



Chapter Title: Introduction

Book Title: Beyond the Movie Theater

Book Subtitle: Sites, Sponsors, Uses, Audiences

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Published by: University of California Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.1791913.5>

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Introduction

In the beginning were movie theaters. Well, not quite. But by the early 1910s, thousands and thousands of venues whose primary business was exhibiting movies had become an established and probably unavoidable fixture of daily life in villages, small towns, cities, and metropolitan areas across all regions of the US. Entrepreneurial and unabashedly commercial, these enterprises sought to profit by regularly offering nationally available screen entertainment (the movies) while remaining in many ways localized and individualized. In terms of profit margins and cultural prominence, the commercial American film industry was as much about theaters as it was about studios, stars, and scandals. Moreover, these accessible venues for inexpensive popular amusement often functioned, directly and indirectly, as key public sites where racial segregation, class relations, and identities related to gender, sex, and age were enacted, enforced, and negotiated. Without taking movie theaters into account, there is no explaining the cultural backlash against the movies or what is often understood as the increasing consolidation, rationalization, and corporatization of American cinema as a mass entertainment business of unprecedented scale. Understandably, movie theaters, the activity of moviegoing, and the business of theatrical exhibition have been the object of valuable research by historians of silent cinema, who have paid particular attention to the flourishing of nickelodeons, the composition of movie audiences, and the changes in programming strategies with the rise of feature films and spectacular serials.¹

However, looking away from the glimmer of the theatrical screen and stepping outside the light of the marquee reveals that during the 1910s, there were a host of other sites and occasions for screening moving pictures, a surprisingly varied range of audiences, and widespread recognition of film's potential to serve different functions and purposes. I'll refer to this vast territory as *non-theatrical cinema*, with the obvious caveat that on certain occasions theaters became sites for screening events that were not the movies and movie-like programs were shown

at sites that could not be mistaken for conventional theaters. The use of moving pictures beyond the movie theater and the much-noted promise of film as a non-commercial medium and a tool during the second decade of the twentieth century are the overarching concerns of this book. In focusing on these topics I aim not to displace mass entertainment, Hollywood, and the movie theater in favor of some other radically different, adamantly non-commercial version of film production and circulation. There is no displacing the movies, nor should there be. Rather, I argue that we need to extend, enrich, and complicate the history of American cinema by attending not only to the movies and the movie theater but also to the full panoply of historically specific non-theatrical practices and possibilities, which in many ways constituted an Other Cinema.²

Some years ago I somewhat unknowingly began working toward this end by posing what seemed to me a fairly straightforward question: Where and how were moving pictures in 1915 used in ways different than the typical exhibition policies and strategies of movie theaters in the United States? In other words, what was non-theatrical cinema in 1915? This was a decidedly high-profile year for the American film industry, marked by the release of *The Birth of a Nation* and the protests it generated, the unprecedented celebrity status of Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford, the opening of Universal City, and the Supreme Court's ruling that motion pictures as a "business pure and simple" did not warrant the protection of the First Amendment when faced with state and local censorship ordinances. With access to searchable digital archives of American newspapers and all manner of periodicals, including—thanks to the invaluable Media History Digital Library—the motion picture and commercial entertainment industry trade press, I was able to find much evidence of cinema beyond the movie theater. Following up on these findings by, for example, tracking over several years advertising campaigns that relied on moving pictures and identifying the widespread availability of lectures illustrated with moving pictures, quickly led me well beyond 1915—a research process, again, greatly facilitated by the use of digital archives.³ Discovering and amassing this material prompted a revision of my initial research question, as follows: during a decade when the nickelodeon boom—fueled by widely distributed, inexpensively priced, readily accessible moving pictures—turned into the extraordinary economic and cultural phenomenon known as the movies, how was non-theatrical cinema imagined, described, promoted, and practiced in the US?⁴

Looking for traces of moving pictures that were put to use outside of commercial venues also underscored for me early in this project that the distinction between theatrical and non-theatrical cinema, rather than being clear-cut and categorical, was relational, variable, and historically grounded—a point that I will return to throughout this book. Perhaps paradoxically, researching non-theatrical cinema requires taking into account theatrical exhibition and various screening sites that operated like and were designated as theaters. In fact, I begin my study

by examining in some detail the exhibition in November 1917 of a film entitled *Twilight Sleep* at the Grand Theater, a moving picture show in Wilmington, North Carolina. Using this particular screening as my curtain-raiser reflects my abiding fascination with historical research undertaken from a local perspective. But the central subject of this book is not the Grand Theater or *Twilight Sleep*, nor is it Wilmington or the year the United States entered World War I.

Foregoing a chronological approach, *Beyond the Movie Theater* ranges over the 1910s (give or take a year or two), with examples drawn from across the US, most often concerning localities nowhere near the centers of the commercial film industry. Although this decade saw the preliminary attempts to market portable 35mm projectors and the limited availability in the US of inflammable “safety” film, the term *non-theatrical* had not yet come into common use in and out of the film industry. In addition, it would not be until at least the mid-1930s that 16mm (introduced in 1923) became the default format for educators, government agencies, and businesses. Yet the 1910s constitute an important formative period in the history of non-theatrical cinema, a decade in which possibilities were explored and practices established and the significance of moving pictures in and for America far exceeded the influential reach of the commercial film industry.

In exploring this decade, I rely on ephemeral bits and pieces of the past like postcards, pamphlets, and official reports, but even more on information culled from contemporary print sources: daily and weekly newspapers, the motion picture trade press, fan magazines, and a wide array of other periodicals, from prominent weeklies like *Scientific American* and *Saturday Evening Post* to specialized publications like *Presbyterian of the South*, *American Industries: The Manufacturers' Magazine*, *School Board Journal*, and *Judicious Advertising*. The digital archives containing these invaluable documents are frequently—perhaps inevitably—incomplete and selective, and the information in digitized print sources is often fragmentary and unverifiable, more suggestive than conclusive. Yet the mass of heretofore largely ignored or unexamined articles, editorials, news items, announcements, and advertisements that reference the use of moving pictures apart from profit-based theatrical exhibition articulate, from sometimes distinctly different vantage points, how non-theatrical cinema was understood and put to use. This piecemeal and evocative evidence points toward an expansive and variegated history of American cinema during the early twentieth century.

Beyond the Movie Theater is fully grounded in the surprisingly vast and disparate material concerning non-theatrical cinema gathered from this voluminous print discourse. I do not marshal this information in the service of a chronological narrative, encyclopedic enumeration, or systematic genre-by-genre or company-by-company survey. Instead, I will examine cinema outside the movie theater by offering a diverse series of detailed, sharply focused discussions of certain screenings, films, periodicals, organizations, advertising campaigns, court cases, public events, and localities.



FIGURE 0.1.
Undated real photo
postcard.

By adopting this approach to non-theatrical cinema, my project loosely resembles *microhistory*, less in terms of the models that influential figures like Giovanni Levi and Carlo Ginzburg offer, and more in line with Siegfried Kracauer's discussion of microhistory in *History: The Last Things Before the Last* (1969), a posthumous volume published several years after his *Theory of Film* (1960).⁵ "The photographic media," Kracauer proposes, "make it much easier for us to incorporate the transient phenomena of the outer world, thereby redeeming them from oblivion. Something of this kind will also have to be said of history."⁶ Indeed, the most obvious instance of "transient phenomena" related to non-theatrical cinema during the 1910s that I have found is an undated and unmailed real-photo postcard of a screening in what appears to be some sort of Quonset hut (fig. 0.1). The projectionist stands near the back of the room operating a small hand-cranked machine; posters on the walls that may refer to films point to both religious (*The Passion Play*, *Life of Mary* [?]) and secular (*Red Riding Hood*, *The Black Mutes Daughter* [?]) subjects, though the actual screen is outside the photograph's frame. The rows of seats, all on the same level, are filled with intermingled children and well-dressed men and women, a white audience of various ages, similar perhaps to a church congregation. A handwritten message signed "mother" on the back of the postcard asks: "do you know any of these." No, we don't and we most likely can't. I am not sure if incorporating this postcard "redeems" this instant and these long-ago spectators from oblivion, but as striking, evocative evidence of a "transient" practice, this bit of ephemera stands for me as an invitation to explore America's other cinema.

To borrow certain of Kracauer's terms: *Beyond the Movie Theater* unapologetically reflects a "devotion to minutiae" and hopefully serves to "vindicate the figure of the [historian as] collector," a role I have long embraced.⁷ In working on this project I have been committed to offering a "fact-oriented historical account" grounded in the "particular" and "events . . . in their concreteness," while being

fully aware that every stage in the process entails choices about selection, perspective, and arrangement.⁸ Covering a full decade and facing a “heterogeneous” historical terrain that is “full of intrinsic contingencies . . . virtually endless . . . and indeterminate as to meaning,” I offer here not one but an array of what might be termed micro-histories, beginning with an examination of *Twilight Sleep*, and also including, to mention only a few, close looks at sponsored public events in Little Rock, Arkansas; the use of motion pictures by a church in Bakersfield, California; the marketing of the Pathéscope projector; the activities of the Business Men’s League in St. Louis, Missouri; screenings arranged by railroad corporations promoting the American West; and representations of the movie theater in *Motion Picture Story Magazine*.⁹ Unlike in the many examples of microhistory surveyed by Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szigártó in *What is Microhistory?*, individual people only occasionally take center stage in this book.¹⁰ Rather, to get a sense of how non-theatrical cinema in the 1910s was imagined and realized, I reference a variety of sites, uses, films, programs, campaigns, screenings, and audiences, almost all drawn from “the world of small events,” though not always from the “local” in a strictly geographical sense.¹¹

Like most commentators on this historiographical approach, Kracauer does not simply validate “micro investigations” as an end in themselves, unrelated to some broader generalizations.¹² “The micro-macro link” might well seem, as Zoltán Boldizsár Simon declares, to be “the most puzzling and mysterious issue” for microhistorical work.¹³ But that depends, I would suggest, on what would qualify as sufficiently macro. “Microhistory claims,” the editors of *Small Worlds: Method, Meaning, and Narrative in Microhistory* propose, “explicitly or implicitly illuminate more general truths, wider patterns, or at least draw some analogy to other cases.”¹⁴ Referencing *Theory of Film*, Kracauer uses the analogy of the movement between close-ups and long shots in cinematic narratives to argue that “the historian must be in a position freely to move between the macro and micro dimensions.”¹⁵ At its most extreme distance from the “world of small events,” Kracauer writes, “high altitude” macro history offers “speculative syntheses” and traffics in abstractions, evoking “universal historical laws” and the “total historical process.”¹⁶ But there are, he insists, multiple “higher levels of generality” and certain “uniformities,” and the historian should aim toward an “interpenetration of macro and micro history.”¹⁷

The heterogeneous, fragmentary, and rich field of non-theatrical cinema in the US during the 1910s does not “illuminate” and cannot be explained in terms of a master narrative concerning origin or institutionalization, progress or decline. The evidence points to a different “level of historical generality,” more in the nature of a heuristic definition: the non-theatrical cinema at this particular historical juncture (and perhaps up to World War II) was multi-purposable in its uses and multi-sited in where it could be shown, targeted at particular audiences and in some manner sponsored. And this formulation, in turn, generates the historical questions

that inform this book: How was this potential utility, functionality, and ubiquity imagined and realized? How did sponsorship actually operate? What audiences were targeted? What extended and what limited the reach and the range of non-theatrical cinema in the US? The level of specificity and particularity I rely on in exploring these questions is not intended as a means of filling gaps in or correcting the historical record, but as a way of plumbing the breadth and depth, tracking the regularity as well as the variety of non-theatrical cinema, as evidenced in certain locations and applications, certain agendas and audiences, and certain events and occasions during the 1910s.

TWILIGHT SLEEP COMES TO WILMINGTON

Before the Grand Theater in Wilmington, North Carolina, opened for its matinee show on Wednesday, November 21, 1917, a select group gathered at this movie theater for what was a decidedly atypical screening event: a “private exhibition” of the film scheduled to be shown that day. Since Wilmington—then the second-largest city in the state with a population of over twenty-five thousand—did not have a local censorship board, three prominent clubwomen joined four men, including the mayor, the city attorney, and a state legislator to make up an ad hoc committee tasked with passing judgment on *Twilight Sleep* (1915), a two-reel motion picture quite unlike the standard fare at the Grand.¹⁸ Owned and operated by the locally based Howard-Wells Amusement Company, this theater was in 1917 a venue for whites only, as were all of Wilmington’s downtown theaters (two “colored” theaters then served the large African American population in this strictly segregated city).¹⁹ The Grand was open every day except for Sunday and specialized exclusively in big-name feature films from companies like Paramount and Universal, with five changes of bill each week.²⁰ Only a few times during 1917 did newspaper advertisements for the Grand specifically mention any shorts or live performers. Notable exceptions were when locally produced footage of the city was offered as an “extra attraction” and when the theater booked the British War Office’s timely docu-propaganda piece, *The Battle of the Somme*, pitched as a “vivid picture of history in the making” that ran once weekly in two-reel episodes during November and December.²¹ On November 21, the second installment of *The Battle of the Somme* preceded the screening of *Twilight Sleep*, and no other films were scheduled.

What now seem like decidedly strange combinations happened all the time in movie theaters during the 1910s—action-packed serial episodes could run back-to-back with picturesque travelogues, slapstick comedy with earnest social-problem dramas. But pairing *The Battle of the Somme* and *Twilight Sleep* at the Grand made for a particularly striking juxtaposition of two quite different versions of topical, (purportedly) non-fiction film in the service of persuasion. While *The Battle of the Somme* pictured the conditions American soldiers faced in the trenches now

WOMEN
ONLY

Shows Start-
ing 1:45, 3:15,
4:45, and 6:15

GRAND

TODAY

POSITIVELY ONE DAY ONLY

M - E - N
ONLY

Shows Start-
ing 8:00 and
9:30 P. M.

THE MODERN MOTHERHOOD LEAGUE ANNOUNCES SCIENCE'S
GREATEST TRIUMPH

TWILIGHT SLEEP

IN MOTION PICTURES AND LECTURE BY DR. ARTHUR H. ROLLNICK

PAINLESS CHILD-BIRTH! ... A BOON TO MOTHERHOOD!

EMANCIPATING WOMANKIND FROM HER ORDEAL—LIFTING THE
CURSE OF EVE FROM MANKIND

The only motion picture clinic ever produced. Positively the most unique
production of the age. Never before seen by human eye.

EVERY MAN AND WOMAN INTERESTED IN THE PROGRESS OF HU-
MANITY SHOULD SEE IT

Women can positively not afford to miss it. Mothers should bring their
daughters. NOTE:—This film has been arranged in a most refined
manner and there is positively nothing in it to offend anyone of
either sex, but owing to the delicate subject, it will be
shown strictly to separate audiences only

POSITIVELY NO CHILDREN

Admission 25 Cents

(Including War Tax)

The Second Episode of "The Battle of the Somme" will be
Shown as an Extra Attraction at the Beginning of Each Show

FIGURE 0.2. Ad for *Twilight Sleep*, *Wilmington [NC] Morning Star*, November 21, 1917.

that the US was fully engaged in the Great War, *Twilight Sleep*'s message was more directed toward women, as it made the case for "the latest method of painless childbirth" (fig. 0.2). *Dämmerschlaf*, translated as "twilight sleep," was developed in Germany and introduced to the US in 1907, though it only became widely publicized and more available in the mid-1910s. This procedure relied on a trained

physician administering morphine and scopolamine to a carefully sequestered woman who had begun labor, so that, in the words of an influential early account in *McClure's Magazine*, “although she may receive certain reflex impressions of pain [the woman undergoing this procedure] does not consciously perceive them, and immediately forgets them.” The goal was “both painlessness and forgetfulness.”²²

Larger-than-usual ads in Wilmington newspapers claimed with the hyperbolic fervor of a carnival barker that *Twilight Sleep* was “the only motion picture clinic ever produced. Positively the most unique production ever produced. Never before seen by human eye.” Yet, at the same time, the producers guaranteed that “this film has been arranged in a most refined manner and there is nothing in it to offend anyone of either sex.”²³ This sensational, revelatory, educational, inoffensive film arrived in Wilmington not from one of the studios turning out new product every week but thanks to an organization called the Modern Motherhood League.

There could well have been different films or variant films circulating between 1915 and 1918 under the title *Twilight Sleep*, and a print of this film has yet to be discovered. But descriptions in newspapers and the trade press consistently indicate that *Twilight Sleep* moved chronologically from a woman in labor, being prepared and given injections, through her “painless” and safe delivery, to her quick recovery and healthy newborn infant, with the twilight sleep procedure presented as being carefully monitored and entirely beneficial. Direct contrasts between the “peaceful” experience of birth using twilight sleep and the “suffering experienced” during “natural” childbirth underscored the superiority of the new procedure.²⁴ *Billboard* noted in its review of the film in 1915 that “a very thorough and complete description of this method for painless childbirth is depicted,” and “plenty of titles . . . describe the situations and scenes in detail.”²⁵ *Variety* called it “more or less of a scientific work in pictures,” while also noting that “of course the pictures were staged and produced.”²⁶ Promotional material for the screening at the Grand (and elsewhere) insisted that “the films [*sic*] were taken during an actual operation and show fully and clearly how womankind is emancipated from her ordeal and how the curse of Eve is removed from mankind.”²⁷ An intertitle could have announced this miraculous emancipation from an age-old biological/biblical curse thanks to science. But it is impossible to tell precisely how “fully and clearly” the print of *Twilight Sleep* screened in Wilmington presented its scenes of natural and assisted childbirth—or even what a “clear” and “full” moving image account of childbirth might have entailed in 1917.

What we can reasonably surmise is that anyone attending a screening of *Twilight Sleep* at the Grand would very likely have had at least a passing familiarity with this method of childbirth, since twilight sleep became a cause célèbre and subject of impassioned public debate from 1914 through 1916, when it had, according to a recent study, “a wide, faddish popularity among middle- and upper-class White women.”²⁸ Historians like Margarete Sandelowski have convincingly examined the far-reaching significance of twilight sleep and the controversy it generated

in terms of changing attitudes toward midwifery and hospitalization, women's "lay activism" in the name of greater self-determination, the racial and class basis of eugenics, and the professionalization of obstetrics.²⁹ "Relatively few women experienced twilight sleep directly during its heyday," Jacqueline H. Wolf writes, "yet the treatment changed everything about how American physicians perceived and treated birth and how American women anticipated and experienced it."³⁰

Wolf notes that the "twilight sleep movement vanished from the public scene within two years of its appearance."³¹ While this timeline seems generally accurate in terms of magazine and journal articles, *Twilight Sleep* the motion picture continued to be exhibited into 1918, traveling far beyond the urban areas where this procedure had actually been practiced. Wilmington, it turns out, was only one of many bookings in North Carolina and across the South, which was the last region to see *Twilight Sleep*. The wide circulation of *Twilight Sleep* attests to the cultural visibility of this approach to childbirth, pain, and the "emancipation" of a certain class of white women, while also pointing toward a notable use of cinema distinct from the commercial strategies common in the mid-1910s.

The initial reliance on moving pictures to explain and promote this approach to childbirth followed on the activities of the National Twilight Sleep Association, which was founded in January 1915 by deeply committed women in New York City.³² This organization focused its efforts on cities in the Northeast, historian Laurence G. Miller notes, sponsoring lectures in department stores and other sites, circulating pamphlets, and garnering widespread press coverage.³³ On March 21, 1915, a presentation on twilight sleep featuring motion pictures was delivered at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, to an audience of physicians and journalists.³⁴ This was the first of several "private," non-ticketed screenings to restricted audiences, though most often—as in Wilmington—these screenings were arranged to determine whether the film could be publicly exhibited in a particular locality.³⁵ In New Orleans, for example, the mayor called on "five leading club women" to report on *Twilight Sleep*, after the Orleans Parish Medical Society, flexing its professional muscles, demanded that the mayor prohibit the exhibition of *Twilight Sleep* since the screening "would create a demand for a treatment which was not always practicable to administer and which had not as yet become a matter of general practice."³⁶ The mayor instead followed the lay committee's advice and allowed the film to be screened.

From the outset, the aim was to exhibit *Twilight Sleep* as a ticketed attraction in movie theaters as well as multi-purpose venues like the Belasco, self-proclaimed as "Washington's Playhouse Beautiful." Directly after the National Press Club preview, the Belasco advertised a lecture on "the real truth" of twilight sleep, "illustrated with moving pictures."³⁷ The film's distributor was the Motherhood Educational Society, which unsuccessfully challenged the banning of *Twilight Sleep* in Chicago, then ran advertisements in *Moving Picture World* and *Motion Picture News* offering state rights for *Twilight Sleep*—marketed to potential buyers

FIGURE 0.3. Ad for the Modern Motherhood League, *Motion Picture News*, April 22, 1916.

as a feature-length attraction, comprised of a lecture “which can be delivered by any one possessing fair education and a reasonable amount of intelligence,” and two reels of motion pictures, “making a show about an one hour and a half.”³⁸ As Maureen Rogers explains, state rights was a “flexible” system in which the owner of a film licensed to “sub-distributors” the right to exhibit the film in whatever manner they chose in a particular territory (usually a state or region) for a certain period of time.³⁹ The licensees of *Twilight Sleep* typically rented a theater for a limited engagement, most often for one or two days.

The Motherhood Educational Society apparently managed to sell certain territories, since screenings began, for example, in Texas in July 1915. But on November 24, 1915, this venture declared bankruptcy, citing liabilities of \$14,000 and declaring that its limited assets, including the *Twilight Sleep* films, were of little value.⁴⁰ In name, at least, the Motherhood Educational Society lived on, however. Through 1916 and 1917, promotional material used for a host of bookings in the Midwest and the West identified *Twilight Sleep* as being presented “under the auspices” of the Motherhood Educational Society (or the Western Motherhood Educational Society).⁴¹ This claim was still being made when the same *Twilight Sleep* program was exhibited as late as 1921 in a small town in Missouri.⁴²

In April 1916, another distributor entered the field, when the Modern Motherhood League—incorporated “to distribute literature and medical theories of all kinds”—began advertising the availability of state rights for *Twilight Sleep*, with its “scenes of realism that stagger the imagination (fig. 0.3).⁴³ This company asserted in *Motion Picture News* that it was offering a “new series of Twilight Sleep pictures,”

3,000 feet in length and entirely different from previous releases under this title, though nothing in subsequent press coverage supports this claim.⁴⁴ It was through the Modern Motherhood League that *Twilight Sleep* eventually arrived in Wilmington in November 1917, after the rights for North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama had been purchased by the newly formed Wilmington Film and Supply Company.⁴⁵

It is worth underscoring that the Modern Motherhood League, like the Motherhood Educational Society, was a commercial enterprise that had nothing to do with “motherhood” beyond seeking to profit from a controversial and highly topical film that was about childbirth. Neither of these distributors were connected with the efforts of activist women who drove the twilight sleep movement in 1914 and 1915. Yet the names chosen for these business ventures obviously mattered, for they appeared prominently in much of the promotional material related to *Twilight Sleep*, no doubt because they gave the impression that a legitimate, non-commercial, progressive organization in some way authorized or was responsible for this special attraction, which warranted higher than normal ticket prices. At the Grand, for instance, tickets were twenty-five cents for all screenings of *Twilight Sleep*, whereas typical prices were five to ten cents for matinees and fifteen cents for evening shows.

This promotional strategy was clearly evident in Wilmington. For the Grand screenings, *Twilight Sleep* was advertised not only as being authentic in that it was “produced . . . under the personal direction of Dr. Kurt E. Schlossnik [*sic*], personal associate of Doctors Gause and Kronig, who are the original inventors of the wonderful method of painless childbirth known as “Twilight Sleep,” but also that it arrived in Wilmington “under the auspices of the Modern Motherhood League.” This explicit acknowledgement of what I will call *sponsorship* is one significant way that *Twilight Sleep* differed from the standard programs offered by the Grand. This difference mattered even though the acknowledgement of sponsorship would appear to have been in this case purely a marketing strategy. “Under the auspices” signified value added and testified to legitimacy.

A second, even more telling difference is that separate screenings of *Twilight Sleep* at the Grand were designated for women (at 1:45, 3:15, 4:45, and 6:15 p.m.) and for men (at 8:00 and 9:15 p.m.), with children prohibited from attending any screenings. Other theaters booking the film enacted different prohibitions and provisions: no screenings at all for men, certain designated screenings for both men and women, no one under sixteen admitted, no one under eighteen admitted except wives, no unmarried men at the screening for men, all theater personnel at the screenings had to be female, and so on.⁴⁶ These varied restrictions were designed to prevent censors from banning the film, while also boosting attendance. There is some evidence that the strategy worked. For example, when the Strand Theatre in Raleigh, North Carolina, reserved one evening screening of *Twilight Sleep* for men only, a newspaper in the city reported that “several hundred men fought desperately last night for places at the ticket window,” and more than

a thousand men packed the theater expecting “something risqué,” which the “very proper” show didn’t deliver.⁴⁷

Delimiting the potential attendance and explicitly targeting a segment of the audience did not occur with any other playdate at the Grand in 1917. Neither did any other film of the more than two hundred screened at the Grand that year arrive with its own lecturer. “*Twilight Sleep* in motion pictures and lecture by Dr. Arthur H. Rollnick” is what advertising promised, helping to sell the screening as an eye-opening “clinic” covering “science’s greatest triumph.” By the time Rollnick appeared in Wilmington, he was a well-traveled performer, having promoted and presented *Twilight Sleep* for over a year in Kentucky, West Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and North Carolina. Identified as a distinguished “professor” who had first-hand knowledge of the German originators of twilight sleep, Rollnick was initially identified as German then described as being from Belgium or South Africa (both suitably foreign and preferable to Germany once the US had entered the war).⁴⁸ Rollnick would on occasion claim to “own” *Twilight Sleep* and to be responsible for renting the theaters where it was booked.⁴⁹

From the first screenings of motion pictures depicting twilight sleep in 1915, the presence of a lecturer was an essential part of the event. Initially, this role was usually filled by Dr. Kurt E. Schlossingk, the man most associated with the procedure in the US. Schlossingk had trained at the Freiburg clinic, had overseen the use of this technique at the Jewish Maternity and Lebanon Hospitals in New York City, and (according to promotional material) was actually featured in the footage that had been shot for *Twilight Sleep* in a Brooklyn hospital.⁵⁰ Schlossingk lectured with *Twilight Sleep* in Connecticut and Texas, but as the film began to circulate more widely in 1916, different women presented the lecture that Schlossingk had authored.⁵¹ In Buffalo, New York, for example, advertisements for the Teck Theater claimed that the film would be “described by Mrs. Charlotte M. La Rue in a Lecture compiled from authentic utterances by Dr. Kurt E. Schlossingk.”⁵² In St. Louis, where the film was booked with “Charlie Chaplin’s latest comedy release as an additional attraction,” a newspaper editorial, entitled “Don’t Frighten Young Wives,” complained that the “woman lecturer” “dwells too much on the dangers that beset young mothers without the use of anesthetics such as are used in *Twilight Sleep*.”⁵³ These screenings sometimes added another live, more interactive component: an “open discussion” or a question-and-answer session after the film led by the lecturer.⁵⁴

Not surprisingly, as Rollnick traveled the South with *Twilight Sleep*, he claimed to have a direct connection to Schlossingk and the painless childbirth movement. Rollnick’s approach to the role he played with *Twilight Sleep* is suggested by his subsequent project. In 1919 and 1920 he lectured and promoted another readily exploitable state rights film, *Are You Fit to Marry?* (1919), which was billed as “a great moral lesson showing the results of unclean living. Scenes of realism that stagger the imagination, never before seen by the human eye!”⁵⁵ *Are You Fit to*

Marry? was the new title given to *The Black Stork* (1917), a sort of docudrama about a surgeon who allows a child born with severe birth defects to die rather than operate, based on the notorious case of Henry Haiselden, champion of euthanasia in the service of eugenics. Rollnick's connection to the development of the exploitation film as a commercially driven niche genre and a mode of exhibition is paralleled by the afterlife of *Twilight Sleep*, as Eric Schaefer notes in his history of this genre.⁵⁶ Cut loose from any connection to the movement for painless childbirth, footage identified as "Twilight Sleep" surfaced as one more short in a multi-film show;⁵⁷ by 1932 "a Twilight Sleep birth" had become part of William Charles Betti's "thrilling, smashing, dramatic"—and "educational"—illustrated lectures on "social hygiene" that played movie theaters.⁵⁸

As this account suggests, the history of *Twilight Sleep* opens onto broader questions concerning the operation of local censorship, the commercial market for non-fiction film and exploitation programs, and the ways that "twilight sleep" as a childbirth procedure and as a means of furthering women's "emancipation" moved through a certain sector of American public life. For my purposes, the exhibition of this film at the Grand in Wilmington and many other movie theaters across the US also points to a certain degree of flexibility in the operation of these venues, offering evidence of presentational strategies and uses of moving pictures beyond familiar movie exhibition practices. As became apparent as soon as the Motherhood Educational Society and the Modern Motherhood League offered to sell state rights for *Twilight Sleep*, the aim in distributing and exhibiting this heavily promoted combination of moving pictures and lecture was to turn a profit—the same as any standard feature film released by the commercial motion picture industry. But the presence of a lecturer, the insistence that the program arrived "under the auspices" of a sponsor, and the strictly delimited attendance policy all marked the theatrical exhibition of *Twilight Sleep* as an appreciably different event than the usual night-at-the-movies at a theater like the Grand.

Some flexibility in scheduling was also apparent in the operation of other movie theaters in Wilmington. The Bijou, for instance, slotted into its regular bill over four days in December 1917 a four-part promotional film about the Curtis Publishing Company (whose magazines then included the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies' Home Journal*), with each "chapter" in this account of the "miracles of modern business" presented by a representative of this company.⁵⁹ More fully divorced from the regular movie schedule was a public service screening presented by the State Insurance Department of North Carolina at 10:00 a.m. before the Bijou opened for regular business. As part of an "Electrical and Firemen's Institute," the "free movies" offered on this occasion were intended "to illustrate the dangers of fire," with all "the people of the city, and especially the children of the schools" invited to the theater.⁶⁰ For a special screening in January 1917 at the Victoria theater, the audience was much more strictly limited. Physicians and surgeons attending the semiannual convention of the Third District Medical Society

of North Carolina heard from an expert from the Red Cross who showed and discussed motion pictures—like *Extraction of a Shrapnel Ball from the Regions of the Heart*—that detailed surgical procedures being carried out on the wounded in French hospitals.⁶¹ Wilmington was one of several stops for these films, which were screened during 1916 and 1917 to groups of surgeons and physicians across the US, including events held at a country club in Munster, Indiana, and a hotel in El Paso, Texas.⁶²

On occasion during 1917, then, Wilmington's moving picture theaters scheduled sponsored films with a lecturer or provided a screening site for "free" films hosted by professional or state organizations. Conversely, sites that were not theaters in any conventional sense could offer programs clearly modeled on theatrical shows. For example, the Red Cross set up a motion picture show in a tent during the Fifth Annual Corn Show and Poultry Exhibit held in Wilmington in November 1917, with films provided free of charge by the company that owned the local theaters. Volunteers collected the ten-cent admission fee, which went to supporting the Red Cross.⁶³ Screenings at Lumina, a popular resort at nearby Wrightsville Beach, were not aimed at fundraising or generating profits but served as an added attraction for visitors who came to dance in the pavilion or enjoy the beach. For years, Lumina had offered a multi-reel film program at 8:15 every evening except Sunday, advertising "free motion pictures over the ocean waves"—a quite literal promise, since the screen was mounted in the ocean and people watched from the sand, the surf, and the hotel's veranda (fig. 0.4).⁶⁴ By 1917, this version of summertime open-air moviegoing was an established tradition, and like the venues in downtown Wilmington, Lumina announced in newspaper ads its daily changing program.

Beyond Lumina's screen in the surf and the Red Cross tent at the Corn Show, Wilmington's newspapers provide other evidence of cinema outside the confines of the city's movie theaters in 1917. It is somewhat surprising given national trends that the local press has no mention of motion pictures being used by the YMCA or any of the city's churches and social clubs. There is coverage, however, of the introduction of "free" motion picture screenings elsewhere in the state—shows for prisoners as part of reform efforts at the state penitentiary as well as the University of North Carolina's newly established "educational film service," a state-wide initiative to distribute for only shipping costs "industrial, educational, and scenic" films to "schools, boards of trade, YMCAs and other organizations."⁶⁵ Likewise, Wilmington newspapers saw something newsworthy in the "moving picture health car" that traveled with a projectionist and a lecturer through rural areas of the state on behalf of the North Carolina State Board of Health (fig. 0.5). Syndicated articles noted the high demand for this free service, which consisted of "modern, scientific health films . . . interspersed with comedies and romances furnishing a program that is interesting, instructive and at the same time highly entertaining"—not least of all because the lecturer offers "a varied program of jokes, local interest stories and lectures."⁶⁶



LUMINA

WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH-

TODAY

CONCERT 3:45 AND 8:45 P. M.

**Come Enjoy the Music---the Surf,
Keep Cool, Healthy and Cheerful**

PROGRAMME TODAY

Concert by Kneisel's Orchestra

The Best Orchestra That Ever Played at Lumina

AFTERNOON, 3:45 O'CLOCK	NIGHT, 8:45 O'CLOCK
1. March of the Clowns—"Marceline" Geo. Trinkhaus	1. "Gems" of Stephen Foster Arr. by Theo. M. Tobani
2. Favorite Old Song—"The Lost Chord" Sir Arthur Sullivan	2. Melodies from the Operetta "Miss Springtime" E. Kalman
3. Concert Waltz—"Beautiful Blue Danube" J. Strauss	3. Saxophone Solo—"One Fleeting Hour" Dorothy Lee
4. Comic Opera Selection—"High Jinks" R. Friml	4. Grand Selection from "Madame Butterfly" G. Puccini
Intermission	
5. March—"A Frangese" Mario Costa	5. March—"Cupid's Patrol" Neil Moret
6. Overture—"Orpheus" Offenbach	6. Two Elegiac Melodies after Norwegian Poems: A—"Heart Wounds" B—"The Last Spring" Edward Grieg
7. Concert Piece—"Badinage" Victor Herbert	7. Suite di Concert Edward German
8. Finale—"Havanola" Hugo Frey	1. Valse Gracieuse
"Star Spangled Banner" (Optional)	2. Souvenir.
	3. Gypsy Dance.

SPECIAL
Monday
Night

Children's Souvenir Dance
8.30 to 9.30
Regular Dance Follows.

FREE
Motion
Pictures

Over The
Ocean Waves

Coolest Moving Picture Theatre in North Carolina. Every night except Sunday, Starting at **8.15**

FIGURE 0.4. Postcard (top), "Surf Bathing in Front of Lumina," ca. 1917; Lumina ad (bottom), *Wilmington [NC] Morning Star*, July 15, 1917.

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The Health Bulletin

Published by THE NORTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

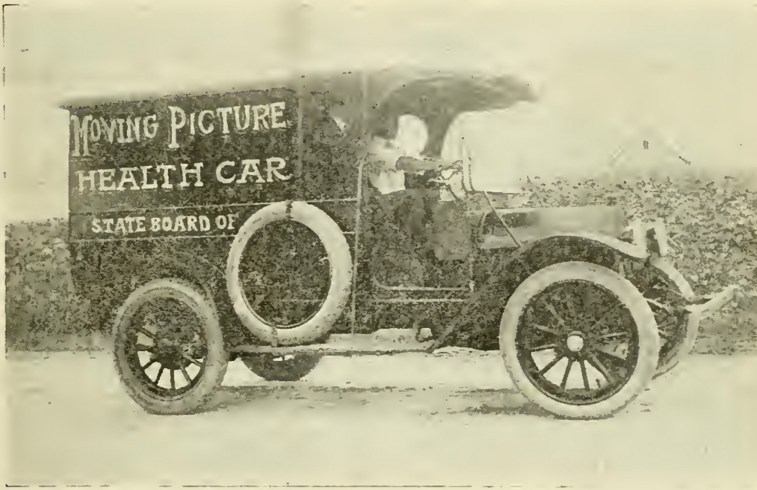
This Bulletin will be sent free to any citizen of the State upon request.

Entered as second-class matter at Postoffice at Raleigh, N. C., under Act of July 16, 1894.
Published monthly at the office of the Secretary of the Board, Raleigh, N. C.

Vol. XXXI

MAY, 1916

No. 2



Moving Picture Health Car

The State Board of Health has fully equipped this car with a powerful electric lighting plant, motion picture machine and accessories, together with a large selection of health and comic films, all of which is in charge of a competent lecturer and machinist. Would you have this car come to your county, give moving picture health entertainments in a dozen or more places, and wage a vigorous educational health campaign for from three to six weeks? Read pages 20 to 23, inclusive.

FIGURE 0.5. Moving Picture Health Car, *Health Bulletin*, May 1916.

Within Wilmington proper, the one non-theatrical site that garnered the attention of the local press was Hemenway School, the city's white high school, opened in 1915, complete with a "moving picture room," which purportedly made it "the first school in the state to utilize motion pictures in connection with nature study, geography, history, etc."⁶⁷ Newspapers do not mention any day-to-day instructional uses of film at Hemenway, but two special events held at the school's auditorium during 1917 were covered. This site served as something of a multi-purpose space available for community use, including musical recitals, a presentation about the YWCA's war work, a series of lectures on the Bible, and training institutes for public school teachers.⁶⁸ The Wilmington Chamber of Commerce sponsored the appearance at Hemenway of the National Cash Register Company's touring program devoted to "community betterment," featuring a four-reel film and a lecturer. The Chamber of Commerce invited "sales people and others employed in the stores of the city" to attend; the school arranged an additional screening for students.⁶⁹

The local press paid more attention to a patriotic benefit arranged by the Colonial Dames (an organization composed of descendants of settlers in America before 1776) for the American Field Ambulance Service. The attraction in this case was an "official" motion picture—*Our American Boys in the European War*—showing these volunteers in action, "rescuing the wounded from the first line trench at Verdun." "The pictures will be presented under very pleasing circumstances," the *Wilmington Morning Star* announced, with the hall decorated in "French and American colors," "young Wilmington society women" dressed as Red Cross nurses serving as ushers, and a group singing of "America" and the "Star-Spangled Banner."⁷⁰ As with all of these screenings, Jim Crow conditions meant that even public events open to young and old, male and female, were limited by race.

The public screening of *Our American Boys in the European War* at Hemenway School under the auspices of the Wilmington chapter of the Colonial Dames, the footage of surgical procedures projected in a movie theater for attendees at a local medical society convention, the presentation of *Twilight Sleep* first to an ad-hoc censorship committee, then complete with lecturer (and two reels of *The Battle of the Somme*) at the Grand Theater separately to men and women—these screening sites, exhibition practices, and uses of moving pictures were each in significant ways distinct from what the city's well-established movie theaters regularly offered on a daily basis. In this variety, Wilmington was not at all unique, though my specific examples would have differed had I taken as my starting point another city in North Carolina, a small town in Texas, or a northern metropolis.

Based on the information about film exhibition that made it into the city's two daily newspapers during 1917, the availability and deployment of moving pictures in Wilmington offers evidence of a basic claim that informs this book: well before the widespread adoption of 16mm, even the residents of a small North Carolina city could learn of and perhaps experience a version of cinema that was sponsored

in some manner or other, multi-sited in where and how it was exhibited, multi-purposed in the uses to which it was put, and targeted in terms of its audiences.⁷¹

CINEMA ACCORDING TO *MOTION PICTURE*
STORY MAGAZINE

As the examples from Wilmington suggest, putting film to use apart from the movie theater in the 1910s did not necessarily (or always) mean intentionally copying, challenging, circumventing, or collaborating with the American commercial film industry. However, these efforts were inevitably framed (and largely overshadowed) by the burgeoning business of film exhibition, the social experience of cinemagoing, and the cultural resonance of Hollywood's made-for-profit, regularly delivered entertainment. Facts and figures purportedly testifying to the unprecedented popularity of theatrical cinema regularly surfaced in newspapers as well as the motion picture trade press. For example, *The Nickelodeon* reported in 1910 that "in St. Louis, it is estimated that 175,000 persons visit the motion picture houses each day, or about one-fourth of the population," while in Cincinnati, "249,000 people or one in every fourteen persons in the city daily attend these shows."⁷² There is no way to verify these figures, but the number of people viewing motion pictures outside of theaters surely paled in comparison to these "devotees." Given the inescapable presence of the commercial industry—projected on screens, visible on public thoroughfares, and generating countless columns of print—it is notable that non-theatrical cinema garnered the attention it did in trade periodicals like *The Nickelodeon* and *Moving Picture World* and even in the pages of *Motion Picture Story Magazine* (hereafter, *MPSM*), the first successful American magazine aimed at fans rather than exhibitors and producers.⁷³

From its introduction in February 1911 and continuing after its name change to *Motion Picture Magazine* in March 1914, *MPSM* sought to capture a profitable share of what it called the "great Motion Picture public" by offering short stories or "novettes" based on current releases (illustrated with photographs drawn from these films) as well as photographs, caricatures, articles, interviews, and news updates concerning filmdom's "leading players."⁷⁴ Columns devoted to answering inquiries from readers and contests soliciting votes and opinions further encouraged the development of a fan culture, as did the frequent publication of poems, at least some of which seem to have been submitted by readers.

Fan magazines of the 1930s and 1940s would pay little attention to how and where movies were screened, much less to the business of film exhibition. But for *Motion Picture Story Magazine* in the early 1910s, the screening site was the all-important interface between the film industry and society. *MPSM* defended and celebrated the enthusiasm of fans and the popularity of moviegoing by insisting that the ubiquitous and well-established motion picture theater was as safe as it was commercially successful. Moreover, for only a nickel or a dime, these

theaters—then still under attack as ground-zero for the “menace” posed by the movies—provided an experience that was, according to *MPSM*, both entertaining and educational and therefore beneficial to individuals of all ages and to society at large.

The often hackneyed poetry that appeared in every issue of *Motion Picture Story Magazine* was largely epistles to picture personalities, but certain poems testified to the deeply rewarding pleasures of moviegoing and celebrated the industry’s success in delivering entertainment to a mass audience as “Into the portals, aglitter with light / Stream crowds of devotees, night after / night.”⁷⁵ What these fans find in the moving picture theater is nothing less than “the cure” for the “friendlessness and bitterness” of a “deadly commonplace” life “devoid of tint or grace.”⁷⁶ No wonder, then, in the words of a poem from 1912, that

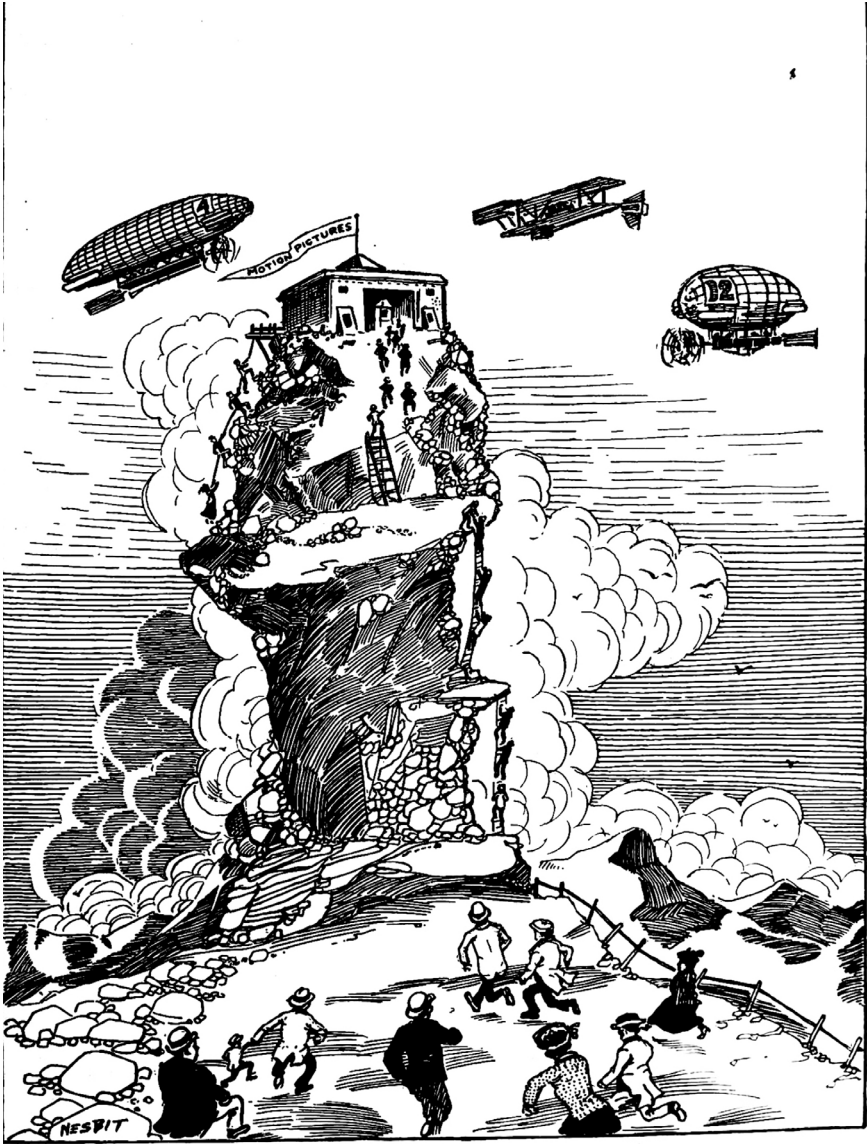
The fascination of the films
Is growing every day
A source of recreation which
Has surely come to stay;
The class of entertainment
To which everybody goes—
The educating, captivating,
Moving Picture shows!⁷⁷

The millions of satisfied patrons daily filling theaters nationwide attested to the remarkable reach and the powerful effects of this commercial juggernaut, as “Their Audience” from the May 1912 issue rhapsodically exclaimed:

Have the pictures come to stay?
See their patrons millions.
Are they growing every day?
Ask the sixteen millions
Of their patrons, what a host!
Found in every town almost.
Reaching out from coast to coast
Are their patron millions.

What a power they must hold,
Daily viewed by millions!
Think what character they mold
In those sixteen millions!
Bringing cheer to hearts each day,
Luring clouds of gloom away.
Thus they exercise their sway
Over sixteen millions!⁷⁸

Complementing poems like these were cartoons in the style of editorial cartoons in newspapers that highlighted the role of moving picture theaters across the twentieth-century American landscape. In a cartoon from April 1914, for instance, a show perched high atop a precarious peak still attracts customers ready to brave



PUT THEM ANY PLACE, AND YOU'LL GET THE CROWD

FIGURE 0.6. Cartoon, *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, April 1914.

the daunting ascent or arrive by airship, proving that theaters can and will do business anywhere (fig. 0.6).

Conversely, “the only village in the United States that has no motion picture theaters,” according to a cartoon from January 1915, is Sleepyville, Illinois, a run-down, overgrown ghost town, which might be deserted precisely because it has no

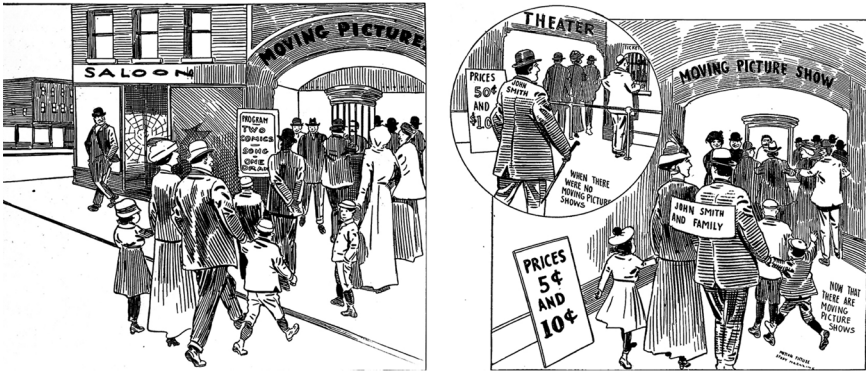


FIGURE 0.7. Cartoons, *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, September 1912.

place where crowds could watch a movie. Other cartoons insist that the thriving moving picture theater stands as a signifier of and a spur to progress in the modern American urban environment. Two examples from the September 1912 issue credit the theater with bolstering middle-class family ties by providing the right sort of leisure-time activity: in one, John Smith and his family approach a busy theater, which stands in stark contrast to the saloon next door gathering cobwebs; in the second, the same family heads for the box office of a bustling moving picture show, which offers an affordable outing that supplants the pricier live theater venue this patriarch formerly attended alone (fig. 0.7). The implied change in male patronage makes the moving picture show “a practical solution to the liquor question.” Given *MPSM*’s investment in a fan’s-eye view of motion pictures that valued new photoplays and picture personalities, it is notable that in these cartoons there is no specific information about what is playing when John Smith and family go to the movies—that they can confidently attend together as a family is reason enough to value the moving picture theater.

A more panoramic, high-angle view from another cartoon in the same issue of *MPSM* situates the moving picture show among the buildings and institutions that define and shape modern urban America: church, office, factory, and school (and perhaps store, which is identified by name but without boldface emphasis) (fig. 0.8). The design suggests that the theater is dwarfed by these more established sites of authority and influence, all of which would become the sites for non-theatrical screenings. The cartoon’s caption, however, declares that “the moving picture show is as important to the development of the generation as the other surrounding factors.” And, again, the defining feature of the theater is that it opens directly onto the street, is affordably priced, and attracts men and women, adults and children, which perhaps accounts for its important social role, particularly in relation to developing the next generation of Americans.

Other *MPSM* cartoons put more emphasis on what the moving picture show delivers, not so much by affording escape and relief from the ills of modernity, as

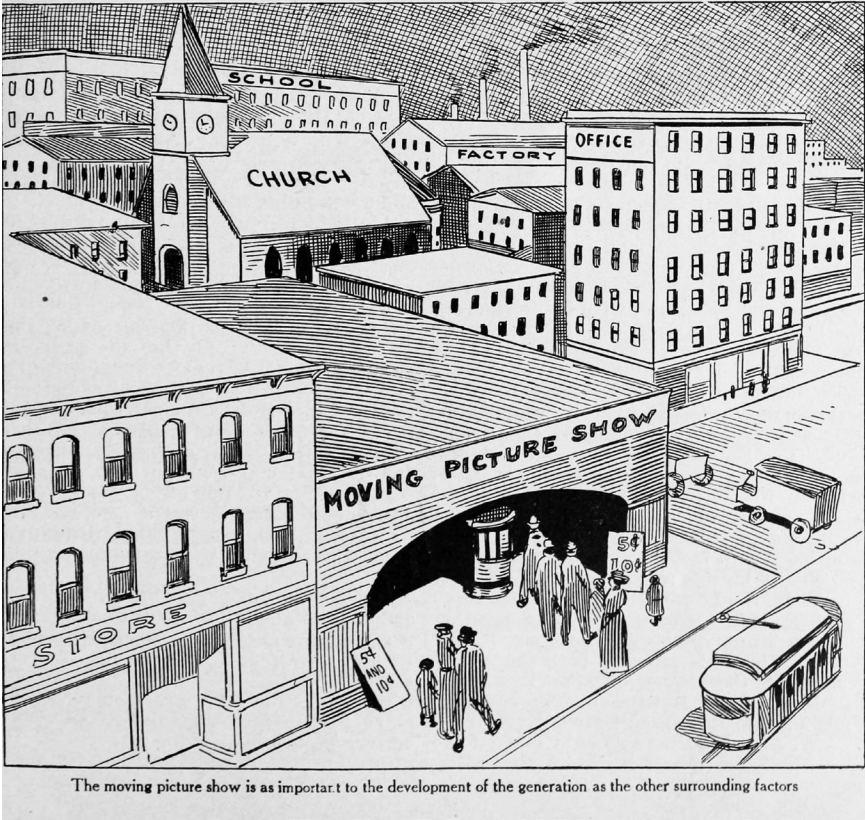
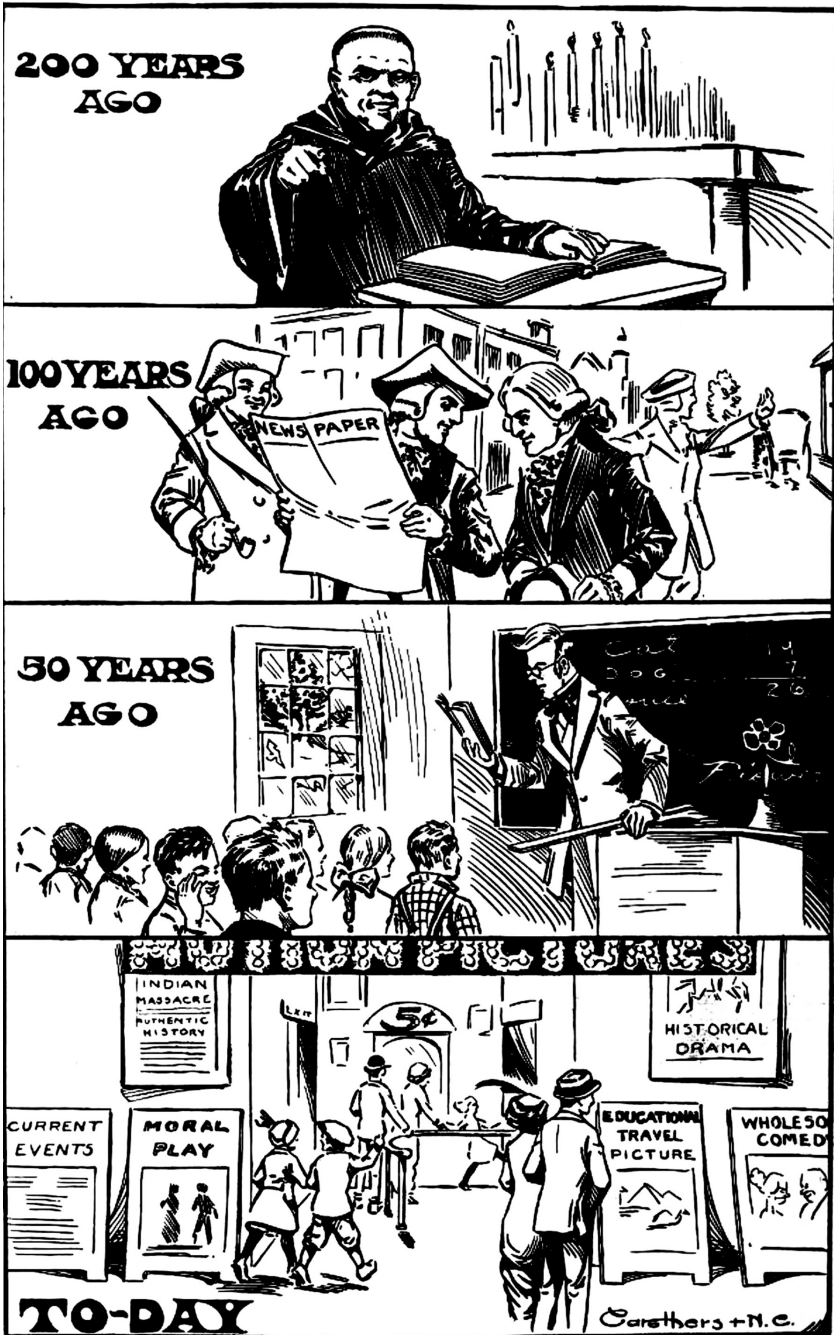


FIGURE 0.8. Cartoon, *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, September 1912.

avored in the poems quoted earlier, but rather by functioning as a sort of modern classroom. The “Epochs in Education,” pictured in the panels of a cartoon from January 1915, progress through Western civilization over centuries, from a book in the hands of a single monk to newspapers being read by a few men in the early nineteenth century to a classroom of students being given instruction by a single teacher to a movie theater whose posters advertise a battery of ostensibly “educational”—not to mention “moral,” “wholesome,” and “authentic” fare that (again) draws children as well as adults (fig. 0.9).

Inside the movie theater, according to a cartoon from the August 1914 issue (which would have been on sale the same month that saw the beginning of the war in Europe), the message is clear (fig. 0.10). People fill every seat, ushers stand at attention, and the projected film announces itself as “The Modern Educator.” While this cartoon could be read as ominous given the perspective it assumes—looking down on an audience rendered a faceless and uniform mass, poised to receive instruction, all heads directed toward the giant screen—for *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, the theater as “The Modern Educator” is an affirmation of progressive media at work, of useful cinema.



EPOCHS IN EDUCATION

FIGURE 0.9. Cartoon, *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, January 1915.

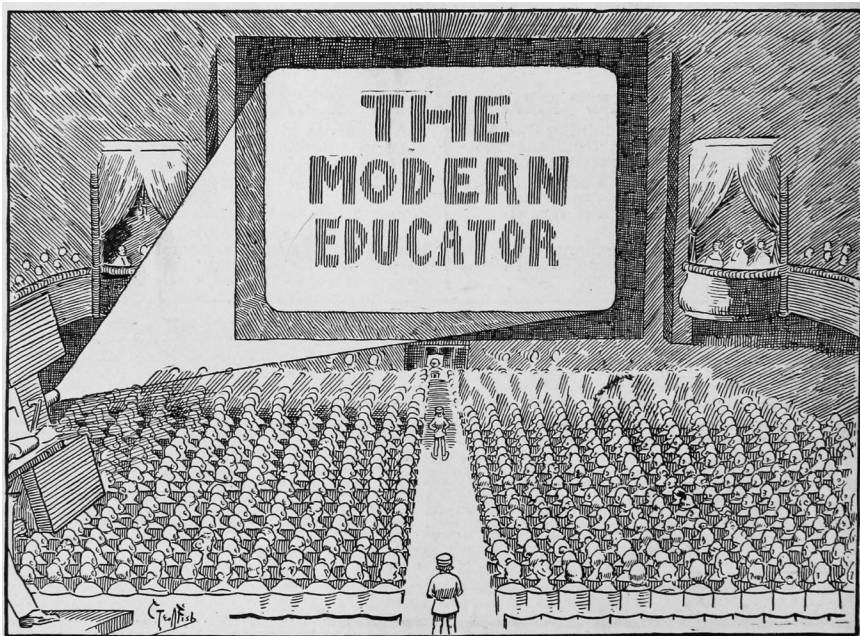


FIGURE 0.10. Cartoon, *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, August 1914.

In accord with how the poems and cartoons in *MPSM* characterize and celebrate the moving picture theater, this magazine saw the prospects for cinema's non-theatrical utility not as competition to the theatrical experience but as more evidence of the power of the medium to fuel progress. In 1911, for example, *MPSM* reprinted an abridged version of Herbert A. Jump's "The Religious Possibilities of the Motion Picture," one of the first calls for Protestant churches to take advantage of motion pictures as a means of illustrating sermons, enlivening Sunday school lessons, and promoting missionary work.⁷⁹ Later articles noted the novel use of moving pictures for entertaining the crews on Navy ships, teaching immigrant girls about the dangers of white slavery, and improving safety conditions for railroad workers.⁸⁰ Though *MPSM* offered no specific example of motion pictures used in the classroom, a cartoon from September 1914 envisioned a suitably twentieth-century pedagogic tableau: students seem attentive but not really surprised now that the haloed goddess of motion pictures in flowing robes has arrived in the classroom to take her place as the "new teacher" (fig. 0.11).

As in this cartoon, classrooms were often imagined to be prime non-theatrical screening sites in the 1910s. Yet the actual term, *non-theatrical*, did not appear in *Motion Picture Magazine* until an article in the July 1920 issue claimed that "the non-theatrical movie field today is a cardinal factor in the youngest of America's big industries." That churches, the US military, manufacturers, and retailers



THE NEW TEACHER

FIGURE 0.11. Cartoon, *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, September 1914.

were employing motion pictures as the new decade began constituted proof for *Motion Picture Magazine* that “more and more universal becomes the movie in its appeal.”⁸¹ Two general points are worth noting here, both bearing on the relationship between commercial exhibition in the movie theater and the options for cinema beyond the theater: (1) examples in this fan magazine of motion pictures

screened in different sites predate the identification of the non-theatrical as a recognizable “field”; and (2) the non-theatrical, unproblematically, is understood to be a “cardinal” field—that is, fundamental and important—and a factor *within* the motion picture industry, the same industry whose stars, new releases, and studio activity filled the pages of *Motion Picture Magazine* each month.

NON-THEATRICAL/THEATRICAL

A defining feature of American cinema—and maybe all cinemas—is that it has always been in practice multi-sited; that is, film has been screened in a variety of different spaces.⁸² Beginning in what Charles Musser calls the “novelty year” of 1896–97, moving pictures in the United States were exhibited in tent shows and churches, Chautauqua assemblies and vaudeville theaters, amusement parks and arcades, fairs and opera houses, and in all manner of public halls and auditoria.⁸³ Even though films continued to be exhibited at sites like these at least through the 1920s, my assumption is that there was no *non-theatrical* cinema in the United States until the remarkable spread of nickelodeons (roughly from 1906 to 1912) helped usher in a more regularized commercial film exhibition business.⁸⁴

From 1908 on, the motion picture trade press is filled with reports of theater openings, often accompanied by photographs of facades and interiors.⁸⁵ Well beyond the theaters featured in this coverage, America’s many movie theaters continued to vary widely in size, architecture, and design, ranging from modified storefronts, small and large structures purpose-built for screening movies, repurposed auditoria and churches, and seasonally operating roofless sites (airdomes), to the first-generation of larger and more luxurious picture “palaces.”⁸⁶ But what precisely made a screening site a moving picture *theater*? In a court case concerning an ordinance to ban the twenty-seven tent shows then regularly exhibiting moving picture programs to paying customers in St. Louis, the jury decided that “a tent is not a building” and so faced different requirements than a movie theater.⁸⁷ At the Lumina Pavilion in Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina, the free programs of current one- and two-reel pictures were projected onto a screen mounted in the surf rather than in a building with rows of seats. Did moving picture shows operated for workers in company towns run by the likes of the Harlan [KY] Coal Company and the Low Moore [VA] Iron Company count as theaters regardless of what was screened or how many days each week or months of the year the show was open?⁸⁸ What about the countless multi-use public halls, local opera houses, and grand metropolitan venues, which were not (or had not yet become) movie theaters, *per se*, but did on occasion serve as sites for commercial film exhibition, along with various other uses—illustrated lectures, benefits, rallies, concerts, touring productions? Picture shows in regular operation as attractions in large or small amusement parks located on street or interurban railway lines pose other questions. “The possibilities of the moving picture as an adjunct to the street railway

park are limitless,” declared *Street Railway Journal* in 1908, “the shows can be made to fit any purse or suit any taste.”⁸⁹ It seems unlikely that once moving picture theaters became fixtures on Main Street, “adjunct” shows of this sort would qualify as movie theaters.

For David S. Hulfish, author of the three-hundred-page *Cyclopedia of Motion-Picture Work* (1914), film exhibition was exclusively a profit-driven enterprise relying on different types of what he calls “motion-picture theaters,”⁹⁰ which in the United States numbered fourteen thousand in 1914, according to the Motion Picture Patents Company.⁹¹ But in the early 1910s, as we will see, newspapers and periodicals also paid considerable attention to the uses of film outside of these theaters. For example, in 1913, the editor of the newly launched *Exhibitors’ Times*, by way of demonstrating that his trade publication “is absolutely independent of any outside influence or control,” explicitly announced that he understood film exhibition to include non-theatrical as well as theatrical cinema: “By ‘Exhibitors,’ we mean not merely people who conduct theatres, but clergymen, school authorities, church and chapel authorities, public lecturers, and many others who use the picture for the purposes of entertainment. It is this large class which the ‘Exhibitors’ Times’ represents.”⁹²

It would be several years, however, before the term *non-theatrical* gained some currency. One of the earliest references I have found occurs in a review of the Model 2 Victor Animatograph projector in the November 24, 1917, issue of another trade journal, *Motion Picture News*. Pitched at “an entirely separate field, that of light exhibition,” the forty-pound Animatograph, *Motion Picture News* approvingly noted, “will well serve the non-theatrical user of motion picture film,” since Victor designed this machine for “traveling exhibitions, private exhibitions, and all education and religious institutions work in both small and large rooms.”⁹³ *Non-theatrical* here covers a wide compass, indeed: institutionally authorized deployment of moving pictures, different sized physical spaces, itinerant (likely including for-profit) practices, and screenings outside the public sphere, with “private” likely referring to the home or to a narrowly restricted audience.

Over the next several years, the non-theatrical was increasingly—and explicitly—understood in print sources as an identifiable, important, and potentially lucrative zone of cinema.⁹⁴ (To what extent this promise of profit ever materialized during the silent era is a different question.) For example, “comprehensive plans for the production and distribution of non-theatrical pictures to schools, colleges, churches, social centers and other public institutions,” by the top-tier Hollywood studio, Famous Players-Lasky, garnered national attention in 1919.⁹⁵ That year also saw the roll-out of *Educational Film Magazine*, promoted as “the only high class publication . . . covering the serious, non-theatrical use of motion pictures and slides.” In 1920 *Moving Picture World* renamed its educational film column “Education and Non-theatrical News,” and the first edition of *1001 Films: A Reference Book for Non-theatrical Film Users* was published, compiled by *Moving Picture Age*,

a magazine that billed itself as being wholly committed to “the advancement of the non-theatrical use of moving pictures.”⁹⁶ It is well worth noting, however, that for *Moving Picture Age* this “advancement of the non-theatrical” was in no way incompatible with the fact that the category of “Entertainment” in its reference guide comprised 254 titles that all had had theatrical runs. Even more telling, the listing of non-theatrical film distributors in *1001 Films* notably included the film exchanges operated by Famous Players-Lasky, Goldwyn, Fox, Vitagraph, Universal, and Metro, whose primary business was servicing the theatrical market.

By the early 1920s, *non-theatrical* was being used in relation to motion pictures in periodicals as diverse as the *Transactions of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, *Religious Education*, *County Agent and Farm Bureau*, and *American Motorist*.⁹⁷ *Variety* would in 1922 call Pennsylvania’s state regulations “affecting the exhibition of educational movies in churches, school houses and auditoriums” a “non-theatrical film code.”⁹⁸ *Educational Screen*, then the sole journal specifically devoted to covering “the multitudinous thoughts, plans and activities in the world-wide visual field,” had come by 1925 to define non-theatrical cinema largely in terms of schools and, to a lesser extent, churches. Yet *Educational Screen* continued to offer regular monthly sections devoted to what it called “the Movie Industry” and the “theatrical field,” providing readers with production news from the major studios, reviews of feature films in theatrical release as well as commercial shorts marketed for school use, and recommendations from the Film Councils of America identifying studio-produced titles that qualified as “wholesome recreation.”⁹⁹ That same year, for *Exhibitors Herald*, a publication aimed at and editorially siding with exhibitors, the battle lines couldn’t have been clearer. In May 1925, this trade magazine reported on beleaguered theater owners forced to declare “open war” against “the non-theatrical evil,” which unfairly threatened their profits by drawing moviegoers to “free” shows at churches and schools.¹⁰⁰ Such bellicose conditions were much less evident in volume 8 of *Harvard Business Reports* (1930), entitled *Cases on the Motion Picture Industry*, where the distinction between theatrical and non-theatrical figured in reports on the University Film Foundation, the YMCA Motion Picture Bureau, Pathé (deemed “the largest American distributor of films of educational value to the non-theatrical market”), and the Universal Picture Corporation (said to be interested in “increasing sales to non-theatrical exhibitors”).¹⁰¹

These assorted examples underscore that *non-theatrical* constituted an identifiable category that mattered, but they don’t all tell the same or the whole story—and that variation is precisely the point. I take the relation between theatrical and non-theatrical cinema to be historically significant because this distinction figured in contemporary discourse and practice and because it was not a simple binary opposition neatly marked by a dividing line.¹⁰² These categories were contingent, permeable, overlapping, subject to redefinition and contestation, and variable according to time and place. Of particular relevance for my purposes, then, is how

the distance and difference between the role, the use, and the value of moving pictures inside and outside the movie theater was understood, articulated, and enacted. The availability of films and projectors was crucial in this regard, but the relationship between theatrical and non-theatrical cinema also depended on shifting exhibition strategies, entrepreneurial efforts, market conditions, industry priorities, state initiatives, institutional policies, racial relations, and municipal laws.

One significant difference between theatrical and non-theatrical cinema did, however, remain constant through the 1910s. During this period, the commercial film industry increasingly took shape as a relatively stable national system with hubs in Hollywood and New York. This system aimed to guarantee profits by methodically routing a regularly delivered supply of distinctively branded and well-advertised new (but familiar) product through established film exchanges out to thousands of hierarchically ordered theater chains and independent exhibitors (including the many “colored” theaters then in operation), who competed for customers and sought a regular clientele.¹⁰³ In contrast to theatrical cinema, non-theatrical cinema during the 1910s (and possibly until the United States entered World War II) had no comparable historical arc—no center, no governing economic logic, no chartable patterns of growth, no graphable timeline of major events, no identifiable trajectory, no through line. While acknowledging the boost given by the US government’s deployment of moving pictures for propaganda, training, and troop entertainment during World War I, I would still argue that non-theatrical cinema developed unsystematically, in fits and starts, encouraged by the promise of myriad uses for moving pictures and by an almost unlimited range of possible screening sites.¹⁰⁴ The commercial film industry sought to rest on a solid foundation, figured as a stable geography: theaters linked to regionally located exchanges linked to faraway New York City and Hollywood. With little by way of a functional infrastructure, non-theatrical cinema can’t readily be tracked according to the commercial logic of interconnected production, distribution, and exhibition. Driven by the aims, initiatives, and funding of sponsors, championed for different reasons and mobilized to different ends, promoted at one time or another by state agencies, non-profit organizations, commercial firms, and individual entrepreneurs, non-theatrical cinema in the United States through the first decades of the twentieth century was unevenly, irregularly dispersed in the vast terrain outside the movie theater.

How, then, to make sense of a historical period during which moving pictures began to be put in the service of innumerable exhibition strategies, sponsors, and practical applications? Recent scholarship examining the technologies, state initiatives, institutional aims, and manifold deployments of what Haidee Wasson and Charles Acland call “useful cinema” across the twentieth century offers a number of productive lines of inquiry.¹⁰⁵ To examine the 1910s, we could, for example, undertake research organized according to specific genres (e.g., the missionary film, the industrial, the safety film, the advertising film), sites (e.g., school, church,

YMCA, public hall), fields (e.g., religion, science, agriculture), or sponsors (e.g., chamber of commerce, government agency, foundation, corporation).¹⁰⁶ I have chosen to range across these possibilities and also across American localities, organizing this historical study in terms of what I take to be the four definitive features of—and opportunities afforded by—non-theatrical cinema: sponsorship, multi-purposed use, multi-sited exhibition, and targeted audiences.

Chapters 1 to 4 each take up one of these four features, testing their utility and situating them historically. My primary examples in these chapters are intentionally varied. They include the circulation of *Your Girl and Mine* (1914), a film sponsored by the National American Woman Suffrage Association, the extensive marketing efforts undertaken for the Nicholas Power Company's Cameragraph projector, the concerted effort to offer free summertime screenings in St. Louis parks and playgrounds, and the coverage of motion pictures in *Scientific American*, as well as a nationwide advertising campaign for corsets, a one-off screening in a church hall aimed at the Portuguese community in San Leandro, California, and the prime role played by moving pictures in efforts for "industrial betterment" mounted by the National Association of Manufacturers. Chapter 5 revisits the four features of non-theatrical cinema by examining certain ambitious, large-scale public events of the 1910s that relied on moving pictures, notably Land Shows designed to promote the West to tourists and homesteaders, and the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (1915), the decade's preeminent national event, which was filled with onsite screening facilities offering decidedly useful fare.

Focusing throughout these chapters on the specific ways that non-theatrical cinema was imagined, funded, promoted, constrained, mobilized, and practiced encourages, I will argue, a recalibration of the history of cinema in America during a notably formative decade. More broadly, attending to this other cinema provides a revealing perspective on how utility was defined, social life organized, and diversity configured by and for Americans, and on the role that moving pictures played in public relations, advertising, educational outreach, corporate publicity, government mediamaking, and civic activism as the United States moved into the twentieth century.