

MOVIETONE/ORPHANS PROJECT

Evan Friss

Jeff Martin

Jennifer Zwarich

Intro to MIAP

Howard Besser/Mona Jimenez

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Our clip was MVTN 4 399-400NYC Street Scenes and Noises. In addition to determining that the clip was shot during the week of November 22nd, 1929, we discovered the identities of the people performing the audio tests, confirmed the location of nearly all the shots, and researched the background of the Noise Abatement Commission, the locations, and the footage itself.

The New York City Noise Abatement Commission

The footage seems clearly to be covering the activities of the Noise Abatement Commission, founded in New York in October, 1929 by the city's Commissioner of Health. A report on their findings was published in 1930, and was a key source of information for our project. (Edward F. Brown, et.al, eds., *City Noise*, Department of Health, New York City, 1930).

Among other activities, the commission tested noise levels throughout the city. These were conducted from the "traveling noise" laboratory by employees of Bell Telephone Laboratories and the Johns-Manville Corporation. One test recorded decibel levels. The other, a "deafness" test, appears to be the one in the film. According to the report, it measured "the 'masking effect' of the noise at any given spot." Apparently the tester noted how loud a predetermined tone had to be in order to be heard, and recorded the result as a percentage.

Based on the dialogue in the footage, we determined that the men doing the test are A. Meyer of Bell Labs, and J. H. Parkinson, of Johns-Manville. and believe that the man speaking is most likely Dr. R. H. Galt, also of Bell Labs, who led the testing.

The Locations

A visit to Times Square confirmed visually our initial suspicion: that the audio tests were shot at 47th and Broadway, (just south of the current TKTS booth) with the camera looking south toward the Times Building.

From this point it would have been possible to shoot the other Times Square locations by moving the camera only a few feet. One shot looks north up Broadway, highlighting the Strand Theater at 1675 Broadway, a 3700-seat house then showing "The Sacred Flame." By checking New York Times advertisements

for the film, we determined that the footage must have been shot between November 22nd and November 29th.

The footage also shows the Embassy theater, on Broadway between 46th and 47th. Three weeks earlier (Nov. 2nd) it had changed operations to show newsreels exclusively. Opened in 1925, it was the first movie theater in America to be managed and staffed entirely by women.

In addition to shots of the el and construction sights, the footage also shows New York City's noisy "Radio Row," the neighborhood of small radio and electronics stores in lower Manhattan. Stores along Cortlandt Street near Greenwich are highlighted. The footage also shows the Cortlandt Street el station. This entire area was condemned in 1965-66 for the construction of the World Trade Center and is now in the center of Ground Zero (including the elevated station.)

The Footage

The background of the footage itself presented a particular challenge. Our first goal was to determine if the footage had in fact been used in a cut newsreel. The answer: we don't know. The Fox News Archive, which holds the cut stories, does not have this in its database. Additionally, their archivist Peter Bregman told us there is no such story listed in the Movietone release sheets, the original paperwork listing the stories released.

We did find a reference to the story in The New York Times, however, in a December 2nd, 1929 review of the newsreel program at the Embassy Theater (!). That review stated that the program was made up of Fox Movietone and Hearst Metrotone stories—which raised another question about the footage. Since Fox Movietone and Hearst Metrotone merged their operations in September, 1929, could footage actually have been used in a Hearst story?

Answer: we don't know. A call to UCLA, where the Hearst Metrotone collection is held, did not turn up a record. Blaine Bartell at UCLA did not think this was definitive proof one way or the other since the dissolution of the Hearst-Fox merger in 1934 broke up the library. UCLA's only Hearst story on the topic appears to be unrelated. (see attached)

A further complication: a search of www.footage.net turned up a reference to a *Pathe* newsreel on the same story, approximately the same date. (See attached.) According to Sherman Grinberg Film Libraries, holder of the Pathe News library, the story is listed as "condition 2," or unknown condition. The existence of this story might explain why there are two different mikes in the footage, only one of which picks up the test audio. The other may be Pathe's.

Footage.net also revealed a similar, but not identical, reference to a Hearst-produced story on noise abatement, this time apparently as part of the King

Features syndicated series of “this week in history” packages. It may be the same footage as the UCLA cut story (see attached.)

There was some evidence in the footage itself that it may have been used. At one point, cuts to the raw footage were made that appear to have removed the “useful” portion of a shot—the part that would most likely have been used in cutting the story together (the tone arm being put on the phonograph.)

For what it’s worth, the story doesn’t show up in the British Movietone database.

SOURCES CONSULTED

The Noise Abatement Commission’s report was a key source. Also vital was the Historic New York Times Database, for coverage of noise abatement, movie ads, etc. Microfilm of other periodicals were consulted. The following websites were of use:

<http://www.cinematreasures.org/theater/2975>

<http://www.timessquarebid.org/visitor/FactSheetforWeb.html>

http://www.antiqueradio.com/Radio_Row_09-98.html

<http://sonicmemorial.org/public/radorow/radorow.html>

PATHE NEWS STORY

Collection PTH

Negative 437

Release Date 12-04-29

Issue P.S.N. 86

Footage 68

Cameraman N/A

Source N/A

Description

LIST BIG NOISES ON WHITE WAY

N.Y. COMMISSION ON NOISE ABATEMENT STUDIES TIMES SQUARE
SOUND EFFECTS, WITH SCIENTIFIC SOUND RECORDERS AND FINDS
THE COMBINED NOISES TEMPORARILY DEPRIVES THE ORDINARY
CITIZEN OF 42% OF HIS NORMAL HEARING FACULTY.

HEARST MATERIALS

King Features

NOISE POLLUTION STORY

HOW THEY HANDLED NOISE POLLUTION IN THE THIRTIES

New York City, in the 1930's, recognized the noise pollution problem. Despite the objections of business, to regulate sound levels, the Commissioner of Health established a temporary commission called the Noise Abatement Bureau. Horses wore rubber shoes instead of metal for the mounted police and metal rims on milk wagons were changed to rubber wheels. It wasn't until 41 years later that the Bureau became a permanent department.

- New York Skyline scenes

Third Ave. El

Line of airplanes with props going

Woman looks at jewelry

Street scenes...group of men seated

Graph....man at graph

Street as trolley passes

Mounted police

Horses with rubber shoes

Milk wagons...rubber tires

Construction rubble

People being herded onto sidewalk

Street scene, Men setting off off-screen explosion

KING FEATURES TV TIME CAPSULE CASSETTE 5 STORY 23 COUNTER 474

UCLA Film and Television Library

Mayor LaGuardia starts fight for noiseless days and nights, New York City

(Hearst Metrotone News; Vol 6 No. 295; Aug 19, 1935)

Thundering trucks, hucksters, wagons, ash and garbage removers, rock trucks, bricks, elevated trains and trolleys, steam shovels, hammers riveters (sic) and steam pile drives (sic), freight trains, etc.

N.Y. School for Deaf sigh. Same without the N.Y.

Semi closeup mother holding her baby with hand over its ear. Small girl

holding hands over ears. Young lady doing same, Young man same

Small boy same

Mother rocking child in carriage