Taking pictures in Bruce County

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Historically Speaking

In 1927 and 1928, the first moving picture "talkies" hit silver screens. With a new method called optical sound, music and dialogue could now be recorded on film alongside the picture.

Some of the earliest Bruce County theatres to feature talking pictures were Blue Water Theatre in Kincardine and Reenville Theatre in Walkerton. In a 1930 poem published in The Walkerton Telescope, the author included the talkie show among the many notable things that made their town a lively and fashionable place to be:

Girls dressed in their best
Keep a-strolling by,
Boys, in groups a-watchin'
Try to catch their eye.
Barber shop is crowded,
Can't get in the stores,
Talkie show is full
Clear up to the doors.
(excerpt from "Saturday Night in Town")

Within a few short years, the talkie times, with some notable proprietors including John Blohm; Schilling and Keyes; Harold and Edna Poidevin; and Joseph Greathead. Originally called The Strand, its name was changed to The Esquire in 1938. This artifact was likely the first sound projector used in Southampton, at The Strand during the 1930s and then at The Esquire during the 1940s.

Sources: The Chesley Enterprise, June 5, 1913; The Bruce Herald and Times, May 11, 1925; The Walkerton Telescope, May 29, 1930; The Walkerton Telescope, June 5, 1930; The Port Elgin Times, May 4, 1938; The Southampton Beacon, July 12, 1945; Bruce County Voter's List, 1949; Obituary of Harold Melvin Poidevin, 1984; Michael Kunkes, "When Movies Learned to Talk", 2005, CineMontage; Motion Picture Projector, Bruce County Museum Collection, 955.458.001.

show had become a staple in many downtowns big and small. In order to delight audiences with the synchronized sound of talking pictures, however, theatres needed to invest in new projectors and sound equipment.

This ca.1930 Simplex-Acme sound projector was one of the earlier models equipped with the ability to read optical sound recordings. It was donated to the Museum by Harold (Jackie) Grasser, who managed The Esquire Theatre in Southampton during the 1940s.

A fixture of Southampton's High Street from the 1910s until 1974, the theatre went through many phases over its 60+ years. Ownership swapped hands multiple