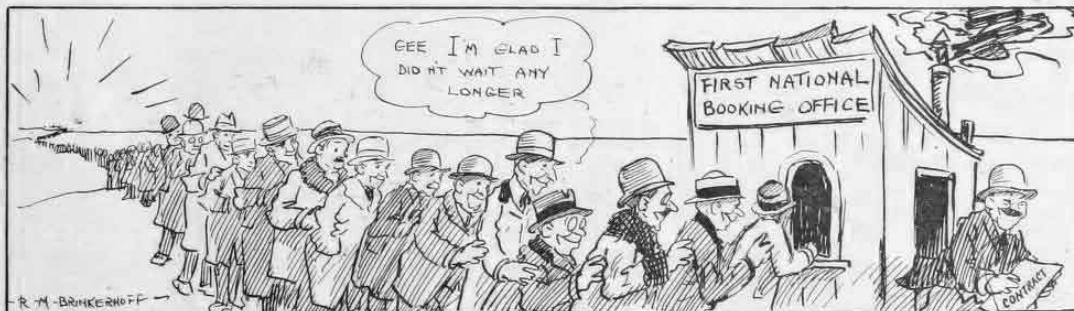
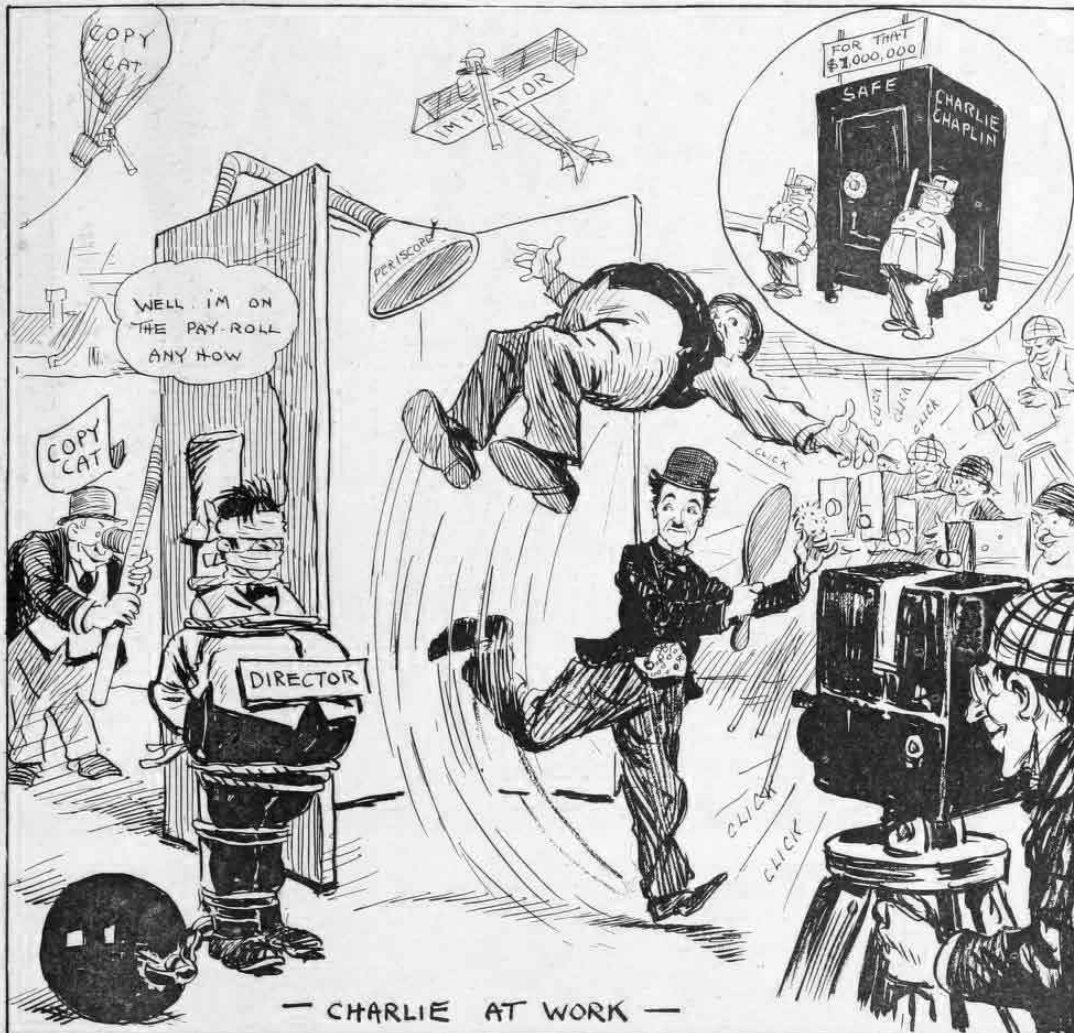


# Chaplin's First Million Dollar Comedy nearly finished!



Where do YOU stand in the waiting line?

*Charles Chaplin*  
 "Signature Protected"  
 Million Dollar Comedies



A "First National" Attraction now being eagerly booked in every land on earth.

Since they had no stills, distributor First National promoted the first independent productions from Charlie Chaplin with these cartoons in their full-page ad in *Moving Picture World*, 2 March 1918.

# The Media History Digital Library

David Pierce

David Pierce: Founder and director of the Media History Digital Library <[www.mediahistoryproject.org](http://www.mediahistoryproject.org)>. He was Head of Preservation and then Curator of the British Film Institute's National Film and Television Archive (London) from 2001 to 2004.

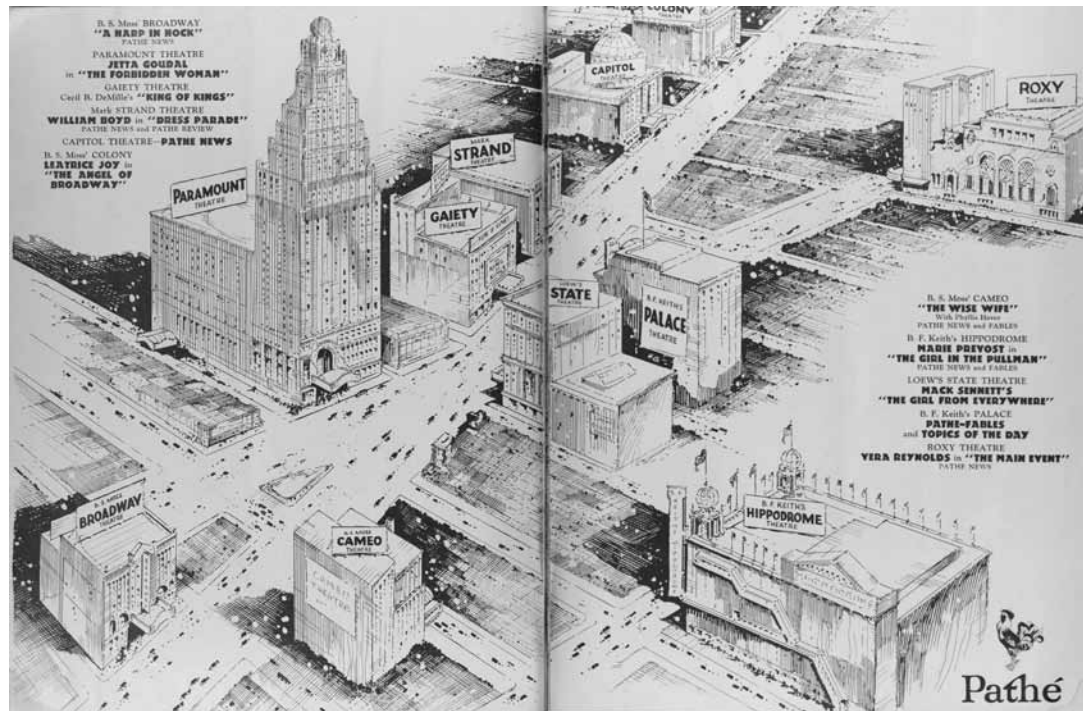
Few archives can hope to put their nation's entire cinema history online, but what if you could republish the contemporary *documentation* of the classic period of your national cinema's history?

The Media History Digital Library, an independent archival activity at <[www.mediahistoryproject.org](http://www.mediahistoryproject.org)>, is digitizing the published history of American cinema, television, radio, and recorded sound for free access and download. That history includes the trade, fan, and technical magazines, year books, newsletters, and catalogues that document the progress of cinema from storefronts to a major international industry. The Media History Digital Library has illuminated issues of access and conservation, and hopefully will point the way for more online resources to be presented in ways that expand public interest in moving image collections. By the beginning of 2013, we had just under 489,000 pages online, from thousands of issues from over 100 different journals, and about 300 books.

As archival moving image collections grow older, without curation and context they become less relevant to modern audiences. In a world in which millions of films and videos are readily available online, how can we increase interest in those titles held by archives

and comparatively inaccessible? I faced the issue of how to make collections relevant as Curator of the National Film and Television Archive at the British Film Institute in the early 2000s, and in the decade since, as a consultant developing access strategies for American archives. Digitizing print materials addresses a key problem, as the text in these magazines can be discovered through Google searches without the need to create metadata models. Google can search text or images from any website, but for moving images, if your video isn't on YouTube with robust metadata, it might as well not exist.

Many archives focus their collecting on moving image materials, but the interests of researchers (and the public) seldom focus exclusively on the film itself. Although the product of an industrial process, these moving image works were created in a social context documented by trade journals and fan magazines. The motion picture, television, radio, recorded sound, and live performance industries were interconnected – as actors, producers and directors moved seamlessly from one medium to another. We may think of Humphrey Bogart as a film star, but he also appeared on radio and television and even co-starred with wife Lauren Bacall in a radio series in 1951.



This two-page advertisement from Pathé promoted that their films were playing the top New York City theatres, while also providing a view of some of the theatres in and around Broadway and Times Square. *The Film Daily*, 30 October 1927.

The best narrative of this vanished world can be found in the press of the time. Trade magazines had little public visibility, but they closely followed their industries, whose members were both their subjects and their subscribers. Fan magazines like *Photoplay*, *Motion Picture*, *Radio Mirror*, and *TV Guide* reported on the personalities in front of and behind the camera and microphone, providing behind-the-scenes studio visits and gossip, as well as “candid” visits to the stars and directors at home.

Magazines are different from film, and moving image archives think of their print collections in a different way from their moving image collections. An issue of *Nickelodeon* from 1909 may be as rare as a 35mm preservation print of a Griffith Biograph from that same year, but putting technical and cost issues to the side, it is much, much easier to get agreement to put that magazine online. Why? Archivists know from experience how rare many films are, and there is a sense that magazines, by comparison, are ephemeral –not core to the collection, and of interest only to the extent that they illuminate a film. It is as if sharing a film reduces the importance of that film to the collection, while sharing a

magazine or book has the opposite effect –enhancing the reputation of the institution. Private collectors have their own motivations. We are fortunate to work with Karl Thiede of Los Angeles, whose willingness to share his encyclopedic knowledge and his collections has helped us curate these materials.

Among the core constituencies for archives are academics who teach and write about films and film history. As cinema studies has shifted from theory back to history and cultural impact, these print materials are of more immediate value. In our initial planning, I discovered that no institution, not even the Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, has a complete run of *Moving Picture World*, the key early cinema trade journal. To digitize *Moving Picture World* from 1907 to 1919 required working from numerous collections, including the Museum of Modern Art Library, Pacific Film Archive Library and Film Study Center, and the personal collections of Eileen Bowser, Robert S. Birchard, Q. David Bowers and Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, while financial support was provided by several donors, including Domitor, the international society for the study of early cinema, David

Sorochty, and Richard Scheckman. Our role in the process is to make those connections and coordinate the digitization and promotion.

### THE IMPACT OF MHDL

This project is transforming the hardest part of historical research –tracking down original or microfilm copies of publications and reviewing them page by page– into a searchable resource you can use from home. In other words, research is now the easy part; interpretation is still hard. Project co-director Eric Hoyt, assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, reports that since our launch in September 2011 with a grant in memory of Carolyn Hauer, film history classes at over a dozen universities have incorporated these materials into the curriculum, shifting students away from writing essays from secondary sources to scrutinizing fan magazine star profiles or comparing pro- and anti-Patents Trust magazines for bias. Our custom search engine, under development for a mid-2013 launch, will make the Library even more useful for research.

We have provided depth, with long runs of several motion picture trade and fan publications, and thanks to the Library of Congress Packard Campus for Audio Visual Conservation we have been able to do the same with radio. Additional support will be required to achieve breadth. Each journal covered events that its competitors ignored and emphasized different aspects of the industry, such as short film production or local exhibition. Because research has been so time-consuming, most previous surveys, such as the coming of sound films, have needed to rely on a single journal –often *Variety*. There were 13 national motion picture trade publications during World War II, plus innumerable regional and local publications. Clearly, it is next to impossible to perform a comprehensive literature search for activities that occurred across an extended time period.



Collage of covers from fan magazines available on the Media History Digital Library website.

## LESSONS FOR ARCHIVES

Early on, I made the decision to provide free and open access to everything we digitize, with no restrictions on reuse. The core audience that might pay for access is relatively small, while the population of people with casual interest is large. The Media History Digital Library is non-commercial and all-volunteer, and we would rather raise money for an altruistic activity than expend the same effort to attract investors. But mostly it is a matter of philosophy. We want to share the magazines and books that are part of our common heritage –not build walls around them.

All of this is made much easier by United States copyright law, under which most magazines and books published before 1964 are in the public domain. But our model might have worked anyway, as we have managed to achieve no-cost licenses with several publications, including *American Cinematographer*, the official magazine of the American Society of Cinematographers, whose publisher shares our interest in education and history.

Once it looked like Google might scan all of this material, but Google Books has turned out to be a disappointment for the university libraries that participated, and not much better for the public at large. Google focused on scanning pages, not volumes, so if pages are missing or out of focus, the product still serves Google's needs. Access to much public domain material is blocked outside the United States, and features such as search and downloading disappear and reappear. There is no promise or expectation of permanence. We work closely with the Internet Archive, whose scanning infrastructure and focus on open and permanent access fit our needs.

With this project we have inadvertently created an organization that meets all the definitions of an archive or library, except that our online collection *is* our collection. This makes us very efficient, since all of our funds and efforts support access. More recently, we have acquired physical collections when offered as some libraries have deaccessioned materials, either by narrowing their collecting policy, or weeding out duplicates. So we are creating a physical archive in the shadow of our virtual one.

While our goal is to be able to put as much as possible online, we will measure our success by the extent that our materials become ubiquitous on the Internet. And because we add value by aggregating disparate collections, the libraries that work with us can provide access on their website to their materials along with those from other collections. We encourage libraries that work with us –and anyone else– to present any or all of the digital copies of materials on their website, adapt and reuse them, and present them as a resource. We want the magazines and books available to be used on websites and blogs, repurposed into new uses (such as websites featuring advertising or magazine covers), and incorporated into new works. The greater the number of entry points to the collection, the better.

fr

La Bibliothèque numérique sur l'histoire des médias (Media History Digital Library), initiative indépendante d'archivage accessible en ligne sur <[www.mediahistoryproject.org](http://www.mediahistoryproject.org)>, a pour but de numériser l'ensemble des publications relatives à l'histoire du cinéma, de la télévision, de la radio et du son enregistré américains afin de les rendre accessibles et téléchargeables gratuitement. Cette histoire comprend des revues corporatistes ou techniques, des fanzines, des annuaires, des bulletins d'information et des catalogues qui illustrent le développement du cinéma, de ses points de contact avec le public jusqu'au cœur même de la grande industrie internationale.

La Media History Digital Library a mis au jour certains problèmes d'accès et de conservation, et ouvrira ainsi peut-être la voie à d'autres ressources électroniques susceptibles d'élargir l'intérêt du public pour les collections d'images en mouvement. Pour de nombreuses archives, ces images en mouvement constituent de cœur-même de leurs collections, alors que l'intérêt des chercheurs (et du public) ne se concentre pas exclusivement sur les films. Bien que produits dans le cadre d'un processus industriel, ceux-ci ont été créés dans un contexte social qui est documenté dans les revues professionnelles et autres fanzines.

La Media History Digital Library propose l'accès libre et gratuit à la totalité des documents numérisés, sans aucune restriction d'utilisation. Le public potentiel qui pourrait payer pour l'accès à cette base de données est peu nombreux, alors que le nombre de personnes ayant un intérêt occasionnel est vaste. L'objectif des initiateurs de cette entreprise originale est de partager les livres et revues qui font partie intégrante de notre héritage culturel –et non pas de les rendre difficilement accessible.

es

La Media History Digital Library, una iniciativa archivística independiente sita en <[www.mediahistoryproject.org](http://www.mediahistoryproject.org)>, está digitalizando publicaciones sobre la historia del cine norteamericano, la televisión, la radio y las grabaciones sonoras para su acceso y descarga gratuitos. Esta historia incluye revistas comerciales, cinéfilas y técnicas, anuarios, boletines y catálogos que documentan la evolución del cine desde las barracas hasta una gran industria internacional. La Media History Digital Library ha arrojado luz sobre temas de acceso y preservación, y esperamos que sirva de ejemplo para que otros recursos puestos en línea hagan crecer el interés del público por las colecciones cinematográficas.

Muchos archivos centran sus esfuerzos en la adquisición de materiales filmicos, pero los intereses de los investigadores (y del público) no suele centrarse exclusivamente en la película en sí misma. Aunque sean el producto de un proceso industrial, esas imágenes en movimiento fueron creadas en un contexto social documentado por las publicaciones corporativas y las revistas cinéfilas.

Proveemos un acceso gratuito y abierto a todo lo que digitalizamos, sin ninguna restricción para su reutilización. La parte del público que podría pagar por el acceso es relativamente pequeña, mientras que la parte de la población que siente curiosidad es grande. Queremos compartir las revistas y los libros que forman parte de nuestro patrimonio común –no levantar muros a su alrededor.

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**COLORLAB** is committed to supporting filmmakers who shoot and exhibit on film.



Photo by Ben McMurry, Colorlab

We're with you  
from shoot  
to finish.

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# Open Forum

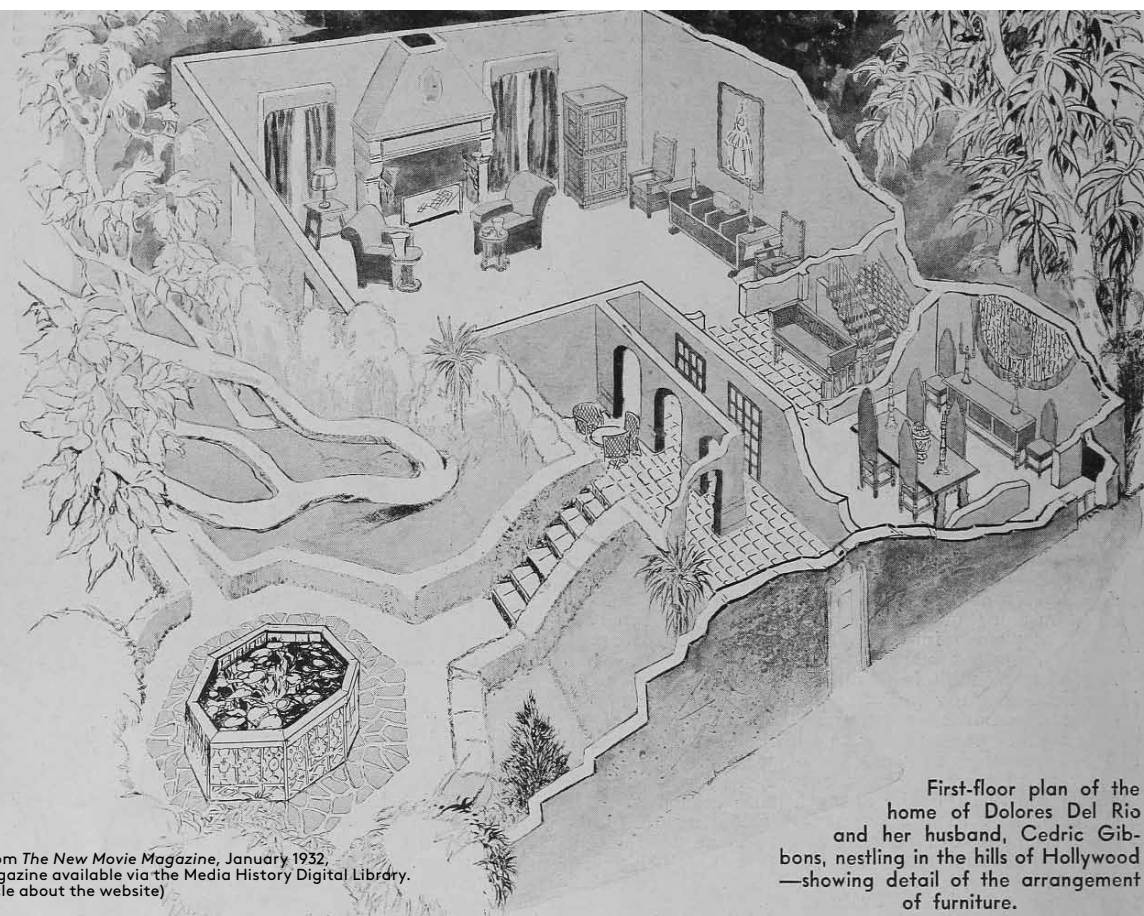


Image from *The New Movie Magazine*, January 1932, a fan magazine available via the Media History Digital Library. (See article about the website)

First-floor plan of the home of Dolores Del Rio and her husband, Cedric Gibbons, nestling in the hills of Hollywood—showing detail of the arrangement of furniture.

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