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## **The Elusive Eastern Film Corporation of Providence, Rhode Island: Resurrecting a Footnote in Film History**

Local historical societies treasure vague records of production in Ithaca, Providence, Ogden, and Augusta, for example, but so little information survives that most historians simply omit this activity altogether.<sup>1</sup>

Richard Koszarski

Perhaps foolishly trying to fashion something out of some “vague records,” I intend, as my honors thesis, to write the history of the Eastern Film Corporation, a short-lived, Providence-based regional movie studio whose years of operation were from 1915-1929. It is of considerable interest to me as someone who wants to become a film historian to experience the process of film history first-hand. In Film 220, one of my most rewarding projects was profiling a Providence motion picture palace, the Albee Theatre, sadly now destroyed. This marked the first time I tried my hand at film history: I consulted primary sources, namely articles from the *Providence Journal* from the 1910s and 1920s, and I learned to use microfilm, two experiences that would prove essential to my study of Eastern.

Eastern Film Corporation was a local studio but its films were distributed and screened throughout New England with the exception of Rhode Island. At least twelve of its films, of various genres, which seemed to have generous budgets for size of the studio, have survived. Eastern’s prime years of business were brief, 1915-1917. Unfortunately, a fire destroyed the building in 1917 and the expenses it would cost to repair it too high for its original founder, Frederick S. Peck, a wealthy Barrington politician. Nevertheless, the studio staggered on

throughout the 1920s. The Eastern Film Corporation is almost completely forgotten, mentioned only by a few film scholars and historians, remaining a footnote in film history. I would like to correct this by recovering and interpreting the history of Eastern Film Corporation in the context of early filmmaking in the silent period in the US, a time when many regional studios such as Eastern flourished, providing films for local and regional markets. Although it operated in three metropolises of the early twentieth century- Providence, New York, and Jacksonville- I will argue that Eastern, essentially, was a regional studio. Unlike the major studios in Hollywood, it did not vertically integrate and had few, if any, significant feature films. In most regards, its fate mirrored regional studios like Flying A located in Santa Barbara.

From the outset, I was aware of the difficulties associated with this project since scant information remains and even fewer secondary sources are available. A great deal of this has to do with the nature of the silent film industry itself: its history and even its films were treated as mere entertainment, unimportant enough to save. Only approximately ten percent of films from the silent era have survived and even those few are threatened with destruction due to the short shelf life (75 to 100 years) and flammability of the nitrate film stock on which they were produced.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the shape and scope of the film industry experienced a major shift in the 1910s from a small (but growing) industry largely centered in New York but co-existing with numerous successful regionalized studios throughout the US to a big business centered in Hollywood. Many regional studios, like Eastern, which thrived in the 1900s and 1910s, were pushed out of the industry and their histories and films lost to time.

Fortunately, the Eastern Film Corporation has not disappeared entirely. I located some primary and secondary sources for its history. My research began at the Rhode Island Historical Society Library, a major depository for Rhode Island's rich historical past, where I discovered in

the clippings file on Eastern three articles written by Kathleen Karr in the 1970s: the first, “Flicks Produced,” a newspaper article which focuses on the business aspect of Eastern; the second, an interview by Karr with Martha Freeman, a former actress at the studio; and the third, an entry on Eastern from *The American Film Heritage: Impressions from the American Film Institute Archives*. Additionally, I found material on Eastern by searching through the archives of the *Providence Journal*, *Variety*, and other various film trade journals such as *Motion Picture World (MPW)* and *Motography*.<sup>3</sup> Finally I found information on some Eastern films in the *AFI Catalog of Feature Films*.

There has been very, very little scholarship published on Eastern. Anthony Slide includes a single-paragraph entry on Eastern in his *The New Historical Dictionary of the American Film Industry*. However, some of the films have survived at the Rhode Island Historical Society in Providence: *My Lady of the Lilacs* (ca. 1916-1919) and *Partners of the Tide* (1915) which are feature-length; *Diamonds* (ca. 1916); *Daisies* (ca. 1915); *The Mutt* (1915); *Practical Chemistry* (ca. 1915); *Wistaria* (ca. 1915); *Fireman’s Muster* (ca. 1916); *The Minister* (ca. 1916); *The Honor of the Humble* (ca. 1919); *The Labor Day Parade* (1915); *Stranger within the Gate* (1917); *Wallpaper* (1923), all of which are shorts; plus *The Reward of Courage*, a 1921 educational film about cancer awareness, a copy of which survives in the National Library of Medicine in Maryland.<sup>4</sup> Given the scant historical record and Eastern’s status as a regional studio, I find it difficult, if not impossible to estimate what percentage of Eastern’s total output this represents.

## Historiography: Making it Meaningful

I find it necessary to consider the role of historical inquiry and discuss my methodology in writing this film history. While works of film history increase, works on the nature of film history, or historiography, scholarship that examines the methodology behind conducting history, remain scarce. There is only one significant text, *Film History: Theory and Practice* by Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery published in 1985. This, perhaps, is the case because readers think they know what history is. But Allen and Gomery who start with the seemingly basic question “what is film history?” indicate that the answer is more multifaceted and less intuitive than expected.<sup>5</sup>

The authors delineate two major approaches to conducting history, empiricism and realism, a relatively new term coined by historians in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> Empiricism, also known as “common sense history,” simply refers to a laundry list of the dry facts which supposedly “speak for themselves.”<sup>7</sup> Although most modern historians (including Allen and Gomery) reject this model, surprisingly this continues to be a mainstream view of history, in no small part due to the way this method is “taught [to] us in high school history classes.”<sup>8</sup> Most problematic about empiricism is its use of an objective scientific method, which in many ways is diametrically opposed to the process of conducting history. In science, one is bound by “the form of universals or covering laws,” which provides a set amount of outcomes; ergo science operates as a “closed system.”<sup>9</sup> History, contrarily, is an open system, one in which every situation has a different outcome, even if certain events seem to have many parallels.<sup>10</sup> Unlike science, where many of the variables are controlled from the onset, historians “cannot ‘see’ a historical event directly, but only the traces that remain.”<sup>11</sup> According to critics of empiricism, nothing (including science) is

absolute or unchanged. So-called facts are based significantly on “different sets of conventions [which] cause scientists [and I would like to add historians] to ‘see’ the world differently.”<sup>12</sup>

By no means do Allen and Gomery suggest a complete overhaul of empiricism because, as they note, “facts do matter” and serve as the foundation for all histories.<sup>13</sup> Rather they advocate for a realist model, which produces “works of historical explanation.”<sup>14</sup> In order to provide explanations, a realist historian must go beyond the one-dimensional observable evidence of reality or a description of that tangible evidence.<sup>15</sup> Roy Bhaskar, a prominent proponent of realism argues that “the world consists of mechanisms not events” and “knowledge of them depends upon a rare blending of intellectual, practico-technical, and perceptual skills.”<sup>16</sup> The historian should think of his/her topic in complex terms, examining all the various elements which create the causal relationship.<sup>17</sup> Allen and Gomery observe that “film is a complex historical phenomenon (an art form, economic institution, technology, cultural product)” and is an “interrelated set of components that condition and are conditioned by each other.”<sup>18</sup> Films endure in their popularity because they are a lively and engaging art form, addressing and interpreting the world in which they were produced and consumed. I think that its history should accomplish a similar goal. Allen and Gomery define a film historian as one who “attempts to explain the changes that have occurred to the cinema since its origins, as well as account for aspects of the cinema that have resisted change.”<sup>19</sup>

Following Allen and Gomery’s lead, I have chosen to adopt the realist approach, which helps me broaden the scope of my history of the Eastern Film Corporation beyond the facts, as I have been able to ascertain them, to the industrial, economic, and social context of the American film industry of the early twentieth century. Thus, I will provide an overview of the American film industry in the early twentieth century in order to contextualize Eastern’s story in terms of

the major developments in early film history. Important here is the emergence of Hollywood, its triumph over New York filmmaking concerns, and its eventual eclipse of regional filmmaking. In order to situate Eastern more precisely within this framework, I will focus on two representative Hollywood studios one major, Paramount, and one major minor, Universal, and their rise in the industry as well as a representative regional studio, Santa Barbara's Flying A, and its demise.

### **The Birth of An Industrial Nation**

With such little literature on the earliest cinema (more commonly known as the "silent era"), one might assume that the Hollywood studio system emerged one day fully formed with the five majors (Paramount, RKO, MGM, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Warner Bros.) reigning supreme and absolute. It does not help that many books about Hollywood relegate the first thirty-something years of motion picture history into a short introduction or omit it altogether. Only a few gems such as the first three volumes of Scribner's *History of American Cinema* series are entire books solely devoted to the early, pioneering days of the American film industry; valuable information from the second of these three books, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915* by Eileen Bowser will be frequently cited throughout this section. Contrary to the age-old myth Hollywood constructed about itself, Hollywood did not happen overnight. Instead its development was a gradual process, very much like a live birth, full of various turbulent stages, roadblocks, and lots of discomfort along the way.

In fact, filmmaking did not begin in Hollywood, or even California. Rather it all started on the East Coast, particularly New Jersey, in 1894 when W. K. L. Dickson, a technician at



Thomas Edison's plant in West Orange, New Jersey, under the direction of Edison himself developed the technology for the Kinetoscope, a device where a patron of a penny arcade inserted a nickel or dime and would watch a very short film (rarely lasting longer than a few seconds) on a small screen. Across the globe, a few months after "a thorough study of the workings of the Edison machine,"<sup>20</sup> two French brothers, Auguste and Louis Lumière, created the Cinematographe, a lighter and more eminently usable camera which doubled as a projector. A key difference between Edison's and Lumière's devices was that the Kinetoscope only served one person at a time, while the Lumière's invention projected the image and thus catered to a larger audience. A savvy businessman as well as creative inventor, Edison realized that more money could be made if films could be shown to a mass audience, so he eventually made films for a larger screen.

As film began to attract the middle classes and became a lucrative industry, Edison, who "had a habit of patenting everything in sight," cockily took steps to monopolize the film trade as early as 1907.<sup>21</sup> Banding with several other contemporaneous film companies-Vitagraph, Kalem, Lubin, Melies, Selig, and Essanay- Edison formed the Motion Pictures Patents Company (MPPC), barring the other firms from obtaining the existing technology necessary to make and distribute a film including cameras and projectors patented by MPPC Companies and the film stock via an exclusive contract with Eastman Film. The MPPC forced the theatres to exhibit only their films on top of demanding a weekly \$2 fee.<sup>22</sup> For those who had the means and/or the chutzpah to fight the monopoly, the MPPC, soon known as the Trust, employed people to destroy, often violently, unlicensed films and equipment and wreck the theatres using them. They also intimidated filmmakers outside the Trust. Directors Cecil B. DeMille and Allan Dwan carried firearms to fend off Trust enforcers.<sup>23</sup> Initially, the Trust was toothless because

Biograph, Edison Studio's biggest and most important rival, initially refused to join and decided to challenge Edison. Biograph finally agreed to join the MPPC, making it fully effective in January 1909.<sup>24</sup> But the coalition was always uneasy as many companies in the Trust resented being under the thumb of Biograph and Edison, and the resentment stewed over time. In spite of the fact that the Trust controlled an overwhelming seventy-five percent of the films in the US market, there was a small group of entrepreneurial men determined to make their mark in the cinema world.<sup>25</sup>

Those producers outside the MPPC, known as the Independents, never accepted the monopolistic practices of the Trust and vigorously fought it from the beginning. During the endless disputes between Edison and Biograph, several independent entrepreneurs formed companies and recruited actors and personnel from their more established rivals. Probably the most significant example is when Carl Laemmle, future founder of Universal, "stole" Biograph contract player Florence Lawrence in 1909, enticing her with a substantially larger salary and on-screen billing. Ambitious and energetic men such as Laemmle, Adolph Zukor, Louis B. Mayer, Jesse Lasky, and Samuel Goldfish (later Goldwyn) vowed to make enough films to provide theaters with an entire year's showing of alternatives to MPPC fare. Although several of the Independents occasionally used some of the equipment patented by the MPPC through illegal means, most importantly the Latham loop, generally they had to produce their own equipment, and more often than not, it was inferior quality that in turn produced inferior-looking product.

By 1912, the MPPC's domination of the motion picture industry was already experiencing problems. Eastman Film broke its exclusive contract with the MPPC and began openly selling film stock to the Independents, because they could not support themselves economically just selling to the Trust.<sup>26</sup> In 1912, a fateful Supreme Court decision against the

MPPC broke the monopoly. Judge Learned Hand ruled on 24 August 1912 that the MPPC's exclusive hold on the Latham loop, a device that allowed films to exceed a single reel without breaking, was unconstitutional. The Independents for the first time could freely access the top equipment and with Eastman's earlier agreement to sell them film stock, "they could now compete on an equal basis" with their tyrannical competitors.<sup>27</sup> Ever persistent, the MPPC continued several of their bullying tactics and their attorneys kept fighting to repeal Justice Hand's decision.<sup>28</sup> But by 1915, with all appeals exhausted, the MPPC officially dissolved and several of these pioneering studios soon went under.

During these years of fighting between the Independents and the MPPC, a more subtle change in the US film industry occurred, which had a larger impact on the future of film than the monopolistic practices of the MPPC. That change was the advent of feature film, which would determine who would become a major industry player and who would drop off the industry map. As film historian I. G. Edmonds writes, "In 1913 the motion picture industry was split between producers who plugged multireel features and those who only wanted to make shorts."<sup>29</sup> The first wave of motion picture producers, which coalesced into the MPPC, enjoyed great success with their one reelers (about eleven to seventeen minutes),<sup>30</sup> also known as shorts, and saw no reason to interfere with a winning streak. Further, they believed audiences would not have the stamina or the time to devote to watching a single feature film. And finally, "one unsuccessful short film in the program could be offset by a good one, but if the feature was poor, the show could not be saved."<sup>31</sup> In sum, from the perspective of the MPPC, "films, like vegetables, were a perishable product."<sup>32</sup> The Trust simply did not get the message about feature films. While MPPC studio heads bought the occasional European super-spectacle to distribute, they refused to grant their directors the right to make films that exceeded one reel. Consequently, they alienated several of

their most talented and successful filmmakers in the process. By 1913, Biograph and perpetually experimental star director D. W. Griffith, were involved in a long-term feud which irreconcilably escalated when he directed a four-reel feature, *Judith of Bethulia* (1913), using their resources without their knowledge.<sup>33</sup> Biograph initially shelved *Judith*, only showing it in 1914, after Griffith left and made the spectacle *The Birth of A Nation* (1915), America's first mega-blockbuster feature film; *Judith* incidentally made Biograph a sizeable profit.<sup>34</sup>

The entrepreneurs of the Independents innately sensed that feature films would be the new norm. A quick aside on the term "features:" it did not have the same connotation then as it does now. During the latter 1900s and early 1910s, its definition changed as rapidly as the industry itself. Initially, it simply referred to any "special film...with something that could be featured in advertising as something out of the ordinary run. It was not just another sausage."<sup>35</sup> Then it came to mean any film that exceeded a reel. Only by the mid-1910s did the industry have a completely standard definition for what constitutes the feature film: a minimum of four-reels (approximately one hour).<sup>36</sup>

The most successful of these early independent entrepreneurs was Adolph Zukor, patriarch of Paramount Pictures. Unlike the generally patrician members of the MPPC, Zukor came from an Eastern European immigrant family (Hungarian in his case), like a majority of the second wave of film producers who came from modest means. Zukor climbed a long ladder to success from being a janitor at a fur store at fifteen to owning his own fur salon in his twenties before entering the motion picture world.<sup>37</sup> Zukor, who always regarded one-reelers as cheap and vulgar, set up his own production company in 1912 to make features. The most significant way in which he distinguished himself from other entrepreneurs was his foresight in distributing the costly 1912 French *film d'art* production *Queen Elizabeth* starring theatrical grande dame Sarah

Bernhardt. While the film did not make a profit at the box office, it created a sensation amongst audiences and critics alike. By 1914, feature films topped the box office. As film historian David A. Cook remarks, “the feature film had by this time triumphed almost completely over the one- and two-reeler, or short, which survived only in the cartoon, newsreel, and serial installment.”<sup>38</sup> Zukor maintained a rapid output of feature films, becoming “the first national distributor to offer a complete feature program, releasing over 100 features a year beginning in mid-1914, and over 150 by 1916.”<sup>39</sup>

The initial setup of his company, Famous Players in Famous Plays, which attempted to be an American version of the highbrow French *films d'art*, had a slightly rocky start but Zukor rose to super prominence due to his equal savvy at showmanship and advertising. Two people in particular aided Zukor to skyrocketing success: Jesse Lasky and Cecil B. DeMille. Lasky, a former theatrical impresario who turned to films after a disastrous flop with a lavish, but over-budgeted, almost Hollywood scale stage production of the *Follies Bergère* in 1911,<sup>40</sup> discovered (due to heavy lobbying by Cecil's ambitious mother, Beatrice) and collaborated with the director Cecil B. DeMille, on a noteworthy feature entitled *The Squaw Man* (1914), produced by Samuel Goldfish, another founder of the venture.<sup>41</sup> Lasky also had several excellent connections which brought him an exclusive contract for the screen rights to plays of eminent Broadway producer-director David Belasco (an unprecedented accomplishment for a motion picture producer) as well as opera star Geraldine Farrar. Simultaneously awed and envious of Lasky, Zukor proposed a merger between the two companies in order to pool their resources.<sup>42</sup> In 1916, they formed Paramount Pictures Corporation, pushing out Goldfish in the process.<sup>43</sup> Above all, Zukor came out on top because he vertically integrated Paramount.

Vertical integration was essential for success and longevity in the film industry. This innovative phenomenon refers to a studio which makes, distributes, and exhibits all of its films. This helped what is now known as the five majors become the majors. Unlike their colleague studios, the majors had the foresight to own theatre chains, which predominantly showcased their company's films. Although the majors only owned 3,000 of the 18,000 theatres in the US, their establishments, which were plush buildings located in the largest metropolises, garnered seventy percent of the total box office receipts.<sup>44</sup> Certainly the unification of these three processes also helped these studios make superior, glossier films, something which would be apparent to an average, non-scholarly film-goer. Controlling exhibition immediately gave these companies an advantage over their competition. As Eileen Bowser notes, when the MPPC acquired features, their affiliate theatres made the lethal choice to show the film one reel at a time, a decision met with a wave of audience and critical scorn.<sup>45</sup> Controlling this last sector gave the five major studios a monumental amount of power over its product as they could insure that their films, particularly the features, were properly shown in their entirety, thus making films no longer merely novelties, but an evening's entertainment. In the end vertical integration with its ownership of theatres trumped the MPPC's near-monopoly of the industry. To a certain extent, this highly concentrated power structure paralleled that of the MPPC as it kept the resources for a select group of companies and eliminated competition. The success of vertical integration prevented the majors from having to resort to hiring thugs to vandalize theatres and helped them enjoy a greater longevity than the Trust.

Universal Studios, founded by Carl Laemmle, began at about the same time as Paramount, and had as much potential, but Laemmle's failure to vertically integrate kept Universal Studios at the second-tier, known as a minor-major, one of the Little Three. Laemmle,

another rags to riches (Hungarian) immigrant, began in a Chicago department store where he rose through the ranks<sup>46</sup> and opened a series of nickelodeons. In 1909, Laemmle left Chicago for New York where he formed his own film company, the Independent Moving Picture Company, simply known to the general public as IMP (with a cheeky devil as its logo.)<sup>47</sup> IMP's first film was a western entitled *Hiawatha* (1909) which attracted a great deal of attention because of Laemmle's loud claims that it was filmed on location in Minnehaha Falls, Minnesota (and thus out of reach of the bullying MPPC).<sup>48</sup> But Laemmle became a bigger threat to the Trust when he and six other companies formed what eventually became known as Universal Pictures. This new coalition was undoubtedly uneasy and it was not until 1920 that Laemmle was able to consolidate his power.

Laemmle's showman genius was in developing Universal City, on the site of a chicken farm in the San Fernando Valley,<sup>49</sup> simultaneously a film studio and tourist attraction. Laemmle persevered with his vision, over all objections of the numerous naysayers, and created a proper city, complete with a post office, a zoo, and a post office, among other attributes.<sup>50</sup> Initially, it was the perfect tourist attraction drawing crowds of about 500 a day; watching scenes being filmed was especially popular.<sup>51</sup>

The studio's moviemaking practices under his direction were intriguingly erratic. Universal's biggest successes were features with lavish budgets and production values, especially *Traffic in Souls* (1913) a brazen sexploitation film involving some of the biggest theatre celebrities, *Neptune's Daughter* (1914) starring swimming sensation Annette Kellerman, and *Damon and Pythias* (1914) a Biblical epic centered around its elaborate and expensive sets.<sup>52</sup> Still Laemmle remained a minor-major, not a full major: he proved very stingy about making feature films or developing movie stars,<sup>53</sup> instead devoting more resources to churning out the

passé one-reelers. He did however continue to make features, serials, two-reelers, whatever was popular, but he always lagged behind the other major Independents, and consequently, his output generally scored less success than that of rival studios.

But the most important reason Universal never became a major was due to Laemmle's failure to vertically integrate. Efforts made by studio executives pleading with Laemmle to do so proved futile. Instead, the stubborn patriarch insisted on marketing his films to small town movie-houses and letting them pick and choose individual films, instead of adopting block bookings (where a theatre has to buy a year's supply of a single studio's inventory or get none) or any of the other methods that helped make vertical integration a smashing success.<sup>54</sup> In another of Laemmle's inexplicable idiosyncrasies, he set up the costly and unsuccessful Bluebird branch, which focused on plush theatrical adaptations starring prominent Broadway actors such as Jane Cowl in direct retaliation against Zukor's success with Geraldine Farrar.<sup>55</sup> What these short histories of Paramount and Universal demonstrate is the centrality of risk-taking, forward thinking immigrant entrepreneurs and the importance of vertical integration.

### **Westward Bound**

By 1915, there were approximately 15,000 workers employed by the motion picture industry in Hollywood and over 60 percent of American production was centered there.<sup>56</sup>

David A. Cook

Sixty percent is indeed an impressive percentage, but that means forty percent, another substantial sum, was located elsewhere. Under the leadership of Midwestern businessman



Samuel Hutchinson, The American Film Manufacturing Company was born. Initially, the headquarters and post-production facilities were in Chicago, and all filming took place at a studio in Santa Barbara (this arrangement would soon change when all operations were moved to Santa Barbara). Like many regional studios, American Film did not vertically integrate, with its films distributed by another company, in this case Mutual Film Company. Better known as Flying A, for its distinctive logo of a capital A encased in wings, the studio situated itself, not in Hollywood, but in the nearby community of Santa Barbara. On the surface, Santa Barbara seemed to have many benefits over Los Angeles. First, as a resort town populated with an educated wealthy elite and containing a large cultural center, Santa Barbara was a much more developed community than Los Angeles, which at that time was perhaps a peg or two more sophisticated than the Wild Wild West.<sup>57</sup> As Koszarski explains, Los Angeles was “still largely a wilderness [as late as] 1915, lacking equipment houses, prop and costume houses, a steady supply of professional actors, or even basic sanitation and safety.”<sup>58</sup> Director Thomas Ince, proprietor of the sprawling, but short-lived Inceville, was “robbed ‘stage-coach style’” near his studio.<sup>59</sup> Erich Von Stroheim, actor/writer/filmmaker, always carried a revolver en route to Universal City.<sup>60</sup> Also, Santa Barbara’s diverse scenery was perfectly suited to Flying A’s needs for film three different genres: westerns, social comedies, and melodramas.

The studio got off to a peachy start as an overwhelming majority of the community (with the exception of a few religious zealots and reformers) and city officials enthusiastically received the Flying A company, expecting the studio to generate income for Santa Barbara. Indeed, Flying A’s presence brought in somewhere between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 per year from business investments and tourism.<sup>61</sup> Even the actors were regarded as respected members of the community, an unprecedented reception for film people in the early twentieth century.

Flying A was a respectable, if not overwhelming, operation. It occupied four city blocks and even had its own stable, carpenter shop, and garage which housed several cars.<sup>62</sup> The American Film Company relocated their entire operation to Santa Barbara in 1913, closing the Chicago operation, and built a significantly larger studio complete with photo labs to process films and multiple interior stages, making a more efficient use of time and resources.<sup>63</sup> Flying A personnel took a laid-back approach to the work. As one of Flying A's most valued employees, cameraman Roy Overbaugh noted, "most of our time was spent at the beach. Working was just a sideline, and even that was fun."<sup>64</sup>

Nevertheless, Flying A produced a considerable output of films and employed several talented people in front of and behind the camera (many of whom went on to greater success). Perhaps the most important individual contribution came from Allan Dwan, an (almost) one-man operation, who acted as producer/director/writer/manager. He directed over two-hundred films, averaging two per week.<sup>65</sup> Dwan discovered and mentored many of the brightest up-and-coming talents such as directors Marshall Neilan, Wallace Reid, and Victor Fleming as well as locals like actress Charlotte Burton. Flying A was predominantly known for its westerns, which stood out from the westerns made by many of the other studios for the distinct locations and diverse landscape of Santa Barbara (often exploited in the publicity campaigns). Adding to the authenticity of these films was the use of real cowboys.<sup>66</sup> These westerns benefitted from the big stars featured in them, most significantly Jack Kerrigan. Flying A produced two significant, yet controversial seven-reel features: the first, based on a controversial French play about venereal disease was entitled *Damaged Goods* and the other was *Purity* (both 1916), a vehicle for then-notorious nude model Audrey Munson, that received an inordinate amount of censorial attention.<sup>67</sup> In 1916 Flying A's biggest star was Mary Miles Minter, who played young

wholesome types a la Mary Pickford.<sup>68</sup> (Her career would abruptly end in 1920 when a pair of her monogrammed panties were found at the scene of the notorious William Desmond Taylor murder.)

Flying A's regionalist ethic ultimately spelled its doom. The most immediate way in which this studio was plagued was by a limited number of personnel which proved highly detrimental when a star or a director left. The first major disruption of this kind came when the controlling Hutchinson fired Dwan for his independent spirit which made him resistant to and resentful of the interference by the corporate heads.<sup>69</sup> This was wholly Flying A's loss as Dwan quickly moved to Universal and enjoyed a successful directing career for many years to come. But more initially impactful, many of the top personnel followed Dwan to his new studio.<sup>70</sup> This included Kerrigan, whose peculiar temperament and volatile ego could only be sufficiently handled by Dwan.<sup>71</sup> With the exception of *Damaged Goods* and *Purity* and a few other titles, under the square supervision of the executives, particularly Hutchinson, Flying A typically produced unimaginative, old-fashioned trifles of which burgeoning sophisticated audiences grew tired. In addition to having an opportunistic stage-mother, one of Mary Miles Minter's main motivations for leaving Flying A for Paramount was the "frantic pace of production and mediocre scripts" intended to capitalize on her soaring popularity.<sup>72</sup> Not only the stars, but also the featured players and the associate technicians migrated to LA where most of the opportunities for work remained.<sup>73</sup> The most unfortunate tactical error was Flying A's failure to vertically integrate, considering that Santa Barbara, unlike many cities at the time, had three motion picture houses.<sup>74</sup> Although Flying A had the bragging rights to being the only studio in Mutual's group of studios to consistently make profitable films, their success alone could not

support their parent company's increasingly plummeting failure, so naturally Flying A, which could not make enough output to survive on its own, sank with the Mutual ship.<sup>75</sup>

### **All About Eastern**

1914 is best known today as the inception of the First World War, a blunt and violent kick start to a more modern world. But another, albeit smaller and less cataclysmic, event began at the end of that same year. On December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1914, the Eastern Film Corporation officially emerged as a film studio in Providence, Rhode Island.<sup>76</sup> Eastern, unlike the Hollywood major studios, was a throwback to older times, where businesses served a select, more localized clientele. The limited information on Eastern seems to suggest that the Providence studio strived for recognition outside of the small Ocean State. While Eastern maintained some presence outside Rhode Island in the neighboring New England areas, Eastern's regional spirit and traditionalist corporate practices defined it as a regional studio.

In terms of its capitalization Eastern was much like other regional studios and a far cry from the major studios in Hollywood. Reportedly, Frederick Peck personally put up the capital of \$300,000 with no stock for sale, a quite hefty investment for Providence.<sup>77</sup> Certainly it surpasses the \$100,000 investment into the incorporation of another Providence-based studio, the What Cheer Film Company, whose history is even more obscure than Eastern's.<sup>78</sup> But Peck's sum seems a pittance in comparison to the \$500 million plus invested into the major Hollywood studios in 1915 alone.<sup>79</sup>

Eastern's founders also diverged from the kind of men who founded the majors. Moguls like Zukor, Lasky, Goldfish, Mayer, and Laemmle were self-starter charismatic immigrant

entrepreneurs with artistic inclinations, willing to risk high sums of money on the products. Eastern's WASP-ish executives were much more conventional businessmen. According to Kathleen Karr, Peck had no artistic proclivities and strictly saw this studio as a business venture, and took no part in the day-to-day operations.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Vice-president Benjamin L. Cook, a well-known stockbroker, seemed to be hands-off; he receives no mention outside the two 1915 press releases by *Motion Picture World (MPW)* and *Motography*.<sup>81</sup> Peck and Cook, like Samuel Hutchinson, head of Flying A, began with the entrepreneurial spirit of the majors but lacked their charisma, their risk-taking, their acumen, and ultimately their success.

It was Elwood F. Bostwick, the third founding father of Eastern, who was left in charge of running the studio. He had one of the necessary requisites for the position of general manager and artistic director—he was very good at promotion—but seemed to lack the business savvy and the instinct for a commercial product that characterized the best studio bosses at the majors, like Irving K. Thalberg. Bostwick's background was in theater and film. Supposedly Bostwick worked with several motion picture companies as a director before Eastern (he apparently discovered Providence while location scouting for another film, although he never mentions which one).<sup>82</sup> Although his considerable experience as an actor and director of the stage can be verified, that did not translate into skills of good management. In fact, he had a prior financial scandal to his name. In 1914 when he managed a theatrical company in New York, he declared bankruptcy, owing \$25,194 to a large number of actors and companies who acted as creditors.<sup>83</sup> However, the extensive list of creditors seems to imply that he had charisma.

Karr states that Bostwick was a “fast-talking director who came from the backwater areas of Rhode Island” and it was he who convinced Peck to invest the large sum of money into the studio.<sup>84</sup> Bostwick explained to a reporter for the *Providence Journal* that his rationale for setting

up a studio in Providence was that “it’s a virgin territory. And it’s so varied. Any kind of location is at your service within a few miles in a machine. California, Long Island, Jersey- why, none of them can touch it.”<sup>85</sup> He did not last long, resigning in the fall of 1915, for undisclosed reasons.<sup>86</sup> In his few months at Eastern, Bostwick managed to keep the company fairly exposed in the *Providence Journal*, writing five articles about motion pictures, most of which are behind-the-scenes scoops of the industry and instructional guides to writing scenarios.<sup>87</sup> After his brief stint, Eastern did not appear in the local paper as frequently.

Sadly for Eastern, they never found the balance of that one special person who combined a sense of showmanship and economics, in short an Irving Thalberg figure. The wunderkind creative head of production who began at Universal in the late teens and continually fought with the obstinate Laemmle to invest in higher-budgeted features, eventually moved to MGM in the 1920s remaining there until his untimely death in 1936. Thalberg was instrumental at catapulting MGM to the top, by shaping its iconic Hollywood trademark look combining a sense of artistry and glamour with his unerring commercial sense.

Later, Frank Tichenor took over Bostwick’s position and is another example of the kind of production head who lacked the necessary combination of skills that characterized the head of production at the majors. Tichenor, who inherited the position of general manager after an even shorter-lived combination of feature-film director George Lessey and businessman W. P. Barrett,<sup>88</sup> probably around the end of 1915,<sup>89</sup> originally handled Eastern’s distribution in New York.<sup>90</sup> Tichenor, “a young Kentuckian engaged in the production of stereoptican [sic] slides” seemed appealing to Peck because he had some theatrical experience.<sup>91</sup> He previously established a film studio called Photo Play Productions, and produced a film version which “later proved to be a highly valuable property” of *The Littlest Rebel* (ca. 1912), starring a very young

Mary Miles Minter before she became a star at Flying A and Paramount; for Tichenor she acted under the name Juliet Shelby.<sup>92</sup> It is unknown what other films this firm made or how long it remained in business, although presumably not long if Tichenor went to work for Eastern. Ultimately, Tichenor possessed a very frugal, conservative, and an old-school ethic.

Arthur Edwin Krows, who worked as production manager for Eastern in the 1920s when it produced commissioned corporate films, wrote that Tichenor, his mentor, whom he greatly admired, cut the budgets for the films slated for production upon his arrival at Eastern.<sup>93</sup> In Krows' estimation, "any man is obliged to choose, for his own success, between being either an executive or a craftsman. He preferred the former, and therefore did not interfere with his workers as long as they achieved proper results."<sup>94</sup> The men Tichenor recruited in senior positions were of a "non-theatrical" (to borrow Krows's term) background, who similarly embraced cost-cutting methods.<sup>95</sup> Although Krows praises Tichenor for his business ethic of "[beginning] small and [expanding] into large," this must have been detrimental to Eastern, holding it back from being a major contender.<sup>96</sup> From the beginning of his tenure at Eastern, Tichenor began courting several organizations, such as the American Red Cross, about potentially making films for them, while Eastern was still officially in the business of making fiction films.<sup>97</sup>

Eastern's facilities were also definitely regional sized. Providence, which did not have its own motion picture studio at the time, was naturally excited. News of the studio's building received the front page spread in the Arts section of the May 30<sup>th</sup> 1915 edition of the *Providence Journal*, although the press releases in *MPW* and *Motography*, the national trade papers, were more matter-of-fact and came three months after the *Providence Journal* notice. Eastern set up shop at 1100 Elmwood Avenue, directly across from the Roger Williams Park, which came in

handy for exterior scenes. The *Providence Journal* reporter enthusiastically detailed the studio's property. Converted from a brewery, the building was 190,000 square feet.<sup>98</sup> This building remained as a storage site for costumes and props as well as the editing room; most of the space was left unused.<sup>99</sup> For filming, the executives erected a second, 450,000 square foot studio with three soundstages.<sup>100</sup> Indeed this seems a respectable operation, until one considers the monumental scale of a West Coast studio. Universal City amassed a whopping 230 acres of land; it even had its own postal code.<sup>101</sup> More importantly, Laemmle created a gargantuan publicity campaign around it. As Dick notes "more than 10,000 people witnessed the birth of [Laemmle's] studio city."<sup>102</sup> Even Eastern's press release seems small in comparison, and overcautious since they waited about six months after the studio opened to make the formal announcement in *MPW* and *Motography*.<sup>103</sup> Some of this discrepancy between the two studios has to do with the relatively limited capital invested in Eastern, but a significant amount lies with Providence itself; it simply was not laid out to support a studio large enough to become a major player in the film industry. Even Flying A had bigger facilities, covering four city blocks.

Eastern was always ambitious and thought of itself, in terms of its acting talent and technical personnel, as equivalent to the majors. At its inception, Eastern hired no less than eight directors in charge of making feature films: George Lessey, Frederick Esmelton, Lambert Hillyer, Tom McEvoy, Allan Croilius, Charles Pitt, Dan Mason, and Hamilton Crane.<sup>104</sup> At one point, Eastern negotiated with Lionel Barrymore to star in one of its films. Sadly, it did not come to fruition and Eastern continually lagged behind the majors in regards to its actors and its crews. But it was not entirely like a regional studio in this regard either. Flying A hired a significant amount of its actors and crew locally. Several of Flying A's personnel doing all types of jobs came directly from the community. One example is Leontine Phelan, a disgruntled piano teacher



whose swimming ability landed her as an extra in swimming scenes, and who got a pristine opportunity when Editor Roy Overbaugh, who sang with her in a choir, invited her to the studio.<sup>105</sup> She officially got her start as an editor there when people at the studio handed her “a laundry basket full of black spaghetti and said, ‘Here, make a picture out of this.’”<sup>106</sup> She and her soon-to-be husband, Robert Phelan, who began as an editor and ended up as a chief cinematographer, were some of the first people employed by Flying A. An even greater leap up the professional ladder happened with Victor Fleming, who started as a chauffeur and began his illustrious directorial career at Flying A and of course went on to direct scores of iconic films such as *Gone with the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz* (both 1939).<sup>107</sup> There could be more assimilation of locals into the crews at the Flying A than at Eastern because the hours were more accommodating. On the other hand, Bostwick initially hired all of Eastern’s personnel from out of state. To the best of my knowledge, all of Eastern’s technical crew came from outside of Providence. Most exotic were Eastern’s two leading cinematographers, John and Charles Stumar, two German brothers who spoke no English.<sup>108</sup>

Eastern and Flying A also greatly contrasted in the types of actors they hired, which impacted their relationship with the local community. Bostwick had a very theatrical ethos, and all of the initial actors he brought over with him were either from the Albee Stock company, Rhode Island’s largest theatrical repertory company at the time, or from the New York stage.<sup>109</sup> Bostwick ran Eastern like a stock company, dividing the forty actors “into three groups, each with a special director and each doing a picture.”<sup>110</sup> In fact, Eastern seemed to be quite standoffish to the local community. Martha Freeman, a local of Providence who worked for Eastern briefly and was a theatrical outsider, described her colleagues in this understanding, but ultimately unsympathetic way: “Actors at Eastern were a world apart. They lived on a false

foundation to begin with, fantasy from the ground up. They were the most conceited people in the world, but couldn't help it otherwise they couldn't do what they were supposed to."<sup>111</sup> The haughtiness might have also stemmed from the salaries they received. As maintained by Kathleen Karr, Eastern allocated \$4,000 to \$5,000 a week to distribute amongst forty actors.<sup>112</sup> In the mid-teens, theatre actors cost studios significantly more money, even though by and large, their films did not perform well at the box office since audiences' wanted younger, more recognizable screen-bred stars.<sup>113</sup> On the other hand, Flying A distributed \$1,000 amongst twenty actors per week, a majority of whom were not theatre actors.<sup>114</sup>

The actors of Flying A were more fondly remembered by the Santa Barbarans than the thespians at Eastern. According to Leontine Phelan, Flying A personnel were a "very friendly lot of people."<sup>115</sup> She recalled many nights when she, Overbaugh, Fleming, and leading Flying A actress and Santa Barbara native Charlotte Burton would fraternize.<sup>116</sup> Vivian Rich, one of Flying A's leading actresses, knew a local girl, Loiz Huyck, and recruited her and mentored her to be her makeup girl.<sup>117</sup> Flying A actors interacted socially, such as having their own baseball players and playing against local baseball teams on Sundays.<sup>118</sup> Kolb and Dill, two of Flying A's top comedians were a part of a local chorus, the Orange Globe Review.<sup>119</sup> Huyck recalled frequently attending the dance socials that took place at the ballroom Edgerly Court, where most of the actors resided. According to Huyck, "it was our only medium of social exchange for the youngsters because most of us were pretty well supervised, and we didn't go out on [the] beach...or wahooing around in the automobiles."<sup>120</sup> Isaac Bonilla, who was an adolescent working as a stableboy, said that he remained friendly with many of the people from the Flying A.<sup>121</sup> This included Charlotte Burton, who gave Bonilla a significant amount of her memorabilia.<sup>122</sup> Burton's is an uplifting story. Burton worked steadily in bit and supporting roles

in Flying A pictures, until she caught on with the public with her scene-stealing performance as the villainess in the serial *Diamonds in the Sky* (1915).<sup>123</sup> From then on she became a leading lady and acted in a total of over 120 films.<sup>124</sup> Perhaps the closest Eastern ever got to a Charlotte Burton type was Martha Freeman, the only local of whom I am aware that had a career beyond an extra.

Martha Freeman, a conventional Rhode Island woman, who had no prior acting experience, or even any knowledge that the studio existed, accompanied a friend to visit Grace Fryer, an actress working at Eastern.<sup>125</sup> Watching Fryer's "hammy" acting, Freeman decided to ask for a job at the Front Office, as she felt her abilities were on par with Fryer.<sup>126</sup> She began as a bit player and adopted the stage name Martha Nelson, on films such as *The Minister*, a film of which she was not particularly fond, and *The Red Petticoat* (1915), a Western, making \$2 a day a salary with which she was pleased and appearing in several of the location scenes.<sup>127</sup> This seems to be a fair salary, as Gloria Swanson who worked as an extra in Essanay pictures starting in 1914 was similarly enthusiastic about making \$13.25 a week.<sup>128</sup> Freeman quickly met and became friendly with a few of the personnel. George Bunny, brother of the first major film comedy star John Bunny (to whom he bore an uncanny resemblance) and one of Eastern's leading comedians, took Freeman aside and directed her to Hall's Drugstore on Westminster Street, the only shop which sold the necessary theatrical makeup.<sup>129</sup> These contacts recommended her to Bostwick, whom she described as a "big, robust, pompous man," who signed her to a contract and increased her weekly salary to \$25.<sup>130</sup> She had one prime role in the film *Cap'n Eri* (1915), starring George Bunny, in which she played the ingénue role of Elsie, the schoolteacher. However, this was not enough to get her a script- only the leads received scripts- so she bought the book to understand the role better.<sup>131</sup>

Ultimately, she had neither the personality nor the motivation to survive at Eastern. The first major incident happened after the release of *Eri*. She yet again moved up the ladder and received the ingénue lead in an unknown film that was supposed to star Lionel Barrymore, who refused, considering her to be an unknown.<sup>132</sup> Then George Le Mare was cast, but he too refused, because she stood four inches taller than he did.<sup>133</sup> It seems as though this film was scrapped. Then, Freeman fought with director Lambert Hillyer, on the set of another unknown film, losing the part. She then incurred the wrath of Lydia Knott, an actress for Eastern and Hillyer's mother, who supposedly became vicious whenever anyone had a disagreement with her son.<sup>134</sup> A fight with Harry Myers, over yet another unknown film part, pushed Freeman over the edge. She decided not to go with Eastern when they relocated to Florida in the winter of 1915, and forever turned her back on show business.<sup>135</sup>

Eastern, like Flying A, suffered from personnel defections to Hollywood. Flying A, with its proximity to Hollywood, faced a quick turnaround of staff, some of whom wanted greater stardom while others simply wanted more consistent job opportunities. Over the course of its years of operation, The Flying A lost famous, and sometimes infamous, personnel to Hollywood such as Allan Dwan, Victor Fleming, Jack Kerrigan, Wallace Reid, Marshall Neilan, and Mary Miles Minter. The same loss, though to a lesser extent, happened at Eastern, where some of the important talent also left for Hollywood, predominantly for more prominent prospects. The list of talent that left Eastern for Hollywood begins with the fascinating and industrious female screenwriter Beta Brueil, who wrote (and possibly directed) *My Lady of the Lilacs*. She went to Hollywood where she wrote feature films, including one for Theda Bara. Lambert Hillyer, a director, who shortly after his feud with Martha Freeman, became recognized for his work on Eastern's westerns, was recruited by Hollywood, enjoying modest success there first as the

director for William S. Hart (one of the big Western matinee idols at the time, although heading towards the end of his career at this point) vehicles. Later Hillyer directed several B-movies for Columbia and Monogram in the 1930s and 1940s before ending his career in television during the 1950s. Harry Myers and Rosemary Theby (whom Bowser cites as being the first screen vamp before Theda Bara made it a popular archetype),<sup>136</sup> a famous duo that enjoyed popularity at Universal before coming to Eastern,<sup>137</sup> quickly returned to Universal, where they ended up with many uncredited bit parts for the rest of their careers.<sup>138</sup> I believe one of the crucial reasons for Eastern's obscurity, except maybe among some hard core early film aficionados, is that none of the people associated with it established a legacy in Hollywood like some at Flying A were able to do.

At the same time, Eastern inherited some people whose careers were sliding. Two of their leading stars, described by Karr as "old timers," were comedians George Bunny and Dan Mason, who came from the failing Edison and Biograph studios.<sup>139</sup> George Bunny is a perfect case of Eastern's wanting to compete on the level of the majors but displaying regional skills. One of Bostwick's major selling points to the press was that George bore an uncanny resemblance to his late and infinitely more famous comedian brother John and the studio executives predicted that he would be equally famous.<sup>140</sup> But instead of promoting Bunny in the more prestigious feature format, Eastern placed George Bunny in a series of one-reelers and the fame predicted for him never materialized. Similarly, Eastern acquired director George Lessey, who worked for Universal on King Baggott features, in a bidding war after his contract expired with his previous studio.<sup>141</sup> Lessey's subsequent work was obscured soon after this move to Eastern and he has not been included in any of the Universal histories.

In a time of monumental industrial change, Eastern created its own doom by failing to vertically integrate. Instead it aligned itself with the old-fashioned General Film Company, the last incarnation of the MPPC, to distribute its films and maintained its failing corporate model. Flying A similarly failed for its alignment with Mutual to distribute its films. Vertical integration, the ownership of production, distribution and exhibition, was part of the triple threat that gave the majors total control over their product and gave their films a certain level of prestige. Eastern never integrated vertically and thus their films never received an apt opportunity to shine as they were clumped together with a whole group of films from other studios under the General Film distribution umbrella.

Not having secure venues meant that even with a distributor, Eastern had to hustle their films to a series of exhibitors, and this did not guarantee that they would sell all their films. For instance, *MPW* reported that the company “won quite a significant little victory” when they sold the tantalizingly-titled *Where’s My Nightie?* (1917), one out of eight of their one-reel comedies, to an exhibitor in Philadelphia for a “solid” three days.<sup>142</sup> This certainly seems to indicate Eastern’s other prospects were dim if this is considered a “victory,” especially considering they did not have a high output of films. It is impossible to say how much exposure Eastern’s (or Jaxon’s or Sparkle’s, the names under which they were being distributed starting in 1917) films received around the world, but Rhode Island never saw any of its films until almost ninety years later when the Columbus Theatre showed a print of *My Lady of the Lilacs*.

To make matters worse, Eastern had a strong financial investment in the economically failing General Film. In 1919, Eastern was the second highest creditor (Essanay, the studio where Chaplin was a huge star before striking out on his own in 1918, was the highest) to General’s Contracting Company.<sup>143</sup> In the mid-teens, most of the executives associated with

General Film were resigned to their company's doom and ready to write-off their assets, but Frank Tichenor persuaded them to stay in the film industry, and kept them afloat using Eastern's name and resources.<sup>144</sup> Sources are split on a major point; Karr and Freeman claim that Peck lost his entire investment while Krows and historian Richard Alan Nelson assert that Tichenor managed to salvage the investment of Peck and the other financiers.<sup>145</sup> Regardless, Eastern or General Film or both ceased to continue in the motion picture industry, and none of these sources indicate that anybody made a profit worth their investment, simply that at best, they broke even, which in the mind of a capitalist is the same as failure.

Eastern lagged behind the major studios in the types of films it made, predominantly one-reel comedies. One-reelers were not bad for business per-se. As Richard Alan Nelson reminds readers, even in the 1910s, when features dominated the market, "despite their neglect by scholars, these weekly one- and two- reel releases proved important both to audiences and exhibitors who relied on them to complete an attractive supplement to the playbill of feature, newsreel, comedy, and scenic or comedy films."<sup>146</sup> That word "supplement" is essential. Studios such as Universal produced droves of short subjects, but they also created feature-length films to balance out the screening. Eastern, on the other hand, only had forty-eight one-reelers to offer exhibitors for the first few months.<sup>147</sup> Eastern started to produce five-reel features for the next year (*Partners of the Tide*, *The Red Petticoat*, *Next*, *Cap'n Eri*, *The Minister*, *A Christmas Story*, *Peaceful Valley*, and *The Return of Eve*, all 1915) but only a handful of them, certainly nowhere near the output of say Paramount's 100 features in 1914.<sup>148</sup> However, judging by the material available to me, Eastern's output of features and other prominent works decreased to three for the remainder of its existence. This included two features, *Strife* (1917) and *The Rich Slave* (1921), and a patriotic twelve-part serial, based on articles in the *Providence Journal*, *A*

*Daughter of Uncle Sam* (1918), about a girl with gumption (played by supposedly famous, but now completely unknown Jane Vance) who fights off German spies.<sup>149</sup> Other than *Cap'n Eri* for its explosion of a house or *Partners of the Tide* for its purchasing of a schooner (this was enough to catch the attention of the film-snubbing *New York Times*), none of these other films received any press coverage. The quality of these features produced in the regionally-sized and equipped Eastern paled in comparison to those from Hollywood.

At a time when the public craved sensational films that flirted dangerously with waywardness, Eastern was determined to make wholesome fare. Eastern asserted multiple times that they would be “the first company that will make an attempt to entirely eliminate the slapstick and all other forms of archaic humor from its comedy releases.”<sup>150</sup> *The Mutt* and *Diamonds* certainly fit this bill for they are tame, too tame. *Diamonds* deserves mention for two things: the interior sets reek of staginess like the early film fare of 1900 while the exteriors outside the windows are clearly a two-dimensional painted backdrop. Also the ending is hilarious (probably unintentionally) for the flippant way the filmmakers treat the death of a thief as the film rushes to its happy ending.

Resembling many regional studios, Eastern moved its operations to warmer weather, in this case, Jacksonville, Florida, during the winter months and produced films under the Jaxon logo beginning in 1917. For whatever reason, Eastern completely contradicted its promise to “eliminate slapstick” when it relocated to Jacksonville, almost exclusively generating slapstick comedy shorts. When Tichenor bought the Vim Comedy Company’s studio in Jacksonville in 1917- which failed because the East and West coast executives Louis Burstein and Mark Ditenfass embezzled the company funds- he continued producing several of their comedy series including Pokes and Jabs and Fin and Haddies under the Jaxon logo, as well as starting his own



line of one-reelers, known as Sparkle Comedies.<sup>151</sup> The ads for Pokes and Jabs, the most publicized of the entire Jaxon crop, emphasize the physical stunts and the “galvanic” humor, although nothing distinctive comes through like Chaplin’s iconic Tramp character.<sup>152</sup> The reviewers for *MPW* frequently use a variation of the phrase “a typical Pokes and Jabs slapstick comedy,” and for the most part, the reviews are decent, but hardly ever enthusiastic.<sup>153</sup> In a review for *Breaking In* (1917) the reviewer noted that “it has a few laughs and is on par with the other numbers in this series.”<sup>154</sup> In reading the summaries provided by Jaxon for these films, I found them tired and clichéd with a moralistic, neat ending. The one exception was a short entitled *Devilled Crabs* (1917), which according to the press release, is about Pokes getting fired by Jabs. Before going home, he stops at the bar and drowns his sorrow in beer and devilled crabs. When he finally reaches his house, he sits by the fireplace and in his drunken state, hallucinates the figure of Satan superimposed with Jabs’ face, seducing him to revel in sin. When he awakens, his wife announces that she has made devilled crabs for dinner. Unlike the others, this one has an ambiguous, perhaps slightly sinister ending: “Pokes’ reply is left to the imagination, but there is a lot of broken dishes in the yard the next morning.”<sup>155</sup> For a change, the *MPW* gave this entry an enthusiastic review, calling it “one of the best numbers in which these comedians have appeared.”<sup>156</sup>

Eastern did not remain in Jacksonville for very long, returning to Providence permanently towards the end of 1917.<sup>157</sup> Tichenor’s hopes of revitalizing the Rhode Island branch were severely hampered when a fire partially destroyed the Providence studios on August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1917, leaving damages amounting to somewhere between \$100,000 to \$150,000.<sup>158</sup> Most of my sources on Eastern abandon it after this traumatic event. But it staggered on for a few more years, with its last known fiction film being *The Rich Slave* in 1921.

## A Sampling of Eastern's Output

On Friday February 22<sup>nd</sup>, I was fortunate enough to view four of the films made in Rhode Island by the Eastern Film Corporation at the Rhode Island Historical Society Library:

*Diamonds, My Lady of the Lilacs, Partners of the Tide, and The Mutt.* This small sampling of contextual evidence provides great insight into the stature of Eastern. These films show their age as well as the volatility of the film stock, as many frames are almost indiscernible due to the nitrate erosion which creates black splotches on the films. The only reason I chose these four films was due to their availability, as they have been transferred to DVD or VHS, while the others remain on film, which makes them more complicated to view. While these films certainly strive for prestige on the level of Hollywood and the majors, and there are commendable, interesting moments, on the whole they never could compete, held back by the regionally-sized resources. Here I will supply an analysis of two of Eastern's most significant and most ambitious efforts: *My Lady of the Lilacs* and *Partners of the Tide*.

*My Lady of the Lilacs* suffers immensely from nitrate decomposition. The first few minutes have a nasty black blotch down the middle of the frame, in many cases blocking the characters and the action. Nobody except writer Beta Breuil was credited, which leads me to believe she directed as well as wrote the scenario. According to James DaMico, the RIHS archivist in charge of the film collection, this film proves to be a big hit with audiences today in spite of all the blemishes. And I can see why since it has a compelling narrative, in spite of the fact that it seems to be missing a few reels.<sup>159</sup> In my opinion, it is the most original of the films I saw. It follows the lives of Myra Craig, a country girl who aspires to be a writer, and Stanton

King, a temperamental, starving artist. In an interesting twist, this film presents a reverie near the beginning, with Stanton and Myra in a park where Stanton, taken with a sleeping Myra, paints her portrait. In the same reverie her mother comes out, and admiringly calls it “My Lady of the Lilacs.” This reverie has strongly resonated with Stanton. In an art exhibition, he steadfastly refuses to sell the portrait to a wealthy art collector. Meanwhile Myra, who just received a telegram of rejection from a book publisher, decides to leave Arnold’s Mill (now Cumberland) and venture to the city to pursue her dreams. Myra, who is hustling as an office clerk, meets a rich man, the same patron who tried to buy Myra’s portrait, and decides to marry him. But interestingly her motive is not so much to get rich quick, like the clichéd plot of a girl from the wrong side of the tracks marrying up and into society, but rather to have his influence help advance her writing career.

The engagement between Myra and the rich man is broken, for undisclosed reasons (or maybe the footage depicting it was lost), leaving Myra to search for work again. Although Stanton is at the depths of despair, unable to pay the rent, he still refuses to part with this magical portrait. Serendipitously, both dejected, they decide to head to the park depicted in the reverie sequence. Although they have never actually met, they immediately recognize each other and embrace. There is an interesting use of the superimposition. When Myra first spots Stanton, we see a superimposition of him depicted as a Knight in shining armor to convey visually how he is her savior without the use of an intertitle.

The ambiguous ending could be interpreted as either progressive or sexist. The final scene shows Stanton painting Myra as a Madonna draped in white with a baby. Some might see that as a very conventional ending, fetishizing Myra as a domestic figure. It could be argued that the baby belongs to Myra and Stanton, although the film does not tell us that they married. Also,

these viewers might be deterred that the focus remains on Stanton's career. However, I believe that has as much to do with the fact that the act of painting is more cinematic than that of writing. And there is something of an equality between the two as his painting her portrait demonstrates a special relationship where both receive artistic stimulation from each other; the film shows no indication of Myra abandoning her ambition.

Although the production values are unspectacular, *Lilac*'s distinction comes from its progressive content values. I cannot think of many early films that show a woman who wants to have both marriage and a career. Perhaps Breuil, who had a vibrant career, empathized with Myra in a way that many of the screenwriters could not. I cannot go beyond conjecture since all my information about Breuil comes primarily from a short article in *MPW*. Her writing career began in her thirties when her stage aspirations did not materialize, and eventually she worked her way up to being the story editor at Vitagraph, one of the studios a part of the MPPC.<sup>160</sup> Burned out by the strenuous workload, she freelanced from around 1915- early 1916, a period in which she wrote multiple films for Eastern, some of which are on the RIHS' adoption list for preservation.<sup>161</sup> Shortly, she became the story editor for features at Mirror, another obscure studio, and then wrote features in Hollywood; the last known one was in 1918 called *When a Woman Sins* starring Theda Bara for Fox.<sup>162</sup> After 1918, I was unable to find any records pertaining to Breuil.

*Partners of the Tide* quite overtly relegates women to a narrow role. The Allen sisters, two middle aged spinsters (who bear some physical resemblance to the murderous sisters of *Arsenic and Old Lace* and have many of the same mannerisms, minus the murderous streak and subsequently the rich characterization), have adopted their nephew Bradley (William J. O'Neill), the protagonist. An example of the quaint view towards women can be seen in the close ups on

their sad faces interspersed with shots of a young Brad sleeping. The intertitle reads, “In every woman’s heart lies a dormant hope of motherhood.” The sisters are the butt of quite a few jokes. When Captain Ezra, the sea captain who takes Brad under his wing, comes to court Clara, the housekeeper with whom he has a fling, the intertitle states “Ezra visits Allen home but not to see the old maids.”

In all fairness, the female characters are not really the film’s main focus. Neither is the story for that matter. *Partners* follows the most basic classical Hollywood narrative pattern: a protagonist who faces and conquers a challenge and a related plot of a heterosexual coupling. It has a single protagonist, Bradley, an orphan who since childhood wants to be a sea captain. When he grows up he works for Ezra, a veteran sea captain who decides to go into business for himself. The major obstacle is that they have to deliver a large order to Boston on a tight deadline. There is a second plot line with Brad in love with a sweet girl named Augusta (Katherine Patch). Naturally strong, brave, and virtuous, Brad has a nefarious antagonist named Sam Hammond (Joseph McManus) who also loves Augusta and goes out of his way to disrupt Brad’s love life and sea faring.

Out of the fifty-odd minutes of this film, there are only two climactic scenes that really matter, the explosion scene and the resurrection of the underwater ship. This is immediately apparent by the high production values here. Prior to these climactic segments, the editing and cinematography are a little on the dodgy side, with jerky match on action, and the camera quite static and generally remaining in a medium long shot. However the explosion of the schooner is especially impressive on many levels. It successfully integrates large scale parallel editing, cutting between Brad, dejected in his room, Captain Ezra and Clara spooning in the kitchen, a crowd of onlookers on the beach, and Sam trapped in the dynamite filled schooner. The editing

seamlessly connects all four of them to create tension and it neatly transitions between varying shot scales; it is deftly paced, starting a little slow, building up to quicker shots. The camera takes multiple angles on the sinking ship and Brad rescuing Sam. It almost rivals the climactic ice-floe scene in D. W. Griffith's film *Way Down East* (1920).

### **A Conclusion: Eastern After the Fire**

Tichenor retained Eastern until the late 1920s, changing its focus to making non-theatrical films for private industries and organizations. By his own admission, Frank Tichenor was primarily a corporate businessman who regarded the medium of motion pictures as a means for “advertising purposes.”<sup>163</sup> When all the corporate heads of General Film abandoned the film industry, Tichenor returned to his business roots and transformed Eastern into a studio that produced commissioned films. He seemed to have a talent and enthusiasm for this type of work. Eastern attracted a myriad clientele including DuPont, the American Wallpaper Association, the National Fur Association, and the American Society for the Control of Cancer.<sup>164</sup> For the latter client, Eastern made *The Reward of Courage* in 1921, one of the first known educational films about cancer prevention. Tichenor wrote an article advocating for more businesses to advertise through the mode of films as a means of generating revenue since “motion pictures are actions and ‘actions speak louder than words.’”<sup>165</sup> In some respects he was ahead of his time in that he made campaign films for politicians, sensing that candidates could use films to both increase their exposure to constituents but also show charisma to make them popular.<sup>166</sup> Tichenor hired many excellent craftsmen, who went on to become famous like cinematographer Harry Stradling who went to work for English producer Alexander Korda on many films including *The Citadel*

and *Pygmalion* (both 1938).<sup>167</sup> Ultimately, Tichenor disbanded Eastern in 1929 with the advent of the talkies as he felt that he could not pay for the expensive equipment with a non-theatrical business.<sup>168</sup> He subsequently entered the publishing world and bought the magazine *Aero Digest* in 1932.<sup>169</sup> According to Krows, Tichenor always wanted to return to the motion picture industry, “once he got this publishing situation in hand.”<sup>170</sup> He never did. Frank Tichenor died in 1950, still in charge of *Aero*.<sup>171</sup>

Similar to a great deal of America, Eastern strove to reap the benefits and status of capitalism. Eastern, along with the majority of Americans, did not attain this goal for a number of reasons. The studio heads were straight-laced corporate types who simply did not have the showmanship required to provide its films with the magic that permeated Hollywood’s output. Not being in Hollywood played a significant part in Eastern’s marginalization and eventual demise as Providence was simply too small of an ocean in terms of resources and talent; every time Eastern had somebody exemplary, they could not prevent him/her from going to Hollywood. Also, they had a very regional way of thinking big but acting small and never put up the necessary capitalization. Consequently, Eastern never rose above a regional level and like many others quietly slipped into obscurity when the sound era required more than they could give with their meager, regional resources.

For many reasons I believe studying Eastern is not only interesting, but relevant too. Although many (usually older) cultural critics tend to decry the internet as a device that breeds misinformation, procrastination, and depravity among other things, I would not have been able to undertake this project without it as many of my supporting details came from digitalized collections of trade journals. While the internet certainly has its share of useless junk, its accessibility and centrality of resources are invaluable to historians and researchers, especially

for those who do not have the resources to travel around to various archives. By no means do I advocate the obliteration of these highly valuable historical depositories or traditional methods of research such as searching through microfilm reels and consulting books (on paper), as much of my foundational knowledge about Eastern came from these sources. I believe the two approaches can be happily combined in order to provide a richer, more complete story. Hopefully several lesser-known, underdog histories will emerge from the availability of resources. As local heritage is coming back in vogue, this is the perfect opportunity to include Eastern into the narrative of film history, resurrecting it from its status as a footnote in history.

## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 104.

<sup>2</sup> Dana Driskel, "The American Film Company: 1910-1923," in *The Flying A: Silent Films in Santa Barbara* (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Historical Museum, 2012), 9.



<sup>3</sup>I used the *Providence Journal (PJ)* in the reference section of the Downtown Providence Public Library; *Variety* at Brown University's Rockefeller Library; *Motion Picture World (MPW)* and *Motography (Motog)* are available on the Early Cinema Collection in the Media History Digital Library. <http://mediahistoryproject.org/earlycinema/>

<sup>4</sup>For a detailed record of the film, visit: "Digital Collections." US National Library of Medicine. <http://collections.nlm.nih.gov/muradora/objectView.action?pid.nlm.nlmuid-101570969-vid> (accessed 2 Mar. 2013).

<sup>5</sup>Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 3.

<sup>6</sup>Allen and Gomery, 14.

<sup>7</sup>Allen and Gomery, 7 and 10.

<sup>8</sup>Allen and Gomery, 9.

<sup>9</sup>Allen and Gomery, 9-10.

<sup>10</sup>Allen and Gomery, 10.

<sup>11</sup>Allen and Gomery, 10.

<sup>12</sup>Allen and Gomery, 13.

<sup>13</sup>Allen and Gomery, 14.

<sup>14</sup>Allen and Gomery, 13.

<sup>15</sup>Allen and Gomery, 14.

<sup>16</sup>Roy Bhaskar qtd. in Allen and Gomery, 15.

<sup>17</sup>Allen and Gomery, 16.

<sup>18</sup>Allen and Gomery, 16-17.

<sup>19</sup>Allen and Gomery, 5.

<sup>20</sup>David A. Cook, "International Expansion, 1907-1918," in *A History of Narrative Film* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 10.

<sup>21</sup>Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 22.

<sup>22</sup>See both Bowser, 23 and I. G. Edmonds, *Big U: Universal in the Silent Days* (Cranbury, NJ: AS Barnes and Company, 1977), 22.

<sup>23</sup>Koszarski, "Making Movies," in *The Classical Hollywood Reader* ed. Steve Neale (New York: Routledge, 2012), 44.

<sup>24</sup>Bowser, 29.

<sup>25</sup>That percentage comes from David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010): 29.

<sup>26</sup>Bowser, 76.

<sup>27</sup>Bowser, 83.

<sup>28</sup>Edmonds, 29.

<sup>29</sup>Edmonds, 33.

<sup>30</sup>See <http://www.wcfr.comarts.wisc.edu/collections/featured/aitken/1910s/>.

<sup>31</sup>Bowser, 191.

<sup>32</sup>Bowser, 21.

<sup>33</sup>Bowser, 204.

<sup>34</sup>Bowser, 204.

<sup>35</sup>Bowser, 191.

<sup>36</sup>According to early film historian Steve Neale, "the length of 'silent' films was generally measured in reels rather than hours or minutes because projection speeds could vary." See Steve Neale, "Introduction," in *The Classical Hollywood Reader*, ed. by Steve Neale (New York: Routledge, 2012), 21.

<sup>37</sup>John Douglas Eames, *The Paramount Story* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1985), Introduction, np.

<sup>38</sup>Cook, 39.

<sup>39</sup>Michael J. Quinn, "Paramount and the Early Feature Distribution: 1914-1921," *Film History*, 11 (1999): 99.

<sup>40</sup>Lasky's misguided attempted to outdo the Ziegfeld Follies. See Eames, np.

<sup>41</sup>Things started less than auspiciously for this film, as the first print had a severe technical glitch. Luckily, a contact of Lasky's arranged to get it fixed and it played to good notices and a steady profit. See Eames, np.

<sup>42</sup>As Zukor was an egomaniac, Lasky naturally took a demotion and worked under Zukor, which was something all of his peers were unwilling to do, hence the partnership which originally consisted of many different studios and heads such as Samuel Goldfish, eventually coalesced into Zukor and Lasky. See Eames, np.

<sup>43</sup> Originally, their studio was named Famous Players-Lasky, but they decided that the production company needed a more elegant and catchy name. See Eames, np.

<sup>44</sup> John Belton, "The Studio System," in *American Cinema American Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2005), 71.

<sup>45</sup> This practice did not change until later when the success of feature films, particularly Italian super spectacles such as *Cabiria* (1909) and *Quo Vadis?* (1911), was irrefutable; this significantly contributed to the demise of nickelodeons which, according to Bowser, did not have the resources to update their technology. See Bowser, 192 and 210. Steve Neale, however, suggests that the nickelodeons' refusal to show multiple reels had more to do with their own stubbornness than anything else as "even when, as was the norm by 1912, reels were released simultaneously and most nickelodeons were equipped with more than one projector." From Neale, 21.

<sup>46</sup> He first gained notice with the owners with his ostentatious store displays; they promptly promoted him to store manager. See Bernard F. Dick, *City of Dreams: The Making and Remaking of Universal Pictures* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 13.

<sup>47</sup> Originally called Yankee Film Co., Laemmle felt that the name might alienate the Southern market, so he held a contest for the best sounding Greek name. After that failed, he settled on IMP because of its catchy abbreviation and its possibilities for a fetching logo.

<sup>48</sup> There is a discrepancy between sources on the accuracy of this claim. I. G. Edmonds seems to accept this assertion, while Bernard Dick openly challenges its legitimacy. See Edmonds, 23 and Dick, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Dick, 36.

<sup>50</sup> Dick, 40.

<sup>51</sup> Dick, 40.

<sup>52</sup> Clive Hirschorn, *The Universal Story* (New York: Hamlyn, 2000), 12.

<sup>53</sup> Some conjectured that Laemmle became disillusioned with the star system when Florence Lawrence and Mary Pickford, two of his most important discoveries, left for higher salaries and more creative control at other rivaling studios. See Dick 28-32 for an excellent account about the oft-forgotten Florence Lawrence and the infamous streetcar publicity scandal, where an "anonymous" source falsely released a story to the press that Lawrence, previously known to the public as "The Biograph Girl," was hit and killed by a streetcar. Universal, who recently acquired Lawrence's talents, loudly accused the Trust for this misinformation. It is more likely that Bob Cochrane, Universal's PR man and Laemmle's right-hand man, planted the story with Laemmle's and Lawrence's knowledge and full-participation. See Edmonds 54 and 80 for an interesting description about the battles between Laemmle and the ambitious and business-savvy Mary Pickford and her mother.

<sup>54</sup> Edmonds, 80.

<sup>55</sup> Cowl, a highly respected actress, did make something of a motion picture comeback in the tail end of the 1940s and the early 1950s in prominent supporting roles with major stars such as Claudette Colbert in *The Secret Fury* (1950), Barbara Stanwyck in *No Man of Her Own* (1950), and Bette Davis in *Payment on Demand* (1951). Edmonds, 58.

<sup>56</sup> Cook, 38.

<sup>57</sup> Stephen Lawton, *Santa Barbara's Flying A Studio*, (Santa Barbara: Fithian Press, 1997), 35.

<sup>58</sup> Koszarski, "Making Movies," 44.

<sup>59</sup> Koszarski, "Making Movies," 44.

<sup>60</sup> Koszarski, "Making Movies," 44.

<sup>61</sup> Lawton, 42.

<sup>62</sup> Lawton, 50 and 109.

<sup>63</sup> Lawton, 48-9.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel Calderon, "Foreword," in *The Flying A: Silent Films in Santa Barbara* (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Historical Museum, 2012), 1.

<sup>65</sup> Anonymous, "Figures and Notes," in *The Flying A: Silent Films in Santa Barbara* (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Historical Museum, 2012), 30.

<sup>66</sup> Lawton, 99.

<sup>67</sup> Lawton, who saw *Purity*, speculates that significant alterations were made to appease the censors since in his opinion, the film is very tame and polite, even in a brief scene where Munson's character is modeling nude. For a more detailed description about the controversy see Lawton, 76-77.

- <sup>68</sup> Film historians and buffs are more familiar with Minter's years at Paramount, although Lawton argues that her roles in *Flying A* were more fruitful than at Paramount, which basically relegated her as a second-rate Mary Pickford prototype. See Lawton, 78.
- <sup>69</sup> See Driskel, 13 and Lawton, 51-52.
- <sup>70</sup> Lawton, 51-52.
- <sup>71</sup> Lawton, 52.
- <sup>72</sup> Anonymous, "Figures and Notes," 60.
- <sup>73</sup> Unlike the leading stars and star technicians, many of the lower rank personnel did not have steady contracts, and lived hand to mouth. See Driskel, 18.
- <sup>74</sup> Driskel, 12.
- <sup>75</sup> Driskel, 19.
- <sup>76</sup> *Acts and Resolves Passed By the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations* (Providence: E. L. Freeman Co., State Printers, 1915): 645  
<http://books.google.com/books?id=IbcwAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA645&lpg=PA645&dq=elwood+f+bostwick&source=bl&ots=IDyiJfFEJY&sig=0uqylZtpcLhk4GglFc6fPjhC0js&hl=en&sa=X&ei=IELnUKKoG8uLrQHJnIFY&ved=0CE8Q6AEwCTgK#v=onepage&q=elwood%20f%20bostwick&f=false> (accessed Dec. 2012).
- <sup>77</sup> Kathleen Karr, "Flicks Produced in Rhode Island," *PJ*, 7 Feb. 1971, np.
- <sup>78</sup> "Film Company Incorporated," *PJ*, 12 Nov. 1915, 12.
- <sup>79</sup> Cook, 38.
- <sup>80</sup> Karr, "Flicks Produced," np.
- <sup>81</sup> "New Producing Company," *MPW*, 4 Sept. 1915, 1624 and "Eastern Film Corporation's Debut," *Motog*, 4 Sept. 1915, 463.
- <sup>82</sup> "Movies with the Providence Label," *PJ*, 30 May 1915, S5, 5.
- <sup>83</sup> "Bostwick A Bankrupt," *New York Times*, 29 Apr. 1914, 13.
- <sup>84</sup> Kathleen Karr, "Hooray for Providence, Wilkes-Barre, Saranac Lake, and Hollywood," in *The American Film Heritage: Impressions from the American Film Institute Archives* (Washington DC: Acropolis Books Ltd., 1972), 108.
- <sup>85</sup> "Movies with the Providence Label," *PJ*, 30 May 1915, S5, 5.
- <sup>86</sup> "Bostwick Resigns as General Manager," *Motog*, 14, 17 (1915): 832.
- <sup>87</sup> See *PJ* articles "How to Write a Movie," 31 Jan. 1915; "How to Write a Movie," 7 Feb. 1915; "How a Moving Picture Play is Produced," 14 Feb. 1915; "The Origin and the Development of the Moving Picture," 21 Feb. 1915; "How Chemistry Made Motion Pictures Possible," 28 Feb. 1915 (all np).
- <sup>88</sup> "Bostwick Resigns as General Manager," *Motog*, 14, 17 (1915): 832.
- <sup>89</sup> Martha Freeman in her brief time remembers working for Tichenor.
- <sup>90</sup> Kathleen Karr, "Flicks Produced," np.
- <sup>91</sup> Arthur Edwin Krows, "Motion Pictures- Not for Theatres," *The Educational Screen* (Sept. 1939): 242.
- <sup>92</sup> Krows, 242.
- <sup>93</sup> Krows, 242.
- <sup>94</sup> Krows, 243.
- <sup>95</sup> Krows, 243-44.
- <sup>96</sup> Krows, 244.
- <sup>97</sup> Krows, 243.
- <sup>98</sup> "Movies with the Providence Label," *PJ*, 30 May 1915, S5, 5.
- <sup>99</sup> "Movies with the Providence Label," *PJ*, 30 May 1915, S5, 5.
- <sup>100</sup> "Movies with the Providence Label," *PJ*, 30 May 1915, S5, 5.
- <sup>101</sup> Dick, 38.
- <sup>102</sup> Dick, 38.
- <sup>103</sup> See "Eastern Film Corporation's Debut," *Motog*, 4 Sept. 1915, 463 and "New Producing Company," *MPW*, 4 Sept. 1915, 1624.
- <sup>104</sup> *NY Dramatic Mirror*, 25 Aug. 1915, 23. However *Motog*. and *MPW* only noted seven directors, and neither provided a full list.

- <sup>105</sup> Lawton, 105; Neil Graffy, "Introduction," in *The Flying A: Silent Films in Santa Barbara* (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Historical Museum, 2012), 5.
- <sup>106</sup> Leontine Phelan qtd. in Graffy, 5.
- <sup>107</sup> Graffy, 5; Fleming won the Oscar for his directorial work on *Wind*.
- <sup>108</sup> Karr, "Flicks Produced in Rhode Island," *PJ*, np.
- <sup>109</sup> "Movies with the Providence Label," *PJ*, 30 May 1915, S5, 5.
- <sup>110</sup> "Movies with the Providence Label," *PJ*, 30 May 1915, S5, 5.
- <sup>111</sup> Martha Freeman and Kathleen Karr, "My Movie Career in Providence," *The Rhode Islander*, 26 Nov. 1972, np.
- <sup>112</sup> Karr, "Flicks Produced," np.
- <sup>113</sup> Edmonds, 58.
- <sup>114</sup> Lawton, 44.
- <sup>115</sup> Leontine Phelan qtd. in Lawton, 105.
- <sup>116</sup> Graffy, 5.
- <sup>117</sup> Lawton, 97-9.
- <sup>118</sup> Lawton, 47.
- <sup>119</sup> Lawton, 118.
- <sup>120</sup> Loiz Huyck qtd. in Lawton, 103.
- <sup>121</sup> Lawton, 120.
- <sup>122</sup> Lawton, 113.
- <sup>123</sup> Anonymous, "Notes and Figures," 52.
- <sup>124</sup> Anonymous, "Notes and Figures," 52.
- <sup>125</sup> Freeman and Karr, np.
- <sup>126</sup> Freeman and Karr, np.
- <sup>127</sup> Freeman and Karr, np.
- <sup>128</sup> Gloria Swanson, *Swanson on Swanson* (New York: Random House, 1980): 34.
- <sup>129</sup> Freeman and Karr, np.
- <sup>130</sup> Freeman and Karr, np.
- <sup>131</sup> Freeman and Karr, np.
- <sup>132</sup> Freeman and Karr, np.
- <sup>133</sup> Freeman and Karr, np.
- <sup>134</sup> Freeman and Karr, np.
- <sup>135</sup> Freeman and Karr, np.
- <sup>136</sup> Bowser, 187.
- <sup>137</sup> Edmonds, 39.
- <sup>138</sup> Edmonds, 96.
- <sup>139</sup> Kathleen Karr, "Hooray for Providence," 108.
- <sup>140</sup> "New Producing Company," *MPW*, 4 Sept. 1915, 1624.
- <sup>141</sup> "Lessey Joins Eastern Film," *MPW*, 23 Oct. 1915, 622.
- <sup>142</sup> "'Sparkle' Comedies for Mastbaum," *MPW*, 28 Jul. 1917, 664.
- <sup>143</sup> "Business Records: General Film Contracting Co.," *NYT*, 19 Jun. 1919, 23.
- <sup>144</sup> Krows, 242.
- <sup>145</sup> Karr, "Flicks Produced," np; Karr and Freeman, np; Krows, 242; Richard Alan Nelson, "Before Laurel: Oliver Hardy and the Vim Comedy Company, a Studio Biography," in *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics, and Law*, vol. 2, ed. by Bruce Austin (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1986), 144.
- <sup>146</sup> Nelson, 138.
- <sup>147</sup> "Movies with the Providence Label," *PJ*, 30 May 1915, S5, 5.
- <sup>148</sup> Film titles came from Karr, *PJ*; *Motog*, 4 Sept. 1915, 463; *MPW*, 4 Sept. 1915, 1624.
- <sup>149</sup> "General Spy Expose," *MPW*, 22 Dec. 1917, 1806.
- <sup>150</sup> *NY Dramatic Mirror*, 23.
- <sup>151</sup> Nelson, 144.
- <sup>152</sup> Print ad for Pokes and Jabs set of six one-reel films: *Are Actors People?*, *Military Madness*, *A Ride for Life*, *The Rest Cure*, *The Pearls of Pauline*, and *Ploughing the Clouds*. *MPW*, 21 Jul. 1917, 358.

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- <sup>153</sup> “Comments on the Films,” *MPW*, 22 Dec. 1917, 1807.
- <sup>154</sup> “Comments on the Films,” *MPW*, 15 Dec. 1917, 1648.
- <sup>155</sup> “Stories of the Films,” *MPW*, 6 Oct. 1917, 124.
- <sup>156</sup> “Comments on the Films,” *MPW*, 10 Nov. 1917, 880.
- <sup>157</sup> Nelson, 144.
- <sup>158</sup> A 1917 Providence Journal article claims the damage to be \$100,000. See “Eastern Film Co’s Loss Estimated at \$100,000,” *PJ*, 24 Aug. 1917, 3. Karr estimates the damage at \$150,000 . See Karr, “Flicks Produced,” np.
- <sup>159</sup> The RIHS’ print is only about 20 minutes long.
- <sup>160</sup> “Beta Breuil with Mirror,” *MPW*, 15 Jan. 1916, 431.
- <sup>161</sup> “Beta Breuil with Mirror,” *MPW*, 15 Jan. 1916, 431. The RIHS has several locally-made films awaiting transfer to DVD. For more information about individual titles and making a donation visit, <http://www.rihs.org/grcolladoptfilm.htm>.
- <sup>162</sup> “Beta Breuil with Mirror,” *MPW*, 15 Jan. 1916, 431.
- <sup>163</sup> Frank A. Tichenor, “Motion Pictures as Trade Getters,” *The Annals of the American Academy* 128, no. 217 (Nov. 1926): 84.
- <sup>164</sup> Tichenor, 85; Krows, 245.
- <sup>165</sup> Tichenor, 84.
- <sup>166</sup> Tichenor, 91.
- <sup>167</sup> Krows, 245.
- <sup>168</sup> Krows, 244; “Frank A. Tichenor,” *Variety*, 10 May 1950, 55.
- <sup>169</sup> Krows, 244.
- <sup>170</sup> Krows, 244-5.
- <sup>171</sup> “Frank A. Tichenor,” *Variety*, 10 May 1950, 55.