

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

by Eddy Ethwell Hanson

They come and they go, proving the old bromide "every dog has its day" to be all too correct. Each generation has its movie queens and kings, raised to dizzy heights of adulation and fame by popular acclaim, to dazzle and glitter for a while, only to fade with the passing of years, and then the next crop of stars moves up from the younger generation.

In the years from 1914 to 1917, Chicago had its very own moving picture company with a stock company of 55 actors and stars. The company was known as the Essanay Film Co. and the studio was on Argyle Street on the north side of Chicago. It was owned by George K. Spoor and Billy Anderson; hence the name, born of their initials "S" and "A." Billy Anderson was the first western cowboy actor. He didn't really know how to ride a horse, and fell off many times before he could stay put; a stunt man did all the hard scenes dressed as a double, in long shots.

The photograph shows the entire Essanay stock company, most of whom are now deceased. Many of them were young when this

picture was taken (about 1915 or 1916), and they all hoped for stardom, of course. Many of them made it. Seated in the row immediately behind the two children on the floor are, L to R: Ruth Stonehouse, Beverly Bayne, Francis X. Bushman and Mabel Normand. In the next row back, slightly to the right of Miss Normand, is Wallace Beery. In the same row, slightly to the right of Ruth Stonehouse, is Clara Kimball Young. In the back row, almost directly above Ruth Stonehouse, is Ben Turpin. Gloria Swanson was married to Wallace Beery, and they drove around Chicago in a yellow Stutz roadster. By the time this picture was taken Gloria had gone on to Mack Sennett movies in California, where she was a bathing beauty. If she is in this picture, no one so far has been able to pick her out.

In July 1917, moving picture companies and exhibitors from all over the United States had a big convention in the Coliseum at 14th and South Wabash Avenue. There were many stars present, and many pipe organ companies had exhibits hoping they could sell their

organs to the movie theatres. Wurlitzer Hope-Jones had an exhibit, as did Kimball, Barton, Kilgen and Skinner.

The writer, an organist and very young at the time, was with the Barton Organ Company with offices in the Maller's Building, 5 South Wabash Avenue. He was in charge of the Barton Organ booth at the convention, so he had a close-up view of what took place.

On the night of July 17, 1917, there was a big banquet at the Hotel Harrison in honor of the reigning King and Queen of the movies, Francis X. Bushman and Beverly Bayne. They were then at the very zenith of their popularity and power, but they did not show up for the banquet, snubbing everybody. As the writer was entering the lobby of the Morrison Hotel on his way to the banquet, a cab drove up to the curb, and out stepped a very young, very slim and beautiful girl, Norma Talmadge. She was accompanied by Joe Schenk, whom she later married. She became one of the all time glamorous stars of Hollywood. Mary Pickford and her mother were at the

The stock company of Essanay Film Co., circa 1914-1916.



banquet too, and the writer could not keep his eyes off Mary's mother, Charlotte Pickford, whom he still thinks had one of the most beautiful faces he ever saw — lovely kind eyes, and an expression like the mother of whom we all dream. There were a lot of drinks at the tables, and someone asked Mrs. Pickford if she would have one more drink. She replied, "Only a spot, please." It was the first time the writer had heard the expression.

To get back to Bushman and Bayne: he had a wife and several children in Baltimore, Maryland, but in those days this was all kept a secret from the public, as romantic stars were not supposed to be married or have children. When the news leaked out they both lost their popularity, almost overnight, as it did not sit well with the public when Bushman left a family to marry Beverly Bayne (who divorced him some years later). In the old days the people demanded good morals and decency in their stars. But while they lasted they were sitting on top of the world, and I suppose they thought it would never end. Bushman had a lavender limousine, or town car as they were called then, that seemed to be a mile long. He had two lavender-liveried footmen and a lav-

ender-liveried chauffeur. Bushman wore a huge lavender ring (as large as a half dollar) and when he drove up and down Michigan Avenue it truly was "A Royal Lavender Streak." The police and merchants in the Loop asked him as a favor not to come into the Loop, as the people mobbed him and the pickpockets and shoplifters had a field day whenever he went into a store. The clerks forgot their jobs, as well as the customers, and bedlam reigned.

How different things are today! In 1917 sex was a dirty word and no stage or movie setting was allowed to have a bed or a bedroom scene. Legs were called "limbs," and busts were "bosoms." Ladies were frail, and fainted on the least pretext. In fact, "they all enjoyed poor health, and complained of feeling better." As a side note to this story of the silent movie days, the writer remembers being called on the carpet for a "risque" line in the chorus of one song used in a sing-along. It read "You can bet your bottom dollar." The management made him change it to read "You can bet your only dollar." *Alas Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis* (Times change, and we change with them too). □

There is still time to get five new members and be a part of the membership contest.

Closing date December 31, 1985.

1979, and his three children, for this was an active and involved family.

I was always treated as one of his family and was privileged to be the last organist to play for Reiny on his Publix #1. It was, therefore, with a genuine sense of pride that I was able to play Reiny's favorite song, "To A Wild Rose," at his funeral on the Aeolian organ once owned by Colonel Little and now installed in Trinity Lutheran Church in Bismarck.

PAUL J. QUARINO □

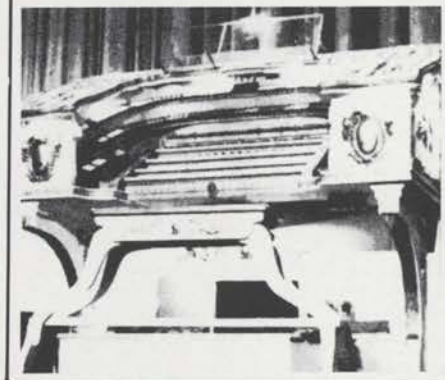
Clyde M. "Sandy" Balcom passed away in Seattle, Washington, on September 3 at the age of 86. He was founder of the well-known Balcom & Vaughan Pipe Organs, Inc. and was, for many years, the leading organ builder in the Pacific Northwest.

Sandy was born at Fourth Plain, Washington, on December 23, 1898 and grew up in Portland, Oregon. His first job was as a street newsboy selling the *Oregonian*. In 1914 he moved to San Francisco and worked as a "dust boy" at the Eilers Music Company. Sandy served as helper on installations of Murray Harris, Johnson and Kimball organs sold through Eilers. He worked with Leo Schoenstein, Babe Jacobus and Red Loller on many theatre organs.

In 1921 Sandy became the head of the organ department of Sherman, Clay & Co. and supervised the installation of the Robert-Mortons in the American Theatre in Bellingham, the Palomar in Seattle, the Vining in Ashland and the Bob White in Portland. He

HOLIDAY GREETINGS

from
Members of J.A.T.O.E.
and
The Rialto Theatre, Joliet, Ill.



Closing Chord



The theatre organ world lost a true friend on August 21 when **Reinhold (Reiny) Delzer** passed away in Bismarck, North Dakota. Reiny was born in Bismarck on July 21, 1905, and worked as a homebuilder until 1940 when he became a general contractor. His company, Delzer Construction, built bridges, streets and utility piping in a four state area.

Theatre organ followers, however, will remember Reiny best as the man who saved the 4/20 Publix #1 from the Minnesota Theatre in Minneapolis in the late '50s, and who was one of the hosts of the 1963 ATOE Annual Meeting in Bismarck. In the Fall, 1961, THEATRE ORGAN there is a four-page supplement picturing the installation of the Publix

in Reiny's house. On the back page of this insert it says, "Organ enthusiasts are welcome to inspect and play this organ at the Delzer home." And this statement characterizes this man whose great love of theatre organ was made manifest in his hospitality. His home was always open to organists and listeners who shared his love for the instrument.

The main reason that Reiny's home was always open was, as he told it, because of an incident that happened when he was nine years old. He had wanted to see the Aeolian residence organ in the mansion of a local banker named Colonel Little, but he was turned away. The disappointed child told the banker, "When I get big, I'm going to have an organ bigger than yours, and I'm going to let everyone see it." And he did!

Through the years, thousands visited and heard the Delzer's Wurlitzer. It was, in 1961, rededicated by Eddie Dunstedter who had originally dedicated it in the Minnesota Theatre in 1928. Organ events were both formal and casual, and included annual visits by groups of school children. For many, this was their introduction to theatre organ, and there were even some who went on to become professional organists; two, in particular, are Dr. John Ellis who teaches organ at the University of Montana and Rob Richards who now lives in Michigan. The console has been autographed by all of the old-time theatre organists who visited the Delzers and played the Publix.

There are more stories than can be told here about this generous and hospitable man, his charming wife Ruby, who passed away in



Reiny and Ruby Delzer celebrated their fiftieth anniversary, July 21, 1976, at their home in Bismarck, North Dakota. (Paul Quarino photo)