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ANNUAL REPORT OF GEORGE EASTMAN HOUSE TO THE
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF FILM ARCHIVES

CONVOCATION AT VENCE, OCTOBER, 1953

HENRY A. STRONG COLLECTION OF HISTORICAL MOTION PICTURES

The Motion Picture Study Collection maintained at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, is called the Henry A. Strong Collection of Historical Motion Pictures, as a courtesy to Mr. L. Corrin Strong, who donated funds to the George Eastman House for *as a memorial to his father.* the duplication of motion pictures. The motion pictures held by George Eastman House are not circulated in any way. They are projected on request to students, scholars, and writers. They are shown on special lecture programs at George Eastman House to study groups meeting on regular evenings, *3 times a week -* and films without special restrictions are shown free of charge to the general public each Saturday and Sunday afternoons in the Dryden Theatre of the George Eastman House.

Acquisitions to this Study Collection are made in accordance with the plan to make available for study a broad cross-section of representative entertainment films. Selections are not made alone on the basis of what we or other critics believe to be artistically outstanding achievements. We are also interested in preserving subjects which represent the typical output of each country for any given year. It is felt, too, that films should be preserved which enjoyed outstanding popular successes in the

country of their origin. We are interested also in preserving some of the noble failures which may have been damned by the public or by the critics and in some cases by both. We are discovering as students work with our collection that they find it imperative to be able to compare a splendid film with some of the mediocre productions produced in the same year that the masterpiece was made. With a collection of this kind the student does not have to depend completely upon ~~the~~ taste of archivists whose personal appraisal of a film's importance so often determines its survival for study. This policy has already proved itself of value to us in a discovery of particularly important technical advances in films of such negligible subject content that they would ordinarily be doomed to the scrap heap. (An instance of this is the Metro production, THE SECOND IN COMMAND, made in 1915 as a starring vehicle for Francis X. Bushman. The Cameraman, William F. Alder, long before the days of studio cranes, dolly tracks, and even before swivel-top tripods were available, somehow managed to film this picture with more camera movement than is contained in VARIETE or DER LETZTE MANN. In this 1915 picture the camera moves about very freely, trucks in and out on the scenes and sails high into the air over the heads of dancing couples with more smoothness than is evidenced in many current productions. This one production alone must force us to revise all our opinions regarding the very gradual development of the use of moving camera shots.)

PRESERVATION OF NITRATE FILM

Just a year ago the George Eastman House completed the construction on its premises of air-conditioned storage vaults for nitrate film. The vaults of cement block and steel construction consist of separate cells each with a separate air-conditioning unit. Each cell contains 588 asbestos composition shelves. Each shelf accommodates two standard reels of film, giving a capacity of 1176 reels per ~~vault~~^{cell}. Five of these cells are now in use, holding 5880 reels of nitrate film. The vault is so constructed that additional cells may be added as they are needed. All electrical connections and devices within the cells are specially shielded and the air-conditioning machines are completely out of the storage room, being placed in special penthouses atop each cell. During the summer months the vaults are refrigerated at a temperature held twenty degrees Fahrenheit below outside temperatures. During the winter months the temperature is held to approximately forty degrees Fahrenheit. The cans are stored horizontally and the films inspected periodically. As you are all most certainly aware, no way has yet been devised to insure nitrate motion picture film against decomposition. Nor is there any predictable pattern of its deterioration. It has been found, however, that storing nitrate film at low temperatures will retard decomposition. The only real solution to film preservation is to duplicate it on acetate stock which the scientists assure us should last as long as

the best grade of paper. The problem of determining a priority for copying nitrate films on acetate is one that will continue to harass archivists. The British system of subjecting punch-out samples of the film to chemical analysis does not seem to us of very much use in determining the health of positive prints. As we are all aware, positive release prints of most silent films were made up of a great variety of separately-tinted sections and one could only determine the condition of a given reel of nitrate positive by taking a punch-out sample from each separate emulsion within a single roll. This procedure seems to us would be neither practical nor desirable, as in the course of a ten-year period a print would begin to become somewhat mutilated by punching out samples in ten or twelve different positions throughout each reel. We have also found that by punching out two samples from a single frame of film and submitting the samples to chemical analysis, that the test has yielded a completely different prognosis for each sample from the single frame. Our scientists have not yet been able to explain this phenomenon and you will appreciate that it does cast some doubts on the reliability of the method.

STORAGE OF ACETATE

The so called triacetate safety bases which have now been adopted completely by film makers in the United States are, of course, still too new to have demonstrated their lasting qualities. Recommendations are, however, that they be stored where dampness will not reach them, as there seems

to be some danger of warping. The only serious hazard that has been encountered in preserving acetate so far is that the emulsion is peculiarly sensitive to the gases arising from nitrate decomposition. For this reason archivists should be warned to keep any acetate films completely separated from nitrate films, as the nitrogen given off in decomposition will cause the image on acetate films to fade. This action has been encountered in films which have been put together composed of some sections of nitrate spliced along with acetate sections.

It is curious that the life and health of motion picture film like that of human beings ^{seems to} depend, barring accidents, upon the elements that contributed to its birth; far more than it does upon its own environment. Our French colleagues may be interested in knowing that in the United States we have never yet encountered a single instance of any decomposition whatsoever in the films of Lumiere, even though all our samples are well over a half century in age.

MOTION PICTURE ACQUISITIONS

During the year 1953 the George Eastman House has added 124 films to its Study Collection. These new acquisitions include Paramount's curious production of Maurice Maeterlinck's THE BLUEBIRD, a souvenir of the poet's unhappy experiences in Hollywood; original release prints in excellent condition of INTOLERANCE and WAY DOWN EAST, which are believed to contain every frame of these films which constituted their

original release lengths; prints of THE BICYCLE THIEVES, THE QUIET ONE, Paul Strand's Mexican film THE WAVE; THE GREEN PASTURES ~~ODDITIES~~, JEZEBEL, and THE PETRIFIED FOREST from Warner Brothers; Asta Nielsen in Bruno Rahn's DIRNENTRAGOEDIE; the Jannings TRAGOEDIE DER LIEBE; and the most curious early German film, THE STORY OF DIDA IBSEN with Werner Kraus and Conrad Veidt. We have printed Rex Ingram's PRISONER OF ZENDA and Pauline Frederick's memorable MADAME X from the original MGM negatives along with Buster Keaton in GO WEST. Another rare Fairbanks Triangle film, FLIRTING WITH FATE, has joined the collection, as have four typical Egyptian productions and four Indian films including the altogether astonishing extravaganza in the Cecil B. DeMille tradition called CHANDRALEKA. Through a special agreement with the Museum of Modern Art Film Library the George Eastman House has undertaken the storage of such negatives and original prints as the Museum may wish to deposit with us. We have received several million feet of original Biograph negatives, most of them representing the work of D. W. Griffith, along with approximately a million feet of Edison negatives. As our laboratory schedules and budget permit, we are planning to prepare acetate prints of this material in close co-operation with the Museum of Modern Art Film Library.

THEODORE HUFF COLLECTION

The George Eastman House was immensely enriched quite recently by the gift from Marianne R. Huff of the entire collections of her son, the late Theodore Huff. Mr. Huff's collected material included

30,000 motion picture stills of which many hundreds represent carefully discriminating choices made by Mr. Huff. It includes a library of some three hundred basic volumes. There is a splendid collection of original shooting scripts of outstanding films including John Ford's THE INFORMER, and complete original music scores for hundreds of silent films - a field that, as many of you are aware, was a specialty of Mr. Huff's. Although George Eastman House has made no attempt to form a library on motion pictures, the acquisition of Mr. Huff's library does provide us with sufficient duplicates of much basic material that we will now be able to comply with F.I.A.F.'s request for volumes to be added to its central library. We are looking forward to the possibility of exchanging still photographs and as always are especially eager during the coming year to envisage film exchanges with the members of the Federation.

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