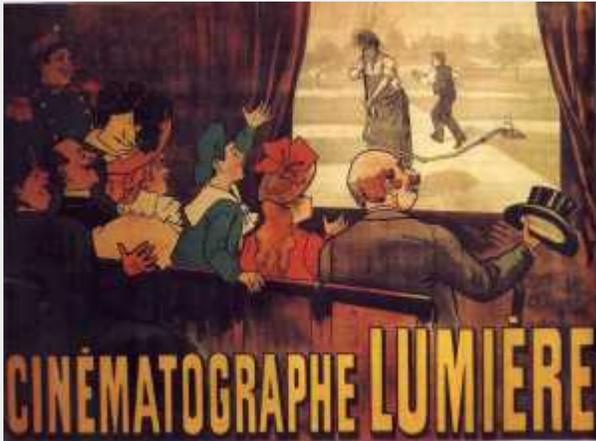
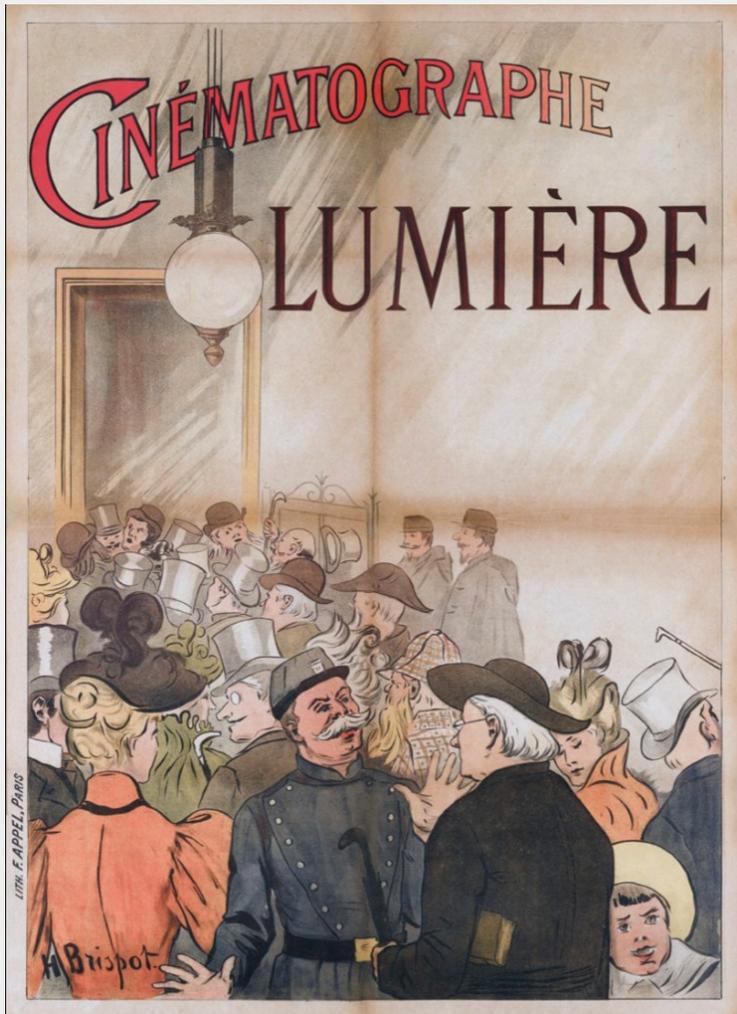


More Than Meets the Eye: 127 Years of Movies and Counting



In late March, 1895, American newspapers were filled with articles about a disastrous cotton fire in New Orleans, a mining explosion in Evanston, Wyoming, and the launch of the first-ever street cars in Los Angeles. There was nary a word about an event in Paris, France that forever changed the world of entertainment.



Cinématographe Lumière 1896 Poster. - Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

On March 22 that year, two French brothers, Auguste and Louis Lumière, presented their innovative color still photography to the prestigious Society for the Development of the National Industry in Paris. They decided to close their demonstration with a novelty they'd been playing with: projected moving pictures. Their 45 seconds of footage showed clear, unique and thrilling images of female workers exiting the Lumière photographic plate factory, along with a few men (two on bicycles), and a dog crossing back and forth. The Lumière brothers were stunned by the audience's amazement and enthusiastic thirst for more.

They followed up a few months later with the first projected movie for a paid audience, featuring 10 stories, each less than a minute. Most were scenes of everyday life, such as a baby eating breakfast, bathers jumping into the sea, and a street scene in Lyons,

complete with a large horse-drawn bus. The “Sprinkler Sprinkled” was a simple comedy in which a man watering his garden is pranked by a boy who, unknown to the man, deliberately steps on the hose to temporarily stop the water flow. You can guess what happens when the man looks into the hose to see what’s going on.

Fast forward to Paris in 1964. A teenage American from New York arrives in Paris right after high school graduation. He’d loved movies since childhood, starting with his first one, Walt Disney’s “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.” At age 5, he was engrossed, scared and hooked for life. I was that kid, who on my trip to Paris, discovered the *Cinématographe*, a museum that offered screenings of movie classics, and still does.

A whole new world opened up for me: Fritz Lang’s American noir “The Big Heat” with its twisted and driven protagonist searching for the murderer of his family; the tense comic vision of director Howard Hawks’ “I Was a Mail War Bride” starring a strangely emasculated Cary Grant; and the social commentary of “I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang” in which an innocent man, a war hero, is turned into a thief by a corrupt society led by equally corrupt politicians, and in the end evil triumphs over good.

Movies! There was more here than meets the eye. I was off to college that fall. Following my bachelor’s degree, I went on to earn a master’s degree in Cinema Studies at New York University, and a life-long avocation teaching film criticism and history.

Movies in Easton

For over 25 years, we’ve been sharing movies and their stories together at the Easton Public Library, initially sponsored by the Friends of the Library, and now by the Easton Arts Council. We’ll be starting again in September with a series of five programs, one every other month.

The upcoming season focuses on laughter. If you are interested in films, or just need a laugh, please come join us at the Easton Public Library, Wednesday evening, Sept. 21 at

7 p.m. for an evening with Charlie Chaplin! Admission costs less than the Lumières charged in 1895, as in FREE. We even throw in popcorn, stories about Chaplin and, of course, the wonderful films.

Film Comedies: Where to start?

By 1910, comedy movies, along with melodramas, westerns, and documentaries, were being produced all over the globe. Soon after, something happened that changed the world of laughter on the silver screen, when a traveling troupe from England visited the United States.



Charlie Chaplin as the Tramp.- Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Fred Karno, an English slapstick comedian, acrobat, and Music Hall impresario, brought his troupe of talented performers to America in 1910 and again in 1912. As the second tour was coming to an end, movie mogul Mack Sennett caught the act in San Francisco and persuaded Karno's star attraction to join his Keystone Studios. By his second film, this newbie comedian dressed up like a tramp. Within two years, Charlie Chaplin was the most famous performer in the world.

Chaplin brought nuance to slapstick and pranks in contrast to the crudeness and violence standard in most comedic films of the times. His Tramp character was both vulnerable and indestructible, and audiences fell in love with him. His films were funny and filled with drama and pathos. He used physical comedy to find ingenious solutions to problems and evoke empathy, while combining acrobatics, dance, and hilarious fun.

There's no better way to start our comedy season than with the world's favorite tramp. Our Easton film series will do just that with two beautifully restored Chaplin films. One is a short subject from 1917, and the other is one of Chaplin's most famous features. More details coming up in the next edition of "More Than Meets the Eye."

The first films screened for the public at the Grand Café in Paris on December 28, 1895.