This little group has been in operation, once a month, for several years now, and this is only about the fourth occasion that we have put out any kind of a program note. The very nature of our programs, which are usually made up from treated footages received the day of the meeting, prevents any kind of careful programming or organisation, and in the past this informality has always seemed to work. After all, the Huff schedule in advance, issues notes, and does scores with the silents --- so it's pleasant once a month to let our hair down and do things the more relaxed way.

"Phantom" is pretty familiar to you in one version or another, so I'm not going to waste time here by relashing old Huff society notes. They're the same as the others. But there are so many different versions of the Chaney "Phantom" around, that I'd like here to try to trace down the ancestry of this print. Bear in mind that this is all largely assumption on my part, and I may well be wrong --- but something pretty much like this must have happened.

First of all, this print --- which we were once assured was an original neg reduction print --- is still a dupe. However, it does have the asset of being absolutely complete, and about a generation better than the print we're used to from the Huff and New Yorker showings. It's also toned, is in reversal, is about two reels longer. However, it is also obviously some kind of direct ancestor of these shortened prints that are around, since all of the hypo and other flaws present in those prints are here --- but in much earlier and less obvious stage.

When Universal planned to reissue (and re-edit) "The Phantom" with a simple sound track in 1930, for some reason no master or negative was available. This version was made some years later, but some film further dupe with the studio hated to see the last of the footage, is about two reels longer. However, it is also obviously some kind of direct ancestor of these shortened prints that are around, since all of the hypo and other flaws present in those prints are here --- but in much earlier and less obvious stage.

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The 7-reel master was then probably put into storage or consigned to destruction, but this latter didn't happen. Somewhere along the line, probably in the early 40's when the remake came along, it may have been brought out for re-perusal. At that time, someone else interested in preserving it, and not knowing of the existence of the complete 16mm neg, made a 16mm reversal print from the 35mm. Now, fifteen years later, 16mm lab work was much improved, and any case reversals often look better than dupes. On the other hand, the bad sections hadn't begun to decompose by now --- and some scenes, like the coffin-bed sequence, and the unmasking, had hypoed beyond saving. It's true, with bad hypo but those few extra scenes shot for sound, that somehow got loose (we know the collector who acquired it, though we don't know how!) and it was from this reversal that a new 16mm dupe neg was made, from which most of the present prints derived. And of course, additional dupes were made from those dupes, in certain quarters, further lessening the quality.

Tonight's print, I am quite sure, is from the original complete 16mm --- but it is a new print, indicating that that neg has come into the sunlight again, and is probably the one in use at Wonderland, a Hollywood 16mm outfit. There is no question about it being new. There is not the slightest suggestion of shrinkage, all scratches are printed in from the neg and are not physical scratches, and there are no splices except where the colored stock is joined. Also, the toning of greenish-red and greenish-yellowing, but is merely a dye. The print has no odor at all, and all authentic toned prints have a very distinctive smell. Also, much of the image has a mildly warped look, although the print itself is certainly not warped. This is consistent with a more than 30-year-old 16mm neg which would almost certainly buckle somewhat over that period. Finally, there are a shade too many repetitions of the shot of the metal hands being raised, and I suspect that these were intercut by Wonderland as an excuse for playing around with the differing tints. To reiterate, this is all theory, but I suspect it to be pretty close to the actual history of this print. 