



## Brunswick and the Golden Age of Silent Movies

When pioneer filmmaker Richard E. Norman of Jacksonville, Florida, acquired stock footage of a dramatic train wreck, he came up with an ingenious scheme. Starting in 1916, he travelled to as many as forty towns in the Midwest and South, including Brunswick, to shoot a film entitled *The Wrecker*, using the train wreck footage and the same screenplay in each location. The movie told the story of a love triangle and the competition between two railway companies for an important mail contract.

In every town, Norman advertised for residents to audition. Using local talent rather than professional actors guaranteed the success of his venture. Norman also ensured that starring roles were given to

prominent citizens. Fascinated by seeing themselves and their friends on screen, the townspeople watched the silent movie over and over, paying ten to fifteen cents each time. After splitting the profits with the city and the local theater, Norman turned the film over to the city.

Norman never crossed over from silent films to "talkies." His studio still stands in the historic Arlington district of Jacksonville. In 2014, a segment of PBS's *Antiques Roadshow* featured the studio and encouraged towns where *The Wrecker* was filmed to search their archives for copies of the movie, as well as still photographs associated with the production. Norman made the movie, using three different titles, with both all white and all African American casts.

A collection of five photographs donated to the Coastal Georgia Historical Society in 1966 documents the 1916 production of *The Wrecker* filmed in Brunswick. The photograph shown here identifies the local talent as (left to right) Chief of Police Philip Burgess, William McKinnon, and Katherine Stiles.

Our monthly images on this page are from the vast archives of the Coastal Georgia Historical Society. The Society's mission includes the "administration, restoration and maintenance of historic facilities and resources ... preserved as a living part of the historical and cultural foundations of our coastal community." Society facilities include the St. Simons Lighthouse and Museum, the A.W. Jones Heritage Center, and the Maritime Center (formerly the U.S. Coast Guard Station). To learn more about the Society, its diverse programs, and the benefits of Society membership, please call (912) 638.4666, or visit [www.saintsimonslighthouse.org](http://www.saintsimonslighthouse.org).