduation ceremonies. The old site is now a parking lot.



El Camino

Source: MHM

We'll end our walk at the corner of 4th Street and Lootens Place. The El Camino Theater entertained guests here from 1928 until 1953 when The Rafael put it out of business. Penney's and then Macy's took residence at the location until the 1990s. The site is now a branch of the Mechanics Bank. Some of the original flat arches can be seen near the top of the building from the Lootens side. Peek inside at the lobby ceiling for a plaster medallion and chandelier from a 1930s renovation.



Mechanics Bank ceiling

Source: Jo Haraf

Q. San Rafael in 1920 and 1930 had populations of 5,500 and 8,000 respectively. How did the theaters compete for their audiences?



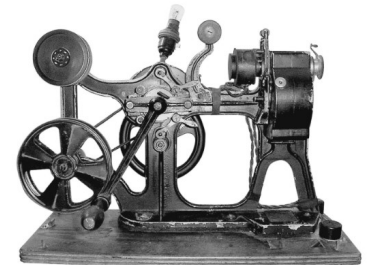
1925

Source: Wikipedia

A. Like today, popular films filled seats. Based on fantastic themes such as magic, the supernatural, myths, and folklore, fantasy films drew big crowds. Contemporary fantasy films included the silent *The Wizard of Oz* (1925) and the black-and-white talkie, *King Kong* starring Fay Wray (1933).

When I was a kid, movie theaters offered double features. San Rafael movie houses offered four, six, even eight movies a day in between live acts. Of course, many of the movies were short.

In the silent era, theater owners battled to hire the best singers and narrators. As theaters do today, they fought for pants-in-seats by offering the latest technology: larger screens, melodic organs, longer two-reel movies, and strong projector-men.



Hand Crank Projector

Source: 1stDibs.com

Q. Projector-men? Who were they?

A. Early projectors weren't electric. They required a strong, steady hand to crank the wheel in pace with the film and ensure the cowboy's horse didn't slow-walk down the hill to save the fair damsel from the villain. The man operating the projector had to maintain a lively pace or the cattle stampede turned into a leisurely stroll.

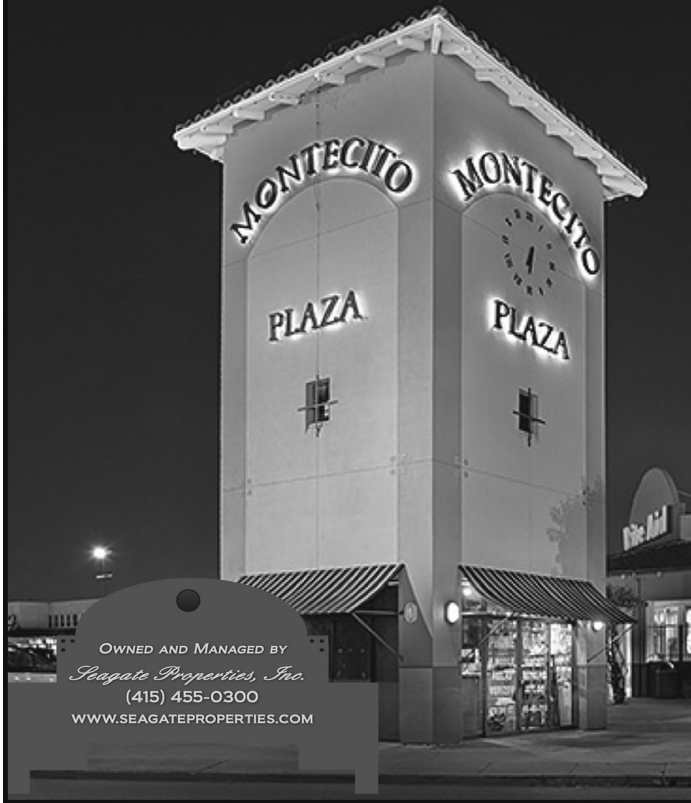
Q. Marcie, thank you for sharing your knowledge of Marin's theaters. How can our readers learn about your future History Walking Tours?

A: Readers can follow my tours at "Save Marin's History" on Facebook or subscribe to the Marin History Museum's mailing list at info@MarinHistory.org. Marin History Museum members always receive an email invitation to join our walks.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

SPEAKERS SERIES

Elks Lodge, 1312 Mission Ave., San Rafael
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July 14 Mt. Tamalpais: The History of Three Peaks & Their Legendary Trails, by Brad Rippe

August 23 Pacheco Land Grant to the Pacheco Winery with Herb Rolland

September 27 History of San Rafael Fire House with Laura Ackley

October 11 History of the Construction of Alpine Dam and other dams of the MMWD watershed with Matt Cerkel

WALKING THROUGH HISTORY WITH MARCIE MILLER BENEFITTING MHM 10:00am \$10

July 14 Join us to walk from Boyd Park to San Rafael Hill.
Starting at Boyd Park 1125 B St San Rafael

August 11 Walk east past historic mansions, St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Mission San Rafael.
Starting at Boyd Park 1125 B St San Rafael

September 23 Celebrate Louise Boyd's birthday with house and estate tour, short film, cake.
Starting at Elks Lodge 1312 Mission Ave San Rafael

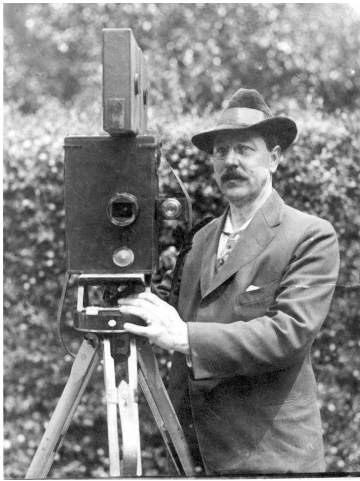
October 27 Visit the burial sites of many of the founding pioneer families of Marin County.
Mt Olivet Cemetery 270 Los Ranchitos Rd San Rafael

For up-to-date information: marinhistory.org

Meet Leon Forrest Douglass

(March 12, 1869 – September 7, 1940)

By Jean Mansen



Source: douglasshistory.co.uk

Leon Douglass achieved financial, artistic, and technical success with the Talking Machine Company's disk phonograph record. He promoted artists including Enrico Caruso and other Metropolitan Opera greats, popularized the image of the dog listening to "His Master's Voice," and developed and patented

the cabinet and stand that became the Victrola, perhaps named for his wife — Victoria Adams.

With unfortunate timing, Douglass moved from Philadelphia to San Rafael in 1906. An inventor with a passion to bring art to the masses, he founded the Douglass Natural Color Motion Picture Company, which perfected a system of filming, in the camera, color motion pictures. Before Douglass's invention, movies had been hand-tinted, frame-by-frame after filming. The Douglass travelogues included glowing sunsets and cerulean skies contrasted against Marin's poppy fields — the colors and tones so natural and vivid that audiences gasped in astonishment. The *New York Times* verified the high caliber of Douglass's device: "[The film] reproduces every shade and tint of the colors of nature ... the range being apparently unlimited, depicting all of the delicate shades and hues."

Douglass produced what is believed the first American feature-length color film shown



Source: MHM

before paying theater audiences — *Cupid Angling*. Set in Marin, the film starred Leon F. Douglass, Jr. alongside Ruth Roland with cameo appearances by Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, who were considering using the Douglass color system. The movie first aired before an audience of five hundred at the San Rafael Elks Club on 5th Avenue in May 1918. Many said it was the most astonishing entertainment they had ever experienced. The *San Francisco Chronicle* described *Cupid Angling* as "a springtime romance which gives full opportunity for introduction of a wealth of colors. It is like viewing nature at its grandest..."

Douglass found his avocation in motion picture photography. He invented the first zoom lens for motion picture cameras and techniques to produce special effects such as multiple images and panoramic images up to three times the standard film width without distortion. He featured these techniques in a commercial film about a drunk who sees double and triple.

Because Douglass color films required specially trained operators and additional equipment to show them, it was an innovation ahead of its time. Cecile B. DeMille said that color would draw the audience's attention away from the plot; thus, Hollywood had no interest. Nevertheless, the Douglass process was pivotal in the formation of Technicolor.



Newspaper ad Source: IMDB.com

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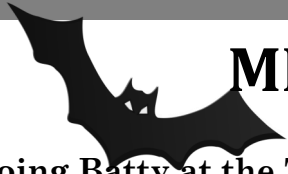
Trivia Questions

Here are some fun questions to pass the time on a hot summer day. The answers can be found in the Bulletin articles.

1. Where was Eve Arden born?
2. What made Leon Douglass's movies unique?
3. Which contemporary filmmaker shot his first movie at the Marin Civic Center? Bonus points if you can name the film.
4. The Cove Players used which movie theatre for their live performances?
5. Bernice Baeza and Heidi Hillenbrand rescued which theater from destruction in 2003?
6. San Rafael's Mechanics Bank is the site of which prior businesses?
7. Which San Rafael theater burnt in 1937?
8. What innovation helped the California Motion Picture Corporation film indoor scenes?



Answers on p. 15



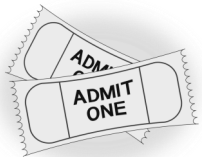
MEMORIES FROM OUR READERS

Going Batty at the Tamalpais

In 1989, my friends and I went to an evening movie at The Tamalpais in San Anselmo. As the theater would soon close for good, only manager John, usher Cliff, and a snack bar clerk were still there. As the virtually empty auditorium grew dark, something began swooping around inside the theater. Cliff and John, armed with ladders and flashlights, scurried around to capture what turned out to be a bat. Their entertaining antics continued for most of the movie. As a result, I can't remember a thing about the show. Later, I worked with Cliff and John at The Fairfax Theater. We often joked about the night The Tamalpais went batty.

Shared by Michelle Sarjeant Kaufman, Marin History Museum Director

Lil' Whippersnappers!



Back in the day, when a group of young boys wanted to see a movie at The Rafael Theater, two would buy tickets and the rest would wait

outside in back. Once inside, one of the boys would distract the usher while the other opened the rear exit so the rest could pour in.

Shared by a gentleman who always paid his way.

Those Ruby Slippers

When *Pricilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) played at the now shuttered Marin Theater in Sausalito, a twenty-something guy in full Kurt Cobain-grunge slipped into a seat a few rows in front of me. As the opening credits started, he raised his feet to the seats ahead of him, displaying for all his fabulous red high heels.

Shared by the delighted shoe spotter.



Drive-in Dating




I was nineteen-years-old in 1961. My girlfriend Vickie and I double-dated on a blind date to Marin Motor Movies, the San Rafael drive-in movie theater. Vickie and her honey, Bob, sat in the front. In the back seat, my companion got fresh and tried to unbutton my sweater. "What are you doing?" I said, catching Bob's attention in the front seat.

After the movie, we all went to Juanita's in Sausalito for coffee. My date said nothing to me the rest of the evening, which was fine by me. I was grateful when Bob chatted me up. The next day, I asked Vickie's permission to go out with Bob—if he ever called me. "No problem," Vickie replied. "I have other boyfriends."

Bob called. We went out. And as they say, the rest is history. We married on June 29, 1963, and just celebrated our fifty-fifth wedding anniversary.

Fondly remembered by Joan Capurro, the gal who got the guy.

Belli Deli
D. J. Shin



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MARIN ON THE SILVER SCREEN

By Jean Mansen

North of the Golden Gate, Marin made enormous contributions to the nascent Silver Screen when motion pictures were just stills moving before one's eyes.

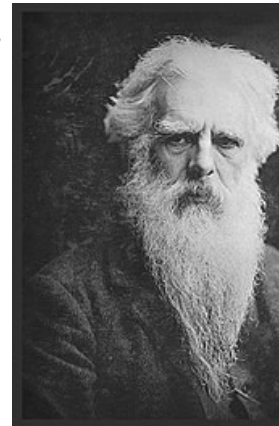
Marin's starring role on the Silver Screen began in the 1870s with the help of Eadweard Muybridge and Leland Stanford. The former was a visionary, the latter a pragmatist — with money. Together they transformed the art of photography (which was in high demand during the Gold Rush as newcomers wanted to document their arrival out West, their good fortune, and their families) into the new medium of cinematography. By current standards, the 1880 projection of a moving image was crude, jerky, and brief. However, the on-screen motion amazed viewers.

Muybridge was born on April 9, 1830, in England. He came to America to seek his fortune, became transfixed by the West Coast scenery, and was inspired to become a photographer to document what he saw. During the 1860s and 1870s, no goods or services were available for aspiring photographers. Muybridge constructed his camera, prepared his chemicals, coaxed his negative plates, developed his negatives, and finally printed his photographs. Printing entailed a glass negative coated with a gooey collodion solution that had to solidify to the precise degree at which it was most photosensitive and then be developed immediately. No simple task. Muybridge garnered Stanford's admiration, respect, and (perhaps most importantly) his financing.

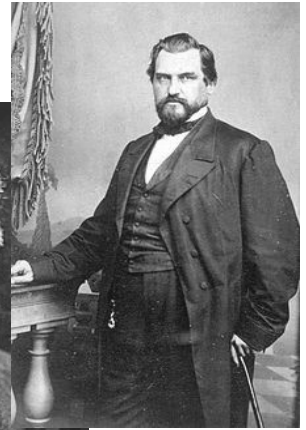
Thomas Edison shot two silent films in Marin, *Mount Tamalpais Railroad* (1898) and *View of Mt. Tamalpais* (1902). Miles Brothers Company filmed another silent movie, *A Trip Down Mt. Tamalpais* (1909). Apparently Mt. Tam has been posing for films and photos for over a century.

Beginning in the 1890s and continuing throughout the silent era, the Bay Area was a supportive home to experimenters of all kinds, including Leon F. Douglass who developed some of the first natural color motion pictures. (See Leon F. Douglass's biography on page 9.)

From 1909 to 1916, Gilbert M. "Broncho Billy" Anderson defined the movie cowboy hero and developed the timeless archetype of the Western. In May 1911, Anderson, who had teamed with George K. Spoor, a Chicago movie distributor and operator of 122 nickelodeons in the Midwest, came to San Rafael. Spoor needed a constant supply of short films — Anderson needed a trusty distributor for his movies. They named their company after their surname initials: Essanay. Max Graf, at the start of his producing career, joined Anderson and his group of cowboys, horsemen, cameramen, and technicians. In Marin County, they made Westerns including: *The Hidden Mine* (June 1911), *The Two-Gun Man* (August 1911), and *The Cowpuncher's Law* (September 1911). Their action films were shot in the meadows between Fairfax and San Anselmo and on old stagecoach roads in the hill country between Bolinas and Fairfax.



Eadweard Muybridge
Source: Wikipedia.com



Leland Stanford
Source: Wikipedia.com



Anderson as Broncho Billy
Source: Wikipedia.com

Anderson hit on a winning model and week after week moviegoers of all ages returned to follow their hero — Broncho Billy. Anderson’s three-ingredient formula continues in movies today: the hero’s journey to attain a noble goal while overcoming almost insurmountable obstacles in the face of immeasurable danger. The intense drama built until Broncho Billy defeated the bad guys. Before the last reel ended, Broncho Billy either got his girl or rescued the fair maiden. As the concept evolved, the scenery became more critical, and Marin County served up breathtakingly rugged locales for filming. All told, the team made forty silent films.

Essanay’s cinematography often received professional acclaim. Roland “Rollie” Totheroh of San Anselmo, assistant cameraman at Essanay, worked under wildly risky conditions, filming head-on horse charges, cliff-side rescues, and gun and bottle fights using real bullets and bottles. Totheroh eventually became a cameraman for all of Charles Chaplin’s major films.

While Anderson was filming his shorts, The California Motion Picture Company, with its star Beatriz Michelena, made tremendous strides between 1913 and 1918 with superior feature-length photoplays. (Read more about The California Motion Picture Company on page 4.)

Marin had much to offer aspiring filmmakers. Year-round photographic conditions, unlike the long, dark, inhospitable East Coast winters, meant that natural light was available for filming most of the time, saving movie studios from using crude artificial illumination that was cumbersome, posed substantial fire hazards, and lit only tiny areas at a time. Natural scenery, including Mount Tamalpais, lush valleys, meadows, and woodlands, plus the rugged coastline, rocky headlands, and wide-ranging beaches provided endless filming diversity.

There were a couple of studios that opened and quickly folded in Fairfax. One produced a movie, *Money*, which lost much more of its title money than it made and resulted in the studio’s bankruptcy. The buildings were taken over by an actress wanting to build her own production company, but again, money proved to be the failing point.

With the closure of the studios in Fairfax and San Rafael, the Depression and World War II, Marin was no longer a film production center.

After the 1940s, Hollywood looked to Northern California again. Alfred Hitchcock filmed *The Birds* (1963) in Bodega Bay and two other movies in the Bay Area. Some actors and directors preferred Marin or San Francisco to Southern California because, “there are no meaningless meetings here,” in the words of director Michael Ritchie. John Korty’s Marin County production company earned a reputation for excellence in film and television along with both an Emmy and an Academy Award.

In 1970 George Lucas, a young filmmaker, shot much of his first film, *THX1138*, in the Marin County Civic Center.



THX1138
Source: YouTube.com

(continued on p.15)

Lucas grew up in Modesto during the 1950s and was interested in making a movie based on his teenage years. United Artists backed him, and Francis Ford Coppola, the producer on his first movie, signed on again. Lucas went to Modesto to view filming locations. But, Modesto had changed. Marin, and San Rafael in particular, were perfect. Lucas could imagine the cars of his youth cruising Fourth Street. When San Rafael balked, Lucas shot in Petaluma. Nonetheless, with *American Graffiti's* (1973) success, cruising Fourth Street in San Rafael became the thing to do for many years. The film launched Lucas's filmmaking career. Today's Lucasfilm is located not far from the site of the California Motion Picture Corporation roughly sixty years earlier.



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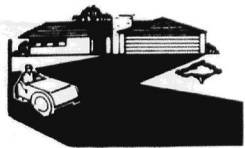
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TRIVIA ANSWERS

1. Mill Valley
2. The films were in color.
3. George Lucas, THX1138
4. The Tiburon Playhouse
5. The Lark Theater in Larkspur
6. Penney's, Macy's, and the El Camino Theater
7. The Orpheus
8. Glass-walled film stage



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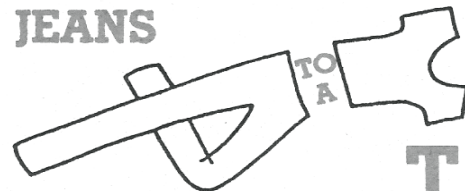
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SAN RAFAEL ORPHEUS THEATER

By Alice Tanner

One hundred years ago in downtown San Rafael, construction began on a movie theater. Today that theater on 4th Street is known as the Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center, but when it opened in January 1920, it was known as The Orpheus. The Orpheus was the first of Max Blumenfeld's many Marin movie theaters and prided itself on showing "pictures of merit and musical selections." How fitting The Orpheus bears the name of a mythical Greek poet and musician often portrayed in art, film, and music. Hard to fathom now, films in those days had no sound. Sound was added to film within the next decade and the movie-going experience was forever changed. The Orpheus was vibrant until a fire forced its closure in 1937.

The Blumenfelds quickly decided to build an entirely new theater in its place. Architect S. Charles Lee designed the new building in art deco style with its iconic neon marquee. The theater reopened on the same site on May 25, 1938, as The Rafael. Henry Martin's murals graced the walls and the new Rafael Theater boasted second-run films shown in "luxurious comfort." Many might remember The Rafael's plush loge seating on the balcony overlooking a large single screen revealed from behind massive drapes that were drawn back as the lights dimmed. Many shows were double features or were of such length they featured an intermission for bathroom break and popcorn refill. How many grown up Marin kids are lucky enough to remember celebrating a childhood birthday at The Rafael. Birthday boys and girls were announced and proudly walked on stage to rounds of applause, hoots, and hollers. Those special touches made the Rafael a favorite.

As the calendar turned, theater going changed and The Rafael fell on hard times. The Loma Prieta Earthquake struck the final blow in 1989 to this Marin treasure, rocking the foundation and forcing its closure. This beautiful theater sat vacant and unused until the San Rafael Redevelopment Agency and the Film Institute of Northern California (now the California Film Institute) teamed up to restore and rebuild the 1,100-seat theater. Planning and construction took six years (1993–1998), but in 1999 the Rafael Film Center was, once again, open for business. In 2000, Christopher B. Smith, a Tiburon philanthropist, donated \$500,000 to the film center and in 2003 it was renamed in his honor. The revitalized theater houses three screens and shows a variety of award-worthy works, focusing on independent, foreign, classic, and documentary films.

The theater originally opened in 1920 as The Orpheus has undergone many transformations to become what it is today, the Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center. What has not changed in the past

100 years is the joy of going to "the show." Our love of learning, of traveling to lands unknown or far away, of being entertained, of losing ourselves in a story not our own for a few hours is universal and timeless. Popcorn, anyone?



Orpheus 1920
Source: CA Film Institute



Rafael Theater
Source: CA Film Institute



Christopher B. Smith Film Center
Source: CA Film Institute

INKY MAKES THE FINAL CUT

By Ed Remitz

Neighborhoods love their lore. Take Larkspur. The city has counted one hundred seventy-nine permits for movie, TV, and photo projects since 2008, says Larkspur City Clerk Jamie Kuryllo. The latest TV project shot here was *13 Reasons Why* in 2016. But local screen history goes way back

Longtime locals have remembered one movie, a film noir, for nearly seventy years. It is *Impact*, a 1949 tale of betrayal and love that was filmed here in part. It stars Brian Donlevy as a square-jawed protagonist played for a fool and Ella Raines, a real looker portraying a grease monkey who helps with a rescue. The story centers on San Francisco, Oakland, and Sausalito, with Larkspur presented as a town in Idaho. “In this world, you turn the other cheek, and you get hit with a lug wrench,” says Walter Williams, Donlevy’s character.



Ella Raines
Source: Doctormacro.com

Not always, though. The plot’s meanings are bested, of course, leaving one puzzlement to delight trivia buffs: the identity of a dog that crosses in front of Donlevy as he

heads south on Magnolia Avenue past the old Blue Rock Hotel and restaurant, now the Left Bank restaurant.

That pup is not Toto. John Burke, a longtime Larkspur resident who moved to Oregon eighteen years ago, solves the mystery and enjoys sharing: It is Inky. “Inky belonged to Ida Esslinger,” says Burke, who was a kid when the movie was filmed. “She used to babysit my sister when my mom went back to teaching.” Ida and Max Esslinger lived across the street from Burke’s grandparents on Onyx Street, a straight-line two thousand feet from the



Impact Movie Poster
Source: IMDB.com

Blue Rock. Inky made the run from Onyx Street alone or at least unleashed, and crashed his way into the final cut. His moment of *canima vérité* lasts nine seconds.

“The heroine in that movie was the epitome of innocence and Larkspur in those days had the same qualities,” says Burke.

Fans also enjoy the scenes with Donlevy and Raines at a service station that is now Frank’s Hair Styles at 236 Magnolia Avenue. Owner Frank Snodgrass rented the building in 1977 and bought it in 1984. “I love the film,” says Snodgrass. He displays eleven *Impact* posters throughout his shop, one of them a looming 47-by-81 inches, and a roll down movie screen where he



Source: Youtube.com

plays the movie on some evenings. “It took me years to find it — I am probably the biggest purchaser of *Impact*,” Snodgrass says.

The movie’s ownership has passed into the public domain and it now is available more easily. *Impact* can be seen on YouTube. Scroll the timeline to 51:36 and watch for Inky. The Larkspur Public Library also has *Impact*. You can also rent it on DVD at the county’s last video rental shop, Bette’s Flicks at 870 College Avenue in Kentfield. The store has one DVD of the movie for sale, adds Keith Azoubel, Bette’s son and a young noir filmsmith who confesses his own trivia about *Impact* — his computer screensaver is a glamour photo of Raines.

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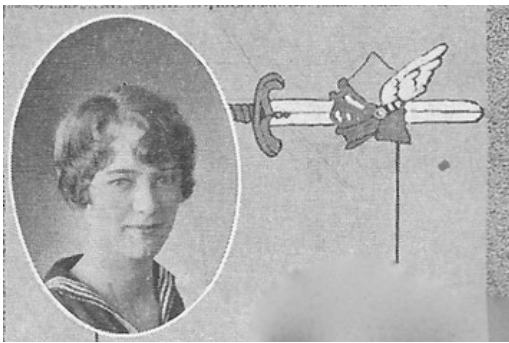
Meet Eve Arden

(April 30, 1908 – November 12, 1990)

By Jean Mansen

Born Eunice Quedens in Mill Valley, Eve Arden was the only child of a gambling-addicted father and former-actress mother. When she was barely a toddler, her parents divorced and she and her mother, reportedly a real beauty with an eye for fashion, moved to San Francisco to open a millinery shop.

Quedens invented stories and acted them out as a youngster while her mother was busy with the shop. After a few frightening years at a San Francisco convent school, Quedens fled back to Mill Valley to live with her father's sister and attend Tamalpais Union High School. She took to drama and immediately upon graduation landed a job with a San Francisco stock company.



QUEDENS, E.

Jinx '22, '23, '24, '25, Circus '23, '24, Senior Day Skit, Junior Prom Committee, Senior Play '26, Fashion Show '24, '25, Freshman Reception '23, '24, '25, '26, Student Body Skits, Night in Radioland, Spanish Play '22, Basketball '24, '25.

Eve Arden 1926 TAM High Yearbook

Source: MHM

From the stage, Quedens had a couple of movie walk-on roles, then was off to Broadway as a Ziegfeld girl, which is where the more glamorous “Eve Arden” name arose. From that came a radio job, then more substantial opportunities in Hollywood, and her breakout role in *Stage Door* (1937) as one of the fraught actresses (which was initially without lines). The cast of *Stage Door* included some of the best actresses of Hollywood's Golden Age: Katherine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Lucille Ball, and Ann Miller.

Arden impressed the directors with her comic delivery and dialogue. In turn, she played best friends, sidekicks, and career women throughout the 1930s and 1940s. There was no better wisecracking supporting actress on screen. Eve Arden earned an Academy Award nomination for her role in *Mildred Pierce* (1945) as Joan Crawford's business partner and best friend.

Perhaps it is *Our Miss Brooks* that springs to mind when you think of Eve Arden. The comedy series ran for nine years on radio, four on television, and was made into a feature film in 1956 — Arden was the female lead in all.

Arden had a short-lived television show of her own, but mainly she made guest appearances on many of the popular programs of the 1960s. Her film career spans from 1921 to 1982 and her television career from 1951 to 1987. You may remember her in *Grease and Grease 2*, or older classics, including *Stage Door*, *Cover Girl*, *Mildred Pierce*, *Anatomy of a Murder*, and *The Mothers-In-law*. Television highlights include: *Our Miss Brooks*, *I Love Lucy*, *Hart to Hart*, and *Falcon Crest*. Her stage credits include: *Private Lives*, *Ziegfeld Follies*, *Very Warm for May*, and *Two for the Show*.



Eve Arden as Our Miss Brooks
Source: WBN Radio

MARIN'S ORIGINAL AND STILL OPERATING MOVIE THEATERS

By Claire Hendren

Before Northgate shopping center opened in 1966 with its very own multiple-screen movie theater, Marin County boasted several other movie venues, many of which are still (or back) in business today. The Sequoia, The Lark Theater, and The Tiburon Playhouse each reveal a distinct part of the area's history.

The Sequoia

The Sequoia in Mill Valley, today owned by Cinemark Theaters, opened on February 21, 1929, at 25 Throckmorton Avenue as a single-screen theater with 1,200 seats. It was not, however, Mill Valley's first movie theater. The Hub, a few numbers down on the same avenue, showed silent films starting in 1915.

The Blumenfeld theater chain, owned by Max Blumenfeld, was responsible for bringing an additional theater to Mill Valley. Blumenfeld owned four other cinemas in the Bay Area at the time, including The Orpheus and The El Camino theaters in San Rafael. Architects Merritt and James Reid, also familiar with the area having designed over two dozen theaters in cities such as Berkeley, Oakland, and Redwood City, conceived the Sequoia. The theater cost over \$100,000 to build and \$25,000 to decorate, owing to its elaborate features such as lotus-inspired chandeliers. With its use of exotic and ornate elements, the theater exhibited an art deco style until the 1930s. The marquee on the exterior was later removed for the theater to be less decorative.

The Sequoia got its name thanks to a publicity stunt to arouse interest in the movie theater. Blumenfeld launched a naming contest for the venue that Ralph Kliewe, a Mill Valley schoolboy, won. Blumenfeld also used the latest sound and image technologies to ensure a large audience. Once technology allowed, the Sequoia replaced its silent films with talkies. Such effective commercial strategies quickly put The Hub, The Sequoia's hometown rival, out of business.

During World War II, The Sequoia did its best to support the war effort. It hosted fundraising events, reduced admission for servicemen, and sponsored Red Cross drives. After the war, new television technology gave viewers three channels to choose among. Theater owners soon matched customers' demands for variety with multiple-screen playhouses. The Sequoia was remodeled in 1975 and its theater twinned – making two rooms out of one. It changed owners again in 2008 when the Friends of CFI-Sequoia Theater purchased the movie venue.



Source: Mill Valley Film Festival

The Lark Theater

The Blumenfeld family also spearheaded The Lark Theater's development on Magnolia Street in Larkspur. William B. David, who started his career in the MGM Art Department and worked

on some Hollywood sets in the 1930s, designed Larkspur's movie theater. He later went on to design several movie houses in the area, two of which boast similar styles to The Lark - The Park in Lafayette and The Noyo in Willits. The Lark Theater's architectural style, mistakenly regarded as art deco because of its facade, is actually art moderne, a less elaborate version of art deco. As a single-screen theater, The Lark originally seated 400 people and featured heating and air conditioning. Two small buildings, on either side of the theater, provided additional office and storage space. In 1953, The Lark hosted a music series organized by the San Francisco Junior League called "Music for Minors."

Due to its precarious economic situation, The Lark closed in 1995 but reopened one year later thanks to Mark Fishkin and the California Film Institute. During its brief reopening, the location played classics, hosted the Mill Valley Film Festival and served as an art-house venue. It closed again shortly thereafter, and by 2003, a developer purchased it and planned to have it demolished. In order to prevent the destruction, Bernice Baeza bought the location, and, along with Heidi Hillenbrand, launched a "Save the Lark" campaign. They renovated the theater, adding red velvet seats, an art deco mural and updated the sound and visual systems. By July 9, 2004, the theater was ready to reopen as an independent, non-profit theater with 246 seats.



1946 Source: Marin Magazine

The Tiburon Playhouse

Before Tiburon was incorporated as a town in 1964, Fred G. Zelinsky bought most of the downtown area in hopes of restoring the town's initial charm as a seaport village. After his initial 1956 purchase of most of the properties on Main Street, Zelinsky developed The Boardwalk, which runs from Main Street to Tiburon Boulevard. He put up new shops and even added a movie theater — the Tiburon Playhouse.



1961 Source: Dodge Promotional Shot by Ryan Richard

Tiburon's movie venue opened on July 11, 1958, and hosted three different organizations. The Tiburon Playhouse Guild, a non-profit corporation for dramatic and fine arts, organized concerts, dances and performances at the Playhouse. The Cove Players, a local theater group founded in 1954, used the Playhouse as its permanent performance location. The Playhouse Cinema, managed by Donald Donahue, offered a wide movie selection. From its opening, Donahue wanted the theater to play foreign, art and Hollywood productions, as well as wild west and outer space shows during matinees for children. In addition to movies, an anonymous donor gave \$1,000 in October 1958 to help develop local cultural programming. Subsequently, a guild program aiming to bring live artists to Tiburon was

put in place in 1959. Years later, the Tiburon Playhouse narrowed its activities to focus primarily on movies, a trend reinforced by its purchase by Cinema West.

These three movie theaters which each have their own story to tell, can also be a lens through which to better appreciate Marin county's history. Cinemas not only provide escape thanks to the entertainment they provide; through their property changes, building renovations, and interior remodeling, they also reveal part of the county's many changes.

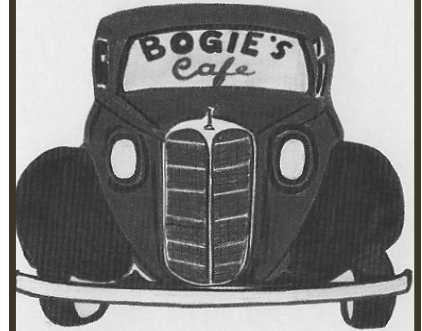


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Scott Fletcher has volunteered with MHM for six years, cataloging the Louise Boyd collection and writing the *Marin IJ's* "History Watch" articles since February 2017.



Jo Haraf quilts, gardens, hikes, and trains Betty (her precocious terrier-mix) when not writing about Marin County history.



Claire Hendren graduated with a M.A. in Art and Museum Studies from Georgetown University in 2015 and is currently a PhD candidate in Paris.



Jean Mansen is an editor and writer who, when not at her desk, can be found hiking Marin's trails with her dog and listening to audiobooks.



Marcie Miller is a ten-year volunteer at the Marin History Museum. Her historical walking tours, including an annual haunt through Mt. Olivet Cemetery at Halloween, are always well attended events.



Ed Remitz is a Marin writer, editor and recovering academic who doesn't believe in the Oxford Comma.

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Alice Tanner, born in Tiburon, has witnessed Marin's transformation over several decades. An addiction consultant in private practice, she works with families locally and nationwide.



Betty von Glahn, a retired teacher, feels the best way to understand a place is to learn its history. She loved learning Marin's history alongside her students

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