

Kattelle Oral History, Tape 11

August 27, 2003

Andrea McCarty: We had been talking about books related to home moviemaking, and there were a few that we forgot to cover.

Alan Kattelle: This is a category of books that were written about a particular, specific make of camera, of amateur camera. We start with this one. *Motion Pictures with the Baby Ciné*. You may not recognize that immediately until I show you the back cover.

AM: Oh, the Pathéscope. Was that for the 9.5mm camera? That's great. Where was that book printed? I think it's London.

AK: That was printed in England, because the price of the book is two and six.

AM: Yes. And it says London on the back cover. It makes sense that it would be a European book.

AK: This was a book devoted to using the Bolex.

AM: Okay, what else do we have?

AK: Kenneth Tidings, the author, was a frequent contributor to *Popular* and *Modern* magazines. *The Keystone Movie Guide*. Also by Kenneth Tidings. Another one by Tidings—

AM: Wow. He was quite the prolific author. *Movies with the Kodak Brownie*. I like the picture there on the front cover.

AK: And lastly, we have a couple of movie stars on the cover of this one—

AM: That's David Niven on the cover, right? Can we also show that picture of Victor Mature?

AK: Yes. Let's find that picture. Here is John Wayne with his [camera].

AM: That looks like it would be on the set of one of those John Ford pictures. Does it say?

AK: Let me see. Oh, William Holden was the other one. It doesn't say, unfortunately.

AM: I really like that picture of Victor Mature. If you can find it, I think it's a good one.

AK: I like this one of David Niven. Oh, that's the same as on the cover, except you can see the back.

AM: So this [book] has a different feel. It uses movie stars to bring home movies to the [masses].

AK: This is interesting. Here's a chapter on the family reel. [Reading from article:] "This is the commonest type of amateur film. The christening. Bathing babies." You want to see?

AM: [Reading from article:] “You must learn to think and express yourself in terms of pictures and sounds.” Wow, so they really want you to structure your home movies. No wonder why they’re using the Hollywood stars.

AK: Oh, this book is great. [Chuckles.]

AM: Where did you get that book?

[Tape turned off]

AM: Okay, we’re back with my favorite pose from the book. It’s Victor Mature and his Eumig camera. Alan, how was the market penetration for Eumig? Where did they stand in the [market]?

AK: Well, judging by the number that I’ve found, they didn’t have a big presence, at least in this country.

AM: But they managed to get their cameras to Hollywood stars for this book. These books that adhere specifically to a type of camera, do they mostly give the amateur tips on certain features and how to use them? Because it would seem to me that, you know, one kind of 8mm camera [isn't so different from another.]

AK: Yes, exactly. It’s a promotional tool for the manufacturer. And the fact that Kenneth Tidings edited so many of them, I would venture to guess that they all tell the amateur the same thing. [Laughs] Don’t you?

AM: Right. He had a sort of boiler plate, and you could insert different company names and [cameras].

AK: Oh, I neglected to look at the bottom and to mention that they were all a series

AM: Oh, the Modern Camera Series. Okay. Let's stop there and we're going to talk about your Kodascope screen.

[Tape paused]

AM: We're going to talk about Alan's Kodascope screen, which I want to make sure we can see pretty well. I'm going to do a pan of the bottom. This is Kodascope screen number three, is it?

AK: This is number one.

AM: Sorry. Yes, now I see it better.

AK: I'd like to point out that, as has been mentioned before, when the original Ciné Kodak Model A, the first 16mm camera was announced, Eastman insisted on selling it as a package. The camera, the tripod, the screen, and I think, an editor.

AM: And the projector as well?

AK: And the projector, as all one package, to make sure that the customer got good results.

AM: But it must have been expensive.

AK: It was, very.

AM: So is this the screen that came with the Model A?

AK: This would have been one with the Model A, that's right. Shall I open it?

AM: Yes. We're shooting against this background, which isn't very good. Why don't we do it on the floor, actually? I'm going to

pause it so that we can change positions, because I'm shooting it against the light from outside.

[Tape paused]

AM: Alright, now Alan and I are going to try to put the screen together and see how it works. [Putting up screen.] That was easy. And there it is. So Alan, what can you tell me about that screen?

AK: Well, the first thing I have to say is that, considering it hasn't been opened for eighty years, it's not in bad shape.

AM: Yes, it's actually looking pretty good.

AK: I'll admit that I've touched up the paint in a few places.

AM: This is a silver screen.

AK: A silver screen, right. And one that needs cleaning, but all in all, I think it has stood up pretty well. And I might mention that they made a much bigger one. Want me to get it? We won't try to open it.

AM: Okay. I'll put everything on top. [Retrieving screen] So here we've got Kodascope screen number two. Perfect. So, Kodascope screen number two was a little bit bigger.

AK: More than a foot wider I think.

AM: And when did that one come out?

AK: I don't know. I don't have any literature on it at all.

AM: But probably soon after screen number one, yes?

AK: Right.

[Tape paused]

AM: Okay Alan, what have you got?

AK: I have here a Sigmund Lubin projector, a 35mm projector.

Lubin was a pioneer cinematographer for the Thomas Edison / Essanay group, a very early professional motion picture machine manufacturer. To me, the most interesting thing about the projector, aside from the fact that its illumination source is limelight, was the manner in which I received it. I had a letter, or a phone call from a gentleman who heard about my collection, and he said that he had an old projector, and he thought I might be interested. He mentioned that it was a Lubin. I said, "Great, I'd like to see it." He said, "Well, I'm on my way south from New Hampshire, but I see you're in Hudson. Could we meet somewhere off route 495, so I don't have to go looking for you?" I said, "Fine, I'll see you at the exit on 117. I'll meet you there." He not only had this projector but he had a very tattered suitcase, a small suitcase, the contents having to do with the owner, the last owner of this [machine]. Unfortunately, there were no films, but there were a number of lantern slides, and a business card of the owner. It turned out that he was an itinerant black preacher. Some of his lantern slides are fascinating. I'm sure I'll have to give it to the black history [society].

AM: Tell me what you have here. Would that fit inside the wooden box? I'm just trying to understand how it works. You have a metal case and then you have a wooden exterior. Did those two fit together at one point?

AK: No, this is just the lamp source. The light source. See, this is where oxygen and acetylene gases were fed into the burner, and when that flame is played on a piece of lime, it emits a tremendously brilliant white light. That's the light source and this is the [aperture through which] you can see whether the light is on or not.

AM: Okay, and then how does that work?

AK: This is the giveaway to those slides. See, this is a slot where a slide carrier would go in, but of course, it would also show movies. It was hand cranked because it belonged to an itinerant man, [in case] he didn't have a power source. The gases for the light, he could easily carry with him, and he didn't need electricity to move the machine because it was hand-cranked.

AM: Okay, and that was the lens in front.

AK: And this is the auxiliary lantern slide projection lamp that goes over on the far side, because when you're projecting, you slide this mechanism out of the way.

AM: Okay, but for the film, the lens is in front.

AK: Yes. Right now it's set up to show film. What's missing would be the upper reel.

[Tape turned off]

AM: Okay we're in Alan's parlor? Sunroom? What do you call this room?

AK: The sunroom.

AM: You can see the silver screen in the background.

AK: And a couple of his sculptures.

AM: And a couple of sculptures. They are tough to see with the window. I'm going to zoom in on the one over there. I'm zooming in on the one with the blue background on the wall. Can you tell me anything about that sculpture, Alan?

AK: I have trouble naming my pieces, or remembering what I call them. [Chuckles.] Just design number one maybe. It's all composed of scrap metal pieces that I retrieved from a scrap yard near where we lived at the time.

AM: I'm going to see if I can [focus in on another one.] Now I'm showing the one with the red...

[Tape paused]

AM: Alright, what's next?

AK: This is the Library Kodascope. It is basically a [Ciné-Kodak] Model B, 16mm Kodak projector. The Model B was fairly common. It became the library Kodascope when it was offered with this lovely walnut case. It was announced in June 1929. And it had some unusual features that the ordinary Model B did not have, such as this rear projection screen. It had a threading lamp, which was a great advance. And it was also self-threading. In theory at least, you put the fly reel up here, and threaded it through the machine, and it would pick up and be wound up automatically down here. Another nice feature, it

came with short and long focus lenses. I was particularly delighted to find this one. In that little container was a Kodacolor filter. And it happens to be in excellent shape. Most of them show considerable deterioration, but this one is pristine.

AM: That's a beautiful projector. The cabinet is in good shape.

AK: It was introduced, as I say, in June of 1929. It cost 300 dollars. That's from here up.

AM: The projector cost 300 dollars?

AK: In August they came out with this stand. That was another 150 dollars. This is a remarkable piece of equipment. First of all, there was storage space for your reels and any auxiliary equipment you might need. A good place to keep the instruction book.

AM: Can I look at the instructions? I would like to do a closeup on them.

AK: And another accessory... Oh, here's an ad you might want to see.

Now, what have we here? Well, for one thing we have a table. You could put the editor on here, and splice it or whatnot. And still more interesting is the screen. And here is the tripod. And there's the screen.

AM: They were all about giving you the complete package, weren't they? Do you have anything else to add about it?

AK: Well you didn't ask me, "Was it very successful?" [Chuckles.]

AM: I always ask you that and I didn't ask you this time. Alan was it very successful? How was it marketed?

AK: [Chuckles.] I'll tell you. The thing to remember is that this cabinet, the additional cabinet, was announced in August of 1929, and you wouldn't remember what happened in September of 1929, but it was the stock market crash. So I think that explains why not many of these were found. Very rare.

AM: I think you told me a story about your acquisition of that [Library Kodascope]. Hadn't you coveted it for a long time?

AK: Yes I had. When I first read that ad I thought that it was a beautiful piece of machinery. I thought, "Oh, I've got to have a library Kodascope." And several years ago, [a collector] in New Jersey had half a dozen. I don't know how he ever [got them]. He must have bought a warehouse somewhere, but he was asking what I thought was an outrageous price, two or three thousand dollars, so I didn't go for it. Then, just about maybe a year ago, a dear friend who collected in Canada, he called me and said, "I'm going to break up my collection. I know you've been interested in a Library Kodascope, so let's talk." We agreed on a price, and he did a marvelous job of crating it. I guess he had a professional do it. It took two of us to get it in

the house, and it took me about half a day to get it out of the crate. But it came through without much damage.

[End of Tape 11, Side 1]

AM: This is the beginning of side 2 of tape 11 on the audiocassette, and we're going to talk about an early Bell & Howell camera. Tell me about it Alan.

AK: This camera represents, I believe, a very, very early model of the first 35mm professional camera that Bell & Howell made. And my reasons for that assumption are twofold. There are a couple other of these early models. One is at the Eastman house, and one is in the Los Angeles County museum. But this one is different. The lens for it is quite distinctively different from either of those two. Those other two have serial numbers. This one does not. This one says "Patent Applied For", so it makes me think it could even be a prototype. It's the 35mm Studio Camera. It took a thousand-foot magazine. I'll try to get it around where you can see it.

AM: Yes, I can see it.

AK: You can see the magazine doors here. Did I say a thousand-foot magazine? Four hundred or five hundred foot, more likely.

AM: Yeah. It looks about four hundred or five hundred. How did you get this camera, Alan?

AK: Well, a dealer in Chicago called me. I didn't know the man. He said that he got my name from a fellow who thought I might be interested. He said, "I have an old Bell & Howell camera." And I said, "Oh yeah?" You know, I stifled a yawn. And I said, "Tell me about it." He says, "Well, it's about twelve-inches high and twenty inches deep, and it's wood. It seems to be a wood body. Are you interested?" And, trying to keep my heart from racing out of control, I said, "Well, if it's what I think it is, then yes, I am interested. Let me send you a picture of what I'd be interested in. Or you can send me a picture." So I guess I sent him a picture from a magazine or something, and he said, "Yes, that's what it is." So we agreed on a price in due time.

A couple things are really fascinating. One of the film magazines had "Art R." written on it, or painted on it. Another one said Reeves. Through a little research, I found out that Art Reeves was an early cameraman for Essanay in Chicago. So it may well have belonged to him. I have subsequently found a picture of Art Reeves cranking a camera that I'm almost certain is this one. It's unusual in this respect, that the cameraman didn't stand behind the camera, but right where I'm standing now. Because the viewfinder lens reflected through the side. I've got a studio shot where the cameraman is standing right here.

AM: Okay. I'm going to move the camera over and get a shot of the side.

AK: This is the footage meter to tell you how many feet you've shot. These tell you if the film is moving out of the magazine. I believe this is the rewind, but I don't know for sure. This is a contemporary tripod. It shows up in early pictures.

AM: Okay Alan, while I have you standing there—

AK: The one behind me?

AM: Sure. If you want to tell me some more about anything, that'd be great.

AK: This is one of the most beautiful cameras that [I've seen]. This is a French Debie. It's a studio camera. 35mm, hand-cranked. Dates from about 1908, so you've got to admit that this is in pretty nice shape.

AM: It's gorgeous. How did you acquire that camera?

AK: Again, word of mouth. A man called me. He said, "I got your name from somebody. I have an old camera." And that's the way it came to me.

[Tape paused]

AM: Alan, what's the camera behind you?

AK: That's a studio camera made by the Century Camera Company. Not very well-known. I think it takes an 8x10 [glass plate]. Oh, here we go. You'd be looking at the image on this round glass, then when you're ready, you put the negatives in behind this.

AM: Why don't you sit down in the blue chair and we can wrap things up? This has been kind of a long process. How long

have we been doing this for? We've probably done this for five or six days?

AK: I've forgotten when we started. You must have kept track of it.

AM: I think we did it Monday and Tuesday of last week. We had a not-so-good day on Wednesday. We took Thursday and Friday off. I came back here for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday of this week.

AK: Well that's not bad, is it?

AM: No. It's not too bad at all. How do you feel about what we've done? Do you feel like we've covered your selections?

AK: I'm certainly thrilled and I can't complain about anything. I just hope I don't come across as a shmuck, or I don't know what.
[Laughs]

AM: No. Come on, I think you should be proud of your collection.

AK: Well I'm very grateful to you, Andrea, for putting your effort into this.

AM: When we shut the camera off [a few minutes ago], you were saying something about how it pays to have your interests well-known.

AK: Yes. It sort of strikes me as you ask me these questions, how often it's been through friends who have known of my interest. They tell me [about equipment for sale], or they tell another person [about me].

AM: There are a lot of these things that found their way to you through, through the goodwill [of others]. Do you have anything else you'd like to add, or any last thoughts before we turn the

camera off and call it a day?

AK: No. We've not touched on some of the written records, but that's something that I'm anxious to have survive. There is a fairly substantial collection of paperwork. Not only camera instruction books, but I've faithfully clipped magazine articles whenever there was something that applied to them. So I've got, as I might have mentioned to you, I've got four big three-ring binders full of articles.

AM: I think there was some chatter on the [AMIA listserv] just yesterday, people were talking about the need to access things like instruction manuals.

AK: Oh was there? That makes sense.

AM: Anything else? Any words of wisdom to young collectors?
[Chuckles.]

AK: [Chuckles.] Get going if you're going to try collecting because this stuff is going fast. [Chuckles].

AM: I think that's a good way to end it.

END OF INTERVIEW