

The Origins of the Moviola

By MARK SERRURIER

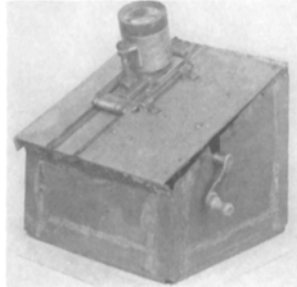
Editor's Note: Mark Serrurier, author of the accompanying article, is the son of the late founder of the Moviola Manufacturing Company, Iwan Serrurier. 1965 completed Mark Serrurier's twentieth year as head of the company founded by his father. Graduating in Civil Engineering from Caltech, Mark Serrurier worked for the Los Angeles Water Dept. on the survey

being made for what later became the Metropolitan Water District. Later he attended the University of Illinois, earning an M.S. degree in Structural Engineering. Returning to Southern California, he directed the design of the dome and structural parts of the 200-inch Palomar Telescope. The tube which he designed for the telescope was simple, extremely rigid, and different in appearance from any pre-

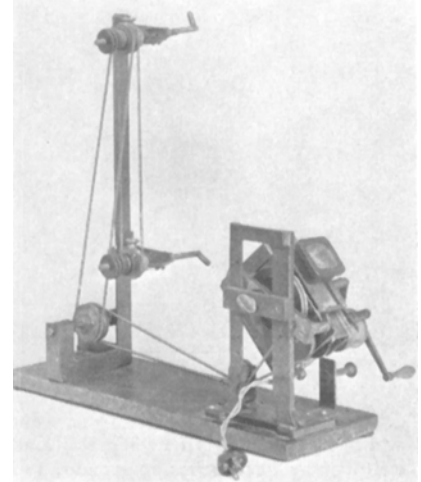
viously built. This design has been used on all large telescopes built since then. When Caltech became involved with a great variety of military developments in the early forties, he participated in these: a high-speed wind tunnel for projectiles, the Co-operative Wind Tunnel, and Jet Propulsion Lab. When the war ended in 1945, he joined his father in the Moviola Company.



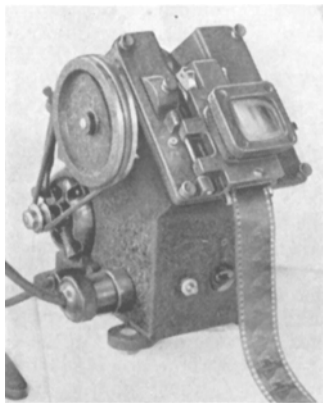
Original cabinet projector for showing movies in the home.



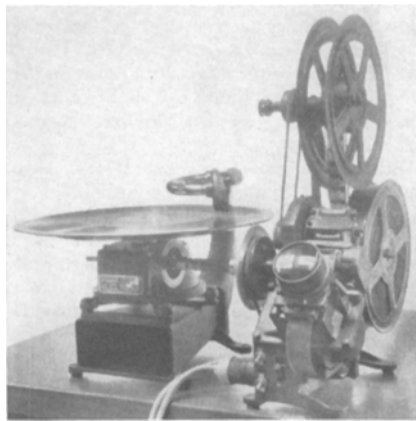
1918: Editing machine built by MGM using old camera movement was made per suggestions from George McGuire, then head of MGM Editorial Dept. Idea was not pursued at this time.



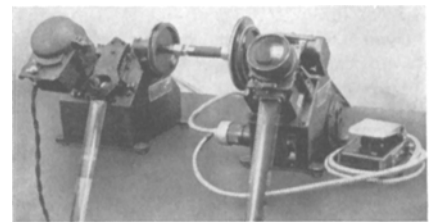
1924: Hand cranked editing machine made from projector. No pictures are available of the original machines made by Iwan Serrurier, but some of the components for this machine were supplied by him.



1924: The Moviola Midget, first machine designed specifically for editing of films. First of these was sold to MGM.



1929: Moviola editing machine for sound on disc system (Vitaphone); made for Warner Bros. only.



1929: Moviola editing machine for optical sound system.

LAST YEAR marked the 40th anniversary of the Moviola Editing Machine. Iwan Serrurier, inventor of the machine and founder of the Moviola Company, had not had any previous contact with the motion-picture industry. The need for an editing machine was pointed out to him in the course of his efforts to sell a machine for showing motion pictures in the home. Sharing in the credit for inventing and perfect-

ing the Moviola are many persons in the industry who contributed their ideas and experiences.

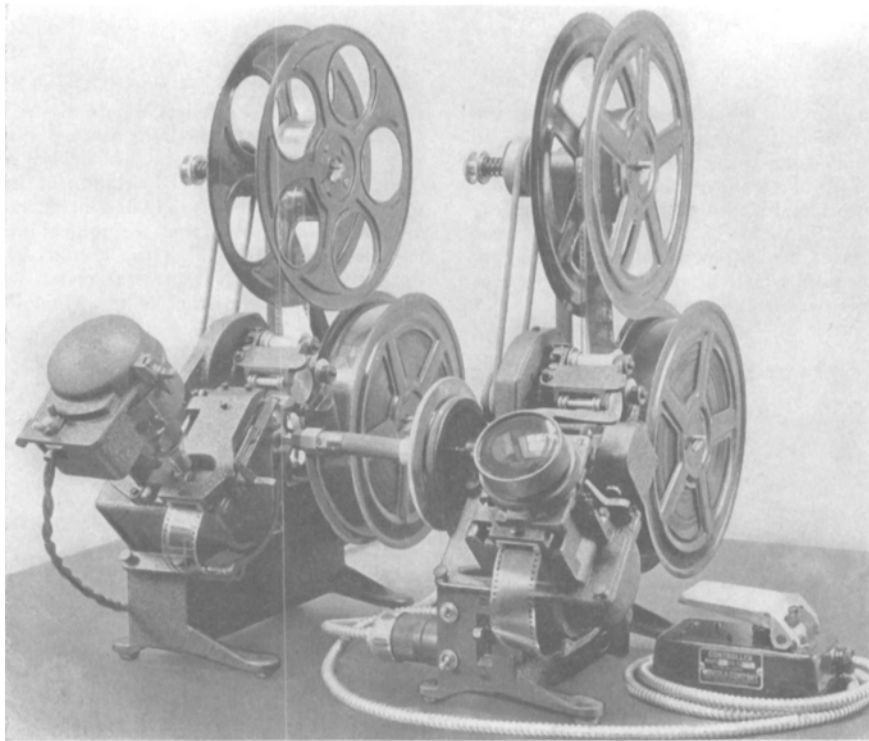
Iwan Serrurier was born in Leiden, Holland, in 1878. He attended the University at Utrecht and then went to the University in Zurich, where he obtained a degree in mechanical and electrical engineering. Upon graduation he married his sweetheart in Holland, and soon they were on their way to the United States. The purpose of the trip was dual—a honeymoon, and a chance to see at firsthand the exciting developments in the United States, particularly electric power and railroads. The long range plan was to

gather experience and then to go to the Indies (Indonesia) for a career.

The young couple spent several months in New York and in Cleveland. They went next to St. Louis for the 1904 World's Fair and spent several months there. I joined the party at this point.

The California Exhibit provided the motivation for their next stop, San Francisco, then Pasadena. They arrived just in time to participate in a real estate boom, and participate they did. They bought houses and lots and, in a matter of months, sold them at substantial profits. They purchased thirty acres in Altadena, put in streets, and divided the land into large lots of one-half acre or more. A few lots were

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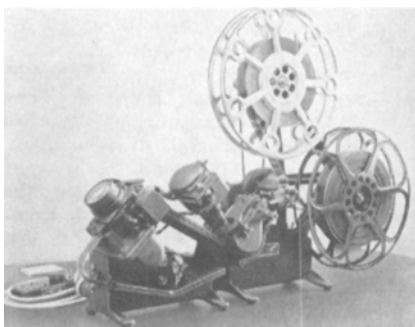


1929: Another view of Moviola editing machine for optical sound system.

sold, and the boom was over. Iwan went to work for the Southern Pacific Railroad as a draftsman in the car department, and then during World War I, he worked for one of the shipyards in San Pedro.

Sometime during this period he became interested in motion-picture projectors. He acquired a used Edison Kinetoscope and some worn out theater projectors. He thought there should be a convenient way for showing movies in the home. He experimented by building some rough cabinets which would serve the dual purpose of containing the projector ready for use and a means of supporting a small screen. These models were the basis for a patent which he received in April 1919.

Iwan had never been happy in his work at the railroad and shipyards. He was capable of much more creative work than they offered, so he decided to see what he could do with his patent. The decision was to build a few machines and try to sell them. During the summer of 1922, Iwan and I went to Europe to visit family, to travel, and to look for a projector mecha-



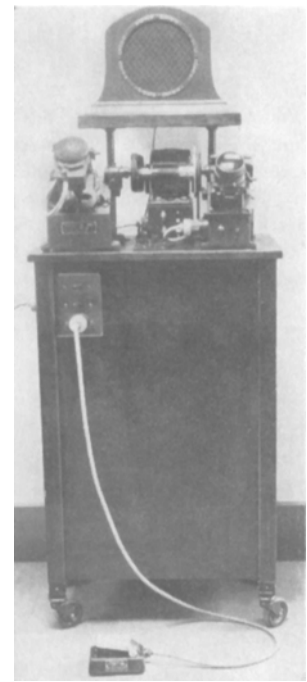
1929: Moviola editing machine for composite prints. Less than half a dozen of these were made.

nism. We brought samples of two different mechanisms back with us. A local phonograph manufacturer designed and built some cabinets. They looked like the phonograph of that time but were considerably larger. The final assembly was in the garage at home in Altadena. The completed machines were stored in the living room for lack of a better place. Iwan's five children were asked to submit names for the new machine. Of the twenty or more names suggested, "Moviola" seemed the best.

But selling was another matter. Iwan soon learned that asking for appointments at the front offices of Hollywood studios was not the way. During 1923 and 1924 he sold three machines: one to Carter de Haven, one to Victor Pearlman, and one to a store in Pasadena. At about this time he met Maurice Cohen, and they became very close friends. Maurice was a French character actor who knew his way around in all the studios. He could walk in the back entrances, and if he was thrown out now and then, it didn't bother him in the least. Through Maurice, Iwan managed to meet quite a few people in the studios.

In September, 1924, they were talking to someone in a cutting room at the Douglas Fairbanks Studio. Unfortunately, there is no record as to who this film editor was, but he showed them how films were being edited at the time. The pieces of film were studied over a light well, spliced, and then run in the projection room, this process being repeated several times until the cut was acceptable. It was said some editors could move the film intermittently by hand and see a moving picture.

This man was not interested in the cabinet-type projector, but he thought the mechanism would be useful for film editing, if it could be modified for use on the editing table. The idea sounded good, so, over a weekend, one of the mechanisms was



1929: Moviola editing machine.

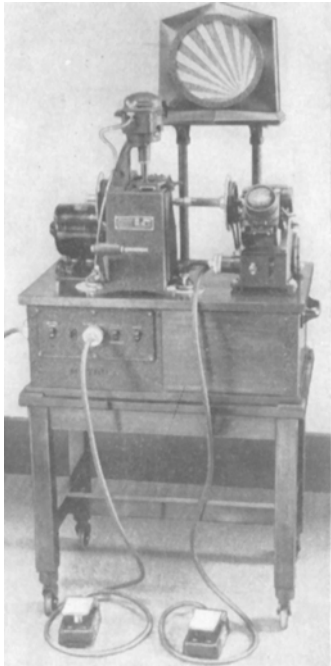
modified. Parts were sawed off, it was mounted upside down on a board, a lamp and a magnifying glass were added.

On Monday Iwan returned with this hand-cranked contraption for a tryout. The editor was very enthusiastic, and the Douglas Fairbanks Studio purchased the first Moviola Editing Machine. All the surplus mechanisms were modified in this manner and promptly sold. The demand continued, so Iwan designed a machine and had twelve manufactured by Mitchell Camera. These machines carried the name Moviola Midget; the first of three was sold to MGM in November 1924. After this lot of machines was sold, additional ones were manufactured, some by Mitchell and some by W. S. Austin, who had a one-man machine shop.

By 1928 it seemed that the market for editing machines was pretty well saturated, but the advent of sound changed that overnight. In July of that year the first home for Moviola was built in the rear of a residence on Gordon Street in Hollywood.

From 1928 to the beginning of World War II the business grew steadily. Quite a few machines were sold to firms in foreign countries. Somehow Iwan managed to run the business with an office force of three. Sales, correspondence, purchasing and production occupied his daytime hours. In the evenings he designed new products and improved the earlier ones. This included soundheads for optical sound (Movietone), turntables for disc recordings (Vitaphone), viewers for 16mm, 35mm, and the early 65mm and 70mm films, a projector, synchronizers, rewinders, sound readers, and, in 1938, the preview machines. How he managed to do all these things with such a small staff, I'll never know!

World War II brought a sharp increase in demand for Moviola machines to fill military and propaganda needs. Material priorities, manpower shortages, and other wartime regulations combined to make



1930: Moviola editing machine. This model was built for many years.

problems which, it seemed, could best be solved by leasing the business to another firm for the duration. So, for the period 1943-1945, the business was operated by General Service Corporation (a division of H. W. Houston). This firm was well qualified and did an excellent job.

In December 1945, I joined the Moviola Company, and Iwan gradually retired from an active part in the business. In 1951 and 1952 he traveled in Europe, visiting places he knew as a young man. He returned in 1953, a few weeks before he passed away.

The original location was enlarged many times and, in spite of extremely crowded conditions, served until 1962. In February of that year, Moviola moved into its new and modern building in North Hollywood.



1937: Mary Carlisle with editor Eddie Dmytryk at Paramount studio to view a scene from "Double or Nothing."

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