Kino International Corp.
presents

EDISON

The Invention of the Movies

From the collections of

The Museum of Modern Art
&
The Library of Congress

A 4 Disc DVD set

Curated by

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Film Notes by
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Introduction

Edison:

Commercial motion pictures were invented at the Edison Laboratory between 1888 and 1893. They were actually a system of inventions: a camera, a viewing machine (the peep-hole kinetoscope), and equipment for printing, sprocket punching, and the developing of long strands of film. Perhaps none of these component parts was strictly new, but the ability of Edison and his staff to reorganize them for a specific purpose was an extraordinary technological and cultural achievement. Within a year, Edison had launched motion pictures as a commercial enterprise, remaining in the business until 1918—a 30 year involvement in motion pictures. During that period, the technical system underwent alteration and improvement: the development of the "Latham loop," which enabled the system to handle large quantities of film; the introduction of projection; a reframing device for projectors so the film could be kept in frame; and the three-blade shutter, which reduced flicker during projection. Arguably more important was the cultural transformation of motion picture production: the shift in editorial control from exhibitor to production company and the concomitant creation of the filmmaker, the development of story films, the proliferation of specialized motion picture theaters (often called nickelodeons), and the eventual emergence and dominance of feature-length films. In 1894, Edison was the sole producer of motion pictures in the world. By 1918, the contributions of his company to film culture had become marginal, both financially and in terms of its overall place in the American industry.

The film industry underwent tumultuous development and change over these three decades. During this period, the filmmaking achievements and fortunes of the Edison Manufacturing Company fluctuated widely. By the end of 1895, motion pictures had ceased to be profitable, perceived by many to be a passing novelty or fad. Then, projection renewed interest and expanded income; even so, the following years continued to be ones of boom and bust. Edison almost left the business in 1900, coming close to selling his motion picture interests to the rival American Mutoscope and Biograph Company. When the deal faltered, he opened a Manhattan studio and his company once again became America's preeminent film producer—in part because his legal team put many rivals out of business. The business faltered again in 1908 and1909, but by 1911-1912, Edison films were once again considered among the best. Many Edison films continued to impress critics and audiences alike as the company employed such accomplished directors as John Collins (who died in the 1919 flu epidemic) and the young Alan Crosland (who later directed *The Jazz Singer*, 1929). This four-

DVD set offers, for the first time anywhere, a wide selection of Edison motion pictures, from the earliest film experiments to what has sometimes been called the last Edison feature film to be released: *The Unbeliever* (Crosland, 1918), featuring Erich von Stroheim.

The Museum of Modern Art:

When the Museum of Modern Art began to build its film archive in the 1935, the acquisition of films such as *The John C. Rice-May Irwin Kiss* (sometimes known simply as *The Kiss*) received article length attention in the New York Times. Later, in 1939, the Film Library, as it was then known, began to make titles available for public screenings through its circulating film program. Two of its 16mm programs were composed primarily of Edison pictures: Films of the 1890s and Porter-Edison Films. Along with circulating programs of Lumière and Méliès films, these two reels of material ensured that people interested in the early years of cinema would be able to see at least some of its highlights.

In 1940, the Museum acquired the surviving nitrate negatives and prints of the Edison Manufacturing Company and quickly undertook a project to copy a handful of key titles for public exhibition. In the early 1970s, Eileen Bowser, longtime curator of MoMA's film archive and a leading force in the field of film preservation, supervised the transfer of the Edison nitrate (as well as the nitrate negatives in the even larger Biograph Collection) to acetate fine grain, thus assuring the long-term survival of both collections. Soon thereafter, in the 1980s, Charles Musser restored and reconstructed a number of important early subjects from the Edison Collection, again in 16mm, and they were added to the Circulating Film Library. More recently, a group of twenty Edison films from the 1910s have been restored by the Museum with funds provided by the National Film Preservation Foundation's Saving the Silents program, administered through the National Park Service. These most recent films, all finished to 35mm and several of which are on the third and fourth discs in this set, are the first in what MoMA hopes will now be a regular Edison preservation program.

Ideally, audiences should see these films in their original 35mm format, in a theatrical environment—the kind of film-going experience to which MoMA and similar institutions have always been, and will continue to be committed. Nevertheless, new technologies (first video, and now DVD) have changed the ways in which these films can be studied and enjoyed, providing audiences with a more affordable and dynamic screening experience, both in the classroom and at home. Moreover, DVD sets such as this can offer viewers a much deeper and more wide-ranging selection of film titles than ever before. It seems only fitting, then, that the Museum's Department of Film and Media should join with Kino International to present this unprecedented collection of films to the public.

Edison: The Invention of the Movies continues MoMA’s longstanding commitment to preserving and making available to the public the world’s film heritage, matching it with Kino’s equally strong tradition of film and video production and distribution.

Credits and Acknowledgements:

This set was produced for video by Bret Wood. The films were selected by Steven Higgins, in collaboration with Charles Musser. The notes and commentary were written by Musser, in consultation with Higgins. Musser and Wood conducted the interviews, which were taped by Michael Schmidt. Brian Shirey supervised the production. The DVD was authored by Stuart Snider at Cinepost, Atlanta.

Patrick Loughney, Head of the Moving Image Section of the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress, provided crucial support for this project by allowing us to include key titles from the Library's extensive Edison holdings.

Ronald Magliozzi selected the original Edison Company documents used in this set from the special collections of The Department of Film and Media at MoMA, where he is Assistant Curator for Research and Collections. Additional print materials were provided by Charles Musser.

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The Ambassador's Daughter
At Bear Track Gulch
One Touch of Nature
The Public and Private Care of Infants
A Serenade by Proxy
Thirty Days at Hard Labor
The Unsullied Shield

The Film Foundation:

The Ambassador's Daughter
At Bear Track Gulch
The Great Train Robbery
One Touch of Nature
The Public and Private Care of Infants
A Serenade by Proxy
Thirty Days at Hard Labor
The Unsullied Shield

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The Bird Hoffman Foundation:

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The Russell Sage Foundation:

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The following films were preserved by The Museum of Modern Art from original nitrate release prints in the collections of the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Michigan:

Blacksmithing Scene
Sandow
Annabelle Butterfly Dance

Preface

The films in this collection are presented in chronological order, allowing the viewer to follow the progression of Edison filmmaking over a 28-year period. We provide credits and program notes for each film, but groups of films are also introduced by some more general comments about filmmaking activities at Edison and in the industry more broadly. These usually cover several years at a time (e.g. 1890-1891, 1894-1895). Given the number of titles in this collection, the program notes for each film are inevitably brief, and the credits are by no means exhaustive. In the early years, films were offered for sale under variant titles and, where appropriate, we have listed them. In some cases, a film was never assigned a formal title at the time of production, and so, for purposes of identification, we have provided a title in brackets.

Film credits, to the extent available, take two general forms. Before 1909, filmmaking at the Edison Manufacturing Company was usually a collaborative activity involving two individuals who were central to the creative process. Indeed, reliance on such partnerships began with the very invention of motion pictures (Thomas A. Edison and W. K. L. Dickson) and initial commercial production (Dickson and William Heise). Therefore, for the period through 1908, we credit these individuals as "filmmakers," to the extent their names are known. In the 1890s, the making of nonfiction subjects often involved a producer and cameraman. With the rise of fiction filmmaking in the early 1900s, the cameraman was joined by a stage director, and yet their roles were more diverse and often more collaborative than these titles would suggest. Stage manager George Fleming was also a scenic designer, while Edwin S. Porter was not only a cameraman, but also the studio head. They routinely selected and developed the film's premise, gag or story in tandem. For this reason, crediting these individuals as "filmmakers" rather than "director" or "cameraman" is sufficiently broad and flexible to be appropriate. Sometimes, J. Searle Dawley and Edwin S. Porter are credited as the directors of films made in 1907-1908. In truth, they were not only co-directors; they were co-filmmakers. After 1908, the industry became more systematized and hierarchal. For this reason it is appropriate to employ modern-day credits (director, writer, cameraman, etc.) for these later films. By this time, films also had specific release dates.

After 1911, the Edison Company promoted its leading actors, noting them in the film's intertitles and advertisements. Before that date, the names of actors were known only irregularly and through different sources. The names of actors for films made in 1907-1908 are taken from J. Searle Dawley's account books, and some of the names are almost certainly misspelled. During the 1910s, the Edison Company generally promoted the writers, but not the directors or cameramen of its films. To make up for this silence, directors making Edison films between

1912 and 1915 paid for and placed in trade papers (such as the *New York Dramatic Mirror*) advertisements that listed their recent credits.

Users of this DVD set may view just the films, or they can also look at additional photographic, manuscript and printed materials relating to particular films. Most such materials come from the special collections of The Museum of Modern Art, but some also come from materials gathered by Charles Musser from a variety of sources (The Edison National Historic Site, New York Public Library, and various flea markets). Moreover, a variety of interviews were conducted with experts on Thomas Edison, Edison films and American culture in general over this 30 year period (1888-1918). These individuals include:

Eileen Bowser, Curator Emerita, The Museum of Modern Art
Steven Higgins, Curator, Department of Film and Media, The Museum of Modern Art
Richard Koszarski, Associate Professor of Film Studies, Rutgers University
Paul Israel, Director, Thomas A. Edison Papers, Rutgers University
Charles Musser, Professor of American Studies and Film Studies, Yale University
Michele Wallace, Professor of English, City College of New York

The program notes generally avoid plot descriptions and evaluative criticism from a present day perspective. Rather, the commentary is meant to reprint period criticism, provide information about the performers, note sources—all in an effort to contextualize the films and enrich the viewing experience for today's audiences.

Key to contributing archives or collections:

MoMA = The Museum of Modern Art (New York)
LoC=Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.)
ENHS =Edison National Historic Site (West Orange, New Jersey)
CNC= Archives du Film, Centre Nationale du Cinéma (Bois d'Arcy, France)
AFI=The American Film Institute (Washington, D.C.)

DISC ONE:

1888-91:

The first commercially successful modern motion picture system was developed by Thomas A. Edison with his laboratory staff, notably his co-inventor William Kennedy Laurie (W. K. L.) Dickson, between 1888 and 1893. On February 27, 1888, Edison met with chrono-photographer Eadweard Muybridge, who had just given a lecture on "Animals in Motion" at the Music Hall in Orange, New Jersey. Together they announced that they would seek to combine the Edison phonograph, which recorded and reproduced sound, with Muybridge's zoopraxiscope, which projected a rapid succession of painted images onto a screen to create the illusion of motion (the painted images were based on his serial photographs). Eight months later, in October, Edison concluded that he could develop his own, much more efficient system for showing motion pictures. At first the inventor imagined a system that used a glass cylinder to hold a spiraling sequence of tiny photographic images. After meeting with Jules-Etienne Marey at the 1889 Paris Exposition, Edison shifted his attention to developing a motion picture system where the images would appear on a photographic filmstrip.

Edison's initial approach to developing a motion picture system that could "do for the eye what the phonograph does for the ear," was to apply the technology of audio recording to the visual realm in a quite literal fashion. Although these efforts were doomed to failure, they were prescient in many ways, as laser disk, DVD and CD technologies demonstrate. Nonetheless, in the early 1890s, the efforts to record and play back a series of tiny images on a cylindrical surface similar to Edison's phonograph faced insurmountable problems. A few samples of such work were submitted as part of the record for patent interference cases, and we reanimate these selections here.

On May 20, 1891, members of the Federation of Women's Clubs, who were attending a meeting hosted by Mina Edison (Mrs. Thomas A. Edison), visited the Edison Laboratory where her husband showed them a short film, (*[Dickson Greeting])* in an experimental peep-hole kinetoscope. This was the first public exhibition of the prototype motion picture system. The word was out, and journalists quickly flocked to the Laboratory and reported on the inventor's latest achievement in the daily press. By June, Edison's motion picture team had taken at least seven short motion pictures on a horizontal-feed filmstrip that was 3/4" wide. The people posing for these films included members of the laboratory staff

and local athletes from near-by Newark. Fragments from four of these films survive in the notebooks of Charles Batchelor (one of Edison's collaborators) and several have been copied onto modern motion picture film.

[Monkeyshines, no. 1]

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: John Ott or G. Sacco Albanese. Shot: June 1889 or 21-27 November 1890; © no reg. Print: LoC.

A surviving sample of efforts to create a motion picture system using tiny images spiraling around a modest-sized cylinder. Based on fragmentary, conflicting and perhaps irresolvable evidence, two Dickson biographers have pointed to two different possible dates for this film. Paul Spehr believes that it was shot in June 1889 with John Ott. Gordon Hendricks points to Dickson's own statements about using Edison employee G. Sacco Albanese as a subject for cylinder experiments and this, combined with surviving employment records, suggests the November 1890 date. This subject was taken outside Building 4 of the Edison Laboratory, at that time used for iron-ore milling experiments.

[Dickson Greeting]

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Shot: May 1891; © no reg. Print: LoC.

Co-inventor of Edison's motion picture system, W.K.L. Dickson, waves—perhaps first to his boss witnessing his employee's handiwork, and then subsequently to Edison Laboratory visitors who were given special access to this Edison-Dickson achievement. Of course, the film expresses a subtle claim to authorship by Dickson as he documents his central presence. Dickson, and not Edison (or some other employee), acknowledges the camera and the audience. This was the first Edison motion picture to be shown to public audiences and the press.

[Newark Athlete (with Indian Clubs)]

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Shot: May-June 1891; © no reg. Print: LoC.

[Men Boxing]

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Shot: May-June 1891; © no reg. Print: LoC.

Displays of virile masculinity, taken in the male-centered world of the Edison Laboratory. The disciplined, toned bodies of these athletes stand in implicit contrast to those of Edison staff members behind the camera (the fleshy tinkers, brains and insomniacs).

1892-93:

During 1892 and early 1893, Edison and his staff reconfigured their experimental prototype into a more durable and commercially viable motion picture system. They moved to a vertical feed mechanism and the film was made wider—1 and 9/16". Once the technology was well advanced, Dickson oversaw the building of a specially designed motion picture studio, known as the Black Maria, on the laboratory grounds. It was here that W. K. L. Dickson and his associate William Heise began to take motion pictures for public exhibition. A prototype viewing machine, the peep-hole kinetoscope, was developed and the fruits of this new system were first presented to the public at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences on May 9, 1893. At least two films were shown on this occasion: *Blacksmithing Scene* and then *Horse Shoeing*. These, along with *The Barber Shop*, also made some time in 1893, were meant for demonstrations purposes.

Blacksmithing Scene
Blacksmiths

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Shot prior to early May 1893; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

That the old-fashioned blacksmith shop was the first subject to be shown in Edison's kinetoscope was a quiet kind of joke. The Edison Laboratory was the center of innovative technology in the late nineteenth century, but here the laboratory staff takes some time off to play at blacksmithing and pass around a bottle of beer. Not only humorous, there is a nostalgic element to the film that would recur in many later Edison films. The mixing of work and alcohol had been common in the early nineteenth century, but by the1890s was part of a bygone era.

The Barber Shop

The Barbershop

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Shot prior to late 1893; © no reg. Print: LoC.

The cost of a shave, a nickel, was the cost of watching the film—and both would appear to take about the same amount of time.

1894-1895:

Motion pictures entered the commercial era on April 14, 1894, with the opening of an Edison Kinetoscope Parlor at 1188 Broadway in New York City. The beginning of the year saw preparations for its commercial debut with a very short production for publicity purposes (*Edison Kinetoscopic Record of a Sneeze, January 7, 1894*) and last minute trials (*[Athlete with Wand]*). By early March, Edison had commenced production with commercial purposes in mind, and on 1 April, motion picture activities were moved from the Edison Laboratory accounts to those of the Edison Manufacturing Company.

The resulting films provide a remarkable record of New York performance culture in 1894-95—vaudeville artists, musicals, and boxing matches. Although some films seemed specifically geared for middle-class family audiences, most films foregrounded what we now recognize as the long-standing staples of American motion picture entertainment: sex and violence. From scenes of women dancing in scanty dress and Sandow in a loin cloth showing off his muscles, to cock fights, gladiatorial contests and boxing cats, Edison films offered marginal and almost-scandalous amusements to spectators willing to part with their nickels (5¢ a look was the standard cost for a peep into the kinetoscope.) The images were often controversial, but the fact that these were representations and not the actual performance provided the showmen who exhibited these films with a certain latitude that did not otherwise exist. No one could have imagined an actual cockfight occurring in mid-town Manhattan, and children were not allowed to dance on the Broadway stage; but by paying a nickel, Americans could see such sights in a Manhattan kinetoscope parlor.

Edison's kinetoscope business declined rapidly after the spring of 1895 and had ceased to be profitable by the end of the year. Other important changes took place as well. In an effort to revive business, Edison marketed the "kinetophone," a kinetoscope with a phonograph attachment. W. K. L. Dickson left Edison's employ in April 1895 to become one of the founding members of The American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, Edison's first domestic competitor. Raff & Gammon also took the kinetoscope to the Cotton States

Exposition in October 1895 and met Thomas Armat who was projecting Edison films. This would lead to a commercial alliance that would revive Edison's motion picture business during the following year.

Edison Kinetoscopic Record of a Sneeze, January 7, 1894
Fred Ott's Sneeze

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Fred Ott. Shot: 2-7 January 1894; © 9 January 1894. Print: LoC.

This subject was never meant to be shown as a film, but served as a chrono-photographic record of a sneeze for an article in *Harper's Weekly*. Fred Ott was one of two brothers who worked at the Edison Laboratory and often assisted Dickson and Heise when it came to film production.

[Athlete with Wand]

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Shot: February 1894; © no reg. Print: LoC.

A gymnast for the Newark Turnverein performed for Edison's camera, almost certainly as a test in preparation for the filming of Eugen Sandow, which took place a short time later. Scenes of somersaulting athletes were filmed at about this time as well.

Sandow

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Eugen Sandow (stage name for Friedrich Müller). Shot: 6 March 1894; © 18 May 1894. Print: MoMA.

Eugen Sandow was the first star to perform before Edison's kinetograph camera. The film reprises the opening of his stage routine in which, according to the *New York Times*, he performed "a number of 'tableaux vivants,' to the accompaniment of slow music and much perspiration, with his mighty muscles standing out in bold relief in the white glare of an electric light." Sandow had become a vaudeville star at the Chicago Columbian World Exposition and then settled into a long run as the headline attraction at Koster & Bial's Music Hall in New York City. His visit to the Edison Black Maria studio was widely covered in the press, as Edison and Sandow met and shook hands—the strongest man in the world meeting the most brilliant inventor of the age. That meeting, combined with the film of Sandow's performance, was used as a promotional tool by both men: it

effectively promoted the strongman's book *Sandow on Physical Training* that appeared shortly thereafter, and it provided valuable publicity for the commercial debut of Edison's kinetoscope, then just five weeks away.

Carmencita

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Carmencita. Shot: by mid- March 1894; © no reg. Print: LoC.

Carmencita, with her Spanish dances, had become a celebrated stage star in 1889 and remained so until she returned to Europe at the end of 1894. Numerous journalists tried to describe her appeal. According to one *New York Times* reviewer, she was "impossible and admirable," while possessing an "apparently untaught abandon rarer than grace."

Boxing Cats (Prof. Welton's)

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Prof. Henry Welton. Shot by mid-July 1894; © no reg. Print: LoC.

Professor Welton's Trained Cat Circus boasted cats that rode bicycles, turned somersaults, and walked through fire, but the boxing cats were the most popular of his attractions playing New York vaudeville houses and roof gardens during the summer of 1894.

Caicedo with Pole

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Juan Caicedo. Shot: 25 July 1894; © no reg. Print: LoC.

Juan Caicedo was billed as the "King of the Wire" and was a leading attraction at Koster & Bial's Music Hall for seventeen weeks during the spring and summer of 1894. According to *The New York Clipper*, a trade journal, "He seems as much at home on the slender thread as the ordinary being is on terra firma, and performs with as much ease without the balancing pole as with it, turning somersaults in rapid succession and landing firmly on his feet." The filmmakers moved their camera outside the Black Maria studio to photograph his performance.

Annabelle Butterfly Dance

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Annabelle Whitford. Shot: by August 1894; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

Annabelle Whitford, known as Peerless Annabelle, had her debut at the Columbia Exposition in Chicago. Although hardly a stage star on the order of Carmencita, films of her performances proved popular and the negatives wore out quickly, which meant that she appeared frequently before Edison's cameras between 1894 and 1898, executing Butterfly, Serpentine and Sun dances. These films were frequently hand-tinted.

Cockfight, no. 2

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Shot: by August 1894; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

The first version of this subject had been taken in March 1894, but these early negatives wore out quickly. This remake was more elaborate as two men exchange bets in the background. The use of a white backdrop also shows off the action more clearly. Blood sports, including rat baiting, were popular early subjects for Edison's camera.

Corbett and Courtney Before the Kinetograph
The Corbett-Courtney Fight

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: James J. Corbett, Peter Courtney. Shot 7 September 1894; © 17 November 1894. Print: MoMA.

Although prize fighting was illegal in every state in the Union, boxing was a national obsession. James J. Corbett, the heavyweight champion who had defeated the great John L. Sullivan, was not only a sports hero but a stage star (and for women, a matinee idol). The Corbett-Courtney Fight was far and away the most profitable film subject of the kinetoscope era. Corbett himself received over $15,000 over the course of its commercial life. Not surprisingly, the arrangements for its production and exhibition were special. The Kinetoscope Exhibiting Company was formed to handle boxing films. They arranged to film six abbreviated rounds, each of which lasted about a minute (three times the length of other films taken for the kinetoscope). These were shown in a bank of six over-sized viewing machines. Spectators would pay a nickel to see each round. Corbett played with Courtney in the early scenes but, apparently on cue, knocked out the challenger in the sixth round.

Sioux Ghost Dance

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Shot: 24 September 1894; © no reg. Print: MoMA/CNC.

Buffalo Bill Cody and members of his Wild West traveled from Ambrose Park in Brooklyn to appear before Edison's camera. The Sioux Indians performed "in full war paint and war costumes," according to Edison catalogs. These films were taken for Maguire and Baucus, who controlled the exhibition rights for the kinetoscope in Europe. Cody and his Wild West would leave for a European tour in early October and these films were undoubtedly seen as a way to promote his show.

Buffalo Dance

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Last Horse, Parts His Hair, Hair Coat. Shot: 24 September 1894; © no reg. Print: MoMA/CNC.

Sioux Indians from Buffalo Bill's Wild West dance in Edison's Black Maria motion picture studio. The Edison Manufacturing Company took numerous films of dancers from different nations and cultures. These could be shown in a bank of kinetoscopes, creating a miniature ethnographic museum.

The Hornbacker-Murphy Fight
Hornbacker and Murphy
(supplemental film)

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Eugene Hornbacker. Shot: 2 October 1894; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

Although the large-sized kinetoscopes that could show a minute of motion pictures were controlled by the Lathams and the Kinetoscope Exhibiting Company, fight films were so popular that Raff & Gammon, who possessed the marketing rights to the kinetoscope in the US and Canada, made a five-round boxing match with 20-second rounds. Neither Eugene Hornbacker nor Murphy (indeed, there were many Murphys who could have boxed Hornbacker) was well known. Although it was advertised as a "fight to a finish," only one round survives.

Hadj Cheriff
Arab Knife Juggler

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Hadj L. Cheriff. Shot: 6 October 1894; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

Hadj Cheriff and his small troupe executed dervish-like dances and feats of strength until his wife's danse du ventre resulted in police interference for indecent performance. After that, he joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West and visited the Black Maria with others associated with Cody's organization.

Glenroy Bros., [no. 2]

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Shot: 6 October 1894; © no reg. Print: LoC.

The Glenroy Brothers were frequent vaudeville performers who offered "The Comic View of Boxing, The Tramp and the Athlete." This particular subject was sponsored by Raff & Gammon (note the boxed R on the lower left).

Louis Martinetti
Luis Martinetti, Contortionist

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Shot: 11 October 1894; © no reg. Print: LoC.

Louis Martinetti, of French Canadian background (born in Montreal), had been part of an acrobatic team with his two brothers before launching out on his own. At about this time, he was associated with Charles E. Blaney's *A Baggage Check*, for which he did an acrobatic dance.

Bucking Broncho

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Lee Martin, Frank Hammitt. Shot: 16 October 1894; © no reg. Print: LoC.

Cowboy star Lee Martin rides the bronco "Sunfish" in a small corral built outside the Black Maria studio. Martin was a star for Buffalo Bill's Wild West—as was Frank Hammitt, who encourages his daring by firing a six-shooter. Neither joined Cody on his European sojourn.

Annie Oakley

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Annie Oakley. Shot: 1 November 1894; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

Annie Oakley, known as "the Little Sure Shot of the Wild West," gives a rifle exhibition inside the confines of the Black Maria, shooting at glass balls.

Imperial Japanese Dance

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Sarashe Sisters. Shot: mid-October-mid November 1894; © no reg. Print: LoC.

With the continued popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* (1885), Japanese dancing girls enjoyed a certain cache in New York's theatrical world. This film, which featured the Sarashe Sisters, was shown in Japan as Nippon Maiko Nuno Sarashi (Japanese Dancing Maidens Waving Streamers). Sarashi thus refers to the act of waving cloth banners and was, at most, a stage name.

Robetta and Doretto, [no. 2]
Chinese Laundry Scene

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Phil Doret[t]o (Phil Lauter), Robetta. Shot: 26 November 1894; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

Robetta and Doretto were known as "the Chinese comiques" and appeared regularly in vaudeville throughout the 1890s. They appeared in three different scenes for Edison cameras, only one of which survives. In this, one performers plays a Chinaman, the other plays an Irish cop. Certainly the comedy duo were playing with ethnic stereotypes. Their Italian last names were, in fact, stage monikers. Phil Doretto was actually Phil Lauter.

Band Drill

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Frank Baldwin (Steele Ayers, the bandmaster), Fred W. Boardman, William Cushing, Ad. Dorsch, E. P. Brown, J. F. Boardman, George Goddard, E. F. Balch, Paul Pfarr. Shot: late November 1894; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

One of several films made from Charles A. Hoyt's musical burlesque *A Milk White Flag*, which mocked the state militias that savored their snappy uniforms and male camaraderie (including free drinks at the regimental bar). In fact, their actual courage was questioned for the "milk white flag" (the flag of purity but also surrender) was "the only one the regiment would stand by in battle." Frank Baldwin as Steele Ayers is the bandmaster.

Fire Rescue Scene

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Shot: late November-early December 1894; © no reg. Print: LoC.

Staging a fire rescue inside the Black Maria was no easy feat, and this may have used members of a local fire department. Films of fire departments in action were among the most popular subjects in the 1890s. The R that appears in the frame indicates that the picture was made under the auspices of Raff & Gammon, primarily for domestic distribution.

Billy Edwards and the Unknown
Billy Edwards Boxing.
Billy Edwards and Warwick

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: Billy Edwards, Warwick. Shot: late January to early February 1895; © no reg. Print: LoC.

The only surviving round of a five-round contest (with each round a separate film lasting about 20 seconds). Billy Edwards was a middle-aged boxing instructor in 1895. Because the boxer "Warwick" bears a striking resemblance to Edwards, this film has often been identified (incorrectly) as a Glenroy Brothers subject.

[Dickson Experimental Sound Film]
[Dickson Violin]

Filmmakers: W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise. Cast: W. K. L. Dickson. Shot: between September 1894 and 2 April 1895; © no reg. Print: LoC.

This short film is the world's first known experiment in producing a motion picture with a recorded synchronized sound track. Although the kinetophone combined recorded sound with moving pictures, even approximate synchronization was elusive. Still, Dickson and his crew pursued serious efforts in this direction, in

this case simultaneously photographing the image and recording the sound (note the gramophone horn on the left). The R (for Raff and Gammon) that appears in the scene suggests that someone may have felt this film had commercial potential; so far as is known, however, it was never shown publicly. The musical selection, performed by Dickson himself, is from the opera The Chimes at Midnight by Jean Robert Planquette.

The wax cylinder recording of the soundtrack was discovered several years ago at the Edison National Historic Site in West Orange, New Jersey (Maryanne Gerbaukas, Superintendent), and was preserved by the staff there. Walter Murch and Rick Schmidlin resynchronized the sound and image.

Princess Ali
Egyptian Dance

Filmmaker: William Heise. Cast: Princess Ali. Shot: 9 May 1895; © no reg. Print: LoC.

Barnum and Bailey's Circus was in Orange, New Jersey, on 9 May, and a number of its performers visited the Edison Laboratory and appeared before the kinetograph camera. The only one of these half dozen subjects to survive is of Princess Ali, who executes a *danse du ventre*.

Annabelle Serpentine Dance
Serpentine Dance
Annabelle Serpentine

Filmmaker: William Heise. Cast: Annabelle Whitford. Shot: April-August 1895; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

Annabelle Whitford returned to the Black Maria studio for another filming session in the spring or summer of 1895, performing her established repertoire of dances, including this Serpentine Dance for Maguire & Baucus and their Continental Commerce Company.

The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots
Execution

Filmmakers: Alfred Clark and William Heise. Cast: Robert Thomae (Mary). Shot: 28 August 1895; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

As the kinetoscope business declined in the second half of 1895, the Edison group hired Alfred Clark to make some films of original subject matter. He produced a number of historical tableaux, including *Burning of Joan of Arc, Frontier Scene* (showing a lynching), *Indian Scalping Scene*, and this recreation of the beheading of Mary Stuart. Several of these, including *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots*, used the technique of stop-action substitution (in which a human body is replaced by a dummy) that would later be exploited by French filmmaker Georges Méliès. Robert Thomae played Mary, an early instance of female impersonation in the movies.

1896-1897:

Isolated instances of commercial motion picture projection occurred in the United States throughout 1895, primarily through the efforts of the Latham family and Eugène Lauste, but none of these were successful enough to capture the public's imagination. This changed with the debut of "Edison's Vitascope" at Koster & Bial's Music Hall in New York City on April 23, 1896. Edison's Vitascope was actually a projector developed by C. Francis Jenkins and Thomas Armat. Armat formed a business arrangement with Raff & Gammon, who had controlled the North American rights to the Edison Kinetoscope. The Edison Manufacturing Company manufactured their projector and supplied the films.

To provide films for the new venture, the Edison resumed production at the Black Maria studio. By May, in response to the efforts of rival companies (notably the Lumières with their cinématographe), the Edison Manufacturing Company had built a portable camera and had begun to take films of New York City streets, Coney Island and Niagara Falls. James White, a Raff & Gammon employee, assumed the role of producer, working with Edison cameraman William Heise.

As film exhibition and viewing expanded exponentially, Edison now faced competition from domestic and overseas producers. When Edison decided to part ways with Raff & Gammon in late October 1896, White stayed on with Edison to become head of his Kinetograph Department. Although many Edison films were innovative in subject matter and technique, others were clearly indebted to the achievements of rivals.

Cinema's novelty period had ended by the close of the 1896-1897 theatrical season. During the second half of this season, the Kinetograph Department took films of President McKinley's inauguration (March 5, 1897), the pageantry surrounding the dedication of Grant's Tomb (April 27, 1897); and the Suburban Handicap (June 22, 1897), which they had filmed the previous year, as well. They also continued to film short scenes in the Black Maria. However, with the

novelty value of motion pictures quickly fading into history, White and newly hired cameraman Fred Blechynden went in search of fresh commercial opportunities and film subjects, taking the camera far beyond the confines of New York and New Jersey. In July 1897, they embarked on a grand adventure that took them on a tour of the Western United States, Mexico and the Far East. They would be gone almost a year. William Heise stayed behind to keep the film business operational.

Amy Muller

Filmmaker: William Heise. Shot: 24 March 1896 [?]; © no reg. Print: LoC.

A film shot in the Black Maria and very much in keeping with subject matter and technique of the kinetoscope film. Amy Muller was a novelty dancer in vaudeville who performed on toe. The film was frequently shown hand-tinted. According to one review in the *Boston Herald*, "Almost every movement of the agile and graceful figure displays some new color, till the whole thing begins to assume a kaleidiscopic aspect."

The John C. Rice-May Irwin Kiss
The May Irwin Kiss
Kiss Scene
The Kiss

Filmmaker: William Heise. Cast: May Irwin (Widow Jones), John C. Rice (stage name for John C. Hilburg, in the role of Billy Bilke). Shot: April 1896; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

This film featured May Irwin and John C. Rice enacting the final moment from *The Widow Jones*, a musical comedy then playing on Broadway. Initially, it was to be published as a series of photographs (via line drawings) in the Sunday edition of the New York World. The "risqué" scene had become a center of controversy during the 1895-96 theatrical year, and the World analyzed it (tongue in cheek) through a succession of photographs and in an accompanying article. Some weeks later, it was shown at Koster & Bial's Music Hall and proved a huge hit, becoming the most popular Edison film of 1896.

Shooting the Chutes
Shooting the Chutes at Coney Island

Filmmakers: William Heise and James White (for Raff & Gammon). Shot: mid June 1896; © no reg. Print: LoC.

One of a series of films taken at Bergen Beach, Coney Island. This was shot at Paul Boyton's Water World. The film was offered for sale in two different lengths (either 50 or 150 ft.). This is the shorter version.

Fatima, Muscle Dancer
Fatima's Coochee-Coochee Dance
Fatima's Couchee-Couchee Dance
Couchee Dance

Filmmakers: William Heise and James White (for Raff & Gammon). Shot: by late July 1896; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

Fatima was famed for her performances at the Columbia World's Exposition at Chicago in 1893. Her dance was considered scandalous and was often censored.

Mess Call

Filmmakers: William Heise and James White (for Raff & Gammon). Shot: July 1896; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

After the Lumières' military scenes drew enthusiastic responses from US vaudeville audiences, the Edison group quickly filmed this and other scenes featuring the New York State Militia at their training camp in Peekskill, New York.

Inventor Edison Sketched by World Artist
Blackton Sketches, no. 1
Sketching Mr. Edison
Sketch of Thomas A. Edison

Filmmakers: William Heise and James White (for Raff & Gammon). Shot: ca. 5 August 1896; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

When J. Stuart Blackton appeared before Edison's camera (either at a make-shift roof-top studio in New York City or at the Black Maria studio in New Jersey), he performed several lightning sketches in exchange for a donation from the Vitascope Company to the *New York World*'s Sick Babies' Fund. The only one of

these to survive was his lightning sketch of Edison. It became such a popular hit that it convinced Blackton and his partner, Albert E. Smith, to enter the motion picture business themselves, resulting in the founding of Vitagraph in 1897.

Watermelon Eating Contest
Watermelon Contest

Filmmakers: William Heise and James White (for Raff & Gammon). Shot: by early September 1896; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

Following the move to projection and fostered in part by the increasing diversity of subject matter, Edison and other American production companies put scenes of well-known racial stereotypes on the screen, black chicken thieves and watermelon eaters among them.

The Lone Fisherman

Filmmakers: William Heise and James White (for Raff & Gammon). Shot: by mid September 1896; © no reg. Print: LoC.

“The Lone Fisherman” was a role made popular by the actor James Moffit in the theatrical version of Evangeline, one scene from which apparently served as the model for this film. The character, which appeared at various points throughout the production, does not exist in the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem, was performed solely in pantomime, and became such a well-known figure in American culture that even a US Senator of the time was often referred to as “the lone fisherman.”

Interrupted Lovers
Interrupted Lover

Filmmakers: William Heise and James White (for Raff & Gammon). Shot: by mid September 1896; © no reg. Print: LoC.

In a scene played out on stage and in real life from time immemorial, a pair of lovers is caught in the midst of a kiss by the girl’s father, who “teaches the gallant a lesson.” This film was called “a hit,” perhaps in more than one way.

Feeding the Doves

Filmmakers: William Heise and James White (for Raff & Gammon). Shot: mid October 1896; © 23 October 1896. Print: MoMA.

Essentially a remake of an earlier Lumière film, *Basse-cour* (Farmyard; summer 1896), this film was so popular that it was itself remade by the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company and the International Film Company.

A Morning Bath

Filmmakers: James White and William Heise. Shot: mid October 1896; © 31 October 1896. Print: MoMA.

A remake of rival Biograph's popular *A Hard Wash*, this film's "joke" plays with racist clichés as well as theatrical conventions where blacks, whether impersonated by white actors or played by African Americans, performed using burnt cork as masks. No matter how vigorous the bath, the baby's skin remains dark and corky.

The Burning Stable

Filmmakers: James White and William Heise. Shot: late October 1896; © 31 October 1896. Print: MoMA.

In the fall of 1896, the Edison Company was busy making their own versions of other company's hits. Since Biograph films were shot on a different (68mm) format, their pictures could not be shown on regular 35mm projectors—providing the Edison with an attractive commercial opportunity. *The Burning Stable* closely followed *Stable on Fire*, which Biograph had made in the summer of 1896. Exhibitors sometimes assembled this film and other scenes into a short narrative to tell the story of a fire and a heroic fire company.

Mounted Police Charge

Filmmakers: James White and William Heise. Shot: late October 1896; © 2 November 1896. Print: LoC.

One of several films taken of the mounted police performing in Central Park. In this scene, the policemen charge toward the Edison camera in emulation of the

cavalry in a popular Lumière film, *Charge of the Seventh French Cuirassiers*. They are, of course, in full dress uniform.

Going to the Fire

Filmmakers: James White and William Heise. Shot: 14 November 1896; Print: LoC.

One of three films taken of the Newark Fire Department over the course of a single day. According to the *Newark Daily Advertiser*, "Photographer J. H. White, with two assistants, had the kinetograph, stationed on a wagon a few feet above the City Hall. Beside the camera, 2,000 curious onlookers witnessed the event: Chief Kiersted, with Driver Cleveland, was in the lead."

A Morning Alarm
Morning Fire Alarm

Filmmakers: James White and William Heise. Shot: November 14, 1896; © 27 November 1896. Print: LoC.

The second film taken on this day was of the firemen "coming out of Engine House and Hook and Ladder House No. 1."

Black Diamond Express, no. 1

Filmmakers: James White and William Heise. Shot: 1 December 1896; © 12 December 1896. Print: MoMA.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the on-rushing express train was a symbol of American power and technological achievement. The Biograph Company had filmed The Empire State Express in September 1896—the fastest train of the New York Central Railroad. The Edison Company subsequently teamed up with the rival Lehigh Valley Railroad, which was competing for the same patronage. Its top flyer—then making new and widely reported speed records at frequent intervals–-was the Black Diamond Express. The Lehigh Valley saw such films as essential promotional items and offered James White a special train and every courtesy that might facilitate his filmmaking efforts. This particular picture proved so popular that new negatives were made frequently over the next several years.

American Falls from Above, American Side
American Falls from Top of Canadian Shore

Filmmakers: James White and William Heise. Shot: early December 1896. © 12 December 1896. Print: LoC.

Niagara Falls was a frequently filmed subject. In May, it had been one of the first places to be visited by the Edison Manufacturing Company's new mobile camera, but the films were not entirely satisfactory. With more experience and better technology, an Edison crew returned to film the falls in early December.

The First Sleigh Ride

Filmmakers: James White and William Heise. Shot: 24 or 25 December 1896; © 8 January 1897. Print: LoC.

One of several films taken in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, after a snowstorm, this film shows two horse-drawn sleighs engaged in a friendly race.

The Morning Alarm

Filmmakers: James White and William Heise. Shot: 25 December 1896. © no reg. Print: LoC.

The Edison crew shot a group of films in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; many of these served initially as local views to draw people into the city's theater that was featuring a new, Edison-designed projector. This film of a fire run proved distinctive because of its snowy background.

Fifth Avenue, New York

Filmmakers: James White and William Heise. Shot: late February 1897. © 5 March 1897. Print: MoMA.

A street scene that showed off New York's "famous parade of fashion" along Fifth Avenue. The film subtly contrasts rich and poor: As one catalog description noted: "A flower fakir in the foreground makes a pleasing foil to the parade of fashion that the picture portrays."

Mr. Edison at Work in His Chemical Laboratory

Filmmakers: James White and William Heise. Shot: May 1897; © 24 May 1897. Print: MoMA.

Thomas Edison displays his talents as a performer, showman and wizard of self-promotion. According to a catalog description, the inventor is "in working dress, engaged in an interesting chemical experiment in his great laboratory." And to the extent that the Black Maria motion picture studio, where this film was made, is on the laboratory grounds, this part of the statement is accurate.

Return of Lifeboat

Filmmakers: James White and Fred Blechynden. Shot: September 1897; © 25 October 1897. Print: LoC.

One of a series of films taken in San Francisco featuring the Pacific Coast Life Saving Service. This picture may be the earliest surviving example of filmmakers reframing a shot during actual filming, as they seek to keep the lifeboat in frame as it comes through the breakers to the shore.

1898-1900:

The nascent film industry was unstable and went through a rapid series of booms and busts. The sinking of the Battleship *Maine* in Havana Harbor on 15 February 1898, and the subsequent events leading up to the Spanish-American War revived business and ultimately compelled a modicum of stability. Both the Edison and Biograph companies sent cameramen into Cuban waters before and after the war began. James White, head of Edison's Kinetograph Department, was caught off guard by these events. In the middle of his Far Eastern sojourn, he was unable to film war-related scenes until he returned to the United States on 16 May, a month after war had been declared. To compensate for his absence, and reflecting his legal campaign against filmmakers that he claimed were patent infringers, Edison worked with several licensed cameramen whose films were subsequently marketed by the Edison Manufacturing Company.

If cinema was demonstrating its success as a "visual newspaper" by putting many of the day's news events on the screen, the leading vaudeville impresarios necessarily developed long-lasting relationships with key exhibition services that had production capabilities. Over the course of 1899 American Vitagraph (J. Stuart Blackton, Albert E. Smith and William T. Rock) joined forces with Tony Pastor, William Paley and his Kalatechnoscope service with F.F. Proctor, and the

Percival Waters's Kinetograph Company (with James White as a silent partner) with Huber's 14th Street Museum. Such alliances lasted until the nickelodeon boom of 1905-07 transformed the nature of motion picture exhibition, distribution and production. Many films were made primarily to please the vaudeville houses.

The year 1900 was a significant one for Edison motion pictures. The American Mutoscope & Biograph Company was the dominant force in exhibition, and Edison's motion picture enterprise often seemed to be more trouble than it was worth. In the spring, the inventor came to a tentative agreement to sell his motion picture business to Biograph; but when financing hit a snag, Edison cancelled the deal and renewed his commitment to motion pictures. Late in the year, he hired Edwin S. Porter to improve his Edison Projecting Kinetoscope (this Edison projector generated an important part of his motion picture income) and other equipment (cameras, printers and so forth). At the same time, the Edison company continued to rely—for the moment at least—on licensees to supply many of its film subjects.

Troop Ships for the Philippines
Troop Ships for Philippine Islands

Filmmakers: James White and Fred Blechynden. Shot: 25 May 1898; © 22 June 1898. Print: MoMA.

White and Blechynden filmed a number of scenes related to the departure of U.S. troops for the Philippines, including *California Volunteers Marching to Embark on May 23rd*. Two days later the troop ships *S.S. Australia* and *S.S. City of Peking* left San Francisco Bay for the Philippines, where U.S. soldiers occupied the islands taken from Spain and fought a Philippine insurrection.

U.S. Troops Landing at Daiquiri, Cuba
U.S. Troops Landing at Baiquiri, Cuba

Filmmaker: William Paley. Shot: 22-26 June 1898; © 5 August 1898. Print: MoMA.

X-ray exhibitor turned cinematographer William Paley was hired as an Edison licensed cameraman in March 1898 and was sent to Florida where he took numerous films of U.S. military activities. He was apparently on board the armada of naval ships that stormed Cuban shores and took a number of films on the island before coming down with yellow fever.

Shooting Captured Insurgents

Filmmakers: [James White and William Heise?]. Shot: July 1898; © 5 August 1898. Print: LoC.

This staged scene of Spanish soldiers executing Cuban prisoners was designed to underscore Spanish brutality and support American intervention in the war. According to one catalog description, “The Spanish officer, resplendent in gold lace and buttons, raises his sword. One can imagine his commands by his gestures. ‘Aim!’ ‘Fire!’ and four pour fellows have joined the ranks of martyrs for the cause of Cuba Libre.”

The Burglar on the Roof

Filmmakers: J. Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith. Cast: J. Stuart Blackton (tramp); Charles Urban (extra). Shot: August-September 1898; © 12 December 1898. Print: LoC.

Blackton and Smith had emerged as important filmmakers and exhibitors in the spring and summer of 1898. When they were caught duping Edison’s copyrighted war films, they seemed to have no choice but to become licensees and acknowledge Edison’s patents. With audiences tiring of war films, they used their experience as entertainers and made short comedies and magic films. *Burglar on the Roof*, which features Blackton as the burglar, was shot on the rooftop of their office building in lower Manhattan.

Firemen Rescuing Men and Women
Rescuing Men and Women by Firemen

Filmmakers: [J. Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith?]. Shot 18-25 March 1899; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

A devastating fire swept the Windsor Hotel in New York City on March 17, 1899, causing numerous deaths. Various New York-based motion picture companies filmed the ruins. J. Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith also shot Reproduction of Windsor Hotel Fire using miniatures, and they may have made this film as a related item.

A Wringing Good Joke

Filmmakers: James White. Shot: [March to mid-April 1899]; © 22 April 1899. Print: MoMA.

A short “bad boy” comedy, based on the 68mm Biograph *film A (W)ringing Good Joke*. The Edison Company’s remake made the gag available to 35mm exhibitors. As the catalog description explains it, “a small boy ties a string from the tub handle to grandpa's chair,” and when the washerwoman turns the ringer on the washtub, the chair “suddenly tips over backward, upsetting the tub, soap suds and clothes all over him. The small boy dances in wicked glee; especially when the woman, in trying to help the old man up, slips on a piece of soap, and herself falls into the mess.”

[Gold Rush Scenes in the Klondike]

Filmmakers: Thomas Crahan and Robert K. Bonine. Shot: July-August 1899; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

This brief compilation of scenes from the Klondike Gold Rush were almost certainly taken by Thomas Crahan and Edison-affiliated cameraman Robert K. Bonine in the Yukon, including Dawson City. Crahan planned to use them for exhibition purposes by his Klondike Exposition Company. Facing financially difficulties, he turned some negatives over to the Edison Manufacturing Company, which sold prints on the open market.

Searching Ruins on Broadway for Dead Bodies, Galveston
Searching the Ruins of Galveston for Dead Bodies
Searching Ruins for Dead Bodies on Broadway

Filmmaker: Albert E. Smith. Shot: 11-19 September 1900; © 24 September 1900. Print: LoC.

Smith reveals the devastation of the hurricane that destroyed Galveston, Texas, and left hundreds dead.

The Kiss
The New Kiss

Filmmakers: unknown. Shot: [February to early March 1900]; © 9 March 1900. Print: LoC.

This film reworks *The John C. Rice-May Irwin Kiss* (April 1896) in a playful but also romantic way.

Capture of Boer Battery by British
Capture of Boer Battery by the British

Filmmakers: James White and ?. Shot: 11 April 1900; © 14 April 1900. Print: MoMA.

The Edison Manufacturing Company had already staged war scenes of the Spanish-American War and the Filipino Insurgency. By the outbreak of the Boer War, shooting battle re-enactments had become routine. In this one, the Gordon Highlanders prove victorious as they charge a Boer cannon—and the camera. American sympathies for the Boers were surprisingly strong, and in this film the camera takes their point of view. The accuracy of such films is questionable given that they were staged in the Orange Mountains, not too far from the Edison Laboratory. In fact the mock battle resulted in a serious accident to James White; when the cannon fired, he was hit by the gun wad and badly burned.

A Storm at Sea

Filmmakers: James White and ?. Shot: 19-27 June 1900; © 9 August 1900. Print: LoC.

James White and an unidentified cameraman left New York on the Kaiserin Maria Theresia, to attend the 1900 Paris Exposition. When they encountered a storm, they took this film, which includes a “cut-in” to a closer view of the ocean. It was promoted as “The most wonderful storm picture ever photographed. Taken at great risk.”

1901-1902:

The Edison Manufacturing Company opened a new, indoor studio on the roof of 41 East 21st Street, New York City in February 1901. It was conveniently located in the city’s theatrical district. Edwin S. Porter helped outfit the new studio and stayed on as cameraman. George S. Fleming, an actor and scenic designer, was hired initially to run the studio, but Porter with his mechanical ingenuity was soon found to be better suited as studio chief. Whoever was in charge, the two worked together as collaborators. Their numerous short comedies complemented the various news films and scenes of the Pan-American

Exposition in Buffalo that the Edison Manufacturing Company provided under the supervision of Kinetograph Department head James White.

Edison's film business was enhanced, at least temporarily, when his motion picture patents were upheld in May 1901, thus putting many rival producers out of business; or, in the case of Biograph, restricting their operations. As a result, Edison enjoyed something close to a monopoly in US filmmaking circles until March 1902, when the US courts rejected his motion picture patents as too broad. This allowed former rivals such as Sigmund Lubin of Philadelphia, who had moved abroad, to resume film production in the United States. Licensees such as William Paley and the Vitagraph group could return to independent production. To meet the threats generated by increasingly active domestic and foreign producers, the Edison Manufacturing Company invested more substantial resources in story films such as *Jack and the Beanstalk* (June 1902) and *Life of An American Fireman* (1902-03).

Old Maid Having Her Picture Taken

Filmmakers: Edwin S. Porter and George S. Fleming. Cast: Gilbert Saroni. Shot February 1901; © 1 March 1901. Print: LoC.

Gilbert Saroni was a well-known vaudeville performer and female impersonator who specialized in playing unattractive old maids in vaudeville sketches like "The Giddy Girl." The old maid's features are so horrific that when confronted with her visage, mirrors crack and cameras explode.

High Diving Scene

Filmmakers are unknown. Shot: [May 1901?]; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

Daredevil acts were a way to draw crowds to amusement resorts, whether looping the loop, slides for life, or high diving into small and shallow pools of water. They required skill and a certain foolhardy courage. But some would rather take the risks than live humdrum lives, working a "normal" 6 days a week, 10-12 hours a day. And as for paying customers who led those more ordinary lives—perhaps they weren't so bad if one considered the alternatives.

There were many such acts at Coney Island, but this performance may have occurred on Memorial Day 1901, in Providence, Rhode Island.

Photographing a Country Couple

Filmmakers: unknown. Shot: late July-early August 1901; © 14 August 1901. Print: LoC.

A comic intersection of various early stock characters that frequently appear in popular American culture. The photographer is about to take a portrait of the country couple, when the rube wants to look through the camera. They switch places. The photographer demonstrates what he wants the rube to do—and kisses his girl. Meanwhile a bad boy appears and ties the rube to the camera tripod, rendering him unable to intervene. The end result is chaos.

What Happened on Twenty-Third Street, New York City

Filmmakers: Edwin S. Porter and George S. Fleming[?]. Cast: Alfred C. Abadie (the swell), Florence Georgie (the girl). Shot August 1901; © 21 August 1901. Print: LoC.

At first, this film appears to be an ordinary street scene, as a woman and her male companion casually approach the camera. Unexpectedly, her dress is blown up around her legs when she steps over a sidewalk grate (anticipating Marilyn Monroe by more than fifty years).

Pan-American Exposition by Night

Filmmakers: Edwin S. Porter and James Blair Smith. Shot: October 1901; © 17 October 1901. Print: LoC.

“This picture is pronounced by the photographic profession to be a marvel in photography, and by theatrical people to be the greatest winner in panoramic views ever placed before the public,” declared the Edison catalog. The panorama as a genre pre-dated the cinema by more than a hundred years and found its way into many forms of popular culture, including lantern shows, for which long slides were slowly moved through the lantern. In 1900 cameramen adapted it to moving pictures with the “circular panorama.” The film is remarkable, then, for combining the panorama with an early use of time-lapse photography and a two-shot construction. There is a pan in the first shot taken during the day that is continued from the same point, in the same direction, and at the same pace in the second shot filmed at night. As a result the panorama seems to display a temporal relation that is characteristic of day/night dissolving views: the image of a building during the day gradually dissolved to the identical view at night. Here, however, the scene is apparently done in a single shot. A *tour de force*, indeed.

Trapeze Disrobing Act

Filmmakers: Edwin S. Porter and George S. Fleming. Cast: Charmion. Shot: early November 1901; © 11 November 1901. Print: LoC.

The performer in this studio production was probably Charmion, whose “risque disrobing act on the flying trapeze" was popular at the turn of the century. Although her striptease was performed for the camera and cine-viewers, the two male spectators inside the mise-en-scène authorized the film spectators' voyeurism and provided a certain comic relief.

The Burning of Durland’s Riding Academy

Filmmakers: [Edwin S. Porter and James Blair Smith]. Shot: 15 February 1902; © 24 February 1902. Print: MoMA.

Fires reported on the front page of New York newspapers routinely brought filmmakers to the scene. Such films were popular in vaudeville houses and fulfilled the cinema’s mandate as a “visual newspaper.” The fire at Durland’s Riding Academy, on Manhattan’s west side, between Sixty-first and Sixty-second streets, certainly met this criterion. The panning camera captured firemen hosing down the still smoldering remains. Since the film was only of local importance, it was renamed *Firemen Fighting the Flames* at Paterson and sold as footage of a better-known event. Re-labeling films to increase their commercial potential was neither unusual nor “naïve,” but consistent with the highly opportunistic business ethics of Edison and other film producers.

Burlesque Suicide, No. 2

Filmmakers: Edwin S. Porter and George S. Fleming. Shot: late March 1902; © 7 April 1902. Print: LoC.

Facial expression films continued to be popular in the early 1900s. In one, a man contemplates suicide but takes a drink instead. In a second version, presented here, *Burlesque Suicide, No. 2,* the same man threatens suicide and then points his finger at the camera (and the audience) and laughs.

Jack and the Beanstalk

Filmmakers: Edwin S. Porter and George S. Fleming. Shot May-June 1902; © 20 June 1902. Print: LoC.

Fairy tales constituted one of the earliest and most successful forms of elaborate storytelling on film, notably Georges Méliès's *Cinderella* (1899) and *Blue Beard* (1902). Inspired by such European achievements, Porter made this ten-shot fiction film that told its story in a clear, yet elaborate manner. It represented a new level of achievement at the Edison Manufacturing Company's studio. Not only are the sets highly detailed and consistent in their stylization (all were shot in the studio), but the action moves smoothly from one shot to the next. Elegant dissolves link the scenes together in the style of a magic lantern show. An immensely popular bedtime story and popular magic lantern program, the film was pre-sold. This familiarity had the added benefit of making it easier for spectators to follow the unfolding narrative.

Interrupted Bathers

Filmmakers: [Edwin S. Porter and George S. Fleming]. Shot: Summer-fall 1902; © 22 October 1902. Print: LoC.

An early tramp comedy.

1903:

Nineteen three was a pivotal year for the Edison Manufacturing Company, as well as for the American motion picture industry overall. It was the year in which the story film came to prominence, beginning with the completion of *Life of An American Fireman* and culminating with the incredible success of *The Great Train Robbery*, quite possibly the most successful American film before Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). It was also a year that saw important personnel changes at Edison: George Fleming departed early in the year, while James White took a new assignment in England. Lacking a regular collaborator, Porter was assisted by—or collaborated with—various people of the theater, such as G. M. Anderson, later known as "Broncho Billy."

By the end of the year, the American film industry was showing signs of renewed vigor. Exhibitors added a three-blade shutter to their projectors, which reduced flicker and made movie watching a far more pleasurable and sensual experience; it was particularly conducive to the enjoyment of fiction films. Moreover, instead of providing vaudeville theaters and other venues with a full exhibition service (projector, projectionist and a selection of films) for a weekly fee, many exhibition companies began to rent a reel of film and let the theater buy the projector and

use their electrician as a projectionist. Thus, the reel of film became a commodity.

Electrocuting an Elephant

Filmmaker: Jacob Blair Smith or Edwin S. Porter. Shot: 4 January 1903; © 12 January 1903. Print: LoC.

Topsy, the original "Baby Elephant," had been a featured attraction across the United States for 28 years. She had killed three men in her time, the last one after he gave her a lighted cigarette butt as a treat, and for this last death she had to pay the ultimate price. The event was front-page news in the tabloids, and 1500 people came to Luna Park, Coney Island to see Topsy's execution.

Life of an American Fireman

Filmmakers: Edwin S. Porter, George S. Fleming and James H. White. Cast: James H. White (The Fire Chief). Shot: November 1902-January 1903; © 21 January 1903. Print: MoMA (LoC/AFI).

The fire rescue was a popular subject across many forms of popular culture (songs, painting, journalistic essays, photography), but particularly in the early cinema. As early as 1896, traveling showman Lyman H. Howe had assembled five short films to tell the story of a fire rescue (some of which are included on Disc One of this set). The genre was so popular that it challenged filmmakers to provided a novel twist—something new that would distinguish their films from those already on the market. Filmmakers began to make multi-shot fire films in which there was continuity of subject matter and action (e.g. James Williamson's *Fire!* of 1901) and, with *Life of An American Fireman*, Edwin S. Porter produced the most ambitious fire film to date. The storyline and the action move across a series of nine shots, displaying a system of continuity that involved repeated, overlapping action as well as a malleable temporality. Most remarkable are the final two shots in which the fireman rescues a woman and her child from a burning building. The action is shown twice, first from the inside and then from the outside, with the actions not so much repeated as depicted in a complementary fashion. It reveals a system of cinematic representation that remained dominant until about 1907.

Egyptian Fakir with Dancing Monkey

Filmmaker: Alfred C. Abadie. Shot: 25-27 March 1903; © 8 June 1903. Print: MoMA.

Cameraman Alfred C. Abadie toured the Mediterranean basin for Edison in early 1903. He started out at the Grand Carnival in Nice (*Battle of Confetti at the Nice Carnival*); traveled to Syria, Palestine (*A Jewish Dance at Jerusalem*) and Egypt (*Excavating Scene at the Pyramids of Sakkarah*); then went through Italy, Switzerland, and Paris before reaching England on 10 May. Abadie subsequently returned to the United States, where his films were developed and thirty-four submitted for copyright.

A Scrap in Black and White

Filmmaker: Alfred C. Abadie. Shot: 30 June 1903; © 8 July 1903. Print: MoMA.

Inter-racial boxing was a flashpoint in the worlds of politics and sports, as Jack Johnson would demonstrate just a few years later. One way to make light of these tensions (but also to extend them) was to displace such encounters onto adjacent subject matter, such as a match between two young boys. As the title's play on words suggests, the tone is meant to be playful. Here, as elsewhere (see *Turning the Tables*), youths have not yet been socialized into the highly constrained social structure of the adult world.

Uncle Tom's Cabin

Filmmakers: Edwin S. Porter, Arthur White and others. Shot: June-July 1903; © 30 July 1903. Print: LoC.

In May of 1903, Edison's chief American rival, Biograph, assembled a series of scenes featuring famed actor Joseph Jefferson as Rip Van Winkle that they had originally filmed and released in 1896, offering them for sale to exhibitors as a special release. The Edison Company responded with a much more ambitious version of filmed theater: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which relied on a traveling *Uncle Tom's Cabin* theatrical troupe to provide performers and sets. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was undoubtedly the most popular American stage show in the second half of the nineteenth century, playing most towns in the northern states a few times every year. The story was so well-known to period spectators that many apparently found it easy to follow, even if today's audiences now find the unfolding of events to be obscure. Porter and the studio staff offered extended excerpts of well-known scenes and introduced each one with its own title card; in fact, this was perhaps the very first film for which Edison provided a head title. Previously, head titles had most often been projected using a lantern slide made

by (or especially for) the exhibitor. Here was one more way in which the production company was assuming greater responsibility for providing a more complete show.

The Gay Shoe Clerk

Filmmaker: Edwin S. Porter. Shot: 23 July 1903; © 12 August 1903. Print: MoMA.

This film is often noted as an early example of the interpolated close-up. However, while the action moves smoothly across the shots, attentive viewers will notice a remarkable set of discontinuities. The woman's underskirts are white in the close up, but not in the long shot, and the shot is not really a close up in the conventional sense, for the leg is isolated against a plain white background. This film has numerous antecedents, among them, Biograph's *Don't Get Gay with Your Manicure or No Liberties, Please* (shot July 10, 1902) and G. A. Smith's *As Seen Through a Telescope* (1902).

Turning the Tables

Filmmakers: Alfred C. Abadie and N. Dushane Cloward. Shot: 24 August 1903; © 1 September 1903. Print: LoC.

In August, after filming at Coney Island (e.g. *Orphans in the Surf* and *Baby Class at Lunch*), A. C. Abadie retreated again to Wilmington, where he filmed outdoor scenes for N. Dushane Cloward. Cloward, a traveling exhibitor who played churches and noncommercial venues during the theatrical season, opened a motion picture show in Brandywine Springs Park for the summer of 1903. He arranged with the Edison Company to take local views that would attract patrons to his theater. Cloward had Abadie photograph a baby review and a Maypole dance on August 21. Together, they organized the filming of *Turning the Tables* and *Tub Race* at the local swimming hole. In the former, a policeman tries to chase a group of boys out of a forbidden swimming hole, but finds himself pushed into the water instead. The naughty boys break the law, but the law has to pay rather than the boys.

What Happened in the Tunnel

Filmmaker: Edwin S. Porter. Cast: George M. Anderson (stage name of Max Aronson) (The Masher). Shot 30 and 31 October 1903; © 6 November 1903. Print: LoC.

This one-shot film was designed to be inserted into a railway panorama (a long tracking shot taken from the front of a moving train) for comic relief. G. M. Anderson (later known as “Broncho Billy”) plays the “masher” who attempts to kiss a well-to-do white woman when the train they are riding enters a tunnel. She anticipates his move and trades places with her black maid (who is blacked up according to stage conventions), and when he comes out of the tunnel he discovers that the tables have been turned. Although the film employs painful racial stereotypes, the women work together to give the sexually harassing male his comeuppance.

The Great Train Robbery

Filmmakers: Edwin S. Porter, J. Blair Smith (with assistance from G. M. Anderson). Cast: Justus D. Barnes (Head Bandit), Walter Cameron (The Sheriff), G. M. Anderson (bits). Shot: November 1903; © 1 December 1903. Print: MoMA.

This, the first blockbuster in American film history, was part of a popular cycle of crime pictures that included the 1903 British releases *A Daring Daylight Burglary* (Sheffield Photo Co.) and *Desperate Poaching Affray* (Haggar and Sons). Only some years later would audiences (and eventually historians) see this picture as a western. G. M. “Broncho Billy” Anderson, who was assisting Porter behind the camera as well as in front of it, appeared in a number of small roles (the fleeing passenger shot in the back, one of the bandits, the tenderfoot dancer in the saloon). This print is not only in excellent condition, but it is the only surviving copy to boast selective hand coloring.

Rector's to Claremont

Filmmaker: Edwin S. Porter. Shot: ca. 1903; © no reg. Print: MoMA.

This picture remains one of the mystery films in The Museum of Modern Art’s collection of Edison negatives. Though often dated 1903, this film probably made in the summer of 1904 or even the summer of 1905. Never released commercially, it was almost certainly commissioned by a showman, perhaps to be projected as part of a stage play, bridging two acts. Rector’s on Broadway was one of New York’s most popular restaurants. A man falls off a tally-ho and gives chase all the way uptown, passing by Grant’s Tomb.