

Golden Anniversary

# Journal

Issue

1930 – 1980

Fifty years ago this month our Society took the momentous step of beginning to publish a monthly journal. (From 1916 through 1929, the SMPE published — irregularly — the *Transactions of the SMPE*.) This is why we consider the present issue of the *SMPTE Journal* a very special one and have given it a gold cover; the remaining issues for 1980 will be red and white.

A Fiftieth Anniversary is a good occasion to reminisce as well as to look at what the future may hold. Fifty years ago the Stock Market Crash (“Black Tuesday”) leading to the Great Depression was a very fresh, two-month-old memory. Between the fall of 1929 and the summer of 1932, the Dow Jones Average plunged nearly 90%. But bad as the economy was, one business, at least, prospered. People still somehow found the dime or quarter they needed to indulge their dreams in the movie palaces.

Motion pictures that talked were considered a modern engineering miracle. All a movie director had to do was specify the miracle he wanted and the engineers (not realizing that the director was asking the impossible) would create it. You want sound? We’ll start with *The Jazz Singer* and *The King of Jazz*. Animation? How about a mouse named Mortimer or maybe Mickey? Soon we’ll have *Snow White* and *Fantasia*. You like color? Kelleycolor, Kinemacolor, and Technicolor are being either perfected or supplanted. You want a wide picture format? We know it was a step backwards when we introduced the square picture, but it seemed necessary when we added a soundtrack inside the sprocket holes; our engineers and standardization committees will work out something — maybe anamorphic lenses for filming and projection? After all, the groundwork was done on this by Abbé in 1897 and Chretien in 1927. Better sound? The acoustical engineers have given us speakers that can make one violin sound as loud as a whole orchestra, and electrically amplified instruments are on the horizon — three or four decades before the Beatles and the Rolling Stones!

Our Society deals with the richest imaginable communications

medium. The images and sounds produced by the motion-picture and television industries convey so much information (speaking in an information-theory sense) to so many millions of people that motion pictures and television rival the richness of life itself. This is another way of saying that the illusion and the reality are now scarcely distinguishable. And the engineers optimistically and endlessly think up solutions as fast or faster than the rest of us can recognize or invent the problems.

What of the future of the Society and the *Journal*? As our Society grows (possibly it will double in size in the next ten years), we will try to keep the membership and society at large informed about the big issues and the little problems. We will cover what people are doing because people are very important in our kind of work. We will remind ourselves of the history of motion pictures and television in the new column *50 and 25 Years Ago in the Journal*, because a knowledge of roots and beginnings can provide a sense of direction and purpose. We will do all in our power to appropriately advance the state of the art or teach it. We feel it is essential to publish “review” or “tutorial” articles, for how else is the beginning engineer going to avoid re-inventing the wheel?

We are all aware of the many problems in the world today — energy, inflation, a shaky dollar, and international tensions, to name only a few — but our Society is in a position to do a great deal of good. Fifty years ago, with the onset of the international Great Depression, it must have looked like the end of the world to many people, but the motion-picture industry was about to prosper, the television industry was waiting to be born, and our Society was beginning to grow toward its present world renown. There may be truth in the Chinese proverb that “A calamity is a time of great opportunity.” Our Society can place at the world’s disposal a great reservoir of scientific creativity, brainpower, and good will. How can we be anything but optimistic for the Society and the *Journal* over the next half century?

The Editor