

# TV

October 26 to November 1

# WEEKLY

SECOND SECTION

PINE CITY PIONEER, October 25, 1978 - 17

## In this section

- ★ Want Ads
- ★ TV Listings
- ★ News features



Jason Robards, one of the stars of 'The Melodeon', a CBS television movie filmed recently southeast of Pine City.



Stringing popcorn for the Christmas tree on the steps of the Royalton Church are, Mrs. Millie Dahlin, Cambridge, Mildred Wendt, Rush City, Lilian Hjeln, Rush City[back] and Olesley Cole, assistant set director. Watching them is Arvid Carlson.

## 'Melodeon' captures rural flavor

Area residents play intricate role in film production

Stories, photos inside



Dressed in their costumes for the movie, Mrs. Ida Heinrich's grandchildren, Steve, Tami and Mike, who play neighbor children in the movie, took advantage of a break in filming to play with the publicity director's dog.

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# Hollywood on the plains

## Once in a lifetime experience for many

by Jackie A. Anderson

Many people from this area owe Tom Krebsbach of Midway Chevrolet in St. Paul a thank you. It was Krebsbach who persuaded his friend George Englund, a Hollywood producer, to film an upcoming CBS Christmas show "The Melodeon", in the beautiful countryside of Minnesota. The show stars Jason Robards, Eva Marie Saint and George Parry with a cameo appearance by Joanne Woodward.

It was CBS who picked the time however. According to reports, Englund Enterprises was scheduled to film the show early in 1979, while Minnesota winter was in full swing, for television airing at Christmas 1979. CBS changed its corporate mind however and wanted the show for this Christmas.

Englund and his crew of technicians, production assistants, cameramen and stars, can thank their lucky stars CBS changed its mind about when the filming would take place.

The Southern Californians had a hard enough time adjusting to the cool, autumn weather - what few cool days we've had during this beautiful Indian Summer - coming down with bronchitis, colds, fevers and the general blazes that come with adjusting to temperature changes. Dr. Norman Lee and Dr. Luther Nelson, both of Rush City, acted as the on-call medical staff for the Hollywood company while it was filming on the Fred Heinrich farm, about six miles northeast of Rush City.

According to Dr. Lee there have been no serious cases that have required more than a shot of antibiotic or similar routine treatment.

The majority of the film company are from California, some like costume designer Sue Hiem and George Parry are from New York.

While things at the Heinrich farm, where most of the filming took place, the Loring Nelson farm, where part of the movie was shot, and the old Royalton Church, where the end of the filming took place, were buzzing with activity, the excitement just didn't seem to equal that of the people from the Pine City area who in some way have had a part in the production of this movie. (According to reports people in Rush City have been buzzing too.)

The filming of "The Melodeon", a depression-era family movie, in this area has given local residents something more to discuss at the coffee shops and businesses than the weather.

The "stars" of the conversations are those local people who have been associated with the movie company in some way.

There's Neva Peterson, who, as owner of Pine City Launderers and Cleaners, has done the laundry for the movie company; and Jim Berglund and Dennis Thorne of Sta-Brite Signs who made the license plates for the vintage cars in the movie; Ruth Gillespie, Jo Lavigne, and Jan Pooker, who as owners of "The Store" in Pine City supplied many of the vintage household props needed; Richard and Elaine

Schneider of Rush City who supplied the vintage cars; Paul Kuzel of Kuzel Electric who helped repair some electrical equipment for the company; and the Arvid Carlsons of rural Braham in Royalton Township who landed speaking roles in the movie.

Then of course there are Mrs. Ida (Fred) Heinrich, Loring Nelson and the Royalton Church Board who allowed the movie company to use their property for the on location shooting.

A handful of local people were also hired to help prepare the sets for the production, among them Mrs. Mary (Otto) Jacobson and Mrs. Bernard Pangel who helped prepare the Nelson farm house for filming by painting walls, wallpapering and hanging curtains. They will also help put Mrs. Heinrich's home back in order when the filming is all through.

Working on the special effects crew during the four weeks of filming were Jeff Pangel, James and Pat Youngbauer and Jeff Marschinko, all of Pine City. Their jobs involved helping create the illusion of winter with plastic snow and large propeller fans, rigging a tree branch that will fall, or appear to, on Jason Robards in the film, supplying gas to fireplaces from concealed lines, so that no valuable time was lost trying to start fires in the wood stoves and fireplaces.

The local special effects men have put in long days, sometimes 18 hours, six days a week during their four weeks with Englund Enterprises. The four were originally going to work on an on-call basis, but soon became regular members of the crew. "There's a lot of waiting, sometimes for hours," Marschinko said. A 1973 graduate of Pine City High School, Marschinko took a leave of absence from his regular job as a painter with Wes Gilbey of Pine City. Pat Youngbauer, also a graduate of PCHS, had just returned home from a one year stay in Memphis, Tennessee before he landed the job with the special effects crew.

Before the semi-trailers loaded with the camera and special effects equipment arrived in Minnesota with the crews, technicians and stars close behind, an advance team was sent to Minnesota to locate a 1920's style farm house that would serve as the central background for the film.

The key figure in locating the farm was Ted Norelius of Lindstrom, former editor and publisher of the Chicago County Press. Norelius received a call one day in September from Alex Mayer, art director with Englund Enterprises.

Mayer gave the requirements: a 1920's farm house with three bedrooms, a good sized kitchen, dining room and parlour. The farm also had to have an old-fashioned barn, no modern silos, in general a 1920's farm that hadn't changed much over the years.

The search for the right place involved looking at nearly 400 farms in the area. A site in Redwood County had been selected, but the production company wanted someplace closer

to the cities if possible. During the week and a half that Norelius helped in the search, he and Mayer visited about 90 farms.

At the end of the fruitless search, Norelius remembered a farm he and his wife admired years ago and with the help of the Chicago County Assessor, Dave Johnson, was able to pin the farm down as the Fred Heinrich property in rural Rush City.

"I was sitting on the porch," Mrs. Heinrich, a widow, recalled recently in an interview with the Pioneer. It was Sept. 6. "Ted Norelius and Dave Johnson just dropped in and wanted to look at my house. They said it was for a movie that was going to be made in the area."

Taken completely by surprise, Mrs. Heinrich, a sprightly woman nearing 70, said "No sir" initially. "I'm too old for that kind of stuff."

During the next two weeks, Mrs. Heinrich was visited by different members of Englund Enterprises who would try to talk her into allowing them to use her farm.

Mrs. Heinrich finally agreed after a personal visit with George Englund and Tom Krebsbach. Englund offered to provide lodging and meals in one of the motels in the area while the filming took place, but Mrs. Heinrich had no intention of leaving her home of 50 years to complete strangers. Krebsbach then provided her with a modern motor-home that was parked near the old chicken coop in the farm yard.

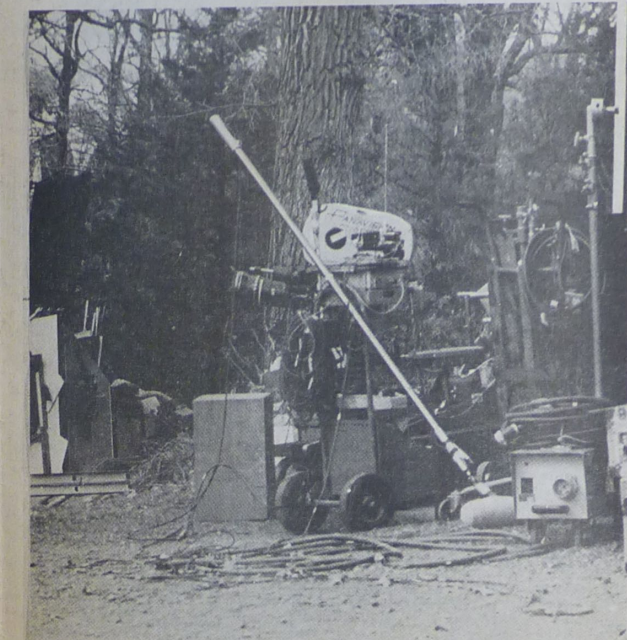
Rumors were flying around the area that the company had offered to send Mrs. Heinrich on a paid vacation to Germany. Mrs. Heinrich has heard those rumors too, but as far as she knows hasn't been asked by anyone connected with the movie company. "I'm still waiting," she said.

Mrs. Heinrich was paid for the use of her house, although she won't disclose the amount. Despite some inconveniences, "It was the most wonderful experience in the world," she said. "I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

Although the Heinrich farm was what the movie company was looking for, there were still changes which had to be made to lend authenticity to the set. JoAnn McDougall, set director, was in charge of preparing the Heinrich house for the cameras. Inside, the house had to be completely redecorated in 1930's style living; outside, the red barn had to be painted a duller red, a pig pen had to be built, an outhouse added and a wooden fence erected to camouflage the modern wire fence and metal fence posts.

Most of the furniture and household props were gathered from antique shops in the area, including the D-R Bargain Spot and Wooden Barrel in Hinckley. And "The Store" in Pine City. Many other items were donated by local residents. The Melodeon, the centerpiece of the film, was found at the Wooden Barrel also.

Driving through the St. Croix River Valley to the Fred Heinrich farm, it is easy to understand why the farm was selected. There are rolling hills, beautiful trees in fall



The Panavision camera, sound equipment and yards of electrical cord were positioned in front of the barn at the Heinrich farm. The crew had taken a break for lunch.

colors and dirt roads leading to the secluded farm house.

What's it like watching your house completely redecorated to an earlier era, with stoves, fluorescent lights, carpeting and furniture removed or disguised? "It's chaos," Mrs. Heinrich said. "No one can imagine what it's like, but wonderful chaos."

Mrs. Heinrich was impressed with the hard work involved in producing a movie and with the niceness of the cast and crew. "They were very nice to me," she said.

Mrs. Heinrich took an active role while the movie company was in the area, recruiting locals for crowd scenes and helping with the collection of props for the sets. Her two sons and grandchildren also got involved as production assistants and as extras in the film. Her grandchildren were cast as neighbor children in the film.

Filming at the Heinrich farm ended last week. There were two days of filming at the Loring Nelson farm south of Rush City and at the Burlington Northern Depot in Rush City. Then the company moved to the Royalton Church last Saturday for two days of shooting. The final day of filming will be today, Wednesday, at the Drexel Apartments in Minneapolis. It is here that JoAnn Woodward will make her cameo appearance.

Bonnie Graves, publicity director for the Melodeon, said the crew has enjoyed their stay in East Central Minnesota. "The

people have been very cooperative and wonderful."

"Usually on location, you get a lot of people interested in movie careers, but around here people are more curious," Graves said. She did say they had one fellow coming around who was "quite persistent," however.

Several actors and actresses from Minneapolis-St. Paul were hired as extras for the film, as well as a Minneapolis teacher who served as tutor for George Parry and the other children involved in the production.

Lowell Anderson, a retired minister from Stanchfield, was hired as the minister in the church scene. And Arvid and Mildred Carlson, a Royalton Township couple, were hired to play the neighbors of Robards and Miss Saint in the film.

Mike Johnson, Danny Cabak and Jay Jindra, all from Hinckley, were hired as drivers and production assistants and have worked with the movie company since they started filming Oct. 2.

Jindra was busy last Saturday at the Royalton Church building a manger and helping get props ready for the interior of the church. The old wooden pews with the folding seats had to be moved closer to the center of the church because the aisle was too wide.

JoAnn McDougall was inside decorating the tree and creating a Christmas atmosphere. She had looked for weeks for time to hang on the tree but couldn't find any in the local stores. Luckily, Mrs.

Arvid Carlson who admits to "never throwing anything away" had some tinsel at home and brought it to the church for McDougall to use.

"I always like to hire local people whenever possible," McDougall said. "They always know other people who can help and usually know where to find things."

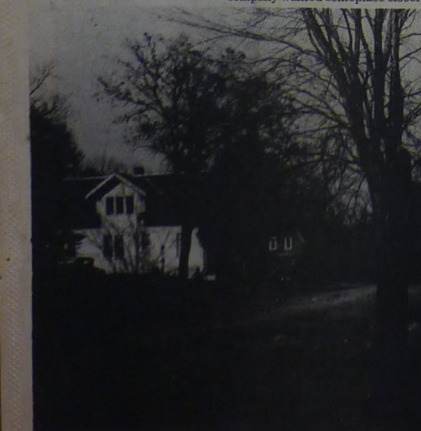
McDougall sang high praise for Carol Norelius who helped find the locations and lent her piano bench with a needlepoint cover to use with the Melodeon.

Several hours before the cast and most of the crew were to arrive at the Royalton Church for a night of filming that would start at about 8 p.m. and end somewhere in the pre-dawn hours, many curious people who stopped to get a closer look at the Christmas scene being created in the church, took a few minutes to help string popcorn for the tree McDougall was working on inside.

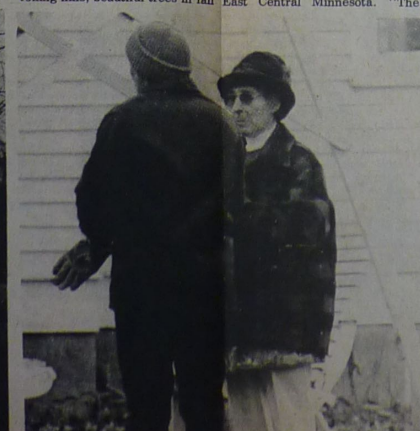
Cars were kept moving outside by members of the Pine County Mounted Patrol, who like their counterparts in Chicago County, were hired by Englund Enterprises to keep local traffic moving and away from the spot where filming was taking place.

The pine trees on metal bases that were used in the snow scenes at the Heinrich farm were soon brought to the church, about an hour before the arrival of the semi-trucks with the other

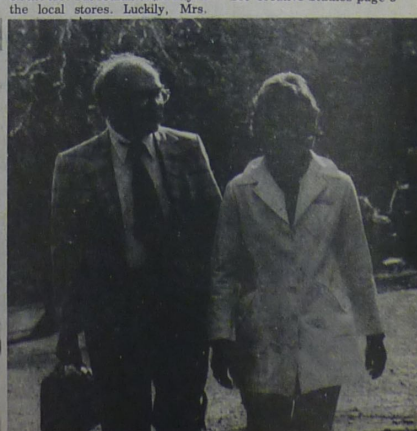
See Creative Studios page 3



Mrs. Fred (Ida) Heinrich farm where the major part of the movie was filmed.



Mrs. Heinrich, right, talks to one of the crew members near the back steps of her house.



Dr. Norman Lee, Rush City, and his nurse Vera Lindstrom, arrived at the Heinrich farm to treat members of the crew suffering from minor cold and flu symptoms.