

'Carl Laemmle's outstanding achievement'

Harry Pollard and the struggle to film *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

David Pierce

In the mid to late 1920s, Harry Pollard was the leading director at Universal Pictures. Carl Laemmle, Universal's president, considered him 'one of the, if not the one, outstanding director in the industry'. Pollard had directed nine consecutive hits for Universal, made stars of light comedian Reginald Denny and actress Laura La Plante and received the same salary as MGM's top director, King Vidor.¹

In 1925 Pollard approached Laemmle with the dream project he had been developing for years – a new version of the popular *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The novel had sold more copies than any other book after the Bible, and the stage versions had been touring continuously for over 70 years. Pollard also proposed that his wife, actress Margarita Fischer, emerge from retirement to play the leading female role. Laemmle supported Pollard, and agreed, on the condition that he direct another comedy, *The Cohens and the Kellys* (Universal, 1926) while preparing his major production.²

Universal usually released one big picture each season. The Erich von Stroheim dramas of the early 1920s had given way to adaptations of popular historical novels, including *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *Les Misérables*. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would follow in this tradition, promising strong appeal among the small-town audiences where Universal films were popular. With high production values and thrilling

scenes, it should please more sophisticated urban filmgoers also. While there had been previous film versions of the story, this production would eclipse its predecessors.

Efficient in the production of program pictures, Universal did not have the expertise or the management controls for large-scale productions. Those epics frequently entered production before their scenarios were satisfactory. Scenes were filmed again and again as scripts were reworked, and money was wasted on expensive sequences cut before release. Budget overruns, along with Universal's lack of big city theatres, ensured that the resulting films cost far more than necessary and did not reach their potential. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would prove to be no exception.³

The novel and the play

In 1925, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the

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TO-NIGHT!

The Story of
UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

Is more interesting to the rising generation not alone because of its beauty, but for the many Historical Scenes, and Clever Pen Pictures of **Life in the South before the War**

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN has been played throughout the United States and is to-day the most popular drama in the land. The most exacting christian people never hesitate to witness its rendition, which they always do with great pleasure and delight us lessons of morality and virtue may be learned from its teachings

REMEMBER This is the only visit of this great company this season, and the only chance to hear told and see acted THE GREAT STORY WRITTEN BY HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.



IT IS DELIGHTFUL, WONDERFUL. INSTRUCTIVE AND STRICTLY MORAL

THIS COMPANY IS EQUIPPED WITH

THE BEST ACTORS AND ACTRESSES. The Most Gorgeous and Appropriate Costumes. The Finest Special Scenery that the eye of mortal man ever gazed upon. The Sweetest Singers. The Most Artistic Dancers. The Latest Dances. The Most Skilled Musicians. The Best and Most Faithful Uncle Tom. The Funniest Topsy, Ophelia and Lawyer Marks ever seen.

DON'T FAIL TO TAKE THE CHILDREN TO SEE

LITTLE FRANCES THE WONDERFUL "EVA" CHILD ARTIST, AS "EVA" AND GIVE THEM A LASTING LESSON IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

Fig. 1. Handbill from a touring company of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. [Author's collection.]

Lowly' had been a popular part of American culture for nearly 75 years. Slavery became a burning issue in America following passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which allowed runaway slaves to be recovered from a free state. Harriet Beecher Stowe's story was one of the most important and

influential novels of all time, playing a major role in turning the North against slavery. Stowe was an abolitionist, and wanted to dramatise the horrors of slavery. While she had never been to the South, Stowe had heard tales from runaway slaves, including a mother who had escaped to freedom, but later returned to cross the Ohio river to retrieve her son. She wove them into an absorbing narrative that proved enormously popular, selling 300,000 copies in the first year following its publication in book form in 1852.

Uncle Tom's Cabin found even greater success in the theatre. A stage version premiered in 1852 in Troy, New York, with a theatrical company that needed a vehicle for child actress Cordelia Howard, 'the Youthful Wonder'. The play was an instant hit, and Howard performed the role of Little Eva for eight years. Other companies formed throughout the country, using a variety of scripts, as Stowe's copyright on the book did not cover stage adaptations. The play always struck a chord with audiences, initially serving to dramatise current events. After the Civil War, the story could be seen as a historical docudrama about slavery, presenting the justification for the war that split the country. Productions were tailored to appeal to different audiences – abolitionist for the North, minstrel for the South, and spectacles for both, including a loose adaptation produced by P.T. Barnum.

The touring companies became known as 'Tom' shows. While there were usually 21 characters in the play, they were often portrayed by a traveling cast of six to twelve. This required actors to perform multiple roles, and players would appear and reappear on stage after changing costumes and applying or removing blackface between scenes. As one chronicler noted, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was one of two things: 'Either it was the world's worst play, or it was so good that nothing could be done to it that could utterly spoil it'. A 1903 Selig Polyscope Co. film, *Uncle Tom's Cabin Parade*, documented the accoutrements of a touring production's grand parade of the players through town to encourage the populace to attend. The play toured well into the 1920s, and many actors and actresses began in a child role, graduating to youth and then adult parts in the same touring company. A 1929 MGM drama, *The Girl in the Show*, reflected the durability of the theatrical tradition. Bessie Love

starred as fifth in a line of Evas in a touring Tom show stranded in Kansas after the manager ran off with the box office receipts.⁴

Uncle Tom's Cabin has strong theatrical values, with broadly drawn characters and a mixture of drama, melodrama, and moral lessons, balanced by comic relief and thrills. The archetypes in Stowe's novel became stereotypes on stage with the idealised child Eva, mischievous Topsy, evil slave master Simon Legree, and noble Tom. Over the years the play's modest critical standing diminished even further as dramatic values succumbed to showmanship. One actress who portrayed Topsy at the turn of the century recalled that the story was so strong that 'bad acting couldn't kill it. It always played to big houses no matter how terribly it was played.'⁵

The characters and plot devices of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were fully absorbed into American popular culture. Life is good on the Shelby plantation in Kentucky, until the slaveowner is forced by debt to sell loyal house servant Tom and the young son of house servant Eliza. Eliza's husband has recently escaped from his brutal owner and headed for Canada. Learning of the plan for her son, Eliza escapes with him through a blizzard, crossing the frozen Ohio River to the free state of Ohio. Staying with Quakers, she is joined by her husband, and after a shoot-out with bounty hunters they head for Canada.

On a steamboat headed down river for auction, Tom befriends the young Eva St. Clare. He rescues the girl when she falls overboard, and she insists that her father purchase Tom. Separated from his family, Tom lives in the household with Eva, her parents, Aunt Ophelia from Vermont and an impish young black slave, Topsy. Ophelia speaks the language of an abolitionist, and tries to understand Topsy, but can't bear to touch her. In her innocence and closeness to God, Eva is unable to comprehend her family's treatment of their slaves or live in a world that tolerates slavery. She dies, having transformed the lives of those around her: Topsy to be good, Ophelia to love Topsy, and her father to eventually free Tom. After the sudden death of his master, instead of freedom, Tom is auctioned to plantation owner Simon Legree as a field hand. Legree beats Tom when he can't break his spirit or his faith in God and the slave is cared for by Legree's

slave mistress, Cassie, who is actually Eliza's long-lost mother. Unable to rob Tom of his dignity, Legree brutalises and then kills him. Cassie escapes to freedom, and in a coda, Eliza is reunited with her mother and the family moves to Africa.⁶

Stowe's novel played an important role in helping white Americans recognise the oppression of African Americans, emphasising their shared values whether free or slave. The dramatic structure revolves around the destructive effect of slavery upon the black family. The slaves, Eliza, George, Tom and to some extent Topsy, are fully developed characters who drive the narrative. The white characters Shelby, St. Clare, lawyer Marks, and Simon Legree are either weak or treacherous, while the 'good' character of Eva is so idealised as to be unbelievable.

The stage productions were constructed around the highlights of the novel. All versions of the play included five key sequences: Eliza's Escape over the Ice, The Fight in the Mountain Pass, Topsy's Confession, The Death of Eva, and the Killing of Uncle Tom. The ice floe sequence, described in two paragraphs in the novel, became a highlight of the stage productions.⁷

While *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did provide exposure for African American characters on stage, those roles were usually played by whites. As a result, the play versions inevitably represented the prevailing white view of blacks as either good or evil. These stereotypes were rejected by subsequent generations of African Americans. In contrast to the idealised Uncle Tom, blacks who worked as servants were not happy with their life of service and sacrifice, but embittered from years of oppression. While Topsy wanted to be more like Eva, rather than emulate white girls, young black girls wanted to play and speak in ways that represented their heritage.

At the movies

Just as it had become a staple of the stage, there were many film adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Edison and Lubin produced one-reel versions in 1903. Thanhouser released a one-reeler the same month in 1910 as Vitagraph's three-part rendition. Another three-reeler followed in 1913 from IMP along with a two-reeler from Kalem. The first feature



Fig. 2. Portrait of Harry Pollard and Margarita Fischer from the mid-1920s. [Robert S. Birchard collection.]

adaptation was from World Pictures in 1914, with a black actor portraying Uncle Tom for the first time on film. Paramount released another version in 1918 as a vehicle for Marguerite Clark in a dual performance as Little Eva and Topsy. In 1920, director D.W. Griffith needed a big scene for his next epic film production. He turned to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and added a chase across the ice floes (minus the bloodhounds) for the climax of his film adaptation of another stage perennial, 'Way Down East'.⁸

The 1920s saw a shift away from the barnstorming histrionics of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to contemporary stories, more complex characterisations, and a more realistic narrative style on stage and in films. Still, the Tom shows had touched many careers, including film veteran Harry Pollard. His ten-year stage career in companies in San Francisco, Chicago and the road included a stint as Uncle Tom in a riverboat production. In 1910, 'we were in vaudeville on the Orpheum circuit with a little dramatic act, and someone had told my husband about the picture business', Pollard's wife, Margarita Fischer, recalled to historian Robert S. Birchard. 'And he scoffed at it; he just couldn't see it. She said they paid good money and we needed

money, so we went reluctantly to the Selig Polyscope Company in Chicago and we were both engaged.' Pollard portrayed Uncle Tom in the 1913 film version for IMP, part of Universal, while the impish Topsy was played by Fischer.⁹

Pollard shifted to direction at the American Film Company (the Flying A) in the 1910s. He was discharged in 1919, reportedly due to alcoholism, separated from Fischer and moved to New York. They reconciled, and in 1922 Pollard restarted his career, directing short films featuring Reginald Denny. Universal acquired the series after it became popular, and Pollard quickly became a successful director of light comedies and even one well-received melodrama. Though he rose to the top of the film industry, Pollard didn't

respect the movies. 'He was an out and out legitimate actor, and he never liked pictures – even directing them', his wife recalled. 'He was a typical "legit" and thought it was beneath his dignity'.¹⁰

The South

As Pollard planned the production and prepared the scenario, Carl Laemmle cautioned that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* should not offend the South. Pollard had a ready answer. As he told the Universal publicity department: 'That I was born and bred of Southern parents – my father was a Virginian, my mother a Kentuckian – is proof that I shall make a production telling the truth about the true South.' In short, Pollard was going to blame the Civil War and all of the suffering of the slaves on the North.

From Pollard's perspective, Harriet Beecher Stowe's book 'was propaganda, conceived at a time when passions flamed high, in that it picked on one or two exceptional instances and made it appear that these were common, everyday occurrences'. Pollard claimed that the villains of the novel 'were not Southerners, but actually were speculators in human chattels who came from an entirely

different section of the country. It was men like Simon Legree, [slavetrader] Haley, [lawyer] Marks and [bounty hunter] Loker, who caused the Negro his most cruel suffering – not the Southern plantation owners'.

Showing remarkable blindness to the real situation for blacks in the South, Pollard continued with more revisionist history. 'The true Southerner was and is – and the Negro will be the first to bear me out in this – kindly, considerate and, in short, the Negro's best friend. It was not until men like Legree came below the Mason–Dixon line to exploit the slaves, that the term "massa" changed from an affectionate word to one denoting a cruel, tyrannical oppressor.'¹¹

Despite Pollard's intentions, he was unable to recognise how inflammatory the story remained to the South. This inability to recognise the lingering resentment over the Civil War would haunt the film, and doom its chance of finding widespread success.

As the scenario was in preparation, the Universal sales department in New York identified a marketing problem. In a memo to the California office, they identified as potentially objectionable the 'emphasis or detail in love scenes between Eliza and George', the mulatto slave couple who are the focus of the film. 'White audiences', they pointed out, 'are not likely to find negroes' love affairs attractive or interesting. However, knowing that these parts are played by Margarita Fischer and Arthur Edmund Carewe, the audience will no doubt lose sight of the fact that they are not white'. They concluded: 'There being so little difference in the colour of Eliza and George and their masters, the repulsive phase is eliminated.'¹²

The scenario

The adaptation by A.P. Younger and Harvey Thew was unfocused and overlong, and the rambling 1638-scene scenario by Thew and Pollard had enough material for two feature films. To help shift the focus of the story away from Tom, the scenario added an opening sequence set in 1840. Cassie, mother of four-year-old Eliza, is sold at auction to Simon Legree. Mr and Mrs Shelby observe the tragic separation and purchase Eliza to raise in their household. A short sequence on a flatboat follows

with a young Abraham Lincoln telling a friend that slavery must end. Lincoln and the federal government were motifs that punctuated the script.¹³

Uncle Tom, an aged, but central character in the play, is here a robust man in his forties. Following the wedding of Eliza and George, a lengthy sequence establishes Tom as a lay minister who gives a sermon and baptises several fellow slaves. Eliza, the young mother and most sympathetic character to a modern audience, appeared only in the first third of the novel. 'The Fight in the Mountain Pass' was dropped, and Eliza is captured following her escape across the ice. In addition to extending Eliza's participation throughout the entire film, the scenario combined characters, greatly improving the narrative flow of the novel, but dulling its social commentary. Through the long arm of coincidence, Eliza meets Tom on the riverboat headed to New Orleans. Both are purchased at auction by Simon Legree and join Cassie at Legree's plantation.

In the biggest change, the narrative was moved forward, so that the second half of the film takes place against the backdrop of the Civil War. This meant that the events in the story no longer had the effect of inciting the war, but became a result of the conflict. The conclusion at Simon Legree's plantation becomes a race-to-the-rescue as Legree brutalises and kills Tom. He terrorises Cassie and Eliza as Union troops march closer, and is killed by a fall from a window. And the reunion of Eliza, her husband and child becomes the climax of the picture.

Production begins

In mid-1925, eight months before shooting was to begin, Harry Pollard headed a location scouting trip to the South. Filming was set to begin in January 1926 when Pollard sent Universal's location scout Bob Lawton to find locations which offered breaking ice for scenes of Eliza crossing the ice. Pollard's first choice was to follow the book, and film on the Ohio River near Cairo, Illinois, but that was scrapped due to an early thaw.

When he received word of an ice jam on the Allegheny River at Franklin, Pennsylvania, Pollard packed up the company of thirty cast and crew members needed for the sequence and headed out by train. In case the weather chose not to co-operate, they brought their own blizzard with them in

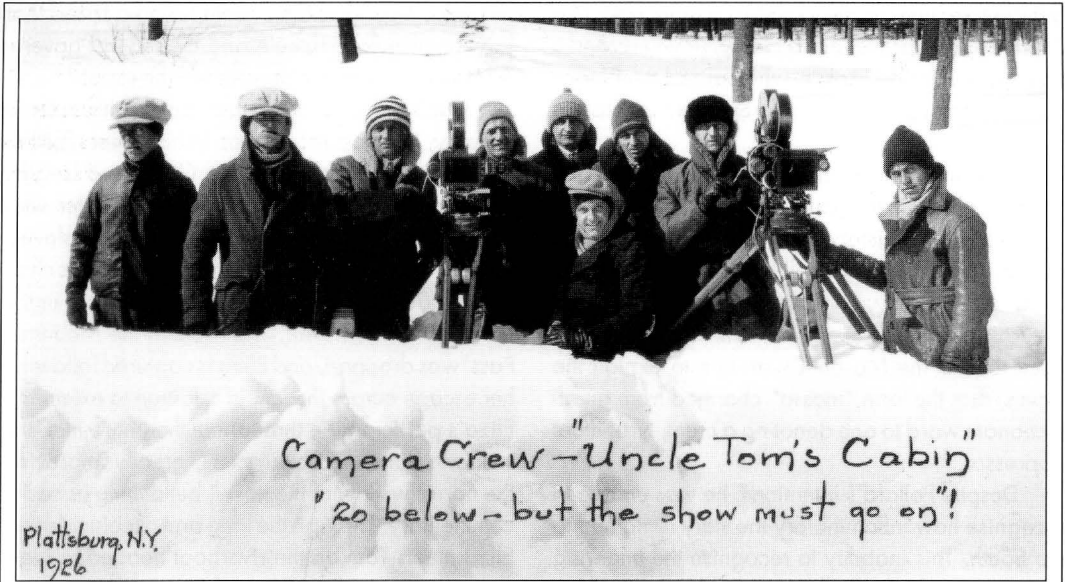


Fig. 3. Camera crew during 1926 location trip to Plattsburg, New York, including Virgil Miller, Chas. Stumar, Buddy Harris, Jimmy Drought, Jake Kull and Wally Kirkpatrick. Inscription by Virgil Miller. [Virgil Miller collection, courtesy George Turner.]

the form of wind machines, blowers and artificial snow and frost. While en route, Pollard received word that the ice at Franklin had been dynamited to protect the towns downstream from dangerous floes. The company spent the next three weeks visiting rivers in the Northeast before choosing a location at a bend of the Saranac River near Plattsburg, New York.

The location shoot required a photographic staff of eight. The first cameraman was Charles Stumar, who had photographed many films for Pollard. Jacob Kull was responsible for the second camera for the foreign negative. Veteran cameraman Virgil Miller was brought along due to his experience with outdoor photography using panchromatic film, and Pollard engaged two Universal newsreel cameramen from New York to film atmospheric background shots. Plattsburg turned out to be incredibly cold, once reaching 37 degrees below zero at 11 am in the morning, with 20 below being the norm. Miller had to oil his camera with kerosene, while the film stock became so brittle from the cold that it would shatter being threaded in the camera.¹⁴

Filming on the river was treacherous, Miller recalled in his memoirs. The crew set up just below

the falls, where the main channel had fast water, while the banks had thick ice. The crew broke up some ice to fill the channel with floating ice for the scenes of Eliza on the run from the bloodhounds. Stuntmen doubled the main characters in long shots. For close-ups of Fischer, a large cake of ice, about thirty inches thick, was framed in wood to keep it intact. It carried the actress, director Pollard, cameraman Virgil Miller and a grip, and was controlled by wires held by men on each shore to manoeuvre it in and out of the rapid water.

Out on the river, Miller was able to film spectacular shots of Eliza chased by bloodhounds, running along the shore, then leaping to the ice floes. As men on shore pulled the wires to return the platform to shore, the lines snapped. The ice platform began spinning and careening downstream, narrowly missing rocks in the water. The foursome stayed low to keep their raft from tipping over, fearing they would likely be drowned in the water or pulled under the ice. A quarter mile downstream with slower water, their ice platform headed for the solid ice near shore and rather than crashing, slid underneath. The filmmakers scrambled onto the ice, dragging their equipment with them.¹⁵

A blizzard hit the Adirondacks during filming,

and days of standing in snow and icy water took their toll on the company. Pollard had caught cold, and his teeth became infected. A Plattsburg dentist fractured Pollard's jaw while removing a tooth, and the director was rushed to a Manhattan hospital with influenza and blood poisoning, and underwent six jaw operations. Production continued under the direction of Pollard's assistant, Frank Messenger, but when Spring arrived, the production stalled with the ice floe sequence not completed. The assistant director's daily report to Universal for 17 April noted that the 'company could not work on account of lack of snow and ice at location – Mr. Pollard ill. Unable to find another location'.¹⁶

Laemmle recalled the cast and crew to Universal City and the studio announced that Pollard would be replaced by Lois Weber, who had revived her career with a recent success with *The Marriage Clause* (Universal, 1926). Pollard recovered after five months in the hospital and resumed his role as director, but *Motion Picture Magazine* reported that the experience 'permanently disfigured the romantic appearance that once made him a popular film hero. He looks ten years older since the first scene was shot.' In many ways the worst was ahead for Pollard, as the production dragged on for another year. As *Picture-Play Magazine* noted ominously, 'the production seems to be a second *Ben-Hur* as regards the halts, delays and misfortunes.'¹⁷

The players

Back at Universal City, Pollard turned his attention to casting. Margarita Fischer began acting on the stage at the age of eight. When she was 14 her father formed the Margarita Fischer Company which toured western America for seven years. She met Harry Pollard when they were both in a San Francisco theatrical stock company. After the contract with Selig, they married during a return to the stage, and then worked as actors for a number of film companies. Fischer was a popular leading lady at the Flying A, promoted as the American Beauty. Although she loved the life of a working actress, at her husband's request, Fischer retired, returning for occasional film appearances. She dyed her auburn hair black for the role of Eliza.

Even before the trip to Plattsburg, the casting

was creating concern. Reviewing the roles yet to be cast, a Universal press release noted 'neither have the roles of Uncle Tom and Topsy been filled yet. There is considerable controversy being waged at Universal over the question of whether they should be filled by colored players or by white ones'. Sounding out potential exhibitors of the film, Universal executives noted that 'blackface' casting could help the film in the South: 'the use of colored players in these roles may not be received with sympathy or enthusiasm in certain sections of the country' – while optimistically pointing out that 'negroes are used in many pictures together with white actors, with little thought being given to the situation any-more'.¹⁸

After much waffling, Uncle Tom was cast with Charles Gilpin, a black stage actor who had created the title role in Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*. Pollard and Gilpin soon had 'creative differences', and Gilpin was out soon after the company returned from Plattsburg. Universal explained that 'Gilpin has Indian blood in him and is proud of it. He refused to wear his hair in kinky tufts over his head, but slicked it back with grease'. They also put out the story that 'Gilpin was forced to leave Universal City pending stage appearances in New York'.¹⁹

After Pollard briefly considered Paul Robeson, Charles Gilpin's replacement was James Lowe, a six-foot actor who began his career as an extra, working up to supporting roles in Universal's program westerns. Reportedly, Gilpin's complaints about the film's view of blacks had contributed to his firing. Lowe wisely saved his comments until he had appeared in so many scenes that it would have been too expensive to replace him.²⁰

Pollard also had to direct novice actors in two other key roles. After Fischer, the next major cast member selected was Mona Ray, a four-foot-seven-inch nineteen-year-old white actress. Thinking her too old for the part, Pollard wouldn't even see her, so when she learned that he would be attending a movie premiere, she got a blackface role in the stage prologue. In the middle of the scene, Ray broke character and walked forward spouting 'I wasn't born! I just grewed'. That captured Pollard's attention, and ultimately the role for Ray, who played Topsy in blackface.²¹

One of the biggest challenges for casting director Paul Kohner was a child actress to play Eva, the saintly daughter of St. Clare. One day alone, he reviewed three-hundred hopeful children. A frustrated Kohner told a reporter, 'we've tested five-hundred little girls and not one proves to be what we want'. He finally selected Virginia Grey, the nine-year-old daughter of the manager of Universal's film library, who was discovered while visiting her mother at work.²²

George Siegmann, who had portrayed lecherous Silas Lynch in *The Birth of a Nation* (Epoch, 1915), had the juicy role of Simon Legree. Pollard was indecisive on the proper look for the character. The book didn't specify Legree's origin, and the stage versions sometimes showed him with a trademark long, twisted Southern mustache. It took six weeks of make-up tests to settle on Southern clothing, accented by Yankee-style chin whiskers.

Actresses Pauline Frederick and Madame Sulte Wan ('one of the oldest colored picture players in the business') were announced for roles, but were replaced due to production delays. The cast also included many Universal contract players. Arthur Edmund Carewe played Eliza's husband, while Gertrude Astor had the thankless role of Mrs St. Clare. Character actor Lucien Littlefield was lawyer Marks. All three would join George Siegmann in

the ensemble cast of Universal's *The Cat and the Canary* (1927).²³

Filming continues

During the summer hiatus, sets were constructed on Universal's huge backlot in the San Fernando Valley. Instead of constructing outdoor false fronts and interior sets on stages, carpenters built completely functional and furnished houses in the far recesses of Universal's 'back ranch', based on actual homes found during the research trip. These fully furnished sets allowed Pollard to shoot through windows and doors to give the entire picture the sense of being filmed on location. The St. Clare house, built at an expense of \$70,000, featured a central chandelier originally in a New Orleans home. The dilapidated main house of the Simon Legree plantation (\$40,000) was copied from a rundown mansion of the period found in Arkansas. The nine-room Shelby mansion (\$62,000), included a street of rundown slave quarters leading down to a wharf, piled with bales of cotton. Fifty bales of Spanish moss from Mississippi forests and imported magnolia trees helped provide atmosphere for the exteriors. Pollard was especially proud of the reconstruction of an original slave auction room, built to match an illustration in a old volume of drawings of Southern architecture.²⁴



Fig. 4. Filming the ice sequence on the Universal backlot. [Harry Pollard Collection, Special Collections, Ablah Library, Wichita State University.]



Fig. 5. Eliza crossing the ice as it appeared in the final film. [George Turner Collection.]

Filming began on these sets, but was interrupted in the fall of 1926 for an extended location trip to the Mississippi river. The special train included three Pullman cars for the 54 members of the cast and crew, a dining car, and a club car. Three baggage cars held clothes for 200 extras, 90 slave costumes for the Shelby and Legree plantations, and 40 cotton baskets and picking bags for the scenes in cotton fields among the costumes and props.²⁵

Universal chartered a Mississippi side-wheeler, the *Kate Adams*, for nine weeks at \$4,350 per week. Once one of the great river palaces, the boat was in disrepair. Fourteen craftsmen devoted two weeks returning the boat to its former glory with cabinet work, smokestack plumes and other period details of the 1850s, renaming it *LaBelle Riviere*, as in the book. Filming began in late October, as the cast and crew followed the Mississippi River downstream from Memphis, Tennessee to Helena, Arkansas; Jonesville, Louisiana; Vicksburg and Natchez, Mississippi and on to New Orleans.²⁶

They were not always welcomed. The General Nathan Bedford Forrest chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, named after the Confederate officer and founder of the Ku Klux Klan, protested the filming. 'The story is false, and is a direct insult to the old true South', said Mrs Mary

Forrest Bradley, president of the chapter and granddaughter of the General.²⁷

The riverboat and shore sequences had an amazing verisimilitude, with the Mississippi visible in the background of virtually every shot. The river trip was not especially pleasant. 'My wife and I had spacious quarters aboard the boat', Pollard recalled, 'yet life was very primitive. There was no running water in the staterooms, and only one shower aboard. I believe nobody on the boat had a bath in anything except a washbowl during the entire eight weeks'. Fire broke out three times, but the flames were extinguished. Soon after their return to Hollywood, the *Kate Adams* exploded and burned at the dock.²⁸

Significant portions of the ice floe sequence, including Eliza's rush to the falls of the river and her rescue, had not been filmed due to location difficulties and Pollard's illness. Despite the enormous effort on location, the original plan to return to Plattsburg was cancelled when the footage did not appear sufficiently authentic. The river bank location was recreated on the Universal back lot and the entire sequence was filmed anew. Three acres were transformed into a winter scene with bare trees, falling snow, a river bank and artificial ice floes. Water diverted from the Los Angeles River to a

waterfall fed a two-million gallon reservoir, constructed at a cost of \$40,000. A framework of wood and plaster recreated the ice along the shore. The snowstorm was created from salt, toasted cornflakes and gypsum, with portable airplane engines to drive the snow into the scenes.²⁹

The recreation was more convincing than the original location. However, even with the artificial snowstorm, the result was not believable when filmed in the blinding California sunshine. Pollard's solution was to construct several incinerators with 40-foot-high smokestacks fuelled by two hundred tons of old car tires. The resulting smoke perfectly set the scene, but the ash quickly coated the set and the actors and crew, who found the smell agonising. For 37 shooting days over a period of two months, Pollard and Fischer woke at three each morning to reach the San Fernando Valley location. For the chase, a kennel of thoroughbred Ledburn bloodhounds were brought in from Kentucky. Their trainer was familiar with manhunts, and the result shows on the screen. One of the dogs was killed by a falling tree, which barely missed Fischer.³⁰

Unfortunately, Pollard had not made all of the shots that he needed on the Mississippi trip either, and it was necessary to recreate those locations. In May and June 1927, a steamboat on the Universal backlot was used as the backdrop to film some additional night scenes. To punch up the scene where Eliza's son is carried off, the shore of the Mississippi river was recreated at the Lasky ranch. Two cameras filmed from perambulators for some moving shots of Eliza hanging onto the end of the wagon that was taking her son.³¹

Pollard spent three months editing 977,000 feet of exposed film down to 13 reels. As expected, many extraneous scenes hit the cutting room floor although the souvenir program still referred to them. The first sequence of a slave auction with Cassie and young Eliza was deleted. Much of the Lincoln footage that periodically punctuated the episodic narrative was dropped. The entire sequence of Tom's rescue of Eva when she falls overboard was removed, along with Eliza's attempted suicide.

For once the publicity hyperbole was close to the truth. According to Universal studio accounting office ledgers examined by Richard Koszarski, the final negative cost was \$1,763,008, plus another \$851,265 for worldwide prints and advertising.

Harry Pollard's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had become one of the most expensive films ever produced. Only a handful of films had ever cost over a million dollars, and only two cost more than *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: *Ben-Hur* (MGM, 1925) and *Old Ironsides* (Paramount Famous Lasky, 1926). Neither had made money for their producers.³²

Well in advance of the premiere, the advertising proudly trumpeted:

The Greatest Human Drama Ever Screened:

Carl Laemmle's Outstanding Achievement

Produced at a Cost of \$2,000,000

Uncle Tom's Cabin premieres

After nineteen months in production, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was finally ready for release in the fall of 1927. Universal scheduled the opening for 4 November 1927 at their New York showcase theater. The 922-seat Central Theater on Broadway at 47th Street in Manhattan, offered first-run ticket prices of \$1 and \$2. The film ran 141 minutes plus a ten minute intermission for two shows daily, with a score compiled by Hugo Reisenfeld and performed by a live orchestra with an off-stage chorus of spiritual singers. For the premiere, the usherettes were dressed in period costume.³³

Before the film could open, Universal had to get approval from the all-powerful New York board of censors. Since the board received the film already edited and titled the week of the premiere, the censors could not recommend that the film be re-edited or scenes reshot. The initial round of modifications toned down the titles. The board ordered the word 'nigger' replaced with 'slave' throughout the film and removal of the second half of the title 'Love, what do they know about love. They are nothing but property'. The censors completely deleted some choice titles from the second half of the picture including 'Besides, marriage between niggers don't count', 'Give him the damndest flogging he has ever had', 'I am your church, do your praying to me', and 'Flog that woman'.³⁴

In a lengthy personal letter to Carl Laemmle,

James Wingate, the director of the New York censor board, reported on the reaction of the audience at the premiere. He felt that 'the first six reels of the picture seemed very commendable. In my opinion, however, the last seven were so overloaded with extreme gruesomeness and cruelty that an audience ... will not feel inclined to recommend it to friends'.

While leaving the theatre, Wingate reported, he overheard 'comments such as: "It was so horrible I couldn't look at it", "I kept saying to myself it wasn't so", [and] "I wouldn't want Grace (presumably a daughter) to see such a brutal picture"'. Wingate felt the audience response was that 'the scenes portraying cruel and inhuman treatment were so overdone and prolonged that they reacted unfavorably and [the film] offended the audience's idea of good taste'.

Anticipating problems for Universal, he continued, 'I also wondered why with the wealth of material there is to show the delightful character of Southern people, generally, that you had not emphasised that point more. All the Southern characters were either weak or otherwise brutal in their strength'. This was supported by the comments Wingate overheard: 'What is the motive of the picture?' 'Why open the old sores?' and 'Why give offense to Southern people?'³⁵

The day after the premiere, a second round of eliminations were ordered to reduce the intensity of the climax, such as the censor's instruction to 'Eliminate scene of Legree kicking Tom after knocking him down' and 'Eliminate views of Legree's face with blood streaming down it'. The press had specifically objected to this sequence, as *The New York Times* reviewer noted 'there are scenes in this episode that might well be excluded'.³⁶

The New York run of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* opened well, then attendance fell off. Only four weeks saw a gross above \$10,000, while grosses of the other films tracked by *Variety* in 1927 and 1928 at the Central Theater rarely dipped below \$10,000. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* played for 21 weeks (Universal publicity later claimed it was 25 weeks), finally

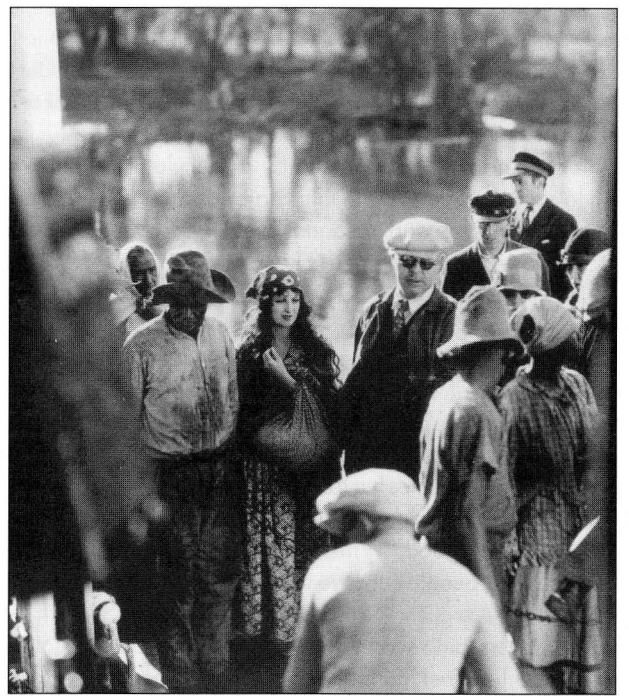


Fig. 6. Margarita Fischer listens while director Harry Pollard sets up a scene. [Harry Pollard Collection, Special Collections, Ablah Library, Wichita State University.]

making way for *The Man Who Laughs* (Universal, 1927). The picture re-opened in June 1928 at popular prices at Manhattan area theatres including the 2,200 seat Rivoli at 1620 Broadway. The picture played a respectable run of three weeks, but opened poorly, plunged 57 per cent in the second week, then another 44 per cent for the final week, for the lowest-grossing two weeks at the Rivoli that year. This was not a big city picture.³⁷

The film's prospects were not helped by a re-issue of the World Pictures version, which had been old fashioned when first released in 1914. It received some bookings, although one exhibitor warned his fellow theatre owners: 'Don't show this piece of junk if you want to keep your house open!' A few months earlier, United Artists had released *Topsy and Eva* (Feature Productions, 1927), a poorly received burlesque of the play starring the popular Duncan Sisters, with Noble Johnson as Uncle Tom.³⁸

The character of Topsy always served as comic relief, but in the novel she also presented a moral

lesson. When Topsy was asked about her mother, Aunt Ophelia was exasperated by the retort of 'Never had none'. The more pointed question of 'Where were you born?' produced a grinning response of 'Never was born, never had no father nor mother nor nothin'. I was raised by a speculator, with lots of others'. On stage this tragic upbringing was simplified beyond recognition with Topsy's catch phrase 'I wasn't borned. I just grew'.

The motion picture presents a more complex view of why the incorrigible Topsy sees herself as 'bad'. After a comic sequence where Aunt Ophelia accuses Topsy of stealing, Eva tries to convince Topsy to be good. Topsy sees little point in trying since 'I couldn't be nuthin' but a nigger if I wuz ever so good'. Topsy equates her troublemaking with her black skin – 'If I could be skinned and come out white, I might be good.' When Eva tries to calm her friend, saying 'people can love you, even if you are black', Topsy replies 'Nobody loves niggers – 'cause niggers ain't worth nuthin', no how', and Eva (with a halo behind her) declares her love for Topsy. The next sequence is played purely for laughs. Aunt Ophelia finds Topsy at a mirror using her powder puff. 'Please, Miss Feely', Topsy declares, 'I jes' wanted to make myself white – so I could be good like Missy Eva'.³⁹

Several reviewers agreed that the film seemed old fashioned and out of touch with the jazz age. *The New York Times* noted that Margarita Fischer, 'with the merest suspicion of an Ethiopian on her countenance, does very well as Eliza'. The dramatic shortcomings of the picture are primarily due to Pollard. As the *Los Angeles Times* reviewer noted, his 'direction throughout is workmanlike and good, but only in one or two instances is it really inspired'. While *Uncle Tom's Cabin* delivers on the promised epic scope, the film falters because Pollard does not create believable characters before putting them in melodramatic situations. There is little empathy at the death of Eva, an especially weak scene where Pollard starts with a medium close up and pulls back to a theatrical tableaux as an angel carries off her spirit.⁴⁰

The film faced a better reception in England when it opened on 12 December 1927 at the London Pavilion at Piccadilly Circus. James Lowe appeared in the stage prologue recreating a plantation 'in which there are real Negroes singing

spirituals'. He was included in a benefit performance of the film in January, with entertainers including Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake and Josephine Baker, who flew in from Paris just for the occasion.⁴¹

Following the conclusion of the New York run, the West Coast premiere of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was 28 March 1928 at the 1600-seat Criterion Theater in downtown Los Angeles. This was a reserved-seat roadshow at a \$1.50 top ticket price with two shows daily and an orchestral score compiled and conducted by Constantin Bakaleinikoff. Packed with Universal employees, the Los Angeles opening also served as a celebration of Carl Laemmle's twenty-second anniversary in the film business. The extensive advertising campaign for the Los Angeles opening included distribution of 100 24-sheet billboards, 200 three-sheet large posters, 300 one-sheet posters and 500 window cards. After all that effort, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* lasted only three weeks; with its first week gross lower than the fourth and final week of the picture the Criterion dropped to make room for it.⁴²

Critic Welford Beaton was in the audience for the Los Angeles opening and pronounced the picture 'almost incoherent'. He was not alone in his reaction, noting, 'someone on the sidewalk told me they were going to monkey with it a lot more'. Beaton blamed the scenario – 'if it had a script, it must have been one of the weirdest ever written'. He was amazed that Laemmle allowed the film to enter production, although 'of course it may be that Uncle Carl was impressed with the old wheeze that a perfect script curbs the inspiration of the director and ... that at any moment Harry Pollard might become inspired'.⁴³

One of the images used in advertising the film was a solemn Abraham Lincoln bringing together Generals Lee and Grant. With the attempt to position *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as unifying the country, Universal seemed surprised at the negative reaction the picture received in the South. In its review of the film, *Motion Picture Classic* noted, 'How it will go south of Baltimore depends upon a Southerner's reactions to certain sequences of slavery and Sherman's well known march'. Southern exhibitors knew their audiences preferred a more romantic view of the past and had little interest in showing a film where the Union Army rescues blacks from rapacious plantation owners. Universal tested the

Southern waters on 26 April, Confederate Memorial Day, with a limited run at the Universal-owned Jefferson Theater in St. Augustine, Florida. The print was specially edited, with the scenes of Sherman's march from Atlanta to the sea completely eliminated. The response was positive, but not enthusiastic.⁴⁴

Miss K.S. Day of Hartford, Connecticut, the great grandniece of Harriet Beecher Stowe, objected publicly to the revisions Universal made to placate Southern exhibitors. In any case, the changes were insufficient. In August the film was previewed for the Atlanta film censor board, which said that public exhibition of the picture would be 'unwise'. After consulting with the Mayor and Universal, all Atlanta bookings were cancelled. Three months later, the Better Films Committee of Birmingham, Alabama, determined the film unfit for showing as it 'depicts scenes of the war between the states and shows the Union Army in the South'.⁴⁵

Almost a year after the premiere, trimmed to 114 minutes, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* entered general release at popular prices in the fall of 1928. Bowing to the popularity of sound films, Universal added a Movietone recording of a music score synchronised and recorded in New York by Erno Rapee. The soundtrack included a song performed in long shot by Eliza, and sound effects, including the cracking whip of Simon Legree. The recording included one bit of dialogue from offscreen – Miss Ophelia's cry of 'TOPSY!' Theatres without sound equipment were offered a cue sheet of music compiled by James C. Bradford.⁴⁶

The year of tinkering finally gave the film a coherence it had previously lacked. 'I was prepared to find *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as bad as it was when I saw it first', wrote Welford Beaton on seeing this version. 'It is still a poor picture when considered purely from the standpoint of screen technic', he concluded, 'but it is nonetheless splendid entertainment'. The story more than ever focuses on Eliza and her passage to freedom. The lengthy sequence establishing Tom's role as a preacher and moral leader was cut. Removal of Topsy's introduction and Aunt Ophelia's shopping trip with Topsy left only two sequences at the St. Clare household in New Orleans. Gertrude Astor's role as Mrs St. Clare disappeared, along with her name from the advertising. The torture of Uncle Tom was minimised and

the intensity of the conclusion was significantly reduced. The general pace was sped up, yet the emotional highpoints were retained.⁴⁷

The picture did its best business in Universal's rural markets. The Princess Theatre in Lincoln, Kansas, called the film 'A wonderful drawing card and a really big picture for the small town. It drew in people that I had never seen in town before and where they came from is a mystery to me... I believe that the small town has a natural in this picture'. The K.P. Theater in Pittsfield, Illinois, also did well with the film, noting 'The picture played three days in the rain to business far above the average on big productions. Be sure to use a school tie-up on it.' The Ideal Theater in Bloomer, Wisconsin, faced one of Universal's other marketing challenges: 'A wonderful picture but did not do the business as it should have. Everyone who saw the picture was well pleased but we couldn't get them in. It seemed to draw the older people. The young folks would not come.' Over Labor Day weekend in Baltimore, *Variety* noted the results at Schanbergers' Auditorium as 'Way below expectations. Got good press publicity, but didn't click; demonstrates rocky road of average film special in a legit house here'.⁴⁸

The disappointing domestic gross of \$1,067,925 (twice the gross of *The Man Who Laughs*) was buttressed by excellent overseas performance for total rentals of \$2,074,992. The film fell \$539,281 short of breakeven. Universal charged off each film's cost of production upon release, and company profits were down significantly as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* played out in 1928 and 1929.⁴⁹

Before the completion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Pollard signed a new five-year contract and was assigned an adaptation of Edna Ferber's *Show Boat*. Screenwriter Charles Kenyon accompanied Pollard on the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* location trip to the Mississippi River. Filming for *Show Boat* (Universal, 1929) went only as far as the Sacramento River, and after two unsuccessful program pictures, Pollard left Universal. Irving Thalberg recruited Pollard to MGM in 1930, but production on his first picture, *Great Day*, a big-budget musical with Joan Crawford and Johnny Mack Brown, was shut down after ten days. *The Prodigal* (MGM, 1931), with baritone Lawrence Tibbett, was a disappointment, but *Shipmates* (MGM, 1931), Robert Montgomery's first

starring vehicle, was a notable success. Having completed two films for producer Paul Bern, Pollard next worked under producer Eddie Mannix. The director finished out his contract with the Jackie Cooper vehicle *When a Fellow Needs a Friend* (MGM, 1932), and *Fast Life* (MGM, 1932), the last picture at the studio for both star William Haines and Pollard. Haines' next film was for Mascot, but Pollard retired from the industry, and he and Fischer moved to Rancho Buena Vista in San Diego County. Harry Pollard died of a heart attack in 1934 at age 51, leaving an estate of \$145,000. Retired from films, Fischer appeared in plays in Hollywood and Pasadena, and was active in charity work before her death in 1973.

In the early 1930s, Carl Laemmle had turned over a group of negatives to a laboratory as collateral for a loan, but the negative to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was not returned. In 1950 distributor Morris Kleinerman sold the negative to roadshowman Howard Underwood, who added narration and his own copyright notice. Underwood played the film throughout the South, doing excellent business. One exhibitor played the film in four of his drive-ins, netting more than his subsequent showing of the prestigious *Quo Vadis* (MGM, 1951), so *Uncle Tom's Cabin* returned for an encore. When word got back to Universal, they took Underwood to court, and Realart Films, Universal's postwar distributor of theatrical reissues, considered a re-release in 1953.⁵⁰

In 1958 Universal sold all rights to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to Colorama Features, a small New York distributor. With opposition to segregation growing throughout the South, a re-issue of *The Birth of a Nation* had done unexpectedly good business. With a loan of \$20,000 from Pathé Laboratories, Colorama's Al Odeal cut the picture to nine reels, removing all the intertitles, retaining the Erno Rapee score, and adding narration by actor Raymond Massey, famous for his stage and film portrayals of Abraham Lincoln. A short introduction was filmed at Harriet Beecher Stowe's birthplace in Litchfield, Connecticut. The drama was not especially hurt by the adaptation, although the voice-over unavoidably distances the audience from the story.⁵¹

Seen today, the virtues and sincerity of Harry Pollard's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* outweigh the shortcomings of its storytelling. The production is handsome,

with impressive sets, an authentic riverboat, and a large number of extras. The chase across the ice floes is fast moving, and is more believable, if less emotionally involving, than the comparable sequence in *Way Down East*. The audience identifies with the plight of Margarita Fischer's Eliza, so the film loses momentum when the focus shifts to Topsy and Eva. Toward the end, cut-aways from the action with Cassie and Eliza to the oncoming Union army are more distracting than suspenseful. However, the film is filled with colourful, believable villains, including the slaveowners, whose weakness of character allows them to betray their faithful slaves, the slavetraders, taking advantage of the mercenary side of human nature, and Simon Legree, a violent and amoral, yet believable character.

The emotional highlight is the sequence that precedes the intermission, written specifically for the film. After her capture following the escape across the ice, Eliza and her son are headed downriver to New Orleans to be sold. While they are sleeping on the deck of the riverboat, slavetraders Marks and Loker quietly sell her son to a plantation owner, then entice the boy away from his sleeping mother. When the boat comes into a landing, Eliza is awakened by her son's cry as he is placed into an oxcart. Distraught, she shoves aside her captors and runs off the boat after her child. Loker catches up with her and drags Eliza away. She takes his whip, and strikes at him until she collapses. Her horror at the loss of her child is vivid and entirely believable.

Harry Pollard did not create the box-office hit he intended. Nonetheless, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* remains a fascinating bridge between the nineteenth-century barnstorming theatrical tradition and the new medium and freedom of the feature film. ♣

Acknowledgements

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was the knowledgeable and resourceful Faye Thompson who identified the Gil Kurland Collection as their location. Linda Mehr showed great patience with my frustration when my requests for the file on Harry Pollard invariably returned the folder for Harry 'Snub' Pollard.

Bob O'Neil, director of vaults and preservation for Universal City Studios, went beyond the call of duty clearing permissions necessary for me to review the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* scenario and continuity held by Universal City Studios Central Files. Mary Nelson of Special Collections, Ablah Library, Wichita State University, was exceedingly helpful and generous providing access to the Harry Pollard and Margarita Fischer collections held there. William Gorman of the New York State Archives provided access to the New York State censorship records. Ron Magliozzi of the Museum of Modern Art Film Study Center was generous as always. My thanks to David Parker, Madeline Matz and Rosemary Hanes of the Motion Picture Reading Room of the Library of Congress for their assistance and encouragement. The Billy Rose Theater Collection of the Performing Arts Research Center, The New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, provided unique and useful material. The staff of the British Film Institute library was helpful during my visit in locating materials not readily available elsewhere.

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And finally, my respect and thanks to George Turner, who accurately remembered the various versions of Harry Pollard's epic and actually *likes* the film.

Notes

1. 'The one outstanding director': 'Universal Signs Pollard for Five Years', *Universal Weekly* (26 March 1927). Laemmle opinion of Pollard: see Universal advertisement No. 448 'Comedy is King and Pollard His Premier', in *Filmograph* (5 September 1925): 2. According to Laemmle, Pollard 'has to his credit the most amazing list of successful pictures I ever heard of in my whole moving picture career'. The advertisement then discusses *The Leather Pushers* (Universal, 1922-24) and Pollard's seven consecutive successful features. King Vidor: Carl Laemmle, 'From the Inside: The Business of Motion Pictures', *The Saturday Evening Post* (10 September 1927): 103. Laemmle noted 'King Vidor, who used to be paid \$15,000 a production, now receives \$100,000. Harry Pollard likewise averages a similar amount for a picture.'
2. Margarita Fischer: The actress recalled that director Henry McCrae suggested that she play the lead. Robert S. Birchard recorded interview with Margarita Fischer, circa 1970. *The Cohens and the Kellys*: 'Studios Work Closer with Film Sales Force', *The New York Times* (3 July 1927).
3. *Hunchback* production: George Turner, 'A Silent Giant: *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*', *American Cinematographer* (June 1985): 34-43. After a disastrous audience preview, *The Phantom of the Opera* (Universal, 1925) was put back into production. After the San Francisco premiere, the film was re-edited. Scott MacQueen, 'The 1926 *Phantom of the Opera*', *American Cinematographer* (September 1989): 35-40. Scott MacQueen, 'Phantom of the Opera - Part II', *American Cinematographer* (October 1989): 34-40. *Les Misérables* (Films de France, 1925) was a French production, released in the United States by Universal.
4. 'One of two things': Ralph Eugene Lund, 'Trouping With Uncle Tom', *The Century Magazine*, Vol. 115, No. 3 (January 1928): 333. Some performers went on to greater fame. The Little Evas on stage included Mary Pickford, Eva Tanguay, Pearl White, Marjorie Rambeau and a very young Raymond Hatton. David Belasco and George Bancroft portrayed Uncle Tom, while Laurette Taylor and Fred Stone appeared as Topsy. For general background, see Harry Birdoff, 'The World's Greatest Hit: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*', (New York: S.F. Vanni, 1947), and Thomas F. Gasset, "'Uncle Tom's Cabin" and American Culture', (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985).
5. Lund, 331. Since the entire audience was familiar with the story, the acting broadened to keep audience interest. The artistic nadir was the novelty of two actors each playing the same role of Topsy, Uncle Tom and Marks. They appeared on stage simultaneously, either speaking in unison or alternating the lines.
6. Harriet Beecher Stowe, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly' (New York: Vintage Books/The Library of America, 1991). All subsequent page references are to this edition.

7. Five key sequences: Volona Pilcher, 'The Variorum Stowe', *Theatre Arts Monthly* (April 1926): 235–236. The various versions of the play are summarised in Linda Williams, 'Versions of *Uncle Tom: Race and Gender in American Melodrama*', in Colin MacCabe, Duncan Petrie (eds), 'New Scholarship from BFI Research' (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 111–139. Some additional information can be found in William L. Slout, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin in American Film History,' *Journal of Popular Film* (Spring 1973, Vol. 2, No. 2), 137–151. Ice floe sequence: Stowe, 78–79.
8. *Way Down East*: 'Showmanship in Films, Not Lobbies', *The New York Times* (4 December 1927).
9. Birchard interview.
10. *Ibid.*
11. 'Preliminary Sequences for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Indicate Pollard-Jewel Will Rank as Outstanding Super of Decade', draft press release for *Universal Weekly* (6 May 1926). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* file, The Billy Rose Theater Collection of the Performing Arts Research Center, The New York Public Library at Lincoln Center. Nowhere in the book could I find an indication that any of the characters mentioned by Pollard are from the North.
12. Unsigned, undated carbon, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* file, The Billy Rose Theater Collection.
13. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Scenario (26 August 1926), File No. 5220, Picture No. 4479, Microfilm reel No. 215, Universal Central Files, Universal City Studios. The term 'scenes' referred to individual shots, not sequences.
14. 'Camera Histories of E.B. Du Par and John Stumar', *The American Cinematographer* (July 1923): 15, 21. 'Pollard Engages Expert Cameramen to "Shoot" Atmospheric Scenes', undated press release, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* file, The Billy Rose Theater Collection.
15. Virgil Miller, 'Splinters From Hollywood Tripods: Memoirs of a Cameraman' (New York: Exposition Press, 1964), 84–89.
16. Pollard stricken: 'Harry Pollard and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Company Returns to Universal City to Shoot Interiors', undated press release, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* file, The Billy Rose Theater Collection. 'Company could not work': Assistant Director's Report for 17 April 1926, Folder 55, Gil Kurland Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
17. Pollard hospitalisation: Hal K. Wells, 'Uncle Tom's Hollywood Bungalow', *Motion Picture Magazine* (May 1927): 112. Paul Thompson, 'Uncle Carl Sells Uncle Tom Down the Movie River', *Motion Picture Classic* (September 1927): 82. Lois Weber: 'The Bulletin Board', *Motion Picture Magazine* (September 1926): 8. During her limited time on the picture, Weber drafted an alternate scenario for the picture. Permanently disfigured: 'News of the Camera Coasts', *Motion Picture Magazine* (December 1927): 109. A second *Ben-Hur*: Edwin and Elza Schallert, 'Hollywood High Lights', *Picture-Play Magazine* (December 1926): 60.
18. 'Universal Company Under Harry Pollard at Plattsburg, N.Y. for Ice Scenes in Super Production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*', undated press release, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* file, The Billy Rose Theater Collection.
19. Gilpin departure: Cal York [pseud.], 'East and West', *Photoplay* (November 1926): 47. Slicked with grease: 'News of the Camera Coasts', *Motion Picture Magazine* (December 1927): 109. Gilpin stage appearances: photo caption on picture of James B. Lowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* stills, Richard Anderson Collection, part of the Hollywood Museum Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Also see: Schallert, 'Hollywood High Lights'. Gilpin later appeared in *Ten Nights in a Barroom* (Colored Players Film Corp., 1926).
20. Lowe: 'A "Close-up" on James B. Lowe', *Amsterdam News* (7 September 1927): 12. 'Gilpin's complaints': Thomas Cripps, 'Slow Fade to Black' (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 159. Cripps' source was Jimmie Smith, James Lowe's agent. Lowe's comments: Daniel J. Leab, 'From Sambo to Superspade' (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), 54.
21. I.G. Edmonds, 'Big U: Universal in the Silent Days' (South Brunswick and New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1977), 149.
22. Kohner: 'News of the Camera Coasts', *Motion Picture Magazine* (January 1927): 112. Schallert, 'Hollywood High Lights', listed Betsy Ann Hisle as landing the prize role of Eva. Virginia Grey: Hal K. Wells, 'Uncle Tom's Hollywood Bungalow', *Motion Picture Magazine* (May 1927): 112–113.
23. Pauline Frederick was to play Cassie. Madame Sul-te Wan: 'Colored Actress in Film', *Variety* (16 February 1927): 18.
24. Hal K. Wells, 'Uncle Tom's Hollywood Bungalow', *Motion Picture Magazine* (May 1927): 33. See also *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Souvenir Program and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Pressbook.
25. 'People for Southern Trip', Folder 55, Gil Kurland Collection.
26. Kate Adams: Contract, Delta Line Steamers, Inc.

- and Universal Pictures Corp. (15 October 1926), Folder 55, Gil Kurland Collection. The rental was \$3500 per week for the ship, and \$850 weekly for the crew; there was no charge for the time to outfit the boat. Filming began on 26 October, and was completed on 18 December.
27. "'Uncle Tom' Gets Walloped: Insult to Film Slavery Story Here, Forrest Chapter Says of Movie Plan', *The [Memphis] News Scimitar* (5 November 1926): 1.
 28. Grace Kingsley, 'Way Down South With "Uncle Tom"', *Picture-Play Magazine* (June 1927): 22.
 29. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Souvenir Program. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Pressbook. Quality of Plattsburg footage: 'No Job Too Difficult for Master Minds of Pictures', *Variety* (25 June 1927).
 30. Burning tires and other details: 'No Job Too Difficult for Master Minds of Pictures'. Woke at three: 'News of the Camera Coasts', *Motion Picture Magazine* (December 1927): 109. Falling tree and general description of the location: Alice M. Williamson, 'Alice in Movieland' (London: A.M. Philpot Ltd., 1927), 168–174.
 31. Assistant Director's Log, Folder 56, Gil Kurland Collection.
 32. 'Greatest human drama': *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Pressbook. Financial figures: Universal ledger, 'World Revenue – Grand Totals 1926/27 to 1930/31 Products'. Courtesy Richard Koszarski. Laemmle admitted to a production cost of \$1,404,412 in 'From the Inside: The Business of Motion Pictures', 103. *Wings* (Paramount Famous Lasky, 1928) had a production cost of \$1,992,000, more than *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but it was produced later in the decade.
 33. 'World Premiere *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Big Hit', *Universal Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 15: 11. The 166-page piano part to Reisenfeld's score is held as JNG-75-60 by the Music Collection of the Performing Arts Research Center, The New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
 34. Letter, Director, State of New York Education Department, Motion Picture Division, to C.E. Fallis, Big 'U' Film Exchange, Inc., New York (2 November 1927). New York State Archives, Series A1418 SED MPD Scripts, 004308-2635 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1927).
 35. Letter, James Wingate, Director, State of New York Education Department, Motion Picture Division, to Carl Laemmle, Universal Picture Corp., New York City (5 November 1927). New York State Archives.
 36. 'Eliminate': Letter, Director, State of New York Education Department, Motion Picture Division, to C.E. Fallis, Big 'U' Film Exchange, Inc., New York (5 November 1927). New York State Archives. 'There are scenes': Mordaunt Hall, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* [review], *The New York Times* (5 November 1927): 16.
 37. New York grosses: 'Key City Grosses' in *The Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures* [1928], (New York: The Film Daily, 1927), 845, and *The Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures* [1929], (New York: The Film Daily, 1928), 876. These financial figures were provided to the Film Daily Yearbook by *Variety*. The film played through the week ending 24 March 1928.
 38. 'Piece of junk': Reports Department, *Exhibitors Herald*, quoted in advertisement, Carl Laemmle, 'The Folly of Fools', *The Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures* [1928], 329.
 39. Stowe, 281–282. Intertitles from 1928 general release version viewed at Motion Picture Broadcasting, Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress.
 40. 'With the merest suspicion': *Uncle Tom's Cabin* [review]. Marquis Busby, 'Novel Makes Notable Film', *Los Angeles Times* (29 March 1928). Pollard had dropped the death of Eva for the previews, but audience response demanded that the key scene from the play be included. Actress Carla Laemmle recalled portraying one of the angels in the sequence. Carla Laemmle to author, 30 June 1998.
 41. 'Real Negroes': Gwendolyn B. Bennett, 'The Ebony Flute', *Opportunity* (April 1928): 122. Also see: Ivan H. Browning, 'Some European Notes', *Amsterdam News* (21 December 1927): 13. The article had a dateline of 3 December.
 42. Los Angeles grosses: 'Key City Grosses' in *The Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures* [1929], 871. The gross for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was \$5,100 the week of 7 April 1928. The following weeks were \$4,450 and \$3,500 respectively. *The Patent Leather Kid* (First National, 1927) with Richard Barthelmess opened with a \$10,000 week, and was still grossing \$6,000 in its fourth week before being replaced by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
 43. Welford Beaton, 'Uncle Tom Has Music Now and Is Much Better', *The Film Spectator* (29 September 1928): 10, 11.
 44. Laurence Reid, 'The Celluloid Critic', *Motion Picture Classic* (January 1928): 52. St. Augustine: "'Uncle Tom" in Fla.', *Variety* (25 April 1928): 23.
 45. Stowe family objections: 'Great Grand-Niece Has Grouch Over U's "Tom"', *Variety* (29 August 1928): 7. Atlanta: 'Ban *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Atlanta

- Deems Film Unwise', *The New York Times* (17 August 1928). Birmingham: 'Uncle Tom's Cabin Unfit for Alabama', *Amsterdam News* (21 November 1928): 8.
46. A memo from Universal's New York General Manager to the state Censorship Commission noted the songs included in Rapee's score were 'Rolling Home', 'Good-bye Brother', 'Lead Kindly Light', 'Oh, Eliza', 'Glory, Glory, Hallelujah', and 'Nobody Knows What Trouble I've Had'. The letter concluded 'we reserve all legal rights to protect or question the right of the State authorities to require the submission of the songs or dialogue in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for Censorship'. Letter, E.W. Kramer, General Manager, Universal Pictures, to New York State Censorship Commission (9 August 1928). New York State Archives. Although it had significantly less footage than the 13-reel premiere version, the general release version was mounted on 16 reels. Reels 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, and 12 were very short.
 47. 'I was prepared': Beaton, 11. *Uncle Tom's Cabin Cutting Continuity*, 11 November 1927, File No. 5220, Picture No. 4479, Microfilm reel No. 215, Universal Central Files, Universal City Studios.
 48. Exhibitor reports: From the 'What the Picture Did for Me' Department of *Exhibitors Herald-World*, reprinted in 'The Motion Picture Almanac 1929', (Chicago: Quigley Publishing Company, 1929), 208. Baltimore: 'Davies Gives Century New High of \$27,000,' *Variety* (12 September 1928): 8. Ticket prices were 25c to \$1.00.
 49. Financial figures: Universal ledger. Unlike most silent films, occasional reminders of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared. Footage from the film appears in the opening scene of Universal's *Abbott and Costello Meet the Keystone Cops* (1955). *A blubbering Lou Costello views the ice floe sequence in a Nickelodeon* (circa 1907) where it is presented to an appreciative audience with piano accompaniment. The Shelby mansion still stands on the Universal backlot, where it has been in continuous use as an exterior since 1927, though it was later moved to a different location. The house can be seen in *The Mummy's Tomb* (1942) and *Son of Dracula* (1943), *The Time of Their Lives* (1946) and *This Island Earth* (1954).
 50. Kleinerman: Letter, Joseph L. Stein, Sargoy and Stein, to Adolph Schimmel, Universal Film Exchanges, Inc. (5 January 1954). The law firm of Sargoy and Stein handled film piracy investigations for members of the Motion Picture Producers Association. Underwood: 'U's Pirated "Uncle Tom", 25 Years Old, Hot B.O.; Court Impounds Prints', *Variety* (10 July 1952). Also see: 'The Product Shortage,' *The Hollywood Reporter* (9 February 1953). Realar: Letter, F.T. Murray, Mgr. Branch Operations, Universal Film Exchanges, Inc., to Dr. Hugo M. Flick, State of New York Education Dept., Motion Picture Division (8 April 1953). New York State Archives. Distributor Dave Friedman recalled in his autobiography and confirmed by telephone that Underwood had purchased a print of the film at a Railway Express auction. Dave Friedman with Don De Nevi, 'A Youth in Babylon: Confessions of a Trash Film King' (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1990), 44-45.
 51. Assignment of Copyright, Universal Pictures Company, Inc. to Colorama Features, Inc. (2 July 1958). Copyright Office Assignment Records, Vol. 1017, 362. Mortgage, Colorama Features, Inc. to Pathe Laboratories, Inc. (27 June 1958). Copyright Office Assignment Records, Vol. 1012, 89-93. This author purchased the rights to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from Colorama Features, Inc. on 8 March 1996. Copyright Office Assignment Records, Vol. 3214, 253.

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