A CELLULOID STORY
NEW JERSEY’S FILMMAKING HISTORY

AN EXHIBITION OF FILMMAKING HISTORY FROM 1880-1920
IN HONOR OF NEW JERSEY’S 350TH ANNIVERSARY
CURATED BY SARAH HART AND ROMANA SCHAIFER
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 3 — FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2014

The Walsh Gallery at Seton Hall University
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Front: Pearl White rehearsing on the Palisades for The House of Hate (Pathé, 1918), with Arthur Miller at the camera

“Directing motion pictures is merely capturing life”
-Maurice Tourneur
in Variety, December 27, 1918
was a medium closely related to the ancient art of the theatre, communication styles were significantly different. The many Broadway stars that came to the New Jersey studios were challenged to find new ways of interpreting the story for a camera that could not capture sound, only intimate gestures and expressions. Cinema was a completely new art form, and the studios in New Jersey were the laboratories where this new medium was tested and refined.

This new art form was not one that could be undertaken by just a solitary individual. The complexity required to create one film need a variety of people. Writers, directors, actors, carpenters, extras, and all the other departments contributed to this collaborative process; a process that first became a complete industry in Fort Lee, New Jersey.

Once the films were produced, people from many different backgrounds enjoyed them in a community setting. While the initial moving pictures designed by Edison were intended to be a single-person viewing experience, demand quickly rose for a way for viewers to enjoy the film together through a large projection. The early movie picture houses that developed for the use of projected films introduced the cinema trips that are still a beloved community experience shared with family and friends.

The popularity of the movies and society’s demand for longer, more intricate stories allowed films to become mirrors of contemporary society. They gave people perspective to better understand themselves and their culture, as well as the lives, cares, and interests of others around the world. Now, in the years that have followed, historic movies have turned from mirrors into windows, allowing those in the present to look back on past generations and see how they shared, experienced and understood their culture.

But these windows are often broken, as the films, the places, and the stories from the past are lost, destroyed, and forgotten. So the larger film community works to preserve and record the history of its past through institutions, organizations, and individual storytelling so that we can continue to build on our predecessors’ legacies.

New Jersey’s first 350 years have been filled with thousands of important people, events, and places that have shaped it as a state. May New Jersey’s next 350 years be filled with the same spirit of cooperation, creativity, and innovation demonstrated by the filmmakers of 1880-1920.

-Sarah Hart and Romana Schaeffer, curators