

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## **PART I**

**Capturing an Audience,  
Creating a Business:  
1896–1916**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



# *Introduction*

The selections in Part I cover approximately the first 20 years of film exhibition in the United States. They begin with the initial commercial vitascope screenings in 1896–7 and move through the nickelodeon boom to the early 'teens, when multi-reel feature films had come to play a much more prominent role in theater programming and when new venues began to be designed and built specifically as movie theaters. Charles Musser's "Introducing Cinema to the American Public: The Vitascope in the United States, 1896–7" surveys the first year of film screenings, when moving pictures were an exploitable novelty attraction, ready-made for entrepreneurial exhibitors across the country. Relying on business records and newspaper accounts, Musser considers both the larger national situation and the particular circumstances of different cities and towns across the United States. In so doing, he foregrounds an essential point: moving pictures were, from the start, a nationally available product that was programmed, marketed, exhibited, and consumed locally. As we will see, throughout the cultural history of film in America, this relation between the national and the local will be reconfigured in a variety of ways.

Looking at the nickelodeon era and beyond, Roy Rosenzweig's richly detailed study of the role of movies and movie theaters in the ethnic working-class communities of Worcester, Massachusetts, also explores locality and nationality, but takes up a different set of questions: Who owned and operated moving picture shows? What audiences did they attract and how did these customers behave inside the theater? What did it mean to be part of the growing movie audience? Did theater operation, programming policies, and audience behavior change so as to attract middle-class patrons to the movies? Such questions, as Rosenzweig proves, point to larger issues about the role of mass entertainment in early twentieth-century America – above all, to the losses and gains accrued when moviegoing immigrants with strong working-class and ethnic ties "moved," in Rosenzweig's phrase, "gradually to the mainstream of American life."

The period documents in Part I supplement and complicate the issues raised by Musser and Rosenzweig. Typical of contemporary reform discourse, John Collier's 1908 article reports on an "investigation" of nickelodeons and other cheap amusement sites in Manhattan, with an eye toward uplift by progressive legislation. Unlike Collier's account, Mary Heaton Vorse's 1911 description of Jewish and Italian immigrant

## Introduction

picture show audiences, published in the general-interest weekly, *Outlook*, is framed much more as a piece of journalistic ethnography, complete with rendered dialect and vividly etched character types. These two early articles raise significant questions: Is the site itself or the particularized audience the most important aspect of film exhibition? On what grounds should we be suspicious of Vorse's sympathetic reportage or Collier's social-scientific investigation? Compare both of these accounts of the nickelodeon with the matter-of-fact catalogue of different types of motion picture theaters by David Hulfish, in the selection taken from his manual on theater operation, first published in 1911. Audiences for Hulfish are customers or potential customers; he is principally concerned with explaining the range of venues in operation, from the small vaudeville theater using films to the "large exclusive picture house" and the airdome. The emergence of distinct types of screening sites has potentially major implications for our understanding of the historical reception of the movies. Is, say, Griffith's *The Girl and Her Trust* (1912) the same film when shown in each of the quite distinct venues Hulfish enumerates? Furthermore, Hulfish's advice on how to boost profits suggests that the independent theater operator had a good deal of discretion in arranging and promoting programs with a particular audience in mind. At what point, we can ask, do certain of these screening sites and programming configurations disappear or become especially predominant?

The material included from *Moving Picture World* (1908–11) samples how this important trade magazine perceived the business of film exhibition, specifically, how it sought to "swell the box office receipts" by improving a range of practices – projection, programming, staffing, design, advertising, and "handling" the patron. In the anxieties expressed and ideals promoted by *Moving Picture World*, we can glimpse what was at stake in attempts to legitimize the movies and standardize and uplift exhibition. Boyd Fisher's survey in *American City* (1912), a journal devoted to municipal government and urban problems, captures a more general apprehension concerning the movie theater as a ubiquitous, unsafe physical and moral presence in the city that civic authority must regulate. Writing in a 1914 special moving picture theater issue of the architectural journal, the *Brickbuilder*, Aymar Embury is less concerned about cultural uplift, moral danger, or day-to-day business practices than about the moving picture theater's emergence as a vital form of indigenous American "street architecture." Thus these readings on the theater bring us back to certain of Rosenzweig's concerns about moviegoing and Americanization, and, more broadly, to thinking about the movie theater as a constructed place, as an economic opportunity, as a site of Americanization, and as a zone requiring regulation.

# 1

## *Introducing Cinema to the American Public: The Vitascope in the United States, 1896–7*

Charles Musser

Although motion pictures were occasionally projected onto a screen in the United States during 1895, by the Lathams' eidoloscope and C. Francis Jenkins' and Thomas Armat's phantoscope, these efforts never reached a level of sufficient achievement either technically or commercially. It was the vitascope – often known as “Edison's Vitascope” – that effectively launched projected motion pictures as a screen novelty in the United States. In late April 1896, the vitascope was showing films in only one American theater – at Koster & Bial's Music Hall in New York City. The subsequent pace of diffusion was remarkable, for both the vitascope and the cinema. By spring 1897, as the year-long novelty period came to a close, exhibitors were using several hundred projectors to present films across the country. Honolulu had its first picture show in early February 1897, while Phoenix, in Arizona Territory, followed that May 1897.<sup>1</sup> In the Northeast and Midwest, towns of a few thousand inhabitants had been visited by showmen with motion pictures not once but two or three times. The vast majority of Americans had had the opportunity to see motion pictures on a screen, and many took it. Their responses

were not unlike those that greeted the magic lantern in the 1650s or the stereopticon in the 1860s – astonishment at the life-like quality of the images. Likewise, during this brief 13- or 14-month period, a new industry was established and staffed.<sup>2</sup> It was a period of ferment and rapid change. By its close, a framework existed within which subsequent motion picture practices developed.

The vitascope was launched by Norman Raff and Frank Gammon, who already controlled the North American sales rights for the kinetoscope. The kinetoscope, invented by Thomas A. Edison and his staff (notably W.K.L. Dickson and William Heise), was a peep-hole machine used for the individual viewing of short films (initially 40–50 feet in length, later as much as 150 feet). It was a key component of the first commercially successful motion picture system in the world. The adaptation of kinetoscope films to projection (to the magic lantern) was an obvious step in the improvement of this system – one which occurred to many customers and was realized in different forms within a very short time frame in both the United States and Europe. The Lathams' eidoloscope was the first effort at adaptation in the United States,

The following essay reworks elements of chapter 4, “The Vitascope,” from *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*, in combination with more recent research, some of which appeared in Musser, “Nationalism and the Beginnings of Cinema: The Lumière Cinématographe in the United States, 1896–1897.” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 19, no.2 (June 1999), 149–76.

but the machine lacked an intermittent mechanism that stopped the film frame in front of the light source. This resulted in a small and unsteady image. The phantoscope did have an intermittent, and was technically successful, but had a disastrous debut at the Cotton States Exhibition in Atlanta, Georgia, in October 1895. At this point co-inventors Jenkins and Armat had a falling out, with Armat reaching an agreement to exploit the machine with Raff & Gammon (leaving Jenkins out of the picture entirely).

Raff & Gammon faced an array of challenges in marketing Armat's phantoscope, which they quickly renamed the vitascope, but one of the most serious soon proved to be the certain invasion of competing "screen machines" from Europe, particularly England and France. The kinoscope had been an international novelty, selling equally in Europe and the United States even as it featured performers from around the world. When it came to the vitascope, international markets were seriously compromised while the domestic market was likewise threatened from without (as well as, obviously, from domestic competitors). Quick and aggressive action was required if they were to have any reasonable chance of success.

### The New York Debut

Working closely with Thomas Edison in the first months of 1896, Raff & Gammon choreographed an abbreviated but effective promotional campaign to launch the new "screen machine." From the outset, they had decided to have the premiere in New York City, the nation's entertainment and media capital. "Judging from our experience with the Kinetoscope, we are pretty well satisfied that we can do much better and make more money for both parties by exhibiting the machine at the start exclusively in New York City. The reports through the newspapers go throughout the country, and we shall do a lot of advertising in the shape of newspaper articles which will excite the curiosity of

parties interested in such things," they explained to Armat.<sup>3</sup>

The name and involvement of Thomas Edison, by this time a semi-mythic figure in American life, guaranteed extensive media attention and a favorable outlook from the American public. The degree of his cooperation, however, remained uncertain until the popular hero had actually attended a private screening on March 27, 1896. Not only did the machine receive his complete approval, but the "Wizard of Menlo Park" stood ready to play the role of inventor, which the press desired and Raff & Gammon had assigned to him. Participating in a press screening at his laboratory on April 3, the Wizard stole the show, and if Thomas Armat was present, he stayed discreetly in the background. As the *New York Journal* reported on the following day,

For the first time since Edison has been working on his new invention, the vitascope, persons other than his trusted employees and assistants were allowed last night to see the workings of the wonderful machine. For two hours dancing girls and groups of figures, all of life size, seemed to exist as realities on the big white screen which had been built at one end of the experimenting rooms.<sup>4</sup>

Representatives of the *New York World* and other dailies also attended, and their reports soon appeared in newspapers nationwide.

On March 23, Raff & Gammon approached Albert Bial and asked him to book the vitascope at his Koster & Bial's Music Hall on 34th Street and Broadway for a fee of \$800 a week. These negotiations were concluded in early April.<sup>5</sup> After the novelty premiered on Thursday, April 23, the *New York Dramatic Mirror* declared the entertainment "was a success in every way and the large audience testified its approval of the novelty by the heartiest kind of applause."<sup>6</sup> The debut helped to sell additional territory; soon only exhibition rights for the South were available for purchase.<sup>7</sup>

Although Koster & Bial's program promised as many as 12 views,<sup>8</sup> only six scenes

were shown on opening night according to New York newspapers:

The first view showed two dancers holding between and in front of them an umbrella and dancing the while. The position of the umbrella was constantly changed, and every change was smooth and even, and the steps of the dancing could be perfectly followed.

Then came the waves, showing a scene at Dover pier after a stiff blow. This was by far the best view shown, and had to be repeated many times. As in the umbrella dance, there was absolutely no hitch. One could look far out to sea and pick out a particular wave swelling and undulating and growing bigger and bigger until it struck the end of the pier. Its edge then would be fringed with foam, and finally, in a cloud of spray, the wave would dash upon the beach. One could imagine the people running away.<sup>9</sup>

This was followed by a burlesque boxing bout, in which the contestants were a very tall, thin man and a very short, stout one. The little fellow was knocked down several times, and the movements of the boxers were well represented. A scene from "A Milk White Flag" was next shown, in which soldiers and a military band perform some complex evolutions. A group representing Uncle Sam, John Bull, Venezuela and the Monroe doctrine got a good welcome from the patriotic. The last picture was a serpentine dancer. The color effects were used in this, and it was one of the most effective of the series.<sup>10</sup>

The Music Hall band accompanied the images with appropriate music. Two of the films were in color, using a hand-tinting process similar to that for stereopticon slides. This was almost certainly done by the wife of Edmund Kuhn in Orange, New Jersey.<sup>11</sup>

Reviewers considered the "projection of [Edison's peep-hole] kinetoscope figures in stereopticon fashion" to be a screen novelty.<sup>12</sup> The *New York Mail and Express* explained to its readers, "In the vitascope the figures of the kinetoscope are projected, enlarged to life-size, upon a screen in much the same

manner as ordinary, everyday stereopticon images."<sup>13</sup> The exhibition methods that typified later vitascope screenings were already in use at the premiere. As with the kinetoscope, each film was spliced end-to-end to form a continuous band so that a brief 20-second scene could be shown over and over again. Jump cuts regularly appeared at the splice. With dances and the wave rolling onto the beach, this jump was not disruptive. With most other subjects, however, the splice created "a few hitches in the changes."<sup>14</sup> Although one exhibitor reported showing each endless band of film only three times before turning off his machine, a subject was usually repeated at least half a dozen times. As was to be the case at some other important showings, two vitascopes were used at Koster & Bial's, "housed in a little turret-like structure built above two of the middle boxes."<sup>15</sup> While one film was being shown on one vitascope, the subject on the other machine could be taken off and replaced by a new one – a process that took approximately two minutes.

By projecting one-shot films in an endless band, the vitascope emphasized movement and life-like images at the expense of narrative. As Raff & Gammon claimed in their prospectus, "When the machine is started by the operator, the bare canvas before the audience instantly becomes a stage, upon which living beings move about, and through their respective acts, movements, gestures and changing expressions, surrounded by appropriate settings and accessories – the very counterpart of the stage, the field, the city, the country – yes, more, for these reproductions are in some respects more satisfactory, pleasing and interesting than the originals."<sup>16</sup> The spectators were thus assumed to make a conscious comparison between the projected image and the everyday world as they knew and experienced it directly. It was the unprecedented congruence between the two that was being celebrated. Projected images were conceived as a novelty for which life-like movement in conjunction with a life-size photographic image provided a sense of heightened realism.

This new level of realism at least temporarily expanded the screen's importance as a source of commercial amusement.

The opening night program of the vitascope, however, was something more than a casually assembled collection of entertaining views. The sequence of films was built around *The Monroe Doctrine*, the only film on the program which we know for certainty was made by the Edison Manufacturing Company for this new era of projected motion pictures. *The Monroe Doctrine* responded to a "crisis" in foreign affairs, involving a long-standing border dispute between British Guiana and Venezuela, which had heated up after gold miners rushed into the disputed area. When Great Britain threatened to use force to assert its claims, the United States intervened by evoking the Monroe Doctrine, "the favorite dogma of the American people."<sup>17</sup> The Monroe Doctrine hardly had the stature of international law, and its new and expanded application in this context could be seen to signal the true beginning of "the American century." The Edison film, which was doubtlessly inspired by a political cartoon on this subject, "shows John Bull bombarding a South American shore, supposedly to represent Venezuela. John is seemingly getting the better of the argument when the tall lanky figure of Uncle Sam emerges from the back of the picture. He grasps John Bull by the neck, forces him to his knees and makes him take off his hat to Venezuela."<sup>18</sup> A burlesque, this editorial cartoon on film showed "Uncle Sam teaching John Bull a lesson."<sup>19</sup> England was only the specific object of a doctrine that the United States sought to apply to all European powers. A synecdochal or allegorical tale seems to be at play: one in which the forbidden interference of Europeans in American affairs could be expanded to include the expected invasion of European motion picture machines into the American market.

Of the six films shown on opening night, three or four others were old kinetoscope films, made in 1894–5: the Leigh sisters in *Umbrella Dance*, *Band Drill* with an excerpt of "The Milk White Flag," and *Walton & Slavin*

showing a burlesque boxing match from *Little Christopher Columbus*. New subjects within the familiar genre of dance films may have included a skirt dance by an unidentified performer (this may well have been an old film). In all these instances, the performers were American (and white). The most novel film was Robert Paul's *Sea Waves at Dover* – duly credited as an English subject but without acknowledging its true author. The film provides a fascinating complement to *The Monroe Doctrine*: *Sea Waves at Dover* suggested not only the geographic mobility of the American machine, but its ability to keep the heart of the British Empire within its vision. And as the waves crashed on the cinematic shore and failed to sweep away its vaudeville spectators, did not this film hint that British power in the Americas was only an illusion? Or that British waves (and John Bull) should stay on British shores? The vitascope's opening night program strongly indicates that Raff & Gammon had consciously chosen to fight the expected influx of international machines (English as well as French) by appealing to American patriotism – even as they (like Maguire & Baucus) had marketed the kinetoscope on the basis of a cosmopolitan internationalism.<sup>20</sup>

The order of the films was (1) *Umbrella Dance*, (2) *Sea Waves at Dover*, (3) *Walton & Slavin*, (4) *Band Drill*, (5) *The Monroe Doctrine*, and (6) *Serpentine or Skirt Dance*.<sup>21</sup> The program thus started off by showing two young female dancers, asserting a continuation between stage and screen. (According to one critic, "It seemed as though they were actually on the stage, so natural was the dance, with its many and graceful motions.")<sup>22</sup> The proscenium arch established by this first film was then broken in *Sea Waves at Dover*. The British waves metaphorically wash away the stage and the Leigh Sisters even as they assault American patrons, causing initial consternation and excitement. This is followed by a familiar subject that reasserted the proscenium. The burlesque bout was between "the long and the short of it," featuring lanky Charles Walton and the stout



John Slavin. According to some sources, *The Monroe Doctrine* also featured Walton as Uncle Sam as well as Slavin's replacement, John Mayon, as John Bull. In any case, Walton and Slavin visually evoked, at least subliminally and retrospectively, Uncle Sam and John Bull engaging in a fistic encounter. The fourth film showed a marching band in uniform: suggesting a mobilization of the American military, it "elicited loud cries of 'Bravo!'"<sup>23</sup> *Band Drill* thus prepared the way for *The Monroe Doctrine*, which "twinned" *Sea Waves at Dover*. The British bombard the shoreline of another American nation – with guns instead of cinematic waves. Uncle Sam forces John Bull to stop. According to one report, "This delighted the audience, and applause and cheers rang through the house, while someone cried, 'Hurrah for Edison.'"<sup>24</sup> With this victory there was a return to the status quo as patrons again viewed a dance film, one similar in style and subject matter to the opening selection. The program began and ended with films of women that indulge male voyeuristic pleasures. A masculinist-nationalist (English–American) confrontation thus forces these pleasures aside until an American triumph is achieved (on the screen), and audiences are returned to their sensual pleasures. More than a miscellaneous collection of self-contained films organized on variety principles and "supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself,"<sup>25</sup> this opening night program displays a highly organized, if oblique, narrative structure. It demonstrates one of the ways in which exhibitors of the 1890s played a creative force. They were responsible for giving more than a "good show." In organizing and presenting sequences of short films they not only shaped meaning but created it. By sequencing the short films in their repertoire (the equivalent of shots or short scenes), showmen effectively had editorial control over their programs. Programming and editing were, in this respect, not yet distinct phenomena. Throughout the 1890s, the exhibitor thus had creative control

over a variety of elements that we would now call post-production.

### **Local Debuts of the Vitascope**

While the vitascope's New York debut created intense demand for "the latest Edison invention" (and the imminent arrival of competing machines from abroad necessitated rapid deployment of machines), the ability to satisfy this desire was hampered by delays in the manufacturing of vitascope projectors. This was particularly frustrating for "state rights" owners because the most lucrative commercial arrangements occurred during the regular theatrical season, which drew to a close in most parts of the country sometime during May. These investors had to watch enticing contracts disappear for lack of a machine. Allen Rieser, who had been promised a machine in mid-March, was impatient and "D — mad" by the second week in May. "The [Summer] Parks that want to engage the Vitascope that I know of wire us if we cannot show them what we have and conclude our engagement they will drop us," he told Raff & Gammon. "Just now I got a telegram from Cleveland Ohio asking whether I could be there on the 16th with the machine. This is the biggest Park in that section of the country. I have to reject them which may be a matter of a couple of thousand dollars."<sup>26</sup> W.R. Miller could have extended his phonograph tour and made another \$500 instead of vainly waiting in Tennessee for a promise to be kept.<sup>27</sup> It was not until mid-May that the Edison Manufacturing Company completed the first group of projectors.

The vitascope opened in a dozen major cities and resorts between mid-May and mid-June, with many others to follow in subsequent weeks:

Boston – May 18  
Camden, New Jersey(?) – May 21  
Hartford, Ct. – May 21  
Atlantic City – May 23  
Philadelphia – May 25

New Haven, Ct. – May 28  
Providence – June 4  
Buffalo – June 8  
San Francisco – June 8  
Meriden, Ct. – June 8  
Nashville – June 13  
Baltimore – June 15  
Bridgeport, Ct. – June 15  
New London, Ct. – June 15  
St. Louis – June 15  
Rochester, NY – by July 20  
Portland, Maine – June 22  
Bergen Beach (Coney Island) – ca. June 22  
Scranton, Pa. – June 22  
New Orleans – June 28  
Wilkes-Barre, Pa. – June 29  
Cleveland – July 1  
Asbury Park, NJ – July 1  
Detroit – July 1  
Los Angeles – July 5  
Chicago – July 5  
Milwaukee – July 26  
Kansas City, Mo. – July 26

Vitascope exhibitions occurred throughout the continental United States in any locality large enough to boast an electrical system. Although the rapid pace of these debuts strained Raff & Gammon's resources beyond the breaking point (Norman Raff even suffered a nervous breakdown), they were generally well received; and the resulting popularity, publicity, and broad diffusion established "Edison's Vitascope" as the first motion picture projector in the minds of the American public.

The vitascope was presented in various types of entertainment venues, thus extending the eclectic nature of sites that had been used for motion picture exhibitions by the Lathams with their eidoloscope. Vaudeville introduced amusement-goers to projected motion pictures in many major cities:

- The vitascope ran at B.F. Keith's Boston theater for 12 weeks and his Philadelphia theater for nine. In each locale, it remained the principal feature on the bill throughout the run.
- The California states rights owners made arrangements with Gustave Walker to play his Orpheum houses in San Francisco (three weeks) and Los Angeles (two weeks).
- The vitascope had its Chicago premiere at Hopkins' South Side Theater where it ran on the vaudeville bill for 20 consecutive weeks. "It is not only an interesting and instructive novelty for the regular patrons of the house," manager J.D. Hopkins declared, "but is drawing scores and hundreds of people who never before attended this popular form of entertainment." He went on to claim that the previous Sunday's business "was the heaviest ever known in the 'ten–twenty–thirty' style of entertainment in this country."<sup>28</sup>
- In Louisville, the vitascope was introduced on September 20 at a newly opened vaudeville house and helped to make it a success.<sup>29</sup>
- In Cleveland, where no vaudeville was presented during the summer, A.F. Rieser engaged a hall and presented the vitascope along with his own small vaudeville company.<sup>30</sup>

Theaters offering other entertainment forms also featured the vitascope. Films were shown in conjunction with plays, musicals, and even operas.

- In St. Louis, vitascope moving pictures were exhibited immediately after the opera, *The Bohemian Girl*.<sup>31</sup> Spectators could either see the films from an outdoor garden or remain inside the theater.
- In Milwaukee, the manager of the Academy of Music arranged for Hixson and Wollam to show the vitascope exclusively at his theater. Each week his stock company put on a new play and a few specialities were performed between acts. Receiving \$400 per week, the vitascope entrepreneurs played two weeks in late July and early August, returned for another two weeks in mid-September, and a single week in early November.

## Introducing Cinema to the American Public

- In Albany, New York, on August 17, the vitascope debuted between acts of a play presented by the Corse Payton Company.<sup>32</sup>
- At an opening in Atlanta, Georgia, on November 16, the Florence Hamilton Company put on a different play each night, with moving pictures concluding each performance. Although Jenkins and Armat had failed to draw audiences of any size at the city's Cotton States Exposition, their invention now became "the reigning fad."<sup>33</sup>

In a few instances, the vitascope was linked to occult figures whose mysterious performances equaled Edison's most remarkable achievements.

- In Connecticut, "Wizard Edison's most marvelous Invention" joined with the touring hypnotist Santanelli.<sup>34</sup> Starting in Hartford and moving next to New Haven's Grand Opera House, Santanelli regularly hypnotized subjects in his entourage and made them perform outlandish feats. These performances were ultimately condemned by the conservative *New Haven Register*, which declared, "ENOUGH OF SANTANELLI. Public Should Be Glad When He Leaves With His Men."<sup>35</sup> His performance was not considered educational and "his freak-like, weak-willed sleeping boys" seemed to be throwing their lives away. The work of this mysterious wizard often received more attention than the vitascope.
- At Melodeon Hall in Lexington, Kentucky, the vitascope co-starred with Miss Winnie Anderson, who conducted a "séance of Spiritualism and Theosophy."<sup>36</sup>

Storefronts were a frequently used outlet for vitascope entrepreneurs. Such premises had already been occupied by phonograph exhibitors and other showmen anxious to avoid the expense and brief runs associated with a regular theater. Once an appropriate space was rented, they could give exhibitions

for weeks at a time and pocket all the income above expenses.

- Residents of Providence, Rhode Island – including the Mayor and the city's leading citizens – flocked to a storefront show at 305 Westminster Street during the first part of June. There they could see ten films for 25¢. Screenings went on 12 hours a day (11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.) over four weeks. The "Standing Room Only" sign was often on display both in the afternoons and evenings.<sup>37</sup>
- After playing for a month at a nearby summer park, Walter Wainwright and William Rock operated a storefront moving picture show at 623 Canal Street in New Orleans. With a 10¢ admission fee, this profitable effort (one of the few) ran from July 26 through September.
- After earlier turns in nearby summer parks, the New York Vitascope Company opened storefronts in Rochester on September 4 and in Buffalo later in the month.<sup>38</sup> Although the Rochester venue at 64 South Street was "a very fine store in the best location in the city," McLoughlin grossed only \$100 during the first seven days – much less than expenses.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, he remained there at least a month. In late December, he opened another storefront in Utica and stayed for five weeks. Fifteen films were presented at each showing with an admission fee of 10¢ to 15¢.<sup>40</sup>

Many of these storefronts were variations on phonograph and kinoscope parlors.

- In Nashville, Tennessee, the main room featured the vitascope but nickel-in-the-slot phonographs were in the foyer.<sup>41</sup> There, W.R. Miller tried various methods of ballyhooing his films. "I started giving a half hour show for 25¢ but it didn't work, so I put the price [at] 10¢ and run one film and change every fifteen minutes in the evening. In that way many people spend

50¢ or more where they would not spend a quarter.”<sup>42</sup>

- The California vitascope exhibitors began to show their machine in the rear of Tally’s kinetoscope and phonograph storefront in late July.
- In Asbury Park, Edison’s Electrical Casino had the vitascope in its small theater while kinetoscopes and phonographs were in the annex.<sup>43</sup>

Summer parks and resorts provided popular locations for vitascope exhibitions during the warm weather. In most cases these venues were either small theaters that functioned like the urban storefronts or summer theaters adapted for vaudeville.

- The vitascope was presented at three summer parks near Philadelphia. One, Willow Grove Park, opened a new theater on August 5 with the vitascope, an X-ray machine (“through the medium of which can be seen the bones in the hand and other portions of the body”), kinetoscopes, and phonographs.<sup>44</sup>
- At the Casino, a summer vaudeville theater at Baltimore’s Arlington Electric Park (run by Charles E. Ford, who owned and managed Ford’s Theater), there was only one projector in operation, and a film was shown between each vaudeville act. By the second week of the vitascope run, 3,500 people attended on a single day, with each paying 25¢. Most were drawn by the screen novelty; and, according to the *Baltimore Sun*, the show became “a favorite point for cyclers out on an evening ride.”<sup>45</sup>
- In Atlantic City, which relied heavily on Philadelphia vacationers, Peter Kiefaber exhibited the vitascope at the Scenic Theater, at “the very centre of the ‘Boardwalk’ and the only room fitted up in theatrical style, finely lit up by electricity and with drop seats.”<sup>46</sup> Arthur Hotaling, who saw his first motion pictures there, felt that Kiefaber’s lack of showmanship was responsible for his poor box-office receipts.

Hotaling, who had previously run a “living picture show” in which performers formed tableaux in imitation of well-known paintings, offered his expertise to the inexperienced showman and was soon managing the theater. Later he recalled,

As a showman one of my best assets was an ability to handle a brush, and the first thing I did was to plaster the front with banners. The two star films were Cissy Fitzgerald in her dance and the John C. Rice-May Irwin kiss, and I decorated the front with these in vivid color. Then I fixed up the entrance so that the curtain could be drawn back to display the screen. If we saw anyone in the crowd getting interested we would drop the curtain and he would have to pay his dime to see the rest. Generally, though, we would show part of the Fitzgerald picture and I would make a “spiel” about the kiss picture, which was from “The Widow Jones,” then a recent Broadway hit. Business picked up.<sup>47</sup>

In August Kiefaber was running another vitascope in a second Atlantic City location, probably a storefront.<sup>48</sup>

- At Bergen Beach, a resort near Coney Island that was run by Percy Williams, the vitascope played in its own small theater and each day delighted “hundreds by its almost perfect simulation of moving scenes in real life.”<sup>49</sup>

These different venues suggest some of the different ways that early films were marketed and understood. This new form of screen entertainment – an up-to-date magic lantern – could serve as a vaudeville novelty, as a vehicle to re-present theatrical performances, or as a new form of technology for mechanical reproduction like the X-ray or phonograph (one of several “new media” making their appearance at this time). Above all, impresarios eagerly associated the new screen novelty with a wide range of entertainment forms, cutting across genres and

in some cases even high–low cultural distinctions. In its methods of production and exhibition, as well as in its subject matter, the vitascope continued the profound transformation of American life and performance culture that the kinoscope had already begun.

### **Problems with the Vitascope**

A wide range of problems plagued the vitascope entrepreneurs. At first, only a handful of people (Thomas Armat and his brothers, Edward Murphy, James White, and one or two others) knew how to set up and operate the machines; these experts raced from city to city trying to salvage dire situations. Eurio Hopkins' terse telegram from Providence was typical: "Rush Murphy quick. In trouble. Also competent man permanent. Turned five hundred away. Unable to give performance."<sup>50</sup> There were no instructions to send out with the machines. In the best of circumstances, mechanically minded men such as Tennessee rights owner W.R. Miller figured out how to assemble the parts and run the machine on their own.<sup>51</sup> Adjustments were often imperfect and sometimes resulted in unnecessary technical difficulties.

The electricity needed to power the vitascopes was one of the entrepreneurs' biggest headaches. The machines were designed to run on the direct current favored by Edison, but many locations were wired for alternating current instead. As Robert C. Allen has pointed out, the nation's patchwork of conflicting currents and voltages meant that the projectors frequently had to be adapted to different conditions when moved to a new locale.<sup>52</sup> In some instances, electricity had to be pulled off streetcar lines. When J. Hunter Armat confronted this situation in Baltimore, he declined to take charge of the show, and it was several days before his more experienced brother Christopher arrived and tied in. With streetcars using 500 volts, the vitascope was overloaded and frequently subjected the motion picture operator to painful shocks.<sup>53</sup> The electrical problem was so

severe that theater manager Charles Ford decided not to renew his contract after a four-week run but rather waited for a more amenable machine to come along.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, from Halifax, Nova Scotia, Andrew Holland wrote Raff & Gammon, "If I have to get a special motor for every town I go into I may as well drop this country altogether, except in towns large enough to support an electric railway system. In Ottawa the alternating system is 52 volts 1600 frequency; here it is 104 volts. I do not know the frequency, but I thought you had overcome the difficulty of differences in frequency by the adoption of cone pulleys."<sup>55</sup> The Halifax showing was a failure due to electrical problems and Holland lost \$200 out of pocket.

Solutions were diverse, often ingenious, but rarely satisfactory. In Los Angeles, R.S. Paine, Charles H. Balsley, and Edwin S. Porter relied on batteries to power their machine. After working imperfectly on opening night, the vitascope was soon performing up to standard. Such a solution was not generally practical, however, since the quantity of batteries needed to project the films would have been prohibitive for someone moving from town to town.<sup>56</sup> Many locales simply did not have electricity. In North Dakota, for example, only four towns could supply electrical power of any kind. In Canada, Holland tried bicycle power in the hope that "I can make myself entirely independent of electric light and power, and consequently will be able to work the small towns through this country to advantage."<sup>57</sup> The results were somewhat disappointing. "The motive power run by hand proves to be a complete success so far as speed is concerned, but it does not give the same even, steady power as an electric motor," he explained. "I have more difficulty with the lamp of the new machine. Do my best I cannot get a good clean light from it the same as we have with the first machine."<sup>58</sup>

Films were another major expense, costing as much as \$12.50 for a new 50-foot (actual length 42-foot) subject. To make matters worse, the Edison Manufacturing Company often failed to turn out film prints of acceptable

quality. The first exhibitions relied on the semitranslucent strips intended for kinetoscopes. When the Blair Camera Company finally produced a clear-base celluloid film stock, it quickly proved unsatisfactory as the emulsion peeled off the base.<sup>59</sup> Exhibitors despaired at the poor quality of films; A.F. Rieser was reduced to sending back only those that would wear out in less than a week. Some prints only lasted a couple of nights.<sup>60</sup> Edmund McLoughlin complained that his films were very gray and discussed the problem with experts at the Eastman Company in Rochester, New York, already the country's leading supplier of photographic supplies. They suggested that Edison was not using the proper emulsion. McLoughlin also informed them, "The Eastman Co. are shipping very heavily to France. They make a positive and negative emulsion and claim better results than you get."<sup>61</sup> Finally, in mid-September the Edison Manufacturing Company shifted its purchases of raw stock to Eastman. From that time on, the photographic manufacturer has been the principal American supplier of motion picture raw stock.

Individual vitascope entrepreneurs faced still other problems. In more rural areas, the screen novelty was greeted with little enthusiasm or patronage. "After the thing becomes ancient history these Yankees may become interested. But it is a harder task to interest the Maine natives in something new, than it is to preach free silver coinage to Wall Street bankers," declared C.O. Richardson in a letter to the Vitascope Company.<sup>62</sup> W.R. Miller apparently had the same problem with Southerners as his gross income with the vitascope generally fluctuated between \$5 and \$34 a day. Far from major urban centers, people were often suspicious of urban popular amusements. In Skowhegan, Maine, Richardson reported that *Watermelon Contest* was considered "nasty and vulgar because of the spitting and slobbering,"<sup>63</sup> and he thus had to ask Raff & Gammon for a replacement. City, county, and state licenses often reflected this hostility. As the owner of the Tennessee rights

complained, "the only city where a good business can be done is Memphis where the City license is \$22.50 per day. State and county are extra so you see that is prohibitive."<sup>64</sup> Eventually many of the problems evoked by "state rights" owners were ameliorated if not completely eliminated; Eastman's satisfactory film stock was adopted; and although vitascope exhibitors complained about the shortage of film subjects, their choice of titles continued to grow.

Despite these improvements, "state rights" owners rarely recouped their investment. Most did little more than meet expenses. Wainwright and Rock were the only ones ever to claim a profit. In early September a Holland brother wrote to Raff:

I am completely disheartened about the Vitascope business in consequence of the wretched films we have been receiving of late. If there is no improvement, it is simply out of the question altogether doing business under present conditions, and I do not wonder at the statements I hear from exhibitors in the United States that they are not making money to warrant paying large bonuses for territory.<sup>65</sup>

A month later, C.O. Richardson reported:

The Vitascope business in Maine has been no picnic by any means. Without counting a dollar for services of myself, wife and daughter, who have done all the work, we have since June, profited enough above running expenses to just pay costs of film and rental. After four months work with state two thirds covered I am still out my original \$1000 for state.<sup>66</sup>

The expense and difficulty of introducing a new technology became their burden, allowing others to prosper.

Raff & Gammon, Thomas Armat, and Thomas Edison were the chief people to profit from the vitascope. Although the vitascope's New York run at Koster & Bial's ended in mid-August 1896, Raff & Gammon reopened at Proctor's two New York vaudeville houses in

*Introducing Cinema to the American Public*

**Table 1** Premieres of “Edison’s Vitascope,” the Lumière Cinématographe, and the American biograph in selected US cities

Cities	Vitascope	Cinématographe	Biograph
New York	April 23	June 29	Oct 5/12
Boston	May 18	Aug 10	Jan 11 (1897)
Hartford, Ct.	May 21	Dec 3	Feb 4 (1897)
Philadelphia	May 25	July 27	Dec 28
New Haven, Ct.	May 28	Sept 14	Nov 30
Providence	June 4	Sept 7	Dec 21
San Francisco	June 8	Aug 30 (1897)	Oct 25 (1897)
Baltimore	June 15	by Jan 15 (1897)	Nov 2
Brooklyn <sup>a</sup>	June 22	Aug 17	Sept 28
New Orleans <sup>b</sup>	June 28	June 21 (1897)	Sept 11 (1898)
Wilkes-Barre, Pa. <sup>c</sup>	June 29	–	Dec 9 (1899) <sup>d</sup>
Detroit <sup>e</sup>	July 1	Jan 17 (1897)	Dec 6
Cleveland	July 1	March 29 (1897)	May 3 (1897)
Chicago	July 5	Sept 14	Nov 16 <sup>f</sup>
Los Angeles	July 5	Aug 9 (1897)	Dec 6 (1897)
Rochester, NY <sup>g</sup>	by July 20	Nov 2	Nov 30
Milwaukee	July 26	Dec 10	April 4 (1897)
Kansas City, Mo.	July 26	Dec 20	Nov 30 <sup>f</sup>
Denver <sup>h</sup>	Aug 16	Jan 23 (1898)	Jan 11 (1897)
Pittsburgh	Sept 7	Sept 7	Sept 14
Cincinnati	Sept 13	Dec 20	March 14 (1897)
Louisville, Ky.	Sept 20	Nov 9	Jan 4 (1897)
Washington, DC <sup>i</sup>	Sept 21	Jan 1 (1897)	Feb 2 (1897)
Lexington, Ky. <sup>j</sup>	Dec 23	–	Jan 25 (1900) <sup>d</sup>
Utica, NY	Dec 29	–	April 12 (1897)

Dates are for 1896 unless the year is provided in parentheses. Information is derived from searches of local newspapers with supplemental sources as noted.

<sup>a</sup> The local Brooklyn premiere of the vitascope was at Coney Island.

<sup>b</sup> Sylvester Quinn Breard, “A History of Motion Pictures in New Orleans, 1896–1908” (M.A. thesis; Louisiana State University, May 1951), published on microfiche in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 15, no. 4 (1995).

<sup>c</sup> Charles Musser with Carol Nelson, *High-Class Moving Pictures: Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition, 1880–1920* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>d</sup> Biograph did not screen its regular films in this city, but showed *The Jeffries-Sharkey Fight* on this date.

<sup>e</sup> Detroit was one of the few cities where the vitascope did not introduce local amusement-goers to projected motion pictures. Manager Whitney of the Detroit Opera House had bought the Michigan rights to the improved eidoloscope (i.e., with an intermittent) and exhibited them in his Opera House to somewhat disappointing results beginning May 28, 1896. According to one report, “thus far it has had very light attendance. The Bull Fight is the only novelty it offers – the other scenes have been seen here before at the Wonderland. The machine is still far from perfection” (*New York Clipper*, June 12, 1896, 231). See also “Eidoloscope at Fresco,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 2, 1896, 10.

<sup>f</sup> As part of show with Palmer Cox’s Brownies *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, November 15, 1896, 4D. It then moved to St. Louis (*St. Louis Republican*, November 22, 1896, 5) and Kansas City (*Kansas City Star*, November 29, 1896, 6).

<sup>g</sup> The vitascope premiered in Rochester, New York, at Ontario Beach (E.M. McLoughlin to Vitascope Co., July 21, 1896, Raff & Gammon Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University). See also George C. Pratt, “No Magic, No Mystery, No Sleight of Hand: The First Ten Years of Motion Pictures in Rochester,” *Image* 8, no. 4 (December

1959). In Marshall Deutelbaum (ed.), *"Image": On the Art and Evolution of the Film* (New York: Dover, 1979), 20–2.

<sup>h</sup> Roger William Warren, "History of Motion Picture Exhibition in Denver, 1896–1911" (M.A. thesis; University of Denver, 1960), published on microfiche in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 15, no. 4 (1995). The phantoscope/phantascope opened on the same day as the vitascope (August 16).

<sup>i</sup> Washington, DC, was one of the few cities where the vitascope was preceded by an international rival, in this instance R.W. Paul's animatographe, which opened September 7, 1896 (*Washington Star*, September 8, 1896, 12).

<sup>j</sup> Gregory A. Waller, *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896–1930* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

mid-September and remained for almost two months. By the time this run was concluded, Raff & Gammon had made over \$10,000 from their exhibition contracts in that city alone.<sup>67</sup> Sale of territory and business dealings with the "state rights" owners must have roughly tripled that amount. Armat probably accrued more than \$10,000. The Edison Manufacturing Company's film-related profits for the 1896 business year were almost \$25,000, while the famed inventor received additional compensation from Raff & Gammon in an informal royalty arrangement. Their success was thus in stark contrast to the fate of most "state rights" owners, who never regained the money from their purchase of territory. These local entrepreneurs faced many impediments to success but only one that could not be overcome or ameliorated: the problem created by competing motion picture enterprises.

Although "Edison's Vitascope" was the first successful screen machine in the American amusement field, competing projectors and enterprises began to appear within a month of its Koster & Bial's debut. In fact, even before its premiere, F.F. Proctor promised the imminent presentation of a mysterious "Kinematographe" – a promise he did not keep but one that told amusement-goers that the vitascope was not unique. During the spring and summer of 1896, several other companies quickly established themselves as leading enterprises in the field: the Eidoloscope Company (by adding an intermittent to its eidoloscope projector), the Lumière Agency with its cinématographe, and the American Mutoscope Company with its biog-

raph service. While organized somewhat differently, they shared underlying similarities with the Vitascope Company. Each company developed a complete motion picture system, built its own equipment (cameras as well as projectors) and acted as a self-sufficient entity. All four sought to control the exhibition as well as the production of their films. This was the characteristic structure of film companies in the initial stages of the novelty period.

Some histories have suggested that the vitascope was quickly vanquished by the Lumière cinématographe.<sup>68</sup> Although this did happen at specific venues, notably some top-line vaudeville houses where the European views offered by the cinématographe provided a welcome change of pace from the American views featured on the vitascope. The arrival of the cinématographe was hardly decisive in the vitascope's demise. Indeed, as table 1 shows, the Lumière cinématographe was quickly challenged (and just as often replaced) by the American Mutoscope Company's biograph exhibition service, which also featured American views and made its initial appeal on the basis of patriotic nationalism. Despite their apparent rivalry, the Edison and Lumière companies were in some way complementary. The biograph service challenged the vitascope group more directly because it offered the same type of subject matter, though of substantially higher technical quality. Indeed, it was Biograph's expensive, large-format system that made it the premier service in the field, potentially leaving room for the vitascope in more moderately priced venues.<sup>69</sup>



In the end, the Vitascope Company and its “state rights” owners could have withstood the challenges coming from rival full-service motion picture companies. It was the activities of independent exhibitors, usually working with the 35 mm, four-perforation format established by Edison, but not yet protected by his patents (despite years of litigation, such protection proved elusive). Rather than building a self-contained company that created its own technological system, these showmen bought their projectors and films from various manufacturers, either in Europe (primarily England) or domestically. Unencumbered by the restrictions and royalty payments that Raff & Gammon imposed on the vitascope exhibitors, these showmen occupied the low and moderate end of the market where they could compete very effectively and to which the vitascope “state rights” owners had been relegated. Inevitably, the vitascope alliance of Edison, Raff & Gammon, Thomas Armat and “state rights” owners fell apart. Nonetheless, the vitascope provided a key role in the introduction of projected motion pictures to the American public and did much to establish a framework within which subsequent exhibition practices were developed.

## Notes

- 1 *Honolulu Evening Bulletin*, February 4, 1897, 5 and February 6, 1897, 1 in Robert C. Schmitt, “Movies in Hawaii, 1897–1932.” *Hawaiian Journal of History*, 1 (1967); *Phoenix Gazette*, May 17 and 18, 1897, courtesy George C. Hall.
- 2 Most owners of film production companies associated with the Motion Picture Patents Company (formed at the end of 1908) entered the field during this year.
- 3 Raff & Gammon to Daniel and Armat, n.d. [ca. December 26, 1895], 3:179, Harvard Business School, Baker Library (hereafter MH-BA).
- 4 *New York Journal*, April 4, 1896, clipping, Raff & Gammon Collection, MH-BA.
- 5 Raff & Gammon to Albert Bial, March 23, 1896, 3:402; and Raff & Gammon to Albert Bial, April 7, 1896, 2:108, MH-BA; this figure is extremely difficult to decipher and may have been \$300 per week.
- 6 *New York Dramatic Mirror*, May 2, 1896, 19.
- 7 For a discussion of “state rights” owners for the vitascope see Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Scribner’s, 1990), 112–15ff.
- 8 A portion of the Koster & Bial program is reproduced in Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926), opposite p. 249.
- 9 “Figures on the Screen” *New York Mail and Express*, April 24, 1896, 12.
- 10 “Amusements.” *New York Daily News*, April 24, 1896, clipping, MH-BA.
- 11 E. Kuhn to Frank Gammon, July 28, 1896, incoming letters, July 1896, MH-BA.
- 12 “Edison’s Vitascope Cheered.” *New York Times*, April 24, 1896, 5.
- 13 *New York Mail and Express*, April 24, 1896, 12.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *New York Daily News*, April 24, 1896, clipping, MH-BA.
- 16 Raff & Gammon, *The Vitascope*, 2.
- 17 Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1867–1907* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1937), 136.
- 18 *Boston Herald*, May 17, 1896, 32.
- 19 F.Z. Maguire & Co., *Catalogue* [March 1898], 31.
- 20 Reports of the Lumière cinématographe reached Raff & Gammon from England. These London screenings destroyed their hope for a lucrative sale of European rights. British “screen machines” were also showing films by the vitascope’s Koster & Bial’s debut. In this respect Great Britain was an appropriate if somewhat misplaced object of Raff & Gammon’s barbs.
- 21 I misidentified *Band Drill* as *Finale of 1st Act of Hoyt’s “Milk White Flag,”* in Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 62.
- 22 “Wonderful is the Vitascope.” *New York Herald*, April 24, 1896, 11. In Charles Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890–1900: An Annotated Filmography* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 200–1.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-

- Garde." In Thomas Elsaesser with Adam Barker (eds.), *Early Cinema: Space-Frame-Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 58.
- 26 A.F. Rieser to Raff & Gammon, May 8, 1896, MH-BA.
- 27 W.R. Miller to Raff & Gammon, May 19, 1896, MH-BA.
- 28 *Chicago Tribune*, July 26, 1896, 34. "Twenty-thirty" refers to theaters with an admission price ranging from 10¢ in the gallery to 30¢ in the orchestra.
- 29 *Louisville Courier-Journal*, September 20, 1896, 6B.
- 30 *Cleveland Plain-Dealer*, July 12, 1896, 15.
- 31 *St. Louis Republic*, June 16, 1896, 11.
- 32 *Albany Times-Union*, August 18, 1896, 1.
- 33 *Atlanta Constitution*, November 21, 1896, 7.
- 34 *New Haven Journal-Courier*, May 29, 1896, 7.
- 35 *New Haven Register*, June 5, 1896, 2.
- 36 Gregory A. Waller, *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896-1930* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 30.
- 37 *Providence Journal*, June 7, 1896, 8.
- 38 Edmund McLoughlin to Raff & Gammon, September 12, 1896, MH-BA.
- 39 Edmund McLoughlin to Raff & Gammon, September 3, 1896, MH-BA.
- 40 *Utica Observer*, December 29, 1896, 1.
- 41 Miller to Vitascope Co., June 21, 1896, MH-BA.
- 42 Miller to Vitascope Co., June 14, 1896, MH-BA.
- 43 *Asbury Park Daily Press*, July 17, 1896, 4.
- 44 *Philadelphia Record*, August 9, 1896, 11.
- 45 *Baltimore Sun*, June 23, 1896, 10. This method of exhibition celebrated each film as a self-contained attraction and differed markedly from the methods of presentation used at Koster & Bial's Music Hall on opening night.
- 46 P.W. Kiefaber to Raff & Gammon, March 31, 1896, MH-BA.
- 47 "Arthur Hotaling Recalls the 'Good Old Days.'" *Moving Picture World*, July 15, 1916, 380. Kiefaber eventually became a prominent producer-director for Sigmund Lubin.
- 48 *Atlantic City Daily Union*, August 19, 1896, 1.
- 49 *Brooklyn Eagle*, June 21, 1896, 23.
- 50 E. Hopkins, Jr. to Raff & Gammon, June 2, 1896, MH-BA.
- 51 W.R. Miller to Raff & Gammon, May 24, 1896, MH-BA.
- 52 Robert C. Allen, *Vaudeville and Film 1895-1915*, 97-8.
- 53 J. Hunter Armat to P.W. Kiefaber, June 17, 1896, MH-BA.
- 54 P.W. Kiefaber to Vitascope Co., June 11, 1896, MH-BA.
- 55 Andrew Holland to Raff, September 8, 1896, MH-BA.
- 56 See Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon*, 81-91.
- 57 Holland to Gammon, September 26, 1896, MH-BA.
- 58 Holland to Raff & Gammon, October 1, 1896, MH-BA.
- 59 H.R. Kiefaber to Raff & Gammon, July 29, 1896; Purdy and Kiefaber to Vitascope Co., August 17, 1896, MH-BA.
- 60 A.F. Rieser to Raff & Gammon, September 25, 1896, MH-BA.
- 61 Edmund McLoughlin to Raff & Gammon, August 4, 1896, MH-BA.
- 62 C.O. Richardson to Vitascope Co., October 4, 1896, MH-BA.
- 63 C.O. Richardson to Vitascope Co., November 13, 1896, MH-BA. Richardson called the picture *Eating Watermelon for a Wager*.
- 64 W.R. Miller to Raff & Gammon, August 14, 1896, MH-BA.
- 65 Holland to Norman Raff, September 3, 1896, MH-BA.
- 66 C.O. Richardson to Vitascope Co., October 4, 1896, MH-BA.
- 67 Holland to Raff, December 28, 1896, MH-BA.
- 68 In *A Million and One Nights* Ramsaye states, "Within two months of the introductory showing of the Vitascope at Koster & Bial's Music Hall in New York, the precedents to govern the next ten years of presentation of the motion picture were laid down. It is whimsically true that these precedents came not with the exploitation of the American-made Vitascope but rather with its French rival, the Lumière Cinématographe" (p. 262). See also Robert C. Allen, "Vitascope/Cinématographe: Initial Patterns of American Film Industrial Practice." In John Fell (ed.), *Film Before Griffith* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 144-52.
- 69 Biograph continued to thrive into the twentieth century (though as part of an international group of sister companies), while the vitascope and Lumière cinématographe had ceased to be a significant presence in the American exhibition field by 1897-8.