



Vancouver in 1907: A Case Study of Archival Film as a Source of Local History

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Abstract

Moving images are a unique resource for the study of local history, but little early footage survives. A 1907 film of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada by pioneering cinematographer William H. Harbeck represents a prime example of the rare, tenuous nature of early film as a source of local history. An understanding of how the film was made provides interesting insights into the characteristics and historical value of early film. The discovery and restoration of Harbeck's footage in the 1990s have led to efforts to bring his film to a large audience in its centenary year. As the story illustrates, facilitating the use of this under-utilized format as an information source is a challenging goal that may ultimately be achieved through the collaborative efforts of cultural and heritage organizations.

Some of the earliest films are records of local and family history. A famous example showed workers leaving a factory. The screening of La sortie des ouvriers de l'usine Lumière at a scientific meeting in Paris on March 22, 1895 is considered by film historians to mark the first successful projection of moving images.¹ The film was made by the pioneering Lumière brothers, whose early films also included family footage of Auguste Lumière and his wife feeding their baby daughter. Although these early films were not intentionally created as historical records for future generations, archival film clearly holds exceptional potential as a resource for the study of history. As Moving Image Collections, a collaborative project of the Library of Congress, Association of Moving Image Archivists, and the National Science Foundation has stated:

¹ Richard M. Barsam, Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History, rev. and exp. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) 21.

More than a reflection of society and culture, moving images are primary documents that can serve a wide range of research purposes. The director Sydney Pollack has said that cinema is 'the most vivid and valuable record of who we were and what we were, and what we thought and what we believed. And it continues to be that.'²

The subject of this paper, an archival film depicting scenes of Canada's largest Pacific city, Vancouver, provides an outstanding example of film as a unique historical record. The film was made in 1907, a mere 12 years after the Lumière brothers' milestone film screening in Paris. In the intervening years, moving pictures had become highly popular. While the first films had been very short (no more than 30 seconds in length), and had depicted very ordinary subjects, such as people at work or walking through the park, the growing popularity of the medium and the decline of its novelty value had spurred a rapid increase both in the length of films and range of themes. By the early years of the twentieth century, films were five to ten minutes in length and portrayed subjects including royal and state occasions, sports, disasters, war, and travel. Many were records of local history.

Very few of these early films are still in existence. The exact scale of loss is not known, but sources suggest that as much as 90% of early film has not survived.³ The loss has been attributed to several factors, including the extreme fragility of nitrate-based film, the lack of film archives before the 1930s, and perhaps most importantly, the unfortunate fact that at the time the films were made, they were considered ephemeral. In her book Keepers of the Frame: The Film Archives, Penelope Houston explains that:

Films disappeared because no one considered it worth the trouble of keeping them after they had served their short time in the cinemas. Efforts were made to hold on to anything with long-term reissue value, but much of the rest slid quietly out of circulation. They were made in all sorts of conditions by all sorts of small companies. The companies went out of business; the laboratories in which the original negatives were stored went broke, or the negatives were worn out by being used as a source of new copies."⁴

² "Remembrance Wall: Presumed Lost," Moving Image Collections: A Window to the World's Moving Images, 1 March 2005, Moving Image Collections, 7 April 2007 <http://mic.imtc.gatech.edu/remembrance_wall/remembrance_presumedlost.htm>.

³ According to Penelope Houston, "it is generally assumed that some 75 to 80 per cent of all silent cinema has been lost, most of it gone beyond recall unless caches still exist in the unexplored recesses of the archives or in the holdings of private collectors" -- Keepers of the Frame: The Film Archives (London: British Film Institute, 1994)15.

Moving Image Collections asserts that "only 10% of pre-1929 films survive" ("Participate in MIC and Moving Image Preservation," Moving Image Collections: a Window to the World's Moving Images, 16 March 2005, Moving Image Collections, 18 March 2007 <http://mic.imtc.gatech.edu/programmers_portal/exhibit_participate.htm>).


Silent Era website states that "educated guesses estimate that only 10 to 15 percent of the films made during the silent era survive today" ("Presumed Lost," Silent Era, 21 February 2007, Silent Era: The Silent Film Website, 8 April 2007 <www.silentera.com/lost/index.html>).

⁴ Penelope Houston, Keepers of the Frame: The Film Archives (London: British Film Institute, 1994)15.

Due to the huge scale of loss, every surviving fragment of early film is significant. The film of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada⁵ made by American filmmaker William H. Harbeck in 1907 clearly illustrates the precarious nature of such survival. The earliest surviving footage of Vancouver, Harbeck's film surfaced in Australia in the 1980s, although Vancouver was not identified as one of its subjects until the 1990s. Now in the custody of Library and Archives Canada, the potential of Harbeck's film and other early footage for exploring and promoting local history is becoming evident through an informal collaborative effort involving local cultural and heritage organizations. The story of the making of Harbeck's Vancouver film, its subsequent fate, and efforts to bring it to a wider audience in its centenary year offer a fascinating case study of the history and characteristics of such films and the possibilities they offer for exploring local history.

Early Vancouver is well documented in primary sources such as newspapers, photographs, and other documents, but almost no moving images survive from the period. According to B.C. filmmaker and historian Colin Browne, the city was first filmed around 1900, when an unknown American cameraman shot footage, since lost, of horses boarding a steamship headed for the Klondike goldfields.⁶ The gold rush and the province in general became popular subjects for entrepreneurial foreign filmmakers in search of new, exciting subjects. B.C. was appealing because of the almost mythic quality attributed to its spectacular mountain scenery and frontier figures such as loggers and fishermen. While many early films were created in order to provide entertainment for commercial purposes, the Government of Canada and Canadian Pacific Railway also took a strong interest in producing and promoting films about Canada's westernmost province, in hopes of attracting immigrant settlers. But although a few early scenic films of British Columbia still exist, no footage of Vancouver survives prior to 1907, when William Harbeck made his film.

William H. Harbeck (1863-1912)



- Bookkeeper
- Journalist
- Inventor
- Traveling book agent
- Deputy sheriff
- Steam laundry operator
- Newspaper editor
- Filmmaker

Moving Picture News, 27 April, 1912, p.6

⁵ The film also includes footage of the provincial capital city of Victoria, taken on May 4, 1907, three days before the filming in Vancouver. The working title of the footage assigned by National Archives of Canada is Vancouver and Victoria Street and Harbour Scenes 1907.

⁶ Colin Browne, Motion Picture Production in British Columbia, 1898-1940: A Brief Historical Background and Catalogue (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1979) 1.

William H. Harbeck⁷ is an interesting figure – an American entrepreneur who vigorously explored the commercial possibilities of the new medium of film, establishing a reputation as an expert cinematographer. Born in 1863, Harbeck had pursued several careers by 1900, including bookkeeper, journalist, inventor, traveling book agent, and deputy sheriff. He had also been the proprietor of a steam laundry and editor of the Anaconda Examiner in Colorado. Exactly when, how, and why Harbeck branched into moving pictures is unclear, but there are indications that he was working as a cameraman for Miles Brothers of San Francisco by 1906, and he is said to have been the first to film the aftermath of the San Francisco earthquake of that year. Harbeck filmed for a variety of employers, including the Selig Polyscope Company of Chicago, the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Grand Trunk Steamship Company, the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exhibition (Seattle) and others, becoming an established member of the film industry. He also visited Europe, where he filmed European subjects and showed and sold his North American films. In 1912, Harbeck was engaged by the White Star Line to film the maiden voyage of the Titanic and was among 1522 passengers to perish when the ship sank on April 15 after colliding with an iceberg. A contemporary film trade magazine paid tribute to Harbeck after his death, describing him as “a pioneer in the moving picture business, who had roamed the world with his camera, and contributed much to the enlightenment of his fellow-men by making pictures that will outlive him as valuable records.”⁸ In fact, despite Harbeck’s pioneering and prolific output, only a tiny fragment of his work has survived, making his 1907 film of Vancouver important not only as a record of Vancouver history, but also as an artifact of early film history.⁹

Vancouver in 1907

- Population: 60,100



Philip Timms, VPL 29165

1906. Vessels at the Vancouver waterfront.

⁷ Biographical information on William Harbeck in this paper is largely based on Stephen Bottomore’s book The Titanic and Silent Cinema (East Sussex England: Projection Box, 2000). The chapter on William Harbeck (p. 26-47) provides the most detailed account available of Harbeck’s life and films.

⁸ “Harbeck Lost on the Titanic,” Moving Picture World 11 May 1912: 506.

⁹ The only other Harbeck footage known to have survived is four reels of scenes filmed at the Pendleton Round-up in Pendleton, Oregon in September 1911. The footage is now housed at the Oregon Historical Society. The Seattle Archives owns footage of the Denny Regrade Project in Seattle (1897-1911) that was probably shot by Harbeck.

When Harbeck arrived in 1907, Vancouver was a burgeoning city with a soaring population,¹⁰ having recovered from a devastating fire 21 years earlier that had destroyed most of the buildings less than two months after the city was incorporated in 1886. A promotional “Land of Opportunity” issue published by the Vancouver Daily Province on September 21, 1907 enthused about the city’s success and future prospects as the “Financial Centre of the Province” and “The Finest Port on the North Pacific.”¹¹ The Vancouver News-Advertiser, looking back on 1907 in its first edition of 1908, reported that “Vancouver Created Many Records During Past Year”, with “large increases in customs, inland revenue and bank clearing returns [and] phenomenal expansion of city, numerous dwellings and business blocks having been erected.”¹² The Vancouver Stock Exchange opened during 1907, the Vancouver Police Department acquired its first automobile and the fire department became the first in Canada to purchase motorized firefighting units.¹³

Harbeck’s 1907 visit to Vancouver followed a similar stop in Victoria, B.C., where he had spent 4 May 1907 filming the province’s capital city and its surroundings. The Victoria newspaper, the Daily Colonist, described the filming in considerable detail, also reporting that Harbeck next planned to travel to Nanaimo, north of Victoria, with a stop at picturesque Shawnigan Lake, to film “the glittering sheet of water and the pretty little hotel”, as well as “the scores of fishermen.” From Nanaimo, he was to cross to the mainland and visit Vancouver, then travel on the Canadian Pacific Railway, where he expected “to get splendid views of the Fraser Canon (sic), and the glorious scenery between Yale and Lytton.”¹⁴

¹⁰ In 1907, the estimated population of Vancouver was 60,100. The early years of the 20th century were a period of rapid growth. According to estimates published in City of Vancouver Annual Reports, the city’s population rose from 29,640 in 1902 to 122,100 in 1912. These figures do not include the adjacent municipalities of South Vancouver and Point Grey, which were incorporated into the City of Vancouver in 1929.

¹¹ “Vancouver the Financial Centre of Pacific Canada . . . A Prophecy That Has Been Fulfilled,” Vancouver Daily Province, First Section, Land of Opportunity Number, 21 September 1907: 1-32.

¹² “Vancouver Created Many Records During Past Year,” Vancouver News-Advertiser 1 January 1908:11.

¹³ “Chronology, 1906-1908,” The History of Metropolitan Vancouver, n.d., 5 March 2007 <www.vancouverhistory.ca/chronology5.htm>.

¹⁴ “Views of Victoria in Realistic Form: Many Pictures of City and Surroundings Taken by Cinematograph Expert,” Victoria Daily Colonist 5 May 1907: 3.



Vancouver World, 6 May 1907, p.7

It is unclear that Harbeck actually followed through on his plans to travel to Nanaimo or through the Fraser Canyon, but his arrival in Vancouver on the morning of 6 May 1907 was heralded by the Vancouver World. The newspaper provided an enthusiastic account of Harbeck and his plans, including the statement that “[he] has had so much experience in his particular line that he is considered the foremost authority on scenic photography.”¹⁵



Philip Timms, VPL 7272

190-. B.C. Electric Railway Company streetcar.

Harbeck intended to film the downtown area of the city from a hand-cranked camera placed at the front of a B.C. Electric Railway streetcar and to film from an automobile while traveling through the city’s famous Stanley Park. The following morning, the Vancouver News Advertiser conveyed a request from the filmmaker: “Mr. Harbeck would feel obliged if the stores en route would furl their awnings.” The newspaper also alerted local residents to the opportunity to appear in the film: “Anyone who wishes to be taken in the picture should stand out in the streets as the car approaches or cross in front of it.”¹⁶

¹⁵ “Vancouver Scenery in Moving Pictures: Representative of Large Concern Will Take Photographs for Exhibition,” Vancouver World 6 May 1907: 7.

The event evidently attracted great interest. On 8 May 1907, the Vancouver Province reported that “many prominent citizens were suddenly stricken with kinetoscopitis yesterday” and reassured readers that “kinetoscopitis is not nearly as serious in its effects as spinal meningitis.” The article observed that “the way that prominent citizens suddenly discovered that they had business on the other side of the street and strolled across sort of unconcerned like, when they saw the kinoscope coming was very amusing to those on the front of the car.” The detailed account also explained how the filming had been timed in order to catch crowds returning home for lunch, and described the route through the downtown core (along streets that still exist) and along two residential streets in the city’s west end. There is no indication that any filming was actually done in Stanley Park as planned.¹⁷



Screen capture from “Vancouver and Victoria Street and Harbour Scenes 1907”
William Harbeck, 7 May 1907 (Library and Archives Canada)

Granville Street, facing north

¹⁶ “Will Take Moving Pictures of Vancouver: Views of Business Section Will be Secured this Morning,” Vancouver News Advertiser 7 May 1907:12.

¹⁷ “Many Citizens Will Figure on Screen: Moving Picture Views of City’s Business and Residential Sections Taken Yesterday – Prominent Citizens Posed,” Vancouver Province 8 May 1907:18.



Screen capture from "Vancouver and Victoria Street and Harbour Scenes 1907"
William Harbeck, 7 May 1907 (Library and Archives Canada)

East Hastings at Carrall, facing east



Screen capture from "Vancouver and Victoria Street and Harbour Scenes 1907"
William Harbeck, 7 May 1907 (Library and Archives Canada)

Carrall and West Cordova, facing south



Screen capture from "Vancouver and Victoria Street and Harbour Scenes 1907"
William Harbeck, 7 May 1907 (Library and Archives Canada)

West Cordova and Cambie, facing west,
with Exhibit theatre at left



Screen capture from "Vancouver and Victoria Street and Harbour Scenes 1907"
William Harbeck, 7 May 1907 (Library and Archives Canada)

Robson and Bute, facing west



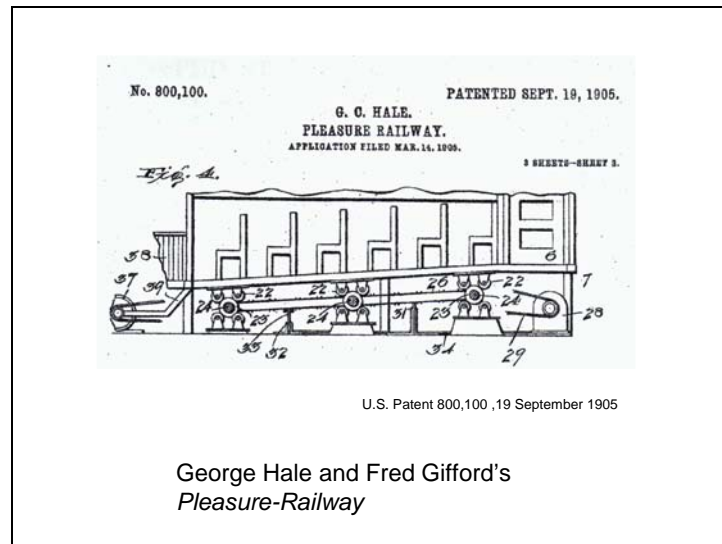
Screen capture from "Vancouver and Victoria Street and Harbour Scenes 1907"
William Harbeck, 7 May 1907 (Library and Archives Canada)

Davie and Nicola, facing west

Harbeck filmed selectively and the event was orchestrated to some extent, particularly with its open invitation to local residents who wanted to be filmed. Nonetheless, while not a complete record, the surviving footage provides a fascinating panorama of everyday life in the bustling city 100 years ago. From time to time, a streetcar is met from the opposite direction. People ride bicycles and horse-drawn carriages ply the streets, with piles of manure clearly visible. (The single car seen in the footage remains parked at the side of the road).¹⁸ People dressed in Edwardian costume walk and wave, and local landmarks are seen, including the Canadian Pacific Railway station, Hudson's Bay Company, and Woodward's Department Store. Smaller enterprises also loom into view: a tailor, jeweler, harness maker, restaurant, clothing store, butcher, and others. The residential portion shows the Manhattan Apartment under construction and homes of the wealthy, including a brief glimpse of the mansion of local

¹⁸ The only car seen in the film, this is one of 175 cars owned by British Columbians in 1907, a number that would rise to 11,639 during the next ten years. For more information, see "Cars Have Come a Long Way," Vancouver Sun 5 March 1984:C4.

business magnate B.T. Rogers.¹⁹ According to the Vancouver Province, Harbeck exposed nearly 2000 feet of film during the streetcar journey.



Despite the contemporary interest generated by Harbeck's filmmaking activities in the city, the immediate fate of his Vancouver footage is unclear. Harbeck may have been working at the time for the Selig Polyscope Company of Chicago, which made films for Hale's Tours. Hale's Tours and Scenes of the World was an American company that specialized in providing audiences with a cinematic experience based on an invention called the "Pleasure-Railway" patented by George C. Hale and Fred W. Gifford of Missouri in 1905.²⁰ The Pleasure-Railway was a stationary theatre that mimicked a real railway car, using mechanical techniques to achieve effects of starting, stopping, accelerating, decelerating, swaying, and a "clickety-clack" sound. To increase the sense of motion, fans were used to simulate blowing wind. "Passengers" watched as the film was projected on a screen at the front of the narrow theatre, creating the illusion of a real train ride through scenic parts of the world. According to an early film trade magazine, Hale's Tours and Scenes of the World "scored the first real success in the moving picture business."²¹

¹⁹ Most buildings seen in the film no longer exist. Of the landmarks mentioned above, only the Hudson's Bay Company, Manhattan Apartment, Rogers mansion and part of the Woodward's store have survived.

²⁰ George C. Hale, Pleasure-Railway, Fred W. Gifford (one-half), Patent 800,100, 19 September 1905.

²¹ "'Hale's Tours and Scenes of the World,'" The Moving Picture World 15 July 1916: 372. A detailed account of Hale's Tours is found in Raymond Fielding, "Hale's Tours: Ultrarealism in the Pre-1910 Motion Picture," Film Before Griffith, ed. John L. Fell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 116-130.



That Harbeck's British Columbia footage was intended to be shown in a Hale's theatre is indicated in the Victoria Daily Colonist account of his visit:

The pictures . . . are exhibited in such a way as to give the illusion of a railway journey. The room in which the cinematography works is fitted up like a railway car, noise, rocking and all, and as the panorama unfolded (sic) the passing scene (sic) are explained to the audience.²²

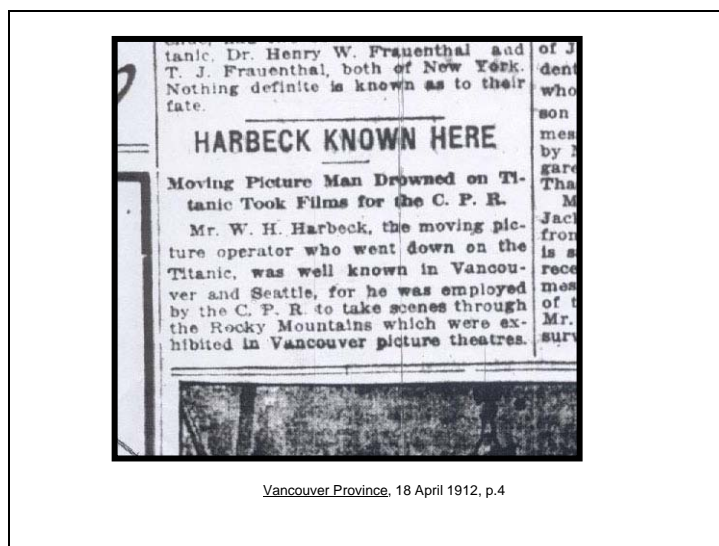
Vancouver had its own financially successful Hale's installation. In 1905, James Dixon Williams had established an amusement parlour, The Exhibit, at 150 Cordova Street. The parlour included a Hale's facility advertised as the "Pullman Flyer."²³ The Pullman Flyer's exact dates of operation are unknown but it is unlikely that Harbeck's Vancouver film was actually shown there. The account in the Vancouver Province had stated that "these pictures will be sent to Portland to be developed and will probably be exhibited in the city in about three weeks,"²⁴ but extensive research in 1907 newspapers by volunteers from the Vancouver Historical Society has failed to locate any reference to a Vancouver screening.²⁵ In view of the considerable attention which Harbeck's initial filming visit had attracted, it seems unlikely that

²² "Views of Victoria in Realistic Form: Many Pictures of City and Surroundings Taken by Cinematograph Expert," Victoria Daily Colonist 5 May 1907: 3.

²³ "Vancouver, B.C. Started with 'Hale's Tours' in 1905," The Moving Picture World 15 July 1916: 373. Although Williams opened several theatres in Vancouver, the claim in this article that his simulated railway theatre was the first movie theatre in Vancouver is almost certainly incorrect. According to another source, the Electric theatre established on Cordova Street by John A. Schuberg in 1898 was "the first successful, permanent cinema in Canada" ("The Movies Come to Vancouver," Canadian Film Weekly 24 April 1963: 4). Williams did, nonetheless, operate a Hale's facility at The Exhibit sometime during this period and a sign for Williams' Exhibit theatre on Cordova Street advertising "Scenes of the World" is seen in Harbeck's Vancouver footage.

²⁴ "Many Citizens Will Figure on Screen: Moving Picture Views of City's Business and Residential Sections Taken Yesterday – Prominent Citizens Posed," Vancouver Province 8 May 1907: 18.

²⁵ Although there is no evidence that Harbeck's 1907 Vancouver footage was seen by Vancouver audiences, other footage by William Harbeck was seen by Vancouverites in 1909. In March, he re-visited the city to film the triumphant return of American boxing champion Jack Johnson, who had defeated Tommy Burns at a



such an event would have passed without mention. The impression Harbeck had made was such that when he died on the Titanic, the Vancouver Province published a short article entitled “Harbeck Known Here.”²⁶ The article did not refer to his 1907 filming of Vancouver street scenes, incorrectly stating that his trip to Vancouver in 1909 to film champion boxer Jack Johnson had been his first visit to the city.²⁷

The 1907 newspaper reports had also stated that the Vancouver street scenes were to “be exhibited throughout Canada and the United States in theatres, side-shows and other places where moving picture machines are operated” and “sent to England and exhibited all over the Continent.”²⁸ Again, there is no evidence that this occurred. Film programs at theatres changed constantly and the use of individual films is not well documented. Whether or not Harbeck’s Vancouver footage was ever shown to any public audience cannot be definitively determined. But for historians, Harbeck’s unique Vancouver footage completely drops from the record at this point, re-appearing almost 75 years later – halfway around the world in Australia.

In the early 1980s, William Harbeck’s footage of Victoria and Vancouver in 1907 was acquired by the National Film & Sound Archive in Australia from the estate of Harry Davidson.

world-famous match in Australia. Johnson stopped briefly in Vancouver on his journey home. Because Harbeck was not present for Johnson’s arrival, the event was re-staged the following day for filming purposes. Several months later, in September 1909, Harbeck made a filming trip to B.C. on behalf of the Canadian Pacific Railway Publicity Department. During this visit, he filmed the journey from Victoria to Vancouver by passenger ship, and along the C.P.R. line through the B.C. interior to Calgary. Footage of Jack Johnson and the journey from Victoria to Calgary was screened at the Majestic Theatre in Vancouver during the week of October 24, 1909, as reported in the Vancouver News Advertiser 29 October 1909: 11.

²⁶ “Harbeck Known Here: Moving Picture Man Drowned on Titanic Took Films for the C.P.R.,” Vancouver Province 18 April 1912: 4.

²⁷ See Footnote 25 for more information on the Johnson filming.

²⁸ “Many Citizens Will Figure on Screen.”

Davidson was an avid film collector who made frequent trips throughout Australia, scavenging for old film. It is not known how the footage ended up in Australia or when or where it was obtained by Davidson. It is interesting, however, to speculate on the J.D. Williams' connection. Film historian Terry Ramsaye wrote of the proprietor of Vancouver's Exhibit theatre that:

The autumn of 1907 found him at the northern limit of his migrations in Vancouver, British Columbia. There Williams had a nickelodeon type theatre Some sea-faring patron of his show left an Australian newspaper in his seat behind him. . . . Williams was curious about this land of Australia, where the natives threw boomerangs, leaves grew upside down on the tree and everything improbable was true. He idled through the discarded newspaper. An advertisement of a picture show way down there caught his eye.²⁹

Reading the notice, Williams' calculated that the theatre business in Australia might be much more profitable than in North America, where people usually paid a mere five or ten cents for admission:

He stiffened up at the discovery that the admission was two shillings and sixpence, the equivalent of seventy-five cents in New York Williams had the usual nickelodeon accumulation of old films and junk pictures on hand, a heritage of the days when every picture show bought its film outright. He went to Australia Williams prospered in Australia with his old pictures, which were new there.³⁰

Ramsaye claimed in the introduction to his book that "the material for this history has been gleaned practically in its entirety from original sources,"³¹ and the above passage has the air of being based on a personal interview with Williams or perhaps a family member, friend or colleague in the motion picture business. Based on Ramsaye's account, it seems plausible that Harbeck's film was among the "old pictures" taken to Australia by J.D. Williams.

When initially acquired by the National Film & Sound Archive in Australia, Harbeck's Victoria and Vancouver footage had the title frame "Hobart in 1906," mistakenly indicating that it depicted the city of Hobart in Tasmania. It wasn't until the early 1990s that the Archives concluded that the film in fact depicted Victoria and Vancouver. In 1994, it was de-accessioned and, together with miscellaneous American footage, sent to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Later in the year, representatives from the National Archives of Canada³² collected the film and took it to Ottawa.

²⁹ Terry Ramsaye, A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926) 679-680.

³⁰ Ramsaye 680.

³¹ Ramsaye vi.

³² In 2004, National Archives of Canada (previously Public Archives of Canada) merged with the National Library of Canada to create a single institution, Library and Archives Canada.

The Harbeck film acquisition comprised three prints of the same film on three loops of nitrate film base, all in poor condition. Between 1994 and 1996, the footage was restored and copied by film conservators at the National Archives of Canada. While the restoration of any old film is a painstaking and complex process, it was particularly challenging in the case of the Harbeck footage. Because the actual arrangement of scenes on each of the three prints was different, considerable time was needed to determine a logical scene order and select the best footage for the restored copy.³³ Other challenges included a high degree of shrinkage, which could have resulted in further damage during the restoration process. Due to non-standard perforations on the original film, it was also necessary to customize the optical printer used to reproduce the footage frame-by-frame. Since restoration, the original nitrate film has been stored in a vault at Rockcliffe Air Force Base with the rest of Library and Archives Canada's nitrate holdings.³⁴

In preparing a detailed archival record of the film, the National Archives of Canada was assisted by B.C. filmmaker and historian Colin Browne, who identified streets and buildings seen in the Vancouver footage. As a result, Browne acquired a copy of the footage which he showed to small private audiences in Vancouver. Finally, on October 17, 1996, almost 90 years after it was made, Harbeck's film had its first authenticated public screening for a paying audience at the Vancouver International Film Festival. On the occasion of its world premiere, the National Archives of Canada's restored copy of Harbeck's Victoria and Vancouver footage was projected with a live musical accompaniment by Paul Plimley. An audience of 625 at Vancouver's Ridge Theatre reacted very enthusiastically.

For the next five years, this remained the only known occasion on which Harbeck's Vancouver footage had been publicly screened. Then, in 2001, Colin Preston, Library Coordinator at CBC British Columbia in Vancouver, a local outlet of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, succeeded in obtaining a Betacam copy of Harbeck's film from the National Archives of Canada. During the next several years, Preston showed the film to small audiences in Vancouver. On November 25, 2004, Harbeck's footage was part of a program of early Vancouver films seen by a large audience at a meeting of the Vancouver Historical Society.

Of the various films screened on that occasion, Harbeck's film attracted the most attention and interest. Recognizing it as an important historical artifact of Vancouver history, members of the audience felt that it deserved wider public exposure. The Society's president, Paul Flucke, invited interested members of the audience to sign up if they were interested in participating in a project related to the film. A sub-committee began meeting in early 2005 to explore possibilities for bringing the film to a wider audience. Members of the Harbeck Sub-Committee included well-known Vancouver historians and other interested community members.

³³ D.J. Turner, "Vancouver and Victoria Street and Harbour Scenes 1907," unpublished manuscript, 10 October 1996. Turner is an archivist at Library and Archives Canada who worked on the Harbeck film project.

³⁴ Luc Morrisett, e-mail communication, 22 March 2007. Morrisett is a film conservator in the Audio-Visual Section, Library and Archives Canada.

With the film's centenary looming in 2007, the Harbeck Sub-Committee decided to develop a project aimed at producing an affordably priced DVD version of the film for public sale. Many possible cultural and educational benefits to the community were anticipated, and it was also believed that the film might play a valuable role in promoting Vancouver internationally, especially with the Winter Olympics coming to the city in 2010. Dubbing the project "City Reflections", the VHS Harbeck Sub-Committee developed a DVD concept comprising three components:

- An original, unaltered version of the 1907 film.
- An enhanced version of the film, with added features such as a map of the streetcar route, voice-over commentary, music, historical photographs and other features.
- New footage, shot in 2007, following the route taken by Harbeck in 1907.

The project is now actively underway in Vancouver. Key areas of focus since its inception have included research, budgeting, exploration of grant and sponsorship opportunities, and development of a communications and marketing strategy. While the intellectual, practical, technical, and financial demands of the project have proved considerable, substantial progress has been made. Accomplishments to date have included preparation of a marketing package, fund-raising, creation of a project website,³⁵ the gathering of substantial research material, and a trial filming along the 1907 route. The latter drew considerable media attention when it took place on April 23, 2006. A camera car travelled down the street in an attempt to replicate Harbeck's footage frame-by-frame. In an echo of the invitation issued in the 1907 newspapers, Vancouver Historical Society representative and local historian John Atkin encouraged readers "to step up and be part of history. . . . if people are down there and see a camera truck go by, don't be shy, wave."³⁶

As the Harbeck Sub-Committee pursues this ambitious project, the film has already been made more readily accessible to the public and used to explore and promote the city's history. Several DVD copies of the National Archives of Canada's restored version have been catalogued and are now being circulated by the Vancouver Public Library, where they have proved popular with library patrons. The footage has also been screened at local history and genealogy workshops offered by the Library, while at the nearby Vancouver Museum, it has been incorporated into a new permanent exhibit, "Gateway to the Pacific: Vancouver's Big City Dreams, 1900s to 1910s."

The Harbeck Sub-Committee's efforts to promote local history by bringing archival footage to a wider audience are not unique. A similar project in San Francisco focused on a film believed to have been made by Jack Kuttner in September 1905 and produced in a similar manner, attaching a camera to a trolley. The film garnered attention after local filmmaker Melinda Stone saw the footage and decided that it deserved to be celebrated in its centenary year. As in Vancouver, Stone's project involved following the original route through the city with a small film crew. The resulting film was seen at an outdoor screening in September 2005.

³⁵ City Reflections: 1907: Vancouver: 2007, 2006, The City Reflections Team, Vancouver Historical Society, 6 April 2007 <www.johnatkin.com/harbeck/project.htm>.

³⁶ "Historical Society Retracing 99-Year-Old Film," The Vancouver Sun 22 April 2006: F5.

A Trip Down Market Street, 1905/2005 attracted a large audience, and a DVD of the same title was produced and is now available for purchase.³⁷

Parallels might also be drawn between the Harbeck project and a large-scale project in the United Kingdom, involving a set of films produced by Mitchell and Kenyon, a late Victorian and Edwardian film company. Mitchell and Kenyon were commissioned by traveling fairground operators to make “local topicals” shown at fairgrounds and other venues in the United Kingdom, mainly between 1900-1913. The footage seen in local topicals was shot in surrounding areas in an effort to capture images of as many local people as possible, in the hope of attracting them to visit fairgrounds and pay to see moving pictures of themselves. The discovery of Mitchell and Kenyon’s footage in an empty photographic shop in Blackburn, England in 1994 and its subsequent restoration have been described as “a near (if not parallel) equivalent to the finding of Tutankhamen’s tomb or the Dead Sea Scrolls.”³⁸ Amounting to an impressive 28 hours of viewing time, the films provide an unparalleled social record and visual impression of the lives of ordinary middle and working class British people during the Edwardian period. Following their discovery, the British Film Institute undertook the expensive and painstaking process of restoring the films, while the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield carried out extensive research to date and contextualize them. The research project resulted in the publication of two books, a film tour, a prime-time television series (broadcast on BBC2 in early 2005), and the production of two DVDs. The British Film Institute’s website provides extensive information on the project, including screen captures and teaching notes.³⁹

Although the Mitchell and Kenyon project might be seen as a model of the possibilities held out by archival film for the promotion and study of local history, it is perhaps exceptional in this respect. In general, moving images are not well utilized as information resources. As Moving Image Collections has stated:

Moving images are unique in the use of multiple information streams (audio, visual and textual) to provide a compelling and immersive educational experience. Yet, [they] have remained isolated from the mainstream as an information resource, rarely cited in research papers, for example, or consulted as primary reference sources.⁴⁰

³⁷ For more information on the San Francisco project, see Dave Ford, “After 100 Years, Not Much Has Changed on Market Street – Well, Not Too Much,” SFGate.com 3 August 2005, April 7, 2007 <www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2005/08/03/DDGJNE18TB32.DTL>. “A Trip Down Market Street” can be viewed online at <http://www.archive.org/details/TripDown1905>.

³⁸ Ian Jack, “The Lost World,” Guardian Unlimited January 7 2005, 25 March 2007 <http://film.guardian.co.uk/features/featurepages/0,4120,1384840,00.html#article_continue>.

³⁹ “The Mitchell and Kenyon Collection,” BFI, 6 December 2006, British Film Institute, 7 April 2007 <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/mk/>>.

⁴⁰ “About MIC,” Moving Image Collections: A Window to the World’s Moving Images, 18 March 2005, Moving Image Collections, 7 April 2007 <http://mic.imtc.gatech.edu/about_1.htm>.

This may not be due so much to lack of interest or failure to recognize the special qualities of archival film as to other issues. At the Vancouver Public Library, requests for old historical footage of the city are common. However, the Library's capacity to respond to such requests is minimal. Referrals are sometimes made to other local institutions such as the City of Vancouver Archives or Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Archives, but access to and use of archival films at these institutions is constrained by factors such as limited public facilities and lack of circulating copies. The example of the Harbeck film provides a good illustration of the difficulties of access to old film. For many years, a consultation copy, available for viewing by appointment only at Library and Archives Canada thousands of miles away in Ottawa, provided the only public means of access to Harbeck's historic footage.

It is notable that the efforts in Vancouver and San Francisco to bring unique historic footage to a wide audience have been driven largely by the passion of interested volunteers and that, in the case of Vancouver, substantial financial backing for the project has remained elusive. Local cultural organizations, including the City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver Public Library, Vancouver Museum and the local branch of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation have supported the Harbeck project in principle, collaborating on an informal basis and making significant in-kind contributions. Staff at the Vancouver Public Library, for example, have devoted considerable time to researching Harbeck and early cinema in Vancouver, relying extensively on both local resources and inter-library loan. In addition, the Library coordinated the volunteer newspaper research project and provided meeting space for the Harbeck Sub-Committee. Nonetheless, the Vancouver Historical Society is the only official institutional participant, and the extent to which the original vision of the project will be reflected in the final DVD, scheduled for release in late 2007, remains to be seen.

Notwithstanding the challenges faced by the Harbeck Sub-Committee, the fact that the permanent loss of Harbeck's unique film would have been an irreparable loss to local history is incontestable. The story of the film and its accidental discovery and return to Canada demonstrate the magnitude of what has been lost in the disappearance of vast quantities of early film as well as the importance of preserving and protecting what has survived. Although conservation and protection are crucial tasks, the true value of Harbeck's and other archival footage can only be fully realized if it is made available to the widest possible audience and actively used to promote and explore local history.

In this area, public libraries can play an important role, their strong traditions of public service, programming, outreach, and links to the community making them exceptionally well placed to generate maximum interest in and use of unique local records. In addition to providing circulating DVD copies of archival films, libraries are an ideal venue for exhibits and posters intended to promote local historical films and for related programming and events for schools and the general public. Local studies collections in public libraries are also an important resource for researchers engaged in the study and contextualization of old local historical films.

The specific place of moving pictures in library-based local history collections and services has received scant attention in professional literature. Practical handbooks on local history librarianship acknowledge the need to include all formats in such collections, but provide little advice on the subject. While collection development is briefly discussed in terms of saving records of current local events and history-in-the-making for posterity, building a

retrospective collection of historical footage is not addressed. Professional resources on video collection development similarly do not explore the unique challenges of building a collection of local archival historical films. Because the technical, legal, and financial obstacles faced by local studies librarians engaged in such an effort would be significant, the need for professional attention and practical guidance in this area is considerable. Obtaining copies of old films in formats that can be readily viewed and circulated is an especially challenging undertaking, requiring public libraries to work closely with the organizations – museums, archives, historical societies, film institutes, news agencies, and others – that are the primary repositories of original footage.

The need for hard copies of original footage may in time be eclipsed by the Internet. Sites such the BBC (U.K.) and CBC (Canada) have already begun making a range of archival film clips available online to audiences around the world, while the National Archives (U.K.) website provides a selection of short public information films dating back to 1945. At the local level in Vancouver, the City Archives are currently exploring web access for some of their older films.

But while providing online access to archival films would be a significant accomplishment, it does not offer a complete solution to the challenge of mainstreaming archival films as tools for the study of history at the local level. It may not be feasible to provide access to large numbers of films by such means – certainly not in the immediate term – and in any case, web access should only be one component of a multi-faceted program aimed at promoting maximum awareness and use. Such a program would involve extensive research to identify, locate, and contextualize films, technical expertise in preserving and digitizing or producing multiple copies of as much footage as possible, specialized cataloguing, the provision of readily accessible public viewing facilities, preparation of educational materials, and creative marketing and programming. To achieve these goals, a broadly-based strategy would be required, with public libraries playing a key role and working in close cooperation with local cultural and heritage organizations. It is through such collaboration, with each participant contributing special skills, experience and resources, that the unique possibilities of local “stories without writing” as information resources may ultimately be fully realized.