

# THE CORKTOWN NEWS

## IDLE HOUR

### CORKTOWN'S 'FIRST' MOVIE THEATRE

by Coralina Lemos, Corktown Historian and Author | corktownhistory.com

The start of the 20th Century saw great progress for Toronto. By 1901 its population was just over five hundred thousand. This brought about an increase in work related industries such as construction, finance and domestic services.

In Corktown alone, there were approximately five hundred new residents that were of Macedonian and other Balkan origins; many referred to in city directories as "foreigners".

The Willinskys then moved to Omaha, Nebraska, where they started a family. Following the birth of their third child they moved to Toronto, the same place Benjamin Vise had settled a few years earlier. United again, the family found living accommodations at King and Sackville Streets in Corktown.

The term IDLE HOUR was often used in advertisements and in everyday humorous expressions.

In 1907, Meyer L. Willinsky purchased a lot then contracted Wilbur Webb to design a purpose-built theatre he named the IDLE HOUR, that opened in 1909. The term IDLE HOUR was often used in advertisements and in everyday humorous expressions. Despite the cinemas name, most City of Toronto directories refer to it as the M.L Willinsky Theatre.

As a result of this economic growth, Corktown witnessed the establishment of new businesses. For entertainment, M.L. Willinsky opened Corktown's first movie cinema he named the IDLE HOUR at 364/366 Queen Street East on the north side between Parliament and Trefann Streets. Just a few doors west of the cinema, Sarah, Willinsky's wife, sold millinery, apparel, and textiles.

When it opened, the IDLE HOUR was the only "amusement" movie picture house servicing the areas east of Victoria Street to the Don River, and from Bloor Street south to Lake Ontario. Although the Willinskys had moved out of Corktown by the time the cinema opened, it kept operating for about ten years. Following this, the space was leased to the Imperial Theatre, Corktown's second cinema that opened in 1915 at St. Paul's Parish Hall, on Tracy Street. Continuing to operate under different management, M.L. Willinsky kept the property until 1929, when he sold it.

Meyer Lionel Willinsky was born in Poland; the youngest of three brothers, he immigrated to the United States while in his early twenties. In the 1880's he was living in Kansas City where he met and married Sarah, daughter of Rachel and Benjamin Vise.

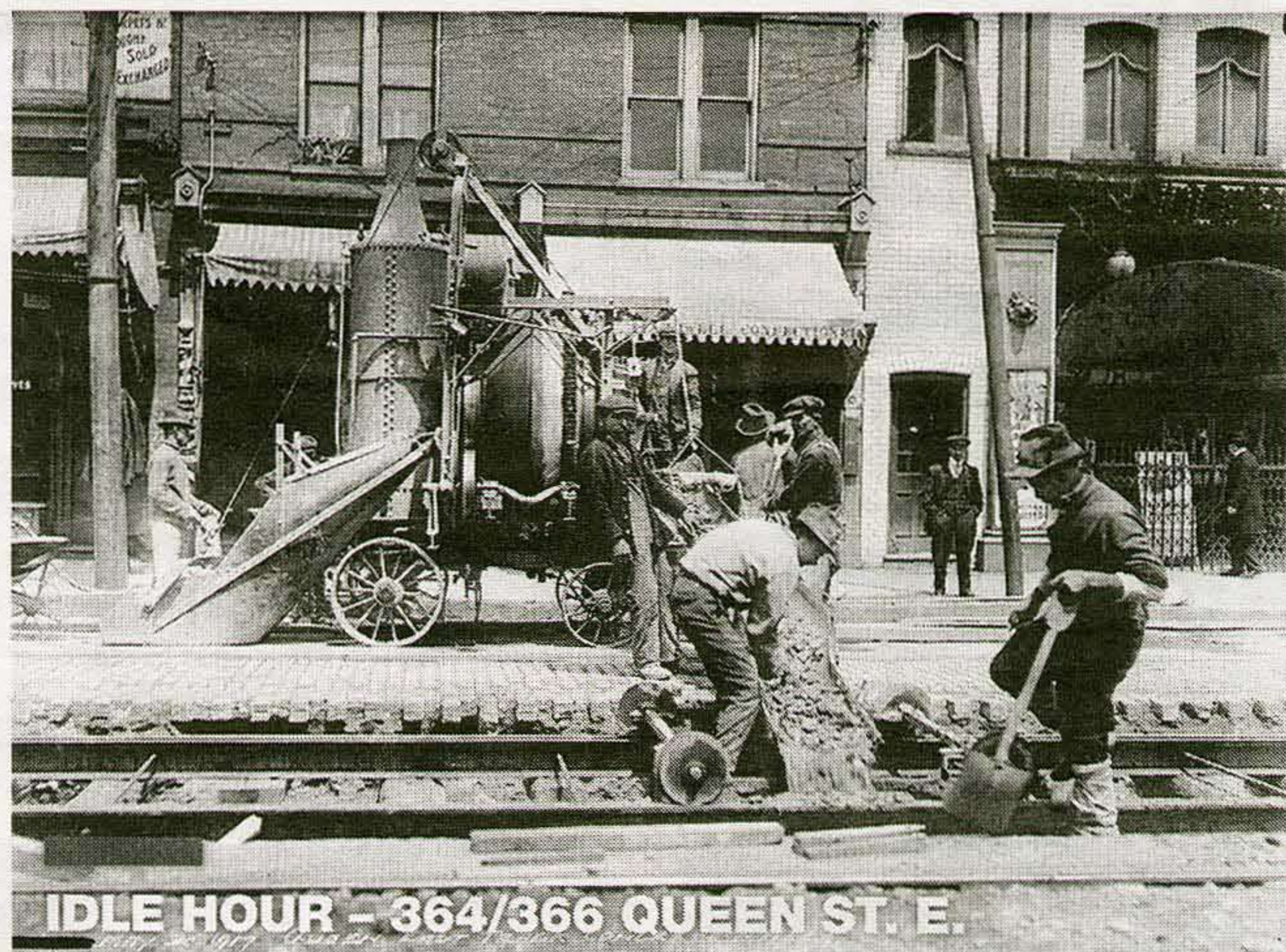


photo courtesy: Toronto Archives (May 30th, 1917)