

Retirement Can Be a Profitable Pastime

By Leonard A. Green

Two lifelong friends, having spent more than 75 years between them in the motion-picture milieu, have retired to Belleville, Ontario, only to start all over again.

On July 28, 1981, Restoration House Film Group Inc. was established by Arnold Schieman, Fellow of the SMPTE, and former Canadian Governor, and Wesley Heeney, to provide a unique archival film restoration and preservation service. It all began a few years ago when they perfected a method of restoring shrunken film to its original shape. Redimension is the way Arnold describes the process.

The recipe states: "Take a reel of shrunken film, immerse it in a tank containing a proprietary solution, expose it to the vapour at 100 degrees Fahrenheit (plus or minus two degrees) and, in a couple of days, the film will revert to its original dimensions."

The secret, of course, is in the formula and the technique.

This process has become so popular that, in response to many inquiries, the Redimension solutions are now being made available through special leasing arrangements.

The success of this process led a Hollywood film organization to ask if the treatment could be applied to sound recording film with oxide coatings in order to resurrect some 35-mm magnetic sound masters, more than 20 years old. Over time, they had shrunk 2½ perforations in 1 ft of film and were difficult to transport over the sprockets of the reproducers.

In preliminary tests, Redimension I (the solution used for the picture material above) proved unsuitable for oxide coatings.

Undaunted, the Belleville alchemists set to work to modify the formula. Success was not too far away. In

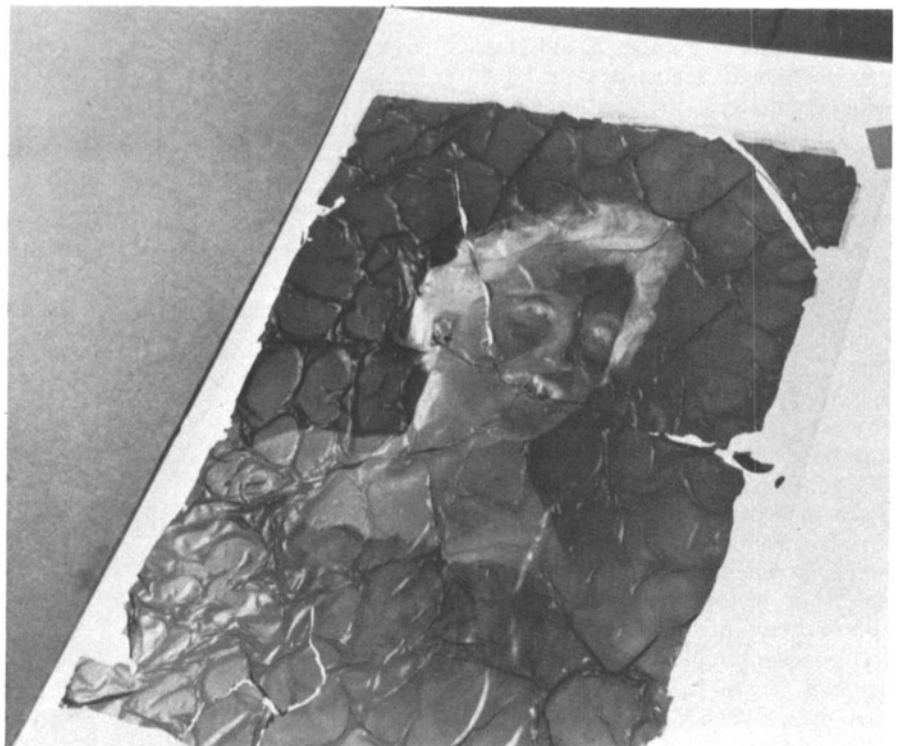


Figure 1. The flakes of emulsion from a glass plate being reassembled.

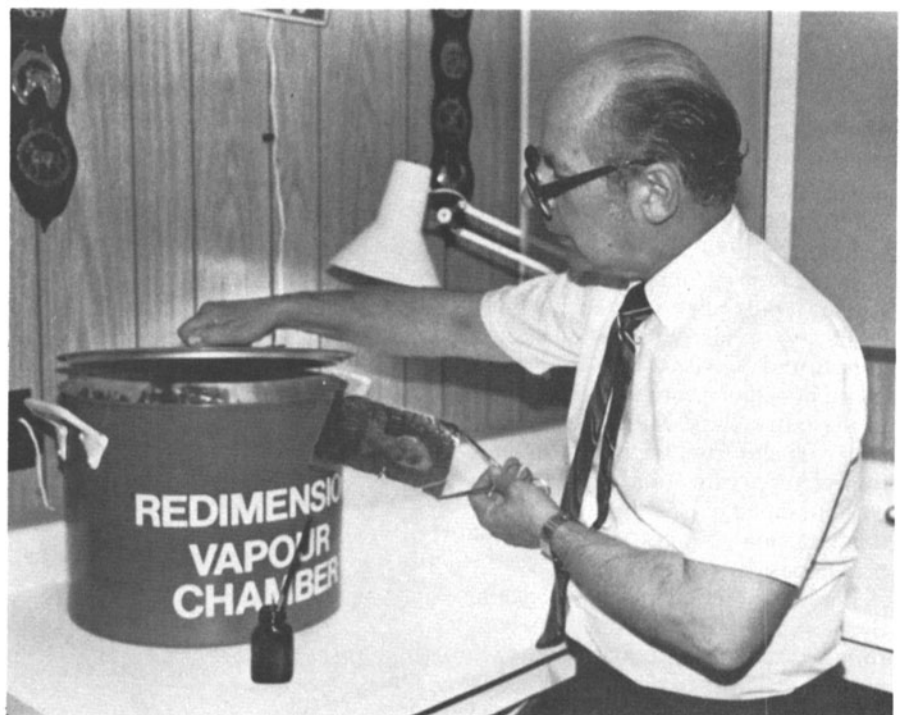


Figure 2. Arnold Schieman redimensioning a glass plate negative.

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a few weeks, they produced Redimension II, which restored the magnetic sound test roll to within 1% of its original length without affecting the oxide coating.

One of the challenges Schieman and Heeney enjoy most is the restoration of old photographic plates. Attending a seminar in Britain during 1980, they met Brian Tremain, principal photographer for the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. There they discussed the possibility of restoring the images on a number of old glass plates. Arnold reported that later, when the material arrived in the mail from England, all the envelope contained was a collection of small pieces of wrinkled emulsion and a few clear plates.

Nevertheless, the jigsaw puzzles were eventually put back together again and the images restored and then rephotographed for posterity. In this case Redimension S — S for Stills — was used to remove the crinkles in the emulsion before re-laying them on a new base material.

Redimension S, by the way, was discovered by accident. In a momentary lapse of concentration, some test plates intended for treatment with an emulsion stripping solution, were submerged into an experimental Redimension fluid. As the cracks and crinkles began to disappear before their eyes, Schieman and Heeney were both surprised and relieved to find they had discovered another very profitable solution.

Recently, the company diversified. It is a well-known fact that dust and dirt are a motion-picture laboratory's worst enemies. This knowledge prompted Arnold Schieman to obtain the patent rights to a product invented by an old friend, Eric Hausdorf, of Hausdorf Precision Laboratories, Ottawa, in 1954. Called the Drypur film and tape cleaning system, it consists of a putty-like substance which, by its very nature, absorbs dust, dirt, grease, and oil with the insatiable appetite of a short-horned grasshopper. Made into rollers, it removes all foreign particles from the surface of motion-picture film (and other film) without damage to either the base or the emulsion surfaces, even after repeated passes.

Before marketing the product again, the Restoration House backroom boys reviewed the properties of the adhesive putty and improved its quality using present-day technology. Now, the specifications read:

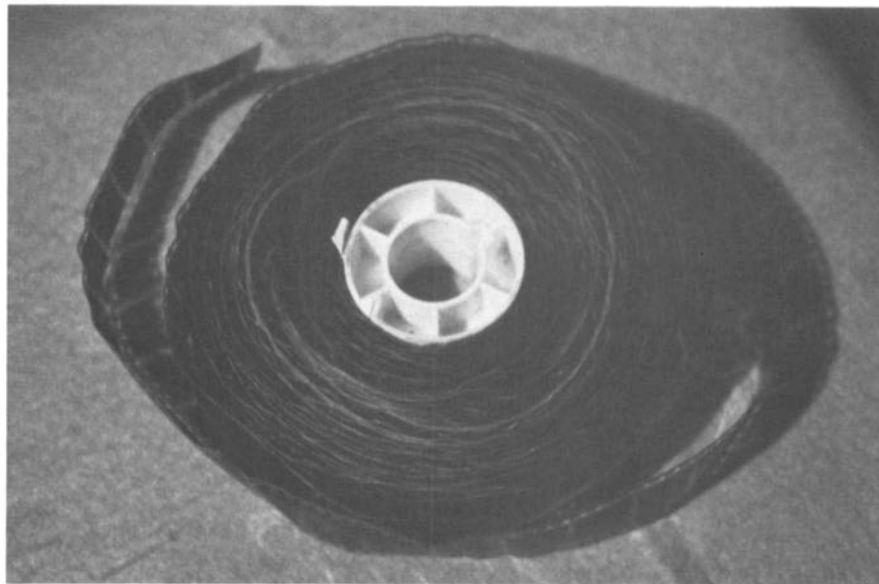


Figure 3. A reel of shrunken film as received for treatment.

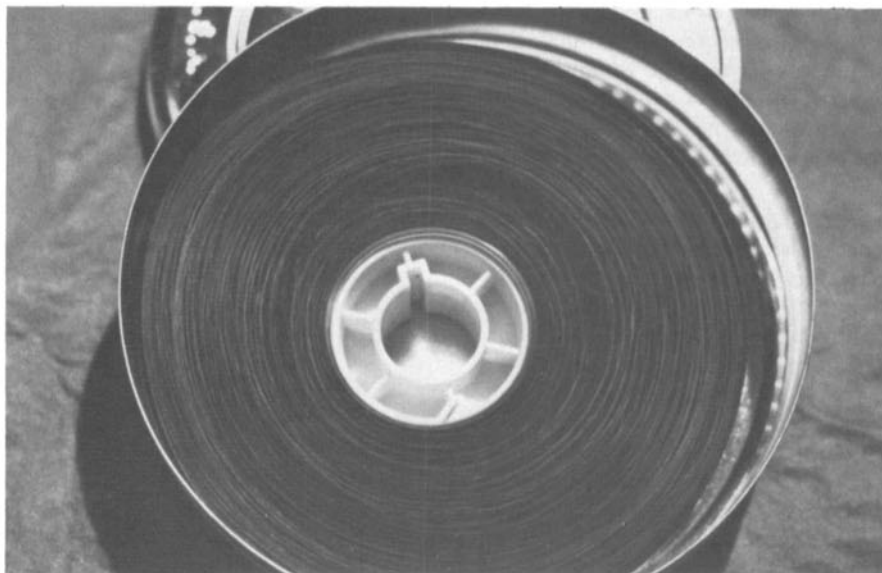


Figure 4. Its progress halfway through the Redimension process.

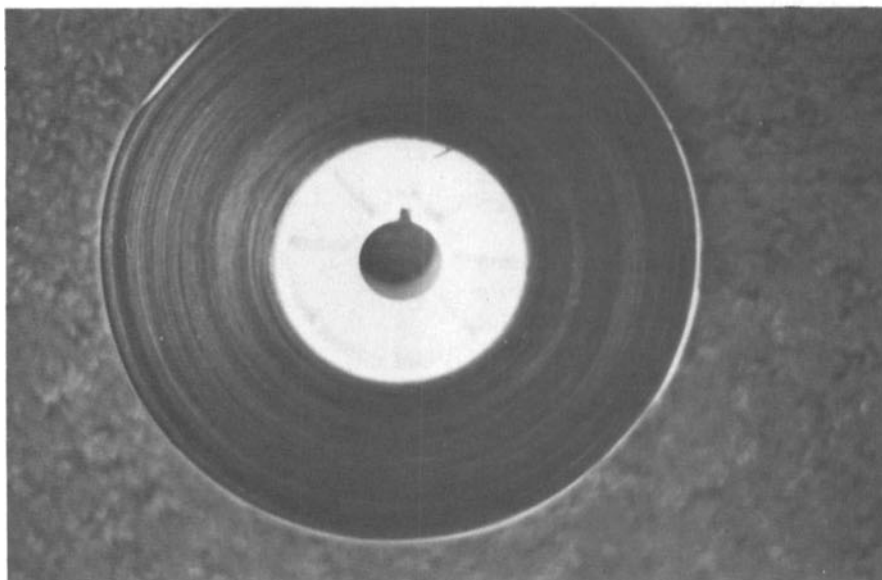


Figure 5. The reel of film fully restored.



Figure 6. Wesley Heeneey assembling Drypur rollers.

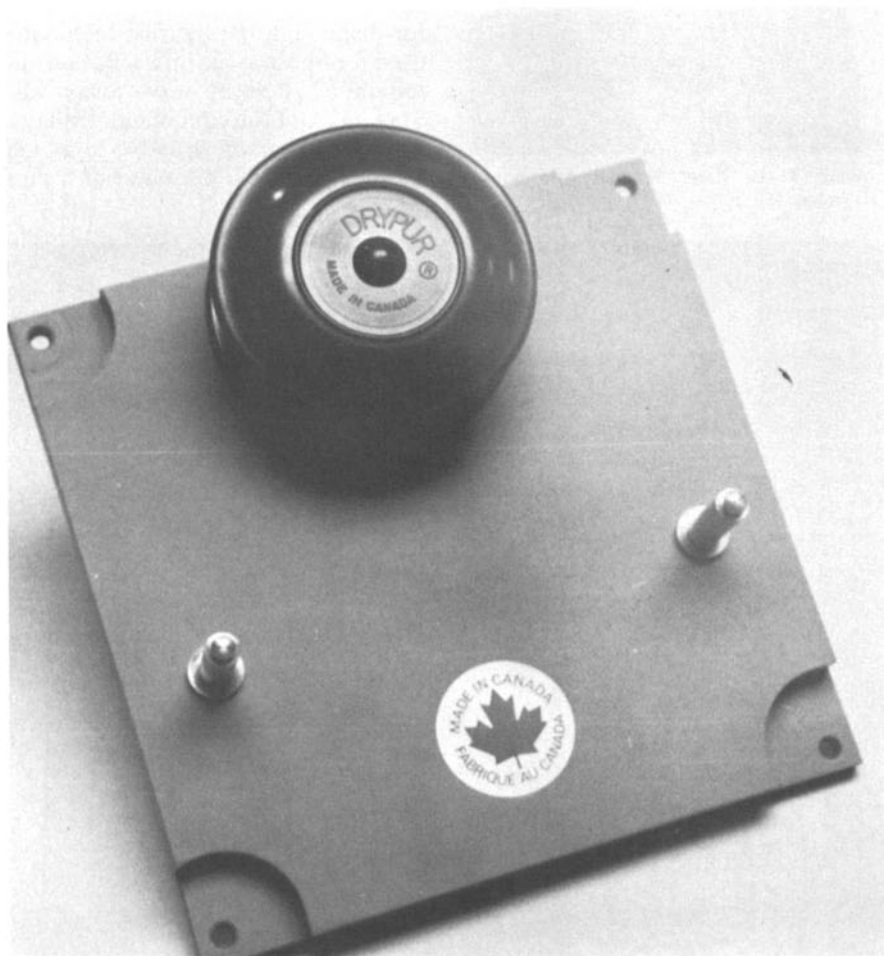


Figure 7. The Drypur rollers mounted for film cleaning.

“Do not use any liquid, chemical, or powder to clean the Drypur film cleaning rollers. When the rollers become soiled, as they will do after a day or two of average use, they should be tightly covered with their protective plastic strip and the strip held in place with the elastic band provided. Given a rest period of a couple of days, the cleaning agent regains its dirt absorbing properties automatically.”

The cleaning ability of the material is almost unbelievable. I know Arnold enjoys a little sorcery from time to time, but the dirt on a test film did disappear like magic. “Everlasting?” I asked. “No, not quite. Eventually the putty becomes saturated and has to be replaced,” replied Arnold, “much sooner, if you neglect to replace the protective strip as it will absorb even the impurities in the surrounding air.”

The last time I met Arnold, in Ottawa, he was working on another idea. In his hands, he had the same putty-like material, now made in sandwich form, to clean cardboard-mounted slides. When pressed for more information, he replied, “Just a little premature. Have to perfect the mechanism so the slide can be passed through the putty. I hope to have it all resolved in time for my paper for the BKSTS 83 conference.”