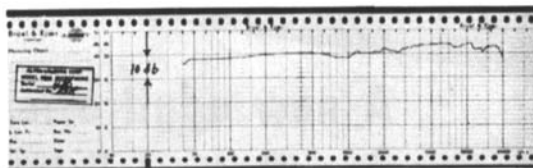


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books reviewed

The Edison Motion Picture Myth

By Gordon Hendricks. Published (1961) by the University of California Press, Berkeley 4, Calif. 212 pp. Illus. Price \$4.00.

(This review is reprinted from the May 1962 issue of *Films in Review*, by permission of the Editor, Henry Hart.)

Most film histories are so contaminated by apocrypha, faulty reminiscence, and retrospective self-aggrandizement that a scholarly publication of any substance is something of an event.

At first glance, this new book by Gordon Hendricks seems to be an exception. But whether readers will be pleased with the conclusions toward which he leads them, or the partisan and arbitrary fashion in which he marshals his evidence, is another matter.

Mr. Hendricks contends that the generally accepted accounts of Thomas Edison's invention of the motion picture camera are substantially fictitious, and that the major credit for the achievement ought properly to go to Edison's self-effacing employe, W. K. L. Dickson.

A prodigious amount of research and scholarly ingenuity have gone into his argument. Hundreds of pieces of information — patent specifications, financial records, memoirs, diaries and other such rarely consulted data — have been fitted together into a fascinating mosaic which chronicles the devious and intricate events leading up to the development of the first motion picture cameras and projectors between 1888 and 1892.

Mr. Hendricks is most successful in demonstrating that considerable hanky-panky was involved during this period in the affairs and claims of the Edison organization. This will surprise no one familiar with the early days of the motion picture business. Hanky-panky was also true of Edison's commercial adversaries.

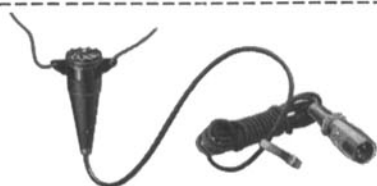
Hendricks makes a good case for the recognition of W. K. L. Dickson as a collaborator in the invention of the Kinetoscope. However, the reader will have to decide for himself how much credit Dickson should receive for this collaboration. For, despite the ingenious arguments presented in the book, the conclusions reached are necessarily based upon fragmentary and circumstantial evidence which can be construed in a variety of ways. Moreover, because an inventor, scientist, or supervising engineer entrusts an assistant with the mechanical realization of his designs, that is not, of itself, sufficient reason to credit



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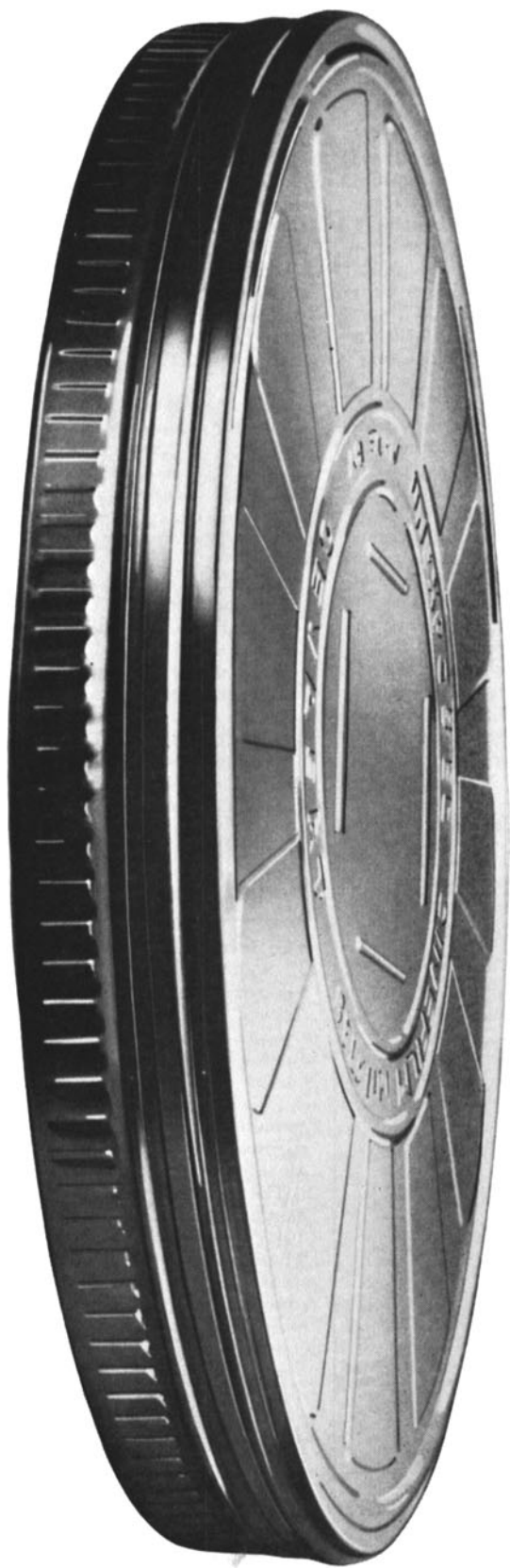
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the assistant with the invention. Insofar as this reviewer is concerned, Mr. Hendricks fails to demonstrate that Dickson's contribution in any way transcended Edison's.

Unfortunately, space does not permit a very detailed analysis of Hendrick's arguments. But there are occasional errors of fact which must be noted. He states, for example, that the Edison patent caveat of October 8, 1888, is published in this book for the first time. It was published six years ago in the September, 1955, issue of the *SMPTE Journal* in an article by Harold G. Bowen. Elsewhere, Mr. Hendricks appears to misunderstand Dr. Kenneth Mees' estimate of the radiant energy candlepower of the sun. These are minor errors and would hardly be worth mentioning were it not for the fact that Hendricks ungenerously attacks older, established historians for similar, inconsequential mistakes.

Another error, however, is of crucial importance to Hendricks' thesis, for he bases a major argument upon it. In his attempt to demonstrate why Edison's first strip-film design (Caveat IV) could not work, he appears to confuse microphotography with photomicrography, and speaks of Edison *restricting* his early designs to a microphotographic operation. The point is that the motion picture process is nearly *always* a microphotographic process and is only rarely a photomicrographic one. The author's mention of the use of a 50-75 power microscope in connection with the

operation of this design seems particularly obscure since a microscope is not mentioned in the caveat text nor is a microscope employed in either the photography, the viewing, or the projection of a microphotographic motion picture image. Even if a microscope were so peculiarly employed (instead of a conventional lens system for the photography and a low-power magnifying glass for the viewing) the relationship between field size and film size which Hendricks describes is not clear. He concludes that the film would have had to have been no greater than $\frac{1}{8}$ in. in width, which does not follow either from his reasoning or from the original sketches numbered 46, 47, and 48 in the fourth caveat — sketches which are not published in this book but which may be seen in the *SMPTE* article.

But far more important is the fact that because Mr. Hendricks is so obviously partisan the professional scholar and critical reader is led to wonder to what extent accuracy may have been compromised by his pre-commitments. Many readers will suspect that Mr. Hendricks reached his conclusions long before he began his research.

Although one may legitimately question many of Hendricks' conclusions, and regret the many scholarly conceits which he sprinkles over his pages, we are all in his debt for this stimulating and carefully researched book. Perhaps it will stimulate other historians in the field to pursue their labors with the same sort of care and effort—*Raymond Fielding*

Techniques of Television Production (2d ed)

By Rudy Bretz. Published (1962) by McGraw-Hill Book Co., 330 W. 42 St., New York 36. 9½ by 6 in. 518 + vii pp. illus. diagrams. Price \$10.75.

The first edition of this book appeared in 1953 and was reviewed in the *Journal* of April 1954 (p. 322) by R. A. Isberg. The second edition has been extensively revised and new material has been added to cover the many advances in the field that have taken place since publication of the first edition. Chapters on television switching equipment, projection equipment, television cameras, and television remotes have been completely revised and brought up to date.

New material added to the section on television recording includes a detailed discussion of the use of video tape. Other sections have benefited from the author's meticulous revisions and addition of updated material especially those dealing with color television and electronic special effects.

The author has had a wide experience in television production. He has been an instructor in the Theater Arts Department, University of California, Los Angeles, and has acted as consultant to television stations throughout the world, including tours of duty for the State Department and for Unesco. He is presently Head of Educational TV, Visual Communications Dept., University Extension, University of California, Los Angeles.—*R.H.*

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The Institute for Scientific Information, 33 South Seventeen St., Philadelphia 3, has announced four publications: *Current Contents of Space, Electronic & Physical Sciences*; *Current Contents of Chemical, Pharmaco-Medical & Life Sciences*; *Current Contents of Social Sciences*; and *Index Chemicus*. The "Current Contents" publications contain the Tables of Contents of current scientific journals. Published weekly, papers are listed by title and author.

The *Index Chemicus* is published twice monthly. According to the announcement, "Original journal articles are abstracted 'graphically' rather than verbally... it speaks in the universal language of the structural diagram, freeing the chemist from the necessity to use involved nomenclature in locating a specific compound." More than 100,000 new compounds are indexed yearly in this publication.

Freedom and Communications, by Dan Lacy, a publication of the University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Ill. (Price \$3.00), is a noteworthy examination of America's communications system — its past, present and future. The author raises questions suggesting that drastic developments are needed in our present system of communications if we are to preserve our freedoms.

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