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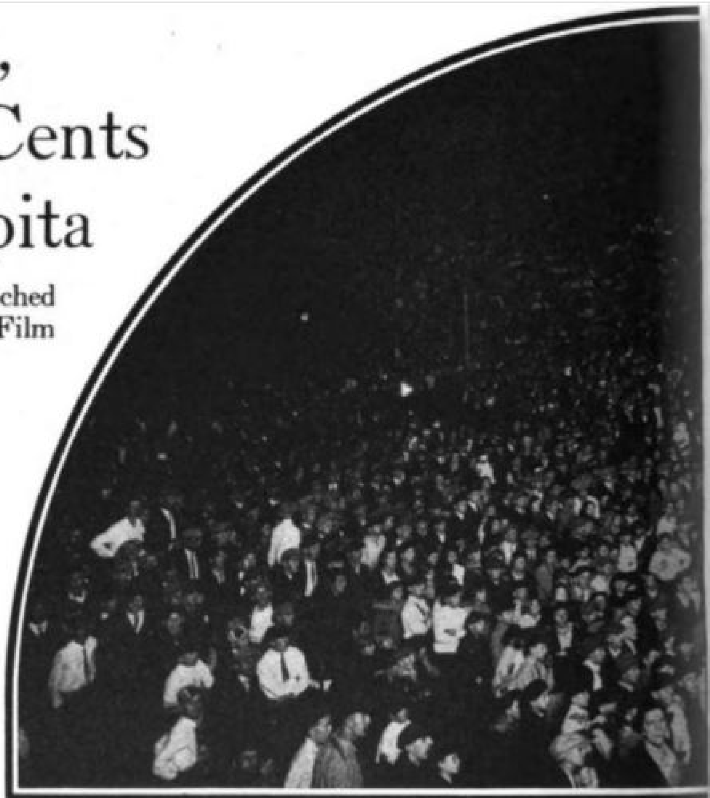
IN THIS ISSUE **BUDGETING—ITS PURPOSE AND PLAN**

Education, at Five Cents Per Capita

How a Light Company Reached the Masses with a Movie Film

By Clayton B. Trost


At the showing in Morgana Park

COMMERCIAL motion-picture films aren't new. Advertising films, publicity films, good-will films, all of them have been tried, and with varying degrees of success. For some concerns they have worked out satisfactorily, but for other concerns they have failed. And usually their success or their failure chiefly has been measured by the extent of their distribution, by the number of persons who have seen them.

Distribution, then, is all-important. No story, obviously, is worth telling unless someone will listen; likewise a piece of advertising or publicity, or a message of any sort, has little effect unless it reaches the public. To get reader attention with a commercial "movie" admittedly is difficult. The actual making of the picture, which includes selection of the cast and the locations, the direction of the action, and the "shooting" of the scenes, may be left to one of the companies whose sole business it is to produce commercial films. That much of the problem is solved. But how about the scenario?

It is here, in the scenario, in the telling of the story, that seems to lie the master key to its distribution. And that key the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company, the light and power utility of the city of Cleveland, seems to have found. Last fall, the Illuminating Company produced a film that, up to the first of May, this year, had been seen by approximately 475,000 persons. No other film in Cleveland, it is believed, irrespective of kind, has been shown to even half that number.

"The Heart of Cleveland," as it was titled, wasn't produced as an attempt to win good will. Good will the company already possessed—lots of it. There was no rate fight just finished, in progress, or pending. The company had no stocks or bonds to sell; for it just had sold $10,000,000 worth of 6 per cent preferred stock to something like 6,700 buyers. Clearly, then, the company stood well with the public; special favor it didn't need. Nor, on the other hand, did it have anything to sell except electricity and steam heat. The Illuminating Company leaves to the dealers the sale of electrical appliances.

This motion picture, then, wasn't inspired by necessity. Rather, the executives of the company considered the time ripe for a piece of publicity that would cement the good will already established, and tend to emphasize, as well, the commercial advantages of Cleveland. They realized that the interests of a city and its public utilities are parallel; that as one succeeds, so does the other; that the success of one is dependent upon the success of the other. They wanted to tell the people more about electricity and about their own city; and they wanted the public to be attentive. This piece of publicity, they decided, must be interesting, educational, and altogether an unusually attractive job.

Many avenues were open, but after considering them all, it was decided to try the motion picture.

Next it was necessary to decide what kind of a picture best would do the job. Frank J. Ryan, director of publicity for the Illuminating Company, and the man who wrote the scenario, tackled the problem carefully. The main element to consider, he realized, was the public. What would be its reaction? In motion pictures nowadays, the public demands quality; the public is movie-wise. And it was to these movie-wise people, he recognized—the people who use electricity—that he must tell his story.

The problem, therefore, was to prepare a picture that, in its human interest, its continuity, its sub-titles, and its photography, would compare favorably, from start to finish, with any photoplay. There was no thought of doing anything spectacular, no intention of imitating the feature films at the theaters.

"Our desire," explains Mr. Ryan, "merely was to tell the people interestingly and simply, how we make electricity, how we distribute it, and what it's used for. We wanted to show them that behind this electric current that they use so freely and take so much as a matter of course, there are enormous investments, extensive properties, huge and complicated machinery, an army of employees, and another army of investors."

The attendance was 35,000

The time will come, in the belief of no less an authority than Thomas A. Edison, when the use of the motion picture for education will greatly exceed its use for amusement.

How this story ought to be told, it was apparent, largely depended upon the manner of reaching the audience; and the first thought was of the theaters. Owners of motion-picture houses in Cleveland, the company learned, would not mind showing a one-reel industrial film if it would interest their patrons. Such a picture, the exhibitors explained, must not be too obviously a piece of advertising; theater patrons don't like to pay for entertainment and then be asked to assimilate a mile or so of advertising propaganda. Nor do they like poor photography or anything amateurish.

For the theaters, then, a commercial film had to attain certain standards. The next consideration was the audiences outside the theaters, audiences such as clubs, churches, civic organizations, celebrations of various kinds—and, highly desirable, the schools. For schools and colleges, obviously, the picture must be educational. It must be simple enough to be understood by a child of eight years, and sound enough in principle to be respected by the student in high school, or in college. And for clubs, churches, it must present these qualities in combination. But for all sorts of audiences one quality, it was realized, must predominate—human interest.

This much determined, the next step was to write the scenario, and into this task there went a great deal of serious thought. The story was written and rewritten, revised, and revised again. Here, in brief, is its outline:

On a certain farm there lives a youngster upon whom has descended a problem. His teacher has asked him to write an essay, in a prize contest, on the subject "Electricity; What Does it Mean to You?" Here's what the boy is up against: To him electricity means nothing at all. With his father, mother, and sister, he lives in an old-fashioned farm mansion only fifty minutes from Cleveland's public square, but fifty years behind the times. The boy is baffled.

Then—the unexpected. One night an aviator, on a test flight in a new airplane, is forced to land on the farm. The members of the household invite him to spend the night at the farmhouse. He accepts and lugs out of the plane a portable radio receiving set; and the members of the family, that evening, hear their first radio concert.

In the morning the aviator repairs his ship, and starts for Cleveland, but with him go the two children. He has learned of the boy's problem and offers to help him.

In Cleveland he takes the children to the home of his sister, where they see, for the first time, electric percolators, electric toasters, electric washing machines, electric stoves, and what not.

After dinner he loads them into his car, and, to the end that they learn more about electricity and its purposes, he takes them to the office of The Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company. Then follows a sight-seeing trip through Cleveland's industrial district. The children see the big electric unloading cranes at the ore docks; they visit a steel mill, a clothing factory, an automobile factory; they see big machines making incandescent lamps and many other products. All this machinery, they learn, is driven by electricity.

Then back to the farm they go, greatly enthused by what they've seen, and before long their home, as a result of their trip, is transformed from an out-of-date house to a home electrical. And finally, of course, at a dinner given at their home for the aviator who has befriended them, they hear, over the radio, the announcement that in the contest the boy's essay has won first prize.

The story is simple, but effective. The airplane views of Cleveland, and the scenes within the factories, are interesting. Only a few times is mentioned the name of The Illuminating Company. The characters aren't amateurs. The boy is an experienced juvenile actor from Chicago; the girl, his sister, was brought from St. Louis; and the farmer and his wife, although actually dirt farmers, had had experience in theatricals. From beginning to end there isn't a single studio set. Locations were chosen carefully. Every important industrial scene first was photographed in the ordinary way, and from these photos were chosen the locations for the film scenes. And the farm home was real, although to find a suitable one required a search, in an automobile, of 500 miles. Every location was selected and prepared before the film company started "shooting."

So much for the story and its filming. Now, the distribution. To fit various types of programs, the picture was cut into versions, of one, two and three reels, occupying, respectively, twelve, twenty-four and thirty-four minutes.

When finally the film company turned over the completed films, The Illuminating Company called together a group of representatives of Cleveland theaters, all of them exhibitors of motion pictures. They saw the one-reel film, and their approval was immediate and unanimous. Yes, they'd use the picture. And they did. So far, it has appeared for at least three days.

and on every program, in each of about 122 theaters. From the light and power company's personnel was recruited a corps of inspectors, whose job it was to watch closely the programs on which the picture was scheduled to appear. These inspectors checked, too, the daily attendance. A compilation of their reports was surprising, for the figures revealed that up to May 1 of this year, "The Heart of Cleveland" had been seen, in the theaters, by about 230,000 persons. It has run in nearly every theater in Cleveland, as well as in the theaters of other towns of Cuyahoga County. And for this successful theater distribution there is just one answer—the picture was something that the public liked.

The wonder of radio and—

Once the film had entered the theaters, then, "reader attention" became, to a certain extent, automatic. But attaining non-theatrical distribution was more difficult. But it was accomplished; and here, again, there became apparent the value of careful forethought. The first public non-theatrical showing of the film was before a group of ninety women, delegates to a district convention of a national fraternal order. The second showing, however, was before a crowd in Morgana Park that, on the company's records was estimated at 35,000; but the police, who have seen other big crowds in the park, estimated the audience at around 60,000. The occasion was a celebration of the lighting of a new "white way" out on Broadway, between Thirty-fourth Street and Miles Avenue. The Broadway Merchants' Association, which was staging the celebration, invited the company to show its film as part of the scheduled program.

On the same day the picture was shown to 400 investment bankers, delegates to the national convention of the American Investment Bankers Association; and a month later came a show at another white-way celebration, this time on Superior Avenue. The crowd at this show was estimated at 25,000.

These all were showings out of doors. Then followed several showings indoors, with crowds almost as big. On October 20, at a convention of the Knights of Pythias, "The Heart of Cleveland" showed to 14,000. Then on November 4, election day, it broke all indoor records. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* staged an election-night show in Cleveland's mammoth civic auditorium, providing a varied entertainment between the announcements of the voting returns. Part of that program was "The Heart of Cleveland," and the crowd that packed the building—19,000 persons—was the biggest crowd in the building's history.

The wonder of industry

These crowds were record-breaker but since then the picture ha entertained civic clubs, fraternal organ izations, church societies, convention trade organizations, professional organ izations, schools, and colleges.

Permission to show the picture because of its educational value, in the schools of Cleveland, is a recognition of which the company is especially proud. In Cleveland, as in most cities, anything introduced outside of the regular curriculum must conform to rigid requirements. Ordinary advertising matter, for example, is barred. But a board of review composed of fifteen principals, after seeing the picture decided, with only one dissenting vote that it ought to be shown to every student from the fifth grade up. So a schedule was arranged, and the film went to every school that contained an auditorium. Colleges, too, have had their turn, as well as grade schools al over Cuyahoga County.

Thus did an apparently difficul problem turn out to be no problem a all. Non-theatrical distribution, i fact, has exceeded the distribution i the theaters. The comparative attend ance records, on May 1, stood a follows: theaters, 230,000; other show ings, 245,000.

Here arises a question of technic the question of satisfactory projectio How, in the open air, in public building in lodge rooms, and so on, was goo projection possible? Few places ou side of the theaters are suitable, withou special equipment, to exhibit a moti picture. For example, there's t matter of darkness. To darken t average room with ordinary wind shades, particularly during the day, well-nigh impossible. Then there's t screen, and the distance from the scre to the projecting machine. And si lar problems arise out of doors.

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Education, at Five Cents Per Capita

(Continued from page 24)

These were some of the problems that the publicity department of the Illuminating Company faced, and solved. Previous to every showing, the location was inspected. If the show was to be indoors, in the daytime, the company provided specially-designed shades for the windows. The screen, almost invariably was a portable screen specially designed. The projection machines, naturally, were portable too, and in the company's laboratories these machines—which were standard types—were altered to increase their projection range. For every show the company supplied an experienced operator, and in most instances the operator used two machines. Thus there were no delays caused by changing reels, for in exhibitions outside the theaters the films were the two-reelers and three-reelers. For short-range projection, small machines, equipped with incandescent lamps, were sufficient; but for big halls and for out-door screenings, there were needed bigger machines, equipped with arc lamps and motors.

Thus was good projection assured. In the non-theatrical exhibitions nothing more was needed. The picture was complete within itself. It told its own story, and needed no explaining. Occasionally, however, there'd be a request for a speaker. The company would send one. But never was a speaker permitted to do more than introduce the picture, and briefly explain its purpose. Never did he attempt anything like an illustrated lecture.

Thus has the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company succeeded in a venture in which many have failed; thus has it solved a perplexing problem of reader distribution. The results of its efforts, naturally, are more or less intangible. But there's been a sufficient assurance of the picture's effectiveness in the fact that, since the first few showings of "The Heart of Cleveland," there has been a steady demand for more. With the possible exception of the schools, the company has sought few exhibitions. Instead, many requests for the picture have been refused. The reason is this: The picture is familiar, now, to fully half the population of Cleveland. Therefore, there is danger now of duplicated circulation. The company believes that the average person doesn't want to see an industrial film twice. Therefore, every request is investigated, and if duplication appears likely, the film isn't shown. And, besides, to get the film the applicant must guarantee an audience of at least seventy-five.

Unquestionably, the picture has been tremendously popular. In a big scrap book in the offices of the publicity department are hundreds of letters from many different organizations, and all of them are complimentary. There are letters from luncheon clubs, advertising clubs, commercial clubs, trade leagues, organizations of professional men, women's clubs, welfare associations, fraternal orders, school teachers, college professors, and there's even one from a film censor.

And now, what about the expense? Such an elaborate piece of publicity i[s] all very well, but what did it cost? Th[e] total expense, including the prepara[tions] for taking the picture, its actu[al] production, and the cost of exhibitin[g] it, was $25,000. Figured on a pe[r] capita basis, the cost per "reader" h[as] been about five cents. And five cen[ts] is lower than the per capita cost [of] many a simple piece of direct-ma[il] advertising.

And the possibilities of commerci[al] motion pictures—the future? Th[e] success of this picture, it would seem, [is] encouraging; and some day, perhap[s] the prophecy of Thomas Edison, whi[ch] he voiced when he and some of h[is] associates saw, and praised, the pictur[e] will be fulfilled. His prophecy w[as] this: That eventually the use [of] motion pictures for educational pu[r]poses greatly will exceed their use f[or] amusement.