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# From the IMIS / BKSTS archive

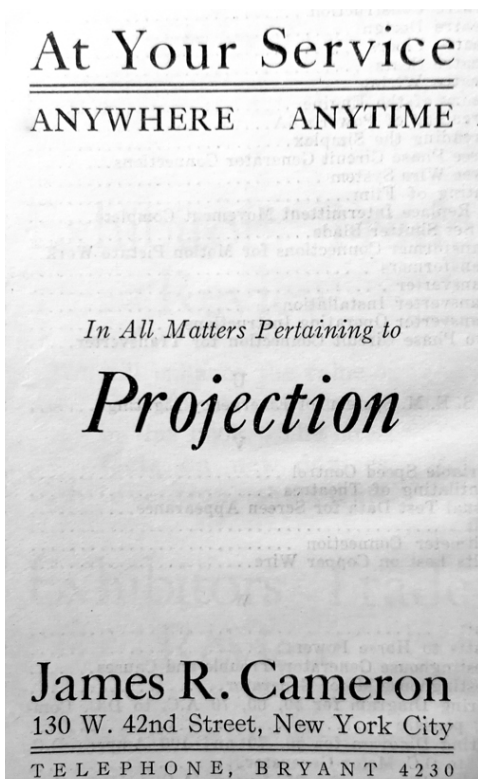
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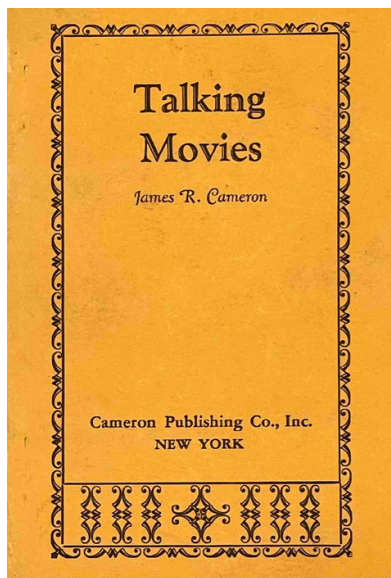
**Mark Trompeteler FBKS**

IMIS members have as one of their benefits, access to a huge online digital archive of all its articles and papers published in its journals going back to the very early 1930s. These online searchable research items, available as downloadable PDF documents, trace the whole gamut of the history of the moving image industries, including cinema and projection, via learned and technical articles. In addition, at the centre of Pinewood Studios, we have a physical archive of books, magazines, journals going right back to the 1880s and a small amount of audio visual material. We hope to provide a catalogue and list of everything we have in the physical archive to all IMIS members in the near future. As the IMIS re-activates, and the archive is in the restricted and secure area of Pinewood Studios, we still have to work out new and limited opportunities for members to visit the archive.

## **A glimpse of cinema projection in New York in the 1920s**

In our archive is a book entitled “Motion Picture Projection: An Elementary Textbook” by James R. Cameron (not the highly successful film director!) It seems to have been a popular book for those seeking professional guidance in projection in America during the 1920s, running to at least three editions. Cameron had written a number of textbooks on electricity and early radio before he turned his hand to both working in and writing about the cinema exhibition industry. Published in New York by the Technical Book Company he also wrote a companion volume “Pocket Reference Book for Managers and Projectionists” and was technical editor for the Exhibitors Trade Review and the International Cinema Review.



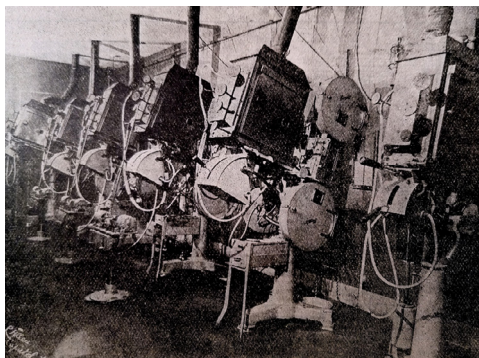
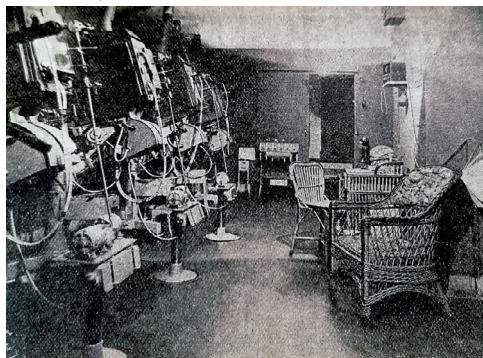


Sounding particularly interesting is his self published rare small pamphlet, measuring 6 x 3.5", entitled "Talking Movies" published in 1927. It is an early attempt at producing printed published guidance on the introduction of sound to cinema exhibition. The first part of the pamphlet covers a history of talking movies from the year 1900 through to WWI, and the second part describes the various talking picture technologies being introduced in cinemas across America. Rare and fascinating as this pamphlet sounds we do not have a copy in the archive. An original copy occasionally appears online for sale at prices around £150 to £200.

In Cameron's 1920s "Motion Picture Projection" textbook, he, amongst very many things, highlights The Capitol Theatre in New York City as being an exemplar of cinema and state of the art cinema

projection facilities of the time. Its projection booth was installed by a local New York based company quaintly called "International Cinema Quipment Center" (not a mistake - no "e"!) which had a projection laboratory or showroom open for industry/trade visitors. The Capitol booth facilities were based on four Simplex projectors, four Simplex double acting automatic arc controllers and four Robins cinema speed indicators with an interchangeable plugging system for all machines.

In addition the booth contained a Simplex single arc double dissolver and effects machine and 2 Simplex special spot lights. The booth and adjoining technical areas were fully equipped with all the latest exhaust/extraction, safe film storage, fire safety and film rewinding and equipment servicing facilities necessary. There were also various electro-control systems installed in the booth and theatre.

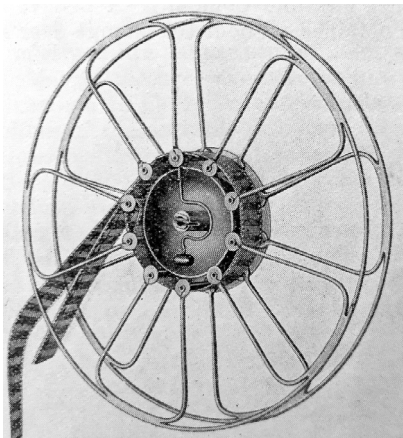


*The projection booth of the Capitol Theatre, mid-1920s.*

The Capitol Theatre on Broadway, just north of Times Square, opened in October 1919 with an original seating capacity of a massive 5230. Press advertising referred to it as “The world’s largest and foremost motion picture palace.” As many readers will no doubt know it was one of the first really large magnificent picture palaces that were to form the core of the cinema exhibition business for the next forty years. In 1924 it was acquired by the Loews Theatres chain and it became their flagship site. It also became the premiere site of many Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer films.

Other Nuggets of projection advice and wisdom in Cameron’s textbook was his championing of the Simplex Signal Reel. He decried and lamented the amount of damage that was caused to lengths of film (and projectionists fingers) by the metal film reels of the time. Slight distortions in the metal parts of a conventional film reel could cause significant damage. He advised the use of the kinder to film Simplex Signal Reel. He also strongly advised the use of film footage readers to the heads of projectors as a more accurate aid to projectionists to help them exactly know where they were in the length of the reel and as an indispensable aid to assist smooth changeovers.

### *The Simplex Signal Reel.*



One of the charming aspects of the book is the advertisements. A hundred years ago the New York based predecessors of the likes of Dion Hanson, Peter Knight, Bell Theatre Services, Omnex and Sound Associates were already advertising and supporting a vibrant and growing industry.

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