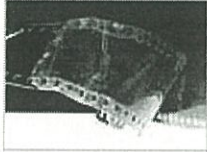


THE FILM ARCHIVE PRESENTS

V2

(Kaye, 2001)

1896 First film



Picking Up the Pieces

At the end of 1993, a small piece of film was deposited with the Film Archive. While being accessioned, it was realised that the contents demanded a closer look. Could it be early New Zealand footage?

What's All This Then?

When the film that came to be called *The Departure of the Second Contingent for the Boer War* was first deposited, it was unclear exactly what the film actually depicted. At first, it wasn't even certain that the film was from New Zealand. However, the film was so old that, even if it turned out to be a foreign film, it had to be important to someone.



A Volatile Subject

Despite its popularity, nitrate film has always been chemically unstable. Not only does it decompose easily under adverse

conditions, but it is also highly flammable.



The First Picture Show New Zealand History Gets Moving

1 | 2 | 3 | 4

The Departure of the Second Contingent for the Boer War is the oldest New Zealand film in the Film Archive's collection. It depicts a parade of young New Zealand soldiers on the eve of their departure to fight alongside their British countrymen in the South African Boer War. The fact that such an event was recorded at the time is remarkable enough, but the story of how the fragile footage survived, was identified and lovingly restored by the Film Archive's team of conservators and historians is testament to the important role that film plays in defining our culture and heritage.

The early days of film

Through the last decade of the nineteenth century, many developments spurred the growth of moving pictures. In Europe and the United States, inventors and scientists worked, often with surprising similarity, to create a viable moving picture system that would capture an image and allow it to be seen by an audience. By 1900, moving pictures were being filmed and shown all over the world, including in New Zealand.

Of the earliest filmmakers, three are most well-known: Thomas Edison, and the Lumiere brothers, Auguste and Louis. Working on different continents, these men were very influential in making pictures move.

In the United States, in 1891, Thomas Edison patented a camera he called the Kinetograph, and the Kinetoscope, a machine that the viewer

could look into to watch short moving pictures.

In 1893 and 1894, using the Kinetograph, Edison filmed well-known performers and sports figures in his New Jersey studio. Often less than 60 seconds long, these early

Still photography in the nineteenth century used single plates for capturing an image. Early moving image machines, such as the Zoetrope and the Praxinoscope, used these still photographs (as well as

drawings) to create the illusion of movement. These machines worked by flicking a series of pictures quickly past the eyes of the viewer, producing short sequences that could be watched through a viewing apparatus. These systems were limited, however, by the fact that only one person at a time could watch.

>> 1981

>> John O'Shea & Pacific Films

Watch Now



See the fully restored *Boer War Departure* film

Requires QuickTime 5

The Film Archive Reference Catalogue

Listed below is a small sample of the Film Archive's extensive collection of resource material relating to New Zealand's film history and cultural heritage.

If you would like to view these items, or learn more about this topic, please Contact Us.

Related Film & Video

[The Departure of the Second Contingent for the Boer War](#)

[Boer War Veterans Parade, 1948](#)

[Royal Visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York to New Zealand, 1901](#)

[Work Horse to Dream Horse: The Story of the New Zealand Horse, 2001](#)

Related Books

[Kiwi Versus Boer](#)

[Scars on the Heart](#)

[To Fight for the Empire](#)

films showed a woman dancing or a body builder flexing his muscles. These films were then put into Kinetoscopes where the public paid to watch them in Kinetoscope parlours.

Edison's inventions, however, did not allow film to be projected onto a screen. In 1894, the Lumiere brothers of France made the Cinematographe, a machine that could film and project moving pictures. With it, they filmed outdoor single shot films of real events. On March 22, 1895, the brothers held a public screening of their first film, *Workers Leaving the Factory*. Consisting of about 800 frames, the film was only a minute long.

In 1885, George Eastman designed a new system for taking photographs. Instead of plates, which all other cameras used, Eastman's system ran long reels of light sensitive paper through a rollholder in the camera. Four years later, he introduced celluloid film to replace the original paper roll, and with this development, it became possible to shoot a sequence of still photographs in quick succession. Being able to take photographs in this way opened the door to true cinematography.

To Fight for the Empire

Preservation and Restoration of Moving Images and Sound

Nitrate Won't Wait

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Film comes to New Zealand

The first public film screening in New Zealand was in Auckland on October 13, 1896. Professors Hausmann and Gow introduced 'Edison's latest marvel, the Kinematograph', with which they showed a programme of short films — the first public film projection in New Zealand. The screening was part of a show by Charles Godfrey's Vaudeville Company, a circumstance that was not unusual for early cinema. Still a new form of entertainment, film was often shown alongside lantern slides and the musical phonograph.

The films screened by Godfrey's company included a bathing scene on the sands at Folkestone; a street scene in Leeds, a scene from the *Milk White Flag*, boys leaving school, a dancing girl with limelight effects, and the Bristol Railway Station with trains entering and departing.

The day after the screening, the New Zealand Herald reported that the reproductions showed the marvellous ingenuity of the inventor. "Everything moved as though in life: in fact, it was life reproduced. So natural was it that the moving figures on the screen were cheered." Such a strong reaction to moving pictures was not unusual — audiences in Paris had been panic-stricken by the Lumieres' film of a train that looked like it was coming off the screen and straight toward them.

It was to be a few more years before the first films were shot in New Zealand. In keeping with the close relationship between film and vaudeville, New

Zealand's first filmmaker was Alfred Whitehouse, a travelling showman. Like so many showmen overseas, Whitehouse could see the potential in moving pictures for drawing audiences to his shows. In 1899, he wrote to the Colonial Secretary, J Carroll, "I have the first and only camera in New Zealand for taking animated pictures for the Kinematograph". He had, he wrote, filmed "three Maori Regatta Scenes at Ngaruawahia, and a scene of the opening of the Auckland Exhibition".

The film of the opening of the Auckland Industrial and Mining Exhibition, on December 1, 1898, was the first shot in New Zealand. With the assistance of W. H. Bartlett, a photographer, Whitehouse shot a further 9 films between December 1898 and mid-1900. In 1900, Whitehouse visited the Paris Exhibition, returning to New Zealand with a new projector and some new films to screen. After his return, however, he never made another film of his own.

Of the 10 films made by A.H. Whitehouse, the only one known to have survived is *The Departure of the Second Contingent for the Boer War*.

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Author

Miranda Kaye, 2001

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