

Afterword

Charting the history of theatrical cinema in any American locality likely begins with identifying theaters. Once the industry had stabilized in the early 1910s, movie theaters had names and addresses; they opened and closed, were refurbished and changed ownership, and likely advertised in newspapers. However much they may otherwise have varied, theaters were all businesses rely on screening movies to turn a profit. While moving pictures were an optional added attraction or supplemental tool for churches, social clubs, department stores, and asylums, if theaters stopped regularly exhibiting movies then they stopped being theaters.

Exploring the history of non-theatrical cinema, in contrast, begins with identifying and examining how, why, where, when, and by whom moving pictures were put to use in ways unlike regular theatrical exhibition. Searchable archives of digitized print material are an indispensable resource for tracking down this basic information by providing access to the range of documents I have relied on throughout this book: advertising material, records of court cases and legislation, government and institutional reports, and, most extensively, a wide spectrum of newspapers and periodicals.

Using these digital resources is easier said than done, given that the sponsors of and sites for using moving pictures non-theatrically were virtually unlimited, and *non-theatrical* was not in the 1910s an all-purpose or default descriptor for cinema beyond the movie theater. My process began with searching digital newspaper archives (like www.newspapers.com and *Chronicling America* from the Library of Congress) for a particular time period, using *moving picture*, *film*, and *motion picture* as general search terms. Sifting through the thousands of search results for *moving picture* in January 1915, for example, uncovered much relevant material, including a syndicated article by popular poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox on “The Value of Moving Pictures in Prison” and a brief notice about a “moving picture exhibition” on missionary activity presented by the Reverend Leslie Wolfe at the University Church of Christ in Des Moines, Iowa. The next step was following



FIGURE A.1. Traveling movie palace, ca. 1925.

these leads, using a wider range of digital newspaper archives and other online sources, most notably the Media History Digital Library and the Hathi Trust Digital Library.¹ Additional searches indicated that this particular church had in fact presented moving pictures since 1912, when it offered *From the Manger to the Cross*, and in 1915 it would host a screening of films about Negro industrial education at the Hampton Institute, complete with a performance of the Hampton singers, the same program that would be featured at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition.² Reverend Wolfe, it turns out, presented his illustrated lecture on missionary work in the Philippines, China, and Japan at “some fifteen churches” in Iowa as well as churches in West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Indiana during 1914 and 1915, before returning to his mission in the Philippines.³

Wolfe’s presentation on missionary work to church audiences that were likely already familiar with such endeavors was a quite different version of non-theatrical cinema than the Pennsylvania Railroad’s Passenger Car Moving Picture Theatre open daily with free illustrated lectures during the ten-month run of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition or the St. Louis Park Commission’s summertime municipal movies or the screening of *The Birth of a Nation* for select audiences at the White House and New York City’s Grace Methodist Episcopal church. Non-theatrical practices in the 1910s were nothing if not remarkably diverse. The potential problem with accruing instances from the ground up is getting lost or stuck

in the bottomland of a territory that is not fully discernible or bounded. Faced with the wide breadth, occasional regularities, and strange byways of cinema beyond the movie theater in the 1910s, my solution has not been to proceed year-by-year, to highlight stellar accomplishments, to analyze a series of representative films, or to subdivide this field according to genres—though chronologies, individual films, and certain genres all figure in this book. I have instead focused on four basic aspects or potentialities of non-theatrical cinema as it was deployed across the US and as it was discursively constructed in a varied array of print sources: this cinema was in some fashion sponsored, likely targeted at a particular audience, multi-purposable, and able to be screened in countless different sites. This way of conceptualizing what was in the 1910s a still inchoate yet strikingly variegated field offers a framework for examining the shifting priorities, fortunes, and articulations of non-theatrical cinema not only for the opening decades but through much of the twentieth century, as sponsors, sites, uses, and audiences changed over time and from place to place.

Each of the four aspects of non-theatrical cinema during the 1910s is best understood as a historically specific range of variables within certain parameters, and each prompts broader social and cultural considerations with import well beyond film studies. In other words, the ways that non-theatrical cinema was put into practice offers a valuable optic for viewing the United States in the 1910s. For example, the discourse concerning multi-purpose cinema and the range of uses to which moving pictures were put points toward a more general affirmation of utility and functionality (sometimes called utilitarianism) as prime values, particularly when it came to media and other technologies in the service of “social economy,” scientific research, ever-advancing modernization, and innovative pedagogy. At the same time, the widespread dispersion and even vaster imagined prospects for screening moving pictures across a range of sites point to the increasing presence—for good or ill—of media in everyday life, highlighting issues related, for example, to the control over and utilization of social and physical space. Examining the role and purview of sponsorship raises questions not just about uneven access to media tools, but also about agency, authority, and oversight—in effect, about power and how it was deployed by groups, organizations, and institutions. Sponsors most often aimed to reach, serve, and/or create particular audiences configured according to any number of criteria, including, but not limited to, age, class, occupation, sex, race, religion, and political affiliation. Like certain advertisers and magazine publishers, sponsors of non-theatrical exhibition saw opportunity not in the supposedly conglomerated, mass audience addressed by the movies but rather in the heterogeneity of twentieth-century America. This heterogeneity figured less as an end in itself than as an opportunity. What mattered for sponsors was that America’s diverse population was divisible into countless, distinctive, targeted audiences, large and small.

For the purposes of analysis and as a way to open up lines of inquiry, I have treated sponsors, uses, sites, and audiences in separate chapters, though any single

non-theatrical screening, like the showing of moving pictures of the Azores in a San Leandro church hall, can be understood as a particular configuration of these features. So can, as my final chapter makes clear, large-scale, high-profile events like land shows and the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, which cast a bright, national spotlight on certain articulations of useful cinema and certain prominent sponsors. Moving across the San Francisco Bay from a one-night event in San Leandro to the daily operation of theaters inside the PPIE over ten months typifies my strategy throughout of considering non-theatrical cinema from a variety of perspectives and locations. Thus, I have looked for evidence of this other cinema in advertising campaigns for a corset manufacturer and a transcontinental railroad, in the marketing of projectors and the pages of *Scientific American*, in a Bakersfield church and the Ohio supreme court, in municipal movies and industrial “betterment” strategies, in screenings in the service of missionary activity and under the auspices of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

These varied examples can’t be incorporated into an overarching, explanatory narrative of the development and significance of non-theatrical cinema through the 1910s. But this decade did have certain distinguishing features: for example, the repeated (and largely unsuccessful) attempts to market portable projectors, the high visibility of event cinema, the prominence of the illustrated lecture as a presentational format, the commitment by certain US government agencies to deploy moving pictures, the discourse of universal access and unlimited utility, and the emergence of a non-theatrical trade press with *Reel and Slide* (1918). Many of these features would remain central into the 1920s. In 1919, *Reel and Slide* was folded into *Moving Picture Age*, which was absorbed by *Educational Screen* in 1925. A year later, the first issue of *Amateur Movie Makers* appeared, announcing the formation of the Amateur Cinema League. A new batch of manufacturers joined Victor and Pathé in marketing portable projectors, with the DeVry company boasting that it had sold twelve thousand of its portable 35mm machines by 1926.⁴ *Popular Mechanics* reported in 1925 that “there is hardly a government department that does not make use of the motion picture for spreading progressive propaganda,”⁵ often relying on illustrated lectures, which remained a flexible, familiar format throughout the 1920s, utilized in the service of public relations, advocacy, boosterism, instruction, fundraising, inspirational uplift, sales, and informative entertainment.⁶

Other developments in the 1920s highlight what looks to have been a distinct shift in priorities from the previous decade. Judging from the trade press and in keeping with the orientation of guidebooks like *Showing Movies for Profit in School and Church* (1919), churches constituted a decidedly more prominent sector of the non-theatrical market, surpassed only by classrooms as prime sites where moving pictures might be put to optimum use. More striking was the increasingly visible role—thanks to the trade press—of distributors in enabling, fostering, and constituting what increasingly was referred to as the “non-theatrical field.” The January 1922 issue of *Moving Picture Age*, for example, contains advertisements and

other references to a number of film sources apart from the commercial exchanges operated by Hollywood studios: the USDA and the Bureau of Mines distributed films, as did various companies like the Reliable Educational Film Company, which specialized in supplying appropriate films to churches and schools. Other firms, notably Ford, advertised prints for sale, thereby encouraging a school to build its own “film library.”⁷ Classified ads addressed film libraries and itinerant exhibitors alike by offering “for sale at all times for the non-theatrical field” what the Apollo Film Company of Newark, New Jersey, identified as “Scenic, Educational, Historical, Biblical features, clean and wholesome comedies, etc.”⁸

Even as the possibilities of non-theatrical distribution (and sales) in the 1920s attracted entrepreneurial, specialized companies, a counter move toward centralizing and systematizing—in a word, *institutionalizing*—the field was also underway, again offering a striking contrast with the previous decade. This process took various forms, notably including the increasing prominence after World War I of film rental libraries operated by the extension departments of large state universities. By 1922, the US Bureau of Education had approved forty-four “Qualifying State [film] Distribution Centers,” covering forty-two different states, paralleling the efforts of national organizations like the National Academy for Visual Instruction, founded in 1921, to bring academic leadership to the field.⁹ At the same time, the commercial film industry took a greater interest in non-theatrical exhibition as potential competition (for exhibitors) and opportunity (for distributors). Supporting certain uses and sites for moving pictures beyond the theater became a go-to public relations strategy for Hollywood, marking a significant permutation in the relation between theatrical and non-theatrical cinema in the US.

Soon after being named head of the newly formed Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), Will Hays delivered a much-publicized speech at the 1922 convention of the National Education Association (NEA), touting the industry’s endorsement of “strictly educational and informative films in schools or religious films in churches” and calling for a joint NEA/MPPDA committee to study the demand for and supply of “pedagogic pictures.”¹⁰ Without ever advocating anything that might be construed as competition to theaters, the MPPDA through the rest of 1920s strategically endorsed certain non-theatrical initiatives, including the development of instructional films by the American College of Surgeons and Eastman-Kodak’s ambitious 16mm pedagogical project, Eastman Classroom Films. When he addressed the Motion Picture Trade Conference held under the auspices of the Federal Trade Commission in 1927, Hays recounted the industry’s record of providing theatrically released films (for free or a nominal fee) to “literally hundreds of institutions for the aged, orphaned, imprisoned and the sick” across the US—in effect, bestowing on isolated, captive audiences what was presented as an invaluable, socially beneficial opportunity to join the movie’s mass public.

Hays noted as well one additional example of the MPPDA's well-publicized generosity: arranging for "more than 750,000 feet of [well-worn] film" to be delivered with the assistance of the Navy to "leper colonies" maintained by the US government, notably at Culion Island in the Philippines.¹¹ This colonialist, paternalistic—and apparently much appreciated—gesture underscored the supposedly universal worth and global appeal of the movies, transportable far beyond American movie theaters. It exemplified the MPPDA's strategic exploitation of non-theatrical possibilities for the purposes of public service and public relations. Given the focus of this book, the American motion picture industry's "film gift" to a remote island in the Philippines opens up a new set of questions concerning the politics and practice of sponsored, useful, targeted, non-commercial cinema once it finds its way or is dispatched to sites outside the US.