

SMPTE ALMANAC



By Michael Dolan

In this column we provide interesting historical briefs from the Journal articles of days past. The purpose of this column is primarily entertainment, but we hope it will also stimulate your thinking and reflection on the Society's history, how

far we have come in the industry, and (sometimes) how some things never change. This is not meant to be an authoritative reference, and no attempt is made to correct any past errors or omissions of the Journal. We simply hope you enjoy the material.

25 Years Ago in the Journal

The March 1980 *Journal* reported in "The Future of High-Definition Television: Conclusion of a Report of the SMPTE Study Group on High-Definition Television" by Donald G. Fink: "This concluding portion of the High-Definition Television report includes the following topics examined by the Study Group: HDTV for the Home: HDTV Systems for Theater Projection: HDTV Systems in Motion-Picture Production: and Avenues of Needed Research and Development...The charge to the Study Group has been interpreted by the group as including an investigation of an HDTV system whose images would be capable of being processed by electronic methods and after appropriate transfer to film would be capable of production of 35mm film release prints competitive in all respects to those of existing conventional 35mm film production practice. Interlaced scanning at two fields per frame is used in all domestic and theater projection television systems at present and is recommended by the Study Group for future HDTV systems in these applications. For use in the production of 35mm motion-picture release prints, however, there is a serious impediment to the use of interlacing...Moreover, the design parameters of camera tubes or other photoreceptors to be used for progressive scanning need review for possible optimization of performance."

50 Years Ago in the Journal

The February 1955 *Journal* reported in "Wide Screen in Drive-in Theaters" by Ralph H. Heacock: "CinemaScope (or any of the other wide-screen, multiple-channel sound, new techniques) presents three important problems to the drive-in theater. The first is a very wide screen. The second is a suitable light source, which can provide enough light to acceptably illuminate the wide screen. The third is the possible use of multiple-channel sound...Last year marked the introduction and widespread use of the wide screen in indoor theaters...Drive-in theater screens for use with the conventional 1.33 to 1 aspect ratio have varied in width up to about 70 ft. During the past season the width of drive-in theater screens have very materially increased. The Westbury Drive-In Theater [has] a capacity for about 2000 cars. The screen, seen in Fig. 1, is

curved and is 124-ft wide. When a CinemaScope picture is projected it overshoots the screen on each side by about one foot, and it completely fills the screen from top to bottom...Fig. 3 shows a typical speaker post in the Belmont Auto Drive-In. Two junction boxes and four drive-in theater speakers are mounted on each post so that each car is equipped with both a right-hand and left-hand speaker."

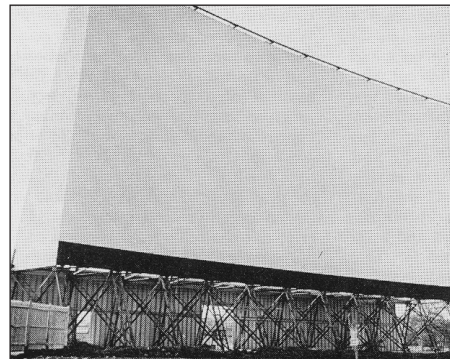


Fig 1. 124 ft curved screen, Westbury Drive-in Theatre.

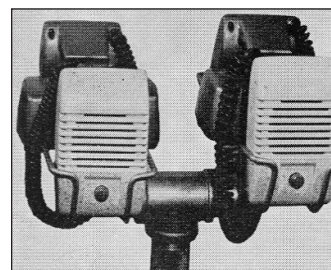


Fig 3. Two separate speaker installations, Belmont Drive-in Theatre.

75 Years Ago in the Journal

The March 1930 *Journal* reported in "A Year of Sound" by Harold B. Franklin: "In the operation of a vast chain of theaters catering to almost seven hundred thousand patrons daily, with over ninety per cent of our theaters equipped with sound installations, our organization is in a position to study the requirements and reaction of the general public in the acceptance of the sound motion picture...That sound is here to stay is a foregone conclusion...The manufacture of sound motion pictures has passed the stage of mystery...Notwithstanding the general acceptance of sound, certain stories or subjects that do not lend themselves to dialog will in all likelihood continue to be made in silent form, for the public have shown themselves to be hospitable to silent motion pictures provided they are of good quality. This has been demonstrated recently by huge grosses of such pictures as Greta Garbo in *Single Standard*, Joan Crawford in *Modern Maidens*, *Four Feathers*, and others. Under the new conditions it is likely that fewer productions will be made than in the past. It is a far more simple problem to turn out a number of silent motion pictures that require only titles to hold a story together. But when a story depends on intelligent and continuous dialog, the richest capabilities of authors and directors are taxed."