COL. WILLIAM N. SELIG, THE MAN WHO INVENTED HOLLYWOOD
COL. WILLIAM N.

SELIG,

the Man Who Invented

HOLLYWOOD

Andrew A. Erish
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I first learned of Col. William N. Selig when I read Kevin Brownlow’s enthralling history of early cinema, *The War, the West and the Wilderness*. Mr. Brownlow’s nonpareil contributions to film scholarship continue to educate and inspire. I am especially grateful for his selfless guidance, remarkable resources, formidable knowledge, and gracious endorsement of this effort.

The bulk of the research for this book was conducted at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library, Department of Special Collections. I am indebted to Research Archivist Barbara Hall for allowing me access to the William Selig Collection and appreciate the kind assistance of Faye Thompson and Sue Guldin. The years I spent in research at the Herrick were enriched by the friendships I made with the Special Collections staff; extra thanks to Galen Wilkes. Special thanks to Randy Haberkamp, who provided me with access to films from European archives when we collaborated in 2009–2010 in putting together Academy screenings of Selig productions.

I’m also grateful for the kind assistance of Mark Gens and Mark Quigley, UCLA Film and Television Archive; Brian Meacham and Brandee Cox, Academy Film Archive; Rosemary Hanes, Josie Walters-Johnston, and Gerald Hatfield, Library of Congress; Jared Case, George Eastman House; Ryan Flahvie, Sharlot Hall Museum; Raymond W. Neal and Bob Silkett, Jacksonville Public Library; Ronny Temme, Eyefilm; Barbara Dey and Jennifer Vega, Colorado Historical Society; Dr. Russell A. Potter, Rhode Island College; Harry Medved; Terri Garst, Los Angeles Public Library; Amy Turner, G. William Jones Film and Video Collection, Southern Methodist University; and Genie Vassels and Nancy Simerly, Los Angeles Zoo.

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Jeff Look, great-nephew of William Selig and keeper of the family archives, graciously invited me into his home to share resources and family lore. Afterward Jeff and I explored the site of Selig’s Chicago studio. We were crestfallen to discover that all but one building on the lot had been demolished. Miraculously, we discovered scraps of ancient 35mm film sticking out of the ground where the foundation for a new building was being dug. We excavated handfuls of film, feeling like Walter Huston in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. It’s an experience that neither of us will ever forget.

I’m truly fortunate to have the support and encouragement of so many dear friends who went above and beyond the call of friendship in assisting me with this effort, yet a few deserve special mention. Joel Dinerstein was instrumental in helping to shape my master’s thesis, which became the basis for Chapters 2 and 3; he also provided invaluable advice on navigating the world of academic publishing. Joe Ornstein proofread my manuscript, and John Mandel performed innumerable research tasks with tireless passion. I have benefited immensely from their wise counsel. Karl Tiedemann, Jerome Vered, and Max Pross have my heartfelt thanks for assisting with material and research needs.

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I am blessed with the most loving and caring family in the world. My parents, Andrew and Sandra, have always abounded in unconditional love and encouragement, as have my brothers Jay and Ricci, and my nephew Josh. You mean more to me than words can convey. The same is true of my uncles, aunts, and cousins, the Harrises, Frangellos, Romanos, and Floyds. I especially appreciate the assistance of my cousins Corey and Tami, and my Aunt Toni and Uncle Tony.

God bless you all,
Andrew A. Erish
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFA</td>
<td>Academy Film Archive, Los Angeles, California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMPASIO</td>
<td>2010 Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Program, Los Angeles, California</td>
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<td>AMPAS9</td>
<td>2009 Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Program, Los Angeles, California</td>
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<td>BGT</td>
<td>Budget Films, <a href="http://www.budgetfilms.com">www.budgetfilms.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDF</td>
<td>Cineteca del Friuli, Pordenone, Italy</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHS</td>
<td>H. H. Buckwalter Collection (mss 1411), Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado</td>
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<tr>
<td>EH</td>
<td>George Eastman House, Rochester, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>FMN</td>
<td>EyeFilm, Amsterdam, The Netherlands</td>
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<td>GRP</td>
<td>Grapevine Video, <a href="http://www.grapevinevideo.com">www.grapevinevideo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HC</td>
<td><em>Hollywood, Colorado</em>, VHS included in David Emrich's <em>Hollywood, Colorado: The Selig Polyscope Company and the Colorado Motion Picture Company</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>Library of Congress, Washington, DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHL</td>
<td>Selig Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles, California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTAFAI</td>
<td><em>More Treasures from American Film Archives, 1894–1934</em>, DVD, 2004, produced by the National Film Preservation Foundation in collaboration with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, George Eastman House, the Library of Congress, the Museum of Modern Art, and the UCLA Film and Television Archive (program 1)</td>
</tr>
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<td>NAA</td>
<td>National Anthropological Archives, <a href="http://www.nmnh.si.edu">www.nmnh.si.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCLA</td>
<td>UCLA Film and Television Archive</td>
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<tr>
<td>WGJ</td>
<td>G. William Jones Film and Video Collection, SMU</td>
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COL. WILLIAM N. SELIG, THE MAN WHO INVENTED HOLLYWOOD
Auto leaving Selig Polyscope Co. Pacific Coast Branch. Security Pacific National Bank Collection/Los Angeles Public Library
THE ACADEMY AWARDS CEREMONY HELD ON MARCH 20, 1948, HONORED what were deemed the best films released in 1947. The event also celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The occasion inspired Academy president Jean Hersholt to spearhead an effort to formally recognize the founders of the American film industry. Four elderly men were honored with special Oscars: Colonel William N. Selig, Albert E. Smith, George K. Spoor, and Thomas Armat. Selig and Smith were able to attend the ceremony.

Moments before receiving his Oscar, Col. Selig, squat with wire-rimmed glasses and bushy white mustache, confirmed in a tremulous voice for Hersholt and a worldwide radio audience listening to the ceremony that he was responsible for starting the motion picture industry in Los Angeles back in 1909, and that he had entered the business in 1896.1 Earlier that week, he had celebrated his eighty-fourth birthday.

Four months after being feted with an Academy Award, William Selig would be remembered once more. The occasion was his death. He then faded back into oblivion.

How is it possible that the man who brought the American motion picture industry to Los Angeles and who created so many other foundational elements of the medium is so unknown to film buffs and historians? The easy answer is that the colonel’s studio, the Selig Polyscope Company, stopped making films in 1918, although he remained sporadically active as an independent producer through the 1930s. Few of his productions are known because no present-day entity perpetuates his work. However, a formidable archive of information regarding the Selig Polyscope Company has been available to historians and researchers for over sixty years. In 1946–1947, William Selig donated his
business records to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Library. Added to other company documents in the library’s collection, the William Selig papers comprise fifteen linear feet and include correspondence, production files, scripts, and scrapbooks. Selig also donated six linear feet of photographs, including production stills from more than five hundred now mostly lost films. In fact, of the more than 3,500 films released by Selig between 1896 and 1938, only about 225 are known to have survived to the present. Many of those that do exist are seminal productions in the development of commercial cinema. Unfortunately, this wealth of material has been virtually ignored by all but a few specialized researchers.

A great deal of film history continues to be based on the ancient puffery of press releases, self-serving memoirs, a notoriously fictive fan press, and inaccurate accounts of the early industry. For instance, widespread myth attributes the founding of Hollywood to Cecil B. DeMille, who co-directed The Squaw Man there in 1914. The reality is that William Selig had long been in Los Angeles by that time. His early success served as a beacon to other American film companies, and Los Angeles was already a thriving film city by the time DeMille and company arrived. In fact, upon Selig’s death, DeMille noted that when he arrived in LA he visited the Selig lot to learn how to make movies.2

D. W. Griffith has also been identified as the inventor of Hollywood. In 1972, his unfinished memoirs were published as The Man Who Invented Hollywood: The Autobiography of D. W. Griffith. It is indisputable that Griffith was responsible for establishing a visual grammar for film that endures to the present, but his innovations were largely confined to how screen images are presented and arranged. While such technique remains the cornerstone of cinematic construction, “Hollywood” encompasses much more.

Neal Gabler’s critically acclaimed An Empire of Their Own is subtitled How the Jews Invented Hollywood. Like most conquering armies, the second generation of American filmmakers rewrote the history of the medium to further their own interests and enhance their legacies. Yet many of the innovations attributed to the film moguls profiled by Gabler had already been established by Selig, who aided many of those same producers as they started in the industry. Jewish filmmakers relocated from the Northeast to Los Angeles not so much to escape persecution as to follow Selig’s successful business and aesthetic models, which included filming amidst a climate and wide-ranging geography that invited year-round production.

In order to better appreciate William Selig as the man who invented Hollywood, consider the following innovations and accomplishments. Selig
INTRODUCTION

- consistently produced longer, more complex stories than his competitors, from the first two-reel narrative film to the first two-hour-long feature made in America;
- produced the first American movie serial with cliffhanger climaxes;
- established the promotion of individual films via innovative exploitation in partnership with newspaper syndicates and publishing houses;
- made the first series of industrial films for a large corporate client;
- produced the first Westerns in the West, with real cowboys and Native Americans, while establishing authentic geography as a primary convention of the genre;
- initiated and developed the jungle-adventure film;
- constructed a movie studio as the site for a public theme park;
- produced the first horror film in America;
- developed the first successful American newsreel (in partnership with William Randolph Hearst);
- established the first American studio production complex with extensive backlot;
- encouraged actors under contract to write and direct;
- cultivated a worldwide audience for his films, significantly contributing to American domination of the medium;
- produced a film that resulted in the Catholic Church lifting its ban on the viewing of motion pictures;
- sponsored archaeological expeditions to remote areas of the world that yielded valuable documentaries and second-unit footage that enhanced exotically set melodramas and adventure films;
- helped the second generation of producers to get a foothold within the industry, which led to the establishment of Warner Brothers, MGM, and Fox; and
- utilized Southern California as a second-unit site, later producing the first fictional films shot in LA and ultimately constructing the first permanent studio in Los Angeles.

As this list indicates, everybody followed Selig, not only by imitating film and business practices, but also by trailing after him to Los Angeles.

For virtually all fans of commercial cinema from the World War I era to the present, Hollywood refers to more than just a neighborhood within the city of Los Angeles; it's both a style of film and the business that supports it, which in reality extends beyond the city and Los Angeles County. Director John Ford once said, "Hollywood is a place you can't geographically define. We don't
really know where it is." The closing credits for many MGM films produced during that company’s heyday read: “The End, Made in Hollywood, U.S.A.,” yet its studios and offices were actually located in Culver City. The same goes for Warner Brothers, which for most of its history has been located in Burbank. It is doubtful that anyone would have considered making films anywhere near Los Angeles had Selig not gone there first and proved its superiority as a production site.

Although hundreds of people contributed their talents to Selig Polyscope productions, William Selig was intimately involved with the vast majority of films bearing his name. An article published in 1911 noted that the man and his studio were synonymous: “When one says the ‘Selig Polyscope Company’ one really means W. N. Selig himself, who is the presiding genius and leading spirit of the establishment. His eye is on every detail of the business at all times.”

There is a single book about Selig—Motion Picture Pioneer: The Selig Polyscope Company, edited by Kalton C. Lahue. It is a starting point, offering a brief text in support of hundreds of production stills that span a seven-year period of the company, supplemented by a dozen contemporary articles and reviews.

This present book is intended to build on Lahue’s work. It does not claim to be a definitive history; both the man and the people who worked for him were involved in the development of far too many facets of the motion picture industry to be covered in a single volume. And, while this investigation does offer aesthetic analysis for some of Selig’s most important productions, it does not engage in the kinds of theoretical musings that dominate the discourse in cinema studies. Rather, this work aims to provide a more complete and accurate history of Selig and early cinema than has ever before been available, filling in gaps and correcting long-held misunderstandings concerning the founding and development of the motion picture industry.

It is hoped that this work will challenge film scholars to investigate primary source material from other neglected or underutilized sources, and inspire additional research into this heretofore neglected innovator and pioneer.
WILLIAM NICHOLAS SELIG (PRONOUNCED SEE-LIG) WAS BORN ON March 14, 1864, at 10 Kramer Street, Chicago, Illinois, to Joseph Franz and Antonia (Linsky) Selig, the fifth of eight children. Selig’s father, a shoemaker, hailed from Bohemia, his mother from Prussia. Not much is known of “Willy” Selig’s early years except that his German-speaking family was poor and staunchly Roman Catholic. Selig attended public school until the age of thirteen and then began serving an apprenticeship as an upholsterer and decorator.

While still in his teens Selig rebelled against his parents’ wishes and became apprenticed to a master magician. He developed into a good enough parlor entertainer to quit the upholstery trade and perform magic in small-time dime museums and variety theaters. Selig debuted at Kohl and Middleton’s Museum on West Madison Street in Chicago and eventually toured throughout the Midwest.

Dogged by poor health, Selig relocated to the healthier (pre-smog) climate of California sometime during the late 1880s, as was the curative fashion of the time. He became the manager of a fruit and health ranch in the town of Chicago Park in Northern California. During the winter Selig revived his magic act, pulling rabbits out of his hat throughout the area’s mining and farming communities.

After regaining his health, William Selig quit the fruit ranch and moved to San Francisco to resume a full-time career in show business, performing his magic act as “Selig the Conjurer” in theaters up and down the California coast. He witnessed firsthand the transformation of bawdy variety entertainment into what would become known as vaudeville. Traditionally, variety entertainment catered exclusively to adult male audiences. Vaudeville, a sanitized, more profitable format, opened up the variety show to women and children.
Col. William N. Selig, ca. 1914. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
Selig’s early recognition that entertainment suitable for the entire family offered potentially larger audiences and greater box office returns would later influence his filmmaking aesthetic.

Prior to the rise of vaudeville, minstrelsy had been the most popular form of American entertainment. Originally, minstrelsy was a performance style in which white entertainers would wear blackface makeup and sing, dance, and joke in an exaggerated manner that was both degrading to and celebratory of blacks. By the 1890s, however, African Americans had begun appropriating minstrelsy as their own.

Between 1893 and 1895, William Selig was co-owner of two minstrel companies. For his first venture, he partnered with San Francisco African American barber Lew Johnson to organize a troupe known as “Selig and Johnson’s Colored Minstrels.” Johnson had nearly thirty years’ experience operating a series of small, all-black minstrel troupes throughout the Midwest and West. Their twelve-member troupe was called a “wagon show,” for they traveled in their own coach, which was pulled by a team of four horses and equipped with a large performance stage. One of the few documented mixed-race minstrel troupes, the company consisted of Selig, Ed Martin and his trained dogs, a Mexican driver who doubled on trombone, and nine African American minstrel entertainers.

One of the adjectives often used to describe William Selig was “Falstaffian.” Throughout most of his adult life he was stout, wore a mustache, and was friendly to a fault. The worst said of him was that he was a hail-fellow-well-met, perhaps a little too anxious to please. Following the example of other nineteenth-century itinerant showmen, Selig added the appellation of “Colonel” to his name. The title connoted a respectability otherwise denied impresarios of popular entertainment. Besides financing and managing the troupe, Col. Selig performed sleight-of-hand tricks during the olio, or variety after-piece, of his minstrel shows.

While the company was being assembled in San Francisco, one of the singers brought a tall, handsome man to audition. In the parlance of the era, he was “high-yaller,” a light-complexioned Negro. The man demonstrated a pleasant baritone singing voice and revealed that he could also dance and play the banjo. He told Selig about how he had been fired from his job on the Southern Pacific Railroad (through no fault of his own) and then been stranded in the Bay area. The way he told his woeful story was hilarious, and his smile infectious; Selig was reminded of Billy Kersands, the top black comedian at that time. Despite his lack of professional experience, Bert Williams was hired to complete Selig and Johnson’s minstrel troupe.
Selig and Johnson's Colored Minstrels deliberately avoided playing major
railroad towns and cities, preferring isolated mining camps and small towns,
where they did better business. They debuted before one thousand members
of the state militia encamped at Bolinas. The militia and townspeople turned
out in full force at the Odd Fellows Hall. Following Martin's dog act, Bert Wil-
liams was to tell a joke, then sing and play the banjo. But Williams' stage fright
was so bad that he forgot the punch line to his joke and started to cry. Thinking
it was part of the act, the audience started to laugh. Williams moved on to the
song, but when he got to the chorus, he blurted out, "I've got it, I've got it," and
proceeded to tell the remembered punch line. According to Selig, the audience
laughed until they cried. Williams thought he'd ruined the show and wanted to
quit, but Selig prevailed upon him to persevere. News of the formidable talent
of Bert Williams passed by word of mouth among traveling salesmen, helping
to make the tour a success.

After the troupe returned to San Francisco, producing partner Lew John-
son quit the venture, as did some of the performers. Williams, who had taken
dancing lessons from an African American named George Walker who had
come to San Francisco with a medicine show, took Selig to see Walker at a bar
on Mission Street where Walker sang and danced for tip money. Colonel Selig
hired him on the spot to join the re-formed troupe, and thus the team of Wil-
liams and Walker was born.

The new troupe, now called "Martin and Selig's Mastodons Minstrels,
with dog trainer Ed Martin as Selig's producing partner, toured throughout
Southern California as far as San Diego before heading back north. A high-
light of the show was a comedy magic act wherein Williams would try to ex-
pose Selig's feats of prestidigitation. The new aggregation, consisting of "five
whites, one Mexican and four colored minstrels," endured a grueling life, ac-
ccording to Williams. Walker earned $8 per week and "cakes," and Williams
received that amount plus an extra dollar for acting as stage manager, though
there were few paydays during the troupe's five months of existence. After
briefly getting stranded in Bakersfield, the minstrels returned to San Francisco
and disbanded.

Having by now developed a performance repartee that would eventually
carry them to Broadway stardom, Williams and Walker were booked into
San Francisco vaudeville houses. Selig went on to perform his magic act in
the "House of Mystery" at the San Francisco Mid-Winter Fair. When the fair
closed, Col. Selig hooked up with a popular midway attraction going out on
tour, a wild animal show called "Boone's Arena." The idea was to work his way
cross-country back home to Chicago. Apparently, the grind of life on the road
had lost its allure.
Selig headed south with the show, once again playing towns down the California coast. Boone’s Arena stayed in San Diego until they raised enough money to travel to a two-week engagement at the Dallas Fair. They arrived just in time to encounter two weeks of steady rain. Broke and disgusted, Selig parted company with the destitute animal show.9

That sojourn would have been little more than an unhappy memory had it not been for something that would forever change Selig’s life: in Dallas, he encountered a kinetoscope. Developed and manufactured by technicians from Thomas Edison’s laboratory, the kinetoscope was a coin-operated machine in which an individual would peer into a peephole on top of a wooden cabinet to view motion pictures. The cabinet contained 50- or 150-foot spools of perforated film that played for approximately twenty seconds or one minute, respectively. Subject matter for these earliest films often drew on preexisting forms of commercial entertainment that accentuated movement, including vaudeville, wild west shows, dance, and sports; the films were photographed inside and outside Edison’s “Black Maria” studio.10

Edison’s kinetoscope was phenomenally successful when it was introduced commercially in early 1894, but by the time the device debuted in Dallas in autumn 1895, interest in it was already beginning to wane.11 Nonetheless, the experience had a profound effect on William Selig. Not only was he intrigued by the entertainment possibilities offered by the new medium, but like a few others, he recognized the inherent limitation of individualized viewing. Selig resolved to develop a means of projection along the lines of popular magic-lantern shows that would provide a simultaneous viewing experience for theater-sized audiences and thus offer the potential for greater profits.

Inspired by a wondrous vision and sense of urgency, Selig set about raising enough money to work his way back to Chicago and finance his new venture. He embarked on a phony spiritualism act, an unseemly offshoot of his background in prestidigitation. Just as his experience performing in vaudeville would influence his approach to filmmaking, so too did Selig’s background in audience deception inform aspects of his cinematic endeavors.

Not long after Selig returned to Chicago in late 1895–early 1896, Edison began marketing a movie projector whose patent he’d purchased from its inventor, Thomas Armat, one of the men who would be awarded a special Oscar with Selig more than fifty years later.12 It was this machine that was used to project the first motion pictures for a paying audience in New York, at Koster and Bial’s Music Hall in April 1896. To finance the construction of his own motion picture camera and projector, Colonel Selig continued performing sleight-of-hand magic at night, operated a commercial photography business by day, and also made magic-lantern slides for vaudeville theaters.13
Selig attempted to build his own projector using samples of motion picture film from the Schiller vaudeville theater as a guide in order to circumvent the patent on the Armat-Edison model. Seeking help in implementing his designs, he turned to the Union Model Works. The machine shop's top mechanic, Andrew Schustek, had been engaged in building a knockoff of a Lumière camera-projector on behalf of a mysterious French customer. The Lumière Cinématographe was in part based on the design of the Edison camera and Armat motion picture projector, but the French company was immune to prosecution for infringement because Edison hadn't applied for any foreign patents.Spying the Lumière blueprint on a workbench, Selig hired Schustek to build a projector for him. Sharing a vision for the potential of motion pictures, Schustek quit the Union Model Works and became William Selig's first employee. Built to accommodate Edison-sprocketed film, the Selig Standard Camera and Selig Polyscope projector were born.  

At that time Eastman Kodak was the only manufacturer of motion picture film in the United States, which it sold unperforated. When Selig was ready to test the new camera, he tediously spent most of a night in a darkroom measuring and marking where the sprocket holes should go along the edge of a ten-foot length of negative, then punching out each perforation using a three-cornered file. With that first strip of self-perforated film, Selig photographed a moving train. Although the uncertain developing resulted in a somewhat hazy image, Selig deemed his efforts a success.

A perforating machine, something all of the early motion picture production companies had to build, was subsequently constructed to punch sprocket holes in the film. After one or two more tests, Selig made a film of the Chicago stockyards in December 1896, which he sold to a vaudeville theater. This was standard practice for the early films made by Selig: he'd shoot a film in the daytime, usually a single shot conveying ordinary movement or trading on familiar stereotypes, develop it at night in his parents' basement, and sell it outright to a vaudeville theater the next morning. Then he'd repeat the same process all over again.

Selig entered commercial filmmaking at about the same time as the other main American motion picture companies: the American Mutoscope Company of New York, Siegmund Lubin of Philadelphia, and the New York–based Vitagraph Company; along with Edison, they would prosper into the twentieth century as the five principal American motion picture companies for nearly two decades. Among the technical problems the pioneer filmmakers had to overcome were the shrinkage of the negative after developing and the peeling of the image/emulsion from the celluloid base. And before the invention of
take-up reels, film ran through cameras and projectors directly into opaque bags. Before the turn of the century, itinerant showmen, carnival black tent shows, vaudeville theaters, and other exhibitors tended to show films made by only one producer who made his own equipment, since technical parameters didn't become standardized until around 1900. Subsequent generations of filmmakers have never known how easy they've had it.

In April 1897 Selig was able to lease an office at 43 Peck Court (later reconfigured to become Eighth Street), between State Street and Wabash Avenue in Chicago’s Tenderloin District, for his fledgling filmmaking business, which he initially called the Multoscope and Film Company. Since virtually all the money he made was put back into the company, Selig walked five miles to and from work every day to save on transportation expenses. There's no record of when Selig began to engage in the more lucrative and widespread practice of making and selling prints of his films, as opposed to selling the original negatives outright. He was certainly doing so by 1899 in order to capitalize on the film that would stabilize his finances and establish him as a major player within the burgeoning industry.

The Tramp and the Dog was a very simple story film. Like many early cinematic comedies, the main character was a “tramp,” what today would be referred to as a homeless person. Tramps were regarded as lazy, deliberately shunning work in favor of nefarious acquisition, and thus became popular objects of derision in an era when the Protestant work ethic was perhaps at its apex in American culture. In Selig’s film, a woman who has just baked a pie sets it on a window sill to cool. A tramp sees the pie, nabs it, and rushes away. A bulldog takes off after the tramp. Just as the tramp has climbed halfway over a fence, the dog leaps and bites him in the posterior. The fence collapses, the tramp crashes to the ground, and the dog trots away clutching a piece of the tramp’s pants between its teeth.

Audiences found the film hilarious, though it is unknown how many prints were sold. Only a handful of movies produced before 1909 resulted in sales exceeding one hundred prints. Selig would later make the outrageous claim that over the course of several years he printed twenty-five hundred or four thousand copies of the minute-and-a-half-long film for $13.50 each. Tramp and Dog, as the film was later known, eventually played England, France, and Germany, and inspired a spate of imitations. More than half a century later, Selig’s original premise and his competitors’ variations would become familiar to baby boomers as staple routines in Hanna-Barbera cartoons.

While developing his business, William Selig lived at his mother’s home and remained a bachelor until he was thirty-five. Flush from the success of
Tramp and Dog, he married Mary Pinkham in a Roman Catholic ceremony in Chicago on September 7, 1899. Mary, also known as Mamie and May, hailed from Stockton, California. Presumably Selig met her in the early nineties when he was living nearby. The childless couple remained married nearly fifty years, until his death in 1948.26

The financial windfall created by Tramp and Dog also enabled William Selig to expand his offices in Peck Court, eventually leading to his leasing of the entire building. The building contained general offices, developing and printing laboratories, and machine shops for building props, sets, and especially projectors.27

Besides producing films, Selig built and sold movie projectors to exhibitors throughout the Midwest and South, dominating the black tent show markets and the vaudeville houses of Chicago, Milwaukee, Memphis, and Louisville early in the new century.28 Following the lead of the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company (aka Biograph), which in 1901 began marketing its product to community parks, Selig’s films were shown to as many as thirty thousand people a night during summer months in Denver’s City Park.29 Electrician Tom Nash was hired as a full-time cameraman and occasional projectionist.30 Selig would place his film service in a new city and then dispatch Nash to photograph notable people and places in the area; Nash would then train local projectionists to show the films.

In 1898 the Spanish American War proved a popular subject with American filmmakers and their audiences. William Selig made several films of preparations for war at Camp Tanner in Springfield, Illinois, such as Soldiers at Play, Wash Day in Camp, and First Regiment Marching.31 The most cinematically complex of his early war films was A Soldier’s Dream, depicting several soldiers sitting around a campfire playing cards and musical instruments. The dreams of one soldier fitfully sleeping materialize in the smoke above the fire, showing his wife and children at home. The sentimental, double-exposed image was likely influenced by the “trick” films of Frenchman Georges Méliès, whom Selig greatly admired.32

In 1900 meatpacking king Philip D. Armour enlisted William Selig to make a series of industrial films showing the entire operation of his business, from cattle being unloaded off railroad cars in the stockyards to the meat being sealed in cans. The films were eventually marketed as The Chicago Stock Yards—From Hoof to Market. A dozen years before the creation of studio lights to illuminate practical interior settings, Selig borrowed several stage spotlights from the Richard Mansfield Theatrical Company, which was then playing the Grand Opera House, and whitewashed the walls inside Armour’s slaughterhouses
and canning buildings in order to provide sufficient reflective luminance for the camera negative. At least fifty-eight short films were made, showing everything from the koshering of cattle to the scalding, scraping, and decapitation of hogs, to sheep being led to slaughter by a goat. The Armour promotional films remained on the market for a few years and would later prove to be the most fortunate co-production of Selig's career.33

By December of 1900, William Selig's productions and projector sales were becoming so profitable that he incorporated, renaming his business the Selig Polyscope Company. Selig's attorneys opted for a small piece of the company in lieu of cash remuneration, but by 1907 he had bought them out and controlled all but a few token shares of stock. At the time of incorporation, the business was valued at $50,000 despite maintaining only a slim monthly profit. Unlike later motion picture companies, Selig's business was always self-financed; during his first decade, the profits from a film often determined the budget for the succeeding one.34 The assets of the new company included prints of nearly 150 individual productions.

The list of films in Selig's incorporation papers provides a glimpse into the late-nineteenth-century cinematic genres that were popular with the medium's first audiences, half a dozen years before the rise of nickelodeons. There are twelve parades of everything from Civil War veterans to automobiles; at least a half-dozen politicians are featured, including President McKinley dedicating a cornerstone and William Jennings Bryan at his home in Lincoln, Nebraska. Among the twenty comedies listed are several satirizing African and Irish Americans, as well as country rubes; ten travelogues of trains passing through picturesque midwestern and western scenery; ten dance films encompassing everything from cakewalks to ballet; and a half-dozen sports films, including bullfights and horse races. Fifteen magic/special effects subjects are also listed, though most were made by Georges Méliès and illegally copied by Selig.35

Almost every American filmmaker at the time made dupes of Méliès' films, including Edison, Lubin, and Vitagraph—though they didn't confine themselves to copying only Méliès' films.36 At the turn of the century, Edison and Lubin were ripping off most of the leading British and French manufacturers.37 Even Selig and Vitagraph made illicit copies of Lumière's epic Passion Play in 1902 without acknowledging or reimbursing the French producers, though it should be noted that at least one British firm was illegally duping and marketing Selig features as its own.38 The American companies were also guilty of occasionally copying each other's productions. For instance, Edison duped Selig's Chicago street scene at the intersection of Madison and State.
Streets, while Selig's *Scenes in a Barbershop* was actually a copy of Edison's *What Demoralized the Barbershop* (1898).\(^3^9\)

From the beginning, Thomas Edison believed his competitors had no legal right to produce and exhibit motion pictures unless they paid him for the privilege. Historian Gordon Hendricks has shown that Marey, Friese-Greene, and even Edison's own employee Dickson deserve much more credit for the invention of motion pictures than does the Wizard of Menlo Park.\(^4^0\) As he'd done with previous inventions originating at his laboratories, Edison filed a patent on his motion picture camera, which was granted in 1897. Within months, he brought lawsuits against Lubin and Biograph, as well as several smaller companies that immediately folded.\(^4^1\) W. K. L. Dickson defected from Edison's employ to become one of the founders of Biograph, which, not surprisingly, became the target of Edison's greatest hostility.\(^4^2\) Siegmund Lubin earned the derisive moniker of "the Pirate King" for engaging in such practices as buying "a copy of every film made by every known manufacturer, foreign and domestic" during an eight-month period in 1897, and striking as many new copies as he could sell at prices that undercut those of the actual filmmakers. In May 1905 Lubin published a catalog that included dupes of seventy-five Pathé titles, out of a total of ninety listed, as his own productions. Edison's lawyers successfully drove Lubin out of the country for a year.\(^4^3\) Edison himself, however, was not above engaging in the practice of duping; Charles Musser has indicated that "of the thirty-four pictures listed in Edison's January 1904 catalog, nineteen were dupes. In the September 1904 catalog thirty-six of fifty-two were dupes."\(^4^4\)

On December 5, 1900, Thomas Edison got around to suing the Selig Polyscope Company for patent infringement, also naming the Sears, Roebuck Company, which sold Selig's films through its catalogs. Selig curtailed his filmmaking activities until a court ruled against Edison in March 1902 in response to a countersuit that had been brought by Biograph. Following Edison's lead, Selig applied for and eventually received forty patents on his camera, Polyscope projector, and various accoutrements. Undaunted, Edison filed another patent infringement suit against Selig in November 1902. The relentless patent litigation instigated by Edison over a ten-year period would nearly destroy the American film industry.\(^4^5\)

Selig's operations suffered another blow in October 1901 when a Polyscope projector exploded during a vaudeville show at the Temple Theater in Louisville, Kentucky. Fourteen spectators were seriously injured during the stampede to the exits. Selig subsequently lost his largest single customer at the time, the Arthur Hopkins vaudeville circuit, which operated theaters throughout
much of the South and Midwest. The Louisville fire hurt Selig’s projector business, though he continued to manufacture improved, fireproof variations through 1912. Undaunted, he continued producing films of mock rescues in cooperation with various local fire departments, from Natchez to Shreveport, Topeka to Sheboygan. The firemen depicted would then help sell tickets to local townspeople.

Although no prints of Selig’s mock rescue “fire runs” have survived into the present, several stunning still photographs exist from *Denver Fireman’s Race for Life*, released in 1902, for which cameraman Thomas Nash and Selig’s Colorado producer H. H. Buckwalter mounted a camera on the back of a downtown streetcar and photographed horse-drawn fire engines racing behind them along Seventeenth Street as crowds lining the thoroughfare cheer them on. This early example of a tracking shot is dynamically cinematic: not only do the objects within the frame move, but the frame itself is kinetic, conveying a perpetually shifting perspective and resulting in aesthetically compelling imagery. An addition to the innovative construction of James Williamson’s seminal 1901 chase films *Stop Thief!* and *Fire!*, which connected action moving from shot to shot, Thomas Nash’s tracking shot would soon be appropriated for all types of chases, especially in Selig’s Westerns, and is indicative of the innovative camera work and sophisticated understanding that Nash brought to the medium.

It should be noted that two years before Edwin S. Porter directed the more widely known *Life of an American Fireman* (1903) for Edison, both the Selig and Williamson films had introduced innovations that were far more influential in the construction of cinematic language.

In later years Selig would cite his 1903 production of *Humpty Dumpty* as his first “real” film, meaning his first narrative consisting of multiple scenes and camera setups. *Humpty Dumpty* was part of a cinematic fairy tale genre at the turn of the century that enjoyed subsequent revivals during the silent era. Selig’s production was essentially a filmed record of a staple of mid-nineteenth-century theatrical pantomime made famous in America by George L. Fox that was easily adaptable to the new medium. Much more than just the simple nursery rhyme familiar to later generations of Americans, Selig’s film included such self-contained episodes as *Humpty’s Trouble with the Washerwoman*, *Humpty and the Dude*, *Humpty and the Pie Woman*, and *Humpty and the Demon*. Exhibitors had the option of purchasing individual episodes or the complete eight-part film, though Selig later recalled that no one to his knowledge was interested in showing the long version. For Selig, *Humpty Dumpty* heralded the move away from simple single-shot narratives toward more complex story and cinematic constructions.
Selig released few new films in 1904 and 1905, the most notable being actualities (i.e., documentaries) of the inaugural ceremonies of President Roosevelt and Vice President Fairbanks, advertised as the only “moving pictures” taken of the events, though Vitagraph offered similar films. It appears that only two narrative films were produced by Selig in 1905, The Serenade and The Gay Deceivers. Serenade is little more than a twelve-scene elaboration on Tramp and Dog in which a young man serenading his beloved is chased by the bulldog of her irate father. The surviving production still re-creates Tramp and Dog’s climactic image, with the dog biting the lover’s buttocks as he climbs over a fence.
The Gay Deceivers is a domestic comedy about two married men whose wives learn of their assignation with two pretty young women. The plot and its contrivances, including a phony note getting the men out of the house, their wives and the boyfriends of the young women catching sight of their rowboat rendezvous, and the husbands' comeuppance, bear a striking similarity to such Laurel and Hardy films as Their Purple Moment (1928), Men O' War (1929), and Sons of the Desert (1933). It's possible that Selig's film may have inspired Laurel and Hardy scenarist Leo McCarey. Unfortunately, Serenade and Gay Deceivers would be the last two narrative films Selig would produce for nearly a year.

Despite the growing popularity of moving pictures, persistent Edison litigation against domestic competitors had such a devastating effect on the American industry that by mid-1905, the French Pathé Company had become the principal supplier of films in the United States. For the next few years European film companies such as Nordisk and Italian Cines would join Pathé to dominate American motion picture exhibition. In 1904 Biograph managed to supplant Edison in producing the most American films, largely because of financing from a New York bank and Edison's waning interest in production. Selig was not so fortunate. Due to the crippling expense of fighting the unremitting Edison lawsuits, the Selig Polyscope Company was on the verge of extinction by early 1906.

In February that year, Upton Sinclair's sensational exposé of the meatpacking industry, The Jungle, was published to enormous popular and critical acclaim. A thinly veiled indictment of working and canning conditions at Armour, The Jungle's hard-hitting revelations threatened to put the company out of business. Anxious to generate some positive public relations to counter the book, Philip Armour asked William Selig to distribute new prints of their 1900 promotional films. Selig told Armour he couldn't do it: fighting the Edison litigation had left him financially drained. Armour's own situation was so desperate that he agreed to take control of Selig's legal defense in return for the creation and dissemination of the prints he desired. The Selig Polyscope Company was thus saved from imminent demise by Philip D. Armour, whose own company weathered the storm, though "a congressional committee vindicated Sinclair[,] and the public outcry brought about the Meat Inspection Act of 1906."

When Selig resumed the production of narrative dramas and comedies at his Chicago studio during the summer of 1906, he hired Gilbert M. Anderson as a director, or, as the position was then known, "producer." Anderson directed at least six films at Selig's Chicago studio during the latter half of 1906, including three dramas (one was The Female Highwayman), and two comedies, the first being The Tomboys.
Capitalizing on the current bad-boy/bad-girl genre, which included Biograph's *Mother's Little Angel* (1905), Pathé's *Les Petits Vagabonds* (1905), and Edison's *The Little Train Robbery* (1905), *The Tomboys* concerns two unruly girls who play hooky and victimize several men with a variety of simple pranks that were hoary even a hundred years ago: they pull the chair out from an unsuspecting old man who falls into a washtub; they pin a "kick me" sign on a man and watch as another obeys the command; they tie one end of a rope to a hobo and the other to a cop, who then "stumble, roll and fall"; the film concludes with the girls tickling two unsuspecting Irishmen with a stick, causing them to almost come to blows. Selig also offered several shorter films of the individual episodes from *The Tomboys* to exhibitors and exchanges.\(^5\)

Shortly after the film's release, Margaret Leslie, an adult actress who starred as one of the tomboys, was strangled to death in a Chicago hotel room by actor Howard E. Nicholas, who played the man that fell into the washtub. Leslie and Nicholas had appeared together in six films for Selig, including *The Female Highwayman*, which hadn't yet been released at the time of the murder, and were contracted to appear in a Colorado Western. A newspaper reported that Nicholas murdered Leslie for her diamonds, though it appears that they may have been lovers and thus the killing may have in fact been a crime of passion.\(^5\) It was probably the first such scandal to emerge from the new medium.

*The Female Highwayman* was undoubtedly inspired by two similarly titled Biograph crime dramas, *The Gentlemen Highwaymen* (1905) and *The Lone Highwayman* (1906).\(^6\) *Female* concerns a cunningly ruthless lady thief who commits four crimes, three of which she commits disguised as a man. She steals from her friends' pocketbooks at a party, holds up a jewelry store, hijacks a car and robs the occupants at gunpoint, then purloins a valise from her friend the bank messenger. When she's finally captured by the police, she chooses to swallow poison rather than be taken alive. A movie about an aggressive, self-destuctive female bandit who commits suicide could only have been made before Hollywood's Production Code went into effect. The cover of Selig's release bulletin for *The Female Highwayman* displays two photos of the eponymous character. In one, she is dressed in a fashionable blouse, long skirt, and hat; in the other, she is disguised as a man, holding a revolver pointed at her crotch while straddling a chair Dietrich-style.

Before 1907, Selig was a major supplier of films and projectors to carnival and circus black tent shows. Other steady customers were itinerant showmen such as A. M. Whaylen, whose painted Wild West Show on Canvas was supplemented with motion pictures projected on canvas. Whaylen would travel from town to town in an automobile, and when a crowd gathered, he'd project
Selig films with power supplied by his car's battery. Selig also continued to supply films, projectors, and projectionists for special occasions, such as a gala held by the Business Men's Association of Ashland, Nebraska, attended by five thousand people. But by 1907, a new, more permanent kind of moving picture venue was mushrooming across the country.

It's generally agreed that the first storefront nickelodeon theater opened in Pittsburgh in mid-1905. Within a year, a competing steel city exhibitor was writing to Selig anxious for new films because he'd already exhausted everything the Northeast manufacturers had to offer and his audience was clamoring for more. Nickelodeons were the first urban venues devoted primarily to exhibiting projected motion pictures. And they were relatively inexpensive start-up businesses. Small, vacant commercial storefronts could be rented for little money down, and in many cases a projector and films could be purchased or leased with payment due several days after initial box office receipts comprising 5-cent admissions had been accrued to cover expenses.

One group of aspiring nickelodeon operators, hailing not far from Pittsburgh, called themselves the Duquesne Amusement Supply Company; they were so impoverished that they couldn't afford to purchase chairs, so they arranged to rent some from a nearby undertaker. When the chairs were needed for a funeral, their patrons would have to stand. Duquesne was owned and operated by the Warner brothers. One of the first films they ordered was Selig's The Bandit King, which he agreed to ship C.O.D. Soon the Warners were threatening to withdraw their business if Selig didn't allow them to order on account; he capitulated and regretted it when they quickly ran up a bill of nearly $300. Even though the brothers were opening new theaters and renting films to other nickelodeons, advertising their distribution company as the "largest theatrical exchange in the south," the Warners continued to owe money to Selig. To make matters worse, Selig learned that one of the Warners' customers ran a film a day before its official release date, beating out their incensed competition. Selig responded by sending his next release C.O.D. This time the brothers appear to have capitulated and paid off their outstanding debt. The Warners would become major distributors of motion pictures, eventually moving into the top ranks of the second generation of American producers with the release of The Jazz Singer (1927). Selig continued doing business with the Warners for nearly twenty years.

Among the thousands of Selig documents that survive, harsh words are reserved for only a few people. Col. Selig's greatest enmity might have been toward Carl Laemmle. Nickelodeon operator and exchange owner Laemmle, who would go on to head Universal Pictures, made the Warners seem like Boy
Scouts. Laemmle poured his profits back into his companies, opening new theaters and exchange offices around the country while mounting a relentless, vicious, and expensive advertising campaign in the trade press against Selig and the other pioneering companies. All the while Laemmle failed to pay the enormous bills he owed Selig—which in comparison dwarfed the Warners' debt. Upon learning in late 1909 that Laemmle planned to move into film production, Selig urged an associate that Laemmle should be "stopped as quickly as possible." 6

When he opened his first nickelodeon in 1907, William Fox placed a standing order for one copy of everything Selig produced. 68 Selig also supplied films to Marcus Loew, whose Greenwich Village nickelodeon would grow into a theatrical empire that would become the parent company of MGM. Loew told Selig that he could get illegal prints of his films from an unscrupulous middleman—presumably Laemmle—at rates lower than what Selig charged, and asked for the same price since he’d prefer dealing with Selig directly. Selig and Loew worked out an amicable deal, and Loew would go on to become a steady customer. 69

Many of the nickelodeon operators, like their customers, were immigrants, or, like Selig, first-generation Americans. In Manhattan and presumably other urban areas, working-class Jewish and Italian immigrants were the principal patrons, while middle- and upper-class audiences tended to stay away. 70 William Selig and immigrant filmmakers like Siegmund Lubin and Vitagraph's Albert E. Smith and J. Stuart Blackton strove to attract the white middle class in order to maximize their profit and raise the social status associated with their craft. One of the ways the American industry tried to expand its audience and distinguish itself from European filmmakers was by following Selig's lead in shunning salacious content in their films. Selig was lauded by a leading exhibitor in Los Angeles for "refraining from producing suggestive subjects," which "seems to be one weak point with foreign manufacturers in picking their subjects." 71 In 1908, while placing a standing order for one print of everything Selig produced, a Dallas exhibitor noted that "American films, especially Selig['s], are in demand while those of French manufacture seem to be losing ground." 72 Virtually every major second-generation producer would adopt Selig's model of family-friendly programming.

Unlike Vitagraph or Lubin, Selig did not operate his own film exchange for the rental and distribution of film prints to nickelodeons; instead, he supplied scores of exchanges with his films. Selig even helped finance William Swanson's entry into the exchange business. Swanson was able to purchase from three to fifteen prints of each film made by the world's top production
companies. During 1907 and the first two months of 1908, Swanson made a
gross profit of $600,000. Like many exhibitors, Ohio nickelodeon operator
H. H. Frazee, who would eventually become the Boston Red Sox owner who
sold Babe Ruth to the Yankees in order to finance Broadway shows like No,
No Nanette, wrote Selig directly requesting a catalog of films. Presumably
exhibitors such as Frazee would have the option of purchasing a film outright
directly from Selig, or renting one at a lower rate from an exchange serving his
community.

Nickelodeons created insatiable audiences, many of whom patronized the
50- to 299-seat storefront shows every day. Operators thus felt compelled to
change their shows at least three times a week, if not daily, running one- or
two-hour-long continuous shows from morning until late in the evening. This
resulted in a rapid turnover and enormous demand for new films. After Phil-
ip Armour relieved much of Selig’s financial burden, Selig resumed the pro-
duction of narrative feature films, averaging about three per month over the
course of 1907. His major competitors at the time, Vitagraph and Lubin, aver-
aged a film per week during the same period.

Among Selig’s most notable 1907 productions was When We Were Boys, anoth-
er excursion into the bad-boy genre. The film cuts back and forth between
two old men happily conversing and the subject of their reminiscence: their
childhood pranks. As boys they steal from a farmer’s orchard and are conse-
quently chased by a bulldog, they receive a “thrashing” after playing a practical
joke on an older brother, and after secretly eating one of grandma’s pies, they
accuse a passing tramp of the crime. The implementation of flashbacks in
When We Were Boys was certainly a first for Selig and quite possibly the entire
American film industry.

With the explosive growth of American production in response to the
booming nickelodeon audience, entertainment industry trade publications
such as the New York Clipper, New York Dramatic Mirror, Variety, and Billboard
began to report on and review motion pictures. The first American periodical
devoted to the movies was Views and Films Index, co-financed by Vitagraph and
Pathé, which began publishing in 1906. This was followed soon after by The
Moving Picture World, which became the most influential trade publication of
the prewar era. In 1907, Selig began to regularly advertise his latest produc-
tions in all of the major trade publications. One of his earliest full-page ads in
Billboard not only publicized his newest releases and latest model Polyscope
projector, but also announced the imminent completion of his new studio.

The ever-increasing demand for new films resulted in the building of in-
door studios that were impervious to the rain, snow, wind, and temperature
fluctuations of the Northeast and Midwest. Since safe and effective electric lighting was still in development, the studios were built much like greenhouses, with specially designed prismatic glass roofs that diffused sunlight for evenly distributed illumination. The first such studios were built by Pathé on the outskirts of Paris. Vitagraph completed an American facility along these lines in Brooklyn between 1903 and 1906, expanding to three studio buildings by 1908. Edison created a small glass studio on a Manhattan rooftop in 1900 and opened a proper studio on a hundred-foot by hundred-foot plot in the Bronx in July 1907. About a month later, Selig unveiled his new studio, the prototype for virtually every major motion picture production facility to follow.

Selig bought a corner lot on what had been farmland at Western Avenue and Irving Park Boulevard in what at the time were the outskirts of Chicago. On it he built a fifty-foot by thirty-five-foot glass studio and brick offices. Tom Nash was promoted from cameraman to manager of the new complex. At the same time Selig hired two of his brothers, August and John Selig, who would rise through the ranks to become the plant's general manager and principal bookkeeper, respectively; they would remain employed by the company until its dissolution in 1920.

In 1908 Selig borrowed $5,000 on the property to purchase the entire block and build the largest studio facility in the country. A five-story steel and brick administration building was erected, the top two floors of which were dedicated to a second, much larger (179-foot x 80-foot) studio with a glass roof and walls that could accommodate seven or eight scenes simultaneously. The lower floors included Selig's private office, dressing rooms, carpenter shops, and a machine shop where all Selig camera equipment was made. During hot summer days, air would be pumped into the studio from a cooling apparatus in the basement. A steel bridge connected the administration building/studio with another brick structure containing the wardrobe department and prop department. There was also a series of tunnels connecting several of the buildings with the studios so that actors, staff, and crew could avoid the elements. Other brick buildings housed the studio's power plant, developing and printing laboratories, and a shop where the Polyscope projectors were manufactured. By 1909 Selig maintained a fireproof vault on the property, where he stored a backlog of several months' worth of negatives and positive prints.

By virtue of having been built on farmland outside the city, the Selig plant had something that none of the other American studios possessed: an enormous three-acre backlot. Near the center of the property was an artificial lake containing sixty thousand gallons of water. The lake was large enough to
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accommodate rowboats and a bridge and/or a small mill, depending on the needs of any given production. A twenty-five-foot stone wall at the extreme north end of the property could support as many as five painted backdrops, though there were also several standing sets, including false house- and storefronts. The backlot also sported a stable for horses; a large barn was soon built to house Selig's growing menagerie of exotic animals. The property was occasionally dotted with tall camera platforms to provide high-angle shots that would hide surrounding buildings.\textsuperscript{83}
This elaborate backlot was used when it would be impractical to transport an entire company of players and technicians to genuine locations. Siegmund Lubin and William Spoor soon built studios and backlots modeled on Selig's facility.\(^4\) With the completion of his new studio, Selig was now equipped to handle multiple productions and significantly expand his business. Within a few months, though, an incident occurred that threatened to shut him down for good.

The year 1907 saw an explosive growth in motion picture production; at the same time, long-standing Edison lawsuits were finally being decided. In March an appeals court ruled that Biograph's camera was of original design and thus not an infringement on Edison's patent. Unfortunately for Biograph, however, key creative personnel, including production heads Frank Marion and
Samuel Long, left the company to form the rival Kalem studio, and Biograph was taken over by the New York Security and Trust Company. Concurrently, many exchanges were cheating producers and nickelodeon operators by giving the best films and rates to their own theaters or friends, or to those who'd pay for the privilege despite contracts with other customers to the contrary. Exchanges would also secretly sublease films without paying additional fees, or deal in high quantities of cut-rate, second-hand "junk" prints, which cast the industry in a negative light. For instance, Selig was selling copies of Tracked by Bloodhounds; or, A Lynching at Cripple Creek (1904) to exchanges in 1905 for $54, while Harry Raza of Omaha was selling dupes for $40. At the same time, public sentiment was growing against sex and violence in films; efforts by government organizations, women's groups, clergymen, and newspapers led to the establishment of local censorship boards throughout the Midwest. At a time when the American motion picture industry should have been thriving, continued in-fighting and chaotic business practices threatened its very existence, and particularly that of the Selig Polyscope Company.

Although Edison lost his suit against Biograph, the court's decision strengthened his claim against the other American producers, and his infringement suit against Selig was reactivated. Afraid of losing the business he'd worked so hard to build, especially now that it promised substantial profit, William Selig was open to reaching a settlement. Selig was not to prevail, however; on October 24, 1907, Judge Christian Kohlsaat of the United States Court in Chicago ruled that the cameras designed and used by Selig infringed on the Edison patents. A week later the Selig Polyscope Company was served with an injunction forbidding the company from "making, using or selling any moving picture machine containing and embodying" the patents issued to Thomas Edison. Fortunately for Selig, J. Stuart Blackton of Vitagraph and George K. Spoor of the newly formed Essanay Company realized that they, too, were in imminent danger of being forced out of business since their cameras were also based on Edison's model. They joined Selig in agreeing to pay Edison the royalties his legal team demanded in return for an end to all litigation—in essence acquiescing to extortion. Selig, Vitagraph, and Essanay were joined by Kalem and Lubin, as well as the French Pathé and Méliès companies, in becoming Edison licensees. Thus virtually every American production company then in existence, with the exception of Biograph, became an Edison licensee on January 31, 1908.

According to the agreement signed by Thomas Edison and William Selig, which was intended to run into 1914, both companies would use 35mm film; they would no longer sell but would rent films for not less than 9 cents per foot.
nor more than 12 cents per foot based upon a rigid pricing scale. In addition, Selig agreed to pay Edison a royalty of $\frac{1}{2}$ cent per foot on the total number of feet leased in a year under 4 million feet. Renters of films by both firms would not be allowed to make dupes, and had to return prints by the first of every month. Presumably the other manufacturers signed similar agreements with Edison, though some may have agreed to pay him a royalty of 1 cent per foot.\textsuperscript{93}

The agreement was also intended to control and regulate the more reputable exchanges, which were organized into the Film Service Association (FSA). The Edison licensees were forbidden from selling or renting films to non-member exchanges, and the FSA was not allowed to rent or buy films from non-licensees. It was also the intention of Edison, Selig, and the other licensed companies to prevent the emergence of any additional producers. Robert Jack Anderson has summed up the licensees' attitude as follows: "The pioneers had taken the risks and now they deserved the rewards."\textsuperscript{94} At last there was peace and stability within the American motion picture industry, and from then on Selig could conduct his business without fear of being shut down.

In the spring of 1907, writer-director Gilbert Anderson left Selig to form a new production company, Essanay, with Chicago exchange operator George K. Spoor; the new company was closely modeled after Selig's operation.\textsuperscript{95} To meet the growing demand for new films, Selig subsequently hired two experienced theatrical directors, Otis Turner and Francis Boggs, to replace Anderson.\textsuperscript{96} Turner had more than twenty-five years of experience staging large productions for leading theatrical producers such as Charles Frohman and Henry Savage.\textsuperscript{97} Boggs had been an actor with various stock companies and was director of a theatrical company starring his wife, May Hosmer, at the time he joined Selig around September 1907.\textsuperscript{98} Perhaps by virtue of his longer theatrical experience and because he joined Selig shortly before Boggs, Turner directed the company's bigger productions.\textsuperscript{99} Turner and Boggs would usually photograph exterior scenes first before moving into the studio, following Selig's edict of utilizing genuine locations whenever possible.\textsuperscript{100} Despite his status as a leading director in motion pictures, Turner publicly expressed disdain for the new medium—a common attitude at the time of veterans of the theater.\textsuperscript{101}

Turner was not alone. Motion pictures were struggling for legitimacy as an art form as narratives became longer and more complex. Virtually every production company engaged in adaptations of popular and critically acclaimed literary and theatrical subjects as a means of attracting preexisting theater audiences and serious consideration from arbiters of high culture.

Early in 1908 Selig released \textit{Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde}, which may have been the first horror film produced in the United States. Like other films of the period, \textit{Jekyll and Hyde} was based on both the Robert Louis Stevenson novel,
originally published in 1886, and its popular theatrical adaptation. In fact, a stock company long associated with the play was engaged to star in Selig’s version. Moving Picture World lauded Jekyll and Hyde not for its fidelity to the book but for “scenes as realistic as any in the theater,” citing specifically its faithfulness to the theatrical production’s costumes, scenery, and staging. The opening image of Selig’s adaptation deliberately provoked the comparison with the raising of a curtain to reveal action photographed on a stage. In essence, Jekyll and Hyde was filmed theater. Around the time it was in production, Francis Boggs was forging a more cinematic approach to theatrical adaptation with his second-unit work for Monte Cristo, though the camera as eighth-row-center spectator would persist in some uninspired quarters until as late as 1912, with the French production of Queen Elizabeth.

Selig was also the first American producer to recognize the satirical possibilities of the horror film with A Modern Dr. Jekyll, produced in 1909. Relying on trick photography and trading on comedic stereotypes then in vogue, A Modern Dr. Jekyll appropriates the popular character and the utilization of an elixir to effect his changes. A bank robber drinks a potion that allows him to alter his appearance at will in order to evade the police, changing into a woman, a horse at a “Dago banana stand,” a “Jew rag picker,” a young girl, and finally a “dude” (a homosexual), at which point he is finally captured.

Before 1908 Selig hired actors from Chicago theatrical agencies by the day, as needed. But by the middle of that summer a company of seventeen players was placed under a year’s contract, working at the Chicago studio six days a week. At the time, Selig claimed that his productions cost about $1,000 to mount, though in truth the budgets were closer to $100 each. Now that Selig was producing nearly two films per week, longtime theatrical directors like Turner and Boggs were valuable not only for their ability to stage scenes but also for their knowledge of scores of theatrical plots from which to craft motion picture stories.

Newspaper articles frequently provided subject matter for films, too, and at least one classified advertisement provided inspiration for a Selig melodrama. The ad read: “WANTED: a good home, in the country, for two small children; mother a hopeless invalid; father a confirmed drunkard; [contact] Salvation Army Headquarters.” A Selig representative visited the headquarters in question and learned that much of their work involved finding homes for orphaned and deserted children. This led to The Blue Bonnet (1908), which met with the approval and cooperation of the Salvation Army, with about twenty members of the Army’s brass band appearing in the film. Exteriors were taken at their headquarters on State Street showing the daily bread line, conveying additional authenticity to the production. Unlike Biograph, which before the arrival
of D. W. Griffith had produced at least two comedies mocking the Salvation Army, Selig treated the organization and its charitable work with respect.\textsuperscript{108}

There is conflicting data about just how popular Selig's productions were at this time. According to an informal survey of films appearing in New York area nickelodeons conducted during June 1908, Selig's were shown only twenty-six times versus Vitagraph's eighty-two, though the tabulation is suspect because Biograph isn't represented at all.\textsuperscript{109} Even though the FSA forbade the illegal "bicycling" of prints between theaters, many exchange operators simply ignored the rules. Thus a more accurate determinant of the success of a producer at that time might be made by considering the number of prints rented to exchanges; Biograph leased an average of forty prints per title during the same period.\textsuperscript{110} According to internal company documents, Selig had contracts with sixty exchanges in twenty-five states during March 1908, with several maintaining standing orders for multiple copies of everything he produced to supply manifold nickelodeons.\textsuperscript{111} It's reasonable to assume that Selig leased between seventy-five and a hundred prints of everything he made in 1908, and undoubtedly more than that for exceptionally popular productions. It was expected that Edison licensees would provide at least one film per week to FSA exchanges; Selig consistently exceeded that quota. However, because exchange operators and nickelodeon exhibitors continued to blatantly disregard the FSA rules, the distribution and exhibition of motion pictures remained chaotic.

One of Edison's chief goals in settling with his rivals was to freeze out Biograph from the American film industry. Biograph retaliated by publicly recommending that all exchanges and exhibitors run both licensed and unlicensed films on the same bill. William Fox deliberately ignored the FSA requirement of returning films to the manufacturers when the lease expired, stockpiling over three thousand reels by the end of 1908. Any given film would pay for itself after several rentals; anything after that was pure profit for nefarious exchangemen. Other large exchanges continued to engage in subleasing, price cutting, and dealing in illegal dupes and "junk" prints of both licensed and unlicensed filmmakers.\textsuperscript{112} The FSA attempted to shut down infringers, relying on abiding exchanges to inform on their unethical competition.

Within a year Edison and Biograph realized that they needed to cooperate in order to end the chaos plaguing the American film industry. A pooling of patents, they believed, could turn their legal stalemate into mutual advantage: Edison owned the patent on movie cameras and Biograph controlled the patent on projectors. Thus on December 18, 1908, the former Edison licensees were joined by Biograph and film importer George Kleine, forming the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC), with the official announcement being
made on January 1, 1909. William Selig realized that competition within the MPPC for exhibitors’ business would significantly increase the quality of their productions, “advancing the motion picture as both an art form and as a mass produced commodity.”

The MPPC implemented efficient new procedures regarding the production, distribution, and exhibition of motion pictures that would prevail for the next forty years. Encompassing virtually every American producer in existence at the time of its organization, the MPPC was designed to eliminate competition by closing the business to any potential newcomers. In addition, the MPPC reorganized the industrial paradigm by creating its own distribution arm, General Film Corporation, to do business only with licensed exchanges, enabling its members to reap the majority of profits instead of the former exchange middlemen, and doing away with the favoritism that had plagued the nickelodeon era. The MPPC also provided fire insurance to its exhibitors and shut down unsafe theaters. Disgruntled exchange operators and exhibitors such as Carl Laemmle and William Swanson (who, it will be recalled, had been ushered into the business by Selig) loudly denounced the MPPC as an illegal “trust.”

While admitting that many of the exchanges and exhibitors closed or shunned by the MPPC had conducted their business in violation of their contracts, Swanson charged that the Patents Company’s actions were actually motivated by anti-Semitism. As proof he cited derogatory comments made by MPPC president and longtime Edison legal adviser Frank Dyer, as well as George K. Spoor of Essanay. However, Spoor’s partner, Gilbert Anderson, was Jewish. Further undermining Swanson’s allegation is the testimony of Philadelphia exchange operator Lewis Swaab, whose correspondence with Selig included anti-Semitic slurs. Swaab testified that MPPC member Sieg mund Lubin, who was Jewish, told him that the Patents Company would wipe out every exchange in Philadelphia except Lubin’s; Swaab lost his license at the beginning of 1911.

Despite oft-repeated claims that the MPPC was formed to prevent Jewish producers from entering motion pictures, the truth is that Selig, Lubin, and Vitagraph were harassed and brought to the brink of ruin by Edison lawsuits over a much longer period than the filmmakers that followed, and suffered the further indignity of having to pay to be free of further litigation with every foot of film they produced. Yet despite all the hardships, Selig emerged as the second-most-prodigious filmmaker in America, and arguably the most influential. As Selig struggled to establish and grow his business, he was also working on developing the first great motion picture genre, the Western, hailed as the foundation of the American film industry.
CHAPTER 2

Making Westerns in the West

William Selig was among the few pioneering filmmakers to produce actuality (documentary) films in the West at the turn of the twentieth century. The choice of images and the methods for producing these films formed the basis for Selig's narrative Westerns, for several years distinguishing his production style and content from those of all other filmmakers. However, just as his Westerns would eventually result in a legacy of influence that extends to the present, so Selig's own productions were inspired by a variety of sources.

Late-nineteenth-century literature, painting, and theater reflected a widespread interest in the American West. Authors O. Henry, Bret Harte, and Owen Wister, painters George Catlin and Frederic Remington, and Buffalo Bill Cody's touring wild west extravaganzas helped shape the imagery, romanticize the inhabitants, and exploit the conflicts, thus establishing the popular, stylized notions of the West. It's not surprising, then, that filmmakers would also capitalize on existing Western themes and iconography for a growing audience.

Both Thomas Edison's company and Biograph produced actuality films of Buffalo Bill parades, cowboys herding and branding cattle, and Yellowstone National Park. According to Daryl E. Jones, such films "accrue . . . historical and cultural significance insofar as they anticipate the development of the feature-length Western film, and thus represent an important pioneering phase in the evolution of the genre."1

By comparison, the documentaries of William N. Selig are virtually unknown, even though according to surviving records, Selig may have produced more Western-based actualities than any other company during the first decade of commercial cinema. Only one of these is known to have survived into
the present. Fortunately, a significant number of company catalogs and correspondence, production stills, and contemporary newspaper accounts have been preserved to document many of Selig’s earliest Western actualities.

Selig’s actualities benefited immeasurably from the participation of Denver newspaper reporter-photographer and booster Harry H. Buckwalter, who had intimate knowledge of some of the West’s most picturesque scenery. Selig befriended Buckwalter at the beginning of 1901; their professional collaboration would evolve from filming actualities in the West to developing the narrative Western. Their friendship, which included vacationing together with their wives, was such that Buckwalter never accepted payment for his formidable assistance. Selig was often described by colleagues as a loner; his friendship with Buckwalter was probably the closest of his adult life.²

Buckwalter helped arrange for Selig to film aboard the Rocky Mountain Limited and from a train traveling through Colorado’s Royal Gorge. This wasn’t the first actuality made in Colorado, though. The Edison Company had shot three Native American dance films there in 1898.³ But rather than focus solely on the people of Colorado, Selig recognized the additional value of exploiting the state’s unique geography. Just as Selig’s Colorado activities were getting off the ground, however, he suffered an unexpected setback.

A lawsuit filed by Thomas Edison on December 5, 1900, resulted in William Selig suspending all film production in the West until March 1902, when Edison lost related litigation that had been brought by Biograph.⁴ By then Selig’s Rocky Mountain films were being exhibited in theaters, concert halls, and parks around the world, including Canada, Mexico, England, Germany, Holland, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. A testament to the quality of his Western actualities is the fact that two of the films were awarded first and second place in the London Photographic Society’s 1903 international competition, beating out such better known rivals as Lumière of Paris and Messter of Berlin in what may have been the first international motion picture competition. Selig’s Colorado actualities were popular, too. In 1902, they were playing regularly at “twenty-five theaters, summer resorts and parks in the East,” in addition to other individual exhibitions.⁵

Buckwalter negotiated opportunities for Selig cameraman Thomas Nash to make railroad films of the Colorado Midland, the whole of the Rio Grande system, the Colorado and Southern, and the cog railroad leading to Pike’s Peak. Scenic point-of-view images ranging from Red Rock Canyon’s towering Seven Castles’ monoliths to a five-mile stretch of steep, winding canyons in the Ute Pass were taken from the front of the trains or from rear observation platforms.⁶
In addition to acclimating audiences to authentic western scenery via the railroad films, Selig produced other subjects that would soon be appropriated into the visual lexicon of narrative Westerns. For instance, as Thomas Nash filmed a stagecoach traveling near Glenwood Springs filled with pretty girls waving their handkerchiefs (for *Runaway Stage Coach* [1902]), the camera inadvertently spooked the horses and recorded what was to become a familiar Western image and story element: the runaway stagecoach.
Selig's Western actualities weren't confined to Colorado. Cameraman Nash was dispatched to Sheridan, Wyoming, during the summer of 1902 to make a series of films financed by the Burlington Railroad. Over one thousand Native Americans from the Crow reservation were gathered there to perform several sacred and cultural dances for one final time before they were banned by the government, including an "Indian Hideous Dance" and "Indian Fire Dance." Selig's catalog noted that these were "of great value from an anthropological standpoint" as "the most attractive [films] ever made . . . with the added value of their genuineness and exclusiveness" and pointed out that several of the participants had survived "the Wounded Knee affair." In addition, Nash filmed *Cavalry Parade* (1902) in Fort Sheridan, advertised as "valuable especially as showing actual appearance of soldiers at forts on western frontier"; *Cavalry Parade* was undoubtedly one of the few films ever made that utilized genuine cavalry troops and an outpost.

Nash staged a one-shot film lasting thirty seconds that would help establish a primary visual aspect of the Western in particular and American cinema in general. One thousand mounted Crow Indians equipped with guns loaded with blanks were gathered on the Wyoming prairie about a half mile from the camera, and were instructed to charge toward Nash at full gallop while firing their guns. Just as they reached the camera, the mass of riders opened up and passed to the left and right. One Indian and pony were thrown just in front of the machine and rolled over in the grass. Another Crow found the space too narrow to pass and jumped his pinto over the camera in order to get clear.

Tom Nash photographed the charge from a position that most likely would have precluded survival during an actual attack, and that would not have been available to audiences in any live performance venue. The shot shows the Crows attacking the spectator by means of a property exclusive to the medium: point-of-view action. The inadvertent mishaps of the two Crow riders proved so dazzling that such feats would become familiar stunts in Western narratives. Similarly, Nash's direction of the riders to fork at the camera would become an iconic shot of virtually all action cinema.

At the suggestion of the Smithsonian Institute, Selig sent Buckwalter and Nash to film Utes, Pueblos, Apaches, and Navajos throughout the Southwest during the fall of 1902. The Smithsonian desired a filmic record of outlawed tribal dances and religious customs for historical preservation before they were completely forgotten. This included the Ute "Snake Dance," which had been performed annually to celebrate the harvesting of crops and pay homage to the snakes, which were thought to be endowed with supernatural powers.

In late 1902, just as the American film industry was beginning to expand the production of narrative subjects, Selig and his competitors were once again
forced to limit their activities in order to fight a new round of expensive litigation initiated by the Edison Company. For Selig, this meant abandoning all Western productions for nearly a year in favor of simpler, more inexpensive comedies and actualities made closer to home.\textsuperscript{11}

Unencumbered by such constraints, British filmmakers flourished during this period, creating cinematic techniques to complement complex dramatic narratives. *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), “the best known and most commercially successful film of the pre-Griffith era,” according to Charles Musser, was actually an amalgamation of such 1903 English productions as *Desperate Poaching Affray*, *Daring Daylight Robbery*, and *Trailed by Bloodhounds.*\textsuperscript{12} Musser claims that *Great Train Robbery* only became a Western in hindsight; it was neither conceived nor initially received as such.\textsuperscript{13} This idea is supported by genre theorist Rick Altman, who argues that *Great Train Robbery*

[and] many of the pre-1910 films produced in the West by Essanay, Kalem and Selig, were actually not Westerns. That is, they may have imitated the outward trappings of the currently popular Wild West shows, and offered identifiably Western scenery, but always in association with a dominant already existing genre, and without the civilization versus savagery plot motifs that later come to characterize the genre. In other words, such films fail to constitute a Western genre, because they are still primarily associated with other genres.\textsuperscript{14}

Unlike Altman and Musser, William Selig did recognize *The Great Train Robbery* as a Western, or at least as an attempt at creating one. It wasn't such a leap: Edison advertised the film as having “been posed and acted in faithful duplication of the genuine ‘Holds Ups’ made famous by various bands in the far West.”\textsuperscript{15}

Musser believes that *Great Train Robbery*’s most distinguishing characteristic is its “realism,” which was the result of director Porter’s “careful attention to the details of robbing a train [and] emphasis on process as narrative, [which] almost takes [it] out of the realm of fiction and suggests a documentary intent.”\textsuperscript{16} Yet several components of *Great Train Robbery* and the other early Western narratives appear patently unrealistic to anyone who’s actually been in the West, beginning with William Selig.

Selig was uniquely positioned to improve upon the dubious locations and fancifully costumed, inexperienced horsemen in *The Great Train Robbery.* Such films, he thought, would be more realistic and believable when produced in genuine western locations, and he gambled that sufficient numbers of moving picture patrons would concur.
Contemporary events in the West provided just what he needed for his first dramatic, multi-scene, self-contained narrative film. A major gold strike at Cripple Creek, Colorado, in 1891 was accompanied by a spate of lawlessness. By then the phrase "western justice" had entered the national lexicon to denote the type of hasty, often fatal judgments meted out by posses and lynch mobs operating outside or in defiance of the law in such isolated and relatively uncivilized areas. Selig was inspired to write a story about a beggar who kills an impoverished housewife who offers him food but refuses to give him money. The woman's husband quickly gathers a posse and, with the aid of bloodhounds, pursues the tramp into wooded hills outside of town. After combating various pursuers, the tramp is captured and hanged from a tree. Capitalizing on R. W. Paul's British crime film *Trailed by Bloodhounds*, Selig titled his film *Tracked by Bloodhounds; or, A Lynching at Cripple Creek* (1904). During this transition from actualities and single-shot fictions to longer, multi-shot narratives, producers often employed such double titles to help audiences better understand these relatively sophisticated stories.

*Tracked by Bloodhounds* was shot in Cripple Creek during April 1904, with Selig directing, Nash operating the camera, and Buckwalter procuring locations and talent. Commenting on the film while it was still in production, the *Cripple Creek Times* boasted that it "shows that in Cripple Creek justice may not drag through the courts and the criminal finally escape." The tramp was cast as a black man, and when the African American community became aware of this, they feared that the film might inspire similar acts of violence by whites against blacks. Word spread that serious reprisals would be taken against any member of the race who accepted the role. When *Tracked by Bloodhounds* opened in Cripple Creek at the Palm Theater on July 18, 1904, African Americans in the audience recognized the actor playing the tramp as Wash Edwards, a local black Pullman Company employee. In a disturbing mimesis of the film, Edwards was apprehended outside the theater by an indignant mob of African Americans. Someone produced a noose with which to lynch Edwards, but he successfully pleaded for his life in exchange for leaving Cripple Creek on the first train out.

As would happen with *The China Syndrome* seventy-five years later, events that transpired before the release of *Tracked by Bloodhounds* resulted in a windfall of publicity for the film. *Tracked by Bloodhounds* was produced during "one of the epic labor struggles in American history: the battle of Cripple Creek." It involved a protracted strike by the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) that began on June 6, 1904; a bomb explosion killed thirteen replacement workers and seriously maimed six more. The local Cripple Creek sheriff, who was
sympathetic to the striking miners, was forced to resign under threat of lynching; the bloodhounds used in Selig's film were mobilized to track the alleged perpetrators of the crime. The Cripple Creek tragedy became front-page news across the country.

Selig was quick to make the most of situation. He implied that *Tracked by Bloodhounds* was, at least in part, a documentary "made at the Colorado gold camp during actual occurrences . . . Dozens of prominent miners and citizens who have since been involved in deportation troubles can easily be recognized in the picture." He accurately predicted that "the advertising Cripple Creek has had during the past few months will make people extremely anxious to see a picture actually made in the Cripple Creek district." Selig sold prints of the film, which had a running time of approximately four and a half minutes, outright for $54.

*Tracked by Bloodhounds* was a contemporary Western, reflecting both current events and a form of vigilante justice that had long characterized the American frontier. Virtually all of the adults in the large posse carry handguns or rifles. All the performers appear to be wearing their own clothing, which is simple and worn; there doesn't seem to be a rented costume in sight. Many of the men's hats resemble what later generations would consider cowboy hats, though these too are more rumpled and scruffy than those that would later be worn by most movie cowboys.

Horses, a staple of the fully developed genre, are largely absent from the film. It is likely that Selig was deliberate in this choice, since the poverty of the tramp and his victim would not have been as credible to contemporary audiences had either owned a horse. In addition, staging the chase on foot leveled the playing field for the pursuit.

The story and visual setting are what anchor and identify *Tracked by Bloodhounds* as a Western. Early in the chase, a spectacular shot shows the enormous, gun-toting posse running across the frame. The action is staged on a hilltop overlooking the mountainous, ramshackle community of Cripple Creek. Such an image could not have been photographed anywhere near the northeastern film studios of Selig's competitors or his own Chicago backlot. In a dynamic commingling of visual realism and narrative fiction, the shot indicates what a real western mining town and its inhabitants look like. The abrupt hanging of the tramp, the shooting into his corpse, and cheers of the lynch mob, though staged, also appear chillingly authentic.

William Selig returned to Colorado in August and October 1904 to make more western-themed movies. The *Girls in Overalls* (1904) contains seven scenes showing how the orphaned son and seven daughters of a Colorado
farmer continued to work the family’s 725-acre cow and hay ranch near Gunnison after their parents’ death. The novelty of the film was seeing attractive girls attired in overalls and engaged in physical labor ordinarily performed by men. In addition to showing the girls chopping wood and raking and stacking hay, the film shows them eating watermelon, playing leapfrog, and sliding down a haystack. Selig took out full-page newspaper advertisements for the film in New York, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, and Chicago, promoting *The Girls in Overalls* as “an original creation made direct from life in the mountains of Colorado . . . that touches the heart.” The film not only showed urban and small-town audiences what a real turn-of-the-century western ranch looked like, but also provided a glimpse into an alternative life for young women.23

Like many Coloradans, Buckwalter had been uncomfortable with the narrative content of *Tracked by Bloodhounds*, which he believed offered a negative image of the state he worked so tirelessly to promote. And at this stage of his career, Selig was not interested in appearing biased in any labor or political struggles that might alienate potential patrons. Since both men were anxious to produce fictional narratives germane to beautiful Rocky Mountain scenery, it was agreed that their next production would be set a generation earlier. It was hoped that a story of lawlessness in the Old West could provide a subtle contrast to a modern, more civilized society.24

*The Hold-Up of the Leadville Stage* (1905) involved a stagecoach made famous during the late nineteenth century for having survived numerous Indian attacks and robberies. To lend greater authenticity to his film, Selig utilized the actual Leadville Stage and its last surviving driver, who had transported silver, gold, and passengers through the region after one of the largest deposits of silver in the world was discovered at the city of Leadville in 1877. In addition, scenes were photographed along “the old Leadville stage road through the Garden of the Gods and Ute Pass.”25

As he had done with *The Girls in Overalls*, Selig took out full-page newspaper ads promoting *Leadville Stage*. The ads predicted that the film’s historical accuracy and scenic locations would insure that “this picture will be one to live long and . . . interest millions.”26

Shortly after the movie opens, four masked bandits on horseback chase after the stage and exchange gunfire with guards riding atop it. After the stage is stopped and the passengers looted, a child is shot and killed while trying to escape. The bandits remount their horses and gallop away across mountain trails. One member of the pursuing posse lassos a bandit and jerks him off his horse. The other three villains dismount and flee around a narrow ledge, but one is struck down by a bullet. The two remaining bandits enter a remote
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cabin and get into a knife fight over the booty, with one being stabbed to death. The surviving outlaw is then captured after the armed posse breaks into the cabin.27

Upon its release in January 1905, audiences long enamored of western stories and imagery in moving picture actualities and other media would have recognized Leadville Stage as a Western by its Rocky Mountain setting, stagecoach, gang of bandits on horseback, shootout between the villains and posse, and the capture of an outlaw by lasso. The film also identifies itself as a Western narrative by its title, the way the crime occurs, and how the villains are pursued.

Although no print of Leadville Stage is known to have survived into the twenty-first century, several production stills exist, one of which reveals the four outlaws on horseback riding abreast of and shooting at the stage. The performers are deliberately costumed to help identify the film for contemporary audiences in 1905 as a historical Western.

As the motion picture industry moved into the nickelodeon era, where the exhibition life of a film was typically three days, Selig’s 1904–1905 Colorado Westerns played all across the country for at least three years.28 Despite the films’ success, more than two years would pass before Selig resumed making

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Postcard for The Hold Up of the Leadville Stage, the first historical Western actually made in the West. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
narrative Westerns; such was the drain of the unrelenting Edison patent litigation on his finances. In the interim, Buckwalter continued to produce inexpensive railroad actualities throughout the West, which Selig supplied to the short-lived fad of Hale's Tours franchises.  

Hale's Tours were venues in which audiences were seated in facsimile railroad cars to watch films photographed from real trains projected onto a screen in vicarious simulation of an actual railway journey, a precursor to high-tech ride simulators at modern-day amusement parks. Selig was not only a major supplier of the films, but his Polyscope projector and custom screens were also in demand by franchisees. Buckwalter reported that in a single week over fifty thousand "passengers" paid to see Colorado railroad films at two Hale's Tours cars in Chicago. The Hale's Tours phenomenon, however, wasn't lucrative enough to cover the legal expenses Selig was incurring in his protracted fight against Edison's litigation.

The financial help Selig received from Philip D. Armour allowed him to resume production at his Chicago studio by mid-1906, and in early January 1907 he resumed filming his Colorado Westerns. Selig could have returned to the production of Westerns earlier by filming them at his Chicago studio and in nearby parks. That had been the modus operandi for his competitors back East: Biograph produced A Frontier Flirtation; or, How the Tenderfoot Won Out (1905) at its Manhattan studio, and Edwin S. Porter filmed Life of a Cowboy (1906) on Staten Island, not far from the Edison studio. Even the French got into the act when Pathé Frères released the ersatz Indiens et Cow-boys, made on the streets of Paris in late 1904.  

No longer available to write or direct Colorado Westerns due to the demands of his growing business in Chicago, Selig hired Gilbert M. Anderson (born Max Aronson) to assume that responsibility. After working for Selig, Anderson would become popular as the cinema's first cowboy star, Broncho Billy. Anderson had earlier played three supporting roles in Great Train Robbery (though he'd never ridden a horse before), which he parlayed into a directing assignment for Vitagraph prior to joining Selig. Anderson honed his directing skills making comedies and contemporary dramas for Selig in Chicago before being sent to resume the production of period Westerns in Colorado under the supervision and tutelage of Harry Buckwalter. Anderson directed three Colorado Westerns and five comedies within a six-week span at the beginning of 1907 during unseasonably warm weather. In all, nearly $1,000 was spent on the Colorado productions, an enormous sum for Selig in 1907.

The first of the films to be shot and released was The Girl from Montana (1907), starring Pansy Perry, "a local society girl, who rides a horse as well as
any cowboy,” in a story inspired by David Belasco’s theatrical success, *The Girl of the Golden West*. In love with a cowboy, she rejects the advances of an “Easterner,” who then becomes vindictive. The Easterner pays a “Mexican Greaser” to frame the cowboy for the theft of a horse belonging to the girl’s father. A posse organized by the spurned suitor discovers the missing horse and prepares to lynch the cowboy. His lover gallops to his rescue and shoots the noose in two while holding the lynch mob at bay with her revolver. The reunited lovers gallop to a nearby town in order to get married, and the girl once more holds the pursuing vigilantes at gunpoint until the ceremony is completed. An African American servant appears on the scene to set the father and mob straight on the identity of the real criminals, who are then apprehended.

As with *The Girls in Overalls, Girl from Montana* features a young woman in the West engaged in activities normally associated with men. There are glimpses of the girl riding her horse at full gallop, and the two scenes of her holding a gun on the helpless posse are surprising given that most subsequent Westerns utilized a male protagonist in similar situations. The most stunning moment occurs when the girl saves her lover by shooting his noose in half as he hangs in the air. The shot was staged to appear convincingly real, and predates by sixty years similar moments in Sergio Leone’s *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1967).

Unlike subsequent dramatic Westerns, *Girl from Montana* portrays a woman as the aggressor and as the protector of her helpless cowboy lover. The fact that *Girl from Montana* failed at the box office seems to indicate that nickelodeon audiences weren’t interested in stories of female protagonists rescuing passive male victims.

The town of Golden became the setting for several scenes in *The Bandit King*. The Overland House was relabeled “County Bank” and robbed, and the Overland Stage, presumably still in operation at the time of production, was held up in Chimney Gulch Canyon. The story concerns Buck Brady, leader of a gang of bandits that steals a Wells Fargo strongbox from a stagecoach and blows it open with dynamite. The gang later robs a bank and is pursued on horseback by a sheriff’s posse. The outlaws dismount and run into some woods, but all are eventually gunned down.

Of the three Selig Westerns directed by Anderson, *Bandit King* seems to have been the most popular. It was the first Selig production ordered by neophyte nickelodeon operator William Fox. In a newspaper interview at the end of the year, Buckwalter said of the 1907 Westerns, “The enormous number of copies sold fully justified the expense and Colorado profited vastly in the advertising secured and still to come, for these pictures are going as well now as they did when first put out.”
Despite the renewal of Colorado production, Selig had limited financial resources to protect his films. The decision was made to submit only two of the new Westerns for copyright protection. Rather than copy the entire films onto paper prints, as Biograph and Edison did, Selig, like Vitagraph, chose a more economical approach by photographing handfuls of frames from some scenes and small portions of others for submission. Unfortunately, these are the only versions of *Girl from Montana* and *Bandit King* known to survive. The original running time for *Girl from Montana* was approximately thirteen minutes; the paper print version is only one and a half minutes long, a kaleidoscope of flashing images mixed with longer fragments of some fascinating scenes. Writing in the 1960s, Kemp Niver misinterpreted *Girl from Montana* and Selig's other fragmented paper prints as complete productions. His erroneous descriptions continue to be repeated.

Although Anderson had worked for Selig for less than a year, he insisted on being made a partner in the company. Selig refused, and by the end of April 1907, Anderson had formed a new production company, Essanay, with Chicago film exchange operator George K. Spoor. He tried to coax Tom Nash and Tom Persons, Selig's cameramen, into joining him, but they declined. As Broncho Billy Anderson, he starred in close to five hundred short films, which he also wrote and directed. Typical of the films was *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* (1914), which copied the plot from *The Girl from Montana* while perpetuating its Mexican stereotyping.

Anderson was hostile toward Selig for the rest of his long life, making many petty, negative claims about their brief association. He called Selig "dull' and lifeless, [lacking] any real vision of the future in motion pictures," and claimed his Westerns were considered "slipshod." Further, Anderson alleged that it was he who had to persuade Selig to allow him to make Westerns with Buckwalter in Colorado, and that he had to employ several "rough-and-tumble looking girls" to double as vigilantes because he was unable to find authentic-looking cowboys. Fifty years after leaving Selig, Anderson claimed that he went into business with Spoor because Selig didn't want to make any more Westerns. The falsity of Anderson's claims becomes obvious when one considers that Selig and Buckwalter made Westerns in Colorado long before and after Anderson's sojourn with the company. In addition, neither Selig nor Anderson ever had trouble rounding up genuine cowboys for their films. As for the allegation that Selig lacked "any real vision of the future in motion pictures," one need only to compare the breadth and innovativeness of Selig's productions with those of Anderson's to see the absurdity and pettiness behind it. Anderson's irresponsible and unfair remarks, which may have been made to hide the
MAKING WESTERNS IN THE WEST

fact that he falsely claimed credit for developing the Western, have unfortunately found their way into several histories of early cinema.53

After Anderson left the company, Selig scaled back his production schedule until the new Chicago studio was completed. Taking advantage of his enormous backlot, which contained a man-made lake and hills, Selig focused on the production of contemporary dramas and comedies directed by Otis Turner and Francis Boggs. In the meantime, Buckwalter continued making Western actualities for the company.54

Selig traveled to Colorado in mid-1908 to consult with Buckwalter about potential stories and locations, then sent director Boggs and cameraman Persons there along with several professional actors to resume the production of Westerns.55 The Selig Colorado unit worked especially fast, once shooting twenty-two scenes in one day before cloudy weather prevented further filming. This is especially impressive given that Colorado casts and crews traveled to locations on horseback, horse and buggy, and horse-drawn wagons. On July 27, 1908, a wagon in a caravan en route to a location fifteen miles outside of Fraser, Colorado, skidded off a narrow trail and plunged two hundred feet into a ravine. None of the seven actors riding in the wagon was seriously injured, though both of the horses were killed. Despite rapid technological changes, living conditions for the Selig Western troupe at this time were closer to those they were reenacting from the Old West of a generation earlier than to the comfort-laden lifestyle that would come to define Hollywood filmmaking in just a few years.56

In 1908, the New York Dramatic Mirror hailed the Selig Polyscope Company as excelling "in large and striking scenic effects, indeed . . . [it is] the only company that has gone to the Rocky Mountains for the magnificent natural backgrounds to be found there better than anywhere else in the world."57 William Selig was defining what the Western should look like not only for audiences but also for his competitors.

The first Western that Selig produced in 1909 was made in Chicago. Although this may have been due to unfavorable weather conditions in the Rocky Mountains, Selig no doubt also wanted to utilize his enormous new backlot. The decision to film his most ambitious Western to date among the man-made hills behind his Chicago studios might also have been influenced by Selig's desire to mimic the geography of the subject; in this case, the Battle of Little Big Horn.58

*On the Little Bighorn; or, Custer's Last Stand* went into production at the beginning of January 1909. In addition to utilizing scores of white extras to play cavalry soldiers and Indian warriors, Selig hired between twenty and thirty
Native American Sioux for the film. Three of the Sioux had participated in the actual 1876 battle on the hilly border between Wyoming and Montana. It was hoped that these survivors could assist in authentically re-creating the battle, but they said that “the fight was over so quickly that they could remember little about it.” However, they were helpful in teaching the Selig Company about traditional Native American management of horses.\(^5\)

Selig’s use of actual participants from the Battle of Little Bighorn—like his previous casting of real cowboys and the surviving Leadville stage driver—distinguishes Selig’s productions from most contemporary and virtually all future Westerns. Thus, Selig Westerns are marked by authenticity in both geography and cast.

According to the surviving continuity script and list of intertitles, the three Little Big Horn survivors aren’t identified within the narrative; their participation is conveyed solely in advertisements and articles publicizing the film. Presumably they’re much older than the other Sioux in the film and not as agile in their dancing or riding. Therefore it’s not the actions of the three survivors that necessarily make the film “real” for audiences; rather, it’s their presence, a sort of authenticity-by-association aesthetic.

No print of *On the Little Bighorn* is known to exist, but two surviving production stills have the documentary quality of turn-of-the-century Edward S. Curtis photographs, showing approximately fifty Indians, several dancing in a circle framed by teepees.\(^6\) As Kevin Brownlow has indicated, some of the early silent films offer “unique glimpses of Western history,” though he echoes the dominant opinion that these “fragments of . . . reality were unwittingly captured.”\(^61\) Yet this was hardly true of Selig, who, when he wasn’t filming in authentic locations, was purposefully utilizing other genuine elements, such as the Native American survivors of the Battle of Little Bighorn. His was a sophisticated amalgamation of fictional entertainment and American history that provided, as noted in *Moving Picture World*, “the desired touch of realism.”\(^62\) While his competitors back east and in Europe were producing Westerns that were wholly artificial, Selig was pursuing more realistic productions characterized by the veneer of documentary. All narratives, whether re-creating an actual incident or merely offering a slice of life, are at some level fictional constructs. It is the heightened commingling of fictional and documentary elements that distinguishes Selig’s Westerns from virtually all others produced at the time. His success influenced other filmmakers to adopt a similar strategy that would transcend the genre, significantly informing subsequent American productions.
A Picture Full of the Pathos that GRIPS THE HEART

The Head-Liner of the Year

Selig's Release November 25, 1909

On the Little Big Horn

OR

Custer's Last Stand

Code Word, Custer Length, 1,000 Feet

Selig's Pictures Always Show to CROWDED HOUSES

Get to Your Exchange at Once and ORDER THE POSTERS

SELIB POLYSCECO CO., Inc.
45-47-49 CHICAGO
Randolph St. U. S. A.

Three of the thirty Sioux hired for the production participated in the real Battle of the Little Bighorn. Courtesy of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
Although *On the Little Bighorn* may not have been the first historical Western, its re-creation of one of the best-known battles of the nineteenth century qualifies it for consideration as the first epic American film, or what at the time was termed a “magnificent historic military spectacle.” Following in the tradition of Buffalo Bill wild west entertainments, which exploited the same incident and also utilized actual Sioux participants, writer-director Otis Turner’s script took liberties with the historical record. Turner attributed the attack on Custer to an act of retaliation by Chief Rain-in-the-Face against Custer’s brother, who had arrested Rain-in-the-Face two years earlier. Shortly after the actual Battle of Little Big Horn, Rain-in-the-Face was misidentified as the killer of Custer and was alleged by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to have cut out and eaten Custer's heart. Identifying the cause of the massacre as a personal grudge relieves Custer of political culpability and allows Selig to follow the popular trend of demonizing the Sioux as “naked painted devils.”

*On the Little Bighorn* was at the vanguard of establishing the cinematic tradition of injecting a fictitious romance into a fact-based, muscular narrative, what promotional materials referred to as “a bit of unwritten history.” Following the lead of novelists from Dickens to Tolstoy, who attached intimate love stories to sagas of revolution and war, Selig personalized the conflict in the hope of attracting women and thus further expanding his audience. The film consists of eighteen scenes; an almost equal number of intertitles announce the action. Compared with other surviving films and scenarios, this was the largest percentage of intertitles for any production in the history of the Selig Polyscope Company. The intertitles for *Little Bighorn* both reinforce the historically accurate components of the production and clarify the fictional interpolations.

*Little Bighorn* was only one reel in length, which ordinarily would have required a shooting schedule of less than a week, but inclement weather delayed the production so much that it took a month to complete. Selig maximized his short-term employment of the Sioux by utilizing them in at least three more films, *On the Warpath* (1909), *Boots and Saddles* (1909), and *In the Badlands* (1909), all directed by Otis Turner in Chicago. Unlike *Little Bighorn*, each of these productions climaxes with the timely arrival of the cavalry, which rescues the white settlers and defeats the Sioux.

During the summer of 1909, Otis Turner also directed one of Selig’s most popular Western comedies, *The Cowboy Millionaire* (1909). As the predominant producer of Western dramas, the company was now in a position to satirize the visual and narrative aspects of the genre it had been instrumental in developing. This was occurring just as Selig competitors Essanay and Bison,
which have been incorrectly credited with establishing the genre, were producing some of their earliest Westerns. 69

_Cowboy Millionaire_ is about a cowboy who inherits $1 million and moves to Chicago. After a while he grows homesick and invites his old western pals to visit him. They arrive riding their horses through the streets of Chicago and firing their guns into the air. Later the uncultured cowboys mistake a theatrical play for the real thing and shoot at the actor playing the villain. The protagonist decides to break with his old life and sends his friends back home. In a final symbolic gesture, he flips over a painting of a cowboy to face his living room wall.

Selig advertised _Cowboy Millionaire_ as a "picture story harmonizing the fast passing scenes of the Great Far West, with glimpses of the luxurious ease of American city life." 70 The moral of the story seems to be that only those cowboys financially able to adapt to an urban lifestyle will survive the civilizing of the American West. This concept radically subverts long-standing conventions of American popular literature and theater. From the late-eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth century, the self-reliant Yankee farm boy, frontiersman, and pioneer functioned as the hero in popular culture, deemed superior over the physically and morally weaker antagonist, a wealthy, corrupt, or feminized male who was either a city slicker or an aristocratic European. But with the dramatic growth of cities during the industrial revolution, there was room for a new twist, with the literate and street-smart city dweller portrayed as superior to the ignorant rube. 71 These models of an idyllic American hero thus reflected a new shift in the culture.

Despite the widespread success of _Cowboy Millionaire_, which one nickelodeon operator termed a "masterpiece [that] played to the biggest [day's] business . . . that the house has known in two years," Selig didn't produce many other narratives portraying westerners as inferior to urbanites in city settings. 72 The cowboy would retain his status as a heroic figure.

Shortly before the release of _On the Little Bighorn_ on November 25, 1909, a tiny article appeared in the _New York Dramatic Mirror_ opposite an advertisement for the film. The article announced what in hindsight can be seen as one of the most significant events in the history of motion pictures: "It is reported that the Selig Company will soon establish a complete studio in Los Angeles, Cal. A large piece of ground with a suitable building has already been secured. It is clear that the enterprise of the Selig Company will stop at nothing." 73 Selig's quest for a location climatically and geographically suitable for the continuous shooting of Westerns and other outdoor narratives had actually been remedied several months earlier.
Within weeks of the establishment of the MPPC, Selig resumed filmmaking outside of Chicago as he'd done following the resolution of earlier legal difficulties. Director Francis Boggs was dispatched to Los Angeles with a company of nine players and technicians. Selig recognized the value of establishing a self-contained unit specializing in Westerns and other action-oriented cinema in a predominantly sunny and dry climate.

The company's first Los Angeles-made Western was *Ben's Kid* (1909), which featured the movie debut of theatrical veteran Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle in a supporting role. The narrative is a somewhat clunky mix of comedy and drama about an abusive husband who forces his wife to abandon their baby. A letter written by the father offers a lamentable yet believable explanation for why he’s abandoned the baby: "The trail[']s a hard one and we are broke—who ever finds the kid can keep it." An ill-prepared cowboy wins the infant in a raffle. Eventually the husband is lynched and the cowboy marries the child's mother. Such productions could be understood by contemporaneous audiences as either historical or modern Westerns, as they incorporate situations that were still in evidence in rural sections of the western United States.

Selig's western company shot interior scenes for *Across the Divide* (1909) at its temporary downtown Los Angeles studio, with exteriors photographed later at Camp Follows in the San Gabriel Canyon above Azusa. Unlike most Westerns, which reflected popular stereotypes, *Across the Divide* features white and Indian partners panning for gold, and it is the white man with the character flaw—a weakness for gambling. Typical of the California productions directed by Boggs, the film was composed of twenty-six scenes, most consisting of a single shot. Two takes were made for all but four of the shots, which required three takes. The narrative concludes with a crooked gambler repenting before he dies; the miner he cheated and the posse that captured him pray at his side, reflecting the Christian ethos that would characterize the Western for more than fifty years.

The only known surviving Selig Western produced in Yosemite during the summer of 1909 is *Buried Alive*. The story concerns two prospectors entombed in a cave-in perpetrated by rivals. The prospectors are rescued by two women, one of whom is an Indian; a "Chinaman" captures the villains. *Moving Picture World* noted that the film "is remarkable because it permits a Chinaman to play a decent role." Such was the relative freedom from social conventions in the earliest Westerns. Visually, what distinguishes *Buried Alive* from all other Western-themed productions made by Selig's competitors at the time are the stunning shots of the Yosemite Falls and rapids, which are incorporated into both the mise-en-scène and the narrative. Richard Abel has noted that "the
‘authenticity’ of the Selig Westerns functioned much the same as the railroad-sponsored travelogues boosting the Southwestern states as a prime site for new settlements. 8

As Boggs was beginning to direct Westerns and other films on the West Coast, Selig dispatched another troupe charged solely with making Westerns at the famous Miller Brothers’ ‘101 Real Wild West Ranch’ near Bliss, Oklahoma. Edison produced a handful of Western actualities and a single-shot stagecoach robbery narrative at Bliss in 1904; the Selig troupe, led by director Jack Kenyon, took full advantage of the enormous 101 Ranch to create more ambitious productions. 81 Several hundred cowboys and Indians, thousands of heads of cattle, and a herd of buffalo were incorporated into the three films shot there, which included The Stampede (1909). 82 The Stampede features “Wild West stunts that compensate for flaws in the film,” including “broncho bucking, lariat throwing and other pastimes . . . posed by members of the Miller Bros. ‘101 Ranch’ Shows.” 83 In 1911 the New York Motion Picture Company
was inspired by Selig’s success to lease the Miller Brothers’ array of personnel and livestock for the Santa Monica Bison Westerns made by Thomas H. Ince. This has led historians who have never bothered to investigate Selig’s early Westerns to declare that Ince “hit upon something ‘real,’” so that “the true history of early life in the Wild West was at last being written on the screen.”

Before 1910, James Young Deer and his wife Princess Red Wing were practically the only Native American actors to actually star in motion pictures, making a handful of appearances in films produced in the Northeast. Selig recognized that the utilization of real Native Americans added another layer of believability to the presentation. He thus arranged with US Indian Agent E. C. Swigert to make a series of Westerns directed by Otis Turner at an Indian reservation in Gordon, Nebraska, in the autumn of 1909. One of those productions, A Daughter of the Sioux (1909), was promoted as being “atmospherically correct in every detail” and “produced on the plains of western Nebraska with real Sioux Indians and enlisted United States regulars.”

When Boggs and company returned to Los Angeles in late August 1909 to establish a permanent studio in Edendale, the Selig company was able to routinize its productions and increase the output of Westerns to about one per
week. A panoramic photo of Selig's California troupe taken shortly after its arrival in Edendale reveals a cross-section of Western character types: three cowboys, four Mexicans, two Indians, and two white women in period dress. The neighborhood around the studio was originally conducive to the exploitation of Western locations, at least until the arrival of competitors from the Northeast.

Boggs wrote and produced a wide variety of Westerns. Typical of the company's sophisticated emphasis on realistic settings, exteriors for *The Ranch King's Daughter* (1910) were shot near Lake Tahoe, and "real log slabs" were brought back to the Edendale studio so that interior cabin scenes and other inserts would match. Variety critic Walter K. Hill, who praised Selig as "the foremost exponent of western scenes and films of rugged life on mountain and plain," mistakenly believed that the production had taken place at the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch.

While Selig's Los Angeles troupe was establishing itself, D. W. Griffith was directing *The Redman's View* (1909). The story of a Kiowa tribe forced off its land by pioneer whites was staged as a "realistic" spectacle, meant to educate as well as entertain, much like the ethnographic displays or tableaux vivant.
mounted in museums and world’s fairs."\textsuperscript{92} Human behavior is prioritized over physical action in Griffith's earnest though somber depiction of white persecution of noble Native Americans, which the *New York Dramatic Mirror* hailed as a "remarkable film . . . full of poetic sentiment and artistic beauty."\textsuperscript{93}

*Moving Picture World* observed that Selig and Biograph represented two "schools" of filmmaking; the former made films for the "majority of our public [who] insist on action," and the latter for "people who demand good acting, who like 'delicate touches.'" Of the two schools, the *World* correspondent declared, "acting is a delightful luxury; but action is a prime necessity."\textsuperscript{94} This observation would come to define perhaps the essential dichotomy at the heart of cinema, a dichotomy that persists to this day.

Noting that action-oriented Westerns were the most popular film genre, Richard Abel has made the uninformed assertion that Selig was "not [the] undisputed leader" in this area, suggesting that this distinction belongs to the Lubin Company.\textsuperscript{95} While it is true that Lubin—along with every other American producer in 1909—made Westerns, the trade press lauded Selig as the genre's most accomplished purveyor.\textsuperscript{96} Siegmund Lubin, whose Westerns were filmed in the suburbs of Philadelphia and starred two former employees from a Buffalo Bill tour, supplemented by local street kids playing cowboys and Indians, was well aware that his films lacked any semblance of authenticity.\textsuperscript{97} So was the press. The *Mirror* critic wrote of Lubin's Philadelphia-made *Cowboy Argument* (1909): "A cowboy picture acted in Eastern country is not as satisfactory as one performed in the West, where mountains and plains and the character of the buildings are in harmony with the subject."\textsuperscript{98} Similar complaints began to dominate the popular discourse on Westerns.

By 1909, both the trades and the moviegoing public were beginning to identify the Western as quintessentially American, "an extension of the country’s 'national literature.'"\textsuperscript{99} *Moving Picture World* thus derided Pathé's *A Western Hero* (1909) for its inauthentic mise-en-scène, which included Indians wearing checked gingham shirts and living in tents made of cornstalks, and cowboys riding atop bobtailed horses with English saddles, on paved Parisian roads.\textsuperscript{100} By 1910 this backlash against foreign-made Westerns had spread to include unrealistic domestic product, which became known as "Eastern Westerns," and even more pejoratively, "Jersey scenery," also called "New Jersey Westerns."\textsuperscript{101}

Typical of such films was *In Arizona!* (1910), produced by the Nestor Company in Bayonne, New Jersey, and advertised as "superbly acted by our own stock company of Broadway actors, assisted by Nebraska Bill’s troup [sic] of genuine cowboys from the real west!"\textsuperscript{102} Edison's *The Pony Express* (1909) was criticized in the *New York Dramatic Mirror* because its western setting and
narrative “are obviously located on Eastern farmland, with little to suggest either the plains or the mountains of the west . . . The best acting is done by the horse that plays dead.” Selig alone defined for audiences and other filmmakers what a believable and profitable Western looked like. While admitting that “every part of America has its Indian tales to tell, the East no less than the West,” the New York Dramatic Mirror perceptively argued that “there is something indefinable in the Western country, as the Chicago producers have shown us, that is almost impossible to counterfeit in the East,” noting that “the Selig Company has been often particularly successful in this sort of work.” The Mirror correspondent advocated authentic location filming that is harmonious with its narrative, justifying northeastern settings only for “Colonial Indian subjects” and concluding that as for “any more cowboys in New Jersey, let us hope not.”

By 1910, the Western had become so popular and pervasive that it accounted for 21 percent of all films produced in America. Two contemporaneous articles offer insightful explanations for this appeal to both filmmakers and audiences. According to the trade magazine Nickelodeon, Selig and his followers were attracted to making Western narratives in the West because “certain phases of life in the West, where passions had been strong and the will unchecked by law, gave a plausible basis for melodrama,” and because “the [exotic] West was not the [familiar] East.”

Motography tied the international popularity of the Western to its visual “dash and action” and straightforward, easy-to-follow narratives. It also recognized that the Western was grounded in myth. “It does not matter if the story is only slightly different from what they have seen before. This is the America that they have long imagined and heard about.”

According to a 1907 list in Views and Films Index, ten companies had 167 films currently in circulation in the United States; Pathé accounted for 69, followed by Selig and Vitagraph with 19 each. But Selig was the only producer with multiple Western narratives and actualities in release. By 1911 Selig was releasing four movies per week, including a new Western every Tuesday. Motography listed 11 “licensed” MPPC companies releasing 140 total titles over a one-month period that year, 20 of which were Westerns, with Selig leading the way. A separate listing in the same issue reveals 11 “independent” unlicensed companies in operation producing 28 Western titles out of 155 total releases, with American (aka Flying A) in front with 11, followed by the New York Motion Picture Company’s Bison brand with 5. It should be noted that Westerns were virtually the only kinds of films produced by both of those firms at the time. Similarly, Broncho Billy Anderson was responsible for Essanay’s Westerns.
One of the early stars of Selig's Edendale troupe, Hobart Bosworth, contributed Western scenarios drawing on his more than twenty-five years of theatrical experience. However, due to his lack of athleticism and cowboy skills, Bosworth's roles depended on melodramatic posturing. For instance, *Davy Crockett* (1910) was an adaptation of an 1872 theatrical warhorse, the highlight of which occurs when a pack of off-screen hungry wolves gnaw on Bosworth-Crockett's arm as he holds a door shut; and in *Bunkie* (1912), a lovesick Indian maiden threatens to kill cavalry officer Bosworth if he chooses his beloved horse over her, until the eponymous horse rescues him—perhaps the source of all subsequent "horse versus girl" cowboy jokes. In such productions, Selig sacrificed aspects of performance and narrative authenticity in the hope of attracting a largely female audience to a recognizable former matinee idol. One of the principal means of compensating for Bosworth's limitations was by photographing many of the exteriors for his films amidst the spectacular scenery of California's Yosemite Valley.

In 1911 Selig decided to reestablish a seasonal company of twenty "actors, actresses, camera operators, scenic artists, etc." in Colorado. The unit went through two directors and switched its base of operation from American City to Canon City in July 1912, when leading man William Duncan took over the directorial chores. Selig's Colorado company then produced over twenty-five films through the end of the year. Conditions remained just as hazardous and primitive as they'd been when the company began making narrative Westerns there eight years earlier. In the final three months of 1912, the troupe endured several mishaps: actress Myrtle Stedman was knocked unconscious when her horse "bucked her off onto a tree stump." Then, "a top-heavy stagecoach loaded with people rolled down a 150[-foot] embankment." Duncan fell from his horse after it stumbled while racing down a hill and "was trampled under the hooves of the other horses behind him"; he was later hospitalized after being hit by buckshot from a live shotgun blast.

Meanwhile, Selig was also working on a hybrid genre of Western melodramas that would appeal to women. *Captain Brand's Wife* (1911), for example, is a love triangle written and directed by Boggs. In the opening scenes, lush landscapes filled with cypress trees provide a striking contrast to the panoramic views of barren desert hills and mountains, which emphasize the isolation and vulnerability of a stagecoach and cavalry troop on patrol. Few surviving one-reel productions of the period utilized such disparate geographical locations. Boggs further emphasizes the scale and danger of the terrain by showing the Apaches galloping down the steep hills toward a lone horse and buggy. Another authentic touch occurs when the Indians effortlessly swing themselves atop their horses and ride bareback.
Much of the acting is broad and obvious, signifying a self-conscious style associated with nineteenth-century melodramatic theater. The protagonists frequently turn to the camera/audience to reveal their forlorn expressions. Black servants are played stereotypically by white actors in blackface makeup, and a white man plays the leader of the Apaches, though the rest of the antagonists appear to be genuine Native Americans. Cinematically, however, Francis Boggs’ shot compositions and emphasis on movement are relatively sophisticated. His most complex staging occurs when an Apache in the foreground shoots Captain Brand at mid-frame, while other Indians pull his wife and baby from the buggy in the background.

*The Country That God Forgot* (1916), written and directed for Selig by Marshall “Mickey” Neilan, should be included among the great films produced in the American desert, such as D. W. Griffith’s *The Female of the Species* (1912), Victor Seastrom’s *The Wind* (1928), and the finale to Erich von Stroheim’s *Greed* (1925). In all these unconventional Westerns, the narrative is intimately connected to its desert setting. *The Country That God Forgot* is a contemporary Western about a prospector’s wife whose isolation amidst harsh, primitive conditions prompts her to run away with an engineering crew paymaster from the city. The opening shots of the film contrast the vastness of the empty landscape with the lonely drudgery of the female protagonist. The insignificance of her husband and his partner is accentuated in an overhead shot as they emerge from a mine. Neilan later places his protagonist in the doorway of her house, staring forlornly at the desert as magazine pictures of stylish Gibson girls tacked to the interior walls speak of her longing. John Ford would similarly frame Harry Carey in *Straight Shooting* (1917) and John Wayne to bookend *The Searchers* (1956).

The interloper from the city is identified by his neatly trimmed mustache and crisp puttees; the husband and his partner, by contrast, are unshaven and wear rumpled clothing. The interloper’s courting of the wife is depicted through a relatively sophisticated montage of close-ups, medium and POV shots, fades, and irises—techniques that predate later Soviet editing modes. A stunning, deep-focus shot shows the husband and his partner watching the wife run away with the paymaster on horseback. Learning that his rival has stolen the government payroll, the husband pursues his wife, a sequence cross-cut, Griffith-style, with the paymaster leaving her in the middle of the desert after his horse breaks its leg. A posse catches up with the paymaster, while the penitent wife and forgiving husband are reconciled.

*The Country That God Forgot* was a popular and critical success, with Tom Santschi’s performance as the husband singled out for praise. Fourteen prints played throughout England and one in Africa over a seven-month
period despite wartime conditions that all but paralyzed the international distribution of Selig's films.120

Virtually every American motion picture company came to embrace Selig's aesthetic of making Westerns in the West. By 1912 Biograph, Kalem, Bison, and even Pathé Frères were following his lead by establishing studios in Los Angeles. According to the Los Angeles Times, “Despite the tremendous output of cowboy and Indian pictures, the local directors say that the demand for them, especially in Europe, is still greater than for any other class.”121

William Selig, more than any other filmmaker, was responsible for adapting and building on earlier traditions to define the essential components of the cinematic Western. The establishment of the first studio in Los Angeles was prompted in part by the demand for a steady flow of geographically realistic Westerns, and the narrative possibilities and audience potential for Westerns were expanded by crossing them with comedies, women's melodramas, and historical epics to create early genre hybrids. Further, the popular success and widespread distribution of these movies resulted in the American domination of international cinema for most of the twentieth century.

Yet another Selig innovation had a profound and lasting influence on the genre and the industry in general: the creation of the cowboy action-hero, as personified by his most popular Western star, Tom Mix.
The Creation of the Movie Cowboy

THE WESTERN WAS OF PRIMARY IMPORTANCE IN ESTABLISHING PHYSICAL action as a defining characteristic of the American motion picture industry. In contrast with the Western melodramas of competitors such as Essanay and Lubin, which featured relatively sedate protagonists, not to mention Pathé Frères, whose “Westerns” were an object of derision in the United States, the Selig films are a kinetic revelation. The authentic mise-en-scène that characterizes William Selig’s productions found its ideal complement in his most popular and influential Western star: Tom Mix.

By the time Tom Mix began working for Selig early in 1910, virtually every American producer was making Westerns. The earliest stars associated with the genre were stage veterans who had no discernible cowboy skills other than being able to stay atop a horse. Their Westerns were little more than theatrical melodramas staged outdoors. Conversely, the charismatic, athletic Mix enabled Selig to infuse his action narratives with a strong personality possessing exceptional physical skills. A chronological investigation of Mix’s career provides perhaps the clearest evidence of how Selig completed the codification of the Western as “the foundation of an American moving picture drama.”

It would seem that the first thirty years of Tom Mix’s life were spent in training to become the prototypical movie cowboy. Born on a farm in western Pennsylvania in 1880, Mix was so dazzled at the age of ten by a Buffalo Bill Wild West extravaganza that he resolved to become a real western hero. “He practiced mounts and dismounts, riding bareback[,] standing on a galloping horse [and practicing] with his lariat and gun.” In search of fame and adventure, Mix enlisted in the Spanish-American War but ended up guarding a factory and waterways in Delaware against potential sabotage for the duration. After the war he went AWOL and was officially listed as an army deserter.
Tom Mix fled to Guthrie, Oklahoma, where he found employment as a seasonal ranch hand and bartender. From there he moved on to become a deputy sheriff and night marshal in Dewey. In late 1905 Mix was hired as a full-time cowboy working and performing at the Miller Brothers’ “101 Real Wild West Ranch” near Bliss, Oklahoma. The rodeos and spectacles staged at the ranch were an outgrowth of the feats of prowess indulged in by hard-living cowboys who’d show off for each other at the end of cattle drives. In the Millers’ wild west shows, Mix initially played a thief being dragged across the ground of the arena by a horse from a rope that attached to his leather jacket. By 1908, his skills had developed to the point where he “was added to the list of 101 Ranch Champions, as Champion all-around cowboy or king of the cowboys.” Mix would soon win prizes at rodeo “frontier celebrations” in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Grand Island, Nebraska.

At the beginning of 1909, Mix married accomplished horsewoman Olive Stokes. His roping act became one of the top attractions of a wild west show they organized for a season in Seattle that also featured mock battles with forty Blackfoot Indians. By early 1910 Mix and his wife had joined Will A. Dickey’s Circle D Ranch Wild West Show and Indian Congress, which was contracted to provide personnel, livestock, and props for Westerns made by the Selig Polyscope Company. It’s possible that Mix joined Dickey’s show because of the Selig connection.

Mix’s cowboy, rodeo, and law enforcement experiences in Oklahoma informed his motion picture narratives and performance style in ways that would transform the genre; further, he was of the final generation to receive practical training in the Old West. As Kevin Brownlow has indicated, the last great cattle drive of Texas longhorns was photographed for inclusion in a silent Western. The only opportunity for most movie cowboys and stuntmen born at the turn of the twentieth century or later to learn genuine western skills has been in rodeos, which is itself a form of show business. Thus, Mix is one of the few participants to span the death of the “real” cowboy and the birth of its “reel” counterpart.

The first Selig film that Tom Mix appeared in was *The Range Riders* (1910), directed by Otis Turner on location in Flemington, Missouri. Mix plays a sheriff involved in a love triangle. His embittered rival leads an Indian attack on the ranch owned by Mix’s girlfriend, which results in a cattle stampede. Unlike concurrent Essanay Westerns, which merely staged generic melodramas amidst Colorado scenery, the narrative of *Range Riders* follows the established Selig practice of incorporating a familiar conflict into characters and settings unique to the American West. Mix’s experience herding and roping cattle on the 101 Ranch is utilized in support of the story.
Well aware that Tom Mix represented a breed of working cowboy who was being usurped by technology and civilization, Selig advertised *Range Riders* as "typical [of an] American system [that] is becoming more and more obsolete and [which] in a few short years [will be] entirely extinct." A review in *Moving Picture World* concurred:

The motion picture film is performing one important artistic public service. It is putting in imperishable form reproductions of the wild riders of the plains, the picturesque cowboy and the treacherous Indian. In a few years all these will have disappeared forever. But reproduced by the camera their reproductions can be called into being upon the screen centuries in the future. Selig has been more than ordinarily successful in his representation of these scenes. [*The Range Riders*] contains all the elements which go to make up a thrilling film.

Contemporaneous recognition that Selig was consciously preserving a passing way of life for the benefit of future generations undercuts the familiar assertion that early filmmakers had no idea their films would have historical value.

The next production Mix appeared in for Selig is often mistakenly cited as his debut, *Ranch Life in the Great Southwest* (1910), directed by Turner. According to Mix biographer Paul E. Mix, the film was shot near Dewey, Oklahoma, the site of Mix's sojourn in law enforcement. The minimal plot provides a showcase to display the rodeo skills of five accomplished cowboys, including Mix, who lassos and ties a steer. This is similar to the semidocumentary structure of Edwin S. Porter's *Life of a Cowboy*, which was released at the beginning of 1907. Advertisements and posters referred to *Ranch Life* as an "ethnological subject," with all the participants identified by name "in dare-devil and death defying feats of science and human endurance"; Mix is billed as an "Ex United States Marshal—Expert Roper and Broncho Buster." The film was an enormous success, both domestically and abroad. For instance, *Ranch Life* played to one quarter of the population of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, during a two-night run at the Casino Theatre, which listed Mix by name on the marquee. *Moving Picture World* expressed the film's visceral appeal: "Oh! the spaciousness of this great picture. The limitless plains, the wild scurry of the horses, the freedom."

The promotional campaign for *Ranch Life*, no doubt abetted by Mix, established two points that would forever be linked to Tom Mix: "death defying" stunts and exaggeration about his pre-movie career. More than any other individual, Mix was responsible for creating a cinematic performance and
narrative style that emphasized dangerous stunt work. But as his popularity grew, so did Mix’s prevarications about his past accomplishments, including service as one of Teddy Roosevelt’s Rough Riders in Cuba, and fighting with distinction in the Boer War, the Mexican War, and World War I. It wasn’t enough for the ambitious Mix to have been a legitimate rodeo champion, working cowboy, and part-time lawman; he wanted to be known as a hero of every major war fought during his lifetime. Yet it was his true experiences and on-screen athleticism that distinguish Mix from virtually all other cinematic cowboy stars at that time.

After completing Ranch Life, Mix and his wife Olive starred in several other films directed by Otis Turner, including In the Wilderness (1911), wherein Mix plays the fiancé of the governor’s daughter and must rescue her from a disgruntled suitor after the latter has sought revenge by instigating a revolt by the territory’s Indians. According to Turner’s script, the penultimate scene showed Tom and Olive Mix riding bareback just ahead of the pursuing Indians. Nickelodeon hailed In the Wilderness as “one of those early settler subjects which Selig does so well, and of which Selig seems to have a private monopoly ... The beauty of them is that they offer valid excuse for conflict and turmoil ... with nature and with Indians[,] a bigness and breadth ... that is rare.”

Mix continued to occasionally play leading roles, such as the title character in The Man from the East (1911), about an eastern college graduate who visits a western ranch to prove his manliness to his girlfriend. He overcomes the pranks of the cowboys, ultimately winning their respect and successfully defending his girlfriend’s honor. As Larry Langman has noted,

The film is an early example of a recurrent theme of this genre: the regenerative powers of the West. More often than not in many of these films, the Easterner is depicted as physically or morally weak or incomplete; only through exposure to the Western environment, psyche or “code” is a person fulfilled or made whole.

The premise, which reflected something of a personal credo for Mix, proved so successful that he remade the film three years later.

Between early August and November 1911, Tom Mix, “the famous Selig cowboy and actor, [and] his wife, Olive Stokes, who has the reputation of being the world’s greatest horsewoman,” were part of the Selig troupe that produced eleven movies in Colorado. When the original director and leading man left the company after only three films, Mix began to share leading roles with William Duncan, as either hero or villain, under the direction of Otis B. Thayer.
During the troupe's stay in Colorado, Mix added to his local notoriety by participating in a variety of dangerous stunts that garnered substantial newspaper coverage. On November 16, 1911, it was reported that Mix "bull-dogged" a large steer by leaping from a speeding automobile and throwing the steer to the ground "in something like twelve seconds," a feat that had "never been equaled in Colorado." The article concludes, "Many of the sports 'pulled off' by Mr. Mix and his associates here for photographic reproduction are hazardous in the extreme and require a degree of skill that is truly marvelous." The ample newspaper coverage helped persuade the audience that what they were seeing was real, which made the fictional story all the more exciting and authentic.

Tom Mix opted not to renew his contract with Selig for 1912. Instead, he was instrumental in organizing the original Calgary Stampede, which was conceived as "an annual national event that will mark the last stand of the picturesque western cowboy on the outer edge of civilization which is gradually . . . sounding the death knell [for] the rough and ready riders." Mix and the other Calgary Stampede promoters were thus motivated, as were Selig and Buffalo Bill before him, to acknowledge and exploit a passing way of life. Mix's involvement with the operation ended after he was seriously injured during a performance in Montreal; his jaw was pierced by a steer's horn.

Mix returned to Selig's Canon City, Colorado, unit shortly after Thanksgiving 1912. During Mix's eleven-month absence, Col. Selig learned that Mix's Westerns were making him a popular cowboy star not only in America but also in Europe. For example, the Central Picture Hall Palace in Thornaby-on-Tees and an affiliated house in Cradley Heath, Great Britain, wrote Selig requesting Tom Mix posters to display in their lobbies. In addition, Richard Abel has identified "Vitagraph's melodramas[,] D. W. Griffith's The Battle of Elderbush Gulch (1913), and Selig's Tom Mix westerns" as among the most popular American films in France, "confirming Moving Picture World's view that the cinema was 'Americanizing the world.'" Such evidence of Tom Mix's popularity during 1911 and 1912 rebuts long-held assumptions that Gilbert "Broncho Billy" Anderson was the only cowboy star at that time and that Mix didn't emerge as a major star until after he joined Fox in 1917. Lubin's Western star, Romaine Fielding, was voted the most popular actor of 1913 in a fan magazine poll, and according to Peter Bogdanovich, Flying A cowboy star J. Warren Kerrigan appeared in more than a hundred shorts for director Allan Dwan between 1911 and 1913.
Fielding and Kerrigan came from the theater, lacking the cowboy skills and athleticism of Mix. Tom Mix's rise in popularity resulted in his appearing in nearly one film per week for Selig beginning in 1913, but the films were no longer produced in Colorado.

In 1912 MPPC companies were following Selig's lead and sending out self-contained production units to tour the West in order to make Westerns in authentic locations. By July, the Prescott, Arizona, chamber of commerce had lured Lubin's new Western company, managed by star-director Fielding, to its town for five months, during which time fifteen films were produced. After the Lubin company moved on to Mexico, Prescott's chamber of commerce made arrangements for Selig's sixteen-member troupe at Canon City to relocate to Arizona during the first week of January 1913.3

For the next year and a half, Tom Mix made Westerns for Selig in Prescott, which afforded varied scenery. The landscape outside the town consists of mountainous hills and valleys, clumps of green forest, and a desert wasteland known as "Slaughter House Gulch." Rock formations hundreds of feet high, known as the Granite Dells, were deemed scenic enough to merit a documentary film of their own. But it wasn't enough for most Selig audiences to merely gaze at pretty scenery—they'd grown accustomed to encountering physical action staged amidst exotic settings. Prescott, founded in 1863, was Arizona's first territorial capital and still resembled an Old West town while the Selig troupe was there. As Kevin Brownlow has noted, such towns served as standing sets for the early Westerns, obviously more authentic than any recreated on a Hollywood backlot.3

In recognition of Tom Mix's importance to the company, Selig built the Diamond "S" Ranch outside of Prescott, which housed the troupe's livestock and served as a frequent shooting location; it also contained a home built especially for Mix and his family. The ranch's name was inspired by the Selig Company's logo, an "S" within a diamond, which accompanied virtually all of the title credits and advertising.

For much of 1913, Tom Mix, William Duncan, Myrtle Steadman, and supporting players Rex de Roselli and Lester Cuneo reprised the familiar character types they'd played back in Colorado. When Mix wasn't starring in films, he was usually playing the villain to William Duncan's hero. In The Sheriff of Yavapai County (1913), Mix is "Apache Frank, a crooked gambler"; in The Taming of Texas Pete (1913), he plays a half-breed kidnapper, thwarted by reformed drunk Duncan; and in Sallie's Sure Shot (1913), Mix is villainous Injun Jim, a claim jumper who attempts to blow up Duncan's girlfriend with dynamite. Each of these films was written and directed by Duncan.
Mix played more complex characters in films written by others, such as *A Child of the Prairie* (1913), in which he portrays a rancher on a fifteen-year quest to find his missing daughter, somewhat anticipating *The Searchers*. In *Religion and Gun Practice* (1913), Mix is a western outlaw reformed by a missionary’s daughter in the type of story with which “Broncho Billy” Anderson and later William S. Hart were typically associated. Tom Mix was establishing himself as a rugged presence in the Westerns he made for William Selig through mid-1913, but they were merely a prelude to the parts he would write for himself. These roles would establish the predominant cinematic cowboy hero for the twentieth century.

Mix incorporated several rodeo-style stunts into the script he co-wrote for *The Law and the Outlaw*, released June 4, 1913. In a scene reminiscent of his initial wild west show specialty, Mix is dragged across the ground by a frightened horse. He saves the rancher’s daughter by bulldogging a steer that’s about to gore her. Mix also makes an escape by rolling down a steep, rocky embankment while handcuffed. Selig advertised that real bullets were used in some scenes. The physicality and variety of Mix’s stunts in *Law and the Outlaw* created a sensation.

A few months later, Mix wrote and starred in *The Escape of Jim Dolan* (1913). Once again, the plot affords abundant opportunities for Mix to exploit his athleticism and rodeo skills. A jealous rival frames Jim Dolan for cattle rustling; Dolan is sentenced to ten years in jail. Jim’s girlfriend brings him a saw hidden in some food and arranges to have a horse waiting for him. Jim cuts through the window bars and flees a pursuing posse. His horse goes lame and he hides underwater, using the barrel of his rifle to breathe. Jim is captured by Apaches, who tie him to the tail of a horse and drag him across the ground for sport, but he is rescued and nursed back to health by a prospector. Jim’s rival is wounded in a saloon brawl and confesses to the crime on his deathbed, allowing Jim to return to his girlfriend.

Recognizing the singular appeal of Tom Mix, Selig promoted *Jim Dolan* as “Tom Mix at his very best in death-defying stunts.” Advertisements highlighted specific stunts and linked them not to the narrative’s fictional protagonist but to the real actor who performed them: “SEE Tom Mix change horses at full gallop; Tom Mix tied to the tail of the wild horse; Tom Mix dragged across miles of prairie; Tom Mix escape from prison . . . and wonder how he still lives . . . Without doubt this is the greatest Western story ever depicted on film.” Mix seemed to transcend the roles he played.

Reflecting Tom Mix’s growing popularity, the national press began to report on his stunt work, especially when something would go awry, such as a
mishap that occurred during the production of Jim Dolan. The New York Clip-
per reported that while attempting to leap from one galloping horse to anoth-
er, Mix inadvertently leapt beyond “the second horse and struck the ground”
on his head, knocking himself unconscious. On his second attempt, traveling
at twenty-five miles an hour, he was successful.  

Reports on hazardous movie stunts in the popular press add yet another 
layer of “authenticity” to Selig’s Westerns and set Tom Mix’s abilities and ac-
complishments apart from those of other cowboy stars. The publicizing of 
Mix’s stunt work was thus made an element of the emerging Western hero’s 
persona. The claim that Tom Mix performed his own stunts in Selig films was 
true. This may help explain the popularity of Jim Dolan, which extended be-
yond America and across Europe.

Mix later adopted the showy costume of a drugstore cowboy for his films 
with Fox, but he wore the clothes of a working cowboy in virtually all of the 
Westerns he made for Selig. He became so popular from Law and the Out-
law and Jim Dolan that Selig featured his likeness in a series of print ads. The 
most frequently reproduced photograph shows Mix standing confidently with 
hands on hips, staring directly into the camera, wearing chaps, boots with 
spurs, a kerchief tied around his neck, and a Stetson atop his head. Selig’s Di-

The resemblance is uncanny: Tom Mix is the cowboy Superman, though 
it’s unlikely Selig’s advertising campaign influenced the design of the Man 
of Steel since Superman’s co-creators weren’t born until a year after the Mix 
photos were originally disseminated. Tom Mix succeeded his childhood idol, 
Buffalo Bill Cody, to become an indestructible Western hero, the first cine-

Mix’s competitors were expected to engage in more athletic displays of 
cowboy skills, and Mix himself was challenged to execute ever more daring 
stunts for his growing audience. In the next film he wrote, The Sheriff and the 
Rustler (1913), Mix transferred from a galloping horse to a moving train, en-
gaged in hand-to-hand combat atop the train, and fell from the train into a
The Escape of Jim Dolan

The Coming Triumph in Western Masterpieces
For Release Thursday, March 12th.

TOM MIX at his very best in death-defying stunts.

Tom Mix as the original cowboy Superman sporting Selig's “Diamond S” trademark on his shirt. Courtesy of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
These stunts, along with others Mix introduced in his 1913 films, would become familiar components of many subsequent Westerns.

Mix reinforced the authenticity of his movie stunts and the genuineness of his Westerns by continuing to participate in public rodeo events. On July 4-5, 1913, he took part in Prescott’s “Frontier Days” rodeo. Mix placed second in the Cowboy Trick and Fancy Roping and Steer Bulldogging events, but came in first in the Steer Riding contest and won top prize in a second bulldogging challenge. That September Mix organized a “program of Western stunts” for the First Northern Arizona Fair at Prescott and also participated in a vaudeville program at the Elks Theater that included Selig players William Duncan, Myrtle Stedman, Rex de Roselli, and Lester Cuneo.

While appearing in a Los Angeles rodeo in 1915, Mix was seriously injured in a collision of two chuck wagons. He suffered a broken jaw, crushed chest, fractured leg, and internal injuries. A headline proclaimed, “Fear Death for Tom Mix”; another newspaper reported that Mix “has little more than an even chance for recovery, physicians say.” A magazine article recounting the incident was headlined, “Tom Mix Emerges from Hospital after Being Declared Dead.” The incident and its attendant publicity further authenticated Mix as a genuine, rugged cowboy, presenting him in mythic terms and reinforcing his image as a death-defying superman.

Mix’s motion picture success inspired other working cowboys and rodeo stars such as Art Acord and Hoot Gibson to enter the medium via Selig Westerns. According to Kevin Brownlow, “Cowboys would follow the rodeo or the Wild West Show circuit in the spring, . . . end up on a ranch for the fall round-up [and then] work in pictures over the winter months,” living in “a cowboy rooming house . . . near the Selig studios.” Had Tom Mix not entered the movies and established the Western-stunt aesthetic, it's possible that someone else might’ve done so. But had Selig not established studios in the West, it's doubtful whether any real working cowboys would have migrated to the Northeast in search of film work and transformed the “Easterns.”

An indication of Tom Mix’s growing popularity and influence on the portrayal of cinematic cowboys was William Duncan’s reassignment as director of “Mix Westerns” at the end of 1913. Soon after, Duncan quit Selig for Vitagraph and resumed his acting career. Mix then took over writing and directing chores in 1914.

By mid-1914, Selig had relocated the Mix unit to Glendale, California. The proximity to Selig’s Edendale studio allowed Mix to occasionally participate in longer Westerns with bigger budgets, appearing with other Selig stars under the company’s top director, Colin Campbell. The first such production
was *Chip of the Flying “U”* (1914), a comedy-Western based on a popular novel by B. M. Bowers (aka Bertha M. Sinclair). Selig’s most popular actress, Kathryn Williams, co-stars as a doctor who is able to handle a gun and take care of herself as well as lovesick Mix can. She eventually falls in love with him after he saves her from a wild stallion. The story serves an emergent female fantasy of romance between a confident, professional woman and a masculine, less intelligent cowboy. *Flying “U”* was the final pairing of Mix and Williams, perhaps an indication of the female-centric narrative’s lack of wider appeal.

There was nothing subtle about Tom Mix’s acting. When appearing in Western comedies, especially when he was directing himself, Mix tended to be overly broad. When he played dramatic roles, he typically projected an exaggerated stoic determination.

In 1911 Mix starred in *Why the Sheriff Is a Bachelor*, playing a sheriff who chooses to uphold his duty by jailing the outlaw brother of his sweetheart, losing her love as a result. Mix also starred in a 1914 remake of the film. During the same period, Mix starred in two versions of *The Scapegoat* (1912 and 1914), which essentially presented the same dilemma as *Sheriff Is a Bachelor*, but with a different outcome. When confronted by his fiancée to free her outlaw brother, the *Scapegoat* sheriff gives her the stolen money, his handcuff keys, and badge, and then departs as the scapegoat for her brother. Even when Mix capitulates to his lover, his ethics prevent him from remaining with a woman who would ask him to break the law. Gilbert Anderson and William S. Hart adhered to a similar moral code in their Westerns, as would most cowboy heroes through World War II. This virtue is rooted in Judeo-Christian traditions and nineteenth-century theatrical melodrama, a world of black-and-white characters, strict ethics, and rigid moral distinctions. The Western was the primary cinematic repository of a form “built on moral absolutes; there was and could be no confusion between virtue and vice, between right and wrong, between the hero and villain.” *Sheriff Is a Bachelor* and *Scapegoat* deviate from the established theatrical formula by not uniting the hero and heroine at the climax, thus forging greater narrative complexity.

A letter Tom Mix wrote to his employer in Chicago in late September 1914 reveals several surprising aspects of their working relationship. Despite the Edendale studio’s expansion into longer, multi-reel films, Mix continued to produce one two-reel Western per week at a total cost of $500 per film. Mix felt constrained by the lack of authentic atmosphere at the company’s nearby Western studio in the Los Angeles suburb of Glendale and was anxious to resume filming in “ranch country.” He looked forward to Selig’s approval of the year’s worth of scenarios he’d compiled and asked for permission to buy a
used car, since it would be more cost-effective than continuing to rent one. In addition, the Mix unit’s relative autonomy is evident in the revelation that Mix seldom had contact with Thomas Persons, who had become manager of West Coast operations at Selig’s Edendale plant; rather, Mix communicated directly with Selig.64

In an effort to compete with more expensive Westerns from so-called independent filmmakers such as Bison’s Thomas Ince, William Selig produced In the Days of the Thundering Herd (1914). The five-reel film was made on location at wild west showman Pawnee Bill’s seven-thousand-acre ranch in Oklahoma between January and February 1914. The location was chosen primarily to take advantage of the seven hundred Pawnee Indians who lived on the ranch and what was purportedly the largest buffalo herd then in existence.65 According to background information accompanying a review of Thundering Herd in Moving Picture World, William Selig instructed writer Gilson Willets and director Colin Campbell that “strict attention should be paid to historical correctness, both in incidents and detail,” in re-creating a fictional story of pioneers crossing the Western prairie in 1849.66

In the film, pony express rider Mix vaults onto a waiting horse and transfers from one galloping horse to another in a dynamic tracking shot. He saves love interest Bessie Eyton from a buffalo stampede, actually standing amidst the onrush in one shot. There are spectacular panoramic views of a long wagon train and crowded Indian village. There’s also a stunning wide shot of Indians galloping across the top of a ridge in silhouette, the kind of composition and cinematography that John Ford would later utilize to great success. In contrast to the artistic flourishes are bedraggled cowboys and pioneers who inject the mise-en-scène with a documentary quality.

Unlike most other Westerns, the Indians in Thundering Herd hunt buffalo and fight the pioneers primarily with bow and arrow. Although Pawnee Bill (aka Gordon Lillie) had petitioned Congress to outlaw the hunting of buffalo, he allowed several to be killed for the Selig production. With Thundering Herd, William Selig produced an epic of Western migration that predates the better-known The Covered Wagon (1923) by nine years.67

According to the Tennessee-American, Thundering Herd “sets a new standard in the big, fine pictures of the west land.”68 The British periodical Pictures and the Picturegoer was only slightly more reserved in its praise: “We will not say it is the best that Selig has ever given us, but it is one of them.”69

The outbreak of World War I had a devastating effect on Selig’s international market. Soon, Tom Mix resumed writing, directing, and starring in inexpensive one- and two-reel productions. Kevin Brownlow has noted that Mix’s
“talent as a director was little stronger than his talent as an actor.” Mix’s pictorial compositions often fail to engage the scenic beauty of his western landscapes; he focuses instead on individual performance and movement. However, as writer-director-star, Mix frequently excelled at satirically conflating the image of the working cowboy with the production of fictional motion pictures.

*The Moving Picture Cowboy* (1914) ingeniously exploits and lampoons Mix’s public image. He plays a movie star who visits his uncle’s ranch dressed in the frilly costume of the much-derided theatrical cowboy, the same type of outfit he would eventually adopt for his Fox Westerns and personal appearance tours. Mix regales the ranch’s cowboys with tales of his thrilling movie exploits, which they in turn visualize. The exploits are re-creations of previous movie stunts that would have been familiar to Mix’s fans, including bronco riding, bulldogging, transferring from a galloping horse to a moving freight train, and rescuing the leading lady from a band of “blood-thirsty” Indians. Mix satirizes his superhuman persona by subsequently disclosing for the movie audience the “truth” behind those stunts, which involves one clumsy mishap after another. The narrative reflects Mix’s brand of self-deprecating humor in spoofing his image. It shouldn’t be surprising that as the creator of the cowboy action hero, Mix was also the first to satirize the character. Throughout his career with Selig, Mix often explored the humorous collision between “genuine” and movie cowboys.

In *Bill Haywood, Producer* (1915), Mix and two cowboy buddies enter the movies but return to their former ranch jobs after determining that movie stunt work is too dangerous.

In *Sage Brush Tom* (1915), Mix plays a lovesick cowboy who knocks himself out trying to impress his favorite actress until he learns she’s returned to her husband. And in *A Mix-Up in the Movies* (1916), Mix and two fellow cowboys steal a camera and pretend to make a film while actually robbing a bank. Actresses convince them to return the money, arguing that they could earn more as real movie actors, but the sheriff ultimately chases them out of town. These Western comedies provide behind-the-scenes glimpses into the working methods and conditions of Mix’s relatively Spartan Selig unit. They also reinforce the genuine physical danger inherent in the execution of Mix’s dangerous stunts.

In July 1915, Selig relocated the nineteen-member Tom Mix troupe of players and technicians from Glendale, California, to the more scenic environs of Las Vegas, New Mexico. The Mix troupe was wooed to New Mexico by the local chamber of commerce. Lubin’s Western unit had been in New Mexico, although Selig had been the first to produce narrative films there, in 1910. Three thousand people greeted the arrival of Tom Mix and his unit at the Santa Fe train station.
Tom Mix spoofing the iconic Western stunts he created.
Courtesy of KJA Consulting.
Fe train station in Las Vegas in mid-July 1915. Mix was accompanied by new leading lady Victoria Forde, who soon became the next Mrs. Mix. The Selig players paraded through downtown Las Vegas while cowboys on horseback from local ranches and others in parked cars cheered them along the route. The confluence of horses and autos attests to the modernization of the West that was occurring just as Selig's Westerns were exploiting a rapidly fading way of life.

Mix completed six Westerns within his first month in Las Vegas, and, as he'd done everywhere he settled, he joined civic and fraternal organizations, including the Commercial, Elks, and fishing clubs, and was appointed a deputy sheriff of San Miguel County. Three months after William Selig visited Tom Mix at Las Vegas in October 1915, the unit relocated one final time to Newhall, California.

Newhall, which would eventually be home to the personal ranches of fellow movie cowboys William S. Hart and Harry Carey, was within the Los Angeles County limits and yet a world away from LA. In 1916 the town still contained weathered buildings and saloons of the Old West. Selig promoted Newhall as "made to order" for evoking "true western atmosphere." The move to Newhall signaled the end of the self-contained Selig touring units, coinciding with the general trend within the industry of consolidating all production in the Los Angeles area.

In Newhall, Mix Westerns strayed from familiar formulas. One 1916 Mix Western is so oddly structured and dramatically unsettling that it has led to some gross misconceptions. The first reel of Twisted Trails, concerning cowboy Mix, and the second reel, involving Bessie Eyton, seem to be completely unrelated. The third act/reel ties the characters together in such unexpected, shocking ways that William K. Everson and Kenneth Macgowan have suggested that the film is an amalgamation of three separate one-reel Westerns.

A surviving print and contemporary review suggest that Twisted Trails was actually conceived and produced as a self-contained feature. Mix is a sheep rancher who observes cattle thieves in action and alerts the sheriff, unaware that the crooked lawman is leader of the rustlers, who subsequently frame Mix for one of their robberies. Mix's infirm foster father and elderly housekeeper Martha are terrorized by the sheriff and his gang before Mix engages them in a shootout. Mix flees, vaulting onto a bareback horse. He leaps from the galloping horse into a car speeding down the road, pushing the startled driver aside and evading the pursuing cattle thieves.

The story abruptly shifts to follow Sunshine West (Eyton), the beautiful adopted daughter of a dance hall proprietor in the town of Purgatory. She spurns
the advances of cardsharp Craig Keyes, who lures her to his home under false pretenses. Keyes assaults Sunshine but she manages to shoot him. She flees into the rainy night on horseback, unaware that Keyes isn’t seriously wounded, and is thrown by her horse.

The next morning Mix finds Sunshine lying on the ground. He brings her back to his house to the ministrations of Martha. Mix is then pursued by two of the rustlers, but manages to elude them by crossing a narrow canyon on horseback over a wooden plank and then knocking it away. After the townspeople become wise to the crooked sheriff and apprehend him, Mix and Sunshine get married. Sometime after the marriage, as Craig Keyes watches through a window, Tom and Sunshine are horrified to discover that they each have a photograph of the same mother. Martha reveals that she is Mix’s real mother, having switched babies at an orphanage to give her son a better home. She then discloses that Craig Keyes was the other baby and is Sunshine’s real brother. Ashamed, Keyes slinks away into the night as Mix, Sunshine, and Martha embrace.

The three-act structure was presumably designed to accommodate Mix’s male audiences, Bessie Eyton’s romance-oriented fan base, and Eugenie Besserer’s (Martha’s) mature female admirers. The narrative for Twisted Trails is characterized by distinctly delineated act breaks in an early attempt at genre hybridization to attract the widest possible audience. Nearly a century later, the third act’s suggestion of incest between Mix and Eyton remains shocking, as is the attraction Keyes feels for his sister. The forbidden attraction is not resolved tragically, as in ancient Greek models, but rather by means of the nineteenth-century melodramatic device of switched babies and secret identities.

There are no surviving Selig documents to assess the financial success or failure of Twisted Trails other than a ledger indicating that only nine prints were ordered for the United Kingdom and Scandinavia between March and June of 1917. The paucity of foreign orders, however, is likely more indicative of the devastating effect of World War I on Selig’s international operations than of the film’s merits.

Tom Mix’s final Western drama for William Selig, The Heart of Texas Ryan (1917), contains a more traditional narrative, involving Mexican bandits and a last-minute rescue by the United States Cavalry. Like Thundering Herd, Texas Ryan is five reels long and co-stars Bessie Eyton. But unlike Thundering Herd, the narrative is confusing, relying on intertitles to explain exposition and action that would have ordinarily been presented as on-screen action. Texas Ryan was produced at Tom Mix’s Newhall ranch and directed by E. A. Martin, who worked better in jungle-adventure films. Kevin Brownlow notes that the
production was supposed to be an adaptation of a Zane Grey novel but had to be altered because of clearance problems. In addition, a freak tornado struck Newhall, destroying a hotel exterior erected for the film, which may have contributed to the incoherence of the story. Although Texas Ryan received even fewer international orders than Twisted Trails, incomplete prints and video copies have been more accessible to the general public through the years.

Tom Mix’s last original Western comedy for William Selig was probably Starring in Western Stuff (1917), co-starring Victoria Forde, longtime sidekick Sid Jordan, and several other Mix veterans. Like many of his comedies, it concerns a confrontation between cowboys and a movie company on location making Westerns. The narrative begins with Mix writing a fan letter to his favorite actress, Forde, who coincidentally travels to his town to star in a Western. Mix rescues her from an assault before realizing she was merely rehearsing a scene. He tries unsuccessfully to show up Forde’s effete male co-star, but ultimately saves her from an attack by real outlaws. Contrary to Mix’s earlier satires on moviemaking, Starring in Western Stuff does not involve Mix’s rejection of the filmmakers; rather, they flee from him. In his last film for Selig, Mix subtly comments on what has happened to the Western: the cowboys have now embraced the movies, and the filmmakers have abandoned the “real” West in order to settle for a more convenient imitation in and around Los Angeles.

Tom Mix signed with nickelodeon-operator-turned-producer William Fox in 1917. Recognizing the merits of Mix’s five-reel features with Selig, Fox embarked on what would become an extremely lucrative policy of featuring Mix almost exclusively in five-reel Westerns; Mix became his most popular star. Much of Fox’s success can thus be traced to the business practices and narrative format he learned from William Selig’s production of Tom Mix Westerns.

Consolidating his dwindling motion picture operations as an independent producer, William Selig cobbled a feature from memorable Mix action scenes titled Movie Stunts (1917). Eventually Selig leased or sold outright Mix Westerns such as The Heart of Texas Ryan, which was reissued in 1923 as Sure Shot Parker. The Aywon Film Corporation acquired many of Selig’s Mix Westerns and made a practice of cutting together several one- and two-reelers into “new” longer features. Intertitles were rewritten in an attempt to connect the disparate footage, but the result was always a confusing mess. Unfortunately, these jumbled features have come to be thought of as Selig films, partly because they often utilized earlier popular Selig titles and partly because they are among the few Selig-Mix films that have survived. This situation has resulted in a variety of inaccurate assumptions about the Selig-Mix Westerns.
Mix in his last Western drama for Selig, The Heart of Texas Ryan. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
Later critics seem to dwell on Mix’s limited range of mostly self-effacing characterizations and marginalize his many juvenile fans and rural and small-town audiences, failing to recognize that the Selig-Mix Westerns successfully exploited the essential property of motion pictures—thrilling action—influencing subsequent cowboy stars from Hoot Gibson and Ken Maynard to Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. Perhaps more importantly, Mix paved the way for virtually all future action-adventure movie stars, from Douglas Fairbanks to Jackie Chan. Like Mix, Fairbanks is also remembered for his self-effacing demeanor and stunt aesthetic.

While most often linked to Buster Keaton’s vigorous stunt aesthetic, Jackie Chan arguably has more in common with Tom Mix. Their broadly comedic, self-deprecating style is uncannily similar, as is the stunt work that defines their films and distinguishes them from other action stars. Chan is also well known for performing his own stunts. Further, the stunts of Mix and Chan are integral to and advance the narrative, unlike the stunts of many other actors. An obvious link is the Shanghai Noon Westerns Chan has appeared in, wherein he performs stunts that Mix initiated ninety years earlier.

During the 1920s, while he was under contract to Fox, Tom Mix was recognized as one of the top ten box office draws in the country. No such institutionalized rankings existed during Mix’s tenure with Selig. And, even though more of Mix’s Selig Westerns exist than those he made for Fox, historians have misidentified his stunt innovations and the action aesthetic he developed at Selig as somehow originating during the latter half of his cinematic career. The truth is that almost all of the stunts and action sequences with which Mix is credited in his Fox films are merely repetitions of work first performed for Selig. For instance, the train stunts Mix performed in The Great K and A Robbery (1926) were originally conceived and executed for Selig’s The Sheriff and the Rustler thirteen years earlier.

The cinematic cowboy hero delineated by Tom Mix emphasizes physical action, including dangerous stunts, exceptional horsemanship, and flashy rodeo skills. Larry Langman describes Mix’s “light-hearted approach to the Western” as “personality over characterization, thrills over strong plots, and entertainment over realism” in opposition to “Hart’s redundant plots, somber characters and hard realism.” Edward Buscombe concurs: “While Hart had aimed for moral intensity and realism, Mix aspired only to entertainment. His films were a carefully concocted mélange of stunts, comedy, fistfights, chases and above all glamour,” catering to “a ready and dependable market for films that placed action and excitement over complexities of character and theme.” Kevin Brownlow notes that William S. Hart made films “celebrated for their
poetic realism” that “firmly rejected the circus-comedy approach of Tom Mix [because] he was genuinely concerned about authenticity.” Mix, on the other hand, “made no pretense of showing the West as it was. Inspired by the Wild West show, it was to the tradition of Buffalo Bill that he remained faithful.”

Such comparisons between Tom Mix and William S. Hart reflect credulous assumptions concerning “entertainment” and “reality,” respectively. The somber performance style of Hart is judged to be more realistic than the more cheerful approach of Mix. And yet William S. Hart entered the movies as a middle-aged veteran of the stage, while Tom Mix had been a working cowboy and rodeo star before joining Selig. Mix’s background arguably provided a reality that William S. Hart could not have been able to draw from, especially because, unlike Hart, Mix was responsible for writing and directing a majority of the scenarios he appeared in. A happy-go-lucky demeanor might be considered just as realistic as a perpetually sullen countenance. Kevin Brownlow has noted that despite the shortcomings of The Heart of Texas Ryan—its lack of artificial glamour (including an unedited fly crawling on Mix’s face) and its casual racial prejudice toward Mexicans—it “is probably more truthful to the West of its day than the most beautifully shot drama of William S. Hart.”

Obviously, there exist differing concepts of authenticity concerning the motion picture Western, especially in regard to the films of Tom Mix. Most of the Mix Westerns produced by Selig employ such realistic elements as genuine southwest geography; “practical” sets, costuming, horsemanship, roping, and other cowboy skills; and narrative conflicts reflecting events of the time and setting. Mix’s Selig films are nonetheless almost completely forgotten or ignored. There seems to be a correlation between serious-themed cinematic narratives and serious inquiry into those films, whereas lighter examples of any genre seldom receive similar evaluation. The groundbreaking Westerns Tom Mix made for William Selig are proof that such an approach has resulted in an inaccurate and limited understanding of fundamental aspects of film history.
DURING NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 1907, FRANCIS BOGGS DIRECTED a thousand-foot version of Alexandre Dumas’ nineteenth-century international best seller, The Count of Monte Cristo. With its title shortened to Monte Cristo, the film was actually a fourteen-minute adaptation of highlights from the popular theatrical version of the novel, which continued to be performed into the early twentieth century.¹ Like Selig’s production of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Monte Cristo was clearly a prestige production, intended to expand the nickelodeon’s audience by attracting admirers of the book and play.²

Boggs’ direction reflects the theatrical roots of the adaptation from the very start of the film, as a curtain reading “Act I” rises to reveal the opening sequence; titled curtains are utilized to introduce all five “acts” (scenes) of the film. The scenery consists of a well-blended mix of period furniture and props in front of backdrops incorporating painted perspectives that add depth to the overall setting. A subtle man-made breeze impels a flag to wave amidst the simulated exteriors shot inside Selig’s Chicago studio. The performers make entrances and exits onto the set from stage-left and -right, and directly address the camera/audience in a melodramatic fashion. They are generally centered within the frame and always photographed head on. Another theatrical motif incorporated into the mise-en-scène is the small chain fence that borders the front of the stage on which the actors perform.

The highlight of the theatrical version of The Count of Monte Cristo occurs when protagonist Edmond Dantes escapes years of island imprisonmenmt and safely crawls ashore to freedom, raises his arms and declares, “The world is mine!” Selig and Boggs agreed that this famous scene should be photographed
not in the studio but on an actual beach. Since the Chicago winter precluded any actor from emerging out of nearby Lake Michigan to re-create the familiar declaration, Selig authorized Boggs and cameraman-factotum Thomas Persons to travel to Southern California and stage the scene on a Pacific beach.

The decision could not have been an easy one for Selig. Found guilty of infringing on Edison's camera patents little more than a month earlier, the Selig Polyscope Company was more than ever on the verge of extinction. Because his financial resources were obviously impacted by this latest round of legal setbacks and he had been ordered by the court to desist from operating the cameras on which his livelihood depended, William Selig took a huge gamble, guided by the strength of his convictions. He and Boggs shared a radical vision of how the inclusion of such a realistic moment in *Monte Cristo* amidst an otherwise artificial theatrical presentation might have a transformative effect on the audience and cinema in general, attracting new spectators and thus equipping Selig with the financial resources and prestige he needed in order to persevere. Conversely, if his company was about to be shut down for good, at least Selig would go out with a noteworthy production to be proud of. It helped that Boggs had a young son living in California with a former wife whom he could visit during the Christmas season and thus assume some of the traveling expenses.

Boggs and Persons arrived in Los Angeles and hired an impoverished dime-museum hypnotist for $1.50 to double for the actor who played Dantes back in Chicago. The three took a Pacific Electric streetcar from downtown LA to what appears to be Laguna Beach's dramatic Three Arches rock formations. Tom Persons cranked the camera in anticipation of Edmond Dantes emerging from the ocean, but the hypnotist didn't surface. The cameraman and Boggs plunged into the water, primarily to save the actor's rented wig and beard to protect their $10 deposit. Persons had to fork over an extra 50 cents before the nearly drowned hypnotist would agree to a retake.3

In the finished film, after Dantes is mistaken for a corpse and tossed from the top of the prison wall, the scene abruptly cuts from the artificiality of the Chicago studio to a spectacular view of waves crashing against a rocky coastline. The next shot shows the Dantes stunt double tentatively crawling onto a surf-sprayed rock, raising his arms, and miming the famous declaration. This is followed by an intertitle: "Finding vast treasures in Monte Cristo." The stunt-Dantes is then shown on the beach digging into the sand, his actions somewhat obscured by a rock in the foreground at the bottom of the frame. The shot is otherwise beautifully composed, with a natural rock archway behind the actor.
framing the pounding Pacific breakers in the background. The scene cuts to a rising curtain titled "Act III," and the action shifts back to scenes made at the Chicago studio.

As prints were being readied for release, an item in *Views and Films Index* teased its readers that the "distant sound of dashing waves and dashed rocks" was a component of Selig's forthcoming feature (emphasis added). The cover of Selig's release bulletin featured a drawing of Dantes emerging from the surf with arms raised, accompanied by the caption "The world is mine!"

*Monte Cristo* was released January 30, 1908, and received excellent notices from the handful of periodicals then reviewing movies. *Moving Picture World* called it "a film well worth seeing," mostly for its fidelity to the theatrical version, "with exact reproduction of the original scenery effects and surroundings, . . . costume and stage setting . . ." A Portland newspaper was even more enthusiastic. "A film without equal . . . The whole tale is unfolded in the moving pictures, and given in a way that all can understand, no matter what the nationality. It is a treat to sit in the comfortable nickel and watch the scenes in the life of the famous novel hero."

Anyone seeing the film today would disagree with the Portland review. Due to the severe editing necessary to condense the story into its approximately fourteen-minute length, *Monte Cristo* is virtually incomprehensible. Many in the original audience would have been familiar with the story and thus able to fill in the gaps. For those new to *Monte Cristo* and confused by the narrative's limitations, nickelodeon operators had the option of designating someone to read aloud the three-page synopsis provided in Selig's release bulletin in unison with the film to clear up ambiguities of the screen story. This would become standard practice during the next couple of years for Selig and his competitors as they grappled to construct an intelligible cinematic language and extend the length of films in order to produce more complex stories. In spite of *Monte Cristo*’s narrative deficiencies, the insertion of the Pacific Ocean shots into the production remains a stunning development in cinematic language and production.

In the year following the release of *Monte Cristo*, Selig’s fortunes improved dramatically: he was no longer burdened with fighting costly Edison litigation. With Otis Turner directing at the home studio and Francis Boggs splitting his time between Chicago and Colorado, Selig was releasing on average more than a film a week. One persistent problem was the Chicago winter, which confined production to inside the glass studio. The same was true, of course, for Selig’s competitors in the Northeast. The nickelodeon boom had made filmmaking
such a lucrative business that Kalem relocated to Jacksonville, Florida, for the winter of 1908–1909 before returning to New York in the spring.\textsuperscript{10} Just as his closer proximity to Colorado influenced the making of Westerns in the West, so too did Selig's location in the Midwest allow him to look southwest rather than southeast for an alternate production site.

It has been suggested that another motive lay behind Selig’s \textit{Monte Cristo} location shoot: that it was deliberately conceived as a scouting expedition to test the viability of a production unit based in Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{11} The historical record bears this out; as early as the fall of 1906, William Selig had personally scouted Los Angeles as a potential branch for his business.\textsuperscript{12} A year after the \textit{Monte Cristo} shoot, Selig felt confident enough to send a full company of players and technicians on the road to establish a West Coast base. In hindsight, it shouldn't have been a difficult decision; after all, in addition to its arid climate and variegated geography, Los Angeles supported two full-time theatrical companies and was part of the Orpheum vaudeville circuit, from which additional players, sets, costumes, and props could potentially be recruited.\textsuperscript{13} San Francisco might have been a more logical destination for Selig had not the 1906 earthquake decimated its larger theatrical community, wrecking the careers of several of his old friends.\textsuperscript{14}

Selig first sent his troupe south. A week after the official announcement of the establishment of the MPPC in January 1909, with its promise of stability and unlimited profits, William Selig dispatched Francis Boggs to New Orleans to construct a story around the forthcoming Mardi Gras.\textsuperscript{15} This time Boggs was supplied with a company of actors and a proper cameraman: leading man Tom Santschi, leading woman Jean Ward, comedian Harry Todd, character actors Charles Dean and Silence Tower, heavy James L. McGee, and cinematographer James Crosby and his wife Edna. The tall, athletically built Santschi hailed from Missouri and had begun acting with theatrical stock companies in 1897 when he was seventeen years old. He joined Selig in 1908 and would remain in his employ until the demise of the company, longer than any other actor.\textsuperscript{16} Crosby was one of at least four cameramen employed by Selig at the time. He was hired in the early days when one of the services offered by the company was the rental of projectors and operators to accompany a program of films.\textsuperscript{17} The troupe left Chicago on January 8, 1909, charged with producing a one-reel film per week.\textsuperscript{18}

Boggs and company made half a dozen films on the road between Chicago and New Orleans.\textsuperscript{19} Although all of the stories were rooted in love triangles, many of the productions are distinguished by narrative and/or cinematic innovation.
Set in Mexico, *Fighting Bob* (1909) concerns American lieutenant seaman Bob and local girl Juanita, who are in love, and jealous suitor Salvatore, who attempts to kill his rival. One shot was photographed aboard a launch piloted by Santschi as he returns two inebriated sailors to their ship. This type of kinetic imagery was rare in 1909, as was the subsequent shot: a reverse angle from the ship that links Santschi bringing the sailors aboard.20

In *A Country Girl's Peril* (1909), the menace confronting the country girl was, not surprisingly, a man from the city. Blacksmith Tom chases after his errant lover on horseback, leaps into the city slicker's car and tosses him out, and then orders the chauffeur back to his fiancée's home. What the narrative lacks in originality Boggs makes up for in how he visually conveys the story. He anticipates the stunt work of Tom Mix in the scene where Santschi leaps from his horse into the car, and infuses the shot with cinematic dynamism by photographing the action from an adjacent moving vehicle.21

During the last two weeks of February 1909, the company produced *Four Wise Men*, a comedy about four henpecked husbands who craft phony telegrams to escape their wives so they can revel in New Orleans. The men pick up four girls while watching the Mardi Gras parade and later carouse with them at a café. Unable to pay their bill, the men are thrown in jail and forced to contact their wives to bail them out. Several scenes of the actual 1909 Rex parade were intercut with the men cavorting with their consorts on a New Orleans balcony. Unlike most Selig productions in 1909, *Four Wise Men* was rushed into release within a month of production, presumably to capitalize on the timeliness of Mardi Gras.22 Shortly after wrapping production on a film shot in Baton Rouge, the Selig troupe left for Los Angeles.23

Upon their arrival in downtown Los Angeles on March 21, 1909, the Selig troupe leased the drying yards behind the Sing Kee Chinese laundry, at 751 S. Olive Street between Seventh and Eighth Streets, to serve as an outdoor studio.24 The site was undoubtedly chosen for its unobstructed exposure to the sun, the privacy provided by the tall fences, and its proximity to hotels and theaters from which additional talent and materiel could be recruited. A small stage measuring approximately ten by twenty feet was built, behind which was erected a sturdy wall facing south, about ten feet in height. The side walls consisted of canvas hung from piano wire. An open roof was necessary to bathe the actors in sufficient light for the relatively insensitive film stock, though it frequently resulted in harsh glare and shadows that were inconsistent with genuine interior lighting. Besides serving as leading man, Tom Santschi received an extra $5 per week for painting and decorating the sets; his total weekly salary was $35.00.25
The first movie shot at Selig's Los Angeles studio was *The Heart of a Race Tout* (1909). Santschi starred as an unemployed man desperate to raise money to buy medicine for his sick wife and to pay back rent to their landlady, who has threatened eviction. Unable to obtain medicine on credit from a druggist, Santschi goes to the park, where he runs into his race-tout friend. They concoct a scheme whereby Santschi rescues the tout from a phony suicide attempt, which results in their raising money from sympathetic passersby. They buy medicine for Santschi's ailing wife, and with the remaining funds, gain admission to the racetrack. The tout sells a tip on a 50-to-1 shot to a farmer for a half-share of his $20 bet, and the horse wins. Santschi and his friend split the winnings and return to the boardinghouse to pay off the landlady; there, the tout falls in love with a kind-hearted neighbor.

The production was designed simply so the company could ease into their new studio. There was no need to supplement the cast or rent special costumes. Only two interior sets needed to be built, the boardinghouse apartment and the drugstore. Much of the film was shot in nearby Central Park (later renamed Pershing Square). A couple of weeks after completing the scenes at the Chinese laundry studio, the troupe surreptitiously shot the racetrack sequences at racing tycoon Lucky Baldwin's notorious Santa Anita Park during its final three days of existence, on April 15–17, 1909. The inclusion of scenes staged at a genuine racetrack enhanced the film's authenticity, subtly suggesting to the spectator a real slice of life. This was an aesthetic that William Selig imparted to each of his directors and that would become a foundational component of virtually all subsequent commercial filmmaking.

The movie that inaugurated the Los Angeles film industry was barely noticed at the time of its release on July 29, 1909. Unaware of what it portended, *Moving Picture World* applauded *Race Tout*'s "good acting and . . . excellent photographic quality," and *Variety* noted rather generically that "the picture has heart interest and is well drawn"; *Billboard*’s review was little more than a three-sentence plot synopsis. Tom Santschi retained snapshots of the production for his scrapbook; other than that, it appears that everyone else seemed to regard *Race Tout* as just another movie.

Following *The Heart of a Race Tout*, Selig's Los Angeles troupe made *The Peasant Prince* (1909). A lackluster period story set in France about rejected suitors disguising a gardener's son as a royal to romance the sisters who rejected them, *Prince* was the kind of film that Pathé had been flooding the American market with. As he would with all of the continuity scripts sent back to the Chicago plant with the camera negatives, Boggs would suggest which shots to cut if the running length exceeded the thousand-foot reel capacity, along with tinting proposals for each scene.
Between shots for *The Heart of a Race Tout*, the first Selig film that was made in downtown Los Angeles. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

The Western *Ben’s Kid* was made in and around the Olive Street studio, with comic relief supplied by Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, who’d been appearing in local Gilbert and Sullivan productions with the Ferris Hartman Light Opera Company. The scenes of Arbuckle trying to quiet the foundling were so funny that it led to his starring in a follow-up comedy, *Mrs. Jones’ Birthday* (1909). Essentially a one-joke story about a man who has to buy a series of plaster figurines for his wife’s birthday because he keeps losing or breaking them in various street encounters, the story climaxes when he finally returns home with the wrong present, a black kettle that his wife abhors and that Arbuckle then puts on his head in close-up at the fade-out. Arbuckle would continue to appear sporadically in Selig productions over the next few years, including *A Robust Patient* (1911), in which he stars as an overweight man who escapes a fat farm after suffering through their draconian regimen, and *Alas! Poor Yorick* (1913), wherein Arbuckle played a supporting role in drag.

During their residency behind Sing Kee’s laundry, the Selig company learned that former Broadway matinee idol Hobart Bosworth was eking out
a living as an acting teacher in a nearby office. Born in 1867, Bosworth made his theatrical debut with McKee Rankin’s stock company in 1885, later joining Augustin Daly, and notably playing Judas to Mrs. Fiske’s Mary of Magdala in New York. He moved to Los Angeles in 1906 in the hope of recovering from the tuberculosis that had derailed his theatrical career. James McGee, who had quickly transitioned from playing the resident villain to becoming the Selig troupe’s business manager, paid a call on Bosworth and eventually prevailed on him to appear in a film. Bosworth received $125 for two days’ work on May 9 and 10, 1909, more than he had ever received in a week on stage. Bosworth was one of only a handful of notable theatrical personalities to appear in a movie to date.

In the Sultan’s Power (1909) stars Bosworth as an American who falls in love with a woman betrothed to a wealthy Turkish nobleman by her greedy father. After her marriage she’s imprisoned in the Turk’s palace. Bosworth goes to her rescue but is captured and sentenced to death. The woman escapes to the sultan to beg for clemency but he decides to keep her for himself. Bosworth leads the opposition army in an attack on the palace, where he overpowers the Turk, rescues the girl, and captures the Sultan.

Bosworth’s salary pushed the cost of the production to $800. When he saw the completed film several months later, he was pleased with his “forceful and expressive gestures,” though his walk wasn’t as dignified as he’d thought. Bosworth’s experience on the nineteenth-century stage infused many of his Selig performances with a broad-gestured theatricality that was antithetical to the subtle expression D. W. Griffith’s players were simultaneously pioneering as more aesthetically appropriate for motion pictures. Because of Bosworth’s disdain for the new medium, Selig had to promise not to promote his name in conjunction with the film; nevertheless, In the Sultan’s Power was rushed into release a month later.

The Selig troupe wrapped production at the Olive Street studio around the beginning of June and set out to make Westerns and other outdoor dramas amidst the spectacular natural scenery of Northern California’s Yosemite Valley, Lake Tahoe, and Mt. Shasta, along the Columbia River near Astoria, Oregon, and Washington’s Hood River Valley. The company expanded to fifteen members, but Hobart Bosworth was not among them; nor was James McGee, whom William Selig charged with acquiring a larger, permanent Los Angeles studio.

The Witches Cavern (1909) is something of a precursor to a horror aesthetic that would take root more than half a century later. While left alone at a campsite during a hunting trip, an innocent young woman is terrorized by
a half-witted "wild man." The scene intercuts between a note she frantically scribbles to her friends and the approach of the wild man. The girl runs for her life and inadvertently seeks refuge with the man's mother, the eponymous witch, who takes her captive in their cavern home. The young woman endures more terror from the wild man and witch until she's rescued by the hunting party. The caverns in and around Yosemite's Nevada Falls were an obvious inspiration for both the narrative and staging of Boggs' production.

The company shot *The Stage Driver* (1909) while stopping over in Oakland to buy their first automobile. Until then they had traveled exclusively by train or horse and wagon. A surviving production still from the film reveals a beautifully composed low-angle shot of a group of cowboys sitting on the edge of a porch in the foreground, with a manned stagecoach looming in the background.

Boggs wrote Colonel Selig in London that the company would soon be returning to Los Angeles. He planned on laying the staff off for a week while the new Edendale studio was readied and Jim Crosby completed shooting actuality footage of Yellowstone Park. The establishment of a second studio half a continent away was both visionary and risky. William Selig confidently explained to a British reporter that the Chicago studio facility and newly acquired Los Angeles property were selected to "get our best scenic effects from. We believe in giving the public the most realistic picture we can get, and we're spending a lot of money on it, too. But it will come back."

On the basis of the Western unit's summer output and the imminent establishment of a permanent Los Angeles studio that would further facilitate the steady production of films, Selig announced that the company would begin releasing two one-reel features per week beginning August 30, every Monday and Thursday. Marcus Loew of the People's Film Exchange, headquartered in New York's Greenwich Village, immediately placed a standing order for all Selig releases. Loew soon had lots of company; within three weeks the Selig Polyscope Company was proclaiming that "over 7,200 exhibitors are using their film weekly." The figure is likely a gross exaggeration, but it still points to the explosive growth that the company was enjoying due in part to the success of the western unit's productions.

After more than three months on the road, the Selig western company finally came home to their new studio in Los Angeles on August 24, 1909. At first sight, the facility might not have seemed like much of an improvement over the drying yards of the Sing Kee laundry. The property at 1845 Allesandro Street was originally less than an acre in size, with a small one-room bungalow that had formerly served as the Edendale Hall. The interior was subdivided
into dressing rooms and a production office, and a sixteen-by-twenty-foot cement stage was installed outside. A barn in the back of the property was used to store scenery and props. Less than three miles from the heart of downtown LA, the Edendale location afforded the company a modicum of privacy while being located near streetcar lines that allowed for easy travel to a variety of locations.

It's likely that the first film made completely at Selig's Edendale studio was *Brought to Terms* (1909), the story of an indecorous battle of the sexes. While a group of shrewish wives organize an independence club, their henpecked husbands gather in an adjacent room. With the others' approval, one of the men procures a cage full of rats, which is opened in the women's drawing room. The wives rush to their husbands in a panic, and the men proceed to kill all but one of the rats. The victorious men order their wives home, after which the host holds a live rat by the tail as his wife waits on him hand and foot. Once again Boggs infused a slight story with a dazzling cinematic innovation. He had the husbands' and wives' meeting rooms constructed on the stage adjacent to each other, then had a camera track built so he could dolly back and forth between the two rooms within a single take. After having placed a camera in automobiles and boats during his location shoots, Boggs brought the concept of the moving camera into the studio.

Within a month or two of settling into Edendale, Francis Boggs located Hobart Bosworth, who had been convalescing from a recurrence of tuberculosis in San Diego, and convinced him to return to Los Angeles and sign a contract with the company to appear in more films. Perhaps as an enticement, expensive sets and Roman costumes were rented and Sheridan Knowles' popular tragedy *Virginius* was rewritten with a happy ending as *The Roman* (1910). The large cast included newcomer Robert Leonard, who would become one of MGM's principal directors of the 1930s. The complicated story, set in ancient Rome, involved secret identities, power struggles, and the inevitable love triangle. Realizing that the silent story might be difficult for audiences to follow, Boggs urged the editors in Chicago to obviate any potential confusion through lengthy announcements, or what have since come to be referred to as intertitles. Boggs suggested to Bosworth that given the expense of the costumes and sets, it would be prudent to utilize them in another film before they had to be returned, and he encouraged Bosworth to write the screenplay. Bosworth penned *The Wife of Marcius* (1910), a simple and morbid story of a Roman soldier in love with a comrade's faithful wife. The soldier's machinations result in the woman killing herself and the husband taking his own life after strangling the scheming soldier.
Brought to Terms, the first film produced at the first permanent studio in Los Angeles. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

Bosworth, who was earning a weekly salary of $125 (nearly $100 more than most of the other players and $25 more than Boggs), overcame his disdain of the movies and allowed Selig to publicize his association with the company. This resulted in advertisements appearing in trade magazines heralding "Hobart Bosworth in The Roman." William Selig was thus among the first American filmmakers during the nickelodeon era to credit popular theatrical players in his films in the hope of attracting interest that transcended the films themselves. In noting the star by name, the New York Dramatic Mirror declared, "The work of all the players is worthy of praise, particularly that of the Roman general, played by Hobart Bosworth." By the end of November 1909, Selig's Los Angeles branch had produced approximately fifty one-reel films, most a thousand feet in length (about fourteen minutes long). The films were exhibited in nickelodeons across the country and around the world. These narrative productions were how most audiences initially encountered California in general and Los Angeles in particular.
The films of Selig's Los Angeles unit displayed a variety of scenery unlike that found in the European film capitals or the northeastern hub of the American industry, scenery that, as in the earlier Colorado Westerns, was integral to the narrative. The sheer volume of releases showed that Boggs and company were unimpeded by weather conditions. Audiences clamored for more, and the curiosity of Selig's competitors, both old and new, was piqued. It was becoming apparent that Los Angeles production was a major factor in Selig's growing prominence within the industry. The old adage "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery" was about to be proven true again.

After tallying eight production companies in the area, half of which were MPPC members and the other four unlicensed "independents," Moving Picture World declared in 1911, "Motion picture manufacturers, as a whole, ought to be grateful to Mr. W. N. Selig, who was the first to discover the photographic advantages of Southern California." But that's not exactly how the history books have reported it.

In his 1931 History of the Movies, Benjamin B. Hampton recognized Selig for having "discovered Los Angeles," but incorrectly identified him as an independent filmmaker whose motivation was to "produce pictures in places so remote that [Edison] subpoena-servers and confiscators of cameras would have trouble in finding his troupes." Hampton claimed that other independents "investigated Selig's operations, and unhesitatingly settled in and near Los Angeles because it was close to the Mexican border." The widely regarded 1938 History of Motion Pictures, written by Frenchmen Maurice Bardeche and Robert Brasillach, elaborated on Hampton, asserting that "if [MPPC] detectives turned up, [the independents] could pile actors, scenery and cameras into a car and disappear across the border for a few days." Both Kenneth Macgowan's 1965 History and Jeanne Thomas Allen's chapter in Tino Balio's influential American Film Industry, published in 1976, repeat the earlier claims about Selig as a former independent leading other outlaw filmmakers to Los Angeles, while admitting ambivalence about the obvious contradictions. The claim about Mexico's proximity to Los Angeles is especially ludicrous; LA is approximately 150 miles from the border, and in 1909 was reachable only by railroad or dirt roads traveled by horse and wagon, negating any fast getaways, not that there was ever any need for them.

In her otherwise insightful history of the American motion picture industry from 1907 to 1915, Eileen Bowser notes the establishment of the Selig company in Los Angeles in 1909, but argues that Fred J. Balshofer of the newly organized independent New York Motion Picture Company's Bison division deserves "nearly as much claim to be the first pioneer as Boggs," since
his was the second company to arrive in Los Angeles. Balshofer offered the following motive for the move: "Los Angeles with its mild climate and sunshine beckoned as an escape both from the winter months of the East as well as the ever-present Patents Company detectives." Yet as Richard Dale Batman has noted, upon arriving in Los Angeles in late November 1909, Balshofer leased a studio site for Bison almost directly across Allesandro Street from Selig in Edendale. Obviously the independent Bison Company wasn't fleeing the MPPC; it was following and imitating one of the most successful MPPC members, the Selig Polyscope Company. Embracing Selig's popular aesthetic, Bison would immediately dedicate itself solely to the making of Los Angeles-area Westerns, occasionally restaging popular Selig productions and presenting them as its own original creations. Within a few weeks of Bison's arrival in Edendale, D. W. Griffith led his Biograph unit to downtown Los Angeles for a season of winter filmmaking on January 23, 1910.

Operating out of the Chicago studio, William Selig utilized his newly acquired menagerie of circus animals to produce a historical drama set in ancient Rome for Christmas 1909 release. The Christian Martyrs, directed by Turner, concerns victorious Roman military commander Flavian, who returns home from the wars and falls in love with Christian slave girl Naodonia, much to the chagrin of jealous Empress Faustina. When Flavian converts to Christianity and announces his intention to marry Naodonia, Faustina condemns the Christians to die in the arena. The entire film was shot in the Chicago studio and on the backlot, with two deer appearing in the background of the love scenes and lions prowling the arena. Moving Picture World cautioned potential viewers that "the realistic scenery in the arena and the horror of what it means are rather trying, though if one can divorce one's self from the impression that it is real it can be looked upon merely as a picture, and as such is marvelous." More than forty years later, a similar plot served as the basis for the first movie released in CinemaScope, The Robe (1953).

After signing Bosworth, William Selig signed several other theatrical stars. Milton and Dolly Nobles re-created their long-running stage success, The Phoenix (1910); M. B. Curtis starred in the film version of his play Sam'l O' Posen, retitled Samuel of Posen, a comedy of Irish and Jewish Americans set in a jewelry shop predating Abie's Irish Rose by a decade; and vaudevillian Fred Walton, "the emperor of silent comedy," starred in The Hall-Room Boys (1911). Unfortunately, all three films appear to have flopped. Dissuaded by the relatively exorbitant salaries and subsequent failures at the box office, William Selig refrained from further investment in established theatrical "stars" and their high salaries for about three years.
In addition to Turner and Boggs, Selig employed at least three other directors during 1909: Jack Kenyon, Dan Mason, and Lorin J. Howard. Kenyon made comedies at the Chicago studio, such as *A Modern Dr. Jekyll* and *Infant Terrible* (1909), while also directing the company's 1909 Westerns at Bliss, Oklahoma. Mason directed at least three comedies for the company: *Winning a Widow* (1909), *A Crowded Hotel* (1910), and *Our German Cousin* (1910). Howard directed just a few films for the company at a short-lived New Orleans studio, including *Sealed Instructions* (1909) and *In the Serpent's Power* (1910).

Early in 1910 William Selig spent a month in Los Angeles arranging for a proper glass studio and developing plant to be constructed on the Edendale property, which he expanded to encompass the entire block along Allesandro Street between Clifford and Duane, one-half block deep. Prior to this, the LA company had been staging its productions in the open on a concrete stage much as it had in Sing Kee's drying yard. In addition, Boggs and company had been unable to see their own rushes because the negatives had to be shipped to the Chicago plant for processing. The Edendale studio was designed in Old California style, with tiled roofs and ornate privacy walls with bell towers, said to be modeled on the San Gabriel and Santa Barbara Missions. Eventually a carpenter's shop, dressing rooms, and other support buildings were added to the property, along with an in-ground pool modeled after the one at the Chicago backlot.
William Selig never had any qualms about providing his actors with the opportunity to write and direct, as long as their efforts were sufficiently popular with audiences. Eugenie Besserer joined Selig’s Los Angeles company in 1910 as a mature leading woman. As a teenager she became adept at fencing and later taught it to Teddy Roosevelt’s daughter Alice. Like several other Selig players, Besserer had been a member of the McKee Rankin theatrical company supporting “emotional actress” Nance O’Neil, whom she would emulate. Besserer toured with other stock companies and wrote a fencing playlet, An Accident, which she performed in vaudeville. She was Selig’s highest paid actress upon joining the company, starring in an adaptation of her play, which was directed by Boggs and retitled The Profligate (1910), set in Paris at the turn of the nineteenth century.77

Besserer plays Pauline, a fencer who falls in love with and marries dashing young captain Paul Dubois of Napoleon’s army. Dubois is wounded in battle and nursed back to health by Pauline’s sister Mercedes, who is unaware that he’s her new brother-in-law. Mercedes and Dubois fall in love, prompting her to write Pauline that she’s about to be married. Pauline visits her sister and discovers what her husband is up to. She disguises herself as a man, provokes a duel, and fatally stabs him. Dubois rips the mask off her face, and upon recognizing his wife, falls dead.78 The vogue for French costume dramas was certainly on the wane by the time The Profligate was released, which may be why
Besserer was soon earning only half of her original salary. Despite the salary decrease, Eugenie Besserer starred in or played key supporting roles in Selig Polyscope features until the company went out of business.

Hobart Bosworth was allowed to direct several of the films he starred in and occasionally wrote. He led a company to the Yosemite Valley during May and June 1911 to make “mountain stories dealing with the early days of California.” While at “Camp Selig,” Bosworth wrote his friend Boggs in Los Angeles thanking him for a shipment of movie magazines that relieved “the tedium of the evenings.” Contrary to his screen image as virile, heroic, and athletic—an image he propagated throughout his life in newspaper, magazine, and radio interviews—Bosworth complained to Boggs about the bad weather, his migraine headaches and suicidal tendencies, the enormous self-will it took for him to work, and his difficulty breathing in the mountains. He promised to work harder as long as it didn’t injure his health permanently, and confided, “I am so ill as to need sympathy like a baby.”

One of the films directed by Bosworth that summer at Yosemite was McKee Rankin’s “49” (1911). The elderly Rankin joined Selig at this time as a character actor in addition to contributing melodramas he’d written and starred in with his stock company. Rankin’s “49” begins with a prologue in which a drunken Bosworth, mistakenly thinking he’s accidentally killed his young son Arthur, flees west. Twenty years later Bosworth is a hard-luck miner raising a pretty waif named “Carrots.” Arthur is now a lawyer, hired to find an heiress stolen by gypsies when she was a child and lately sighted at a mining camp. Arthur is taken in by the oblivious Bosworth and lovesick Carrots. He summons the old family retainer, Ned, whom Carrots recognizes by a song he used to sing her, and she is proclaimed the missing heiress. Bosworth strikes it rich, recognizes the scar he’d given Arthur as a child, and they are reconciled.

Red-haired beauty Bessie Eyton, a newcomer to the Selig organization, played Carrots in Rankin’s “49”. Eyton was the prototypical overnight star, a Southern California native with no prior acting experience who on a lark took a job as a movie extra and was subsequently chosen for a leading role. Around the time she joined the company she married low-level Selig executive Charles Eyton. Athletic and demure, Bessie Eyton succeeded the Edendale studio’s original ingénue, Betty Harte.

Betty Harte spent three years with a Philadelphia stock company and a season in vaudeville before relocating to California. Following the collapse of her own theatrical company, she took a job as a newspaper reporter and was assigned to interview Francis Boggs shortly after his arrival at the Edendale studio. The interview was scuttled when Harte told Boggs that she knew how
to ride a horse (she didn't); she promptly accepted an offer from Boggs to join the company. One of her last appearances for the director was the starring role in *The Little Widow* (1911), produced off the coast of Southern California and utilizing the company's two-masted schooner. *The Little Widow* is an example of the short-lived "marine" genre in which Selig and Biograph excelled, featuring relatively desolate Southern California beaches and coastal islands. According to Eileen Bowser, the mise-en-scène in such films was one of the factors that first attracted critics to the notion that film might be considered an art form. By late 1911, when *The Little Widow* was released, at least five other companies had followed Selig to Los Angeles.

Kalem, Pathé's American branch, and the independent Centaur Company also relocated to Los Angeles. Like Bison, Pathé settled on Allesandro Street near Selig's studio; Kalem built a studio in nearby Glendale; and Centaur changed its name to Nestor upon landing in Hollywood, just a few miles from Edendale. As these other companies were learning how to make Westerns in the West, the Edendale studio was steadily expanding its staff, reaching forty members by autumn 1911. For the week ending September 23, Bosworth was still earning a higher weekly salary than any of the others, at $150, followed by Boggs at $125. The lowest-paid employee was the studio's gardener and janitor, Frank Minematsu, a twenty-nine-year-old Japanese immigrant whose $25 salary was crossed out in the company ledger in September 1911 and replaced with $10.

In October Boggs was engaged in the production of a controversial Western utilizing many of the company's star players. *The Danites* (1912) was an adaptation by McKee Rankin of his most popular theatrical success, which in turn was based on Joaquin Miller's novel *The First Families of the Sierras*. The cover page of Rankin's original manuscript contains the following disclaimer:

> Note: After the death of the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, a band of Mormons called "Danites" or "Destroying Angels" were commissioned by the Elders of their church to destroy all who participated in the death of their prophet, together with the members of their families, wives, mothers, and children. This interesting drama is a faithful chronicle of that organization.

Rankin's film adaptation, based on the 1857 Mountain Meadows Massacre, in which Mormons wiped out a wagon train crossing through Utah, concerns a survivor of the massacre who is hounded to death by her relentless Mormon pursuers. The large cast included Betty Harte, Hobart Bosworth, Tom Santschi, and Eugenie Besserer. During the week of October 21, the cast was
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Selig payroll showing signatures of Francis Boggs and his killer, Frank Minematsu. Courtesy of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
on location in Santa Cruz, California, shooting exterior scenes for a few days before returning to Edendale, where Boggs was to meet with Colonel Selig, who was visiting from Chicago.91

By the autumn of 1911 William Selig had made a habit of traveling to Los Angeles two or three times a year to inspect his Edendale operations, evaluate story ideas pitched by the staff, and otherwise grow the business.92 Such was the plan when he and wife Mary arrived there on Thursday evening, October 26, and checked into their rooms at the fashionable Alexandria Hotel. The following morning, as was the custom during Selig’s visits, filming was suspended, although several of the players hung around the studio rehearsing and meeting with the boss.

At 10 a.m. Selig was conferring with Francis Boggs and contractor M. Scott in Boggs’ private office about plans to expand the Edendale studio.93 Animal trainer “Big Otto” Breitkreutz, who’d accompanied his boss and Mrs. Selig to Los Angeles to assist in the production of several forthcoming jungle films, discovered Frank Minematsu peering through the keyhole of Boggs’ office and chased him away. Minematsu went into the vacant men’s dressing room, found a revolver that was frequently used as a prop, and loaded it with ammunition he’d brought with him that morning. Moments later he burst into Boggs’ office and fired two bullets into the director. As Boggs slumped to the floor, Scott ran from the office, but Colonel Selig wrestled with Minematsu in an effort to prevent further bloodshed. Minematsu fired another bullet, which struck Selig in the right arm and passed through his bicep. Minematsu fired again, missing, as they continued to grapple, then hit Selig over the head with the gun, which caused a concussion and lacerated his scalp.

Responding to the gunshots, Tom Santschi and company treasurer E. H. Philbrook ran to Boggs’ office, but Minematsu managed to elude them and run toward the studio, where several actresses, including Betty Harte, Eugenie Besserer, and Bessie Eyton, had been rehearsing a scene.94 Quickly surrounded by Santschi, Philbrook, Breitkreutz, James McGee, and actor-director Fred Huntley, Minematsu brandished a long dirk knife he was carrying, but he was overpowered. Almost immediately a mounted policeman arrived, alerted by the shots. Boggs was loaded into the back of an automobile and Minematsu was handcuffed to the cop as they raced to the hospital, but it was too late; Boggs was pronounced dead on arrival. The first bullet had entered his heart, the second his abdomen; the coroner later testified that either could have killed him.95 Selig was rushed to Sisters Hospital, where he spent a week recuperating from his wounds, though initial reports reaching Chicago and New York stated that he had been killed.96
Francis Boggs seated at the desk at which he was killed. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
Frank Minematsu was taken from the hospital to the Central Police Station and booked for murder. At least three detectives grilled him that day about a motive, but the stoic Minematsu would only respond that he had killed Boggs because he "was a bad man." The shootings were reported in newspapers across the country and were in fact the first time the local motion picture industry made the front pages in Los Angeles. The *Examiner, Times,* and *Herald* reported that Minematsu committed the murder because an unidentified old man had told him Boggs was a bad man and should be killed. The *Times* and *Herald* also noted that Minematsu deliberately waited to shoot Boggs until the actresses had finished speaking with Selig because he didn't want to shock or inadvertently hurt them. According to some of the Selig players, Minematsu had gotten drunk six months earlier and fired bullets into Boggs' car in the studio garage. He lost his job but was later rehired after promising never to drink again. Hobart Bosworth made the outrageous statement that "the Japanese and Mr. Boggs were great friends, except on the occasion when Minnamatsu [sic] tried to kill Mr. Boggs several months ago." Tom Santschi told the *Times* that Minematsu was known as "the Gentleman Janitor" around the studio because of his polite demeanor; the paper subsequently referred to him that way, too.97

Boggs' widow, May Hosmer, arrived from Chicago a week after his murder and arranged with the police to confront Minematsu in the hope of learning a motive, but her husband's killer would only repeat what he had originally told the detectives, that "Boggs was a bad man."98 After listening to the inquest testimony of witnesses Santschi, McGee, Breitkreutz, Huntley, Scott, and the mounted policeman, a coroner's jury declared that Minematsu had deliberately murdered Boggs.99 A week later, during a preliminary hearing, the confessed killer declined to offer any evidence on his own behalf. William Selig, his arm still stiff from the gunshot wound, was the principal witness for the prosecution. Santschi, Philbrook, Huntley, and Scott also testified.100 After a four-day trial, Minematsu was convicted of murder and sentenced to life at San Quentin.101

The film world was stunned by the news of the tragic shootings. Boggs was eulogized in the *Moving Picture World* as directing films "marked by artistic touches hitherto unknown to the silent drama."102 Kalem president Samuel Long wired condolences, offering his company's assistance for anything Selig might need.103 In perhaps the most poignant expression of grief, the thirty-six members of the Pacific coast branch of the Selig Polyscope Company pledged to William Selig that they would "do all that lies in our power to aid you in carrying on the work which Mr. Boggs so nobly and kindly trained us to do" while "maintaining the standard Mr. Boggs has so lovingly labored for in all his studious effect and endeavor to please you."104 Several of the staff, including
Hobart Bosworth, Betty Harte, and Herbert Rawlinson, owed their motion picture careers to Boggs. Coincidentally, on the same day the director of the first movie company in Los Angeles was murdered, the first company to permanently settle in Hollywood, Nestor, began production on its first effort, *The Best Man Wins*.

Neither the police nor the prosecuting attorneys were able to ascertain a motive for the murder of someone whom James McQuade of *Moving Picture World* called “the most loyal and kindhearted of men.” McQuade continued, “No one on his large force ever saw him in a temper.” But two days after killing Boggs and wounding Selig, Minematsu did in fact reveal to detectives that when he was employed as the Boggs’ part-time housekeeper several months earlier, he was ordered out of the house by Mrs. Boggs, “who objected to his insolent behavior.” Her husband began to strangle him, according to Minematsu, and was stopped only when a Selig actor arrived unexpectedly.

Surviving continuity scripts reveal Boggs’ proclivity for offensive racial and ethnic epithets and stereotyping of minority characters. With only one or two exceptions, his narratives regard blacks and Asians with a vicious lack of dignity or humanity. Given the choking episode, it’s quite possible that Minematsu was subjected to other fits of Boggs’ verbal and physical abuse. Such evidence does not justify the shooting, but does suggest that these were not capricious or motiveless acts. One aspect of the shootings was obvious to all, however: William Selig was not a target; he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time, attempting to defend his valued employee.

Hobart Bosworth finished directing *The Danites* on behalf of his late friend and later chided Selig for releasing the film in two parts. What he didn’t understand was that Selig was contractually obligated to General Film to distribute only one-reel productions to nickelodeons, at the exhibitors’ insistence. As time passed, Bosworth—whose career the Selig company had resurrected—rarely missed an opportunity to exaggerate his own importance and that of Francis Boggs, minimizing whenever possible the influence and stature of William Selig. Bosworth spuriously claimed, for example, that Boggs had invented dissolves, close-ups, silhouettes, fade-outs, and matted keyhole effects, but that “the Chicago office [i.e., Selig] objected to these innovations.” The truth is that virtually all of those devices were being utilized in Selig productions before Boggs ever made his first film.

In another effort to cast himself as the keeper of the flame for the slain Boggs, Bosworth initiated a short-lived campaign in 1915 to raise funds for the construction of a memorial to Boggs, “pioneer of the film industry on the Pacific Coast.” Veteran correspondent for *Film Index* and *Moving Picture World*
James S. McQuade, who was well acquainted with both Selig and Boggs, set the record straight: "At Mr. Selig's suggestion and at Mr. Selig's expense, Mr. Boggs went [to California and] established the first motion picture studio." In 1920 Selig was more gracious about sharing credit with Boggs for initiating Los Angeles filmmaking, though Selig had personally scouted Los Angeles as a studio site a year before Boggs joined the company. However, that hasn't stopped subsequent efforts to credit Boggs as being responsible for bringing filmmaking to Southern California. A 1957 article in the Hollywood Reporter advocating the construction of a statue of Boggs went so far as to claim the director was killed when a “crazed Japanese valet” fired a bullet at Selig and Boggs threw his body in front of him.

From the day of the murder, Bosworth consistently misrepresented the facts. On the day his friend was killed, Bosworth claimed, in interviews with reporters from at least two Los Angeles newspapers, that he had been among those who had “overpowered” Minematsu. Bosworth also told the Herald, “I found the boy in my dressing room, but thought nothing of it at the time,” though he admitted to the Examiner, “I learned afterward that Minematsu [sic] had been in my dressing room . . . watching Colonel Selig and Mr. Boggs.” In fact, Bosworth wasn’t even at the studio when Boggs was shot. All of the witnesses to the incident were called at the arraignment and preliminary hearing; Bosworth wasn’t among them. Four years later Bosworth boasted that Minematsu “had decided to kill all of us, he said later, but my quickness with the gun, and my apparently uncanny strength, had so impressed him that he waited until the rest of us had left the studio”; this from the man who was “so ill as to need sympathy like a baby.” Even worse, Bosworth made the offensive allegation that Minematsu's Christian faith had led to a “delusion that in the studio we rehearsed deeds of violence to be actually committed outside” to explain the killing.

In 1947, former newspaper reporter Alfred Cohn revealed that on the day Boggs was murdered Bosworth helped him and his colleagues dope out a motivation for the crime. As printed from coast to coast, the Jap became obsessed with the idea that the camera was a hangout for evil spirits which could only be exorcised by liquidation of the boss. (Actually Boss Boggs had chided the Nipponese for ignoring the geraniums in favor of a lady of the studio who didn’t take to the make.)

It appears, then, that Minematsu had made an unwanted pass at Boggs' wife, which resulted in the choking incident and subsequent deadly revenge.
In “The Los Angeles Tragedy,” Moving Picture World offered an informed perspective in response to initial reports that Selig, too, had been killed:

In the suspense that followed the first tidings of the affair, it was brought home with telling force that Mr. Selig's removal from the manufacturing field would mean a disastrous blow to the picture industry. The magnificent confidence he has shown in the future of moving pictures by investing over a million and a quarter in his Chicago and his Los Angeles plants has served as a stimulant to all his colleagues, while his liberal expenditures on productions have done much to raise pictures to their present high standard.\textsuperscript{124}

Bosworth's misrepresentations have contributed to the existence of inaccuracies in the historical record. There is no question that Boggs was a talented and innovative director. William Selig clearly recognized Boggs' talent, giving him far greater autonomy than any of his other employees, before or after. At the time the nine-person western company settled in Los Angeles, Boggs was given free rein to initiate productions and hire and terminate employees as he saw fit.\textsuperscript{125} It was Selig, however, who taught Boggs how to make films, who imparted the aesthetic of genuine locations in the service of cinematic believability, who developed the Western, who built the studio into an efficient and profitable enterprise, and who first recognized the advantages of filmmaking in Los Angeles.

In the parlance of 1911, William Selig had become a “moving picture magnate.” The Selig Polyscope Company was second only to Vitagraph as the most profitable American motion picture firm. Because Selig went to Los Angeles, others followed.

At the same time that Selig was establishing a presence in Los Angeles, he was supervising the production of a film at his Chicago studio that would spawn a new motion picture genre: the jungle-adventure film.
CHAPTER 5

Selig's Cinematic Jungles and Zoo

WHEREAS WILLIAM SELIG’S ENGAGEMENT WITH DEVELOPING THE essential properties of the cinematic Western seems to have been deliberate, his development of another motion picture genre, the jungle-adventure film, seems to have been almost accidental. The company frequently referred to these films as “Jungle-Zoo Wild Animal Pictures,” and they would for years vie with the Western as his most popular product.1 The jungle-adventure was spawned from an unlikely source.

Shortly before the end of 1908, the public learned that President Theodore Roosevelt planned to go on a yearlong African safari upon leaving the White House. The safari was front-page fodder for newspapers from the New York Times to the Los Angeles Times, reflecting the public’s seemingly insatiable interest in the president and curiosity about what famed explorer Sir Henry Morton Stanley dubbed “the Dark Continent.”2 Realizing that exclusive motion pictures documenting Roosevelt’s African expedition could be a financial boon to his company, William Selig resolved to make a personal pitch to the president.3

Selig belonged to the prestigious New York Republican Club, an indication of his growing stature as a movie mogul.4 Granted an audience with the Republican president, Selig outlined his plans, which included teaching Roosevelt’s son Kermit how to operate a movie camera for the safari. T.R. was interested and told Selig to return to the White House on Christmas Eve, when they would have more time to work out the details.

Selig returned at the appointed time bringing presents for the First Family: a Polyscope projector and several of his productions. Thus on Christmas Day, 1908, Mrs. Roosevelt hosted the first screening of motion pictures ever shown at the White House.5 Regrettably, Roosevelt revealed that Selig would not be able to film the safari after all because of objections by the Smithsonian, one of
the sponsors. The president assured him, however, that no one else would film the expedition, either.⁶

On March 23, 1909, less than three weeks after the inauguration of William Howard Taft, former president Roosevelt and his son Kermit departed for Africa. Although the primary purpose of the trip was to collect animal and bird specimens for the Smithsonian, it became public knowledge that T.R. was anxious to “bag” a lion for himself.⁷ As Roosevelt’s steamer departed, a voice in the crowd of well-wishers reflected the sentiment of most: “Kill a lion for me, Teddy!”⁸

As Roosevelt headed to British East Africa, newspapers revealed that Cherry Kearton, “a pioneer in the field of natural-history cinematography,” had been engaged to film the safari.⁹ William Selig was outraged, feeling he’d been betrayed, especially given T.R.’s assurances that no one else would be making motion pictures of the trip.¹⁰ But the colonel was not to be denied; he resolved to make his own film of T.R. hunting lions in Africa, one way or the other.

For Selig, filming the safari stateside, without the real T.R., probably didn’t seem unethical. After all, wasn’t deception at the very heart of motion pictures? If Méliès could take audiences on A Trip to the Moon, and the first great Western narrative could be shot in New Jersey, why not stage Roosevelt’s African adventure at a Chicago studio? This would be just another kind of cinematic illusion.¹¹ And it wouldn’t be the first fictional cinematic safari. That distinction appears to belong to a 1907 Nordisk film, Lion Hunting, which the Danish production company presumably exported to the United States the following year under the Great Northern brand name.¹² It’s possible that William Selig was inspired by that earlier production.

As Selig was formulating his plan, his friend John Ringling referred him to a small circus to which he’d sold some animals in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Selig immediately traveled to Wisconsin and made arrangements with the 350-pound “Big” Otto Breitkreutz for his circus to supply the animals and wranglers needed for the Roosevelt film.¹³ One venerable lion was purchased outright for the production for several hundred dollars.¹⁴

When Selig returned to Chicago in early April, he learned of a Teddy Roosevelt impersonator appearing at one of the local vaudeville theaters.¹⁵ At the time, Roosevelt impressions were an epidemic; all featured the familiar toothy smile, full mustache, pince-nez, and the exclamation “Dee-lighted!”¹⁶ Fortunately for Selig, the actor was at liberty for the next two weeks. Prosthetic gapped teeth were quickly obtained for him to make the illusion complete. Several African Americans from Chicago’s South Side were also hired to play the native porters and jungle guides.¹⁷
The Colonel supervised construction of a jungle set within a twenty-by-sixty-foot arena inside his new glass studio, which was loaded with every fern and palm frond available from Chicago-area greenhouses, and in the center of which was a smaller safety cage camouflaged with cane and vines. He made slight alterations to the shooting script prepared by writer-director Otis Turner, all the while keeping tabs on the Francis Boggs–led troupe that was wrapping its first Los Angeles production.\(^1\)

Several days before the Roosevelt party even came ashore at Mombasa on April 21, 1909, Selig had produced his version of the safari.\(^1\) Due to the unpredictability of the animals involved, two cinematographers were utilized, Tom Nash and Emmett Vincent O'Neill.\(^2\) Amazingly, the phony safari, consisting of ten scenes, was produced in a single day, most of it shot in chronological order.\(^3\)

Early in the morning, the cameramen cranked atmospheric footage of wild animals roaming the jungle-decorated Selig backlot, including an establishing shot of a lion drinking from the man-made lake behind the glass studio. Principal production began at 8:30 a.m. The actors playing Roosevelt and his son Kermit, dressed in pith helmets and puttees, disembark at a lion-less shore by the “Mombasi Hotel” and exchange greetings with a similarly costumed great white hunter. The three then turn their attention to the kneeling, cheering natives, and brusquely order them to heave steamer trunks marked “T.R.” onto their backs—the only direct reference to Roosevelt in the film. Waving a rifle above his head, Roosevelt and the two other white men then mount horses and lead the procession across much of the backlot. The party encounters a jungle thicket, requiring them to dismount and send their horses away. T.R. then climbs atop an elephant, with Kermit and the white hunter following on foot, shaded and fanned by natives. The trunk-toting porters trail behind.

By noon the filming shifted to inside the studio, where a large bellows was pumped to simulate an outdoor breeze that would cause the palms and vines to rustle. The story picks up with Roosevelt having to continue on foot due to the narrowness of the jungle trail. Lion tracks are sighted and the natives dig a hole, covering it with palms. A close-up is made of a live goat being tied to a jutting rock at the far edge of their trap. The remainder of the scene is photographed from platforms twelve feet above the camouflaged cage. A lion is turned loose, springs for the goat, and plunges into the hole. Several natives enter the area and lower a cage into the hole. A closer shot is taken of the cage with the lion inside being raised and carried away.

The elderly lion is then released into a different end of the large enclosure. The lion growls, frightened by the strange environment. After getting poked in
the ribs with bamboo poles off-camera, the lion prowls about the set, walking first toward the camera operators before finding a place to lie down amongst some vines, palms, and bushes. A native tracker stripped to the waist and crawling on all fours enters the trail, followed by Roosevelt, Kermit, and the great white hunter. The tracker discerns the fresh lion prints and signals frantically. Roosevelt hurries forward, inspects the tracks for himself, and excitedly shakes hands with the tracker, exclaiming, “Dee-lighted!” He joins the other white hunters behind the foliage camouflaging the smaller safety cage as a slew of natives armed with spears and clubs rush onto the scene. As the native beaters close in and begin to jab, the lion drops low to the ground, snarls, and hurriedly retreats deeper into the stage brush until he is out of sight, refusing to budge.

The actor playing Roosevelt, whose rifle was loaded with blanks, aims at the lion from inside the safety cage. Director Turner hollers, “Fire!” As T.R. pulls the trigger on his bogus weapon, a “crack” marksman stationed outside the big cage simultaneously fires his high-powered Krag-Jorgensen rifle, but the shot is not fatal, striking the lion in the jaw. The animal emits a horrific roar that unnerves all the participants. Colonel Selig yells for the cameramen to continue cranking. The lion then makes a desperate leap toward the camera platform, but falls short. Enraged, the lion turns its attention to the native beaters, still trapped inside the big cage. The marksman then fires two more shots in rapid succession, the first hitting the lion in the eye, the second fatally striking it in the head.

Filming could not continue until the marksman entered the cage to assure the shaken actors that the lion was indeed dead. As the cameras resume rolling, the native tracker emerges from the underbrush, approaches the lion, and lets loose with a triumphant cry. Kermit and a still noticeably shaken Roosevelt join him. The great white hunter then grabs the lion’s tail and pulls it into the open. Roosevelt tentatively lifts the head, counts the bullet holes, and plants a triumphant foot on the lion, smiling broadly. Suddenly, everyone begins shaking hands, with Roosevelt and the native tracker falling over each other in jubilation. The sequence ends with Kermit taking a still photograph of the native beaters. The scene then cuts to bearers carrying the lion, tied to a pole, through the jungle. Roosevelt and the rest of the safari follow. The film concludes with Roosevelt, Kermit, and some natives standing by an evening campfire near their tents watching the great white hunter and head tracker skin their splayed trophy.

Colonel Selig was thrilled with the results. “I believe we’ve come ... as near [to] doing the real thing as ... could be done.” Because Selig had his own processing plant, he was able to have the movie edited into the standard one-reel
length and to have 120 prints made within days. The film, entitled *Hunting Big Game in Africa*, was previewed and presold to movie exchanges for distribution to individual theaters around the country, but Selig deliberately withheld its release. President Roosevelt didn’t shoot his first lion until the last week of April, and it took about two weeks for that news to reach the States. Selig released his film to exchanges on May 20, 1909, shrewdly co-opting the Roosevelt publicity to maximize the real-life quality of *Hunting Big Game*. Years later Selig gleefully recounted the moment when he overheard a woman who’d just watched the movie express her wonderment that an event occurring half a world away could be exhibited at the Chicago Orpheum only a few weeks later.

The *New York Dramatic Mirror* was effusive in its praise: “It is safe to assert that no other manufacturer, foreign or American, has ever even remotely approached [the] startling and realistic scenic effects [of] this remarkable picture.” The anonymous critic for *Moving Picture World* considered the movie an audacious mixture of the real and unreal, although there are many, no doubt, who would accept the whole thing as absolutely natural throughout . . . The whole thing is full of movement and shows great resource on the part of the producers . . . The real interest of the film centers . . . in the photography—which was presumably done at Chicago—of a real lion. There is no doubt about this lion; he stalks majestically about the picture, thus enabling an audience to realize how a lion would look, not on the war path, but peaceably ambling about among natural surroundings. Your captive lion in a zoological park does not do much prowling about except in a small cage. This part of the film attracted very great attention.

The writer presciently concluded: “We hope that it will be an encouragement to Mr. Selig and his merry men to cultivate the production of moving pictures of animal life.”

Over the next couple of weeks, nickelodeons took turns showing the film in customary two- or three-day rentals. But *Hunting Big Game* was a sensation, attracting audiences well beyond the typical run. After two months in release, the film, which cost over $1,000 to produce—a fortune compared to other films at the time—grossed $15,000 for Selig. A year later the film was still playing nickelodeon theaters all over the world.

When President Roosevelt’s yearlong African safari finally concluded, he traveled through Europe before returning home. While visiting the kaiser in Berlin in May 1910, Roosevelt was confronted with a banner stretched across
the front of a theater advertising *Hunting Big Game in Africa*. The former president went to see it and was outraged. Cherry Kearton's documentary of the safari, *Roosevelt in Africa*, had been released a few weeks earlier, on April 18, 1910—almost a year after the debut of Selig's film. The documentary showed Zulu women at work, the president enjoying native war dances and planting a tree, and a porter carrying Roosevelt on his shoulders across a stream. Kearton hadn't been around when T.R. was “bagging” any of his nine lions. Both exhibitors and audiences found the film disappointing. Kearton's production may have been authentic, but compared to the Selig version of the Roosevelt safari, it was boring. Kevin Brownlow has asserted that the unprecedented popularity of Selig's faked production and the utter disaster of Kearton's documentary contributed to a “prejudice against factual films.”

Nordisk's *Lion Hunting*, meanwhile, resulted in the development of a circus genre in Scandinavian cinema, while the evidence appears indisputable that William Selig's production of *Hunting Big Game in Africa* initiated what was to become a staple of American cinema, the jungle-adventure genre. The raison d'être for *Hunting Big Game in Africa* was to show Roosevelt killing a lion. Shocking as it is to modern sensibilities, there's no doubt that the lion killing is what lured the enormous worldwide audience, just as the killing of two lions in *Lion Hunting* "generated huge sales" for Nordisk. These were nothing compared to the actual Roosevelt expedition, which killed on average forty animals a day during the yearlong safari. The final shot of *Hunting Big Game*, showing the lion being skinned, is especially gruesome. The days have long since passed when the pelts of big game served as status symbols and trophies for wealthy hunters to be mounted on walls or, as is implied in the Selig film, displayed as a new rug for the ex-president's Sagamore Hill estate. In reality, it ended up as a rug in William Selig's new executive office at 20 East Randolph Street in Chicago.

While preparations were being made for *Hunting Big Game*, Selig rushed two other films into production in order to take advantage of the wild animal circus he was renting. *The Lion Tamer* (1909) was directed by Otis Turner and most likely starred circus owner Big Otto Breitkreutz in the title role. It's the story of a man who runs away from home to become a circus lion tamer, vowing revenge on the farm girl who rejected him. Years later she visits the circus with her husband and child; the vindictive lion tamer snatches the child and throws it into the lion's den. The child is rescued and the lion tamer is chased by the circus crowd before being thrown into a cage with a hungry lioness. The Breitkreutz circus tent was erected on Selig's backlot for exteriors, but all interior scenes, including the lion, pony, and elephant acts, were produced inside the glass studio.
Selig’s Cinematic Jungles and Zoos

The Lion Tamer was immediately followed by The Leopard Queen (1909), directed by Turner and starring Olga Celeste. Celeste joined Big Otto’s circus as a teenager in 1904 and quickly developed a rapport with the leopards. Eventually known as the “Leopard Lady,” her career spanned forty-five years. She played in more than a thousand movies, doubling for actresses in scores of Selig jungle adventures and for Katherine Hepburn in Bringing Up Baby (1938), among others.37 Leopard Queen concerns a girl and her father who survive a shipwreck off the coast of East Africa. After the father dies, the girl, clad in animal skins, grows to become “Queen of the Animal Kingdom, controlling and dominating amongst other things some beautiful leopards.” After a hunting party discovers her, she and her pets are shipped to Paris, where they become
stars at the Hippodrome. According to a review in *Moving Picture World*, “The impression that it made upon the audience at the time we saw it was extremely favorable. The jungle scenes are particularly luxuriant to look upon.”

Although *The Lion Tamer* and *The Leopard Queen* were made immediately prior to *Hunting Big Game in Africa*, they were released later, in the summer of 1909.40 Thus, William Selig always considered *Hunting Big Game* his “first animal picture.”41 Despite the international success of *Hunting Big Game*, it was *The Lion Tamer* that may have spawned the most immediate imitations. For instance, the independent A. Harstn and Company’s *The Vengeance of the Lion Tamer* (1909) featured a jealous lion tamer enticing a woman into a den of lions, and Pathé’s *The Little Animal Trainer* (1911) concerned a fatherless boy who “has a bright idea (finger to forehead)” and becomes a lion tamer to help his destitute mother. Unlike Selig’s productions, both films were trashed by the trade press.41 *The Leopard Queen*, by contrast, with its story of a girl raised by wild jungle animals who as an adult is returned to civilization to entertain theatrical audiences, would have a more lasting influence on everything from Edgar Rice Burroughs’ original “Tarzan of the Apes,” written in 1912, to *King Kong* (1933).

On the heels of *Hunting Big Game*, *Lion Tamer*, and *Leopard Queen*, Selig and director Turner utilized exotic animals from Big Otto’s circus for a variety of other genres. For instance, the war films *Won in the Desert* (1909) and *Lost in the Soudan* (1910) featured Bedouins and British soldiers riding camels. Lions and other big cats figured prominently in *The Christian Martyrs* (1909).42 With Selig’s wild animal lease presumably up, he didn’t resume the production of wild animal or jungle-themed films for nearly a year.43

Following the production of his initial jungle pictures, William Selig lent a substantial sum of money to Big Otto Breitkreutz to keep his modest circus afloat. Unable to pay off the debt, Breitkreutz forfeited ownership of the circus to Selig in early autumn of 1910.44 The production of jungle films was resumed that October, but not in Chicago. Just as the impracticality of making Westerns in the Midwest and Rockies during the winter months led to the establishment of Selig’s Los Angeles studio, so too did the resumption of jungle films result in a seasonal relocation, only this time to the Southeast rather than Southwest.

Kalem relocated its entire company to Jacksonville, Florida, for the winter of 1908–1909.45 Lubin and Edison were among the major companies that followed, setting up similar seasonal studios. Despite the success of his Los Angeles filmmaking operations, Selig found Jacksonville’s subtropical climate and lush landscape attractive enough to establish a temporary studio for the
production of jungle-adventure and other films during the winter of 1910–1911. Selig was also influenced by the fact that both the Chicago and Edendale properties were undergoing expansion, which would have severely restricted the utilization of wild animals. So it was that during the last week of October 1910, “160 trained animals including elephants, tigers, lions, camels, and horses” arrived in Jacksonville from Selig’s Chicago studios. It was said that the aggregation resembled “a circus, wild west and [theatrical repertory] show combined,” an apt description for a troupe that would produce not only jungle-adventure stories, but also Westerns such as The Witch of the Everglades (1911) and melodramas such as The Rose of Old St. Augustine (1911).46

Otis Turner was the director of the Florida troupe, William V. Mong wrote most of the scenarios, William Foster was cameraman, and Thomas Persons functioned as production manager.48 The female star was Kathlyn Williams and the leading man was Charles Clary, with Tom Mix appearing as both villain and supporting character; most other roles were played by local talent. Blonde-haired, blue-eyed Kathlyn Williams had joined Selig’s Los Angeles company in April 1910 after making her film debut two months earlier in D. W. Griffith’s All Is Not Gold. Born and raised in Butte, Montana, Williams was playing small roles in local plays when she entered into a relationship with Senator W. A. Clark, “the copper king,” whom she variously described as her “benefactor” and “guardian.” Clark paid her tuition at a New York acting school for two years, after which Williams landed a position with a Los Angeles stock company, where she came to the attention of Griffith.49 It was her starring roles in the immensely successful Florida jungle films that would establish Kathlyn Williams as the queen of that emergent genre and Selig’s most popular female star.

Among the seminal Florida films is Back to the Primitive (1911), which concerns three Britons, two men and a woman, shipwrecked on a deserted island off the coast of Africa. But rather than exploit a love triangle, the narrative instead pits the castaways against the savage lions that rule the island. The effete British lord is eventually devoured in a nighttime attack by six lions, but the more virile civil engineer and woman survive alone for two years clothed in animal skins before they’re rescued by her brother. Besides utilizing the castaway motif of Leopard Queen, Back to the Primitive also followed the precedent established in Hunting Big Game of fatally shooting a real lion in the climactic scene, after which “several natives jab their spears into his carcass again and again.”50

The Survival of the Fittest (1911) concerns a love triangle among three Italian circus animal trainers.51 William Mong wrote the script, and things didn’t go
well with Otis Turner. Mong wrote directly to Col. Selig in protest. Mong related to Selig that he wrote the script "in response to... Turner's request for an animal picture." Turner read the finished script and "curtly" told Mong "that it should not be produced, giving such reasons as 'The American people are very bitter toward the Italians... the picture would be too expensive and... it would be impossible to put "atmosphere" into it.'" Mong sent William Selig a copy of the shooting script with Turner's changes, which he argued were a "great detriment" to his story; he was also critical of the sloppy direction of the film. Turner, Mong wrote, "made the remark that there is no use trying to do anything with any 'animal stuff' except [Back to the Primitive], as the others were nothing but junk." Referring to Turner as "a controlling power" within the organization and himself as "a hack," Mong requested that other arrangements be made whereby they would no longer have to work together.  

Selig valued Mong's ability as a writer from the moment he bought his theatrical play, The Clay Baker, earlier that year. Mong was recalled to Chicago and given the opportunity to direct. He followed up his script for Lost in the Jungle with Lost in the Arctic (1911). It would seem that from the very moment writing and directing became specialized responsibilities among separate individuals, there were inevitable creative and control clashes between them.  

In Lost in the Jungle, the last of Selig's Florida jungle-adventure films, Kathlyn Williams is a Boer girl driven away from her home into the jungle after rejecting the neighboring Boer farmer her father wants her to marry. The young woman is attacked by a leopard and saved by a friendly elephant. An aristocratic Englishman and his uncle find the girl and take her home with them, much to the consternation of her spurned Boer suitor. Selig's publicity department reported that Kathlyn Williams was injured while making the film when a leopard sank its claws into her scalp during the attack scene. The injury may have been genuine or a publicist's invention—and if there was an attack, the affected scalp may well have belonged to stunt double Olga Celeste. In any case, the publicity attending the attack and Williams' starring roles in the Jacksonville jungle films established her as Selig's most popular and plucky female star. She would forever after be referred to as "fearless" and "intrepid," and she never countered these descriptions of her character by mentioning her occasional stunt double, Olga Celeste. "Every scene that I take part in is real," she declared, "and not mythical or faked."  

Selig was applying to jungle-adventure films some of the same principles that underlay his Westerns, to considerable success, and again his work would be widely imitated. In an extensive article about the Selig Polyscope Company written for the trade magazine Motography, Eugene Dengler observed that its
“animal actors [gave] the Selig plant a distinct character [and] enabled it to lead all others in the production of animal stories, or what might be termed the drama of the jungle.” Dengler attributed the popularity of these films to the combination of “sensation and novelty in the highest degree, two qualities for which the public has always shown a liking.” The article also noted that the production of Selig animal and jungle films had returned from Florida to Chicago, although, as it turns out, the relocation would be short-lived.

One of the animal pictures made at the Chicago studio, *Two Old Pals* (1912), starred Big Otto Breitkreutz and Selig’s first four-legged star, Toddlies the elephant. Toddlies became immensely popular after his appearance in *Lost in the Jungle*, when he saved Kathlyn Williams from the leopard attack. Toddlies was subsequently credited with such attributes as courage, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and intelligence; all are evident in *Two Old Pals*. The premise for the film may have been inspired by real-life events: unable to pay his many creditors, “Big Otto is held in default of bonds, and his Circus is attached.” He and Toddlies consequently make their getaway under cover of darkness. The police pursue them, but Toddlies chases them away. The elephant later breaks into a bakery and steals a basket of rolls for himself and his trainer. They sneak out of town aboard a freight car, arrive in a new town, and find employment with a “friendly circus.” Toddlies was so popular at the time that he received sole billing on Selig’s posters for the film.

The Chicago studio and backlot were large enough for relatively simple animal films such as *Two Old Pals*, but could not accommodate large-scale jungle adventures. Besides, two years of uninterrupted production in Southern California had taught William Selig that making any kind of outdoor subject was easier there than in Chicago or Jacksonville, with its frequent rains and lack of a proper studio. In 1911 he acquired a thirty-two-acre tract of land on Mission Road, east of downtown Los Angeles, to house his expanding menagerie of exotic animals and stage the bulk of his subsequent animal films. “The semitropical growth of trees and vegetation provided [a] necessary thicket . . . capable of staging a miniature durbar, a trip to the frozen north, or scenes in an African jungle.” Thus was born the Selig Wild Animal Farm.

When Big Otto Breitkreutz accompanied William Selig to Los Angeles in October 1911 at the time of the fatal Francis Boggs shooting, one of his missions was to help supervise the construction of cages and corrals for the newly acquired Selig Wild Animal Farm. In addition, cottages were built so that Big Otto and five animal trainers and their families could live on the property.

One of the first big films made at the Selig Wild Animal Farm was *Kings of the Forest* (1912), about a family of “quaint, old fashioned Boers, living in
Filming of *A Wild Ride* (1913) at the Selig Wild Animal Farm. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

comfort on an isolated farm in the Transvaal wilderness.” The highlight of the movie occurs when the family’s four-year-old daughter hides inside a trunk in a covered wagon to escape an attack by lions. The little girl was played by “Baby” Lillian Wade, Selig’s top child actress, who had made her debut with the company a year earlier.54

*Kings* was directed by Colin Campbell, who joined the company just a few weeks before the murder of Francis Boggs.65 As with virtually every other motion picture director of the time, Campbell’s background was in the theater, working with companies in New York, Milwaukee, New Orleans, and Chicago.66 Though Campbell’s early films reveal little of the cinematic innovation apparent in Boggs’ films, they were competently constructed, which is more than can be said for the work of some of Selig’s other directors.
Not all of Selig’s animal films during the period were violent. Three comedies made at the Chicago studio in 1913 were directed by Oscar Eagle and starred Arabia, “the Human horse.” Typical is *Arabia Takes the Health Cure* (1913), wherein the horse becomes ill while starring in a society circus and is brought to a sanitarium by his owner. They become separated at the hospital and Arabia wanders in and out of various rooms, driving the inmates crazy. Finally Arabia puts on a show for the patients before taking to his bed, adjusting his nightcap, and signaling “Good-night.”

In something of a twist, Big Otto directed a film starring Toddles that was written by someone else, J. Edward Hungerford. In *A Wise Old Elephant* (1913), Toddles carries love notes back and forth between Kathlyn Williams, the daughter of a plantation owner in India, and her lover, played by Herbert Rawlinson, who lives on a neighboring plantation. Several years after the lovers elope, a disgruntled suitor, played by Hobart Bosworth, abducts their baby but is trounced by Toddles, who returns the child to the formerly estranged grandfather, effecting a happy ending.

While most of the jungle-adventure films made at the Selig Wild Animal Farm were on average two-reels long, *Thor: Lord of the Jungle*, Selig’s big Christmas release for 1913, was nearly three reels in length. The film’s “all-star cast” included Charles Clary, Thomas Santschi, and, of course, Kathlyn Williams. The narrative combines the two most common settings for Selig’s wild animals: the jungle and the circus. The film was written by James Oliver Curwood and directed by F. J. Grandon, who like virtually everyone else working for Selig would helm several such films. *Thor* essentially adds a love triangle to *The Leopard Queen* of four years earlier: Clary plays an American circus owner’s son who travels to South Africa to capture wild animals. He enlists the aid of a Dutch farmer and woos his innocent daughter, played by Williams, who is betrothed to a kind-hearted neighboring farmer (Santschi). Among the animals they capture is a lion named Thor. Clary entices Williams to accompany him and Thor back to the states, but during the voyage proves himself “a drinker, a gambler and a libertine.” Williams becomes the queen of the circus, and Thor is her only friend. An abused hunchback安排s for the lion to escape his cage and attack Clary as he assaults Williams. Clary is killed in the attack, and Williams convinces the authorities to allow her to return to the jungle with Thor. There the lion is set free and rejoins its mate while Williams is reunited with her faithful lover. The print that survives in the Netherlands Eyefilm archive is beautifully tinted, and indicates that Kathlyn Williams and Tom Santschi were not doubled when they freed Thor from his cage.
According to figures compiled by the trade magazine *Motography*, Selig's was the third-largest American production company in 1913 in terms of total number of films released, just behind Vitagraph and Lubin. Like his Westerns, Selig's jungle-adventure films inspired widespread imitation throughout the industry, especially with upstart independents. Selig's unequaled contributions to the development of the jungle-adventure genre, however, have been largely ignored or distorted by film scholars. For example, in his otherwise erudite history of *King Kong*, Gerald Peary mistakenly attributes the birth of the "jungle cycle" to director Alice Guy-Blaché's *Beasts of the Jungle*, made in 1913 in Fort Lee, New Jersey. That film featured "two lions, a tiger, a monkey, and a parrot," and compared a Congo African ("the lowest type of mankind") with a chimpanzee ("the highest type of Simian"). Blaché claimed her film was "the first picture in which as many different animals have been used [and] in which the performers appear in the scenes with the wild beasts." Meanwhile, William Selig was at work on yet another big idea. As early as May 1913, he announced the construction of a zoo on his animal farm property at 3800 Mission Road in East Los Angeles. He reasoned that since the jungle-adventure films were such a profitable and high-profile component of his company, why not exploit the connection further by constructing the largest privately owned zoo in the United States. A properly constructed zoo would allow the public to visit the popular Selig wild animal stars, as well as witness the making of jungle-adventure films. In essence, the Selig Zoo was conceived as the original motion picture theme park.

Beginning in 1911, the somewhat swampy property was sufficiently drained to allow for the construction of administrative buildings, trainers' cottages, and animal houses reflecting the architectural styles associated with Africa, India, South America, and Southeast Asia. These structures, many of which were designed by Arthur Benton, architect of the Mission Inn in Riverside, served not only as residences for the animals, but also as permanent exterior sets against which various jungle scenes could be staged. This practical aesthetic, which originated at Selig's Chicago studio, would continue with the construction of pavilions and other new buildings for the zoo, and influence construction at virtually every subsequent large studio lot in Southern California.

In 1914 Selig entered into contracts with scores of exchanges across the country and around the world to release at least one "Jungle-Zoo Wild Animal picture" per week. Meanwhile, personnel changes were occurring within the company during the early part of the year. Big Otto Breitkreutz was replaced as supervisor of the growing Selig menagerie by John Robinson, third-generation scion of a famous circus family who brought with him a variety
of wild animals, including several elephants.\textsuperscript{77} In addition to overseeing the well-being and training of the zoo animals, Robinson coordinated the needs of company directors producing jungle or animal films. For instance, during the first six days of October 1914, Tom Santschi, E. A. Martin, Thomas Persons, and Noval MacGregor were each directing films at the zoo property. Santschi required the use of six lions, two elephants (including Toddlies), two pumas, three leopards, three monkeys, and two parrots; Persons needed nine Bengal tigers for his sole directorial effort for the company; Martin needed four bears and three tigers; and MacGregor required two lions, a camel, a zebra, a water buffalo, alligators, cows, and two elephants (mother and child).\textsuperscript{78}

One the most stunning features of the zoo was the nearly two hundred animal “figuerinos” that were sculpted by Carlo Romanelli from concrete into the friezes and statuary adorning the massive entry arches.\textsuperscript{79} Perhaps even more impressive were the life-sized concrete lions along the sides of the arches and, between the arches, eight elephants standing atop a pedestal that supported a flagpole to which clung several monkeys.\textsuperscript{80} The lions and elephants were said to be modeled directly from actual denizens of the zoo.\textsuperscript{81}

Born in Florence, Italy, Romanelli was a sixth-generation sculptor who came to the United States at the turn of the century after winning the Prix de Rome. Romanelli’s work was praised by the art critic of the \textit{Los Angeles Times}, who characterized “the vitality of his animal groups” as “unquestioned.” The
critic continued, "They are as alive as a strong man's spirit breathed into plaster and fixed in bronze can make them." It was claimed that the entrance alone cost William Selig $60,000; of that he agreed to pay Romanelli $10,000 for his work. Circumstantial evidence, however, suggests that the sculptor took much longer to complete his work than had been originally anticipated, delaying the opening of the zoo by as much as six months. By the time the zoo was ready to open, Selig had punitively paid Romanelli only $8,815; the sculptor had to take him to court in order to receive the balance.

Traveling from Chicago in the company of Mr. and Mrs. Tyrone Power and their infant son, Tyrone Jr., William Selig arrived in Los Angeles on May 3, 1915, to personally supervise the completion of the public portion of his zoo, which according to various newspaper reports cost $500,000, $750,000, or $1,000,000, depending on the newspaper. Selig explained the enormous expenditure as an investment in the future—a continuing commitment to California filmmaking, especially in furtherance of his ongoing effort "to secure quality." In addition to the jungle thickets planted on the Mission Road studio backlot, the property also sported man-made rock formations and caves, as well as a South American village set.

While in Los Angeles, Selig spent his mornings in the projection room of the Edendale plant evaluating the rushes of his nine Los Angeles–based directors. Afternoons were spent at the Mission Road studio conferring with Thomas Persons, who'd been promoted to general manager of West Coast operations. In addition, Selig oversaw completion of the zoo and discussed animal matters with John Robinson. His nights were spent reading and approving every script scheduled for production, a formidable task given that the company was releasing at least five two-reel productions per week, in addition to longer features ranging from three to nine reels in length. Selig was also periodically adding new animals to his collection, some of which, such as fifty peacocks, were primarily for display at the zoo. Before the zoo was completed, Colonel Selig paid for the feeding of the animals out of his own pocket, but starting in March 1915, he arranged for the company to cover those expenses, which at the time amounted to $5,000 per month.

After innumerable delays, on Sunday, June 20, 1915, the Los Angeles Examiner headlined: "Selig Zoo Invites All Los Angeles Today." The Tribune announced: "Wonderful Selig Zoo to Open Today; 700 animals and birds in collection menagerie valued at $300,000 is proud possession of motion picture head." Focusing on the enormous investment of the project, the Los Angeles Times reported, "The new park represents an outlay of nearly $1,000,000 of the good money of W. N. Selig, motion picture magnate," and broke down such
individual costs as animal and bird valuation, construction and landscaping expenses, and monthly upkeep. Between eight and ten thousand of the city’s 550,000 inhabitants attended the opening. It’s likely the majority of visitors traveled there using the Eastlake Park streetcars, which ran along Main Street to Mission Road. They were encouraged to picnic at tables and on the beautifully landscaped lawns under shady eucalyptus trees, enjoy the dance pavilion, and watch the three-hour daily animal show featuring Olga Celeste and other trainers with “tigers, leopards, lions, six elephants, a herd of trick ponies and a baby elephant taking part.” But even more than the show, the great lure was the opportunity to see up-close the heavily advertised seven hundred animals and birds. In the early twentieth century there were few zoos in the United States, and even fewer that offered the wealth of exotic creatures to be found at the Selig Zoo.

Acclaimed by arbiters of popular culture as one of the great showplaces of Los Angeles and an unqualified success with the public, the zoo was one of the crowning achievements in the career of William Selig, but one which he celebrated alone. Selig’s wife Mary, who usually accompanied him on trips to California, New York, and Europe, was not with her husband for the opening of the zoo, instead remaining behind at their Chicago home. Then, the day before the zoo’s grand opening, nationwide newspaper headlines blazoned, “Selig Jewels Stolen.” The headlines provided a mere taste of what would become a bigger, more titillating, story.

On June 18, Mrs. Selig reported to police that $8,825 worth of jewelry had been stolen by Frederick Cors, an eighteen-year-old “houseman” employed at the couple’s twenty-room mansion at 2430 Lake View Avenue in Chicago. Selig had purchased the home in 1912 for $52,000 in cash. The purloined gems included two gold rings set with two-carat diamonds, valued at $3,000, and a $3,225 platinum ring with diamonds forming an “S.” Mrs. Selig had hired the penniless, “fine looking” German immigrant three months earlier. She said in a statement that Cors seemed to deliberately overlook “$2,000 worth of jewelry belonging to my daughter, Helen, which was in her room two doors away.”

As police patrolled Chicago-area train stations in search of the blond-haired, blue-eyed “Apollo,” it was revealed that Helen Selig was actually Mrs. Selig’s niece, not her daughter, and that the German-born thief, who “could hardly speak English,” had been recently hired to help out the chauffeur and cook who had worked for and lived with the Seligs since early in their marriage. A wicked satire on the robbery written in screenplay form appeared in the magazine Photoplay Scenario, suggesting a relationship between the corpulent middle-aged matron and the handsome teenaged houseman: “Mrs.
Selig wrings her hands, speaks: 'Have I lost my jewel of a houseman?' Cors was apprehended a month later in Oakland, California. He told police that after Mrs. Selig had shown him the jewels and bragged about how much they were worth, he "could not resist the temptation" to steal them in order to finance a trip to California. The stolen gems were eventually recovered from pawn shops in St. Paul and San Francisco.

Col. Selig kept working. After spending nearly nine weeks in Los Angeles, he returned to Chicago on June 27 to coordinate plans for a third and final zoo grand opening celebration. As part of the festivities, Selig leased a train, dubbing it the "Selig Exposition Special," which would transport a contingent of motion picture executives, reporters, and other notables from Chicago to the final Selig Zoo opening by way of the Panama-Pacific Exposition. California was an especially popular destination for tourists in 1915, fueled by the explosive growth of, and interest in, the Los Angeles motion picture industry as well as the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. The Moving Picture Exhibitors League of America was among those holding their annual convention in San Francisco.

The public was invited to come along for a fee of $128, which covered all round-trip fees except meals. As a way of inducing pretty young women to take part, Selig worked with newspapers in various cities to sponsor contests that would pay their expenses. In all, 160 people made the seventeen-day round-trip, including Selig and several of his executives, Motion Picture News editor W. A. Johnston, Chicago-based gossip columnist Louella Parsons, and popular playwright George Ade of The College Widow. At least a dozen cars composed the Selig train, which included "special Pullmans [for] exhibitors and their families, one car for the scenario writers [and a] special coach devoted to the comfort of the newspapermen and their friends." One car served as a ballroom, complete with a banjo orchestra, and another was equipped as a theater for showing films; a piano was included, for accompaniment.

With Selig's Exposition Special, the old Hale's Tours exhibition gimmick had come full circle. Not only would films be projected, but one would actually be produced aboard the train and at stopovers made during the trip. The Seven Suffering Sisters, a comedy-travelogue, began shooting at the Chicago and Northwestern station shortly before the train departed at 11 a.m. on July 8, and included scenes taken at Royal Gorge, Colorado, Salt Lake City, and the Selig Zoo. The film was subsequently presented in weekly installments of the Hearst-Selig newsreel.

On July 15 the Selig Exposition Special passengers were joined by about half of the three thousand Moving Picture Exhibitors League of America conventioneers for the final opening ceremony at the Selig Zoo, with a jovial
The Selig Exposition Special in Colorado, en route to the final grand opening ceremony for the Selig Zoo. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

William Selig personally greeting many of them at the gate. Also on hand were Kathlyn Williams, Tom Santschi, Bessie Eyton, and Eugenie Besserer. They were treated to a three-hour animal show followed by an evening ball at the dance pavilion. The following day the zoo hosted a banquet and dance for the Pacific Coast Writers. The celebrations came to an end on July 17 with the filming of the concluding scenes for *The Seven Suffering Sisters*. The Selig Exposition Special passengers departed LA the following evening, being feted along the way in Calento, Nevada, Kansas City, and St. Louis before arriving back in Chicago on July 25.
The Selig Zoo quickly became the preferred leisure site for an eclectic array of organizations. Within its first seven months of opening, the zoo hosted a fund-raiser on behalf of the Hebrew Sheltering and Home for the Aged. There were gatherings of Civil War veterans, a meeting of eight thousand Elks, and five thousand picnicking Socialists. A group of Italian Americans picnicking at the zoo raised $1,000 for the Italian Red Cross. The following day two thousand people celebrated Mexican Independence Day at the Selig Zoo with a barbequed lunch, a concert, and a speech by the mayor. Ten thousand people attended a Swedish Society picnic. The zoo’s first Labor Day attracted over fifteen thousand admissions and featured a baby contest that was judged by California governor Hiram Johnson and filmed by Hearst-Selig cameramen.
A singles club was formed that met at the dance pavilion every Wednesday night. They called themselves The Giles Club (“Selig” spelled backwards). As was customary, men paid an admission fee to participate, in this case 25 cents, while women entered free of charge.109

Among the daily animal performers was Anna May, the famous “baby” elephant who’d been born at the pre-zoo Selig Wild Animal Farm. Four-year-old Anna May would begin her performance by saluting the audience with her trunk. She’d stand on two legs, walk on barrels, and lay atop her trainer, Captain Langdon, without inflicting injury. The act segued into the elephant’s housekeeping routine, as she placed kindling in her specially constructed stove and lit a match to it. Anna May would next sit at a table and ring a dinner bell with her trunk, prompting Langdon to serve her a tray of apples and bananas. After finishing the meal, she’d clutch a napkin and gracefully wipe her mouth. Anna May ended her act by playing a tune on the harmonica and then bowing to the audience.110 She performed her housekeeping act at the Selig Zoo for nearly a decade.

In the first seven months that it was open to the public, the Selig Zoo attracted “nearly 150,000 paid admissions.”111 Perhaps because of intrusive curiosity seekers, a wall was eventually built to separate the zoo from the stages, dressing rooms, and other structures of Selig’s motion picture studio complex in the rear of the property.112

William Selig’s wild animals appeared outside of his motion picture studio and zoo in ways both planned and unexpected. Selig loaned sixty-year-old Tilly the elephant to the Young Men’s Republican Club for a New Year’s night parade in downtown Los Angeles.113 Shortly before Thanksgiving 1915, a four-foot-tall sacred monkey that had arrived from India a month earlier escaped from its specially built cage and roamed East Los Angeles. It wandered into the gymnasium of Lincoln High School in Highland Park and “terribly frightened Miss Elizabeth Worthen, the instructor there,” before moving on, and was last seen walking along the road near Avenue Twenty and North Broadway.114

The zoo enjoyed as much popularity in its second year as it had during its first, and would continue to do so for as long as William Selig owned it. His filmmaking operations were another story, taking a huge downturn in 1916 from which he would never recover. Increased competition from so-called independent producers with seemingly unlimited sources of financing from Wall Street investment firms, coupled with the crippling effects of World War I on the international distribution of his films, resulted in Selig consolidating his filmmaking operations at his Mission Road studio and zoo.115
Col. Selig feeding baby elephant Anna May. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
The company went from releasing at least one jungle-adventure film per week in 1915 to averaging only one per month in 1916. Mid-year, Kathlyn Williams married Bessie Eyton's ex-husband Charles and resigned from the Selig Polyscope Company. Charles Eyton soon became general manager at Paramount, where Williams was placed under contract, starring as a society matron in several contemporary dramas for Cecil B. DeMille.¹¹⁶

One of the last jungle-adventure films produced by the Selig Polyscope Company was two and a half years in the making: The Lad and the Lion (1917). It was written by Edgar Rice Burroughs, who in 1912 would gain instant fame with his second published story, “Tarzan of the Apes,” the story of a white child who is raised in the jungle by apes and encounters civilized members of his race as an adult.¹¹⁷ In private correspondence with Professor Rudolph Altrocchi, Burroughs admitted having been inspired by the Romulus and Remus myth and Rudyard Kipling's The Jungle Book, published in the mid-1890s.¹¹⁸

Richard Slotkin has written that Burroughs also acknowledged the influence of Charles King, Owen Wister, and Jack London on his stories, though his “indebtedness” to other writers sometimes smacked of plagiarism.”¹¹⁹ Edgar Rice Burroughs was a fan of fellow Chicagoan William Selig's jungle-adventure films and was anxious to join the company’s writing staff; thus there is a reasonable likelihood that Burroughs may well have been indebted in his creation of Tarzan to The Leopard Queen, in which a white girl is raised among jungle leopards, and to Back to the Primitive, whose castaways live amidst wild beasts on a jungle island.²²⁰

Wanting to see “Tarzan of the Apes” adapted into a motion picture, Burroughs arranged for Cora C. Wilkening of the Photo-Play Agency of New York to represent his story to potential producers beginning in June of 1914. After Mrs. Wilkening met with Colonel Selig in December, Burroughs wrote the motion picture mogul directly, including his only copy of the unpublished manuscript for “The Lad and the Lion,” as well as a copy of “Tarzan of the Apes.” Selig agreed to meet with Burroughs the following week. In the meantime, Burroughs’ syndication agent requested permission to submit “Tarzan” to Universal, but Burroughs replied that Selig “was his [only] choice to make the movie—they have ‘the best zoo equipment of any of them.’” During negotiations for “The Lad and the Lion,” Burroughs wrote Wilkening that he “liked Mr. Selig immensely and should be glad to write for him regularly.” Burroughs had no clue as to what constituted fair compensation for a motion picture scenario, but he was distinctly underwhelmed with the $500 he received for his “Lad and the Lion” manuscript; he was also paid $300 for a story submitted in synopsis form with the uninspiring title “Ben, King of the Beasts.” Burroughs agreed to the deals in the hope that they would lead to additional work for Selig.¹²¹
As eager as he was to become a scenario writer for William Selig, and as successful as his early works of fiction had been, Edgar Rice Burroughs was among the first to struggle with a problem common to many novelists and short-story authors attempting to write for the screen—difficulty in adapting to a visual medium. He asked for help from Selig’s story department editor John Pribyl, whose advice reveals much about the degree to which practical business considerations influenced narrative content for productions of the Selig Polyscope Company:

The importance of your story will determine the number of reels, whether one, two, three, four, or even five. The chief purpose in writing a scenario is to get as much action in each reel as possible and each reel is to contain a strong punch, all leading up to a final climax. If a two reel story can not have a big incident in each reel it is better to crowd all of the incidents in one reel. If a photoplay is in one reel it will not justify an expensive production, but if the production runs into three or more reels there is a possibility of economy in one or more reels to offset an expensive construction in the balance of the story, thus the general advantage of cost will be the same as if we were making single reel productions.

Perhaps even more important for the aspiring motion picture writer was understanding an essential characteristic of commercial cinema, the fact that "anything that can not be photographed should not be written." Burroughs submitted other stories to the company, but the Colonel passed on all except "The Lion Hunter"; Burroughs, however, rejected Selig’s offer of $60 as insufficient. He then submitted two of the stories to Universal but never even received the courtesy of a response.

William Selig understood that the complexity and scope of "Tarzan" would require an expensive, multi-reel production. He believed that capturing authentic, close-up footage of apes in African jungles was crucial in authenticating the bulk of the story, which would by necessity be produced at the jungle-zoo in Los Angeles. Selig contacted Victor Milner, whose African camera safari he was financing, about getting second-unit footage from him, but it appears that the heat and humidity of the lower Congo may have rendered the film unusable. By the end of 1915, Selig had scrapped the idea of turning "Tarzan" into a film.

Burroughs’ manuscript for The Lad and the Lion was given to Selig’s scenario department for cinematic adaptation in March 1915. The film was to be completed in time for a mid-autumn release to coincide with the story’s
publication in *All-Story* magazine, which Burroughs had negotiated prior to the Selig deal. Unfortunately the project became stalled as Selig focused his attention on the building of the zoo, consolidating his studio operations, and overseeing ambitious features such as *The Ne'er-Do-Well* (1916), which was being produced in Panama.

Burdened by his heavy workload, Selig hired J. A. Berst, former American representative for Pathé and treasurer of General Film, as his first and only vice president; Berst was to handle projects in development, including *Lad and Lion*. He wasn't up to the task, however, and the Burroughs story languished during Berst's brief tenure with the company. In fact *The Lad and the Lion* did not go into production until early 1917, more than two years after Selig acquired the property. Selig arranged with the editor of *All-Story* magazine to release both the cinematic and three-part print versions of the story within a month of each other as a cross-promotion; the cover for the first installment featured a plug for the Selig Polyscope production.

The "lad" of the story is the son of a millionaire whose steamer explodes en route to Africa, causing him to lose his memory. Rescued by the sadistic lone passenger on a sailing ship, the lad befriends a caged lion aboard the vessel that forces the sadist overboard. The lad and his friend the lion go ashore near an African desert and encounter a beautiful Arab girl whom they save from marriage to an evil brigand chief. The lion kills the chief, the lad’s memory is restored, and he proclaims his love for the girl. There were slight alterations to Burroughs' original story, the most significant being the replacement of a "half-crazed epileptic" with the sadist.

Director Alfred Green, who nearly thirty years later would win acclaim for his direction of *The Jolson Story* (1946), was lauded by *Moving Picture World* for the realistic shipwrecks and desert skirmishes staged for the film, but Burroughs was miffed by the alterations to his story and considered the production inferior, deliberately concealing its release from family and friends. Despite his disappointment, Burroughs would again cross paths with Selig. Two months before the premiere of *Lad and Lion*, a company Burroughs put together to produce the first screen version of *Tarzan of the Apes* (1918) shot part of the film on the jungle set at the Selig Zoo.

Although the Selig Polyscope Company released at least a half a dozen wild animal films after *Lad and Lion*, most of these were actually earlier productions that were given new titles, character names, and intertitle announcements. *Thor: Lord of the Jungle* became *A Man, a Girl and a Lion* (1917); *A Wild Ride* (1913), starring Tom Santschi and Bessie Eyton, was renamed *Her Perilous Ride* (1917); and a year after Kathlyn Williams left the company, Selig released "a
new wild animal drama, *In the African Jungle* (1917), which an observant critic recognized as “one of the first Selig jungle pictures Kathleen [sic] Williams made.” The ploy didn’t seem to work, for there’s no record of Selig attempting any further jungle film re-releases beyond 1917.

In early 1918 William Selig suspended all production by the Selig Polyscope Company and eventually dissolved the company. He reemerged as an independent producer in 1919 at the zoo studio. As he’d done with Burroughs’ independent *Tarzan* film, Selig would continue to lease his studio facilities, jungle backlot, and animals for other productions.

In September 1919 Selig arranged to lease a portion of the zoo property to former New England theater owner Louis B. Mayer, who had just relocated to Los Angeles after producing a handful of films in the New York area. Existing from one production to the next, much as Selig had in the early days, Mayer decided to cut his expenses in half by sharing his facilities with B. P. Schulberg, another budding independent producer from back east who was responsible for creating the advertising campaign for Adolph Zukor’s import of *Queen Elizabeth* (1912). Schulberg’s son Budd, who later became a distinguished novelist and screenwriter, described the Selig studio and zoo as “a place full of endless wonder for an eight-year-old.” In his memoir Budd Schulberg described Colonel Selig as “a ruddy-faced hail-fellow with a Falstaffian figure. I remember him as a kind of W. C. Fields, without Fields’s bibulous craftiness (on stage) or bibulous meanness (in his private life).”

Budd Schulberg wasn’t the only movie kid to hang around the Selig Zoo. When Anthony Quinn was about five or six years old, his father got a job as an animal trainer at the zoo and was later promoted to cameraman. One day a cub was needed to appear in a scene with two grizzly bears; the problem was, there were no cubs. When someone suggested putting a child in a bear skin to simulate the cub, Quinn’s father volunteered little Anthony. That evening Anthony rehearsed moving around like a bear while wearing the skin. During the night he wet the bed, and the next morning Quinn’s mother and grandmother forbade him from participating in the film. Young Anthony was devastated and never forgave the cousin who took his place.

William Selig returned to producing wild animal films with *Sic-Em* (1920), a fifty-five-minute, five-reel production based on a Broadway farce of 1917. Another 1920 release was Selig’s first jungle-adventure serial since *The Adventures of Kathlyn*, the fifteen-episode *The Lost City*. Although the script was credited to Frederick Chapin, much of it was actually rewritten by director E. A. Martin, who crafted scenes utilizing the front gates and other studio-zoo structures to double as the entrance to walled cities in the jungle and other
exotic structures, among the most impressive shots of the film. Virtually every Selig leopard, tiger, and lion appeared in the serial, as did elephants, camels, and Mary the chimp. *The Lost City* was actually a co-production between independent producer Selig and former nickelodeon operators the Warner brothers, who were responsible for selling the American and Canadian rights to theater chains.\(^{138}\)

The success of *The Lost City* led to another co-production between Selig and the Warners, *Miracles of the Jungle* (1921). Long-time Selig scenarist Emma Bell Clifton wrote the original screenplay, though it, too, was rewritten by director E. A. Martin.\(^{139}\) *Miracles* was a troubled production. Col. Selig, who was responsible for the day-to-day production of the serial, learned that the Warners had employed crew members as spies and that the Warners might have been in collusion with the distributor they sold the foreign rights to.\(^{140}\) The production dragged on for six months, during which time Martin lavished attention on the leading lady, with whom he was having an affair. Martin's wife confronted them at the studio and the leading lady abruptly quit, necessitating many retakes.\(^{141}\)

Despite the mutual mistrust, delays, and disappointments that plagued *Miracles of the Jungle*, the production must have made money, because Selig and the Warners jumped right into another serial, *The Jungle Goddess* (1922), starring former Mack Sennett bathing beauty Elinor Field and future radio and television announcer Truman Van Dyke. The screenplay, by Frank Dazey and Agnes Johnston, contains one outrageous situation after another. A little girl is kidnapped and thrown into the basket of a hot air balloon, which eventually lands in an African jungle. The natives believe her to be divine and she grows up as the Jungle Goddess. When a jealous witch doctor attempts to sacrifice her to lions, she's saved by a giant stone idol, which catches a pouncing lion in its hand. A hero is sent to find the Jungle Goddess, who was born Lady Betty, and bring her back to civilization, but they somehow wind up in India. A Rajah wants the Jungle Goddess for himself and feeds the hero to some alligators, but of course he manages to escape. The protagonists also have adventures in China before returning home.\(^{142}\)

Reviews for the serial, consisting of fifteen episodes of two reels each, were complimentary. *Motion Picture News* declared: "Serials have come and gone, will come and go again, but *The Jungle Goddess* quite surpasses them all when it comes to measuring out thrills by releasing a bunch of wild animal stunts [and] unadulterated action."\(^{143}\) According to *Moving Picture World*, when compared to *The Lost City*, which had been regarded as "the pinnacle of serial production..., *The Jungle Goddess* is far more elaborate... daring in presentation and
representative of the investment of considerable money [establishing] a high mark in serials."144

As his filmmaking activities declined, Colonel Selig made plans in 1922 to expand the zoo into an amusement park along the lines of Coney Island.145 Perhaps as a means of raising money for the construction of this park, Selig contracted with the firm of Kemp and Ball to auction the contents of the Selig studio in 1923. A full-page advertisement in the Los Angeles Times heralded "The Most Unique, Spectacular and Stupendous Sale of Its Kind, Ever Held!!!" One can only imagine how humbling the experience was for Colonel Selig. "The entire studio furnishings used in the creation of many masterpieces of the screen, by the . . . Selig Polyscope Co. . . . will be sold to the general public, piece by piece, during 5 days of intensely interesting selling." Among the thousands of items on the block was a seventeen-piece Louis XIV hand-carved boudoir suite made of brown mahogany with cane insert; a hand-carved Italian Renaissance dining suite; bronze statuary by DuPree, Feibelman, and others; over two hundred paintings; American Indian canoes, shields, and spears; a complete set of Japanese warrior armor; Bibles dating from 1612, 1702, and 1750; a twenty-six-volume set of Punch; a fifty-four-volume set of The Art Journal dating back to 1750 and containing "17 inserts of original artist's proofs by Whistler, Haig and other equally famous artists"; and assorted studio props, including dueling pistols, swords, and mounted animal heads.146 The auction prefigured a similar sale nearly half a century later, at Twentieth Century Fox, which marked the passing of a later era.

In May of 1924, William Selig's finances suffered a blow from which he would never recover. Upon the formation of MGM, Louis B. Mayer abruptly moved his studio operations from the Selig studio-zoo to Culver City. This left B. P. Schulberg to cover the lease on his own, and he soon vacated the Selig studio-zoo as well.147

Late in the year, "Col. William N. Selig, Mary H. Selig, Selig Zoo Park and others" were charged with selling shares in the amusement park project "contrary to the terms of the Corporate Securities Act." Recovery of $6,900 was sought by several individual investors, who must have realized that given Selig's financial setbacks, the enterprise would never come to fruition.148 Fortunately for William Selig, within a month the State Corporation Department granted Santa Monica Exposition Inc. a permit to raise money for the construction of "a large amusement park to be known as Luna Park [on three-quarters of] the present site of the Selig Zoo."149 A year later, in 1925, it was announced that "R. C. Durant, millionaire automobile manufacturer and sportsman, [along] with a group of Pacific Coast capitalists," had agreed to purchase the "historic"
Selig Zoo for $474,000 for the construction of Luna Park. It appears that as a condition of the sale, William Selig would retain offices as an independent producer on the zoo property for as long as it was owned by the Luna Park group.

For the year prior to the sale of the zoo, William Selig’s principal means of support was the rental of his animals to other production companies. For instance, Mary the chimp and her mate George were rented to “Goldwyns” [sic] for five days for a total of $1,125; Mack Sennett rented elephant Anna May for one day at $125; an owl was rented for a day by Universal for $5; and Famous Players-Lasky leased fourteen lions, two buzzards, and a tiger, along with trainers and helpers, over a three-day period for $1,150. And on February 19, 1925, the fledgling Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Company rented a lion and trainer George Carressello; according to Hollywood lore, the Selig lion became the first to herald the opening of an MGM film. Selig charged his former tenant $50. For the year, Selig grossed more than $7,000 from the rental of his animals.

The renamed Luna Park Zoo was merely one component of the new amusement park. Olga Celeste remained to continue performing her afternoon “leopard tea party” act on Sundays when not working in pictures. The jungle backlot was leased to various productions that William Selig himself likely managed. Erich von Stroheim’s The Wedding March (1927) was filmed “out in Selig Park” from June 1926 through February 1927. One of the most beautiful scenes of silent cinema was photographed there, featuring Fay Wray and von Stroheim riding in a horse-drawn carriage through an apple orchard while being showered by hundreds of thousands of artificial blossoms.

The nadir of production on the zoo backlot was Ingagi (1930), an unsavory exploitation film that purported to show a tribe of African women who mated with gorillas. Not only was Ingagi one of the last films produced at the former Selig Zoo property, but it is often linked with Hunting Big Game in Africa as one of the most notorious hoaxes in film history.

In 1933 the California Zoological Society acquired Luna Park and changed the name to Zoopark. The sale resulted in the severing of William Selig’s connection with his beloved zoo. Long in disrepair, the zoo suffered irreparable rain and flood damage in 1938 and was finally shuttered in 1940. The remaining animals were sold off, one of the purchasers being Olga Celeste, who borrowed money from her friends and mortgaged her furniture because she “could not bear to part with [the] remaining five leopards and three lions.” The former Selig Zoo property continued to be utilized as a small amusement park until 1957, at which time the massive front gate and Carlo Romanelli’s beautiful statuary were carted off to junk yards.
Remnants of the Selig Zoo restored for twenty-first century visitors to the Los Angeles Zoo. Author's photo, courtesy of the Los Angeles Zoo
When the Selig Zoo was opened in 1915, George Blaisdell wrote in *Moving Picture World* that “William N. Selig will go down in motion picture history as the pioneer manufacturer of the Pacific Coast,” but “his more enduring monument [might be] the creation of the great Selig Zoo. [The] ornate entrance . . . alone . . . should withstand the wear and tear of the elements for a thousand years.” But in less than fifty years, one observer would describe the zoo as a forgotten relic of LA history. In the 1960s, the property was leveled and redeveloped. The only reminder of its former existence is a street sign for a short dead-end road that intersects with Mission Road at what was once the glorious entrance to the largest private zoo in America: “Selig Place 3800 E.” By the end of the twentieth century, there were few people left with memories or even knowledge of William Selig’s jungle-adventure films or zoo.

Fortunately, the Los Angeles Zoo discovered and was able to acquire the life-sized elephant and lion statues that originally greeted visitors at the entrance to the Selig Zoo; the items were found in a junkyard and on the lawn of a private residence. In 2009 several restored lions and lionesses were placed on pedestals inside the entrance of the Los Angeles Zoo. The remaining sculptures will be unveiled on the grounds when the restoration is completed. Besides the obvious link between the present zoo and the long-forgotten one, the two facilities share a more intimate connection: when Colonel Selig sold his zoo to the Luna Park consortium in the mid-1920s, he donated many of his animals to the Griffith Park Zoo, forming the nucleus of the future Los Angeles Zoo collection. Although the Los Angeles Zoo isn’t able to re-create the original grand entrance to the Selig Zoo, the stunning animal statuary crafted by Carlo Romanelli nearly one hundred years ago enhances the visits of twenty-first-century visitors. William Selig’s legacy has thus been preserved for new generations.
Selig's success wasn't merely the result of cultivating a more dynamic form of cinema; just as important was his establishment of a London-based distribution center that would eventually reach into every corner of the world. Ironically, Selig's worldwide dominance would ultimately contribute to the demise of his company.

Perhaps because he was raised by German-speaking parents, William Selig was able to establish business relationships with German film producers and exhibitors, who provided a steady outlet for his productions starting in 1902. By the end of 1908, Selig was producing more than one film per week. At that time pioneer British filmmaker James Williamson distributed Selig's films in England. Williamson's representative counseled Selig that the British market habitually shut down during the hot summer months in that pre-air-conditioning era. Such hindrances didn't exist in Canada, where during the early summer of 1909 a theatrical stock company that had been employed by Selig a year earlier in Colorado reported seeing themselves on screen at a theater in Edmonton, Alberta. Given the success of the North American model of year-round exhibition, Selig began to consider whether it might work just as well in Great Britain and on the Continent.

In 1909 the international success of his Westerns and Hunting Big Game in Africa prompted William Selig to personally investigate the European film market in the hope of establishing a broader, more lucrative distribution network. This was a formidable task given that Europe accounted for three-quarters of the world's motion picture production that year, with France and Italy supplying most of the world market. Leaving Chicago on August 1, 1909, Selig was interviewed upon his arrival in London by the Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly, one of the leading British trade publications. He revealed that
he had just established a studio in Los Angeles, and attributed the success of his company to an emphasis on realistic mise-en-scène. He noted that unlike their British counterparts, American producers advertised their films and cultivated audiences by linking distinctive studio trademarks to their productions.5

While in England, Selig toured the studios of British film pioneers James Williamson and Cecil Hepworth. In a confidential report written to fellow MPPC members about his trip, Selig noted that the British film industry was “in very bad shape.” Williamson averaged sales of only seven or eight prints for each of the few films he now produced. Hepworth enjoyed slightly better success, though he feared it was too late for native filmmakers to reclaim dominance of the British market from the Americans.6 The dearth of British film production is particularly striking given that by 1911 there were more than two thousand movie theaters in England alone.7

From England, Selig traveled to Paris, where he met with Charles Pathé, whose international dominance of film production was about to end. Selig was impressed with the Gaumont Company’s diversification into other entertainment-related businesses, though he was surprised by the meagerness of the other French studios and somewhat shocked that Georges Méliès had temporarily suspended filmmaking operations.8

Selig next visited Italy, touring the facilities of the Italia Film Company, which he considered second only to Pathé in “turning out the best work in Europe.” Selig noted that Italy was virtually the only privately owned film company in Europe, enjoying success comparable to the top American producers. He was critical of smaller Italian companies such as Cines, which, like its French counterparts, produced stories of “murder, rape and robbery . . . not fit for any decent person and especially children to see.” Selig also visited Austria and Germany, though both countries, according to Selig, had yet to establish a permanent studio facility.9

More importantly, Selig learned that all the countries he visited, as well as Hungary, Holland, the Balkan States, Russia, and Scandinavia, were experiencing an explosive growth in the construction of movie theaters and were anxious to show American productions.10 He suggested that the best way for the MPPC to meet that need in the most profitable manner was by “open[ing] up one large agency” and producing films “that would be entirely foreign and different from the Pathé films.”11

When the MPPC declined his suggestion to open an international sales agency, Selig, along with Edison and Lubin, contracted with Markt and Company to distribute his films during 1910 from their offices in London, Moscow, Berlin, and Vienna.12 Selig productions were also distributed from agencies in Paris,
Hong Kong, Sydney, Melbourne, Johannesburg, and Rio de Janeiro. Besides producing various dramas and comedies, Westerns, and jungle-adventure films, Selig also embarked on a series of historical war epics that seemed designed especially for British audiences.

*Briton and Boer* (1909) mixes several battle scenes with the story of a girl who renounces the "strange customs and fierce hatreds" of her fellow Boers to marry a British mining superintendent. She betrays a former suitor in helping her husband lead the Brits to victory. This was followed by *The Highlander's Defiance* (1910), the story of two Scottish brothers who enlist to fight the Boers and choose to die heroically rather than surrender. The interior scenes for both films were directed by Otis Turner at Selig's Chicago studio, with battle scenes staged at Willow Springs, Illinois. Turner later directed *Lost in the Soudan* (1910), a variation on *The Four Feathers*, with Dune Park on the shore of Lake Michigan doubling for the Sahara desert. According to an article in the *Gary Tribune*, over five hundred extras were costumed as Bedouins for the production, supplemented by three hundred horses and three camels. A handful of palm trees and specially constructed pyramids were shipped from Chicago to Dune Park. Because of his expertise with horses, Tom Mix was hastily recruited to become lead wrangler of the uncooperative camels.

In the summer of 1910, the British trade periodical *The Bioscope* reported that "undoubtedly Western films are the favorites of [London] audience[s]; and the same holds good in the provinces." The article suggested that the reason "may lie in the contrast" between civilization, which constrains the individual with law and order, "habits and customs beyond which he may not go," with life in the West, where "man had to rely upon his own resources" in combating "the savage forces of Nature." Western films arouse "our sympathies, and [make] us long to be fighting, and working, and making love as do these cowboys—sturdy, simple men." Such was the popularity of Selig's Westerns that Pathé eventually opened an American studio next door to Selig's Edendale studios in order to attempt more realistic fare in genuine western settings.

The breadth of the international success of Selig's Westerns is stunning. The manager of the Edison Parlor Theatre in Revelstoke, British Columbia, considered *A Squawman's Daughter* (1908) "one of the best films we ever had." Selig's 1913 remake of *The Cowboy Millionaire* played Odessa, South Russia, and was one of the "best draws" ever for the King George Theatre in Auckland, New Zealand, selling three thousand tickets in one day alone. Posters for Selig's most popular cowboy star, Tom Mix, adorned theater lobbies in Bradford and Thornaby-on-Tees. *The Escape of Jim Dolan* (1913) was "extremely popular" in Dublin and Rome. Mix's one-reel *Grizzly Gulch*
Chariot Race (1915) played Glasgow, while two copies of the epic feature Days of the Thundering Herd (1915) were distributed throughout Scandinavia. A letter Selig received from a South African exhibitor listing Johannesburg's most popular films seems to reflect the Mix action aesthetic: "Cowboy and Western drama (with plenty of shooting, riding, killing and general excitement), detective dramas and mysteries, train robberies and smashers, convict and prison dramas, good comics and an occasional comedy."

Dissatisfied with how other companies were selling his films overseas, William Selig decided to open his own sales office at the beginning of 1911 in London, deemed an "ideal... selling center for films for all sections of Europe, and even Australia and New Zealand." He hired Pathé's former American representative, E. H. Montagu, to head the London affiliate. Montagu was chosen because he was a born and bred Londoner, was well known to Selig from his six years based in Chicago with Pathé, and had relationships with a variety of film exchanges and exhibitors around the world. Unlike the succeeding generation of American producers, who forced theaters and exchanges to buy blocks of films sight unseen, Montagu sold Selig's films on the open market, providing screenings of each production for the trade at his showroom a month or so before its release date.

Selig productions were regularly advertised in the two principal British trade magazines, Kinematograph Weekly and The Bioscope. Within a few months of establishing the London office, Selig began to issue weekly booklets describing new releases for theater operators and exchanges in the United Kingdom. Selig's publication of foreign release bulletins had begun in Germany two years earlier, featuring titles translated into German; for instance, Under the Stars and Stripes (1910) became Unter den Sternenbanner and Girls of the Range (1910) was retitled Mädchen auf den Viehweiden.

Like the German release bulletins, the British versions offered synopses, production stills, running lengths, and European release dates for upcoming films. In addition, they advertised color posters for each release to theater owners for a nominal fee, and provided generic posters promoting the Selig Polyscope Company free of charge. Distinguishing the company's productions from its competitors, the bulletins promoted William Selig as "the man who produces the 'something different.'" Montagu also used the bulletins to offer suggestions to exhibitors, such as keeping their theaters open during the summer, and asked for help in tracking down "dealers, renters, and exhibitors" offering illegal dupe copies of Selig films for sale. Selig competitors Biograph, Lubin, Kalem, and non-MPPC member Bison Company continued to have their films represented by Markt and Company, while Vitagraph opened
its own foreign sales offices in Paris, London, and Berlin, enjoying more business in Europe than in the States.\textsuperscript{34}

Within a year of the establishment of Selig's London affiliate, \textit{Moving Picture World} reported that American films accounted for "eighty per cent of the world's supply of moving picture films." It presciently understood that "our ideas, therefore, and our morals are bound to make an impression and produce an influence, more or less profound, in every country, in which they are shown." The article also noted that "sympathy [for] the under dog is another distinctively American trait, which Europeans admire, as it is bodied forth in hundreds of our moving pictures."\textsuperscript{35}
HOBART BOSWORTH
in dem Schaupiel
“Der Römer.”
Künstlerisch für die Bühne bearbeitet nach den Schriften und Überlieferungen der ersten Anfänge des Alten Römerreiches.

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Selig

„Der Römer“.
Hobart Bosworth als Spurius Maelius.


Fünfzehn Jahre später
finden wir Valerius im Forum. Ein politischer Streit ist im Gange; Valerius macht Anstrengungen, als Diktator erwählt zu werden. Spurius bekämpft ihn mit aller Macht.

Cultivating an international audience for American films in 1910. Courtesy of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
At the beginning of 1912, a Southsea, England, exhibitor wrote Selig assessing each of the past year’s films, including those of two other American powerhouses, Biograph and Edison. It noted that

Selig productions are among the most popular [and] the animal subjects surpass any other kind of film[.] Capt. Kate and Lost in the Jungle being about the best of the class ... Patrons visited the hall more than once to see [them]. The only regret with such films as these, all other subjects of any brand appearing in the same program, seem to be rather uninteresting after view[ing] such a masterpiece.36

It seems that audiences everywhere responded similarly. A print of Back to the Primitive was ordered for Peru, which required Spanish intertitles and synopses.37 Lost in the Jungle played in Brussels, presumably with French intertitles.38 The same film also played in czarist Russia.39 At least twenty-two and perhaps as many as thirty-two prints of Captain Kate were ordered for Austria, with Selig’s representative there providing German intertitle translations for the London office to execute. Curiously, the censors in Vienna forbade a Selig Western from being shown but approved scenes of animal cruelty in the jungle films.40 In a letter to Selig, the manager of the Electric Picture Palace in Dalton-in-Furness best summed up the European response to the jungle narratives: “I may say your animal films are all the go on the other side.”41

Wamba, a Child of the Jungle was one of many Selig features to play Bombay, India, in 1913.42 It’s interesting to note that unlike the failure of European Westerns with American audiences, Selig’s jungle films enjoyed success in the places where they were set, such as Africa, India, and South America.

According to The Bioscope, “The popularity of . . . the ‘animal picture’ is greater, perhaps, than the popularity of any other class of picture one can compare with it. The reason is . . . because the introduction of savage beasts into plays . . . is something which is absolutely unique to film drama.” In the Midst of the Jungle was “without much question the greatest animal drama ever produced.” “The Selig company,” The Bioscope declared, were “specialists in the production of this type of film, . . . develop[ing] the animal drama to a point which has been reached by no one else.” The thinness of Wamba’s plot, about a young woman forced to survive dangers in the jungle after being separated from a hunting party, was considered an advantage, “for, freed from . . . ordinary artificial complications, the action stands out with the boldness and the realism of an episode of actual life.” As with some of Selig’s earlier jungle adventures, a lioness that had purportedly gone blind in real life is fatally shot, and a leopard and hyena engage in a savage fight.43 As with other
Utilizing Selig Zoo buildings for In the Midst of the Jungle. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

Selig jungle-adventure productions, the film was enjoyed from Calcutta to Denmark.44 In the Midst of the Jungle, directed by Henri McRea, is the most superbly crafted of the twenty or so surviving Selig jungle-adventure films.45 In addition to beautiful cinematography and impressive production design, Jungle boasts seamless editing between genuine actuality footage of the African veldt and scenes staged on the Selig Zoo backlot.

According to a report issued early in 1914 by the Export Department in Washington, DC, England imported the most American films, followed by Canada, Australia, Cuba, France, Japan, Argentina, Brazil, China, and the Philippines.46 In an article for an American trade publication, E. H. Montagu revealed that films not exceeding three reels could result in sales of up to ninety copies in the British market, as was the case with Amid Raging Beasts (1914). British theaters required fewer new films than did US theaters because they changed their programs less frequently. Montagu also indicated that
film exhibition in Great Britain was in healthier shape than on the Continent, where a single print of any given film would be exhibited from theater to theater at lower rental rates until it disintegrated to the point where it could no longer be projected.  

Photos of Selig stars hung in the lobbies of theaters in such far-flung locations as Burma, Ceylon, New Zealand, India, and Rhodesia. As might be expected, the lobbies of well over one hundred theaters in the biggest cities and smallest towns of Great Britain permanently showcased Selig posters and photos. Theaters all over the world had standing orders for all Selig films, including Toronto, Warsaw, Johannesburg, and the South Pacific.

Following the success of his 1909 trip, William Selig made annual visits to Europe to evaluate and expand his business. During 1913 he spent nearly two months touring Paris, Hamburg, Berlin, and Vienna, in addition to overseeing construction of a new international headquarters in the heart of London’s film district. Selig also visited the legendary Hagenback Zoo, where he drew inspiration for the creation of his own private zoo and for productions featuring wild animals. In July 1914 Selig returned to London to personally supervise the European launch of The Adventures of Kathlyn.

Little did he or anyone else know that events in Sarajevo would have momentous consequences throughout the world. Shortly before Selig landed in London, his Chicago office received a cable from Vienna that cameramen in Sarajevo had “obtain[ed] some excellent and first hand moving pictures of the assassination of the Grand Duke of Austria and his wife,” which would soon be shipped to them. Unaware of the swift-moving events that were about to plunge much of the world into war, Selig traveled on to Paris from London.

As Selig was expanding his international business in 1909, he learned that it was cheaper to have prints made for foreign exhibition from negatives in Europe rather than pay stiff tariff fees on every foot of film shipped from the United States, so he contracted with the Eclipse Company of Paris to manufacture his foreign release prints. While Selig was on his way to Paris in early August 1914, Montagu received a telegram and letter from Eclipse alerting him that the situation in France had turned chaotic; all cargo shipments had been halted, and the only possible opportunity for transporting any prints to England was as personal baggage—at great personal risk—on the remaining ferry operating between Le Havre and Southampton. Selig consequently arranged for an enormous shipment of negatives from the United States to London that would provide enough new releases for Great Britain to last six months. Upon his return to the States, Selig stated that the war had “wholly upset the moving picture business on the continent.”
In major port cities such as Liverpool, the influx of labor and refugees actually caused a spike in movie attendance. But despite the temporary stockpile of new titles, many British theaters and film exchanges, which had been operating on slim profit margins, quickly went under or incurred enormous debts they were unable to pay. In response, Montagu notified the apprehensive Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association that Selig would increase its rental fee discount to theater owners and exchanges that paid their bills on time, and would not prosecute delinquent customers.

Despite the chaotic conditions in Europe, Selig proceeded with the expansion of his business, at least in England. In September it was announced that "Selig House" would resume construction following the resolution of a building strike. Selig subsequently arranged to advertise his films on the front page of *The Film Renter* for every week of 1915. That same year the top half of the inside cover of *Pictures and the Picturegoer* was also leased to advertise new releases. But it was impossible to escape the reality of the devastating effects the war was having on his finances. Kalton Lahue has noted that "the 1915 War Tax instituted by England meant that each 1,000-foot reel of film [imported from the United States] cost . . . $160 to bring into England." Increasing numbers of British theater chains entered receivership, unable to pay their outstanding debts.

Selig received a letter in March from a distributor who stated that "Paris is still a very sad town, we all wish this terrible war shall end soon . . . Business is at a standstill and [there is] not a single copy of a film to be sold." The same was true of neutral Holland. Similarly, it was impossible to ship films into Switzerland through all but the most circuitous and dangerous black market channels via Copenhagen, which Selig was reluctant to do.

The situation seemed to improve when Selig negotiated with England and France to have his latest feature, *The Carpet from Bagdad* (1915), shown at military rest camps. But indicative of the company's changing fortunes, the films were shipped on the *Lusitania*. Amazingly, in 1982 divers salvaging artifacts from the *Lusitania* recovered a reel of *The Carpet from Bagdad* that contained some identifiable images, which are now displayed in a British museum.

Faced with a dwindling outlet for his films and rapidly declining profits, Selig resorted to desperate measures in the hope of saving his business. In the autumn of 1915, Selig arranged to secretly ship his films, posters, and production stills to Copenhagen for distribution throughout Scandinavia, Austria-Hungary, and Germany, though it appears that the films encountered competition from illegal dupes on the black market, which were renting at lower rates. The new distribution system made it possible for his films to reach
Holland, but conditions there were so bad that only one print per production was purchased and shown throughout the country. The situation was just as bleak for Australia. Due to the significant war tax imposed on imported films, few Selig productions were being ordered despite the longtime popularity of Selig films down under.

In 1916 Selig entered into an agreement with a new Spanish distributor who was able to place one print of *The Carpet from Bagdad*, along with two copies each of *The Circular Staircase* (1915) and *Pals in Blue*, with the three theater chains that controlled Spain. The distributors explained that Spaniards preferred serials, but the Selig Polyscope Company had lost too much business because of the war and was contractually locked into a daily release schedule that precluded production of any more serials.

Only 118 Selig productions were exported outside of the Americas during 1916–1917, and no film sold more than twenty-eight copies, in stark contrast to an average jungle film like *Amid Raging Beasts*, which had just two years earlier sold ninety-two copies in Great Britain alone. Two of Selig's finest Western features, *The Country That God Forgot* and *Twisted Trails*, sold only fourteen and nine prints, respectively. One of Selig's most notorious productions fared just as badly: *I'm Glad My Boy Grew Up to Be a Soldier* (1915) sold twelve foreign copies.

William Selig's Civil War epic, *The Crisis* (1916), deserved a better fate. More than just an attempt to capitalize on the unprecedented success of D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), *The Crisis* was a sympathetic portrait of abolitionism and President Lincoln's efforts to reunify the country. The story, adapted by Selig staff writer Lanier Bartlett from a best-selling novel, concerns families from the North and South whose friendship is tested by the war. Selig chose to reopen the Chicago studio on March 6, 1916, to stage the interior scenes for *The Crisis* because of its proximity to several authentic Civil War locations utilized in the production.

Clearly, this was to be another important historical spectacle along the lines of *The Coming of Columbus* (1912), and genuine props and locations were used to authenticate the production. Five steel engravings that had hung in Lincoln's White House office and the dispatch box that accompanied him throughout the war were loaned by the US government; a slave auction was re-created on the steps of the St. Louis Courthouse; one of the few extant Civil War warships was procured for the spectacular attack on Fort Jackson; and an enormous and stunningly photographed torch-lit rally was staged for the Lincoln-Douglas debate. Six hundred members of the Mississippi National Guard were employed to stage the Battle of Vicksburg, one of many day- and nighttime combat sequences in the film that rivaled Griffith's. Eight gunboats were constructed
atop barges and loaded with explosives for a spectacular Mississippi River battle. In one memorable shot, a shell exploded beneath a soldier on horseback standing atop a ridge, causing horse and rider to tumble down a steep embankment. It was spectacularly harrowing, as good as any movie stunt that’s ever been performed. According to promotional material prepared by the company, the stuntman on the horse was none other than Tom Mix.81

The opening shots set the tone: crossed flags of the Union and Confederacy, followed by Abraham Lincoln placing his hand on the head of a kneeling black man in knee britches. The image of Lincoln and the black man is based on popular paintings of the Great Emancipator, which in turn were based on similar portrayals of Christ.
Bessie Eyton plays the daughter of wealthy old southern merchant Colonel Carvel, who quarrels with his lifelong friend Judge Whipple over the question of slavery. Tom Santschi is a northerner whom Whipple sends to St. Louis with his mother (Eugenie Besserer); shortly after disembarking from their riverboat, Santschi is horrified at the sight of black human beings being sold at a slave auction. Santschi outbids Eyton suitor Marshall Neilan for a young female “quadroon,” whom he then gives to her black mother as a free woman. Neilan is furious that Eyton’s father has invited “that damned Yankee” (Santschi) to a dance at their home. Eyton tries to resist her attraction to Santschi, derisively referring to him as a “black Republican.” As black musicians play for the dancers, they’re interrupted with news of Lincoln’s election to the presidency.

Santschi becomes an officer in the Union Army, while Neilan enlists as a Confederate officer. Later, Eyton and Besserer are present at the deathbed of Judge Whipple, who is reconciled with his estranged best friend Colonel Carvel moments before he dies. Soon thereafter, Colonel Carvel rejoins his regiment and is killed by a sniper’s bullet. At war's end, Eyton and Santschi are reunited and successfully plead with President Lincoln to spare the life of captured Confederate spy Neilan. As the story concludes, Santschi and Eyton mourn the assassination of Lincoln.

On August 28, 1916, The Crisis was previewed for exchange operators, critics, and theatrical luminaries in Pittsburgh, where a popular play based on the same novel had premiered. Within a week William Selig sold an unspecified interest in The Crisis for the United States and Canada to exchange operator Harry Sherman for $250,000. Sherman believed "The Crisis . . . a worthy successor to The Birth of a Nation," from which he’d made a considerable profit. Although thirty-two editions of the novel had been published since its debut in May 1901, William Selig convinced Grosset and Dunlap to publish a popular-priced "photoplay edition" illustrated with production stills from the film.

The Crisis was released regionally in the United States beginning in late 1916, doing record business through much of the South, Midwest, and Northeast. Virtually every newspaper review favorably compared The Crisis to The Birth of a Nation, including those in southern towns such as Vicksburg and Jackson, where some of the location scenes had been filmed. The New York Tribune reported that at the New York premiere on February 26, 1917, "The audience became so enthusiastic that they stood up and cheered." According to the Minneapolis Journal,
The chief merit of *The Crisis* lies ... in the glimpses given of the customs and manners of our grandparents ... The torchlight procession at the Lincoln-Douglas debate furnishes a scene no director has excelled. The battle pictures of Vicksburg are more satisfying than those of *The Birth of a Nation* because attention is not diverted by some purely sentimental episode.87

The *Philadelphia Telegraph* concurred, arguing that "had it antedated Griffith’s spectacle, *The Crisis* would have been acclaimed as the best of all motion pictures."88

William Selig solicited an endorsement from Thomas Edison, which was reprinted in most of the promotional material accompanying the film: "In *The Crisis* we have the titanic figure of Lincoln, his actions, his characteristics preserved for posterity in moving pictures in a manner so true to life that it recalls to my mind the Great Emancipator as I knew him."88 It was such a good quote that no one seemed to question the fact that Abraham Lincoln was assassinated when Thomas Edison was a teenager; it’s highly unlikely that he personally knew the sixteenth president. A less suspect testimonial came from H. D. Bates, the eighty-year-old personal telegrapher of President Lincoln, who "pronounced Sam D. Drane’s characterization of Abraham Lincoln as wonderful."90 As D. W. Griffith had famously accomplished with *Birth of a Nation*, a special White House screening of *The Crisis* was arranged for Woodrow Wilson and members of his cabinet on March 6, 1917.91

The Warner brothers acquired the California rights to *The Crisis*. For reasons lost to history, they waited to release the film until April 5, 1917, where it received an enthusiastic response. The following day, President Wilson declared war on Germany. Abruptly confronted with the reality and immediacy of a new war, the country was not in the mood to see another Civil War recreation and seems to have lost interest in the film literally overnight. The Warners claimed their investment was a total loss, which unfairly stigmatized *The Crisis* as a commercial and/or artistic failure.92

Undoubtedly motivated by the opportunity to reap a pure profit as his own distributor, William Selig defied wartime obstacles and mounted an enormous publicity campaign for *The Crisis* in England, exploiting the excellent critical notices it received. The *Financial News* proclaimed, "There is not a dull moment in it, and it absorbed the attention of the audience to the close."93 The *London Evening News* called it "in many respects ... far greater than *The Birth of a Nation*. It is stronger in characterization and better in story, ... bound to live when hundreds of other pictures have been forgotten."94 That review
was written by William Faulkner; *The Crisis* was based on a best-selling novel by Winston Churchill. But Faulkner the critic was a Brit, and Churchill the author, despite his name, was a Yank; such was the perverse irony of Selig’s dwindling fortunes.

British audiences seemed evenly split in their response to the film. Representative of the complaints: “At the present time the British public don’t want anything with WAR in it”; “I am extremely sorry to say it is the biggest failure I have ever done with”; “people simply walked out when it was put on the screen”; “to be candid, I have lost more money by booking *The Crisis* than any film I have ever shown.” For some venues, managers reported that class distinctions dictated audience reaction: “Film went excellently well with better class clients, but was too long for our Tommies.”

Other theaters experienced a wholly positive response to *The Crisis*: “I am pleased to say we accomplished record business. The picture received great appreciation from all classes of patrons”; “we are delighted to inform you that *The Crisis* established a record for this theatre”; “a great success and in many ways was even better than *The Birth of a Nation*. I will have no hesitation in booking films of this kind.” Unfortunately, such positive response wasn’t nearly enough to save the film or overcome the financial crisis faced by the Selig Polyscope Company in the final year of the war. In all Selig was able to distribute only five prints of *The Crisis* throughout Great Britain.

The collapse of Selig’s international market was due to World War I conditions and increased domestic competition from bank-financed independent production companies that hadn’t yet come to rely on foreign revenues. The Selig Polyscope Company ceased production in 1918 and closed its London office the following year. Although the Selig Polyscope Company was a casualty of World War I, the apprehension expressed by Cecil Hepworth in 1909 that it was too late for British filmmakers—and most other foreign cinemas—to regain dominance of their home market has remained true for a century. More than any other domestic producers, Selig and Vitagraph were responsible for establishing American domination of the world film market. Selig’s vision of what American cinema could be enabled him to take enormous risks in order to carve out an international business and audience for his films. The second generation of American filmmakers thus had a relatively easy time filling the gap the dissolution of Selig’s business left at the end of World War I by following the industrial and aesthetic models he established.
Throughout most of the silent era, actualities was the term used for films that would later become more commonly known as “documentaries.” During the first decade of American commercial cinema, actualities were more widely produced than narratives. They were easier and cheaper to make than narrative films, which required a storyline, actors, props, and usually purpose-built sets.

Alison Griffiths has stated that the first twenty years of commercial cinema were “ethnographic film’s ‘golden years’ in terms of the sheer number of films produced and innovations in style and content.” It was also during this period that William Selig’s boyhood friend Burton Holmes popularized the term travelogue to describe his travel lectures, which were accompanied by motion pictures. Selig helped finance several anthropological expeditions, beginning with Professor Frederick Starr’s 1905–1906 journey to the Congo Free State. His camera operator’s attempt to take “moving pictures” in the Congo on behalf of Selig failed due to the heat and humidity, which wreaked havoc on the camera and film; however, a limited edition book of Starr’s stunningly beautiful photographs, Congo Natives, was dedicated to Selig as one of the sponsors.

Starr’s academic credentials—he held a PhD in geology and was a member of the faculty of the University of Chicago—lent credibility to the fledgling medium he endorsed. In both lecture tours and in articles for the Atlantic Monthly, Chicago Tribune, and Ladies’ Home Journal, Starr enthusiastically sang the praises of motion pictures for skeptical and more educated audiences. Selig’s association with Starr also lent credibility to Selig, who like his competitors yearned for acceptance into the upper classes. Selig’s interest in funding Starr’s return to Africa in 1912 appears to have been primarily motivated by a desire to collect stock footage of authentic landscapes, people, and animals that could be interpolated into narrative scenes staged at the pre-zoo Selig...
Wild Animal Farm, a strategy that would later be misidentified as an MGM innovation for *Trader Horn* (1930).5

Selig also sponsored Starr’s tours of Japan, which yielded a five-minute travelogue, *In Japan* (1911), and a short ethnographic subject, *The Ainus of Japan* (1913), concerning the aboriginal people residing on the island of Razu.6 On at least one of the Asian trips, Starr also shot copious documentary footage of Korea and the Philippines.7

In addition to bankrolling Starr’s travels, Colonel Selig financed an Amazon River expedition led by Emmett O’Neill, hired Victor Milner and Frank T. Farrell to film the Belgian Congo for second-unit footage in 1915, and funded two extensive around-the-world photographic trips made by Dr. Edward Burton McDowell, a popular lecturer.8 McDowell, who later changed the spelling of his name to “MacDowell,” was a “doctor” in name only, according to Rick Altman, having appropriated the title to give himself a veneer of legitimacy on the lecture circuit—much as Selig was a self-named “colonel.”9 Their relationship began during the fallow years, when Selig was spending most of his resources fighting Edison lawsuits; among his few releases in 1906 were motion pictures purchased from McDowell of Samoa and Fiji made during 1903 and 1904, respectively. These were purportedly the first films ever made in those South Sea islands.10 McDowell’s first major expedition sponsored by Selig resulted in eighteen films of China, thirty-three of India, and an unknown number of African scenes; the imagery was so compelling that it directly influenced the mise-en-scène of exotic jungle narratives such as *The Adventures of Kathlyn* (1913–1914).11

McDowell’s second worldwide expedition for Selig lasted more than a year; he left New York on December 1, 1913, and didn’t return to Chicago until early 1915. In Egypt he photographed Cairo, the Great Pyramid, and the Sphinx; as he traveled the Nile, he documented the ancient temples of Karnak and Luxor. McDowell filmed a nomadic tribe of Sudanese, as well as biblical landmarks such as Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Bethlehem. Sailing from Port Said to Singapore, Java, Bangkok, and Siam, he then traveled to Hong Kong; because war had already broken out, McDowell was forced to travel to Japan on a small rice steamer. He spent two and a half months there taking ten thousand feet of film that included scenes of Geisha girls posed amidst cherry blossom gardens.12

Building on his early railroad “phantom rides” and single-shot city views, Selig periodically produced American travelogues, such as a series in late 1911–early 1912 that included *Seeing Washington* (and Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Buffalo, Spokane, and New Orleans). On the same split reel with *Seeing Washington* was one of Selig’s oddest industrials, *Making a Six-Ton Cheese* (1911), the
brainchild of an Appleton, Wisconsin, cheese maker. The eight-foot-diameter cheese contained 72 tons of milk, 330 pounds of cheese salt, and 31 pounds of rennet. Perhaps even more surprising than the decision to produce such a film is the fact that *Six-Ton Cheese* was aggressively promoted throughout the world by Selig's London agent, E. H. Montagu.

America's pastime provided Selig with his most notable releases in the field of sports. The *Championship Baseball Game between the White Sox and Cubs* consisted of exclusive footage of game five of the 1906 World Series. The "Hitless Wonders" (White Sox) won, beating the heavily favored Cubs 8 to 6. The film begins with a shot of the enormous crowd of spectators buying tickets and milling about outside the Cubs' West Side Park. There was a reported attendance of 23,257 at the game, and purportedly another 80,000 outside the stadium watching from rooftops and atop telegraph poles. The second shot of the film is a 180-degree pan of the playing field and grandstand during pregame batting practice. Also included is a presentation of two live black bear cubs posed alongside Cubs manager Frank Chance—of Tinkers to Evers to Chance fame—made at home plate. There is also actual game footage of both teams at bat. Ten years later, Selig would pay $2,500 to the National Baseball Commission for the privilege of taking “moving pictures” of the 1916 World Series, in which the Red Sox beat Brooklyn four games to one. Films taken by eight cameras at each game of that series were developed, cut, printed, and released to the public within forty-eight hours after each game was played. Unfortunately, along with the vast majority of Selig productions, no films from either World Series are known to have survived into the twenty-first century.

Selig made a thousand-foot film of the 1913 Kentucky Derby, the thirty-ninth annual running at Churchill Downs, which was won in record time by Donerail, who has the distinction of being the longest shot ever to win the Derby, at 91 to 1. Several films of professional wrestling contests were produced. One of the earliest was a 1909 match featuring the legendary Polish champion Zbyszko (aka Stanislaus Cyganiewicz). The following year Selig photographed a match between Zbyszko and World Heavyweight champ Frank Gotch in which the American jumped the opening bell and pinned his Polish opponent early in the first round. Five years later, William Selig announced with outrageous hyperbole worthy of twenty-first-century professional wrestling promoters that Frank Gotch would receive $100,000 for three "real" championship bouts to be staged at the company’s Chicago studios for an invited audience. These matches were released as part of the Selig Athletic and Physical Culture Contests, a series of sports films released every Monday beginning in April 1915.
Champion sportsmen weren't the only individuals to be featured in Selig actualities. During the last week of June 1911, the Selig Polyscope Company received a letter from Harry L. Virden, a former teacher at the Oklahoma School for the Blind, suggesting that eighteen-year-old Wolcott Coombs would make a worthy subject for a film. Like Helen Keller, who had come to the public's attention with the publication of her autobiography eight years earlier, Coombs was both deaf and blind, yet had learned how to speak distinctly, albeit in "the mute tone [which] they all retain . . . more or less." In the three years Coombs attended the Oklahoma school, he learned to use a Remington typewriter, type and read both Braille and New York Point for the Blind, converse in sign language and via letters drawn on his palm, and write with a pencil. Virden proffered that Selig's only expenses would involve round-trip train fare for Coombs from his Anadarko, Oklahoma, home, hotel accommodations, and a $50 fee for Virden's services; there's no mention of remuneration for the teen. Virden also stood to gain by being supplied with his own print of the film for lecture dates. A more troubling aspect of Virden's interest became apparent when he volunteered that Coombs "is really a very pleasant boy to look upon." Nevertheless, William Selig was sufficiently intrigued to approve the production of an actuality about the remarkable young man.

Wolcott Coombs joined Harry Virden in Kansas City, where they were filmed by Thomas Persons. Selig was so impressed with the results that in late September he sent for Coombs and Virden to make additional films at the Chicago studio. By this time Virden had arranged to keep Wolcott with him over the winter for private tutoring, with the goal of eventually entering college. They arrived in Chicago just as Cinderella was entering production at the Selig studio. Wolcott, who prior to this "knew nothing about how moving pictures were made," climbed "ladders to feel the scenery and stage settings, and [ran] his sensitive hands over all the [props] and costumes" created for the Cinderella shoot. He later wrote that "it was like being in some great fairyland where one learned many wonderful lessons each day without realizing that he was doing anything but having a good time." Cinderella seems an especially appropriate subject to introduce Coombs to the world of motion pictures, for like the exploited title character, he had known little of the outside world.

On September 27, 1911, within days of Coombs' arrival in Chicago, William Selig invited representatives of the press to witness additional filming of the deaf and blind young man. With Harry Virden leaning over his shoulder, Wolcott Coombs was photographed typing a letter to "Mr. W. N. Selig and his friends":

![Image of Wolcott Coombs typing a letter](image-url)
There was a time—not many years ago—that I never could have believed that the big out-side world of which I knew nothing contained all the wonderful things that are daily being revealed to me now. The most wonderful thing I have found in this new world of mine has been the friendship of big-hearted men and gentle women. Because I have learned that a man is worth more than anything he has made or written, I am most interested in his religions, his governments, and his social conditions. It is my hope that some day there may be established a national school for the deaf-blind where those in the same condition as myself may be assured the benefit of the same sort of instruction and companionship that I have always enjoyed when with Mr. Virden. Very truly yours,"[24]

Coombs then signed the letter in ink in a somewhat tentative though legible hand.

Selig provided Virden with $500 to open a workshop where Coombs could weave rugs and bind books for sale to the public. Selig also offered to secretly pay for Coombs' college education and make his attorneys available to help Virden become the boy's guardian until he turned twenty-one. Virden planned to embark on a series of lectures at fourteen universities and colleges that winter, whereby he would display Coombs' special abilities—and turn a tidy profit.[25]

A. M. Coombs, Wolcott's widower father, wrote Virden that he was leery of the proposed arrangement and expressed concern that his son would not benefit after its expiration. Virden then cajoled Wolcott into writing his father in the hope of gaining his acquiescence. In his letter, Wolcott declared that Virden "always does what is good for me." He provided an inventory of new clothes Virden had bought for him, not realizing that Selig had paid for them, and innocently mentioned how much he enjoyed his morning baths and Japanese wrestling, presumably with Virden.[26] A. M. Coombs replied that Wolcott could remain with Virden "as long as you want to stay and they use you right," but refused to relinquish legal guardianship of his son.[27]

While staying with Virden's father and siblings in Springfield, Illinois, Coombs seems to have developed an interest in his tutor's youngest sister; his handicaps did not prevent him from taking her to the movies.[28] Around the same time Virden appears to have developed a close friendship with Selig publicist Stanley Twist, who within a year would no longer be in the company's employ.[29]

The completed half-reel film, Wolcott Coombs, was released for public exhibition on April 5, 1912. In addition to showing Wolcott's typewritten letter to
Wolcott Coombs

Phenomenal Deaf and Blind Boy

An exceedingly interesting educational picture, showing the marvelous results that have been accomplished by one determined boy in three years time

DESCRIPTION BY STANLEY H. TWIST

This really remarkable picture, we are shown Wolcott Coombs, and some of his accomplishments. Young Coombs is deaf and blind and only seventeen years of age, yet in three years he has accumulated more education and practical knowledge than most sighted boys master in twice that time. To those who are familiar with the career of Miss Helen Keller, this boy's accomplishments will be doubly interesting. Three years ago he came under the supervision of Mr. Harry L. Virden, then principal of a large school for the blind. Virden was so impressed with young Coomb's determination to secure an education that he decided to devote his entire time to furthering this boy's training. Without funds or training facilities (there being no school for the deaf blind), the outlook was far from bright, but progress proved rapid, however, and young Coombs expects to enter college in the near future. The picture shows us Coombs weaving rugs, making hammock, caning chairs, typewriting, reading, writing and "hand talking" in the various systems used by the blind, and many other scenes of remarkable interest.

With the Boys of the Figure Two

Showing many thrilling scenes of life on the West's largest horse ranch. Cowboys, in their dare-devil, break neck, sports and pastimes. If you liked "Life on the Diamond S Ranch," don't miss this!

Harry Virden hovers over deaf and blind Wolcott Coombs typing his letter to Col. Selig. Courtesy of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
Selig, the film included scenes of the young man weaving a rug and making a hammock, caning a chair, and communicating in various ways with his tutor. Simultaneous with that film’s release, a second, longer version was made available for Virden’s lectures, as well as for independent educational and scientific outlets. Besides elaborating on Coombs’ mastery of several means of communication, including typing on sighted and Braille machines, the film showed Coombs working in the shop with which Selig had anonymously provided him. 

Motography lauded Selig and Virden’s “broad humanitarianism, for neither has a thought of financial gain in exploiting the subject,” and noted that Coombs’ most praiseworthy ambition was his desire to “be instrumental in establishing a school for the deaf-blind in this country where others in his condition may secure the educational advantages that he has enjoyed.” Tragically, that dream was not to be realized, for Wolcott Coombs’ 1917 registration card for the World War I draft lists him as an insane inmate at Eastern Oklahoma Hospital Asylum in Vinita, Oklahoma, as does the 1920 census report; there is no record for him in the 1930 census, suggesting that he died in the interim.

Selig’s audience for films about a handicapped teen or giant cheese were undoubtedly limited. But patronage for actualities was expanded by combining a variety of documentary subjects into a longer format, with some elements designed to appeal specifically to men, women, children, or special interest groups. This format, which came to be known as the newsreel, was introduced by Charles Pathé in Paris circa 1910.

The success of the Pathé Journal inspired the company to inaugurate a weekly American edition in August 1911, sixty percent of which contained American content. Soon monthly newsreels were introduced by American companies but were short-lived. According to Raymond Fielding, “As early as the autumn of 1911, Edgar B. Hatrick, head of photographic services of the Hearst organization, proposed that the company produce a newsreel in competition with the new Pathé and Vitagraph releases.” In 1913, the Hearst organization finally allowed Hatrick to enter negotiations with William Selig about co-producing a newsreel with William Randolph Hearst’s powerful newspaper syndicate. The partnership resulted in The Hearst-Selig News Pictorial, which premiered on February 28, 1914. Selig’s association with Hearst lasted slightly less than two years, during which time the term newsreel was coined for their twice-weekly, ten-minute-long cinematic tabloid.

From the beginning, the venture was a success, benefiting from the promotional and organizational acumen of both partners. The Hearst syndicate had access to international business and government leaders, as well as the ability
to cover newsworthy events at a moment’s notice. Selig maintained a team of salaried cameramen and stringers throughout the United States and around the world who worked in concert with Hearst’s news bureaus. Two processing laboratories at his Chicago studio enabled scores of prints to be made and rapidly distributed to theaters throughout the nation every Monday and Thursday. *Hearst-Selig* quickly became the most popular newsreel service in the country, supplanting Pathé.\(^{35}\)

There’s no doubt that *Hearst-Selig News Pictorial* benefited from the outbreak of war in Europe. Within six months of its debut, it was promoted as “First in War—First in Peace—First in Popularity.” Three weeks after Great Britain announced it was in a state of war with Germany, *Hearst-Selig* presented views of enormous crowds outside of Parliament awaiting news of the declaration, followed by scenes of men lined up outside recruiting stations and men training for the British Expeditionary Force. The footage was a remarkable coup, given the suspension of steamship traffic and rigid governmental censorship imposed by Great Britain.

The fall of Belgium was especially well documented: footage included King Albert sending off the Ninth Regiment, which would soon be massacred at Liège, Belgian Queen Elizabeth caring for the wounded in the Royal Palace at Brussels, which had been converted into a hospital, and columns of German troops occupying Brussels in what were advertised as “the first and only pictures of the German army in motion, on hostile soil, shown in the United States.” The latter films were obtained by *Hearst* newspaper correspondent A. E. Wallace, who held special German passports and permits that allowed him astonishing access to German troops; he recorded German soldiers laughing, smiling, and waving at the camera as the defeated populace looked on. *Hearst-Selig* cameramen also got exclusive footage of thousands of Russian prisoners herded by the Germans at Königsberg, French prisoners being marched through the streets of Königsbrück, and “thrilling and exciting scenes” of cheering crowds gathered outside the Kaiser’s palace following the declaration of war.\(^{36}\)

Because of President Wilson’s policy of neutrality and the antiwar sentiment then prevalent in the United States, *Hearst-Selig* often presented scenes from both sides of the war that were often sympathetic to the Germans. This strategy resulted in one of the most ill-advised advertisements of the war. A full-page ad appearing in *Moving Picture World* for the *Hearst-Selig News Pictorial* release of March 8, 1915, included a full-length photo of von Hindenburg gazing squarely into the camera with the following text:
YOU CAN BE NEUTRAL
AND STILL SHOW
YOUR PATRONS THE
IDOL
OF THE
GERMAN ARMY
The master mind on which the
hopes of the German Empire rest—
the man, who every day, bears the
greatest weight of responsibility ever
placed upon the shoulders of a
human being—
Field Marshal
VON
HINDENBURG
The first motion pictures of this Colossus of the
Military World, taken at Army Headquarters in
East Prussia, by Staff Photographer A. E.
WALLACE . . . 37

Such a blatant endorsement of the Allies’ most prominent enemy is so unlike
anything else ever generated by Selig’s publicity department that it could only
have come from Hearst, who during both world wars was forced to remove his
name from his newsreels because audiences were outraged by his advocacy of
Germany. 38

By the beginning of 1915, Selig had cobbled together enough wartime scenes
from the newsreels for a five-reel feature-length documentary, The History of
the World’s Greatest War, “made on gruesome European battlefields amid the
dismal ruins of old-world cities . . . by the bold and intrepid Selig camera men in
cooperation with the fearless and efficient Hearst newspaper correspondents.”
The film utilized animated maps to indicate troop movements and included
shots of starving Belgian women clamoring for food from relief workers and
other scenes that were excluded from the original newsreels, as well as newer
footage of the retreat of British and French armies to the Marne, and scenes of
prison camps in England and Germany. 39 An estimated fifty thousand people
packed San Francisco’s Portola Theatre during the film’s weeklong engage-
ment there. 40

Coverage of the European war was only one component of the Hearst-Selig
News Pictorial. Hearst newspaper columnist Grace Darling was utilized as an
on-camera reporter specializing in women’s issues for the Thursday releases beginning in 1915. One of her first assignments was conducting a “visualized interview” with secretary of state and perennial presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan. He was filmed speaking at length about the women’s suffrage movement, a speech that undoubtedly suffered from the limitations of silent cinema. In short time, lengthy interviews with newsmakers were dropped from the format.41 Another component of the newsreel that was geared to the female audience was Lucile (Lady Duff-Gordon), reporting on the latest fashions, “frills dear to feminine hearts,” in the Monday edition.42

Hearst-Selig also covered a potpourri of news events. The sixty-fifth edition, released August 16, 1915, included scenes of a military funeral at the Charleston, Massachusetts, navy yard for US sailors killed during the occupation at Port-au-Prince, Haiti; sick children receiving care aboard a floating hospital in New York; fund-raising efforts at the San Francisco Exposition to aid widows and orphans of German soldiers killed in the war; submarine mine-laying maneuvers in Boston Harbor; the doubles championship winners at the Western Tennis Tournament held in Lake Forest, Illinois; the sixty-second annual Scotch Picnic in Roxbury, Massachusetts; soldiers of San Marino joining the Italian forces; fifty thousand women demonstrating outside the House of Commons for the opportunity to assist England in war work; and General Frederick Funston commanding forces following the outbreak of the Mexican Civil War.43

Celebrities were a popular subject in the Hearst-Selig News Pictorial. The October 28, 1915, edition included shots of George M. Cohan laying the cornerstone for the new Friars Club headquarters in New York, and scenes of Thomas A. Edison being feted during Edison Day at the San Francisco Exposition in the company of friends Luther Burbank and Henry Ford.44

The Hearst-Selig released on September 6, 1915, showed William Randolph Hearst at his home and William N. Selig in his Chicago office on the phone, purportedly conferring with each other about “important matters” concerning their newsreel.45 By the end of the year, however, their partnership had dissolved. Selig claimed it was at his behest, but records indicate that Hearst had signed a contract with new partner Vitagraph two months before his association with Selig ended.46 The Hearst-Vitagraph newsreel lasted less than a year, after which the newspaper tycoon would form partnerships with Pathé, MGM, and finally Universal, which would continue until 1967.47

William Selig quickly found another producing partner with which to launch a new newsreel. Given their mutually beneficial relationship in the promotion of The Adventures of Kathlyn, it’s not surprising that Selig would team with the Chicago Tribune in his second newsreel endeavor.48
billed itself as “The World’s Greatest News Film,” a variation on the Tribune’s motto, “The World’s Greatest Newspaper.” Former Secret Service agent Lucien C. “Jack” Wheeler was hired as editor-in-chief. Besides providing contacts with former presidents and other Washington insiders, Wheeler had experience as a reporter on the New York World and Washington Post. The Selig-Tribune maintained a staff of war correspondents in the Balkans, London, France, Russia, Mexico, and the Orient, along with a “camera-reporter” embedded with the German General Staff. Selig also retained the services of roving photographer Edwin Weigle, who’d earlier filmed the fall of Vera Cruz and Antwerp, the Germans in Poland, and Austrians in Italy. Salaried cameramen were stationed in Chicago, New York, Washington, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, El Paso, New Orleans, Atlanta, and Portland, Oregon.

The Selig-Tribune was conceived as a visual newspaper and presented as such. The opening shot of most editions resembled the front page of a newspaper, utilizing headlines and articles to indicate the newsreel’s contents. Printed replicas of the front pages were also used as magazine advertisements and posters. Another innovation of the Selig-Tribune was its intertitles, printed in English, German, and Italian, reflecting the diversity of the American motion picture audience during the teens. Seventy-five people were employed at Selig’s Chicago studio developing the negatives, editing the raw footage into stories (which ranged from thirty seconds to two minutes in length), inserting intertitles, and printing and shipping hundreds of reels twice each week to scores of exhibitors, many of whom stayed loyal to Selig rather than Hearst.

The Selig-Tribune contained a mixture of current events and general interest stories. Edition number 63, released on August 7, 1916, contained footage of the aftermath of the Black Tom Island munitions explosion, which was perpetrated by German agents and caused $20 million worth of destruction, including permanent damage to the arm of the Statue of Liberty. A Selig-Tribune cameraman photographed the commissioning of the battleship Arizona, which twenty-five years later would be bombed at Pearl Harbor.

Just as Selig had compiled war scenes from the Hearst-Selig News Pictorial into a feature documentary, so he used a combination of Selig-Tribune newsreel footage and recycled images from the Hearst partnership to make War-Torn Poland (1916), which was built around Paderewski’s visit to Illinois as he appealed for aid for his devastated country. Toward that end, William Selig announced that a portion of exhibitors’ proceeds would be donated to the Polish Relief Fund.

Selig also covered the war in Mexico, even though the Ohio Board of Censors forbade the exhibition of films of “murderer and . . . bandit” Pancho Villa
within the state. The Selig-Tribune had a camera car especially built for the use of "daring cameramen" Victor Reis and Nicholas McDonald in Mexico. The touring car contained a seventy-five-gallon gasoline tank, carried fifteen gallons of water and eight gallons of oil, was lined with steel plates, and was equipped with a machine gun and turret. Perhaps because of the enormous cost of maintaining a large international staff of salaried camera-reporters, the Selig-Tribune proved too costly to sustain, especially given Selig's other setbacks. Thus, the venture folded in May 1917 after issuing nearly 150 editions.

Following the demise of the Selig-Tribune, Colonel Selig rushed an ersatz newsreel into release, The Selig World Library, which was a compilation of old newsreel and actuality footage photographed by Starr and McDowell. In 1918, William Selig arranged for Bengar Pictures, a New York distributor, to offer his twenty years' worth of actuality and newsreel footage for commercial and private exhibition.

One endeavor Selig got involved with just prior to the outbreak of World War I had the potential of significantly transforming the industry he helped found. Instead, Selig's foray into talking pictures would have disastrous consequences on his finances. In 1914, Selig was approached about filming Harry Lauder, regarded at the time as the most popular vaudeville and music hall performer in the world. Dressed in the traditional Scottish apparel of kilt and tam-o'-shanter, Lauder was a gentle humorist and singer of original songs. Like George M. Cohan, he wrote simple and catchy tunes and lyrics; audiences would invariably sing along after hearing a chorus just once. Lauder had already made his reputation in European music halls by the time he made his American debut in 1907, after which he became the first major client of ruthless talent agent William Morris, earning $5,000 a week. Lauder opened a six-day engagement at Chicago's Garrick Theatre on Monday, February 2, 1914, during his seventh world tour.

Between shows at the Garrick, Lauder would go to Selig's Chicago studio to be filmed singing his songs and telling his stories—in talking pictures. In 1912, Isodor Kitsee applied for a patent on a pneumatically controlled "synchronous phonograph and kinetograph" he'd invented with fellow Philadelphian Alvah Rittenhouse. Kitsee persuaded theater owner John Cort to raise money for the construction of their talking picture equipment. A consortium of five venture capitalists from Butte, Montana, agreed to invest $40,000 in the project and Cort enticed William Morris to commit Harry Lauder to star in a series of films in return for a half-interest in what would become Harry Lauder's Films Company. The Selig Polyscope Company was then hired to produce talking pictures of Lauder using Kitsee's and Rittenhouse's equipment.
On Sunday February 8, a day after Lauder’s Chicago vaudeville engagement ended, Selig screened some of the finished films for him, and Lauder was “elated” with the results. The Scottish superstar inscribed a photograph “To Mr. Selig, ‘The Studio King’” and on the back wrote, “Please let me say how grateful I am to you because I know the result of my pictures depended on a good studio. Yours cannot be exceeded.” Dr. William Leonard Renick, representing the Butte investors, was so pleased with the results that he instructed his hunting guide to capture two grizzly bear cubs as a gift for Selig’s Zoo.  

Seventeen films featuring Harry Lauder’s most popular songs were made, including “Roamin’ in the Gloamin’,” “I Love a Lassie,” and “She’s Ma Daisy.” In addition, a three-hundred-foot “filmlet” was improvised at the studio starring Lauder and William Selig himself. The film opens with Selig exiting a bank with a bag of money. Lauder accosts him and they agree to flip a coin for the sack. The Scotsman wins; Selig removes wad of cash from his pocket and they toss again. After Lauder wins once more, Selig punches him in the stomach. As the two men grapple, the police arrive and arrest them while bystander William Morris looks on. The unreleased “filmlet,” one of the few appearances Selig is known to have made on film, turned out to be more ominous than comedic.

A twenty-minute set of Harry Lauder Singing and Talking Pictures debuted as part of the vaudeville program at the Savoy Theatre in San Francisco on March 22, 1914. Its perfect synchronization of picture and sound was declared far superior to all competing devices, including Edison’s sound-on-disk Kinetophone system, which had played in fifty Keith-Albee vaudeville houses for over a year. By the beginning of May, a similar set of Lauder films was playing New York’s Palace Theatre, the pinnacle of big-time American vaudeville. Because of a long-standing feud between William Morris and Palace owners B. F. Keith and E. F. Albee, Harry Lauder never played that legendary theater in the flesh. However, that didn’t prevent Keith-Albee from booking the films at what Variety reported as one-fifth of what Morris charged for Lauder’s live appearances. In what was applauded as “fine business acumen,” the Palace advertised Lauder’s name on a poster outside the theater in giant four-foot letters, with “Singing-Talking Pictures” beneath in one-inch type. Of the songs included in the Palace turn, “A Wee Deoch an’ Doris” was the most successful because it was the only one of the four to be photographed in close-up, capturing much of the Scotsman’s likable personality. While noting that the films were inferior to seeing a performance of Harry Lauder in person, Variety publisher Sime Silverman admitted that “for those who like Lauder and for those who haven’t seen him, the Lauder Talker is a big act for vaudeville.”

As
William Selig (standing between the two policemen), with William Morris (second from right) and Scottish superstar Harry Lauder (at right). Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

a result of the success of the Palace engagement, two or three extra prints of the most popular songs were struck and shown in vaudeville theaters on the Orpheum circuit for the next year and a half.66

Despite the lucrative success of Singing and Talking Pictures, which netted William Morris at least $1,500 per week, William Selig was owed a balance of more than $1,500 for the manufacture of the extra prints and other services rendered.67 Morris kept the profits while the Montana investors were saddled with the responsibility of paying expenses, presumably including advertising fees and projectionists’ salaries, as well as the costs of fighting a bogus lawsuit that claimed patent infringement. Frustrated with their lack
ACTUALITIES, EXPEDITIONS, AND NEWSREELS

of profit participation, the Montana group bought a half-interest in Morris' Harry Lauder's Films Company at the end of October 1915; then, acting on behalf of his partners, Dr. Renick offered William Selig an opportunity to join them in a new company that would produce additional films of Harry Lauder, who was contractually obligated to participate through 1916. (In another ominous aside, Renick informed Selig that the hunting guide charged with procuring the grizzly cubs had days earlier accidentally killed himself.68) Recognizing the potential of applying the proven sound-and-film system to features and thus transforming the motion picture industry, Selig accepted the offer in return for a fifty-percent interest in the company, ownership of the synchronizing equipment, and the cooperation of inventors Kitsee and Rittenhouse.69

On April 12, 1916, William Selig acquired the patents for the camera and the "synchronizing picture exhibiting and sound record" from the Cort-Kitsee Company.70 A week later Selig received thirty-four Harry Lauder prints from William Morris, along with the synchronizing machines, which appeared to have been deliberately sabotaged.71 It has been suggested that Morris' malevolent behavior was motivated by an unwillingness to share Harry Lauder's profitability with others.72 He may also have recognized the danger of overexposing his most profitable client and acclimating exhibitors and audiences to Lauder at discount rates. Regardless, Colonel Selig had no choice but to send one of his engineers to Philadelphia in the hope of constructing a new synchronizing device with assistance from the inventors; unfortunately Rittenhouse was of little help in deciphering the incomplete blueprints, as was Kitsee, due to deteriorating eyesight.73 Selig was further constricted by the war economy, which impeded the acquisition of materiel and aid from the electrical industry.74 Needless to say, he was furious at Morris, who had the nerve to promote potential stars for Selig features while failing to pay long-standing debts.75

Although Selig contractually lost the services of Harry Lauder at the beginning of 1917, he remained convinced that the device he co-owned for "the synchronism of the human voice and picture" was the finest invented and would eventually prevail throughout the motion picture industry.76 Unfortunately, by the time he was able to reconstruct the apparatus in 1920, his exhibitors no longer had any interest in talking pictures.77 Years later Selig and the Butte investors asserted that the synchronization process used for The Jazz Singer (1927) infringed on their patents, although there is no evidence to suggest that legal remedies were pursued or that any private settlement with Warner Brothers was reached.78

In 1931, during the Great Depression, William Morris contacted Colonel Selig about the possibility of re-releasing Harry Lauder Singing and Talking
It took Selig over six months and virtually every penny he had to get the films and rebuilt equipment in working order. He even found "parties ready to do business"; but Morris abruptly reverted to form by claiming that Selig had no legal right to the Lauder films or machinery. Instead of earning a desperately needed income, William Selig suddenly found himself in the position of defending his right to a share in any potential deal for the Lauder films against a relentless assault of bogus objections. This continued into 1932, during which time Selig was forced to pawn furniture and his wife's jewelry just to make ends meet. The entire episode seems to have finally come to an end with the death of William Morris in 1932.
CHAPTER 8

The Development of the Feature Film

During the first fifteen years of commercial American cinema, most films were no more than fifteen minutes in length—a single, thousand-foot reel. This was partly because projectors could accommodate only one reel at a time. In addition, a full reel’s approximately fifteen-minute running length mimicked the duration of the average small-time vaudeville act. Small-time vaudeville theaters were one of the primary sites exhibiting films during the period, along with storefront nickelodeons, which attracted the same working-class and immigrant clientele that were patronizing variety entertainment. In addition, many individual films during this period ranged from fifty to five hundred feet in length. A variety of subjects would thus be spliced together to fill an entire “split” reel. During the first ten years of commercial cinema there were two notable exceptions to the rule: multi-reel boxing matches and religious subjects, which were frequently advertised as “feature” attractions, a term used in vaudeville to describe an exceptional offering.

William Selig aspired to increase his audience by attracting middle-class patrons; he believed the best way to accomplish this was by presenting longer narratives with more complex plotting and characters. Unfortunately, he has never received credit for his role in developing the feature film as that term has come to be known by generations of moviegoers. This is because the vast majority of histories that address the first two decades of American filmmaking vilify in toto the members of the Motion Picture Patents Company, pejoratively termed the “Trust,” as being unimaginative technicians whose avarice or ignorance made them hostile toward or unable to comprehend the development of longer feature films as a means of exploiting the artistic and commercial potential of the new medium.
Some of the more prominent sources of misinformation through the years include Terry Ramsaye's early history of the industry: "The established camps of the orthodox motion picture producers . . . were unconditionally opposed to the idea. These long pictures promised to cost money. They cost something even more serious—creative thought." Neal Gabler's *An Empire of Their Own* claims that resistance to "feature pictures" was typical of "the intransigent, bull-headed Trust." Gabler approvingly cites Adolph Zukor's self-serving memoir: "What they were making belonged entirely to technicians," Zukor said sometime later in a concise analysis of what distinguished the older movie gentiles from the Jews." And Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell's latest textbook history perpetuates the notion that the MPPC constituents were not interested in producing films greater than one reel in length because "each reel rented for the same price, whatever the film was, [thus] producers viewed films as standard products, like sausages." Such accounts credit the second generation of filmmakers with innovations that were actually made by the first-generation pioneers. It's true that the bankers who took control of Biograph kept D. W. Griffith from producing longer narratives, but this was certainly not the case with William Selig or fellow MPPC member Vitagraph.

Selig's first thousand-foot, one-reel feature was *The Female Highwayman*, a contemporary crime drama released in 1906. Vitagraph and Pathé have been credited with producing a two-reel film as early as 1909. However, it appears that William Selig may have produced the first two-thousand-foot fictional feature made in America, *Damon and Pythias*, which was released on June 22, 1908. Similar to other theatrical adaptations of the time, *Damon* was staged in front of painted backdrops, tableaux style. The promotional material Selig prepared for the film leaves no doubt that the subject matter and unprecedented running length were deliberately selected to attract "a class of people who have not visited [a nickelodeon] before. Understand this is something so different, something that is instructive as well as beautiful. It appeals to people of every social life."

While spectator response to *Damon* is unknown, feedback from distributors and exhibitors refutes long-held assumptions about the source of resistance to longer films. Several distributors complained that had they known the film was so long, they never would have ordered *Damon* in the first place. The exchange men claimed that nickelodeon operators "do not want films at this length," believing that longer films would result in a slower turnover of audience and thus lower their profits. In addition, they argued that their patrons were interested in watching a variety of short subjects, not lengthy, more complex narratives. Eileen Bowser has noted that many exhibitors were of
the opinion that "an unsuccessful short film in the program could be offset by a good one, but if the feature was poor, the show could not be saved." A protest organized by the newly formed Film Service Association of New York, which included several of the men who would later be credited with pioneering longer features, informed Selig that they would not honor their contracts with him and were returning the film. At least one nickelodeon operator took it upon himself to slash Damon and Pythias down to one reel. Faced with exchanges and exhibitors who refused to purchase such productions, Selig did not release another complete fictional film in excess of one thousand feet for three years.

The institutional resistance to multi-reel films resulted in compromises that adversely affected Selig's narratives. In 1908, Wizard of Oz author L. Frank Baum hired Selig to produce twenty-three short films depicting scenes from two of his Oz books and one other novel to accompany Baum's lecture tour, which was entitled "Fairylogue and Radio-Plays." Baum incurred enormous debt in financing his multimedia presentation, owing William Selig $3,000. He paid off a portion of it by giving Selig the motion picture rights to three of his books: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, The Marvelous Land of Oz, and John Dough and the Cherub. Otis Turner wrote and directed movies from these stories back-to-back at Selig's Chicago studio late in 1909.

In adapting the Oz books for motion pictures, Selig was faced with three options: condense them into a single fifteen-minute, one-reel production that would please the exhibitors but disappoint and confuse the audience; create a multi-reel feature and risk the very real possibility of not being able to sell it; or produce three distinct films based on components from each of the books and release them individually. Selig chose the third option, though it was not a very successful compromise. For one thing, elements from all three books were incorporated into each of the self-contained films, resulting in confusing narratives for those both familiar with and new to the material. Wonderful Wizard was actually an amalgamation of the novel, the long-running 1902 stage musical which had been adapted by Baum, and some original interpolations such as the use of camels in a procession scene. Like the iconic 1939 MGM version, Selig's film features painted backdrops; however, Dorothy encounters the scarecrow in Kansas, and they're transported to Oz along with some barnyard animals clinging to a spinning haystack caught up in a tornado, which was a cinematic departure from both the novel and the stage production.

Selig's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz received a rave review from the New York Dramatic Mirror: "The reputation of [Selig] for producing striking and unusual films is too well established to require further description. It is an
excellent film, well acted and clearly photographed." Selig's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was believed lost for many years until a copy surfaced in 1983; it has since been released on DVD by the National Film Preservation Foundation in the *More Treasures from American Film Archives* collection. To date it is the most commercially available Selig film for contemporary audiences.

Several months after the release of the *Oz* films, William Selig decided to attempt another long feature, *The Two Orphans*. Production began at the Chicago studio in the spring of 1911, shortly after director Otis Turner and stars Kathlyn Williams, Winnifred Greenwood, and Charles Clary returned from filming in Florida. The finished film was three reels long, but General Film, the MPPC's distribution arm, would not release it that way. General was set up solely to distribute one-reel films to its exhibitors—who continued to insist on nothing longer. Vitagraph had attempted to release a three-reel version of *A Tale of Two Cities* earlier in the year, but nickelodeon operators would only exhibit it in installments, a reel a day. Selig was forced to follow suit, releasing *The Two Orphans* one reel at a time on September 25, 26, and 28. It should be noted, however, that the complete three-reel film was released in England, where despite the initial trepidation of exhibitors, it proved to be a "great success."

After the domestic debacle with *The Two Orphans*, William Selig sought popular narratives that would be harder for exhibitors to reject or segment. No doubt emboldened by the success of such imported multi-reel Italian films as *The Fall of Troy* (1910) and *The Crusaders; or, Jerusalem Delivered* (1911), which were distributed by a competitor of General Film, Selig embarked on the production of a feature that he hoped would prove too appealing for exhibitors to resist. The classic children's fairy tale *Cinderella* had been filmed at least twice before; a Georges Méliès production played Chicago in 1900, and New York–based independent Thanhouser released a cut-rate version in 1911. Selig knew that in order to break the prohibition on longer films, he would have to produce a lavish, spectacular version of the story. Thus, as he'd already done with Hobart Bosworth and others, Colonel Selig hired an established theatrical star "of the first magnitude" who would legitimize and bring a large following to the film. Petite Mabel Taliaferro, who'd been a star since the age of fourteen, was approached about playing Cinderella but turned down the offer, harboring a disdain for motion pictures typical of theatrical celebrities of the era. She changed her mind after touring Selig's Chicago studio and being offered more money.

Production of *Cinderella*, which was written by Henry K. Webster and directed by Colin Campbell, began during the second week of September 1911.
Moving Picture World critic James McQuade was given an advance preview of the film, due to be released on January 1, 1912. McQuade, in turn, contacted the manager of the Lyric Theatre in Minneapolis, S. L. “Roxy” Rothapfel, about acquiring the film. Rothapfel was beginning to acquire a reputation for creating tasteful and opulent stage shows in support of the films that played his theater. Selig attended Rothapfel's presentation of Cinderella, “an epoch in Motion Picturedom,” with all three reels of the film run together as a whole, accompanied by a twenty-piece orchestra. General Film released Cinderella one reel at a time, but Selig urged exhibitors to run all three reels together, as Rothapfel had, and not to speed up the projection, as many were wont to do in order to squeeze in extra shows.

According to promotional material, Cinderella cost $21,310 to make, much of the expense consisting of Mabel Taliaferro's significant salary and the opulent costumes and settings. Because original material was added to the slight fairy tale in order to expand the narrative to three reels, Selig hired Clarence E. Sinn of Moving Picture World to write a spoken lecture to accompany the film, which could be utilized at the discretion of individual exhibitors. At the end of each reel, the lecturer was instructed to announce that the film would resume momentarily, presumably because most theaters were equipped with only one projector and needed time to change reels.

The New York Telegraph was effusive in its praise of Cinderella:

In this production of “Cinderella” by the Selig Polyscope Company, in which Miss Taliaferro plays the stellar role, another forward stride has been made in American motion photography . . . The presentation as a whole is remarkable both for its massiveness, its scenic and costume display, and for the excellence of its cast, from the star to the humblest supernumerary. It attains all that has been claimed for it and should prove a delight to millions of spectators for years to come.

Cinderella was an international success. Selig withheld the British release of Cinderella until late in the year in order to exploit it as a “high-tech” alternative to traditional Christmas pantomime shows. An early endorsement by one of the leading British periodicals, The Cinema, was no doubt helpful to Selig's British representative in selling the film. “It is a Selig film, and that in itself is sufficient to recommend it . . . I have never been asked to come and view a mediocre film at Selig's showroom, for Mr. Montagu's a man who recognizes that it is no use trying to boost a film that is not super-excellent.” Cinderella proved so popular that Colonel Selig re-released a hand-colored version a year
COL. WILLIAM N. SELIG

and a half later, which according to Rothapfel was even more successful than
the original release.\textsuperscript{30} By then, Selig had worn down institutional resistance
to multi-reel features with a production that dwarfed Cinderella and virtually
every other American film to date.

In the fall of 1911, Selig increased the company’s output to four one-reel re-
leases each week, which he was contractually obligated to supply to scores of
exhibitors via standing orders through General Film.\textsuperscript{31} At the time, the New
York Dramatic Mirror commented that such steady production and distribu-
tion arrangements tended to dissuade filmmakers from producing bigger
features.\textsuperscript{32} This was not the case for Selig and Vitagraph, who continued to
push the boundaries of narrative length and content, inspired by the success
that multi-reel Italian features were enjoying around the world.\textsuperscript{33} Billboard
noted that such long feature films would “some day form another branch of
the world’s healthiest amusement youngster—the moving picture,” with
component reels “issued at frequent intervals.”\textsuperscript{34} Moving Picture World more
presciently predicted that multi-reel features were necessary for narratives of
quality and would become “the rule rather than the exception,” arguing that
“to show one [reel] on Monday and the other on Tuesday is ridiculous.”\textsuperscript{35}

While Selig was engaged in expanding the possibilities of cinematic nar-
rative, the worldwide industry was attempting to surmount other difficul-
ties, some of which were of their own making. Early in the twentieth century,
French filmmakers had established a reputation for exploiting female nudity,
while Italian productions were notorious for their violent content.\textsuperscript{36} One of
the primary objectives of the Motion Picture Patents Company was to curb
excessive sex and violence in American productions by establishing a standard
of self-censorship, thus staving off government and other organized interfer-
ence in film content. It was also hoped that family-friendly films would attract
a larger middle-class audience and distinguish American from European film-
making.\textsuperscript{37} Criticism of sex and violence in the movies was not limited to Amer-
icans. The New York World reported in July 1909 that Italian “police records
of late have shown that much of the violence committed by criminals [can]
be traced to the influence of the realistic picture show horrors.” This led Pope
Pius X to issue an order forbidding the clergy from attending motion pictures.
Priests, in turn, extended the prohibition to the Catholic laity.\textsuperscript{38} During Selig’s
tour of Europe in the fall of 1909, he observed that the recent Catholic ban on
movies was having a crippling effect on the Italian film industry.\textsuperscript{39}

Anxious to expand his audience, Selig resolved to make an “important” film
about an American subject that would have universal appeal, one calculated
to overturn the prohibition on movies that affected hundreds of millions of
potential Catholic ticket buyers. Upon returning to Chicago, Selig became aware of three ships languishing in the mud of Lake Michigan. They were full-scale replicas of the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria that had been built by the Spanish government in commemoration of the four hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus' discovery of the New World. The ships had followed Columbus' original route to San Salvador and eventually sailed into Chicago Harbor for the 1893 Columbian Exposition as gifts to the United States. Selig was thus inspired to make a historical epic about Columbus's monumental feat.

Selig had to post a bond of $20,000 to lease the replicas from the South Park Commission, and spent several thousand dollars caulking, refitting new sails, and repainting the ships to make them seaworthy. In October 1910, Selig engaged veteran Chicago Inter-Ocean theatrical critic and author-playwright C. E. Nixon to research and craft a historically accurate scenario, for which he was paid $25. Production designer Gabe Pollock acquired coconut palms, date trees, ferns, and other tropical plants from local greenhouses to transform a sandy shore of Lake Michigan near Gary, Indiana, into San Salvador. As many as 350 extras were engaged for the production, all of whom, with a few notable exceptions, were costumed in lavish period clothing. As a means of helping to authenticate his production, Selig obtained Columbus' original log book, on loan from the Spanish consulate, as a prop for the film. All told, The Coming of Columbus was in preproduction for nearly two years and in production for over a month and a half during the late summer of 1911, purportedly costing Selig over $50,000.

After the production wrapped and the film had been edited, S. L. Rothapfel commissioned a musical score to accompany his friend's feature. Selig inurred the additional expense of having at least one print of Columbus hand-colored for prestige screenings. The first of these was presented on Columbus Day, 1911, under the auspices of the Knights of Columbus, who had assisted in researching the production and restoring the ships. The program included a live pageant, a solemn high mass, and speeches—all indications of the importance with which the film, "historically exact in every detail," was regarded. According to program notes, which were no doubt prepared by Selig's publicity department, The Coming of Columbus "may be regarded as a historical monument which will enlighten the world for centuries to come. Mr. Selig gives it to the world and to posterity without hope of pecuniary remuneration." Col. Selig's behind-the-scenes actions suggested otherwise.

Less than a month later, The Coming of Columbus was screened for Cardinal Gibbons, the leader of the Catholic Church in America, who deemed
Col. William N. Selig

Columbus "excellent." This emboldened Selig to send the color print to his friend Father Joseph Tonello, who was visiting the Vatican on business. Despite the Pope's prohibition on movies, Fr. Tonello was able to arrange a screening at the Sala Pia in the Vatican for a select group of cardinals, prelates, and other dignitaries, including the Pope's private secretary. The crowd cheered Selig's film, and the following day Fr. Tonello presented the film to Pope Pius X during a private audience at the pontiff's apartment. Having learned of the earlier screening from several of those present, Pope Pius gave Fr. Tonello a commemorative silver medal and bas relief to present to Selig. The Pope told Tonello, "You will please extend my thanks and congratulations to Mr. Selig and my wishes for the greatest success on this Coming of Columbus. I wish to encourage him to make other films of such historic and moral value." According to Tonello, the Pope said of motion pictures, "It is my great desire that this great invention of our day should become a school of truth, of high education, of morality, of social and domestic virtues, of real benefit to humanity and religion." The next day Tonello wrote Selig that preparations were being made for Pope Pius to secretly watch The Coming of Columbus, the first film he would ever see. The Pope's representative commanded Tonello and Selig to secrecy about the screening, forbidding them from publicizing the event in any newspaper, Italian or otherwise.46

William Selig couldn't have planned the next turn of events any better. Italian newspapers disregarded the gag order and broke the story.47 Within days of the Vatican screening, Selig sold the exclusive rights for Christopher Columbus—as the film was known outside the United States—in the United Kingdom to an English broker for an undisclosed amount, allegedly the highest ever paid for a film.48 Columbus broke box office records and elevated the regard for motion pictures in such disparate British towns as Torquay, High Shields, Chesterfield, and Llanelly, drawing customers who had never seen a movie.49 At the Picturedome in St. Helens, each screening was supplemented with twenty-five choristers and the Boy Scout band.50 Selig had even greater success with Columbus in Austria. That country's minister of education recommended that "all schools ... attend the theaters where this is being shown."51

Aside from a few special advance screenings, The Coming of Columbus was the only Selig production to be commercially released in Europe before America, in part because of the film's length: Columbus was three reels long. However, Selig believed an important film like this required more time to communicate a coherent, dramatically effective story. Equipped with a Vatican endorsement and success throughout Europe, Selig prevailed on General Film to inaugurate a "Special Feature Service" to distribute The Coming of Columbus
to theaters for longer runs at higher prices. Eileen Bowser has suggested that this was a significant factor in the demise of the storefront nickelodeon, whose limited seating and nickel admission price made Special Feature Service films cost-prohibitive.52

*The Coming of Columbus* was released in America on May 6, 1912, more than two months before Adolph Zukor imported *Queen Elizabeth* (1912) from France, which many motion picture histories have erroneously cited as the first multi-reel historical subject of importance to be exhibited in the United States.53 It might be more accurate to posit that Zukor was inspired to import *Elizabeth* because of the success of *Columbus*. *Motography* declared the Selig film a “masterpiece which has never been surpassed, either as an intense, absorbing drama, or as an immortal record of an epoch in world history.”54 *Moving Picture World* called *Columbus* “the greatest achievement yet wrought by cinematography . . . destined to win millions of new patrons for the moving picture.”55

Selig promoted *Columbus* in ways that accentuated the importance and uniqueness of the production. The complete review by the London *Bioscope*, which called *Columbus* “the greatest historical subject which has ever yet been produced,” was provided to US exhibitors in what may have been the first time foreign reviews were utilized to promote an American film in the United States.56 Full-page feature stories illustrated with production stills appeared in newspapers and magazines, including scores of Catholic periodicals, throughout the country.57 Almost every article highlighted two aspects of the production: its endorsement by the Pope and its historical accuracy.

Father Tonello wrote a two-page article for *Motography* in which he recounted his experiences showing *Columbus* at the Vatican.58 Photographs of the medal and bas relief presented by the Pope to Selig were included in the article, as if to dispel any doubt about the legitimacy of the papal endorsement. Another *Motography* article declared that the endorsement of the film by the Knights of Columbus, which “is concerned with seeing that the memory of the great explorer is properly honored . . . is a guarantee . . . of authenticity.” Specific scenes were cited as examples of the film’s accuracy, in addition to the log book, ships, costumes, replicas of period side arms, ancient tools, and the windlasses visible aboard the *Santa Maria*.59 The size of the cast, years of preproduction, and especially the cost of *Columbus* were also touted as authenticating factors.60 Selig’s newspaper ads boasted that *Columbus* was “the one picture that is universally endorsed by educators, press, pulpit and public. The one story in history that is known to every civilized human being.”61 Another of Selig’s promotional innovations was sending publicist Harry Cohen to all
branch offices of General Film by airplane to create a nationwide buzz about *Columbus* over a twenty-day period.\(^{62}\)

Between the viewing of the film and the accompanying ballyhoo, spectators felt as if they were witnessing actual history as it was being made. "The Columbus of the pictures is alive. It is as if the camera had reached back into the past by some occult power and visualized scenes forever departed."\(^{63}\) Compared with other films, "it may not . . . be more successful from a dramatic point of view, but, as an educational subject, a chapter of 'living history' vivid, accurate and detailed in every possible particular, we do not think that it has yet had its equal."\(^{64}\) As he had done with the Western and jungle-adventure genres, Selig established a standard of verisimilitude with *The Coming of Columbus* that would affect all subsequent historical epics. *Columbus* became everything he'd gambled it would be.

As for the film itself, it opens with Columbus and his son kneeling in prayer at a grave on a rocky hillside. At a monastery, Columbus interests prominent clergy in his theories. The scene shifts to a tent on a battlefield, where Columbus meets with Queen Isabella. They are interrupted with news of the surrender of the Moors. From there Columbus's sanity is questioned by other officials of the Church. With King Ferdinand, a cardinal, and members of the royal court in attendance, Queen Isabella sells her jewels. The setting shifts to a priest leading Columbus and his crew in prayer aboard the *Santa Maria*. As the ship languishes in the water, Columbus quells a mutiny by his crew. The winds return and the ship races through the water with Columbus at the wheel. After the priest leads the crew in prayer, several small boats row from the three ships toward a tropical shore. Columbus and his party are met on shore by several dark-skinned natives. The scene then shifts back to the royal castle, where trumpeters herald the return of Columbus, who leads a long procession of people and products of the New World, to be received by Ferdinand and Isabella. While feted at a banquet, Columbus is insulted by one of the guests and places an egg on end to prove a point. Several years later, after returning to the New World, an aged Columbus is confined to a thatched home by Spanish soldiers. He is ordered to be returned to Spain and is rowed away in irons as Indians bid him farewell. The story ends with Columbus confined in a ship's brig, utterly disheartened.

As was often the case in the development of cinematic narrative during the early silent era, the story is sometimes difficult to follow. It seems apparent that the movie was crafted in a way that relied on the audience having prior knowledge of the major events in the life of Christopher Columbus, not unlike the way more recent films, such as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and *Flags of Our
Fathers (2006), rely on spectator familiarity with historical aspects of D-day and the Battle of Iwo Jima, respectively, to overcome narrative deficiencies. As Selig had done with Cinderella, he provided a synopsis of Columbus among the promotional materials that could be read aloud by a lecturer simultaneously with the film in order to provide clarification. For example, for those for whom the intertitle “Columbus’s famous reply to insult at banquet” had no meaning, the narrated synopsis would explain the incident with the egg:

A courtier, moved by a narrow feeling of personal jealousy, asks the Admiral whether or not in his opinion any man, given the same opportunities, could not have discovered the Indies, which he thought he had found. In answer to this, Columbus took an egg that was before him, and invited the courtier to make it stand on one of its ends. He could not do it. Then several others tried to do the trick, but failed. Then the Admiral struck the egg upon the table with such force as to flatten the end by fracture, and left it standing. ‘Anyone can do that,’ exclaimed the courtier. ‘After I have shown the way,’ replied Columbus.

Intertitles such as “Columbus granted interview with Queen on battlefield of Graad, interrupted by surrender of Moors,” were all that was needed to explain the corresponding scene.

Because a sandy beach on the Indiana side of Lake Michigan substitutes for San Salvador, the shots of Columbus coming ashore in the New World as the replica caravel remains anchored in the harbor could only be photographed in one direction, from land looking out over the water. It would have been nearly impossible to craft a realistic reverse-angle shot with the ships in the foreground and Columbus landing on the Indiana beach in the background.

Also evident in the film is a commingling of cinematic and theatrical elements. Christopher Columbus’s actual log book was procured for the production, along with authentic-looking medieval furniture, yet many of the interior backgrounds consist of painted canvas. In a scene that takes place inside Queen Isabella’s tent, a large number of animals and costumed extras engaged in plausible actions are visible through the opening flap. This juxtaposition of the cinematic and the theatrical is no doubt jarring to modern audiences, but the degree of cinematic verisimilitude demonstrated a huge leap forward for mise-en-scène rooted in stagecraft.

The majority of the 350-person cast was attired in lavish period wardrobe, in imitation of contemporaneous French and Italian costume dramas, while the New World natives were portrayed by white actors in very dark makeup.
more African than Native American in simulated pigmentation. Given the previously noted church and educational endorsements, it’s notable that some of the female Indians are bare-breasted. This, too, established a context for permissible nudity in historical drama depicting nonwhite people.

*Columbus* was produced during a transition in cinematic acting and directorial styles; the film reflects both theatrically broad gestures played directly at the camera/spectator and a more nuanced performance style and camera placement. Charles Clary’s performance as Columbus and Kathlyn Williams’ as Isabella are uneven mixtures of exaggerated movement and subtle gestures, perhaps a reflection of their backgrounds in theatrical melodrama. The actors portraying the *Santa Maria*’s crew and San Salvador Indians, presumably less experienced in the theater, offer less flamboyant characterizations in what
would become the preferred cinematic style. Director Otis Turner often shot his subjects at an angle rather than head-on to provide a more aesthetically pleasing illusion of depth. He utilized high-angle shots to encompass both foreground and background action, as in the scenes on the ship's deck and in the landing of Columbus. There's also a spectacular dolly-in on Columbus standing on deck scanning the horizon for land, an extremely rare camera movement for 1911.

Christopher Columbus himself is portrayed sympathetically, in striking contrast to the disrepute he suffered during and immediately following his final years, and which once again has become the fashion among much of contemporary society. The final intertitle of the film, "The Shame of San Salvador," along with the image of a despondent Columbus in chains, values historical accuracy over the often fictional "happy ending" that has plagued subsequent cinematic biographies.

The unique fact about Columbus, that it broke the Catholic prohibition on seeing movies, is especially ironic given the fact that, though raised by conservative Catholic parents, Selig had abandoned the faith, and the Pope's endorsement of the film was based on the response of an audience of Vatican cardinals and nuns before he himself had actually seen it. Yet while it was liberating Catholic spectatorship, because of its length and expense, which necessitated exhibition in larger venues, Columbus was a precipitating factor in the demise of the nickelodeon era. The principal exhibitor in Chicago wrote Selig that Columbus was so successful that he had to add extra shows that didn't end until midnight; the film broke all records for his thousand-seat theater. He asked for more "specials" like Columbus that would draw a large assortment of spectators and improve perceptions of the new art form. Despite the technical and aesthetic changes to motion pictures that followed, The Coming of Columbus continued to be exhibited as late as 1930.

As a result of the success of Columbus, General Film arranged to distribute two- and three-reel films produced by MPPC members on a regular basis, such as Selig's subsequent three-reel feature Monte Cristo, released on October 14, 1912. Like The Two Orphans, Monte Cristo was an expansion of an earlier success; in this case Selig's 1907 foray into Los Angeles filmmaking, directed by Francis Boggs. Director Colin Campbell adapted the newer version, which was produced at the Edendale studio and various locations around Southern California. Surviving production stills from the $15,000 film indicate that interiors were constructed and locations chosen in keeping with Selig's insistence on realistic settings. Hobart Bosworth starred as Edmond Dantes and was supported by Tom Santschi, Eugenie Besserer, and Bessie Eyton.
Monte Cristo was previewed for exhibitors and the press prior to its American debut on October 14, 1912, and its international release in early January 1913. A British critic writing for The Cinema observed that

the setting of the piece is such that no theatrical entrepreneur can ever hope to accomplish anything approaching it by the aid of artificial properties. We have every scene enacted amidst natural surroundings... Nothing more realistic than the portrayal of the suffering of Dantes in his dungeon has ever been attempted on the moving picture or on any other stage.\(^2\)

Despite such critical acclaim and widespread commercial success, ranging from the north of England to Shanghai, Selig's remake of Monte Cristo was quickly to become the most troubled production of his long career.\(^3\)

Seated in the audience at the Delancey Street Theatre on New York's Lower East Side the night Selig's film debuted was Edwin S. Porter. Long known for having directed The Great Train Robbery, the most popular American film of the early silent era, Porter had never again come close to duplicating its financial success or cinematic bravura. Still, that film's legendary profits were enough for former furrier and nickelodeon operator Adolph Zukor to hire Porter as the director for the production company he formed in the latter half of 1912, known as Famous Players.\(^4\) Zukor and Porter selected The Count of Monte Cristo as their inaugural production, no doubt aware of the Selig production, which had been well covered in the trades. James O'Neill, who had played Edmond Dantes almost continuously in more than five thousand theatrical performances since 1883, was hired to re-create the role for Famous Players.\(^5\) An old armory on West 26th Street in New York City was "hastily converted" into a movie studio, and The Count of Monte Cristo was rushed into production.\(^6\) Porter's film was allegedly ready to be released when he attended the opening night screening of Selig's Monte Cristo.\(^7\)

In what was most likely a ploy to generate some publicity for their debut film, Famous Players initiated a lawsuit against Selig, arguing infringement of the copyright on the theatrical version of The Count of Monte Cristo, which was supposedly owned by James O'Neill. Instead of having General Film withdraw his film from circulation, William Selig fought the litigation, which in the New York State Supreme Court was designated James O'Neill v. General Film Company. O'Neill claimed that on June 15, 1884, he purchased the rights to the English-language theatrical version of Dumas' story, which had been written by Charles Fechter and Arthur LeClercq in 1870-1871. However, O'Neill had no receipt or other written record of the alleged transaction. O'Neill's assertion
was further compromised when he stated elsewhere in his deposition that the man from whom he purchased the play hadn’t acquired the rights until August 31, 1887. On behalf of Famous Players, O’Neill charged that Selig’s *Monte Cristo* was based on the theatrical play he owned, not the book written by Dumas. He also complained that it was exhibited “by persons . . . of a cheap order, in theaters and places of exhibitions charging not more than five to twenty-five cents admission” (failing to mention that these were the same rates that Zukor and virtually every other exhibitor in the country were charging).  

In his November 16, 1912, deposition, Edwin S. Porter, who referred to himself as “an electrical engineer by profession,” admitted that more than a month after the film opened, it was still playing in Manhattan. According to Porter, “One of the most striking similarities” between Selig’s *Monte Cristo* and the play occurred when Dantes escapes from prison, climbs upon a rock, and exclaims, “The world is mine!” Porter noted that in the Dumas book, Dantes climbs upon the rock and falls asleep, and that the phrase “The world is mine!” was written for the play to which O’Neill purportedly owned the rights.  

Testifying on behalf of William Selig in court were his story editor, John Pribyl, and *Monte Cristo* director Colin Campbell. Pribyl stated that the Selig film was essentially an adaptation of the Dumas book “with some variations that were suggested by the numerous dramatic versions . . . that have been produced on the stage since the publication of the novel in 1844.” In his deposition, Colin Campbell affirmed Pribyl’s statement and argued that his knowledge of the phrase “The world is mine!” came from “posters and prints I have seen publicly exhibited and circulated in connection with performances of the dramatic versions of *Monte Cristo*.” A copy of Campbell’s shooting script was provided to the court, along with a detailed comparison between it and the theatrical version allegedly owned by O’Neill.  

After nearly three years of protracted litigation and untold attorneys’ fees, the court finally rendered an opinion on October 15, 1915, ruling that O’Neill held “valid title to the play by adverse possession”; that “a person witnessing a performance of the photo play and familiar with the [O’Neill] version will readily recognize it”; and that both narratives were presented “in substantially the same order and sequence.” Selig/General Film was ordered to pay damages to O’Neill/Famous Players, withdraw the Selig version of *Monte Cristo* from exhibition, and destroy all prints. The decision against Selig meant that he could never reissue *Monte Cristo* and that it would be lost to future generations.  

At the time Famous Players initiated the litigation, they claimed that the unfair competition from Selig’s *Monte Cristo* was preventing them from releasing their own version. It is likely, however, that Zukor was aware that his *Monte
Cristo would not compare favorably with Selig's version. Eileen Bowser has noted that Porter's direction was "so old-fashioned in style as to permit James O'Neill... to look at the [motion picture] audience and gesture what he intends to do." Charles Musser concurs, adding that "O'Neill's acting style and the set were incompatible with popular conceptions of realism and had become old-fashioned, even in the theater. When finally released late in 1913, The Count of Monte Cristo received little attention, even in the trade press." Adolph Zukor's advertising gimmick at least yielded publicity for his growing empire.

Meanwhile, despite the commercial and critical success of Selig's Monte Cristo, the film ended up being Selig's biggest financial disaster because of the devastating legal fees and court-imposed damages. Zukor's legal shenanigans must've been especially galling to Selig since he had been one of only three MPPC members who had voted to approve Zukor's request for General Film to distribute Queen Elizabeth.

William Selig was not alone in producing longer, more narratively complex feature films during this period; several European filmmakers were engaged in developing a similar aesthetic. Italian productions imported by Selig's friend George Kleine enjoyed great financial success and strongly influenced American filmmakers. The eight-reel spectacle Quo Vadis? (1912) was hailed a masterpiece by the New York Dramatic Mirror after opening at the Astor Theater in New York, though it was exhibited in three acts separated by intermissions, following the custom of the "legitimate" plays that otherwise occupied that venue. In recognition of the narrative and visual sophistication of Quo Vadis?, Motography noted that "to shorten [Quo Vadis?] in any respect would be sacrilege... The long feature is a necessary and inevitable step of progress. It solves the problem of producing really important photoplays."

The proof that there was an audience for longer, entertaining feature films of quality was at the box office. After eighteen months of exhibition in the United States, The Last Days of Pompeii, Cleopatra, and Quo Vadis? had grossed the phenomenal sum of $1,183,428 for George Kleine. Canvassing a number of nickelodeon operators, Motography astutely observed, "The demand for features longer than the prevailing length of picture theater programs seems to have been created after the supply. There has been evident no great clamor for them on the part of the exhibitor... most of [whom] prefer strong one-reel dramas." D. W. Griffith was so inspired by the length and content of the Italian spectacles that he ignored the edicts of his Biograph bosses and created his first hour-long production, Judith of Bethulia (1914). William Selig responded to the Italian filmmakers by embarking on a production that would redefine American cinema in a fundamental manner that
endures into the twenty-first century: the two-hour-long feature film. With
this longer format, Selig aimed to expand his audience and profit margin while
at the same time raising the general perception of film as an art form on par
with literature and theater. Accordingly, he sought a literary property of re-
nown that would work as a longer motion picture. He was particularly inter-
ested in producing an American story from an American author. He entered
into simultaneous negotiations with two of the most critically acclaimed and
popular contemporary authors.

The first was Jack London. Shortly after actor Sydney Ayres made his film
debut with Selig's Edendale company in the spring of 1911, Ayres convinced
Jack London that he would be able to negotiate a “good contract” with the com-
pany for the rights to *The Sea Wolf* with Ayres playing the lead. Ayres pitched
the idea to Francis Boggs but was apparently turned down. Undaunted, Ayres
continued to offer London's stories to other companies. In April 1913 Ayres
and London contracted with a newly formed company to produce a series of
the author's stories, but the venture turned into a fiasco, due in part to Ayres'
ineptitude as a director and producer. Having lost faith in Ayres, London de-
cided to make a new deal directly with Selig. After months of negotiation,
the parties agreed to consummate the deal at the end of July 1913; but London
abruptly informed Selig that he had accepted “another proposition with local
Los Angeles backers... They are starting very shortly to produce.” Adding
insult to injury, the “Los Angeles backers” with whom London had made the
deal were led by Hobart Bosworth, whose plans had been laid for some time.

The second American author to whom Selig turned was Rex Beach, author
of the popular novel *The Spoilers*. In June 1913, Selig had reached an agreement
with Beach to turn *The Spoilers* into a motion picture. The decision to hire
Broadway star William Farnum to play the lead role appears to have bruised
Bosworth's considerable ego, motivating him to leave Selig and put together
a production company capitalized by two wealthy partners. Undoubtedly
aware of his employer's plans to develop an extended feature film, Bosworth
cunningly made London an offer he couldn't refuse, abandoned Selig, and
rushed *The Sea Wolf* into production. Bosworth would later claim that he had
originally been given the lead in *The Spoilers* but left the company with Selig's
blessing to make “the first long production... in the United States”; surviving
documentation, however, indicates that this was yet another of the vainglori-
ous actor's prevarications. Not that it really mattered, for it would be Selig's
production of *The Spoilers* that would transform motion pictures for good;
it was the first “feature film” produced in America in terms of contemporary
standards of length and content.
Originally published in 1906, *The Spoilers* quickly became a best seller. The *New York Times*, while admitting that “there’s nothing subtle about Mr. Beach,” nonetheless reviewed *The Spoilers* as “a good story, to put the enterprise in a nutshell.” The following year, Beach and a colleague adapted the novel for the stage. The theatrical version fared well with regional audiences but bombed on Broadway, at least in the opinion of the *Times* drama critic. The novel was built around big action sequences such as a daring escape from a steamship, the dynamiting of a gold mine, and a protracted fistfight that ends in a broken arm for one of the combatants. Since none of these could be convincingly re-created for the stage, Beach’s play was short on action and long on conversation, or as the *Times* put it, “Lots of shooting irons, but no powder or smoke.”

William Selig recognized that motion pictures were not only better suited than the “legitimate” theater for adapting such action-oriented melodrama, but also had the potential for improving on such novels. Given its lineage, *The Spoilers* satisfied Selig’s artistic aspiration to produce a film that could compare favorably with popular literature and theater. And, just as important, it came with built-in audiences familiar with the book and play whose proven interest helped justify the unprecedented financial investment such a production would incur. Selig acquired the rights to *The Spoilers*, paying an unspecified “record price” that included a percentage of the profits for Beach. The film would be promoted as “the most soul-stirring drama of American life... A sensational drama of red-blooded men and women!”

Selig’s film closely followed Beach’s story. While returning to Alaska from a vacation in the States, virile Glenister and old Dextry, co-owners of the Midas, the largest gold mine in Nome, save pretty Helen Chester from a gang of thugs. Helen is to deliver documents to a lawyer on behalf of her sickly uncle and his associate, political kingpin McNamara. Glenister forcefully attempts to make love to Helen, but she rebuffs him. In Nome, Helen innocently delivers the documents, which contain instructions to seize gold mines from their rightful claimants—a scheme concocted by the lawyer, her uncle (a crooked judge), McNamara, and their co-conspirators in Washington, DC. Glenister and Dextry learn of the conspiracy and are aided in regaining the Midas by dance hall hostess Cherry Malotte, who carries a torch for Glenister. When Helen learns of the scheme, she risks her life and virtue to foil it, while also falling in love with Glenister, infuriating the jealous McNamara. Along the way, Glenister dynamites the mine, preventing the conspirators from profiting by it, and engages in a sprawling fistfight with McNamara, which concludes with Glenister breaking the bigger man’s arm.
Selig chose to exploit the author's celebrity status by advertising the film as "The Spoilers, by Rex Beach," even within the opening title credit of the film. The story was anonymously adapted for the screen by staff writer Lanier Bartlett, who wisely followed the original novel, disregarding most of the theatrical version. Beach's involvement with the project consisted of elucidating a few of the weaker character motivations and plot contrivances of the story, as well as providing photographs of Nome mining operations taken at the turn of the century to help Selig authentically re-create the Alaskan setting.

Selig's top director, Colin Campbell, was chosen to helm The Spoilers. The cast consisted almost entirely of longtime members of the Selig stock company. The exception was William Farnum, one of the day's most popular Broadway actors, who played the title character in the original stage production of Ben Hur.

It took eight weeks to produce The Spoilers, from July through the first week of September 1913. Many of the interior scenes were beautifully photographed at Selig's Edendale studio by Alvin Wyckoff, whose "Rembrandt lighting" is mistakenly thought to have made its debut in films he later made with Cecil B. De Mille. An elaborate set of buildings depicting the major thoroughfare in turn-of-the-century Nome were constructed at the company's Mission Road zoo and backlot. The harbor at nearby San Pedro doubled for the Nome waterfront. The most impressive set built for the production, the Midas gold mine and its attendant buildings, was constructed on rugged property north of Los Angeles. This area would soon be flooded to create the new San Fernando reservoir, part of a 240-mile aqueduct supplying water to the city of Los Angeles. The total cost for the production of The Spoilers was $23,000.

William Selig arranged for the premiere of The Spoilers to coincide with the opening of the opulent Strand, the first motion picture palace built in New York City. Managed by Selig's friend S. L. Rothapfel, the Strand was situated on Broadway in the Times Square district, with a seating capacity of nearly thirty-five hundred. Not only were the form and content of American motion pictures in ascendance, so was the manner in which they were exhibited. In reviewing the new theater, Moving Picture World declared, "It does indeed mean something to the art and industry at large that a group of men of affairs have erected such a costly monument of their faith in the future of motion pictures... Here is a theater in which the film of quality will get its proper frame and housing[,] the ideal temple of the motion picture art."

The April 11, 1914, premiere of The Spoilers was noted for attracting an audience consisting of both a "Who's Who in Society [more] suggestive of a night at the opera than a motion picture entertainment," and "enthusiasts to
"THE SPOILERS"

Big Moving, Masterful and wholesome in its human interests thrilling in incident, absorbing in situation, powerful in progression from start to finish.

"The Spoilers" is a thrilling red-blooded story of strong men battling for supremacy, with all their power of mind and muscle — alert for every cast of chance.

The picture with the punch powerful!

This Picturesque rugged romance of Alaska has a love story with splendid imagination that grips and holds the sympathies. "The Spoilers" presents the most stubborn, strenuous and exciting fight ever pictured — the acme of realism.

See a whole town dynamited!
A volcanic earthquake extraordinary!
A wonderful drawing power!

The first two-hour-long feature film made in America. Courtesy of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

whom the motion picture is the only and favorite entertainment." The same critic noted that during the presentation of short films preceding The Spoilers, the vast majority of the audience behaved typically, commenting audibly on the story, actors, and direction. When The Spoilers started, however, "the running comment was hushed." There was ample reason for their unprecedented reaction.

From its opening images, The Spoilers announces itself as something different from anything that had come before. The cast credits are presented in a radically unique way. William Farnum, in costume, stands against a dark background inside a life-sized picture frame. Printed on the bottom of the frame is his character’s name, Roy Glenister, beneath which is Farnum’s own name. Farnum deliberately moves within the frame, smiling to either side of the camera, then gazing directly at the audience. By placing each of the principal cast
members within the kind of oversized frame associated with portraiture, Selig is presenting The Spoilers as a work of art. And something much more: a work of moving, living art; motion pictures.

The image of William Farnum dissolves into that of Bessie Eyton, who plays ingénue Helen Chester. This transition is jarring because the cinematic framing and picture frame remain consistent between the two shots, so that Eyton is positioned within the frame in the exact same place as Farnum; it's almost as if William Farnum turns into Bessie Eyton. The same effect occurs later on within the story itself to convey a moment when Glenister is thinking of Helen, an awkward attempt to portray the character's inner thoughts and explain the source of his brooding.

The gesturing of two of the cast members, Kathlyn Williams as Cherry Malotte and Wheeler Oakman as the Bronco Kid, is quite broad and obvious, embodying an unrealistic style associated with nineteenth-century theatrical melodrama. Roberta Pearson has written that such “histrionic” acting was common in early cinema. The style is “reflexive, consciously theatrical, and aware of the spectators.” The gestures employed “are heavily stressed, and the actors tend to extend their arms fully in making them.”10 Between the time The Spoilers was being produced and the time it was released, Kathlyn Williams had become a star of the highest magnitude, thanks to her role in the serial The Adventures of Kathlyn (1913-1914).11 Moving Picture World noted that at The Spoilers' New York premiere, fans burst into applause when Williams was introduced on the screen, the only actor accorded such a response.12 Ironically, Williams' pop-eyed playing directly to the camera/audience is a distraction throughout the film, contrasting sharply with the more subtle acting of most of the other performers.

The film's narrative is a fairly faithful adaptation of the novel, even going so far as to quote key dialogue verbatim in some intertitles. A prologue is preceded by the intertitle "Glenister breaks off with Cherry Malotte." This format, where the intertitle announces what is about to occur, was commonplace throughout much of silent cinema, though it often robbed the succeeding moments of suspense or surprise.13 In the case of an adaptation, it does have the effect of cueing those familiar with the original text to the scene about to take place, again emphasizing a reassuring fidelity to the source material.

The opening scene is framed as a single two-shot, mid-thigh to the top of the head. This is followed by a reverse-angle of the same shot, though it's extremely difficult to identify it as such on initial viewing, because the reverse is an extremely wide shot and the positioning of the characters doesn't quite match. This first cut suggests that continuity was not as precise in 1913 as it
would later become, although all but one of the remaining reverse-angles that occur in the film are composed and executed with far greater precision.

Selig, who pioneered the use of second-unit footage to establish genuine locations, resorts to an intertitle to announce another prologue setting, Washington, DC. In the scene, several well-dressed men, later identified as the antagonists, are seated around a table smoking cigars. A portrait of Lincoln hangs on the wall of the small room, a cynical touch given that these villainous men are the political conspirators, aka “spoilers,” of the story.

An early scene involves a minor character warning Glenister to be wary of McNamara when he arrives in Nome. This is a significant alteration of the novel, where that information was given to Glenister’s older partner, Dextry. It’s the first indication that Dextry’s role has been greatly diminished in order to focus on Glenister as the central figure of the story. On a practical level, this helped justify paying Farnum his large salary. Although stunt doubles had been employed in Selig films for at least four years, none were used in The Spoilers; Bessie Eyton dives off the side of a steamer and swims in the San Pedro harbor doubling for Nome, and there are numerous fight scenes involving Farnum, Frank Clark as Dextry, and Tom Santschi as McNamara.

The entry of Glenister, Helen, and Dextry onto the main street at Nome reveals an authentic re-creation of the town, even fooling the critic of the Montreal Star, who thought the scenes were photographed on location. The buildings appear to be weathered, three-dimensional structures, not the kind of freshly painted false fronts that would later dominate Hollywood backlots. The streets are appropriately muddy, reflecting the spring rainy season, which is an essential component of the story. And the town is populated by crowds of extras, all authentically costumed and, more importantly, moving realistically through the frame. The utter believability of the extras in simulating behavior appropriate to the given location and/or dramatic content is one of the hallmarks of director Colin Campbell, comparing favorably to D. W. Griffith’s acknowledged mastery in directing supernumeraries.

The pictorial compositions at the Midas mine set are particularly compelling. The introductory images are fairly tight three-shots of Glenister and his companions standing at the bottom of a hillside sluicing grid. A substantial amount of the scene unfolds in these tightly composed shots, until the moment Glenister learns that McNamara has legally taken control of his mine. As Glenister walks out of frame, the scene cuts to a wide-angle view of the entire mining operation, encompassing approximately five buildings along the ridge of a mountain, below which is an extensive network of wooden sluices and troughs where approximately fifty men are engaged in individual tasks.
Among the many components of film grammar that D. W. Griffith would showcase a year later in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) was the panoramic establishing shot that was presented at the beginning of a sequence. This standard has been adhered to ever since. And yet, the placement of the panoramic shot late in *The Spoilers'* introductory mine sequence is brilliantly conceived to coincide with the revelation of what Glenister has just lost.

A scene filling an entire chapter of Rex Beach's novel, reproduced in *The Spoilers'* most widely distributed poster, is condensed to a mere couple of minutes in the film. This is where rejected Cherry conspires with the Bronco Kid to cheat Glenister out of his money in a crooked faro game, only to reverse herself at the climax. As Eileen Bowser has indicated, the sequence "shows the conventions of scene dissection to be established in a way quite close to the future Hollywood style."115 The scene's sophisticated mix of wide shots, close-ups, and extreme close-ups to build tension during the card game is a precursor to the suspense sequences associated with Alfred Hitchcock.

The scenes inside the saloon reflect great attention to realistic detail. When compared to contemporary photographs of the era, the set offers a more authentic appearance of a turn-of-the-century saloon than virtually any film since. The main room is long and narrow, with curtained booths arranged in horseshoe formation on the upper level. At one end of the room is a raised stage where chorus girls and black-faced song-and-dance-men can be glimpsed entertaining the crowd, seated at nearby tables.

The dynamiting of the Midas mine is an extraordinary sequence. The buildings and sluices are blown up by Glenister to prevent McNamara and the other spoilers from retrieving any more gold from the mine. The destruction of the buildings is photographed with a telephoto lens a significant distance away. In one of only two pans in the entire film, the camera moves across a wide panorama from building to building as each explodes. It represents an amazing feat of precision choreography, synchronizing the movement of the camera with the enormous explosion of each building in sequence, which according to an eyewitness newspaper account was personally supervised by William Selig.116 The largest building, labeled "Midas-1" on its roof, is dynamited in a separate shot, though it occurs too abruptly for the viewer to fully process the image. Still, the initial explosions are as good as any pyrotechnics Hollywood has devised before or after, especially because they're real.

The sequence for which *The Spoilers* would be most remembered is the climactic fistfight between Glenister and McNamara. According to scores of contemporary reviews and newspaper accounts, nothing like it had ever been seen before. Years later Tom Santschi recalled that director Campbell instructed
him and Farnum to put everything they had into the fight because it would only be filmed once, using multiple cameras. Unfortunately, the camera angles weren't varied enough and the action was occasionally halted and resumed, resulting in several jarring jump-cuts throughout the long sequence. The result is a cinematic fight that today only Jean-Luc Godard could appreciate.

The Spoilers was critically acclaimed in newspapers across the country. The New York Clipper declared that "Selig's remarkable revelation of the new art form (motion pictures) ... [is] a remarkable volume of Americana ... in length and quality [it] outclasses any motion picture made in this country." Virtually every other review concurred: "the greatest motion picture ever made" (Dubuque Tel.-Herald), "the greatest production known in the history of film-dom" (Vincennes Commercial); "The Spoilers is without question the greatest motion picture production of all time" (Providence Evening Tribune). Many newspaper advertisements featured photo portraits of the eight principal cast members inside hand-drawn stars along the border, the progenitor for later campaigns featuring "all-star" casts.

Variety reported that the film grossed approximately $9,000 in its first week at the Strand, where the seats were priced from 10 to 25 cents. According to an advertisement that appeared in the Houston Chronicle, a total of 172,000 people saw The Spoilers during its two-week engagement at the Strand. It was estimated that fifty thousand people saw the film in its second week at the Portola Theater in San Francisco, where it had been booked by fledgling distributor Sol Lesser. Before the year was out, The Spoilers would return to the Portola for a second extended engagement; it also enjoyed three separate runs at Clune's Auditorium in Los Angeles. On Christmas day 1914, the San Francisco Chronicle sponsored a screening of the film for sixteen hundred inmates at Folsom Prison. On January 1, 1915, the Los Angeles Times reported that "the biggest returns from any individual pictures made here are said to be those from The Escape, made by Mr. Griffith, and The Spoilers, made by the Selig Company."

The Spoilers was an international phenomenon as well, playing Rangoon at the end of 1914, the People's Picture Palace and Vaudeville Theatre in Singapore in 1915, and the Apollo Theatre in Shanghai at the beginning of 1918. Selig's London representative rotated eleven copies of The Spoilers throughout the United Kingdom before World War I put a halt to its distribution. William Selig later said that had he gotten out of the business immediately after The Spoilers, he would have been an extremely wealthy man for the rest of his long life.
It's clear that Selig's production of *The Spoilers* surpassed both the novel and theatrical versions. Even Rex Beach was quoted as saying that he could not "but feel the great superiority of moving pictures over the written word." A Portland, Oregon, audience "applauded as sincerely as if the enactment was on a stage instead of a screen." The *San Francisco Chronicle* declared, "Steadily and surely the photoplay is taking its place as one of the greatest amusement institutions ever known . . . and this has been due in great degree to the excellence of the work turned out by such men as Selig." Moving Picture World praised the decision to present the complete film rather than installments, as had formerly been the custom, noting that it might be alright to set *The Spoilers* in book form down and come back to it later, but that it wouldn't work with the film version.

*The Spoilers* was and remains notable not just for its unprecedented running length of two-hours-plus; it contains images and ideas never before attempted in an American production. At its core, the narrative for *The Spoilers* is all about transition: how civilizing forces transform a lawless frontier community into a law-abiding society that protects and provides opportunities for its inhabitants in the pursuit of their dreams. In a sense, Selig's production helped civilize the motion picture audience, compelling viewers to appreciate feature films in large venues. No longer would audiences view short films in storefront nickelodeons; they would see epic features in opulent theaters built especially for the movies. *The Spoilers* attracted significant numbers of the middle class and transcended national borders to captivate a world audience with a vision of the American dream.

The quality that distinguished *The Spoilers* from virtually every other film that came before it was the realism of its contemporary, epic American story. Almost a century later, so much of the film still looks authentic, from the three-dimensional weathered sets, to the costuming, to the varied location filming, to the actual destruction of a mining operation. D. W. Griffith's controversial masterpiece *The Birth of a Nation* would emerge a year later, its success riding in large part on the transformation of the moviegoing audience that was effected by *The Spoilers*.

Writing in 1915, one of America's early cinema theorists, Vachel Lindsay, singled out *The Spoilers* as one of the most accomplished examples of the "Action Film," which he considered the most common genre of the mid-silent era. Interestingly, there are those who consider *The Spoilers* to be a Western, such as William K. Everson in his pioneering history of the genre; he classified it "among the early really successful Westerns." Not really a Western
because of its setting, *The Spoilers* might more appropriately be classified as a "Northern," as later films such as *North to Alaska* (1960) often are. Avoiding genre labels, Daniel Blum referred to it in 1953 simply as "a landmark."\(^{138}\)

In order to accommodate the longer features produced by Selig and others, movie projectors were redesigned to hold larger reels, and theaters were compelled to acquire a second projector so that the narrative would not be interrupted for reel changes. This also affected venues for exhibition. Because multi-reel features cost more to produce, theater owners were charged more to exhibit them. Nickelodeon operators accustomed to daily changes in their relatively inexpensive programs were unable to afford the more expensive features, and so the nickelodeon gave way to larger, more elegant movie palaces that could recoup their rental fees over a longer period of exhibition. *The Spoilers*’ success quickly led other producers, especially second-generation filmmakers, to at least partially imitate its nine-reel format. By mid-1914, D. W. Griffith was releasing six-reel films through Mutual; Universal created a Special Features Branch producing four- to six-reel features; and by the end of the year Paramount, the Warner brothers, and William Fox were releasing five-reel films.\(^{139}\)

Given the resounding success and influence of *The Spoilers*, one might assume that William Selig had no qualms about releasing it. Actually, the film was ready for exhibition by late September 1913 but was withheld for seven months, until April 1914. It appears that Selig was not sure that a large-enough audience existed to support American films of two hours’ length. *The Spoilers* was deliberately kept on the shelf while he implemented a different sort of innovation to prepare motion picture patrons for significantly longer multi-reel stories: the motion picture serial.

In late 1912, Edison’s Kinetoscope Company produced a motion picture version of a story being serialized in *Ladies’ World* magazine. Each installment of *What Happened to Mary* was released to theaters simultaneously with its appearance in the magazine. The twelve-part series of melodramatic films didn’t really constitute a serial, since each chapter was for the most part self-contained.\(^{140}\) Some have called *Fantomas*, a three-chapter crime story by Gaumont released in April 1913 in France, the first motion picture serial.\(^{141}\) Others believe that distinction more properly belongs to Selig’s *The Adventures of Kathlyn*, which premiered in December 1913.\(^{142}\)

Inspired by *Mary* and the publicity generated by its concurrent publication, William Selig conceived of producing his own multi-reel narrative with significant innovations: the story would be action-oriented in a dangerous jungle setting, and structured in serialized form with each chapter concluding at
the height of a suspenseful, often life-threatening situation. In early August 1913, Selig instructed Gilson Willets to “write a series of two-reel adventure stories of India atmosphere” featuring his most popular female star, Kathlyn Williams. Willets had made a sled journey across Russia, Finland, and Sweden; been the editor of *Current Literature* and *Romance Magazine*; covered the Spanish-American War for *Colliers*; traveled extensively through India; crossed Mexico on horseback for *Leslie’s Weekly*; and covered every state of the Union for *Railroad Man’s Magazine* before joining Selig’s writing staff in 1911. He was thus the perfect choice to write the first American adventure serial. Willets had his meals brought to his hotel room and he disconnected the phone so he could write the thirteen-installment scenario “in a very short time,” for which he was paid $100 per chapter. The scripts include numerous references to actuality footage taken in India by E. B. McDowell, which is both interpolated into the narrative and serves as the basis for character and costume design. The lone surviving reel of the serial also reveals a comprehensive utilization of the Selig zoo menagerie.

The story concerns Kathlyn Hare, daughter of animal trapper Colonel Hare, who once saved the king of Allaha from a leopard attack and was consequently named his successor. After Colonel Hare departs on a secret mission to Allaha, Kathlyn is told that her father has summoned her. She leaves her California home and arrives in Allaha, encountering Umballah, an influential and avaricious Hindu who announces that her father and the king are dead. Against her will, Kathlyn is crowned queen and informed she is to marry Umballah. Kathlyn delays the wedding ceremony and frees a falsely condemned prisoner and his enslaved wife; they in turn become her loyal friends. She is also befriended by Bruce, an American sportsman. Over the course of the twenty-seven-reel serial, Kathlyn and her friends are attacked by lions, tigers, leopards, wolves, baboons, and elephants in jungles, deserts, sporting arenas, and within the king’s palace. Willets’ narrative reflects prevailing racial attitudes of the era; for instance, in the second chapter Kathlyn bullies the natives “with the natural electric force with which the Anglo-Saxon always controls the brown man,” and during Chapter 6 Kathlyn and Bruce overcome desert brigands by giving them opium to smoke. Kathlyn eventually discovers her father is alive and rescues him. She arranges to abdicate the throne in return for recovering a hidden island treasure, but she and her party nearly perish from an erupting volcano. Umballah is finally captured and chained to a stone treadmill for the rest of his life. Kathlyn buys her freedom by distributing the treasure to the poor of Allaha, and returns with family and friends to her California home.
COL. WILLIAM N. SELIG

With the completion of Willets' scenario, Selig's next move was to arrange for it to be published simultaneously with each bi-weekly installment of the film. He didn't have to look far.

Almost two years earlier William Selig had arranged for the Chicago Tribune to publish "Photoplay[s] in Story Form." The Tribune would devote an entire page of its Sunday edition to reprinting the scenario of a film currently in release in short story form, accompanied by a dozen or more production stills of key scenes from the movie. Melodramatic short stories were a popular component of newspapers at the time, and the free publicity was invaluable in generating interest in Selig's productions. Thus it really isn't surprising that at the beginning of September 1913, the Selig Polyscope Company announced that it had reached an agreement with the Chicago Tribune's Sunday feature service to publish stories corresponding to its forthcoming thirteen-part serialized "wild animal series," The Adventures of Kathlyn. This meant that the Tribune would not be the only newspaper to participate; the scores of other Sunday papers that subscribed to the Tribune's syndication service would participate, too. At the time, the Tribune was in fierce competition with several other Chicago newspapers, including two Hearst-owned tabloids. Aware of the rapid growth in movie attendance, the Tribune was betting that once patrons viewed an installment of Kathlyn, they would want to read about it again in much the same way that baseball fans read about games they've attended.

In addition to the publicity he hoped to generate through the Tribune syndicate, Selig also believed that attaching the name of a popular novelist would help legitimize the serial for those who had rarely, if ever, patronized motion pictures. It was originally announced that Gilson Willets had adapted the scenario from a story by "one of the biggest authors in the country," whose name they were "not at liberty to divulge at the present." Two weeks later the company proclaimed that it "will adapt ... a series of stories under the caption The Adventures of Kathlyn ... to be written by popular author Harold McGrath (italics added). Company records confirm, however, that The Adventures of Kathlyn was written by Willets, not McGrath. Though it may have been the first, it certainly wouldn't be the last time that screenplay credit would be ascribed to someone who had little or nothing to do with actually writing a film.

The Adventures of Kathlyn was in production by November 1913. Co-starring with Kathlyn Williams were Selig stalwarts Tom Santschi as Bruce and Charles Clary as Umballah. The serial was directed by F. J. Grandon at the Selig Wild Animal Farm on Mission Road in East Los Angeles. Grandon was chosen because of the success of Thor: Lord of the Jungle. As was the case with virtually every major Selig production, Gabe Pollock was the art
Early in the production, it was decided that the first chapter would be three reels in length, with the subsequent twelve installments consisting of two reels each, released at two-week intervals. Fewer than half of the chapters were completed by the time the first episode, “The Unwelcome Throne,” was released on December 29, 1913.

A condition of the Tribune’s involvement was that Kathlyn be exhibited in at least ten “moving picture” theaters in Chicago. This was a tall order; the average film played in only three Chicago theaters at a time. The Tribune hedged its bets; full pages were devoted to publicizing the serial, which hailed it “the most elaborate and most successful series of motion pictures that human genius and human skill have ever yet been able to produce,” costing Selig the outrageous sum of $140,000 to produce. The novelty of Selig’s jungle-adventure serial and the Tribune’s advertising blitz obviously paid off; The Adventures of Kathlyn opened in eleven Chicago theaters. In the two weeks between the first and second installments, a dozen more theaters were added. During the first week in February, fifteen more theaters began showing Chapter 1, accounting for at least thirty-eight Chicago-area theaters showing the serial in all. Not only was such widespread exhibition unprecedented, with lines stretched a block long outside theaters, but for the first time—at least in Chicago—exhibitors were buying space in the Tribune to advertise that they were showing the films. Robert Grau noted in his history of the young medium, published later in 1914, that “the tremendous publicity through the weekly installments [of Kathlyn] in so many important newspapers marked a new era in the film industry.”

The serialization of Willets’ scenario, supplemented with production stills, appeared in at least forty-five newspapers across North America, including the New York Sun, the New Orleans Picayune, the St. Louis Dispatch, and the Calgary Herald. The Chicago Tribune reported that the Kathlyn serialization increased its Sunday circulation by fifty thousand, an unprecedented achievement. The publicity engendered by the articles not only motivated interest in the film but also ended the enmity between the fourth estate and motion pictures; newspapers quickly added movie columns and initiated other means of cross-promotion. In what may have been another first, Selig arranged for the Bobbs-Merrill Company to publish a novelization of Kathlyn that sold three hundred thousand copies.

Movie audiences couldn’t get enough of Kathlyn. Several unscrupulous exhibitors capitalized on its popularity by instructing their projectionists to run the films at twice the normal speed so they could squeeze in more showings and spectators. Moving Picture World presciently observed that Selig’s serial
represented "a new departure in production and a new method of treating a prolonged subject." In addition, Kathlyn would "establish a new standard for all who follow in the domain of perilous adventure and thrilling... narrative. One thrill succeeds another so rapidly that the spectator is out of breath, mentally, trying to keep abreast of them." The New York Clipper noted, "Never before in the history of motion pictures has a production created more interest than this adventure story and never has anything more magnificent been attempted... As for Kathlyn Williams, she reigns supreme." The Adventures of Kathlyn thus spawned one of first movie stars as well as a new genre, the adventure serial.

Not content with hyping his budding superstar in just the newspapers, William Selig and his director of publicity, Charles E. Nixon, who had replaced Stanley Twist earlier in 1913, conceived of other innovative gimmicks that quickly became a major component of commercial filmmaking. Tin Pan Alley music publisher Leo Feist was commissioned by Selig to compose and distribute sheet music of the "Kathlyn Waltz"; the tune was later recorded by various record companies and sold all over the world. A wide range of Kathlyn products appeared, including perfume, cigars, slippers, and face powder. Selig also arranged for Kathlyn Williams' picture to adorn hundreds of thousands of postcards, which were sold to theater operators in the Americas, Europe, and Asia; these in turn were purchased by their patrons. It was reported that in a single week, fifty thousand Kathlyn postcards were sold in one Chicago theater alone. Kathlyn Williams was chastised by longtime Selig lieutenant Thomas Persons for making her own deal with a rival postcard manufacturer. Clearly unaware of her enormous popularity, she wrote her employer a letter of apology and promised to buy back the errant postcards. In a reader's survey published in the June 1914 issue of Photoplay, Williams was voted the second-most-popular leading lady in motion pictures, behind Margarita Fischer and ahead of Mabel Normand and Mary Pickford.

More than six months after its debut, The Adventures of Kathlyn concluded with Chapter 13, "The Court of Death," released on June 15, 1914. The New York Daily Mirror declared that the quality and excitement of the serial tended to improve with each new installment, and thus its conclusion was "satisfactory from every standpoint." The Adventures of Kathlyn created such a sensation that rival studios began rushing their own serials into production. Edison utilized the star of the two Mary series for Dollie of the Dailies, which premiered at the end of January 1914, and William Randolph Hearst teamed with Pathé to produce perhaps the most famous serial of the silent era, The Perils of Pauline, premiering March 23, 1914. Raymond Stedman has noted that Pauline
"Plucky" Kathlyn Williams and Goldie Colwell in The Adventures of Kathlyn. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
was not nearly as successful as *Kathlyn* in crafting suspenseful cliffhangers at the end of each episode, although Hearst did mimic the newspaper, song, and other advertising tie-ins innovated by Selig. Within the year, Lubin, Universal, and Vitagraph were also producing serials.\(^{172}\)

William Selig and Gilson Willets had discussed the possibility of a sequel to *Kathlyn* as early as the completion of the first draft of the script.\(^{173}\) Rumors of a sequel were rife among the cast and crew while the serial was still in production.\(^{174}\) However, given the unprecedented success of the genre that he created, it’s curious that William Selig didn’t make another serial until he became an independent producer a half-dozen years later, working in conjunction with other partners in order to share the financial risk.\(^{175}\) Having produced the longest movie released to date, Selig may have been deterred from further production of serials due to their sheer expense.\(^{176}\) Besides, he’d accomplished what he had originally set out to do: cultivate an audience for longer, more complex motion pictures. *The Adventures of Kathlyn* paved the way for Selig to release *The Spoilers* and every other two-hour-long feature film that followed, while spawning a new type of film, the adventure serial.
The Selig Polyscope Company at its apex. Courtesy of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
WILLIAM SELIG REACHED THE PINNACLE OF HIS SUCCESS WITH THE release of *The Adventures of Kathlyn* and *The Spoilers* in 1914. The popularity of his jungle-adventure films, which resulted in the construction of one of the world’s largest private zoos and first movie theme park, as well as the international success of the Tom Mix Westerns, all contributed to Selig’s high standing in the motion picture industry during the prewar era. His preeminence was celebrated in innumerable newspaper and magazine articles from the *Los Angeles Times* to *Electrical Review and Western Electrician*, whose March 1914 issue offered a detailed examination of Selig’s Chicago studio, which employed more than four hundred people.¹

Even at that early date, however, signs of trouble were apparent. Selig’s Chicago plant closed just three months after the March publicity, on June 27, 1914.² Selig’s many triumphs weren’t profitable enough to compensate for the enormous expense of operating two formidable operations half a continent apart. The official explanation for the closure was that the expanded Los Angeles facilities afforded “better arrangements” beyond the hospitable climate and variegated scenery that originally inspired Selig to establish a studio there.³ In the six years following the opening of Selig’s Los Angeles studio, most of the rest of the American motion picture industry followed suit, with the more successful filmmakers imitating everything from his Western aesthetic to longer, more complex feature films.⁴ Ironically, Selig would in a sense become a victim of his own success.

Under the weight of pressures from both within and without, William Selig’s empire would crumble and fade from the scene. A new generation of filmmakers, inspired by Selig’s success with long feature films, quickly jumped on the bandwagon with financing from New York banks. Try as he might,
Selig, like the other self-financed pioneers, couldn't begin to compete with the resulting spike in production costs. Simultaneously, Selig's international business became an early casualty of the First World War, and the massive overhead required to operate a privately owned zoo was a crippling drain on his dwindling capital.

Col. Selig grappled with the need for economizing even as *Kathlyn* and *The Spoilers* were enjoying tremendous success. Months after ushering in a new era in motion pictures with the production of the *Kathlyn* serial and two-hour-long features, Selig appeared to temper his enthusiasm for the longer format, declaring that a "program offering four or more [one-reel] productions is more apt to please an entire audience than is a program offering a photo-play of four or five reels." Implicit in his statement was criticism of filmmakers who were padding their productions to the detriment of the stories and the industry in general. Selig noted that only "exceptional" stories and strong casts justified the occasional longer feature. His position is understandable given the years of institutional resistance to longer films, as well as his contractual obligation with General Film to supply exhibitors with single- and two-reel films on an almost daily basis. And, of course, lengthy features were much more expensive to produce.

One of the reasons General Film was established was to control exhibition by buying the former FSA exchanges in order to exclusively distribute the films of MPPC members; however, Greater New York Film Rental Company president William Fox held out for a higher price. When his exchange license was consequently revoked, Fox filed suit against the MPPC and General Film. A lower court ruled in favor of the MPPC, but the US Department of Justice appealed the decision, charging the MPPC with antitrust violation. Three years later, on October 1, 1915, a federal court ruled that the MPPC and General Film were an illegal monopoly and forced them to dismantle. By imitating the business and aesthetic practices of Selig and other MPPC members, former nickelodeon operators Adolph Zukor, Carl Laemmle, William Fox, Louis B. Mayer, and the Warner brothers were able to make a successful transition into production. However, each of the second-generation moguls also engaged in rewriting the history of the medium in order to claim the pioneers' innovations as their own.

Perhaps the greatest change the non-MPPC producers actually did bring to the industry was Wall Street financing—which would, as it turned out, hurt William Selig and most of the other MPPC members. Unlike the stingy New York Security and Trust Company's management of Biograph, several other New York banks and investment firms enabled the nascent producers to lure
performers, craftsmen, and executives away from Selig and the other MPPC members at exorbitant salaries for the creation of lavishly capitalized three- to five-reel features. It is unclear whether the first-generation filmmakers clung to self-financing or simply did not have access to the financial sources friendly to their new competitors. In any case, the development of new ways of financing motion pictures exacerbated Selig's growing financial challenges.

Selig struggled to keep up with the trend in longer features he initiated, which put him at odds with General Film. While publicly a loyal member of the MPPC, he privately grew frustrated with General Film's inflexibility in accommodating new ways of distributing films. Selig was particularly angry with General Film president Frank Dyer, for years Thomas Edison's ruthless patents attorney and since 1908 responsible for the day-to-day operations of several components within the Edison empire, including the motion picture division. Faced with Dyer's intransigence in distributing only short films, Vitagraph, Lubin, Selig, and Essanay formed a partnership, known as V-L-S-E, in 1915 to distribute their features of five reels or more. In order to offset part of the expense of those productions, V-L-S-E maintained a cooperative chain of booking offices whereby exhibitors did business directly with the individual producers, thereby eliminating middlemen. The company also instituted the practice of re-releasing "films of real merit." More importantly, V-L-S-E allowed the exhibitor to book only the films he wanted, in contrast to the independents' policy of requiring payment for everything they produced, including unwanted bad films.

Hoping to replicate the success of The Spoilers, Col. Selig decided to make his next two-hour-long feature bigger in every way, though he bypassed V-L-S-E in a reckless gamble for greater profits. In hindsight it would have been smarter to take a more cautious approach. Selig chose to follow up The Spoilers with an adaptation of another Rex Beach novel, The Ne'er Do Well (1916). Once again Lanier Bartlett did not receive on-screen credit for his adaptation. And, once again Selig distinguished himself by insisting on a realistic mise-en-scène. He sent director Colin Campbell and a dozen star players, including Kathlyn Williams and Wheeler Oakman, along with fellow Spoilers alums Frank Clark and Jack McDonald, to produce the film where most of the story is set: the Panama Canal Zone.

On January 4, 1915, the company of fourteen sailed from New Orleans to Panama. Within a month they were joined by their employer, who personally oversaw much of the ambitious production. The nearly two-month-long production also employed scores of American soldiers, as well as Panamanian and Jamaican canal workers and residents as extras in several of the scenes.
EXILED FROM EDEN

The exotic mise-en-scène also benefited from the utilization of the old Panama prison, exteriors and interiors of mansions built by the Spanish aristocracy, shantytowns, jungle locations, and the actual Canal itself.\textsuperscript{15}

*The Ne'er Do Well* is one of the stunning achievements of William Selig's oeuvre. The story is classic melodrama: the wastrel son of a New York millionaire is disowned by his father after finding himself penniless in Panama. He's taken in by the smitten wife of an American diplomat. The millionaire's son in turn falls in love with and marries a Panamanian girl, incurring the wrath of the diplomat's wife and the police chief, to whom the girl was betrothed. When the cuckolded diplomat commits suicide, his wife and the police chief conspire to frame the millionaire's son for murder. Fortunately his father is summoned to Panama and prevails on the woman to come clean about her husband's suicide. The millionaire is reconciled with his son and welcomes his daughter-in-law into the family as the broken-hearted diplomat's widow leaves the country.

Colin Campbell's direction and the editing of *The Ne'er Do Well* are more accomplished than was the case with *The Spoilers*. There is much more cutting within individual scenes, tighter shot compositions, and a greater tendency to photograph the subjects at more aesthetically pleasing angles rather than head-on. Dynamic tracking shots are also very much in evidence, from Oakman and friends driving down Broadway in a pre-Panama sequence to several stunning images of Williams and Oakman aboard a train touring the canal and traveling past discarded machinery and shantytowns.

The production makes extraordinary use of its locations, from the throngs of black Panamanians filling the waterfront, slums, and red-light districts of Colón, to the aristocratic mansions of Ancón, with verandas abutting the dense jungle. The Panamanian jail is appropriately decrepit, as is a crowded flophouse. The utilization of black extras stands in marked contrast to Jack McDonald's blackface makeup, though a scene in which Oakman defends his friend's decision to sit at the front of the railroad car in defiance of the segregation policies indicates a particularly progressive attitude for 1915. The ruined jungle castle provides another exotic location, as does the island village where Oakman and Williams consummate their relationship. Another noteworthy setting is the Panamanian courtroom filled with black spectators and soldiers.

As had been done with *The Spoilers*, a lot of time was spent preparing *The Ne'er Do Well* for release. To help advertise the film, Selig and his new publicist Franc Woodward arranged for Harper and Brothers to publish a "special photoplay edition" of *The Ne'er Do Well* that was embellished with many production stills.\textsuperscript{16} Rather than rent the film to individual exhibitors through V-L-S-E, he sold the film outright in early 1916 to independent exchange operator Sol
Lesser for $150,000 cash. According to Lesser, there was no haggling—the deal was closed within five minutes and Selig was promptly paid. Following runs in three California cities, Lesser sold distribution rights to V-L-S-E. The dearth of press coverage for *The Ne'er Do Well* suggests that Selig and his partners purchased an expensive box office flop.¹⁷

Selig's efforts to expand such genre staples as comedy and melodrama met with similarly disappointing results. For eight years the Selig Polyscope Company produced one short comedy per week according to its contract with General Film. But unlike the frenetic slapstick style popularized by his Allesandro Street neighbor Mack Sennett, William Selig preferred character-based comedies.¹⁸

In the early half of 1915, Selig commissioned Maibelle Heikes Justice and William Lord Wright to craft a series of scripts poking gentle fun at the residents of a typical midwestern country village. Selig had so much confidence in his rustic situation comedy concept that he built an entire village on the Mission Road property. Named “Bloom Center,” the village became a tourist attraction to visitors of the newly opened Selig Zoo, sporting roads with primitive lamp posts, a hotel, print shop, grocery, apothecary, blacksmith's shop, laundry, livery stable, barber shop, brewery, opera house, and church. The drugstore and print shop were equipped with practical interiors.¹⁹ The series was called *The Chronicles of Bloom Center*, and featured a large ensemble cast headed by John Lancaster and Lillian Leighton, directed by Marshall “Mickey” Neilan.

Kicking off the series was *Landing the Hose Reel* (1915), about a New York millionaire raised in Bloom Center who offers to donate half the money needed to purchase a new hose reel for the fire department as long as the villagers can raise the other half. When the Ladies’ Art Embroidery Club gets involved in the project, a tax on whiskers is proposed, which causes a run on the barber by the bearded townsmen as they scramble to become clean-shaven. Bloom Center’s constable then decides to create a speed trap for drivers passing through town but is thwarted by the antics of mischief-maker Chubby Green. After the hose is purchased, Green pulls several false alarms, after which the fire chief starts ignoring alarms, unaware that his own house is actually burning to the ground.²⁰ The *New York Dramatic Mirror* praised the production as laughably amusing from start to finish with a brand of humor that depended more on the situation than the aggravated acrobatic slapstick that is so prevalent in screen comedies. Every laugh was caused by a legitimate means, resulting from something really funny that happened. ... It is the greatest collection of true life types that we have ever seen incorporated into one picture.²¹
After completing only ten of a projected twelve Bloom Center comedies, director Neilan "regretfully" resigned to return to New York "owing to domestic troubles." Given the substantial investment in the Bloom Center comedies, Selig had the option of assigning another director to replace Neilan. The fact that he didn't suggests the series was not profitable.

Melodramas geared principally toward female audiences were another steady component of Selig's production schedule. His most successfully realized "women's films" did not exceed the one-reel length established in 1906 with *The Female Highwayman*. Typical of the genre was *When a Woman's Forty* (1914), which offered an exceptionally rich role for Eugenie Besserer, who played a flighty twenty-year-old as well as the same character at age forty, lonely and longing for a more meaningful life. As the middle-aged character stares at burning logs in a fireplace, the flames dissolve into a succession of scenes involving lovers from years past. The memories inspire the woman to take an abrupt interest in orphaned children, which according to the *New York Clipper* inspired unintentional laughter from the audience because the juxtaposition of images inadvertently suggested that the orphans were the offspring of her many affairs. Designating a big game hunter the love of her life provided an opportunity to use wild animals from the Selig Zoo to be incorporated into the narrative. The *Clipper* suggested that "the moral of the tale would seem to be 'Grab him, girls, while he's handy or he may go off and shoot tigers, and stay away for ten or twenty years or so.'"

*The Tragedy of Ambition* (1914) provided Bessie Eyton with one of her most dramatic and nuanced performances. She plays an impoverished luncheonette cashier who falls in love with slumming playboy Reginald Van Doren (Wheeler Oakman). The proprietor and a henchman rob Van Doren and toss him out the window into the bay. Eyton crashes a chair over their heads and dives in after her unconscious lover, rescuing him from drowning. Eyton then contacts his family while nursing him back to health. The family arrives at Eyton's hovel to bring Van Doren home, accompanied by a society girl whom they convince him to marry. As Eyton is trying on a wedding veil, expecting to marry Van Doren, she receives a note from him: "Our marriage can never be—the social chasm is too great—I'm enclosing a check for $1,000." Devastated, she vows revenge. Four years into his unhappy marriage, Van Doren is seriously wounded in a car accident. The nurse assigned to care for him happens to be Eyton. She is instructed by the physician on the correct dosage of Van Doren's injections: "One drop too much will kill him." After the doctor leaves, Van Doren calls out her name in his delirium. Eyton orders his wife out of the room and while cradling him to her bosom, she grins as the film slowly fades to black. Eyton's steely eyed smile is deliberately ambiguous, representing either happiness over
Eugenie Besserer in costume for When a Woman's Forty, signed “To my esteemed employer Mr. Selig.” Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
being reunited with her lover or satisfaction that she will get revenge by administering “one drop too much.” *The Tragedy of Ambition* reveals that Eyton was a far better actress than her ingénue roles allowed; however, *Moving Picture World* observed that “Wheeler Oakman . . . is decidedly unconvincing—the truth is he made some laugh by his playing [in] the last act.” Oakman’s melodramatic overacting as Reginald Van Doren is strikingly similar to one of Jackie Gleason’s more memorable comic creations, Reginald Van Gleason III.

Hoping to transform his short women’s films into more profitable longer features, Selig produced what Kevin Brownlow has called “the first large scale suffragist film” under a veil of secrecy at the temporarily reopened Chicago...
studios. Your Girl and Mine (1914) was initiated and supervised by Mrs. Medill McCormick, chair of the Congressional Committee of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, who intended the project “to be the Uncle Tom’s Cabin of the suffrage movement.” The socially prominent Mrs. McCormick also happened to be the daughter of a United States senator and wife of the publisher of the Chicago Tribune. The eight-reel film was written by Gilson Willets, whose scenarios for The Adventures of Kathlyn had been favorites with the suffragists.

Advancing the argument that women needed voting rights in order to amend unfair laws, the story focused on the plight of a woman forced to pay the debts of her unscrupulous alcoholic husband, whose mistress and illegitimate child perish in a tenement fire after he’s deserted them. When the husband dies, the wife’s children are placed in the custody of her father-in-law, according to the terms of the will. The woman is arrested after abducting her daughters but a female lawyer successfully defends her, arguing, “If this mother’s act was a crime, then all mothers are potential criminals.”

The allegorical figures of Equal Suffrage and Justice function as a Greek chorus upon the story, “showing man as a natural villain,” as does Aunt Jane, “an angelic character devoted to good deeds.”

The Chicago and New York premieres were tony affairs, attracting the leading lights of the suffragist movement. Despite the heavy-handed characterizations, Billboard called the film “good, smashing melodrama”; the New York Clipper raved that no “scenario writer ever devised a more thoroughly satisfying motion picture drama. . . . It takes the genius of a William N. Selig to present such a picture without falling into the very common error of overdoing it . . . sacrificing truth for dramatic effect.” Despite the favorable premieres and reviews, the film failed to attract an audience. What seemed an irrefutable argument to Mrs. McCormick and her cohorts was overly didactic, offensive, or merely not entertaining to those who weren’t as zealously committed to their cause.

As was becoming increasingly the case with so many other Selig Polyscope features, Your Girl and Mine was an expensive flop.

An abrupt shift in the nation’s political climate doomed a Selig feature that received considerable preproduction publicity, turning it into one of the most infamous productions of the silent era. In mid-1915 William Selig arranged with Tin Pan Alley music publisher Leo Feist to adapt the contemporary hit song “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” into a motion picture. The song reflected the antiwar sentiment that prevailed in America during the first year of the war in Europe. Gilson Willets was recruited to execute the adaptation; from the very first, it was intended that an alternate, pro-war version would be
prepared for international audiences. The foreign release was titled *I'm Glad My Boy Grew Up to Be a Soldier*, based on lyrics also supplied by Feist. Willets' customarily detailed scenario actually incorporates both versions with surprisingly no difference in the visuals of the story, only in the intertitles, which quote the lyrics of the respective songs. Hence a typical intertitle from the intended American version, "Hearts must break for the ones who died in vain," is replaced in the international release to read "Better he died nobly, though it break my heart, than to stay at home to play a coward's part."

By the time the film was ready to be released domestically in mid-December 1915, the tenor of the country had changed from isolationist to preparedness. As a result, William Selig scrapped the pacifistic version and instead released the pro-war international cut in America. The disingenuousness of the project was ridiculously evident in the advertising campaign concocted by Franc Woodward, touting *I'm Glad My Boy Grew Up to Be a Soldier* as "inspired by the popular Feist song hit 'I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier.'" The direction by former Flying A veteran Frank Beal was uninspired, though Eugenie Besserer, who suffers the loss of both her husband and only son to war, delivered a typically moving performance.33

Less than a month following the release of *I'm Glad My Boy Grew Up to Be a Soldier*, General Film underwent reorganization. Frank Dyer was out as president, replaced by George Kleine. The company continued to distribute the one-, two-, and three-reel films of the former MPPC members, as well as those of some newer independents. One of the final acts of the Dyer regime was to abolish the policy of standing orders, ostensibly allowing MPPC members to redirect their individual finances toward the production of longer, multi-reel features. But it was too late.

At the same time, there were other tectonic shifts in the industry. In May 1916 the American Tobacco Company invested in Vitagraph, which was then recapitalized at $25 million. Four months later Vitagraph bought out its partners' interests in V-L-S-E, which gave the firm its own feature film distribution outlet. Selig and Essanay then joined George Kleine and Thomas Edison's feature distribution cooperative to form K-E-S-E.34 Siegmund Lubin was not able to weather the transitions taking place in the business and ceased making films in August 1916.35 Biograph halted production in 1916, just two years after D. W. Griffith's departure.36 According to Albert Smith, Vitagraph acquired what was left of Kalem in 1916.37 Shortly after the termination of Charlie Chaplin's brief association with Essanay, Broncho Billy Anderson sold his share in the company to his partner, George K. Spoor, who managed to churn out a few more productions before going out of business early in 1918.38 At
about the same time, Thomas Edison shut down his filmmaking business.\textsuperscript{39}

At the beginning of 1916, concurrent with the reorganization of General Film, William Selig closed his Edendale studio. Just as the Chicago studio had proved prohibitively expensive to maintain in the face of a collapsed international market, increased competition, enormous overhead, and disappointing productions, so too did the operation of two separate Los Angeles facilities. Selig moved all of his business to the zoo property on Mission Road, including the developing labs.\textsuperscript{40} The Edendale complex was then sold to nickleodeon-operator-turned-producer William Fox. Fox entered film production in 1914, and by the time he purchased the Selig property, he’d produced about forty short features, many starring William Farnum. In 1917 Fox signed Tom Mix to a long-term contract that, like Farnum’s, lasted well into the following decade.\textsuperscript{41}

As William Selig’s fortunes declined, several other second-generation producers lured talent away by utilizing the vast sums available through bank financing. Edendale’s original leading lady, Betty Harte, left at the beginning of 1912 to join David Horsley’s Nestor Company.\textsuperscript{42} Charles Clary departed in 1915 and briefly appeared in Universal productions; around the same time Chicago director Otis Turner joined Universal and William Duncan signed with Vitagraph.\textsuperscript{43} Colin Campbell would go on to direct a handful of films for Universal after leaving Selig in 1918, utilizing Eugenie Besserer and Frank Clark, among other alums, though he himself quickly segued into a second career as a character actor.\textsuperscript{44} Despite the other pioneer filmmakers going out of business and most of his stock company departing for more lucrative salaries elsewhere, William Selig forged ahead with a greater emphasis on the production of features between five and nine reels in length.

Stephen Bush, writing in \textit{Moving Picture World} in 1912, noted that William Selig was among the few producers who has “given us pictures dealing with social evils and making a strong appeal for redress and reform.”\textsuperscript{45} Selig would make several such films throughout much of his career with varying degrees of success. But an attempt to transform attitudes about a popular law during wartime, no matter how heartfelt, represented yet another blunder for a man who had obviously lost touch with his audience at a time when he could ill afford to.

The seven-reel \textit{Who Shall Take My Life?} (1917) offered a thoughtful narrative in condemnation of capital punishment. Maibelle Heikes Justice visited the death house at Sing Sing Prison to research the story, which was rewritten by Gilson Willets and directed by Colin Campbell; it starred Tom Santschi, Bessie Eyton, and Eugenie Besserer. The story concerns a woman who vows revenge when the man she loves marries another. The woman later frames
him for a murder he didn’t commit and he’s sentenced to die. Shortly before the execution, the woman is prevailed upon to confess his innocence, but it’s too late to save him. Who Shall Take My Life? was given an impressive premiere with the Chicago branch of the Anti-Capital Punishment Society of America, with attorney Clarence Darrow in attendance. Although the film was endorsed by the New York Dramatic Mirror, it appears to have had a limited, unprofitable release.46

As William Selig’s fortunes waned, so did his film output. In 1917 he released approximately one hundred films, about half the number he’d released the previous year; several were re-titled reissues. In 1918 only nine films were...
released, though each one was crafted with great care. It was from two of those final Selig Polyscope features that there emerged an actress who would come to define the Jazz Age.

Selig hired teenaged Colleen Moore to star in one of his last successful features, *Little Orphant Annie* (1918). Not to be confused with the later comic strip, *Little Orphant Annie* was based on a poem and short story by Indiana poet James Whitcomb Riley. The inspiration for the character was an abused orphan whom the poet’s parents had taken into their home in the mid-nineteenth century. Riley and his siblings would delight in the girl telling solemn ghost stories, which she’d always conclude with “The gobble-uns ’ll git you, ef you don’t watch out.”

William Selig obtained the motion picture rights to Riley’s stories early in 1916 and made films of the elderly poet. Gilson Willets was dispatched to meet with Riley shortly before his death that summer in order to obtain additional information regarding Annie, the Riley family, and antebellum small-town life in Indiana. As he’d done with other adaptations, Selig instructed Willets to use verses from Riley’s poem as intertitles for the film.

A year would lapse before *Little Orphant Annie* finally went into production under Colin Campbell’s direction. Joining Colleen Moore in the film were Tom Santschi and Eugenie Besserer. Among the opening credits is a dedication Riley wrote for the story when it was originally published: “To the Children of the old times and of these—with changeless love.” This is followed by shots of Riley with children gathered about him as he opens a copy of *Little Orphant Annie* and begins to read. The story begins with Annie comforting her dying mother, then being placed in an orphanage, where she entertains the other children with strange ghost stories. Her Uncle Tomps takes Annie out of the orphanage to live with him and subsequently abuses her. Handsome David Jeffries comes to her rescue and thereafter she dreams of someday marrying him, envisioning him as a knight in shining armor in a beautifully executed dissolve that is made all the more charming due to Colleen Moore’s winsome expression. Annie is adopted into the home of the good squire and his wife and enchants her new siblings with weird tales about the “Gobble-uns.” David enlists when war breaks out, and when Annie learns that he has been killed in action, she appears to slowly die of a broken heart. In a brief epilogue the squire informs the other children that Annie has recovered from her heartache. Despite plans to make more Riley films, Selig was no longer able to self-finance his films.

Several months after selling his Edendale studio, Selig sold his Chicago mansion. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, attorney John A. Verhoeven took
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title of the eighteen-room Lake View Avenue residence on behalf of an unnamed client. Verhoeven was Selig's attorney, to whom the Colonel made regular payments through the mid-1920s.

By the end of 1917, William Selig had permanently suspended all production. Without any new product to distribute, General Film went out of business in 1919. Despite a false start or two, the Selig Polyscope Company would exist only on paper until finally dissolving in 1920. That same year Selig sold his enormous Chicago studio complex for $400,000 to an automobile dealership that would eventually transform Western Avenue into a hub for car dealerships in Chicago.

In spite of his financial travails, William Selig quickly reinvented himself as an independent producer. His first project, Ravished Armenia (retitled Auction of Souls, 1919), one of the most important films of his long career, was based on one of the great tragedies of the twentieth century. The genocide of Turkey's Christian Armenian population began on Easter Sunday, 1915. It has been estimated that by 1917 half of the 2 million Armenians in Turkey had been brutally slaughtered. Among the victims was the Mardigian family from the city of Tchemesh-Gedzak. Thirteen-year-old Aurora was spared the fate of her parents and most of her siblings because she was pretty. For more than a year, Aurora, like other Armenian girls, was repeatedly raped and degraded by Turks and Muslim Chechnians, sold to an Islamic chieftain, and later paraded nude through a village and sold at a slave market into the harem of a Kurdish sheik. Throughout her ordeal, Aurora witnessed brutal mass killings and sexual atrocities. Finally escaping her captors, the teenager spent a year fleeing through the Armenian wilderness, often malnourished and without clothing. Exploited from village to village, she finally received sanctuary in Russia and Norway, before being shipped as a refugee to the United States.

Shortly after she was taken in by an Armenian American family in New York, Aurora told her story to reporters from the New York Sun and New York Tribune. Screenwriter Harvey Gates and his wife Eleanor read the sensation-ally horrific story and prevailed upon Aurora to collaborate with them on a book. It was the teenager's faith that sustained her through the ordeal and she readily accepted the offer, believing that God had spared her in order to share her story and inspire Americans to help save other survivors of the genocide. Harvey and Eleanor Gates became her legal guardians and changed Aurora's surname from Mardigian to Mardiganian. After the manuscript was finished, Aurora was sent to Connecticut for a few weeks to learn rudimentary English. When she returned to New York, Eleanor Gates instructed Aurora to sign a document for her to star in a film adaptation of her book, Ravished Armenia.
for which she would receive $15 a week; unbeknownst to the teen, her guardians kept the rest of her substantial fee.

William Selig acquired the rights to produce the film on behalf of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief. In return, he turned over a percentage of the profits to that charity. Oscar Apfel was hired to direct. Co-starring with Aurora were Anna Q. Nilsson and Irving Cummings; they were supported by Eugenie Besserer as her mother and Frank Clark as a village priest who is tortured to death by the Turks after refusing to convert to Islam. Gabriel Pollock designed the sets and for the only time in his long career with Selig would receive on-screen credit. Scenes were shot at the Selig Zoo studio and backlot; Santa Monica Beach doubled for desert scenes and Mount Baldy stood in for Mount Ararat.

Production on the eight-reel feature coincided with a Thanksgiving 1918 proclamation by President Woodrow Wilson urging Americans to contribute $30 million to aid the 1 million Armenian survivors. On the first day of shooting, Aurora emerged from her dressing room to discover crowds of men wearing tasseled fezzes. She became hysterical, believing that she had been deceived and was being returned to the Turks. Her guardian, Eleanor Gates, had failed to explain what it meant to make a movie, or that Aurora was required to perform her own stunts. During the shooting of a scene in which she escapes from a harem that required her to jump from one roof to another, Aurora fell twenty feet and broke her ankle. Production was not suspended to allow her ankle to heal; Aurora was carried from set to set and instructed by Eleanor Gates to step hard on her foot so it would heal faster.

Ravished Armenia wrapped at the end of the first week of 1919, requiring only about one and a half months of production. Yet even before its completion, the selling of the film and Aurora Mardiganian had already begun. In addition to the publication of the book, the Hearst Newspaper Syndicate serialized excerpts throughout the country, exposing many readers for the first time to the Turkish and Islamic atrocities directed at Christians half a world away. Aurora subsequently became a celebrity, arousing the interest of several well-intentioned society matrons.

On Valentine’s Day in 1919, Ravished Armenia was previewed for an invited audience of New York’s upper crust, each of whom paid $10 for the privilege, the proceeds going to the Committee for Relief in the Far East. Aurora Mardiganian spoke at the event, expressing her love for America and asking that it help the Armenians to help themselves. It was later noted that the girl who had been held in bondage by the Turks and Kurds was now a captive of committee co-chairs Mrs. Oliver Harriman and Mrs. George Vanderbilt. A correspondent
attending the screening for the Morning Telegraph raved that the film "ranks easily among the few truly great productions of the screen. Ravished Armenia could not have been surpassed even in the master hands of Griffith."\(^5\)

By mid-March, William Selig had signed a distribution agreement with First National. The newspaper advertising copy in the press book prepared for Ravished Armenia highlighted the film's more prurient aspects: "Heroine of 'Ravished Armenia' Once in Harem with other Naked Girls, Pretty Aurora Mardiganian Was Sold for Eighty-Five Cents." This was certainly uncharacteristic of "Col. Selig, [who] never approved of sex pictures." Resorting to such measures is perhaps more indicative of the desperate financial straits he was in. The film contained an even more prurient scene, production stills of which were published in newspapers around the world: eight nude young women crucified on wooden crosses, their long hair barely covering their private parts.\(^6\)
Aurora introduced the film, which had undergone a last-minute title change to *Auction of Souls*, to a standing-room-only audience at its official premiere at Loew's New York Theatre on May 11, 1919, and commented on the crucifixion scene:

There were seventeen of us girls tied naked across the backs of seventeen horses. The Kurd Sheikh, Bekram Bey, drove us ahead of his band till we came to the ancient city of Diabekir. The gates to the city were closed and Bekram Bey did not want to bother with us any more. Just outside the city walls there were sixteen great wooden crosses. There was one more girl than there were crosses. That is why I am here tonight—the other sixteen of us were crucified.\(^6\)

It was a stunning revelation; but it wasn’t completely true. The real story was far more shocking. Nearly seventy years later, Aurora Mardiganian set the record straight for film historian Anthony Slide:

The Turks didn’t make their crosses like that. The Turks made little pointed crosses. They took the clothes off the girls. They made them bend down. And after raping them, they made them sit on the pointed wood, through the vagina. That’s the way they killed—the Turks. Americans have made it a more civilized way. They can’t show such terrible things.\(^6\)

The same night of *Auction of Souls’* Times Square premiere, Aurora spoke at two other New York theaters, one on the Lower East Side and the other in Brooklyn.\(^6\) The following day Eleanor Gates accompanied her to Buffalo, where she also introduced the film. At that point the stress was too much for the distraught and exploited teen, and Gates packed her off to a convent, hiring seven impersonators to fulfill speaking engagements at charity events in Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston, and Los Angeles. Aurora threatened suicide before escaping from the convent.\(^6\)

*Auction of Souls* opened in postwar London in November 1919. After attending a private exhibition of *Auction of Souls*, former ambassador to the United States Lord Bryce noted that the film “if anything, fell short of the facts,” which seems to support Aurora Mardiganian’s later disturbing revelations.\(^6\) Two months later, in January 1920, the League of Nations Union arranged for *Auction of Souls* to be exhibited at London’s Albert Hall for three weeks. Fearful of reprisals from hostile Muslims, the British Foreign Office approved the exhibition only after the crucifixion scene and all references to

\(^{6}\)
Christians in the subtitles were removed from the film. Ninety years later, much of the world continues to yield to similar threats and pressures in failing to acknowledge one of the most tragic events of human history.

Reviewing *Auction of Souls* for *Moving Picture World*, Hanford C. Judson wrote, “It is so reverently done and so wonderfully true to humanity in all that it shows, that no doubt it will be kept for years and handed down as a historical manuscript in picture.” Unfortunately, as with many of Selig’s productions, only fragments of this harrowing interpretation of one girl’s experiences in the Armenian genocide are known to have survived into the twenty-first century.

In addition to a half-dozen jungle-themed features and serials made between 1920 and 1924, William Selig produced several other features and shorts, with varying success. At the climax of *The Raiders* (1921), the villain is struck down by lightning just as he’s about to shoot the hero. On the other hand, *The Rosary* starred Lewis Stone and Wallace Beery alongside Eugenie Besserer, with location filming in Monterey to simulate the New England coast. Beery plays the villain, who blows up a cannery and then hides out in a church. He fires his gun at the priest but his mother steps in the way and sacrifices herself to save him. Beery then plunges to his death in a swollen stream, attempting to elude a posse. *The Rosary* received good reviews and enjoyed wide-ranging success.

After wrapping *The Rosary*, Selig retained Lewis Stone and Wallace Beery to co-star in at least four two-reelers, which were released during the winter of 1921–1922, most being remakes of earlier Selig productions. Colonel Selig gambled that two-reel action-dramas with recognizable stars and high production values would prove just as popular as the short slapstick comedies that normally supplemented the five-reel feature presentations dominating most movie houses at the time. *Los Angeles Times* critic Edwin Schallert noted the “brisk tempo” of the two shorts he previewed. “Not for a moment did I feel that lagging of interest, that wearisome boredom which is the bane of the long feature.” Even though the two-reelers were booked into such prestigious venues as New York’s Capitol Theater, the venture was short-lived.

Although William Selig’s career was clearly in decline, he remained respected enough to be included in the formation of the Independent Screen Artists’ Guild, an organization dedicated to fighting censorship imposed from outside the industry. A photograph taken at the inaugural meeting, held at the Ambassador Hotel on December 15, 1921, shows Selig seated on the dais alongside Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. Others in attendance included King Vidor, Louis B. Mayer, Mickey Neilan, Sol Lesser, B. P. Schulberg, Raoul Walsh, and Maurice Tourneur. The photograph represents the past, present, and future of the motion picture industry.
Seated left to right: Col. Selig, Buster Keaton, Thomas H. Ince, Jackie Coogan, and Charlie Chaplin at the formation of the Independent Screen Artists Guild. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

Of all the MPPC members, Vitagraph remained active longer than any of the others; it was purchased by Warner Brothers in 1925, at which point Albert Smith and J. Stuart Blackton retired from the industry. However, William Selig co-produced at least three features during the 1930s, including *The Drag-Net* (1936).

At the beginning of 1936, William Selig entered into a six-picture co-production deal with Burroughs-Tarzan Pictures. Edgar Rice Burroughs, who arguably owed part of his success to the inspiration provided by Selig's jungle films a quarter-century earlier, and three investors had formed an independent production company to make *Tarzan* and other low-budget films. Their first non-Tarzan endeavor was *The Drag-Net*. It's unclear what William Selig's role was in the making of the film other than supplying the story that he had originally made twenty years earlier; however, the opening credits identify *The Drag-Net* as "A W. N. Selig Production." According to John Taliaferro, "The entire film was written, shot, edited, and shipped in less than two months"; it certainly looks it. An ultra-low-budget variation on *The Thin Man* (1934),
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The Drag-Net's imitation of William Powell and Myrna Loy are tall, tuxedo-clad Rod LaRocque and diminutive Marion Nixon, one of the most visually incongruous couples in screen history. The creaky proceedings seem to take a lot longer than the seventy-minute running time; thus it's not really surprising that The Drag-Net was a flop, "bringing in a paltry three hundred dollars a week." As a result, the contract between Burroughs-Tarzan Pictures and Selig was prematurely terminated. However, Selig wasn't quite finished with the motion picture business. He couldn't afford to be.

And, he had a large stock of story material. As early as 1909, William Selig began to purchase the motion picture rights to hundreds of novels and short stories. He usually paid anywhere from $5 to $50 per story. Kalton C. Lahue has noted that in 1911, Selig acquired "exclusive scenario rights to all stories" appearing in Street and Smith's many popular magazines. Among the assets liquidated with the shuttering of the Selig Polyscope Company were four hundred books, plays, and short stories that he sold to the fledgling Robertson-Cole studio—which later became a component of RKO. Popular authors represented in the sale included Earl Derr Biggers, O. Henry, Opie Reed, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and James Oliver Curwood. Although it is not known how much Robertson-Cole paid for the library, Selig's ledger indicates that he received a final payment of $5,500 at the end of April 1919. Beginning in 1918 Selig had in fact begun selling off several of his more popular story properties, including Zane Grey Westerns, to the Fox Film Corporation. William Fox had thus taken possession of Selig's Edendale studio, signed several of his most popular stars (including Tom Mix and William Farnum), and was producing Selig stories. So much for the myth that the "new breed of [producing] entrepreneurs were more willing to take risks . . . and venture into new areas."

The sale to Robertson-Cole represented just a fraction of the stories owned by William Selig. From 1918 through 1935 he sold more than one hundred novels, short stories, and plays to virtually every studio in Hollywood, from MGM and Universal to Columbia and Monogram. Stories were also acquired by actors such as Norma Talmadge and Sessue Hayakawa, and directors such as Marshall Neiil and King Vidor. Among the stories sold were Auction of Souls and The Cowboy Millionaire, a story Selig himself had written in 1909 and twice produced.

From the time he sold the zoo in 1925 until the end of his life, the sales of these stories represented the principal source of income for William and Mary Selig. In 1926 Selig earned $16,300, $12,000 of which came from selling the remake rights for The Crisis to MGM. Selig earned less than half that amount the following year.
After shutting down the Chicago studio, the Seligs settled permanently in Los Angeles. Indicative of their declining fortunes, they moved at least thirteen times between 1920 and 1948. The early years of the Great Depression were especially difficult, forcing the Seligs to pawn furniture and jewelry in addition to borrowing small amounts of money from friends.\(^8\)

William Selig outlived his Edendale studio. It passed through a variety of owners, including Mickey Neilan, until it was razed in 1936. The buildings that replaced the Selig studio were demolished in 2007, which restored the property close to the condition that Francis Boggs and company originally encountered back in August 1909.

During the 1920s, just over the hill from Selig’s Edendale studio, was Mixville, the Western studio William Fox built for Tom Mix. Mix remained with Fox as his most popular star until 1928. In later years Mix toured with various Wild West shows and circuses before dying in an automobile accident in 1940.\(^9\)

After her contract with Paramount ended in 1921, Kathlyn Williams continued as a freelance supporting player until 1935.\(^9\) Although she was counted among the social elite of Los Angeles, Kathlyn Williams’ post-Selig career was fraught with tragedy. In 1922 her only child died at the age of sixteen, and her marriage to Charles Eyton ended in divorce in 1931.\(^9\) On the night of December 29, 1949, Williams was involved in a devastating auto accident while returning from a Christmas vacation in Las Vegas with two socialite friends.\(^9\) Her right leg was amputated and she plunged into severe depression, seldom venturing outside her Hollywood apartment.\(^9\) On September 24, 1960, Kathlyn Williams died as the result of acute alcohol and barbiturate intoxication.\(^9\) In an era when the press protected the reputation of former stars, the Los Angeles Examiner reported that “death was from natural causes,” though its obituary quoted Williams as having once confessed, “I wanted to die when I realized how bad off I was.”\(^9\)

Longtime leading man Tom Santschi freelanced with several studios after the Selig Polyscope Company shut down, enjoying perhaps his greatest post-Selig triumph in John Ford’s Three Bad Men (1926). Santschi died of a heart attack a year after making a cameo appearance with William Farnum in Paramount’s 1930 remake of The Spoilers. After Eugenie Besserer left Selig, she played supporting roles in several films for D. W. Griffith and most memorably appeared as Al Jolson’s mother in The Jazz Singer (1927); she passed away in 1934.\(^9\) Hobart Bosworth died at the end of 1943 after spending the last twenty years of his life appearing in occasional supporting roles and bit parts.\(^9\) Selig’s best-known ingénues, Betty Harte and Bessie Eyton, both died in 1965,
decades after appearing in their final motion pictures. After leaving Selig late in 1917, Colin Campbell went from directing to acting, enjoying a prolific career in supporting roles until his death in 1966.

From the early 1930s through the mid-1940s, William Selig maintained an office at 6606 Sunset Boulevard as a "Playbroker and Author's Agent," staying abreast of current trends in the business he had helped to create in the hope of interesting studios in purchasing stories he still held the rights to. It seems, however, that by the late 1930s his sales were few and far between. He made a few half-hearted stabs at writing his memoirs, no doubt wanting to rectify the self-serving misrepresentations of former employees such as Gilbert Anderson, Thomas Persons, and Hobart Bosworth, as well as general histories that began to appear that were tainted by the irresponsible claims of second-generation filmmakers such as Adolph Zukor, William Fox, and Carl Laemmle, who wanted to be credited for aspects of motion picture production that preceded their entry into the business.

A few veteran columnists tried to help their old friend out. As Selig entered his eighties, virtually every article mentioned his vitality and contented disposition in spite of his rather bleak financial circumstances. No matter how pathetic the circumstances of their later years were, as his wife Mary was fond of saying, "We've been rich and we've been poor but we've been the same people throughout." Whatever problems William and Mary Selig had experienced as a couple back in 1915 had long since been resolved and forgiven.

During the final decade of his life, Colonel Selig was fortunate to enter into a friendship with Charles G. Clarke, a top cinematographer under contract to Twentieth Century Fox who had grown up in Los Angeles with the arrival of the movie industry. Clarke's lifelong hobby was preserving that history. As a way of helping out the impoverished pioneer, Clarke purchased several of Selig's papers during the late 1930s-early 1940s, including 416 letters of foreign correspondence spanning 1910-1918.

By 1938 William Selig was championing the establishment of a motion picture museum that would preserve and exhibit the voluminous material he and others had collected charting the development of the American motion picture industry, "before the material now available is lost, or scattered or destroyed." No doubt Selig was hoping that such a facility would pay handsomely for his business documents. Fortunately, Clarke prevailed upon Selig to donate the papers and photographs he'd saved to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Library. Selig's donation, made sometime between 1946 and 1947, was the first major collection donated to the Academy's library, which has since grown to become arguably the premier motion picture archive.
in the world.\textsuperscript{105} William Selig spent much of the final year of his life at the library, annotating scores of documents to provide greater clarity for future generations.\textsuperscript{106}

Four months after receiving an honorary Oscar for his “belief in a new medium [and] contributions to its development,” William Selig passed away at his home on July 16, 1948, at the age of eighty-four, following a brief illness.\textsuperscript{107} Newspaper and magazine obituaries got names, dates, and places wrong in their condensed summations of his career, with much of that misinformation persisting into twenty-first century electronic data banks.\textsuperscript{108} Among the two hundred mourners joining his widow Mary at the funeral were Kathlyn Williams, Mickey Neilan, and William Farnum. Also present were Louis B. Mayer, who upon learning of Selig’s death stated, “I held Colonel Selig in great affection since our first business transaction in 1910,” and Cecil B. DeMille, who eulogized that “Colonel Selig had the rugged strength of a true pioneer. When I first came to Hollywood I sat in his studio many a day watching his popular serial \textit{The Adventures of Kathleen} [sic] being filmed and learning many tricks of the trade . . . his death is a great loss.” Samuel Goldwyn put Selig’s accomplishments into perspective by noting, “Although he was not active in picture production in recent years, his influence has always been felt and will continue to be.” Selig was cremated following Episcopal and Masonic services; his wife Mary passed away nearly eight years later. Their ashes are interred together at Chapel of the Pines Crematory near downtown Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{109}
MORE THAN A CENTURY HAS PASSED SINCE WILLIAM SELIG LED THE motion picture industry to Los Angeles. So many of the things he initiated or was instrumental in developing are so intimately woven into the fabric of the movies that a complete accounting of his accomplishments is all but impossible. Thus it doesn’t seem all that far-fetched to suggest that commercial films made after Selig owe something to him, though it’s doubtful if anyone involved in the production of motion pictures over the past eighty years has been aware of that debt. It’s understandable, since few of the thirty-five hundred films Selig produced have been publicly exhibited since the silent era. Much more troubling is the fact that Col. William N. Selig is missing from most histories of the medium.

Although Selig was the first filmmaker to donate his papers to the Academy library, no one has ever bothered to fully examine the contents of that material. Why? Selig’s standing within the industry had already waned as the earliest movie histories were being written. With few exceptions, historical inquiries into the establishment of American commercial cinema tend to focus on those filmmakers whose careers span the late silent era through the post–World War II years. Most of the men who controlled the industry during this period claimed innovations and practices that had actually been developed by the first generation of filmmakers. Adding insult to injury, the second generation characterized the efforts of their predecessors as so primitive or inept that they did not merit attention. People writing about film tend to take them at their word, a few motivated by prejudice, others relying on secondary sources such as self-serving memoirs for information because it’s easier than researching more time-consuming primary sources.
Sorting through secondary sources alone to ascertain the truth can be a difficult task. Such is the case with the 1908 version of *Monte Cristo*, sometimes cited as the first film made in Los Angeles. In fact, actualities were made in downtown Los Angeles as early as 1898, and a film taken of a Los Angeles pigeon farm was listed in both Selig's 1903 catalogue of films and Edison catalogs at the turn of the century; it's anyone's guess as to who was duping whom. Charles G. Clarke wrote that a man with a camera came to LA to make a film of Roy Knabenshue's airship in 1903, though Marc Wannamaker claims Knabenshue was actually a filmmaker, producing *Old Dirigible* in 1904. Kevin Brownlow reported that Biograph established a studio in Los Angeles in 1906, but Jan Olsson has shown that it wasn't until January 23, 1910, that D. W. Griffith brought a company of Biograph players there. However, Biograph did send a cameraman to Los Angeles in 1906 to film *A Daring Hold-Up in Southern California*, a re-creation of an actual robbery of passengers on a trolley car. Albert E. Smith claimed to have made a Western in Southern California in May 1904, but the Vitagraph records do not support him. What does seem indisputable is that the beach shots made for *Monte Cristo* constitute the birth of the motion picture second unit, whereby a skeletal crew travels to photograph a location away from the studio in order to inject realistic elements or action-oriented exterior images into a fictional story.

Just as damaging to our understanding of cinema has been decades worth of prioritizing theory over history within academic film studies. Minimizing history in the service of artificial constructs that fall in and out of fashion leads to misinformation and misunderstandings. To be fair, generations of cinephiles have been conditioned to ignore or dismiss the pioneer filmmakers. The world of cinema studies needs to recognize, accommodate, and celebrate the need for serious historical inquiry that can exist independent of theory. A more complete and accurate historical record inevitably leads to deeper understanding and the opportunity to craft more plausible theory.

Few physical reminders of William Selig's legacy have survived into the twenty-first century. The five-story glass-roofed studio that Selig added to his Western Avenue and Irving Park Boulevard complex in 1909 is all that remains of his sprawling Chicago facility. In recent years the building has been converted into a condominium; the only evidence of its past history is the Diamond "S" frieze over the main entrance. Despite the fact that Selig single-handedly established filmmaking in the Windy City, the Essanay Company appears to be much better known to Chicagoans, probably because of the year Charlie Chaplin spent with the company, though ironically he refused to make films at its Chicago studio.
In Los Angeles there's a "William N. Selig" star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Hollywood Boulevard between Gower Street and El Centro Avenue. "Selig Place" is a half-block-long street bordering the long-forgotten entrance to the Selig Zoo and studio intersecting with Mission Road in East Los Angeles.

When Selig's "western company" arrived in Los Angeles in late March 1909, the city boasted a population of slightly more than three hundred thousand. Within half a dozen years that figure had doubled and Los Angeles was adjudged to be the motion picture capital of the world. One hundred years later there are approximately 10 million people in Los Angeles County, where the motion picture industry still dominates. When films shoot in downtown LA on weekends, production vehicles often park in a lot on Olive between Seventh and Eighth Streets, the site of Sing Kee's laundry, where Selig's first Los Angeles film was shot.

On January 1, 1916, the Los Angeles Times crowed:
No longer the grand entrance to the Selig Zoo, 2010. Author's collection

101 years after the filming of The Heart of a Race Tout, 2010. Author's collection
Some day, no doubt, . . . a suitable tablet will be imbedded in a certain spot on the grounds of a certain studio in Edendale . . . For here, hidden away now between the big steel-and-glass studio and immense concrete property house of the Selig Polyscope Company’s Edendale plant, is the first permanent moving picture stage built in California—the first footprint, as it were, of an industry which, in the six years since the pioneer producing company of actors arrived from Chicago, has impressed in tremendous degree the life of Southern California. 9

Before the mid-century buildings on the Selig Tract were leveled at the end of 2007, the property sported a plaque for more than half a century marking its importance to film history. The marker was placed there in tribute to Mack Sennett after he was feted on the This Is Your Life television show in 1954, but it was wrongly located; Sennett’s Keystone Studio was across Allesandro Street (now Glendale Boulevard) and two blocks south of Selig’s Edendale studio. 10 The adage that “a prophet hath no honor in his own country” seems to hold equally true for the pioneers of the motion picture industry.

After William Selig ceased to be a “player” in the industry that he helped to create, his one hope was to be acknowledged for his contributions. The Special Collections Department of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and

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Not a remnant left of the first Los Angeles studio, 2010. Author’s collection
Sciences’ Margaret Herrick Library has done an outstanding job in preserving the voluminous documents and photographs that were donated by Selig shortly before his death. Just as important to understanding and appreciating Selig’s achievements are the approximately 225 surviving prints of some of the most important films in the development of motion pictures that exist in film archives throughout the world.

During Selig’s lifetime it was frequently acknowledged that “due to [his] enterprise . . . there has been built up in Southern California the greatest moving picture manufacturing center in the world. He took the initiative in establishing a plant here and properly he can be called the father of the moving picture industry in [California].” In 1945, at the height of Hollywood’s success, the Los Angeles Times mused that “maybe if it hadn’t been for William N. Selig there never would have been a Hollywood.” These instances of public recognition of William Selig’s contributions are, unfortunately, more the exception than the rule.

Fortunately, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Los Angeles Zoo held special events during 2009 to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the motion picture industry in Southern California, with special emphasis on the contributions of the Selig Polyscope Company. It is hoped that the screenings and exhibits that accompanied these and similarly themed celebrations, along with this inquiry, will inspire greater interest not only in William Selig but also in the most neglected—and arguably the most creative and exciting—period of film history.
Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. 1947 Academy Awards show recording, MHL.
2. Dorothy Manners, “Selig Death Saddens Pioneers,” Examiner, July 17, 1948, Selig Biography Files, MHL.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Contemporaneous with Selig’s restorative sojourn in California, Thomas Edison and William Kennedy Laurie Dickson in the United States, Jules-Étienne Marey in France, and Louis Aimé Augustin Le Prince and William Friese-Greene in England were developing machines for recording and conveying motion pictures.
2. Typewritten, undated family history entitled “Selig Family” and State of California Certificate of Death stamped 48-053534, dated July 15, 1948, for William Nicholas Selig, courtesy of Jeff Look; National Archives, 1880 Census, Roll 189, Sheet 29, Selig, MHL; untitled manuscript, Selig Folder 551, MHL; Jeff Look interview with the author; see also Terry Ramsaye, A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture through 1925, 3rd ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 302–303. According to Ramsaye, Chicago Park was a health resort, not a fruit farm; Terry Ramsaye, “Col. Selig’s 50 Years,” Motion Picture Herald, March 11, 1944, 35.
NOTES TO PAGES 7–10

5. The account of Selig’s minstrel career is primarily taken from an untitled, undated manuscript written by William Selig, Selig Folder 551, MHL, and J. Keeley, untitled article, Selig Scrapbook #10, MHL. Ann Charters, Nobody: The Story of Bert Williams (London: Macmillan Company, 1970), 18, provides information on producing partner Lew Johnson, but fails to correctly identify Selig, probably because of a typographical error that refers to him as “Seig.” According to two articles written by Bert Williams and quoted in Eric Ledell Smith, Bert Williams: A Biography of the Pioneer Black Comedian (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1992), 9, 11–13, the troupe was called “Martin and Selig’s Mastodon Minstrels.”


9. William Selig, W. N. Selig, Selig Folder 551, MHL.


12. Charles Musser, Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 57–64. According to Terry Ramsaye, Selig witnessed the first public exhibition of a projected motion picture in Chicago that actually predated the Edison program. The projector was built by Woodville Latham. However, extant documentation indicates Selig had not yet arrived in Chicago by the time of the Latham exhibition. Ramsaye, A Million and One Nights, 191.

13. Untitled manuscript, Selig Folder 551, MHL.

14. Ramsaye, A Million and One Nights, 304–306; Musser, The Emergence of Cinema, 139, 168; Kitty Kelly, “Films and Such: A Chat with Wm. Selig,” Chicago Examiner, Selig Scrapbook #10, MHL; Ramsaye, “Col. Selig’s 50 Years,” 35–36, says that the camera was known as the “Schustek Camera.”

15. Untitled manuscript, Selig Folder 551, MHL; Scoop Conlon, “First Movie Studio in California Starts in Old Chinese Laundry to Film Pioneer ‘Thrillers,’” San Francisco Chronicle, January 15, 1922, 2E; W. N. Selig, Selig Folder 551, MHL.

17. Handwritten note by William Selig, Selig Folder 551, MHL.

18. “Black tent” (or “black top”) shows were popular motion picture exhibition venues at midwestern carnivals and county fairs prior to the nickelodeon era. These were special light-proof tents made for the continuous exhibition of films day and night. William N. Selig, “Cutting Back,” Photoplay, February 1920, 45.


20. James S. McQuade, “Twenty-One Years in the Business, Moving Picture World, May 12, 1917, 948–949; Selig Folder 551, MHL.

21. Selig, “Cutting Back,” 45. In an untitled manuscript, Selig Folder 551, MHL, Selig says the film was made in 1899. In other interviews, the date is given as 1896. For more information on the exhibiting practices of early film companies, see Max Alvarez, “The Origins of the Film Exchange,” Film History 17, no. 4 (2005): 431–465.

22. 1903 Complete Catalogue of Films and Moving Picture Machines, Selig Folder 552, MHL; Ramsaye, A Million and One Nights, 306; Conlon, “First Movie Studio,” 2E; Selig, “Cutting Back,” 44–45.

23. For instance, according to Charles Musser, “The most popular film of 1905, The Whole Dam Family and the Dam Dog, sold 92 prints during the year of its release, but Dream of a Rarebit Fiend sold 192 copies the following year.” Musser, Before the Nickelodeon, 330.

24. Untitled manuscript, Selig Folder 551, MHL. “There wasn’t a lecturer, carnival company or circus that did not show it”; W. K. Hollander, “Selig Reviews His Film Work,” Selig Scrapbook #10, MHL; 1903 Complete Catalogue.


31. Musser, The Emergence of Cinema, 255.

32. W. N. Selig, Selig Folder 551, MHL.

33. 1903 Complete Catalogue; McQuade, “Chicago News Letter,” 948.
34. Selig Polyscope Company ledger, Selig Folder 527, MHL; bill of sale, William N. Selig to the Selig Polyscope Company, Selig Folder 526, MHL.
35. Selig Polyscope Company ledger.
43. Abel, “Pathé Goes to Town,” 12; Eckhardt, 24, 39–44.
44. Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon*, 277.
46. The Selig projector was by no means the only culprit; it’s been estimated that by 1907 there had been approximately a thousand projector fires. Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 334, 443.
NOTES TO PAGES 15–19

52. Special Films of the Inauguration Ceremonies at Washington, D.C., March 4, 1905, Selig Folder 552, MHL; Slide, 12.
53. The Serenade, Selig Folder 552, MHL.
54. The Gay Deceivers, Selig Folder 552, MHL.
55. Abel, “Pathé Goes to Town,” 3; Anderson, “The Motion Picture Patents Company,” 70–71; Musser, The Emergence of Cinema, 488; Musser, Before the Nickelodeon, 276, 335; Niver, Biograph Bulletins, 4.
56. Kevin Brownlow, Behind the Mask of Innocence (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 472; see also Ramsaye, A Million and One Nights, 386–387.
57. Selig, “Cutting Back,” 45; 1907 Catalogue; The Female Highwayman, Supplement no. 47, Selig Folder 552, MHL.
58. Niver, Early Motion Pictures, 214; Musser, Before the Nickelodeon, 344. The individual episodes offered for sale from The Tomboys were An Irish Luncheon, A Misleading Sign, and The Mischievous Girls, 1907 Catalogue.
59. “Murdered Margaret Leslie a Figure in Moving Pictures at the Orpheum,” The Denver Post, October 26, 1906, 17.
60. Niver, Early Motion Pictures, 117; Niver, Biograph Bulletins, 262.
61. Letter from A. M. Whaylen to W. N. Selig, dated October 26, 1904, Selig Folder 460, MHL.
62. Letter from the Business Men’s Association of Ashland, Nebraska, to W. N. Selig, dated July 5, 1906, Selig Folder 467, MHL.
64. Letter from Rowland, Pittsburg Calcium, to William N. Selig, dated May 18, 1906, Selig Folder 460, MHL.
68. Letter from William Fox to Selig Polyscope Company, dated April 5, 1907, Selig Folder 458, MHL; letter from William Fox to Selig Polyscope Company, dated April 15, 1907, Charles G. Clarke Collection, Scrapbook #2, MHL; Musser, The Emergence of Cinema, 436.
70. Musser, Before the Nickelodeon, 327.
72. Letter from Loper to Selig Polyscope Company, dated August 21, 1908, Selig Folder 460, MHL.
74. Letter from H. H. Frazee to Selig Polyscope Company, dated December 31, 1908, Selig Folder 458, MHL.
76. 1907 Catalogue; Musser, The Emergence of Cinema, 478.
77. Abel, “Pathé Goes to Town,” 16; Anderson, “The Motion Picture Patents Company,” 10.
78. Prior to 1907, Selig had advertised sporadically, as finances allowed. See letter from Views and Films Index to Selig Polyscope Company, dated September 7, 1907, Selig Folder 473, MHL; and letter from J. P. Chalmers to William Selig, dated November 2, 1908, Selig Folder 473, MHL.
79. “The Selig Polyscope Company,” advertisement, Billboard, March 16, 1907, 112; Selig Folder 524, MHL.
80. Abel, “Pathé Goes to Town,” 12; Gartenberg, 8, 12. According to Albert Smith, Vitagraph’s first studio was built in Brooklyn in 1903. Albert Smith and Phil A. Koury, Two Reels and a Crank (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1952), 175, 251; Musser, Before the Nickelodeon, 158-159, 385-387; “The First Real Studios,” Moving Picture World, March 10, 1917, 1498.
84. Eckhardt, 86.
85. Musser, Before the Nickelodeon, 329, 335; Musser, The Emergence of Cinema, 451, 458; Gartenberg, 9-10.
NOTES TO PAGES 25–27


88. Musser, Before the Nickelodeon, 432.


90. Ramsaye, A Million and One Nights, 465.

91. Preliminary Injunction Gen. No. 26,512, dated November 1, 1907, Selig Folder 526, MHL.

92. For the definitive history of the Edison licensees and the Motion Picture Patents Company, see Anderson, “The Motion Picture Patents Company”; see also Ramsaye, A Million and One Nights, 466–467; Ramsaye, “A Romantic History of Motion Pictures,” 99–100; Musser, Before the Nickelodeon, 375–377.

93. License agreement between Edison Manufacturing Company and Selig Polyscope Company, dated January 31, 1908, Selig Folder 526, MHL; Musser, Before the Nickelodeon, 377.

94. Musser, Before the Nickelodeon, 377; agreement between Edison and Selig et al., dated February 8, 1908, Selig Folder 526, MHL; Anderson, “The Motion Picture Patents Company,” 11.

95. Musser, Before the Nickelodeon, 329; David Kiehn, Broncho Billy and the Essanay Film Company (Berkeley: Farwell Books, 2003), 7.


103. Review of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, in Moving Picture World, March 7, 1908, 194–195.

104. A Modern Dr. Jekyll, William Selig Papers, Folder 321, MHL.
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106. "Late Chicago News."
107. The Blue Bonnet, Selig Supplement no. 98, Selig Folder 553, MHL; "Late Chicago News."
108. The two Biograph films are The Chorus Girl and the Salvation Army Lassie (1903) and Soubrettes in a Bachelor's Flat (1903). Niver, Early Motion Pictures, 56, 306.
111. Contracts with exhibitors, Selig Folders 571 and 572, MHL.
113. Anderson, "The Motion Picture Patents Company," 269; quoted telegram from William Selig to George Kleine, May 14, 1911, George Kleine Collection, LOC.
115. Letter from Lewis Swaab to William Selig, dated August 28, 1908, Selig Folder 460, MHL.

CHAPTER TWO

2. H. H. Buckwalter letter to George Kleine, dated August 24, 1916, Box 19, George Kleine Collection, LOC.
NOTES TO PAGES 32–37


7. *Special Supplement of Colorado Films*.


9. “Redskins’ Realistic Charge.”

10. “Weird Dance of Utes Caught by the Camera,” *Denver Times*, November 25, 1902, 11, Buckwalter, CHS.


17. As occasionally happens in early cinema, *Tracked by Bloodhounds; or, A Lynching at Cripple Creek* was also known by another title, *Lynched without Trial*. “To Depict Stratton’s Part in Discovering Cripple Creek,” *Colorado Springs Telegraph*, July 18, 1904, 2, Buckwalter, CHS.

18. “H. H. Buckwalter Snaps Sensational Moving Picture,” *Cripple Creek Times*, April 10, 1904, Buckwalter, CHS.

19. “Bloodhound Chase”; “Mob Sought His Life,” *Denver Times*, July 19, 1904, Buckwalter, CHS; “Negroes Drive One of Their Race out of Town,” *Denver Post*, July 19, 1904, Buckwalter, CHS. The local African American community recognized Edwards as the actor playing the tramp, but generally, the tramp character has been taken to be a white person. “Mob Sought His Life” identifies the tramp as being Caucasian, for example. An audience viewing *Tracked by Bloodhounds* at Chapman University on November 12, 2007, also thought he was white.

20. J. Anthony Lukas, *Big Trouble* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 222, 228–229; *Tracked by Bloodhounds; or, A Lynching at Cripple Creek*, Selig Folder 552, MHL.

22. "Unique Pictures to Advertise Colorado," Denver Times, August 1, 1904, 7, Buckwalter, CHS; "Moving Pictures Will Advertise the District," Cripple Creek Times, October 4, 1904, Buckwalter, CHS.

23. Girls in Overalls, Selig Folder 552, MHL; "Seven Girls Who Own and Operate a 725 Acre Ranch," Chicago Tribune, October 16, 1904, F5; and "Girls in Overalls," after a Successful Harvest, Visit Denver," Denver Times, October 24, 1904, 8, Buckwalter, CHS.


25. The Hold-Up of the Leadville Stage, Selig Folder 552, MHL.

26. The Hold-Up of the Leadville Stage.

27. The Hold-Up of the Leadville Stage.


31. Hale's Tours Films, Supplement no. 44, August 1906, Selig Folder 552, MHL; 1907 Catalogue.

32. Denver Republican, March 7, 1906, Buckwalter, CHS.


34. Some historians spell his given surname "Aaronson"; I have deferred to the spelling used by David Kiehn, Anderson's biographer. David Kiehn, Broncho Billy and the Essanay Film Company (Berkeley: Farwell Books, 2003), 1-6.


Transcript, January 24, 1907, Buckwalter, CHS; "Trade Notes," Views and Film Index, February 23, 1907, 6; untitled clipping, Golden Globe, January 26, 1907, Buckwalter, CHS; "Moving Pictures of Denver Sought," Denver Republican, December 16, 1907, 8, Buckwalter, CHS.

37. Kevin Brownlow has suggested that "society girl" Pansy Perry may be the same woman who later doubled for Geraldine Farrar in Joan the Woman (1916). Letter from Kevin Brownlow to author, dated April 28, 2009.

38. The Girl from Montana, Selig Folder 552, MHL.


40. Denver Republican, January 13, 1907, Buckwalter, CHS; Golden Globe; "Actors and Actresses."

41. 1907 Catalogue.

42. Letter from N. H. Mosher to Selig Polyscope Company, dated April 21, 1907, Selig Folder 458, MHL; letter from Eastern Film Company to Selig Polyscope Company, dated April 27, 1907, Selig Folder 458, MHL.

43. Letter from William Fox to Selig Polyscope Company, April 15, 1907, Charles G. Clarke Collection, Scrapbook #2, MHL.

44. "Moving Pictures of Denver."


46. Added to the confusion of the kaleidoscopic imagery is the fact that the scenes are out of sequence. It is the policy of the Library of Congress not to rearrange any shots from paper prints, even when it can be proven beyond doubt that the images were originally released in a different sequence.


49. Smith, 30.


51. Smith, 38, 40, 43; Brownlow, 249.

52. Kiehn, 17; Denver Daily News, June 15, 1908, Buckwalter, CHS.

53. For instance, see Fenin and Everson, 53; Simmon, 33; and Brownlow, 249.

54. Grand Canyon of Arizona and Cliff Dwellers, advertisement, Moving Picture World, August 10, 1907, 1.


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58. Moving Picture World, April 17, 1909, 468.
59. F. N. Shorey, "Making a Selig Film," The Film Index, January 30, 1909, 4–5.
60. James S. McQuade, "Making 'Selig' Pictures," The Film Index, November 20, 1909, 4–6; On the Little Bighorn; or, Custer's Last Stand, Selig Folder 553, MHL.
63. "Custer's Last Stand."
65. On the Little Bighorn.
66. On the Little Bighorn; On the Little Big Horn, or Custer's Last Stand, Selig Folder 332, MHL.
68. On the Warpath, Selig Folder 333, MHL, Boots and Saddles, Selig Folder 553, MHL; In the Badlands, Selig Folder 553, MHL.
70. The Cowboy Millionaire, Selig Folder 553, MHL.
72. Letter from George H. Hines to William Selig, dated October 20, 1909, Selig Folder 458, MHL; Selig produced a remake of The Cowboy Millionaire in 1913.
74. Although Richard Dale Batman was the first to recognize the link between the establishment of the MPPC and Selig’s dispatch of the Boggs troupe to make Westerns in Los Angeles, he incorrectly asserted that the events occurred within twenty-four hours of each other. Richard Dale Batman, “The Founding of the Hollywood Motion Picture Industry,” Journal of the West 10, no. 4 (October 9, 1971): 610. For more on the establishment of Selig’s Los Angeles studio, see Chapter 4.
75. Ben’s Kid, Selig Folder 171, MHL.
77. Across the Divide, Selig Folder 154, MHL.
78. Buried Alive, Selig Folder 185, MHL.
81. The Stampede, Selig Folder 388, MHL; Musser, Before the Nickelodeon, 323; Kemp R. Niver, Early Motion Pictures: The Paper Print Collection from the Library of
82. "Selig Takes Pictures on 101 Ranch," Billboard, April 24, 1909, 14; The Stampede, Selig Folder 553, MHL.
84. Anderson, 24; Verhoeff, 362.
85. Simmon, 60.
86. Pratt, 143; Langman, ix–x.
87. Abel, 85; Simmon, 10.
88. Letter from E. C. Swigert to William N. Selig, dated July 31, 1909, Selig Folder 467, MHL.
89. A Daughter of the Sioux, Selig Folder 553, MHL.
90. The Ranch King's Daughter, Selig Folder 355, MHL.
92. Abel, 86.
95. Abel, 80.
99. Abel, 83; "What Is an American Subject?" Moving Picture World, January 22, 1910, 82.
105. Anderson, 25; Buscombe, 24; letter from W. C. Quimby to the Editor, Moving Picture World, February 11, 1911.
107. "Exporting the American Film," Motography, August 1911, 90.
NOTES TO PAGES 53–58

111. Michael Booth, ed., Hiss the Villain: Six English and American Melodramas (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), 34; Davy Crockett, Selig Folder 554, MHL.
112. Bunkie, Selig Folder 568, MHL.
113. Dengler, 17.
114. “Selig Company in Colorado,” Motography, September 1911, 146; letter from H. H. Buckwalter to Selig Polyscope Company, dated August 30, 1909, Selig Folder 458, MHL; letter from H. H. Buckwalter to William Selig, dated February 1, 1911, Charles G. Clarke Collection, Scrapbook #2, MHL.
117. Captain Brand’s Wife, Selig Folder 568, MHL.
119. The Country That God Forgot, advertisement, Moving Picture World, January 6, 1917, 40, Selig Folder 525, MHL.
120. Letter from W. Rushworth to Selig, London, dated August 29, 1917, Selig Folder 491, MHL; log of films ordered for distribution in the United Kingdom, Selig Scrapbook #9, MHL.
121. “California, the Producers’ Eden,” Motography, May 1912, 227–228.

CHAPTER THREE

4. Mix, 45, 46, 48, 66–67, 70.


12. Review of *The Range Riders*.


15. Mix, 74.


19. Letter from A. Perray to Selig Polyscope Company, dated October 23, 1910, Selig Folder 458, MHL.


21. Ramsaye, 544; *Biographies of Selig Players*, Selig Folder 528, MHL; Fenin and Everson, 109–111.


23. Langman, 276.


25. Emrich, 26, suggests that Mix may have been responsible for relocating the Selig troupe to Canon City, since he won the Royal Gorge Rodeo there in 1909.

26. *Canon City Record*, November 16, 1911, 2, quoted in Emrich, 39.

27. Mix, 81–83.

28. Emrich, 34.
NOTES TO PAGES 61–64

29. Letter from A. Cumiskey to Selig Polyscope Company, dated May 12, 1912, Selig Folder 491, MHL; letter from Central Picture Hall to Selig Polyscope Company, dated September 5, 1912, Selig Folder 491, MHL.


35. Yarbrough, 19.


37. Brownlow, 249.

38. Yarbrough, 19.

39. *The Sheriff of Yavapai County*, Selig Folder 557, MHL.

40. *The Taming of Texas Pete*, Selig Folder 569, MHL.

41. *Sallie's Sure Shot*, Selig Folder 569, MHL.

42. Langman, 79, 365.

43. *The Law and the Outlaw*, Selig Folder 558, MHL.

44. *The Escape of Jim Dolan*, Selig Folder 558, MHL.

45. *The Escape of Jim Dolan*, Selig Folder 570, MHL.

46. “Mix Overleaps Himself,” *New York Clipper*, September 27, 1913, Selig Scrapbook #2, MHL.

47. Harvey Parry’s revelations of stuntmen doubling for a reluctant Mix apply only to the films he made for Fox during the 1920s. Brownlow, 307.

48. Letter from Jas. T. Jameson and Sons to E. H. Monragu, dated March 18, 1914, Selig Folder 493, MHL; letter from Società Anonima per il commercio cinematografico to Selig Polyscope Company, dated January 23, 1915, Selig Folder 502, MHL.

49. *The Escape of Jim Dolan*, Selig Folder 570, MHL.

51. The Sheriff and the Rustler, Selig Folder 558, MHL; The Sheriff and the Rustler, Selig Folder 570, MHL.
52. Mix, 83.
55. “Fear Death for Tom Mix,” Los Angeles Examiner, May 6, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL; Los Angeles Express, May 6, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL.
56. “Tom Mix Emerges from Hospital after Being Declared Dead,” Plaza Magazine, June 14, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL.
57. Brownlow, 290.
59. New York Dramatic Mirror, July 1 [1914], Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL; New York Clipper, October 25, 1913, Selig Folder 524, MHL; Mix, 84; Robert S. Birchard, “Earliest Days of the Tom Mix Legend,” American Cinematographer, June 1987, 40.
60. Chip of the Flying “U”, Selig Folder 561, MHL.
61. Langman, 511; Why the Sheriff Is a Bachelor, Selig Folder 436, MHL.
62. The Scapegoat, Selig Folder 568, MHL; Langman, 394.
64. Letter from Tom Mix to William Selig, dated September 28, 1914, Selig Folder 453, MHL.
65. In the Days of the Thundering Herd, Selig Folder 561, MHL; “Selig Filming Lillie Buffalos,” Motography, January 10, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #2, MHL.
66. Review of In the Days of the Thundering Herd, Moving Picture World, December 12, 1914.
67. This misunderstanding has led to ill-informed statements such as the following: “The first Western epic, The Covered Wagon... was intended to be as different as possible from the series Western of the day starring Tom Mix.” Buscombe, 33.
68. Tenn.-Am., January 9, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.
69. Review of In the Days of the Thundering Herd, Pictures and the Picturegoer, May 8, 1915, 90–94, Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL.
71. The Moving Picture Cowboy, Selig Folder 561, MHL.
72. Langman, xvii; Brownlow, 307.
73. Sage Brush Tom, Selig Folder 436, MHL.
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74. “A Mix-Up in the Movies,” Selig Folder 435, MHL.
76. Patriot, July 25, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #7, MHL; Birchard, 40.
78. Moving Picture World, August 21, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #7, MHL; Paste-Pot and Shears, August 23, 1915, Selig Folder 562, MHL.
79. Paste-Pot and Shears, October 25, 1915, Selig Folder 562, MHL; Paste-Pot and Shears, January 10, 1916, Selig Folder 562, MHL.
81. Fenin and Everson, 113; Macgowan, 191.
82. Twisted Trails, Selig Scrapbook #9, MHL.
83. Log of films ordered for distribution in the United Kingdom, Selig Scrapbook #9, MHL.
84. Dickson G. Watts, review of The Heart of Texas Ryan, Selig Scrapbook #10, MHL; Brownlow, 307.
86. “Tornado Raises Havoc,” Los Angeles Times, August 27, 1916, III; The Heart of Texas Ryan, Selig Folder 58, MHL.
87. Log of films.
88. Starring in Western Stuff, Selig Folder 436, MHL; Starring in Western Stuff, Paste-Pot and Shears, December 25, 1916, Selig Folder 564, MHL.
89. Mix, 89–90.
90. Hampton, 124, 335.
91. Review of Movie Stunts Featuring Tom Mix, Moving Picture World, June 2, 1917, 1469, Selig Folder 525, MHL.
92. Langman, 197.
93. Fenin and Everson, 109; Buscombe, 35; Langman, xiii.
94. Langman, xiii; Buscombe, 30–31.
95. Langman, xiii.
96. Buscombe, 30–31, 35.
97. Brownlow, 264–308.
98. Brownlow, 307; The Heart of Texas Ryan, Selig Folder 58, MHL; “Typically Wild West Town”, Watts.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Monte Cristo, Selig Supplement no. 82, Selig Folder 553, MHL.
2. The same strategy was true of Edison's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903) and Vitagraph's several adaptations of Shakespeare released in 1908, including *Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet*, and *Richard III*.


5. *Monte Cristo*.


8. Unidentified clipping, Selig Scrapbook #1, MHL.


14. For instance, see letter from Peter Bacigalupi to "Dear Friend Selig," dated February 15, 1908, Selig Folder 458, MHL; and letter from Charles Morrell to "Friend Selig," dated June 16, 1906, Selig Folder 453, MHL.

15. This was not the first time Selig dispatched a unit to make films in New Orleans. Nearly a year earlier, in April 1908, director Paul DuPont and cameraman Hy Reimers made a film for Selig shot mostly at City Park in New Orleans utilizing local vaudeville talent. The shooting title was *Love's Dear Price*, though no such title was ever released by the company. "Making the Life Motion Pictures," Pensacola Journal, April 25, 1908, http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/locnn/sn87062268/1908-04-25/ed-1/seq-2/.


19. Unlike other studios, which typically numbered all of their productions sequentially for in-house business purposes, each of Selig’s directors seems to have utilized his own numbering system. By 1909, Selig productions were not released in the order in which they were produced; thus, release dates are a most unreliable means of attempting to determine a production chronology.

20. Fighting Bob, Selig Folder 226, MHL.


22. Four Wise Men of Dobbinsville, Selig Folder 236, MHL; Four Wise Men, Selig Supplement no. 147, Selig Folder 553, MHL; Four Wise Men, advertisement, Moving Picture World, March 20, 1909, 323; Four Wise Men, advertisement, New York Dramatic Mirror, March 27, 1909, 15.

23. The itinerant Selig troupe may have followed up Four Wise Men with The Dairy Maid’s Lovers, for which no information exists other than a release date, although it’s also possible that it was produced at the Chicago studio.


25. Scott, B17; Selig payroll record for April 2, 1910, Selig Folder 548, MHL.

note; "How the Movies Began in L.A.,” Los Angeles Evening Herald and Express, October 8, 1938, A16, Selig Folder 525, MHL; Ramsaye, “Col. Selig’s 50 Years,” 35–36; Henry, A1; Cecilia Rasmussen, “L.A. Then and Now: Movie Industry’s Roots in Garden of Edendale,” Los Angeles Times, September 16, 2001, B3. The continuity script for Heart of a Race Tout was purchased from William Selig by Charles G. Clarke, who withheld it from the other Selig documents he donated to the Motion Picture Academy. The script disappeared following Clarke’s death and is presumably now in the possession of a private collector.

27. The Heart of a Race Tout, Selig Folder 553, MHL.


32. Displeased with the climactic scenes for one of the last films produced at Olive Street, The Wheels of Justice, Boggs reshot a new ending two months later in Dunsmuir, California. See note from Francis Boggs to Tom, dated July 29, 1909, The Wheels of Justice, Selig Folder 420, MHL. Ironically, production stills from the discarded finale have been misidentified in books and articles as being from Heart of a Race Tout. For instance, see Kalton C. Lahue, ed., Motion Picture Pioneer: The Selig Polyscope Company (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1973), 27.

33. As with the productions made on the road to New Orleans and later on in Northern California and the Pacific Northwest, the chronology of Olive Street studio films is based primarily on the production numbering and notes contained in Boggs’ scripts, supported by correspondence, production stills, and reminiscences. It’s possible that Peasant Prince was immediately preceded or succeeded by A Royal Outcast or The False Alarm, for which no information exists other than a release date.

34. The Peasant Prince, Selig Folder 346, MHL.

35. Ben’s Kid, Selig Folder 171, MHL; Ben’s Kid, Selig Folder 553, MHL; Ainsworth, 17.

36. Mrs. Jones’ Birthday, Selig Folder 320, MHL.

37. Review of A Robust Patient, The Film Index, January 28, 1911, 23; Lahue, 146; Alas! Poor Yorick, Selig Folder 557, MHL.

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39. In the Sultan’s Power, Selig Folder 553, MHL.

40. Birchard, 77–78.

41. In the Sultan’s Power; Bosworth, 75–76.

42. In fact, McGee remained employed in similar capacities for Selig into the 1920s. Dengler, 17.

43. The Witches Cavern, Selig Folder 427, MHL.

44. “Actors Rest at the Tavern,” Los Angeles Times, August 7, 1909, Ill8; Babcock, C11, C28; Scott, B17; Conlon, 2E; “Actor Made Early Movie Appearance,” Los Angeles Times, July 14, 1929, 20.

45. The Stage Driver, Selig Photo Collection, MHL.

46. Letter from Francis Boggs to W. N. Selig, dated August 16, 1909, Clarke Scrapbook #3, MHL.

47. “Selig Talks,” Film Index, September 18, 1909, 12.


49. Letter from Marcus Loew to Selig Polyscope Company, dated August 20, 1909, Selig Folder 459, MHL.

50. “Chicago Film Notes,” Billboard, September 18, 1909, 40.


52. Babcock, C11, C28; “Echoes from the Selig Jungle,” 70–71; Conlon, 2E; handwritten note by William Selig; Birchard, 79.

53. Brought to Terms, Selig Folder 182, MHL.


55. The Roman, Selig Folder 362, MHL.

56. The Wife of Marcius, Selig Folder 424, MHL; Bosworth, 77; Birchard, 79.

57. For instance, see Edendale payroll records for April 2, 1910. Selig Folder 548, MHL.


60. “Los Angeles,” Moving Picture World, December 2, 1911, Selig Biography Files, MHL.


67. “Independents,” New York Dramatic Mirror, October 9, 1909, 17. In a column written in 1939, when he was a top director at MGM, Robert Leonard claimed that when he became an actor for Selig thirty years earlier one of his duties was to patrol location shoots armed with a loaded gun and “scare, if not shoot” cameramen from independent companies attempting to surreptitiously film the Selig production and pass it off as their own. Robert E. [sic] Leonard, “Looking at Hollywood by Ed Sullivan,” Chicago Tribune, March 16, 1939, 19.


70. Selig, “Cutting Back,” 130; Samuel of Posen, advertisement, Moving Picture World, February 26, 1910, 310; Samuel of Posen, Selig Folder 554, MHL; Samuel of Posen, Selig Folder 369, MHL; Samuel of Posen, Selig Folder 368, MHL; Moving Picture World, January 8, 1910, 18; The Hall Room Boys, Selig Folder 247, MHL; The Hall Room Boys, Selig Folder 554, MHL.

71. Moving Picture World, January 8, 1910, 18.


74. Clarke, Early Film Making, 21.

75. Rasmussen, B3; Blaisdell, 230.


77. Eugenie Besserer, Selig Microfiche Files, MHL; Eugenie Besserer, obituary, Variety, June 5, 1934; Eugenie Besserer, Biographies of Selig Players, Selig Folder 528, MHL; Paste-Pot and Shears, September 27, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #5, MHL; Temple Grand [Theatre] advertisement, Selig Scrapbook #5, MHL; payroll for six days ending November 19, 1910, Selig Folder 548, MHL; The Profligate, Selig Folder 554, MHL; Dengler, 12.

78. The Profligate.
79. Payroll for six days ending September 23, 1911, Selig Folder 548, MHL.
80. Dengler, 10, 17.
81. Letter from Hobart Bosworth to Francis Boggs, dated May 31, 1911, Selig Folder 453, MHL; letter from Hobart Bosworth to Francis Boggs, dated June 28, 1911, Selig Folder 453, MHL.
82. McKee Rankin’s “49”, William Selig Papers, Folder 312, MHL.
84. Spencer, 768; Dengler, 12, 17; “Perils of Betty,” Los Angeles Times, September 15, 1963, G1, G7.
86. Méliès may also have briefly opened a Los Angeles studio. In addition, Flying A settled in Santa Barbara, and Essanay’s Western unit operated a studio in Redlands before permanently relocating to Niles, California. “Los Angeles”; “Los Angeles Great Back-Drop for the World,” Los Angeles Times, January 14, 1912, V19.
88. Selig Edendale payroll for September 23, 1911, Selig Folder 548, MHL.
89. Birchard, 81.
90. The Danites, Selig Folder 207, MHL.
91. The Danites, Selig Folder 208, MHL; The Danites, Selig Folder 568, MHL; Birchard, 81–82.
92. Dengler, 17.
93. Motography, July 1911, 46.
94. According to the Los Angeles Times, Minematsu fired another shot in the direction of Bessie Eyton that traveled through the studio, breaking both glass walls; however, this may have been a product of Hobart Bosworth’s imagination since it’s not mentioned in any of the other accounts of the murder and contradicts all other reports, namely that Minematsu actually waited to kill Boggs so as not to place the women in harm’s way. “Life Price of Fancied Wrong,” Los Angeles Times, October 28, 1911, III.
95. “Selig, Photoplay Magnate Shot, Aid Slain by Jap,” Los Angeles Examiner, October 28, 1911, 1; “Life Price of Fancied Wrong”; “Slayer Delays Deed to Save


100. "Nippon Killer," II.

101. "Assassination of Francis Boggs," 234; Birchard, 83. Unfortunately, microfilmed records of the Minematsu trial, case #7250, are currently missing from the Los Angeles Superior Court Archives.

102. McQuade, "The Los Angeles Tragedy," 455. Unfortunately, fewer than ten of the approximately two hundred films directed by Boggs are known to still exist.

103. Letter from Samuel Long to E. H. Montagu, dated November 10, 1911, Selig Folder 471, MHL.

104. Letter from the Pacific Coast Branch of the Selig Polyscope Company to Mr. W. N. Selig, undated, Selig Folder 521, MHL.

105. Letter from Herbert Rawlinson to Francis Boggs, dated August 2, 1910, Clarke Scrapbook #3, MHL.

106. Robert S. Birchard was the first to make the connection between Nestor and the day Boggs was killed, although he erroneously reported that David Horsley's company arrived in Hollywood that day rather than initiating their first production. Paul Mandell, "David Horsley, Pioneer Picturemaker," *American Cinematographer* 70, no. 3 (March 1989), 49; Birchard, 83.


109. The vituperative Boggs refers to the black stevedores in *Skipper Daughters* as "niggers" and "coons" and the Chinese hero of *Buried Alive* as a "chink" throughout the script. The two black characters in *Stage Driver* are an "Old Coon" and "Saloon Nigger," and the Chinese in *Smuggler's Game* are called "chinks" throughout. *The Skipper and His Mates* (aka *The Skipper's Daughters*), Selig
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Folder 379, MHL; Buried Alive, Selig Folder 185, MHL; The Stage Driver, Selig Folder 387, MHL; The Smuggler’s Game, Selig Folder 380, MHL.


111. Birchard, 80, 83.

112. Note, for instance, the dissolves and matte work in A Soldier’s Dream, the tracking shot in The Female Highwayman, and the close-up of Pansy Perry at the beginning of The Girl from Montana.


118. “Slayer Delays Deed,” 3.


120. Bosworth, 78.

121. Letter from Hobart Bosworth to Francis Boggs, dated May 31, 1911; letter from Hobart Bosworth to Francis Boggs, dated June 28, 1911.

122. Bosworth, 78.


CHAPTER FIVE

1. For instance, see “Some of the Selig Producers and Writers,” Motography, July 24, 1915, 144.


3. William N. Selig, Hunting Big Game in Africa, unpublished manuscript, Selig Folder 551, MHL.

4. William N. Selig, unpublished manuscript, Selig Folder 551, MHL.


6. Selig, Hunting Big Game.
10. Selig, Hunting Big Game.
13. Selig, Hunting Big Game; A Wise Old Elephant, Selig Folder 426, MHL.
15. Selig, Hunting Big Game.
17. “Hunting African Lions.”
18. Selig, Hunting Big Game.
20. Two production stills reprinted in the Chicago Tribune suggest that two cameramen were utilized. An eyewitness account published in the Tribune confirms this, identifying them as Tom Nash and Charley Turner, though “Charley” may have been a nickname for the film’s director, Otis Turner, since there are no records of a Charley Turner ever working for Selig. Kevin Brownlow identifies the other cameraman as Emmett Vincent O’Neill, who was employed at Selig’s Chicago studio at the time. According to Terry Ramsaye, 520, one of the cameramen was Thomas Persons, long a source of misinformation. Brownlow, 405; “Hunting African Lions.”
22. No prints of the film survive; the shooting sequence and story of Hunting Big Game in Africa have been culled from Selig, Hunting Big Game; Ramsaye, 520; “Scientific Nature Faking”; “Hunting African Lions”; Hunting Big Game in Africa, Selig Folder 553, MHL.
24. Hunting Big Game, Selig Folder 553, MHL; Kitty Kelly, “Films and Such: A Chat with Wm. Selig,” Chicago Examiner, Selig Scrapbook #10, MHL.
NOTES TO PAGES 105–109


32. Ramsaye, 522; Mitman, 10; Richard Alan Nelson, "Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 1898–1930", PhD diss., Florida State University, June 1980, Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI (ATT 8020342 [148]).


34. Mitman, 5.


36. *The Lion Tamer*, Selig Folder 298, MHL.


38. Review of *The Leopard Queen*, in *Moving Picture World*, August 21, 1909, 253; *The Leopard Queen*, Selig Folder 296, MHL.

39. *The Lion Tamer*, Selig Folder 298, MHL; *The Leopard Queen*, Selig Folder 553, MHL.

40. Kelly.


42. *Won in the Desert*, Selig Folder 429, MHL; *Lost in the Soudan*, Selig Folder 554, MHL; James S. McQuade, "Chicago Letter," *Film Index*, July 9, 1910, 8; *The Christian Martyrs*, Selig Folder 192, MHL.


44. Stroller, "A Visit from the 'Film King,'" *The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, July 30, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.


46. Nelson, 131, 149–150.

48. Shadows of the Past, Selig Folder 376, MHL.


50. Back to the Primitive, Selig Folder 568, MHL.

51. The Survival of the Fittest, Selig Folder 555, MHL.

52. Letter from William Mong to William N. Selig, dated December 17, 1910, Selig Folder 453, MHL.

53. “Cape Cod Held to Light,” Los Angeles Times, October 6, 1929, B15.

54. Lost in the Arctic, Selig Folder 568, MHL.

55. The narrative for Lost in the Jungle exploits the enmity between British and Dutch (Boer) colonists in East Africa that culminated in the recent Boer War (1899–1902).


57. “Film and Screen: Kathlyn Williams,” Chicago Tribune, March 1, 1914, B11; “How Jungle Film Thrillers Are Made.”


60. Two Old Pals, Selig Folder 556, MHL; Two Old Pals, Selig Folder 568, MHL.


63. “Maintaining a Wild Animal Jungle.”

64. Kings of the Forest, Selig Folder 556, MHL; Kings of the Forest, Selig Folder 288, MHL; “Baby Lillian Wade,” Selig Scrapbook #3, MHL; One of Nature’s Noblemen, Selig Folder 568, MHL.


66. “Colin Campbell Joins Selig.”
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67. Arabia Takes the Health Cure, Selig Folder 557, MHL.
68. According to promotional material for the film, Toddlies was born in Cathay, India, and toured with the Ringling Brothers before joining Big Otto’s Circus and becoming an employee of William Selig. *A Wise Old Elephant*, Selig Folder 557, MHL; *A Wise Old Elephant*, Selig Folder 426, MHL.
69. *Thor: Lord of the Jungle*, Selig Folder 570, MHL; “Handling Wild Animals in Pictures,” Selig Folder 551, MHL.
73. Peary, 39.
75. Blaisdell, 227.
76. “Handling Wild Animals.”
78. *New York Dramatic Mirror*, October 7 [1914], Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.
85. "Selig Polyscope Co. Spends $1,000,000 in Southern California," *Selig, Kleine and Essanay Convention News Magazine*, 12, Selig Folder 574, MHL.

86. Blaisdell, 228.

87. Blaisdell, 227.


89. Minutes for March 1915 Board of Directors Meeting, Selig Folder 527, MHL.


94. "Blondes Halted”; *Photoplay Scenario*, Selig Scrapbook #7, MHL.


97. Blaisdell, 227; in Hearst newspapers the train was called the “Hearst-Selig Exposition Special.” “Motion Picture Special Leaves,” *Chicago Examiner*, July 9, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL.

98. "Film Men to Spend Week in Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Examiner*, July 4, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL.

99. We Want You with Us in California, Selig Exposition Special, Selig Folder 573, MHL; “Three Fair Trips for Ohio’s Fairest Enliven Interest in Girls’ Contest,” *Cleveland Leader*, Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL.
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103. “60 Mile an Hour Movies.” For more on the Hearst-Selig alliance, see Chapter 7.

104. “Film Men to Spend Week”; “1,500 Film Folk to Visit South,” *Los Angeles Express*, July 5, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL; *Motion Picture News*, July 17, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL; “9,000 Delight in Attractions at Selig Zoo Park,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, Selig Scrapbook #8, MHL; *We Want You with Us.*


109. Giles Club business card, Selig Scrapbook #8, MHL.
110. "A Visit to the Selig Zoo."
112. Harleman.
113. Los Angeles Examiner, November 21, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #8, MHL; "Uncle Sam to Ride Elephant in Parade," Selig Scrapbook #8, MHL.
115. Paste-Pot and Shears, January 31, 1916, Selig Folder 562, MHL.
123. Fenton, 74–76; Porges, 227–228; Taliaferro, 121.
124. Victor Milner would go on to have a distinguished career as one of Cecil B. DeMille’s principal cinematographers, winning an Academy Award for his work on *Cleopatra* (1934). Letter from Victor Milner to E. H. Montagu, dated April 11 [1915], Selig Folder 467, MHL; *Bengar Pictures, Inc.*, pamphlet, Selig Folder 528, MHL.

125. Porges, 226, 229.


130. Porges, 235.

131. James S. McQuade, review of *The Lad and the Lion*, *Moving Picture World*, June 2, 1917, 1456, Selig Folder 524, MHL; Taliaferro, 133.


133. For more information on the dissolution of the Selig Polyscope Company, see Chapter 9.


137. *Sic-Em*, AFI catalog clipping, Production Files, MHL; *Sic-Em*, press book, Production Files, MHL.


139. *Miracles of the Jungle*, Selig Folder 115, MHL; *Miracles of the Jungle*, Selig Folder 110, MHL.

140. Letter from William N. Selig to Warner Bros., dated October 4, 1920, Selig Folder 120, MHL; letter from William N. Selig to Warner Bros., dated October 5, 1920, Selig Folder 120, MHL; letter from William N. Selig to Abe Warner, dated October 20, 1920, Selig Folder 120, MHL.
141. Letter from Abe Warner to William N. Selig, dated April 13, 1921, Selig Folder 120, MHL; letter from William N. Selig to Abe Warner, dated April 20, 1921, Selig Folder 120, MHL; “Riled at Hubby’s Ma,” Los Angeles Times, December 24, 1915, I13.

142. The Jungle Goddess, Selig Folder 91, MHL; Joe Weil, “Not for Ten Thousand a Week!” Pantomime, June 3, 1922, 18, Selig Folder 91, MHL; The Jungle Goddess, Selig Folder 75, MHL.

143. Laurence Reid, review of The Jungle Goddess, Motion Picture News, Selig Folder 91, MHL.

144. Roger Ferri, review of The Jungle Goddess, Moving Picture World, Selig Folder 91, MHL.


147. Eyman, 77–79, 84; Schulberg, 154.


150. “Selig Zoo Will Be ‘Luna Park,’” Los Angeles Times, August 30, 1925, 14.

151. For instance, see letter from Channing Pollock to W. N. Selig, dated September 21, 1925, addressed to 3800 Mission Road, Selig Folder 455, MHL.

152. “Animal Rental 1925,” Ledger, Selig Folder 519, MHL.

153. Sutherland.


156. Sutherland.


158. Blaisdell, 227.

159. Don Haley, “The Los Angeles No One Knows,” January 1963, 18, Selig Biography Files, MHL.


162. Westphal; Urban, “Zoo Oughta Be in Pictures,” 7; Haley; Bailey.
NOTES TO PAGES 132–134

CHAPTER SIX

1. "Of Interest of German Residents," *Rocky Mountain News*, September 14, Buckwalter, CHS.
10. "MPPC Selig Report on Europe," 8–9; for example, by 1911 Russia reportedly had twelve hundred movie theaters. See "Exporting an Imaginary America."
14. *Briton and Boer*, Selig Folder 553, MHL.
15. *The Highlander's Defiance*, Selig Folder 554, MHL.
18. McQuade, "Chicago Letter."
21. Letter from C. North, manager of Edison Parlor Theatre, to Selig Polyscope Company, dated December 10, 1908, Selig Folder 483, MHL.

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23. Letter from Eclipse Trading Company to Selig, London, dated May 9, 1911, Selig Folder 491, MHL; letter from A. Cumiskey to Selig, London, dated May 12, 1912, Selig Folder 491, MHL.


26. Letter from George Leal and Company to Selig, dated January 19, 1915, Selig Folder 513, MHL.

27. “Exporting the American Film,” 90–91.

28. “Behind the Scenes,” Pictures and the Picturegoer, March 31–April 7, 1917, 16, Selig Scrapbook #10, MHL.

29. Selig Release Bulletin no. 66, Selig Folder 569, MHL; Selig Release Bulletin no. 146, Selig Folder 570, MHL; letter from E. H. Montagu to the Exhibitors Mail, dated December 22, 1913, Selig Folder 497, MHL.

30. Selig Release Heralds, Selig Folder 566, MHL.

31. Selig Release Bulletin no. 6, Selig Folder 568, MHL.

32. Selig Release Bulletin no. 20, Selig Folder 568, MHL.

33. Selig Release Bulletin no. 10, Selig Folder 568, MHL; Selig Release Bulletin no. 18, Selig Folder 568, MHL.


36. Letter from A. W. Lillington to Selig Polyscope Company, dated January 9, 1912, Selig Folder 496, MHL.

37. Letter from La Industria Electrica to E. H. Montagu, dated August 26, 1911, Selig Folder 506, MHL.

38. Letter from Alexis Bouquin to Selig Polyscope Company, dated September 4, 1911, Selig Folder 478, MHL.

39. Letter from Constantin Brenner to E. H. Montagu, dated November 3, 1911, Selig Folder 510, MHL.

40. Letter from J. Powell to E. H. Montagu, dated October 6, 1911, Selig Folder 477, MHL.

41. Letter from the Electric Picture Palace to Selig, dated January 12, 1912, Selig Folder 492, MHL.
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42. Letter from Sydney H. Carter to E. H. Montagu, dated August 16, 1913, Selig Folder 501, MHL.
43. Al G. Waddell, “‘Duke’ The Big Lion Actor,” Los Angeles Times, January 31, 1913, III.
44. Letter from J. F. Madan to E. H. Montagu, dated November 20, 1913, Selig Folder 501, MHL; letter from H. J. Gershoi to E. H. Montagu, dated December 17, 1913, Selig Folder 511, MHL.
45. In the Midst of the Jungle, Selig Folder 71, MHL; In the Midst of the Jungle, Selig Folder 570, MHL.
49. Various correspondence, Selig Folders 490–491, MHL.
50. Letter from S. E. Quimet to Selig Polyscope Company, dated April 12, 1907, Selig Folder 483, MHL; letter from L. J. Applegath to Selig Polyscope Company, dated July 22, 1909, Selig Folder 483, MHL; letter from Stanislaw Salzman to E. H. Montagu, dated March 22, 1911, Selig Folder 508, MHL; letter from Manuel M. Voister to E. H. Montagu, dated July 9, 1911, Selig Folder 513, MHL; letter from Walter L. Isaacs to Selig Polyscope Company, dated December 10, 1908, Selig Folder 471, MHL.
51. Moving Picture World, October 25, 1913, Selig Scrapbook #2, MHL.
52. “W. N. Selig Returns from Europe Pleased by Trip,” Telegram, October 19, 1913, Selig Scrapbook #2, MHL.
53. Stoller, “A Visit from the ‘Film King,’” Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly, July 30, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL; Moving Picture World, July 25, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #3, MHL.
55. Letter from Paul Singer to E. H. Montagu, dated July 29, 1914, Selig Folder 487, MHL.
56. Letter from Williamson, Dressler and Company to William N. Selig, dated September 24, 1909, Selig Folder 495, MHL; letter from Swaan to E. H. Montagu, dated April 14, 1911, Clarke Scrapbook #2, MHL; letter from Société des Établissements Gaumont to Selig Polyscope Company, dated September 8, 1910, Clarke Scrapbook #2, MHL; letter from Baker to E. H. Montagu, dated August 6, 1914, Selig Folder 487, MHL.
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57. Letter from Baker to E. H. Montagu, dated August 6, 1914, Selig Folder 487, MHL.

58. Letter from E. H. Montagu to the Cinematograph Exhibitors’ Association of Great Britain and Ireland, dated August 31, 1914, Selig Folder 489, MHL.

59. Tom Bourke, “America Must Take Care of Europe, says W. N. Selig on Return,” Telegraph, March 3, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #3, MHL.

60. Letter from Lionel F. Chambers to E. H. Montagu, dated August 27, 1914, Selig Folder 492, MHL.

61. For example, see letter from John H. Taylor to E. H. Montagu, dated August 27, 1914, Selig Folder 491, MHL; letter from Anglo-American Films to E. H. Montagu, dated September 18, 1914, Selig Folder 490, MHL; letter from the City Film Service to E. H. Montagu, dated November 17, 1914, Selig Folder 491, MHL.

62. Letter from E. H. Montagu to the Cinematograph Exhibitors’ Association of Great Britain and Ireland, dated August 31, 1914, Selig Folder 489, MHL.


64. Letter from The Film Renter to E. H. Montagu, dated January 15, 1915, Selig Folder 497, MHL.

65. Letter from Fred Dangerfield to E. H. Montagu, dated May 11, 1915, Selig Folder 497, MHL.


67. Letter from the Artograph Film Company to Selig Polyscope Company, dated April 14, 1915, Selig Folder 490, MHL.

68. Letter from Charles Helfer to William N. Selig, dated March 8, 1915, Selig Folder 487, MHL.

69. Letter from F. A. Noggerath to E. H. Montagu, dated December 6, 1915, Selig Folder 504, MHL.

70. Letter from L. Burstein to E. H. Montagu, dated March 29, 1915, Selig Folder 515, MHL.

71. “Films Were Lost,” Movie Record, June 7, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #7, MHL.


73. Letter from Lobenstein to William Selig, dated October 14, 1915, Selig Folder 500, MHL; letter from Lobenstein to William Selig, dated October 30, 1915, Selig Folder 500, MHL.

74. Letter from F. A. Noggerath to E. H. Montagu, dated December 6, 1915, Selig Folder 504, MHL.
75. Letter from F. Grant to E. H. Montagu, dated December 15, 1915, Selig Folder 492, MHL.
76. Letter from Alfonso y Castro to E. H. Montagu, dated April 26, 1916, Selig Folder 514, MHL.
77. Log of films 1916–1917 ordered for distribution in the United Kingdom, Selig Scrapbook #9, MHL.
78. See Chapter 9 for more information concerning I'm Glad My Boy Grew Up to Be a Soldier.
79. Paste-Pot and Shears, March 13, 1916, Selig Folder 562, MHL; Paste-Pot and Shears, March 20, 1916, Selig Folder 563, MHL.
80. For more on The Coming of Columbus, see Chapter 8.
81. “Selig to Stage Stupendous Spectacles,” Movie Magazine, May 15 [1915], Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL; James S. McQuade, Moving Picture World, quoted in Paste-Pot and Shears, October 16, 1916, Selig Folder 564, MHL; The Crisis, British theater program, Selig Folder 50, MHL; Paste-Pot and Shears, April 10, 1916, Selig Folder 563, MHL; Paste-Pot and Shears, June 5, 1916, Selig Folder 563, MHL; “Startling Realism Marks Battle Scenes,” Selig Scrapbook #11, MHL.
82. “Selig Sells Interest in The Crisis for Quarter of a Million Dollars,” Paste-Pot and Shears, September 18, 1916, Selig Folder 564, MHL.
83. The Crisis, British theater program; Paste-Pot and Shears, September 11, 1916, Selig Folder 564, MHL.
84. Letter from John H. Kunsky, Detroit, to W. N. Selig, dated November 27, 1916, Selig Folder 459, MHL.
89. William N. Selig, manuscript, ca. 1917, Selig Folder 551, MHL.
90. “Private Presentation of The Crisis in New York,” Paste-Pot and Shears, October 9, 1916, Selig Folder 564, MHL.
93. The Crisis, Selig Folder 50, MHL.
94. The Crisis by Winston Churchill, Selig Folder 50, MHL; review of The Crisis, London Evening News, Selig Scrapbook #11, MHL.
95. Letter from R. Allen to Selig Polyscope Company, dated February 8, 1918, Selig Folder 494, MHL; letter from New Empire to Selig Polyscope Company, dated December 8, 1917, Selig Folder 48, MHL; letter from John E. Blakely to Selig Polyscope Company, dated December 13, 1917, Selig Folder 48, MHL; letter from the Picturedome to Selig Polyscope Company, dated December 15, 1917, Selig Folder 48, MHL.

96. Letter from the Picture House to Selig Polyscope Company, dated December 27, 1917, Selig Folder 48, MHL.

97. Letter from the Olympia to Selig Polyscope Company, dated January 4, 1918, Selig Folder 49, MHL; letter from the Empire to Selig Polyscope Company, dated January 28, 1918, Selig Folder 49, MHL; letter from the Gaiety to Selig Polyscope Company, dated February 13, 1918, Selig Folder 49, MHL.

98. J.J., "Bankruptcy in Pictures Laid to War Conditions," Variety, October 25, 1918, 32. Kevin Brownlow has pointed out that "The Birth of a Nation, when shown in London, also had a depressive effect on British audiences. They had been taught to believe war was a glorious thing, and Griffith confronted them with a powerful pacifist statement. The audiences here may have avoided The Crisis, expecting more of the same." Letter from Kevin Brownlow to the author, dated April 28, 2009.

99. Log of films 1916–1917 ordered for distribution in the United Kingdom, Selig Scrapbook #9, MHL.


101. For information on the grave effect World War I had on Vitagraph’s international business, see Smith and Koury, 252, 259, 261–262.

CHAPTER SEVEN


3. Griffiths, 284–285; Frederick Starr, Congo Natives (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1912), Selig Folder 586, MHL.


6. In Japan, Selig Folder 568, MHL; The Ainu of Japan, Selig Folder 557, MHL; Griffiths, 284.

7. Bengar Pictures, Inc., Selig Folder 528, MHL; “William N. Selig,” undated manuscript, Selig Folder 551, MHL.


10. Selig Supplement no. 55, Selig Folder 552, MHL; Altman, 67–69.


13. Making a Six-Ton Cheese, Selig Folder 568, MHL.


17. The Kentucky Derby, William Selig Papers, Folder 569, MHL.


20. “Selig Athletic and Physical Culture Contests,” Selig Monthly Herald, April 1915, Selig Folder 561, MHL.

21. Letter from H. L. Virden to W. N. Selig, dated August 2, 1911, Selig Folder 457, MHL.

22. Letter from H. L. Virden to W. N. Selig, dated August 18, 1911, Selig Folder 457, MHL; letter from H. L. Virden to W. N. Selig, dated September 22 [sic], 1911, Selig Folder 457, MHL.


24. Letter from Wolcott Coombs to William Selig, dated September 27, 1911, Selig Folder 457, MHL.
25. Letter from H. L. Virden to W. N. Selig, dated October 25, [1911], Selig Folder 457, MHL.
26. Letter from Wolcott Coombs to A. M. Coombs, dated November 8, 1911, Selig Folder 457, MHL.
27. Letter from A. M. Coombs to Wolcott Coombs, dated November 13, 1911, Selig Folder 457, MHL.
28. Letter from Wolcott Coombs to Mr. Twist, dated November 20, 1911, Selig Folder 457, MHL; letter from H. L. Virden to Mr. Twist, dated November 20, 1911, Selig Folder 457, MHL.
32. Fielding, 68–69, 71, 75, 80, 82–84, 85.
34. Fielding, 3, 85–87. According to Louis Pizzitola, 102, the *Hearst-Selig* newsreel debuted a day earlier, on February 27, 1914.
35. Fielding, 78–79.
40. “Record Crowds See Real War Movies,” *San Francisco Examiner*, January 16, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.
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42. "Dame Fashion in Motion Pictures," Moving Picture World, March 27, 1915, 2034, Selig Scrapbook #5, MHL.

43. Paste-Pot and Shears, August 23, 1915, Selig Folder 562, MHL.

44. Paste-Pot and Shears, November 1, 1915, Selig Folder 562, MHL.

45. Paste-Pot and Shears, September 6, 1915, Selig Folder 562, MHL.


47. Fielding, 86–88; "Hearst's News of the Day."

48. For more on the partnership between Selig and the Tribune in exploiting The Adventures of Kathlyn, see Chapter 8.


50. Fielding, 88, 105; Cohn, 46–47, 152; Paste-Pot and Shears, January 17, 1916, Selig Folder 562, MHL.

51. Cohn, 44–45, 152. For instance, see letter from Otto Wells to Selig Polyscope Company, dated December 27, 1915, Selig Folder 460, MHL.

52. Paste-Pot and Shears, August 7, 1916, Selig Folder 563, MHL.

53. Paste-Pot and Shears, October 30, 1916, Selig Folder 564, MHL.

54. Paste-Pot and Shears, March 20, 1916, Selig Folder 563, MHL.


57. Bengar Pictures, Inc.


60. Garrick Theatre, advertisement, Chicago Tribune, February 2, 1914, 8.

61. Portrait of Harry Lauder inscribed to "Mr. Selig 'The Studio King,'" dated February 8, 1914, Harry Lauder Biography Files, MHL; Curtis, 418–425; letter from William Leonard Renick to William Selig, dated February 12, 1914, Selig Folder 463, MHL; letter from William N. Selig to Dr. W. L. Renick, Butte, Montana, dated February 18, 1914, Selig Folder 463, MHL; letter from Dr. William Leonard Renick to William N. Selig, dated November 7, 1915, Selig Folder 463, MHL.

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24, 1914, 18; three of the seventeen films were made after Lauder left Chicago, at a fairground in either Denver or San Francisco, though these were never released. Letter from William Morris to William Selig, dated March 31, 1914, Selig Folder 463, MHL; letter from Harry Lauder to William Selig, dated March 9, 1914, Selig Folder 453, MHL. It should be noted that according to John Montgomery, sometime before 1904, "Harry Lauder sang 'I Love a Lassie', 'Stop Your Tickling, Jock', and other popular songs for the [British] Gaumont 'Chronomegaphone', a primitive 'talkie' system which synchronized film with a gramophone record." John Montgomery, Comedy Films, 1894–1954 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), 27–28.

63. "A Comedy Filmlet," Moving Picture World, April 11, 1914, 201, Selig Folder 463, MHL.

64. Letter from William Morris to William Selig, dated March 31, 1914, Selig Folder 463, MHL; Curtis, 418–425; Grau, 348–349.


69. December 1915 letters between Renick and Selig, Selig Folder 463, MHL.

70. Contract dated April 12, 1916, between William Selig and the Cort-Kitsee Company, Selig Folder 463, MHL.

71. Letter from Abe Lastfogel to William Selig, dated April 19, 1916; letter from William Selig to William Renick, dated April 28, 1916, Selig Folder 463, MHL; letter from Dr. William Renick to William Selig, dated October 14, 1916, Selig Folder 463, MHL; letter from Renick to Selig, dated March 19, 1918, Selig Folder 464, MHL.


73. Letter from William Selig to attorneys House, Grossman, and Vorhaus, dated October 4, 1916, Selig Folder 463, MHL; letter from William Selig to H. K. Heslet, dated October 17, 1928, Selig Folder 464, MHL.

74. Letter from William Selig to Dr. Renick, dated March 22, 1917, Selig Folder 464, MHL.

75. Letter from William Selig to William Morris, dated December 27, 1916, Selig Folder 463, MHL; telegram from William Morris to William Selig, dated June 6,

76. Letter from William Selig to Dr. Renick, dated March 27, 1918, Selig Folder 464, MHL.

77. Letter from William Selig to Dr. Renick, dated March 19, 1920, Selig Folder 464, MHL.


79. Telegram from William Morris to William Selig, dated February 10, 1931, Selig Folder 464, MHL; telegram from William Selig to William Morris, dated February 12, 1931, Selig Folder 464, MHL; letter from William Morris to William Selig, dated February 20, 1931, Selig Folder 464, MHL.


CHAPTER EIGHT


7. For more on *The Female Highwayman*, see Chapter 1.

8. Vitagraph’s film was *Napoleon, The Man of Destiny* and Pathé’s was *Drink*. Bowser, 196–197.


10. Letter from William Steiner, Imperial Film Exchange, New York, to Selig Polyscope Company, undated, Selig Folder 459, MHL; letter from James B. Clark, Pittsburg Calcium Light and Film Company, to Selig Polyscope Company, dated June 25, 1908, Selig Folder 459, MHL.


13. Letter from W. J. Watkins, Film Service Assn of New York, to Selig Polyscope Company, dated June 29, 1908, Clarke Scrapbook #2, MHL.


15. Turner’s shooting/continuity scripts for the films are numbered sequentially, and it’s probable that the same actors were used in all the *Oz* films. *Dorothy and the Scarecrow in Oz*, Selig Folder 214, MHL; *The Land of Oz*, Selig Folder 554, MHL; *John Dough and the Cherub*, Selig Folder 285, MHL; *Wizard of Oz*, Selig Folder 428, MHL; *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *The Marvelous Land of Oz*, and *John Dough and the Cherub*, Selig Folder 575, MHL; Mark Evan Swartz, *Oz before the Rainbow* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 2, 161–162, 167, 170, 172.


18. *The Two Orphans*, Selig Folder 555, MHL.

20. Selig Release Bulletin no. 39, Selig Folder 568, MHL.


23. C. Wirt Adams, “Mabel Taliaferro as Cinderella,” Motography, December 1911, 259–260; Cinderella, Selig Folder 569, MHL.


25. Letter from S. L. Rothapfel to William N. Selig, dated December 9, 1911, Clarke Scrapbook #2, MHL.

26. Cinderella, Selig Folder 569, MHL.

27. Cinderella, Selig Folder 39, MHL.

28. Cinderella, Selig Folder 569, MHL.

29. Cinderella, Selig Folder 39, MHL; letter from Mr. Arthur Carlton, Ravenscourt, to E. H. Montagu, dated September 21, 1912, Selig Folder 491, MHL; letter from R. F. Smith, Leeds, to E. H. Montagu, dated September 18, 1912, Selig Folder 491, MHL; letter from C. Cunningham, Swindon, to E. H. Montagu, dated November 5, 1912, Selig Folder 491, MHL.

30. Letter from S. L. Rothapfel, Lyric Theatre, Minneapolis, to Col. William Selig, dated June 14, 1913, Selig Folder 460, MHL.

31. Selig Folder 555, MHL.


34. “The Feature Film,” 51.

35. Moving Picture World, June 17, 1911, 1355, quoted in Bowser, 200.


NOTES TO PAGES 168–171

40. "Wonderful Moving Pictures," Inter-Ocean, April 21, 1912, M3.
42. McQuade, review of The Coming of Columbus, 407–410.
43. "Pageant of the Voyage and Landing of Columbus 1492," Selig Folder 44, MHL.
44. William Bruce Johnson, Miracles and Sacrilege: Roberto Rossellini, the Church, and Film Censorship in Hollywood (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 23; letter from L. O'Donovan to Mr. W. N. Selig, dated November 8, 1911, Selig Folder 43, MHL.
45. In an article appearing in the May 1912 issue of Motography, Father Tonello is misidentified as "Reverend Tonelli." Rev. J. Giuseppe Tonelli [sic], "Columbus Films at the Vatican," Motography, May 1912, 213–214.
46. Letter from Joseph Tonello to William Selig, Folder 43, MHL; Tonelli, 213–214; Corriere d'Italia, February 4, 1912, Selig Folder 41, MHL.
47. The exact sum paid for Christopher Columbus was never disclosed. Releases for March 14 and 17 [1912], Selig Folder 568, MHL.
48. Letter from Courtney Crocker to E. H. Montagu, dated April 14, 1912, Selig Folder 42, MHL; letter from Wilfred Bryant to E. H. Montague [sic], dated April 15, 1912, Selig Folder 42, MHL; letter from Central Hall to E. H. Montagu, dated April 22, 1912, Selig Folder 42, MHL; letter from Jas. Haggar to E. H. Montagu, dated April 22, 1912, Selig Folder 42, MHL.
49. Letter from Sam Leonard to E. H. Montagu, undated, Selig Folder 42, MHL.
50. Letter from Powell to E. H. Montagu, dated March 29, 1912, Selig Folder 477, MHL.
51. Bowers, 203–204.
54. McQuade, review of The Coming of Columbus, 407.
55. The Lyric Theatre Special, May 1912, quoting Bioscope review of The Coming of Columbus, February 8, 1912, Selig Folder 41, MHL.
58. McQuade, review of The Coming of Columbus, 407–410.
64. *Lyric Theatre Special*.
65. For instance, see letter from Wilfred Bryant.
66. *The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus*, Selig Folder 556, MHL.
67. Letter from George H. Hines to William N. Selig, dated May 10, 1912, Selig Folder 458, MHL.
68. Letter from the Redemption School to Selig, dated July 6, 1913, Selig Folder 43, MHL; letter from Sala Pia boys’ school to William Selig, dated November 11, 1913, Selig Folder 43, MHL; letter from William Smith to Selig, dated July 2, 1917, Selig Folder 492, MHL; program for *The Coming of Columbus*, dated October 10–13, 1930, Selig Folder 44, MHL.
69. Bowser, 204.
70. For more on the earlier version of *Monte Cristo*, see Chapter 4.
71. Supreme Court Brief for Appellant, 40, *Monte Cristo*, Folder 122, MHL; *Monte Cristo*, Selig Folder 123, MHL.
72. A.E.T., review of *Monte Cristo*, *The Cinema*, October 1912, Selig Folder 125, MHL.
73. Program for *Monte Cristo* from the Princes Hall, Hull, Selig Folder 125, MHL; letter from S. Hertzberg, Apollo Theatre, Shanghai, to E. H. Montagu, dated March 3, 1913, Selig Folder 485, MHL.
74. Gabler, 15, 29–33.
75. James O'Neill deposition, *Monte Cristo*, Selig Folder 121, MHL.
77. Edwin S. Porter’s direct and cross-examination, dated March 15, 1915, *Monte Cristo*, Selig Folder 124, MHL.
78. James O'Neill deposition.
79. Edwin S. Porter deposition, dated November 16, 1912, *Monte Cristo*, Selig Folder 121, MHL.
80. John F. Pribyl deposition, dated December 5, 1912, *Monte Cristo*, Selig Folder 122, MHL.
83. Bowser, 251.
85. Smith and Koury, 249.
NOTES TO PAGES 178–181

87. Bowser, 210–211.
88. "These Long Features," Motography, April 19, 1913, 261–262.
89. Anderson, 255.
94. Letter from Sydney Ayres to William Selig, dated March 30, 1913, Selig Folder 453, MHL; letter from Davie Sydney Ayres to W. N. Selig, dated July 9, 1913, Clarke Scrapbook #2, MHL; Birchard, 21–33.
95. Letter from Jack London to William Selig, dated July 29, 1913, Selig Folder 455, MHL.
96. Letter from Rex Beach to William Selig, dated June 9, 1913, Selig Folder 454, MHL; "Bosworth, Incorporated," Moving Picture World, August 23, 1913, 848; Bowser, 206; Kevin Brownlow, Behind the Mask of Innocence (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 125–126.
97. Robert Birchard has shown that "reaction to Bosworth's production was somewhat reserved. At a time when most trade magazine film reviews wrote only the most glowing terms . . ., the notices for The Sea Wolf damned with faint praise." Birchard, 31–33. Tony Williams has claimed that the failure of Bosworth's Jack London productions was due in part to "the public antipathy to the new multireel film narratives, lack of effective distribution, and problematic early history of film advertising." The success of Selig's The Spoilers refutes such explanations. However, Williams does admit that Bosworth's partners eventually dropped him from the company as a liability. Tony Williams, "The War of the Wolves: Filming Jack London's The Sea Wolf, 1917–1920," Film History 4, no. 3 (1990): 199–200. Compare this to the grandiose claims made in Hobart Bosworth, "The Picture Forty-Niners," Photoplay, December 1915, 80–81.
100. W. N. Selig, "William N. Selig," undated manuscript, Selig Folder 551, MHL.
101. The Spoilers, Selig Folder 137, MHL.
102. Letter from Rex Beach to William Selig, dated June 9, 1913, Selig Folder 454, MHL; New Blood, pamphlet, 7, Selig Folder 528, MHL.
NOTES TO PAGES 181-186

103. "The Spoiler's [sic] Is Fox [Theater]'s Big Picture," New Britain Herald, January 22, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL; Montreal Star, January 27 [1915], Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL.

104. Email from Kevin Brownlow to author, March 27, 2011.


107. Glessner; unidentified clipping, Selig Folder 525, MHL.


111. St. Louis Times, April 29, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #3, MHL.

112. Bush, "Opening of the Strand."


114. Montreal Star.

115. Bowser, 263.


118. New York Clipper, April 18, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #3, MHL.

119. Dubuque Tel.-Herald, November 15, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.

120. Vincennes Commercial, January 10, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.

121. Providence Evening Tribune, January 10, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.

122. Creston Daily Plain Dealer, January 31 [1915], Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL; The Spoilers, advertisement, Moving Picture World, Selig Scrapbook #5, MHL.

123. "Strand's Big Start," Variety, April 17, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #3, MHL.

124. Houston Chronicle, December 8, 1914, 6, Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.

125. "Portola Theater," Call and Post, June 20, 1914, Selig Papers, Scrapbook #4, MHL.

126. Selig Release Herald, November 1914, Selig Folder 561, MHL.

128. *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.
130. Log of films 1916–1917 ordered for distribution in the United Kingdom, Selig Scrapbook #9, MHL.
133. *Oregonian*, July 14, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.
134. “Rex Beach Play New Screen Hit,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 12, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.
139. Bowser, 198. It should also be noted that Vitagraph released an eight-reel film, *The Christian*, in 1914 (not 1912, as has been erroneously reported). Smith and Koury, 203, 252–253.
142. Bowser, 209.
144. “Gilson Willets, the Author with Ideals,” Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL; “His Light under a Bushel,” *New York Dramatic Mirror*, October 7 [1914], Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.
147. *The Adventures of Kathlyn*, booklet; *The Adventures of Kathlyn*, scenarios, Selig Folders 2–9, MHL.
149. *Franklin Evening News*, September 6, 1913, Selig Scrapbook #2, MHL.
150. Stedman, 8.
152. *Waterloo Reporter*, September 6, 1913, Selig Folder 13, MHL.
154. See also handwritten notation by William Selig in published edition of *The Adventures of Kathlyn*, Selig Folder 12, MHL.
155. “Handling Wild Animals in Pictures,” Selig Folder 551, MHL.
157. Letter from W. Field to John Pribyl, dated December 19, 1913, Selig Folder 10, MHL.
159. Grau, 240.
163. “‘Kathlyn’ Causes Much Comment,” *Telegraph*, January 25, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #2, MHL.
164. James S. McQuade, review of *The Adventures of Kathlyn*, *Moving Picture World*, January 17, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #2, MHL.
165. “More anent Selig’s ‘Adventures of Kathlyn’ Twenty-Seven Reel Serial, Released through General Film Co.,” *New York Clipper*, January 24, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #2, MHL.
169. Letter from Kathlyn Williams to William Selig, undated, Clarke Scrapbook #3, MHL.


173. The Adventures of Kathlyn, booklet.


175. Selig did re-edit The Adventures of Kathlyn into an eight-reel feature version, which appears to have done little business. Paste-Pot and Shears, February 21, 1916, Selig Folder 562, MHL; for more on Selig’s later serials, see Chapter 5.

176. Grau, 240.

CHAPTER NINE


2. The Chicago studio’s laboratories were not affected by the plant closure, continuing to process and print product from Selig’s Los Angeles and western companies.


NOTES TO PAGES 198–201


9. Anderson, 107, 270–271, quoting letter from William Selig to George Kleine, dated December 31, 1913, George Kleine Collection, Box 52, LOC.


11. “Pays to Re-Show Pictures,” Motography, June 5, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.


14. “Chicago Film Brevities,” Moving Picture World, February 13 [1915], Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL.

15. “Selig Company back in Los Angeles from Panama,” Motion Picture World, March 20, 1915, 36, Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL; Paste-Pot and Shears, January 10, 1916, Selig Folder 562, MHL.


18. Having moved into the former Bison facility across from Selig’s Edendale plant, Sennett staged innumerable Keystone chases up and down Allesandro Street.


20. Selig Monthly Herald, October 1, 1915, Selig Folder 561, MHL.

21. Dramatic Mirror review reprinted in Paste-Pot and Shears, November 8, 1915, Selig Folder 562, MHL.

22. Unlike his acrimonious relationship with future employer Louis B. Mayer, Neilan wrote Selig that “never in my life have I been accorded such fine treatment as I have in your employ,” and affectionately closed their correspondence with “Always your debtor.” Letter from Marshall Neilan to W. N. Selig, dated May 30, 1915, Selig Folder 453, MHL; letter from Marshall Neilan to William Selig, dated April 26, 1917, Clarke Scrapbook #3, MHL. Selig later employed the talented filmmaker to write and direct The Country That God Forgot, among other projects. For more on The Country That God Forgot, see Chapter 2.

23. For more on The Female Highwayman, see Chapter 1.
NOTES TO PAGES 201–206

24. When a Woman’s Forty, Selig Release Herald, vol. 1, Selig Folder 561, MHL; review of When a Woman’s Forty, Motography, August 8, 1914, 191, Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL; review of When a Woman’s Forty, New York Clipper, August 29 [1914], Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.

25. Review of The Tragedy of Ambition, Moving Picture World, March 14, 1914, Selig Scrapbook #2, MHL.


28. “Plead Suffrage Cause in Films,” Herald, October 4 [1914], Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.

29. “Your Girl and Mine,” review, New York Clipper, October 24 [1914], Selig Scrapbook #4, MHL.

30. “Your Girl and Mine,” review, Billboard, October 24 [1914], Selig Collection, Scrapbook #4, MHL.


33. “Anti-War Subject Named after Song,” Motion Picture News, July 27, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #6, MHL; Paste-Pot and Shears, November 1, 1915, Selig Folder 562, MHL; I’m Glad My Boy Grew Up to Be a Soldier, Selig Folder 68, MHL.

34. Staiger, 203–204; Paste-Pot and Shears, September 11, 1916, Selig Folder 564, MHL; Albert Smith and Phil A. Koury, Two Reels and a Crank (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1952), 260.


40. Paste-Pot and Shears, January 31, 1916, Selig Folder 562, MHL.


43. Moving Picture World, January 23, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #6, mhl; Los Angeles Record, May 25, 1915, Selig Scrapbook #6, mhl; Slide, The Big V, 97.


46. Brownlow, 259; W. K. Hollander, “Hanging Is Brutal Theme of This Film,” Selig Scrapbook #10, mhl; Who Shall Take My Life?, advertisement, Selig Folder 150, mhl.

47. Grosset and Dunlap’s Business Promoter, special fall announcement, 1916, 4-5, Selig Folder 100, mhl; Little Orphant Annie, Selig Folder 97, mhl; Little Orphant Annie, Selig Folder 99, mhl; Daniel Blum, A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1953), 130, 145.

48. Grosset and Dunlap’s Business Promoter; Little Orphant Annie, Selig Folder 97, mhl.

49. In the original shooting script, Annie dies from a broken heart. The epilogue that exists on the surviving print may have been added following the film’s initial release. Little Orphant Annie, Selig Folder 99, mhl. William Selig produced another story by James Whitcomb Riley back-to-back with Annie, A Hoosier Romance (1918), utilizing the same cast and crew.


51. Ledger with account register entries for 1931-1936, Selig Folder 519, mhl.

52. “Passing of General Film Marks End of Old Regime,” Variety, April 11, 1919, 61; Staiger, 203.


55. Anthony Slide, Ravished Armenia and the Story of Aurora Mardiganian (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997), 2-4; Auction of Souls, advertisement, Los Angeles Evening Express, June 21, 1919, 3, Selig Folder 24, mhl; Auction of Souls, American Film Institute Catalog, 38, Production Files, mhl; Auction of Souls, Oversize Press Books, mhl.

56. Oscar Apfel was the principal director of The Squaw Man (1914), which for almost a century has been variously misrepresented as the first film made in Hollywood and/or Los Angeles, or wrongly credited as having been solely directed by Apfel’s partner, Cecil B. De Mille. Anna Q. Nilsson, a top star during the silent era, portrayed Cherry Malotte in the second screen version of The Spoilers.
(1923), though she may be best remembered for her appearance as one of Norma Desmond’s bridge-playing friends in Sunset Boulevard (1950). Irving Cummings became a director of popular musicals at Twentieth Century Fox, including Little Miss Broadway (1938), Down Argentine Way (1940), and The Dolly Sisters (1945).

57. Slide, Ravished Armenia, 3–4, 7–9, 207; Auction of Souls.
58. Slide, Ravished Armenia, 8–9; “The Auction of Souls Will Start Here with Midnight Production,” New York American, May 10, 1919, Selig Folder 24, MHL.
59. Los Angeles Examiner, December 29, 1918, 2, Selig Folder 25, MHL; “Girl Martyr to Be Honored Guest of City,” Los Angeles Examiner, January 5, 1919, Selig Folder 24, MHL; Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger, January 25, 1919, Selig Folder 24, MHL; Helen Pollock, “Feature Film Reviews,” Morning Telegraph, February 16, 1919, 5, Selig Folder 24, MHL; Slide, Ravished Armenia, 15; “The Auction of Souls Will Start Here.”
60. Slide, Ravished Armenia, 8; Auction of Souls; Scoop Conlon, Selig Folder 551, MHL.
63. “The Auction of Souls Will Start Here.”
64. Slide, Ravished Armenia, 16; Morning Telegraph, May 25, 1919, Selig Folder 25, MHL.
65. The Illustrated London News, November 8, 1919, 713, Selig Folder 27, MHL.
66. Slide, Ravished Armenia, 11–12.
67. Selig Folder 575, MHL; Slide, Ravished Armenia, 3, 16–17; Auction of Souls, Moving Picture World, May 31, 1919, 1379, MHL.
69. Letter from A. B. Edson quoted in cover advertisement, exhibitors Herald, April 1, 1922, Selig Scrapbook #13, MHL; W. A. Johnston, Motion Picture News, October 15, 1921, Selig Folder 134, MHL.
70. These included The Northern Trail, The White Mouse, The Ne’er to Return Road, and The Policeman and the Baby.
71. Edwin Schallert, “New Tabloid Screen Drama,” Selig Folder 525, MHL.
72. Scoop Conlon.
73. William Selig photographic file, MHL.
74. Staiger, 205; Slide, The Big V, 1, 2, 109, 113.
The couple may have inspired a scene in *The Bank Dick* (1940), wherein W. C. Fields is hired to direct a similarly costumed and mismatched couple.

78. Taliaferro, 296.

79. *Selig Release Herald*, August to December 1914, Selig Folder 561, MHL.


82. Ledger with account register entries for 1931–1936, Selig Folder 519, MHL.

83. Selig Folder 575, MHL.

84. Finler, 52.


86. Ledger with account register entries for 1931–1936.


90. *Morning Telegraph*, March 5, 1922, Kathryn Williams Biography Files, MHL; “Star of Silent Films Injured,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, December 30, 1949, Kathryn Williams Biography File, MHL.


93. Kathryn Williams, Certificate of Death, Kathryn Williams Biography File, MHL.


103. Charles G. Clarke, Early Film Making in Los Angeles (Los Angeles: Dawson’s Book Shop, 1976), 57; note from Charles G. Clarke, dated May 1979, Selig Folder 528, MHL; letter from W. N. Selig to Charles Clarke, dated December 22, 1941, Clarke Scrapbook #3, MHL; Charles G. Clarke, Highlights and Shadows (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1989), 40.


105. Unfortunately, no precise records exist for when Selig’s donation to the Academy actually occurred.

106. Terry Ramsaye, “Col. Selig Passes in his 84th Year,” Motion Picture Herald, July 24, 1948, 16; “Col. Selig, Who Made First Big Film Here, Dies,” Los Angeles Times, July 17, 1948, Selig Biography Files, MHL.


CONCLUSION


SUGGESTED READING


———. "The Role of the Western Film Genre in Industry Competition, 1907-1911." *Journal of the University Film Association* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1979): 19-26.


SELECTED SELIG FILMOGRAPHY

The Selig films that were screened for this text are listed.

The Adventures of Kathlyn, chapter 1 (1913, FMN)
An Angelic Attitude (1916, BGT)
An Arizona Wooing (1915, UCLA)
The Attack on Port Arthur (1904, LOC)
The Bandit King (1907, UCLA)
Belle Boyd, a Confederate Spy (1913, UCLA)
Beware of Strangers (1917, LOC)
Buck's Romance (1912, LOC, HC)
Bully of Bingo Gulch (1911, EH)
Buried Alive (1909, AMPAS9)
Buried Treasure of Cobre (1916, EH)
Captain Brand's Wife (1911, LOC)
The Child, the Dog and the Villain (1915, EH)
Chip of the Flying "U" (1914, LOC)
Circumstantial Evidence (1912, LOC)
The Coming of Columbus (1912, AFA)
The Country That God Forgot (1916, EH, LOC)
The Cowboy Millionaire (1913, FMN)
The Crisis (1916, LOC)
The Crown Point Automobile Race (1909, LOC)
Elizabeth's Prayer (1914, LOC)
Euchered (1912, LOC)
The Fifth String (1913, LOC)
A Five Thousand Dollar Elopement (1916, BGT)
Foreman of the Bar Z Ranch (1915, UCLA)
A Frontier Girl's Courage (1911, FMN)
The Garden of Allah (1917, EH)
The Girl from Montana (1907, UCLA)
The Girls in Overalls (1904, EH)
SUGGESTED READING AND SELECTED SELIG FILMOGRAPHY

The Golden Thought (1916, EH)
The Heart of Texas Ryan (1917, BGT)
Hearts and Masks (1914, LOC)
His First Ride (1907, UCLA)
How They Stopped the Run on the Bank (1911, CdF)
In Leopard Land (1915, LOC)
In the Days of the Thundering Herd (1914, AFA)
In the Midst of the Jungle (1913, LOC)
Jimmy (1915, LOC)
The Jungle Princess (feature version of The Lost City, 1920, GRP)
Kazan (trailer, 1921, LOC)
Kings of the Forest (1912, FMN)
The Lake of Dreams (1912, LOC)
Legal Advice (1916, UCLA, LOC)
Life on the Border (1911, NAA)
The Lion Hunter (1914, LOC)
Little Orphant Annie (1918, GRP)
The Little Widow (1911, LOC)
Local Color [on the A-1 Ranch] (1916, GRP)
The Maid at the Helm (1911, FMN)
A Man, a Girl and a Lion (1917, LOC)
The Man from Texas (1915, LOC)
The Mate of the Alden Besse (1912, FMN)
A Matrimonial Boomerang (1915, EH)
A Matrimonial Deluge (1913, LOC, HC)
Maud Muller (1911, EH)
The Merry Wives of Windsor (1910, LOC)
Mishaps of a Baby Carriage (1907, LOC)
Monte Cristo (1908, LOC)
The Ne'er Do Well (1916, LOC)
The New Woman and the Lion (1912, LOC)
Pansy (1912, LOC)
Perils of the Jungle (1915, LOC)
Pioneer Days (1917, EH)
Pres. Roosevelt at Dedication Ceremonies, St. Louis Exposition (1903, AFA, LOC)
Renegade's Vengeance (1914, EH)
Ropin' a Bride (1915, BGT, LOC)
Sage Brush Tom (1915, AFA)
Saved by Her Horse (1915, LOC)
Saved by the Pony Express (1911, LOC, FMN)
The Sergeant (1910, AMPAS10)
Shipwrecked (1911, FMN)
COL. WILLIAM N. SELIG

*The Spoilers* (1914, UCLA, GRP, LOC)
*The Stage-Coach Driver and the Girl* (1915, FMN)
*Starring in Western Stuff* (1917, UCLA)
*Sweet Alyssum* (1915, EH)
*A Tale of the Sea* (1910, LOC)
*Tempted by Necessity* (1912, EH)
*Thor: Lord of the Jungle* (1913, FMN)
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All histories of Hollywood are wrong. Why? Two words: Colonel Selig. This early pioneer laid the foundation for the movie industry that we know today. Active from 1896 to 1938, William N. Selig was responsible for an amazing series of firsts, including the first two-reel narrative film and the first two-hour narrative feature made in America; the first American movie serial with cliffhanger endings; the first westerns filmed in the West with real cowboys and Indians; the creation of the jungle-adventure genre; the first horror film in America; the first successful American newsreel (made in partnership with William Randolph Hearst); and the first permanent film studio in Los Angeles. Selig was also among the first to cultivate extensive international exhibition of American films, which created a worldwide audience and contributed to American domination of the medium.

In this book, Andrew Erish delves into the virtually untouched Selig archive at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Library to tell the fascinating story of this unjustly forgotten film pioneer. He traces Selig's career from his early work as a traveling magician in the Midwest, to his founding of the first movie studio in Los Angeles in 1909, to his landmark series of innovations that still influence the film industry. As Erish recounts the many accomplishments of the man who first recognized that Southern California is the perfect place for moviemaking, he convincingly demonstrates that while others have been credited with inventing Hollywood, Colonel Selig is actually the one who most deserves that honor.

Andrew A. Erish teaches film history and aesthetics at Chapman University and is a guest lecturer at the Los Angeles Film Studies Center. He has published articles in the Los Angeles Times and Quarterly Review of Film and Video. Erish has also lectured at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Schubert Archive, Los Angeles Zoo, and Santa Fe Film Festival, and presented at the PCA/ACA Conference. He lives in Los Angeles.