

# COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

## REPORT OF THE HISTORICAL COMMITTEE\*

As this is the Fifteenth Anniversary of the formation of our Society it is particularly appropriate to stress the importance of the work of the Historical Committee. Our President has fittingly recognized this importance in arranging the pioneer dinner which will take place on Wednesday evening.

Because the industry which we represent has seen its principal phases evolve within the memory and experience of most of you now present, it is a hard task to force realization that these memories and experiences are fast passing into oblivion and that, if we desire to retain a record of the things for which our Society stands, we must brook no delay in preserving these records for posterity.

No other industry in history except radio has developed with such swiftness and with such far-reaching effects. There is no doubt that the motion picture and its effect on civilization will be a paramount subject with future historians. We, who are now here in the thick of the struggle, have little conception of the world changes which cinematography is bringing about in shaping the annals of the world.

There is little of the spectacular in searching the moldy records of the past. It calls for a type of mind which is often looked upon with condescension by those preoccupied with the problems of the present and the future. Perhaps it is too much to expect that the younger members of the Society withdraw momentarily from their forward-looking pursuits to render tribute to those who constructed the foundation on which they are now building.

Conflicting claims of pioneers still living, intolerances and jealousies in the memories of more recent workers, all go to render the task of the Historical Committee most difficult. To run down the evidences submitted, to sift the records and search for witnesses who have retired from active life, is a task which calls for endless and

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\* Presented at the Fall, 1931, Meeting at Swampscott, Mass.

monotonous work and which often arouses bitter enmities and unexpected antagonism.

Despite these difficulties the Committee has carried on, handicapped by having practically no funds and having to go on with the fore-knowledge that the work accomplished is almost purely for the benefit of posterity and of little interest to the present.

Unfortunately, most of the members residing in the East were not able to be present at the Coast convention and see the historical exhibit arranged by Mr. William Earl Theisen, head of the Museum Section of the Historical Committee. An account of this exhibit with illustrations will appear in an early issue of the JOURNAL. This exhibit is now on view in the Museum of the City of Los Angeles.

The Committee again recommends that the work of Jean Acme LeRoy and Eugene Lauste be recognized in some fitting manner by the Society. The records of these men have been published in the JOURNAL and are too long to be reiterated here.

Work on the collection of historical data has gone steadily forward and a number of large loose-leaf scrap books suitable for deposition in a museum or public library have been prepared. These scrap books are classified, mainly according to outstanding personalities in the early days of the industry. Among these personalities are included: Georges Demeny, Wm. Kennedy Laurice Dickson, Thos. A. Edison, Wm. Friese-Green, C. Francis Jenkins, Eugene Lauste, Louis Aimé Augustin Le Prince, Auguste and Louis Lumière, Jean A. LeRoy, Ettienne-Jules Marey, Eadward Muybridge, and others.

The Historical Committee wishes to express its gratitude for the kindly and generous coöperation and contributions to its work of such men as E. Kilburn Scott, London; Will Day, London; Jean A. LeRoy, New York; Wm. Kennedy Laurie Dickson, Channel Islands; J. Tarbotton Armstrong, Museum of the University of California; J. Waldemar Kaempffert, Museum of Science & Industry, Chicago; F. C. Brown, Museum of Peaceful Arts, New York; D. D. Jackson, Chemical Museum, Columbia University; A. J. Olmstead, Smithsonian Institute; Dr. Bryan, Los Angeles Museum.

The Chairman of the Committee also wishes to express his thanks to the members of the Committee for their able assistance, particularly to the unflagging zeal of President Crabtree, C. Francis Jenkins, Glenn E. Matthews, Merritt Crawford, Terry Ramsaye, Oscar Depuc, F. H. Richardson, and W. E. Theisen, who have contributed greatly to the work of the Committee.

A large amount of historical data has been published, both in the technical and the popular magazines, and much of the material published has been directly or indirectly the result of the work of the Committee.

C. L. GREGORY, *Chairman.*

E. W. ADAMS	O. NELSON
M. CRAWFORD	T. RAMSAYE
O. B. DEPUÉ	F. RICHARDSON
C. F. JENKINS	W. E. THEISEN
G. E. MATTHEWS	F. J. WILSTACH

#### DISCUSSION

MR. RICHARDSON: I should be delighted to present to the Society, when some means are provided for taking care of them, some old pictures that I possess, one of which is one of the first reels that the old Bioscope Company made. I also have an old photograph of the first motion picture theater of which there is any written record.

Four years ago, when visiting the International Projector Corporation I asked to see one of their old mechanisms, but was informed that they did not have any. I looked around, and in a lumber room, under a mass of scrap, I found some astonishing things. In the dirt and dust, as Mr. Griffin will remember, I found some old projector mechanisms that I didn't believe existed any longer. There was the old Selig, and the old pink Bioscope claw-feet projector. I do not know whether the International Projector Corporation could be persuaded to give them to the Society, but they certainly ought to be preserved in a museum.

PRESIDENT CRABTREE: I should like to make a plea to everybody who has apparatus of historical interest, that they offer it to the Historical Committee for placing in a suitable depository. We have two possible depositories, one in the East and one in the West. The one in the West is of little use to us in the East, and *vice versa*. I believe that attempts were made to establish one in Washington, but there has been much objection to that because it would not be accessible. The motion picture industry in the East is centered in and around New York City. We want this exhibit to be of value, and not something which is going to collect dust and never be looked at.

MR. GREGORY: Mr. President, probably a great many of you are unacquainted with the Museum of Peaceful Arts, which is in the new News Building at 220 East 42nd St., New York, N. Y. The idea of this great museum, which covers two floors of that building, is to be situated in the heart and center of things, so as to prove of easy access to any one visiting New York City, or who lives in the city. This museum has ample space for the presentation of any motion picture material which may be loaned or given, and the director is quite willing to accept things as a loan. If conditions require, any exhibit so loaned may be recalled, and replaced in a more suitable depository. Mr. F. C. Brown is the director of the museum. The space which was available at the Smithsonian Institute is already filled. If important exhibits are given to this museum, they can replace

some of their less important exhibits, which would be put into storage. But any exhibits donated to the Smithsonian Institute would have to be very important in order to receive a place where the ordinary visitor could inspect them.

MR. MATTHEWS: In connection with the provision made for apparatus, I should also like to make a plea for those members who, as a hobby, occasionally browse among old bookshops and libraries, that they watch for early articles on motion pictures, and have photostats made of any papers that seem to be pertinent to the early history of the motion picture. These should be sent to the Secretary's office, in New York. Very interesting material, which should be recorded in our records but which is promptly lost or forgotten, is continually being unearthed by different members.

MR. RICHARDSON: I do not believe that the matter of accessibility is as important as the matter of permanency. We should establish a museum for the benefit of those to come, when you and I are gone.

I suggest that the President appoint a committee to confer with the Smithsonian Institute to find out if space could not be made available for a motion picture exhibit.

PRESIDENT CRABTREE: The Historical Committee can attend to the matter.

MR. GREGORY: I made a special trip to Washington to see the officials of the Institute; the remarks which I made about their limited facilities are the result of that trip.

MR. RICHARDSON: Did you remind them that the motion picture industry is the fourth largest in the United States, and that it wants to establish a museum for posterity?

MR. GREGORY: Yes. They did not seem to be convinced, but said there was much other material of great importance, and that they could not enlarge the present building. Their thoughts may change if their facilities are improved, but until additional appropriations are made, they do not see any other means except to retire exhibits of less importance as exhibits of more importance come in. There is available a room about 40 by 60 feet in size, which is pretty well filled at the present time.

PRESIDENT CRABTREE: The problem apparently is to convince the authorities that the motion picture industry is much more important than they seem to think it is. I believe the suggestion is in order for the Historical Committee to make further efforts.

MR. FARNHAM: The Committee might have included in its report a note to the effect that some of the large companies maintain historical exhibits. The Bell Telephone Laboratories has an exhibit of equipment, and our company preserves its historical lamps. Although these companies will undoubtedly keep these collections intact, the fact should be on record that they exist, in case any one should want to look up historical material.

MR. J. R. CAMERON: Mr. E. S. Porter, who is present at the Convention, has with him the original Simplex projector built by him in about 1898; I am sure he would be pleased to show it to anyone who may be interested.