

# Canada Weekly

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## Treasure trove of historic films found in Yukon permafrost

Workmen in Dawson City in the Yukon, preparing a site for a new recreation centre, recently unearthed a cache of over 500 motion pictures that had been buried for 49 years. Mike Gates, Curator of Collections for Klondike National Historic Sites in Dawson City, sent samples of the find to Sam Kula, Director of the National Film Archives, Public Archives of Canada, in Ottawa, which resulted in a unique project to excavate the site and retrieve the films before the bulldozers moved in to start construction.

Under the supervision of Kathy Jones, Director of the Dawson City Museum, a workcrew carefully explored the site, an area approximately 15 m by 45 m (50 feet by 150 feet), located next door to Canada's only legal gambling hall, "Diamond Tooth Gertie's".

As the films were retrieved, they were stored in a sod-covered ice house at Bear Creek Mining Camp, now the property of Klondike National Historic Sites. Those close to the surface were heavily damaged by ground water, but as the diggers reached the permafrost the films recovered were found to be in better condition, though affected by damp and the corrosion of the metal reels on which they were wound and the tin boxes in which they were packed. "It is impossible to tell without a thorough examination in our laboratory," said Kula, "but the preliminary inspection carried out by Miss Jones and her colleagues at Bear Creek indicates that perhaps half the reels recovered can be salvaged, in whole or in part."

### Typical evening program

The films, all on 35 mm nitrate stock, are a cross section of film production between 1903, the earliest example as yet identified, and 1929 — the feature films, serials, and newsfilms that would make up a typical evening's program in the era of the silent film. Among the items already identified are serials such as *The Red Ace* (1917), *The Girl and the Game*

(1916), *The Seven Pearls* (1917), *The Lightning Raider* (1918); dramas such as *Wild Fire* (1915) with Lillian Russell and Lionel Barrymore, *Princess Virtue* (1917) and *Polly of the Circus* (1917) both starring Mae Murray, *The Lure of a Woman* (1915) with Alice Brady, *The Closed Road* (1916) directed by Maurice Tourneur, *The Inspector's Double* (1916) directed by William Beaudine, and *The Dancer's Ruse* (1916) a Biograph Company production.

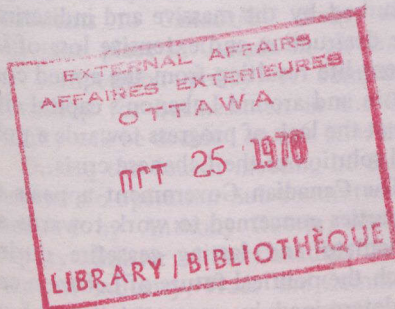
Of particular interest to the Archives are the newsfilms — produced during the



Sample of unearthed films, Dawson City, Yukon, August 1978.

war years of 1914-1918 — issues of Universal Screen Magazine, Gaumont's "The Reel of Real News", British Canadian Pathe News, Universal Animated Weekly, Pathe Animated Gazette, Universal Current Events, and Pathe News have been identified. Many of these are not known to have survived elsewhere and what have been unearthed in Dawson City may well be unique copies.

Dawson City had boomed to a population of 30,000 in four years after the discovery of gold in 1898, and by 1902 the Dawson Amateur Athletic Association (DAAA) was regularly presenting film shows as part of its recreational program. They were shown in its new club house (destroyed by fire in 1938), along with the amateur theatricals it organized to



One hundred years ago yesterday...

Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first Prime Minister (in 1867) and a father of Confederation, became the nation's leader for the second time.

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