

# Lecture included some silent screen classics

By Bill Rea

There is a certain attraction to the silent films of the past that might have something to do with the marvels of the early days of movie making. Or it may be related to the fact that people had to watch them with more attention, since there wasn't any dialogue to cover them when they looked elsewhere.

Professor Arne Bowers offered a number of insights into the history of silent films at a recent lecture he delivered as part of Arts Festival King.

There was a time when going to the movies was not considered a very wholesome activity. Bowers said nickelodeons were the first cinemas, located in Vaudeville houses, where the acts were interspersed with silent movies. These operations were regarded as "disreputable" by some, who were worried about the morality of people sitting in the dark.

But even in the early days, there were efforts to guide the behaviour of the viewing public. The screens would flash various messages, and Bowers had several of them to show, such as "Somebody's baby is crying. Is it yours?"

Others included "Ladies without escort cordially invited;" "Please read the titles to yourself. Loud reading annoys your neighbours;" "No smoking please. It annoys the ladies;" and "Don't spit on the floor. Remember the Johnstown flood."

Bowers said the first successful film was about two minutes in length and ran for more than a year. It featured two Broadway actors who asked to repeat a scene for cameras.

Eventually, a group known as Uplifters got together. They viewed Nickelodeons as "recruiting stations of vice," according to Bowers, and tried hard to uplift the movie-going public. There were calls in 1912 to have theatres lit to the point where one could read a newspaper while the film was being shown. Other provisions that were being called for included ventilation systems, ushers in uniforms, the addition of rest rooms and the elimination of "vulgar Vaudeville acts."

In those days, stories from literature were attractive to film makers, as were biblical adaptations and American history.

Bowers said the early days of film making saw lots of experimenting with animation and special effects.

Cecil Hepworth was an Englishman who published the first technical manual on film making in 1896. Bowers showed one of his movies from 1900, called Explosion of a Motor Car. As the name implies, it showed a car suddenly blowing up, a police officer rushing in to investigate, then taken note as various body parts of the occupants rained down around him.

There were also clips of a 1902 French film called A Trip to the Moon, which featured lots of scantily-clad women, six astronauts with top hats and umbrellas and a number of special effects, such as puffs of smoke. The voyagers made the trip in a capsule that was shot out of a huge cannon. Bowers pointed out the cameras hardly moved at all, so the action took place almost like it was on a stage, with very little in the way of close-ups.

Another classic he showed was Edwin S. Porter's The Great Train Robbery from 1903.

Bowers said it was around this time that films started telling stories about the world. The Great Train Robbery also saw the use of hand-tinted colour, as well as animated special effects. He also pointed out the cameras panned a bit in this feature.

He added theatre owners were calling for longer films, as the vaudeville acts were dying out.

As well, there was a demand for films being made by certain people, as opposed to starring certain actors.

It seems some things never change, and that goes for the existence of blue movies. Bowers had a few examples, and unlike some of the risqué offers available today, the blue movie of the early 20th century left a great deal to the imagination. In fact, there was very little in the movies he showed that would be considered offensive by modern standards. "They promised a lot more than they delivered," Bowers observed.

Despite movies like that, there was censorship in those

days. South of the border, individual states had boards. Bowers listed some of the orders the board in New York issued for a movie called Greed, including the cutting of scenes showing the administering of ether, the hero biting the fingers of the heroine or a horse kicking in agony after being shot. As well, lines were ordered taken out, including "By God," and "Damn his soul."

By 1921, the Americans had had replaced state boards with a federally regulated body. President Warren Harding got his postmaster general, William Hays, to resign and take on the job of cleaning up Hollywood. He eventually came up with a code aimed at restoring morals to the movie industry.

Around that time, the star system started developing, with names like Mary Pickford, Wallace Reid, Ramon Novarro, Rudolph Valentino and Buster Keaton rising to prominence. The public started calling for more films with these stars, and the stars started asking for more money. Pickford started earning \$114,000 per year, making her the highest paid star at the time.

Bowers said Pickford never directed, but another woman of the period, Alice Guy Blache did. One of her movies, that was shown at the lecture, was called Making an American Citizen, dealing with a couple that had immigrated from Europe. The husband was abusive, and there was no shortage of American men ready to intervene and see that he was brought to justice. Bowers said this really wasn't a feminist film, as it showed a wife's place was still in the home.

But he pointed out how it showed that the viewers were obliged to put more of themselves into watching silents. For example, they would have to pay more attention and envision what the actual dialogue would be.

That would mean paying a lot more attention to facial expressions, along with the antics and histrionics on the screen.

## Student volunteers sought for Main Street Christmas

Are you a high school student looking for a way to build up some of your needed community service hours?

The organizers of the annual Main Street Christmas celebrations in Schomberg could use your help.

The annual festival will be Dec. 2, but volunteers are needed the day before and day after too. Jobs are available for those interested in helping with the set up, serving as elves for Santa, taking care of the fire barrels, cleaning up afterwards, etc.

If you can help, call Linda Jessop at (905) 939-2069.



Professor Arne Bowers spoke about some of the silent screen classics at his talk in King.

# York Region honoured by Recycling Council of Ontario

York Region recently received two awards at the Recycling Council of Ontario's (RCO) Waste Minimization Awards held in Etobicoke.

The Region won the Gold Award in the Promotion category for its Yes! Blue Box Campaign and a Bronze Award in the Waste Diversion Program Operator category for the Region's Waste Management Centre.

"York Region is very proud to receive these two awards from the Recycling Council of Ontario," said Regional Chair Bill Fisch. "Waste diversion is a priority for York Region and this award represents our commitment to waste diversion and the quality education and services that we provide to our residents."

York Region's Yes! Blue Box Campaign was launched last fall and aimed to educate residents on what new items were being accepted in the blue box program, as well as what hap-

pens to their recyclables once they are picked up at the curb. This successful campaign was also awarded Best Campaign for 2005 by the Association of Municipal Recycling Coordinators. Throughout the fall in 2005, the campaign included full-page, colour advertisements placed in local and ethnic newspapers, bus advertisements, messages on mobile signs, the creation of a full-colour brochure and promotional advertisements placed in schools, community centres, restaurants and fitness centres across York.

In July 2005, the Region opened its new \$39 million Waste Management Centre in East Gwillimbury, which includes a single-stream recycling facility, garbage transfer station, food waste transfer station and education centre. Approximately 290 tonnes of recyclable materials are received at the centre daily and it is estimated that a total of more than 75,000 tonnes will be

processed through by the end of the year.

"Effective communications are critical to our success in diverting 65 per cent of our waste by 2010," said Regional Councillor Mario Ferri of Vaughan, chair of the solid waste management committee of Regional council. "Our Waste Management Centre is a key component of our waste diversion strategy, allowing us to increase the variety and amount of recyclable materials we can process as residents divert more waste from landfills and our programs expand."

RCO is a non-profit organization incepted in 1978 and committed to minimizing society's impact on the environment by eliminating waste. RCO's mission is to inform and educate all members of society about the generation of waste, the avoidance of waste, the more efficient use of resources and the benefits and (or) consequences of these activities.

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