AMIA 2013 Awards: Silver Light
Introduction of Northeast Historic Film founders David Weiss and Karan Sheldon
Presented by Andrea McCarty at the AMIA Archival Screening Night
November 7, 2013

I am honored to present the 2013 Silver Light Award to Northeast Historic Film. Northeast Historic Film, or NHF, is located in Bucksport, Maine, a small town of 5000 people. I, along with many others here, have found a sort of archival home-away-from-home there, and always look forward to a visit—the drive up the coast of Maine, crossing the stunning Penobscot Narrows bridge, and finally, arrival at the Alamo Theater on Main Street in Bucksport, a restored 1916 movie theater which houses the Archives. It's an unexpected place for a world-class archives, but NHF has always been a place to expect the unexpected.

From humble beginnings in a converted chicken barn, cofounders Karan Sheldon and David Weiss have led this organization to the top of our field. As a non-profit moving image archives, their mission is to collect and provide access to the film and video record of Northern New England. This heritage includes collections of amateur film and television newsfilm, industrial films and travel films, all constituting a record of 20th century regional culture.

Karan and David began NHF with a focus on outreach and access, travelling up and down and across the state of Maine with a projector in the back of a station wagon, presenting shows based around the amateur film *From Stump to Ship*, which is one of two NHF films on the National Film Registry. Since then, they have received countless grants for collections preservation and outreach—I couldn't begin to list them all, but for instance, two CLIR grants for hidden collections since 2010 and multiple grants for preservation of newsfilm; they've also built a state-of-the-art cold storage facility, providing cool and dry film storage for their own film, and for other institutions up and down the east coast.

I was first introduced to NHF through Karan Sheldon, when I heard her give a presentation on amateur film at the George Eastman House. This was quite a few years ago now, and the dynamics of our field were vastly different then. Home movies and amateur film were not part of the discussion like they are today, and were marginalized in terms of funding and attention. Since the founding of AMIA, Karan and David worked with others to bring small gauge film the attention it deserves. These activities blazed a path for those who are interested in non-feature films, and allowed smaller archives a voice in the larger discussion.

While pushing for small-gauge film on the national level, NHF has also fostered a whole generation of archivists in Bucksport, some of whom are in the audience tonight. The most important thing that I learned from Karan and David is that anything is possible, with some creative thinking, hard work and attention to detail. Working at Northeast Historic Film, there was a sense that anything could happen on a given day. You never knew who was going to walk through the doors. Maybe a donor with a collection of old films – home movies, industrials, who knows?—just waiting to be discovered. Or a researcher or an archivist coming to explore the collection or, in the old days, Bill O'Farrell coming in with a box of unidentified films he picked up at a yard sale on his way down from Canada.



NHF operates on many levels, locally, nationally and internationally. Their annual Summer Film Symposium brings together archivists, scholars and amateur film fans for good discussions and great screenings, all culminating in a lobster dinner on the final evening. Now in its 13th year, the symposium has hosted hundreds if not thousands of archivists and scholars from national and international institutions. On the local level, the Bucksport community depends on the theater as a gathering place in the heart of town. Karan and David have developed good relationships with local clients and national colleagues, opening their doors to all.

In a time of transition for our field, we must stop and recognize leaders like Karan and David, who have worked tirelessly for over 25 years, bringing NHF from that chicken coop to a state of the art building with film scanners and LTO technology onsite, an online collections guide, cold storage for conservation and most importantly, the flexibility and creative thinking needed to navigate the changes that the future will bring.

David, the consummate juggler, you keep the doors of NHF open, dealing with donors and administration one minute, and then rolling up your sleeves to help pull film or change letters on the marquee. Your can-do attitude, unflappability in the face of any situation and sense of humor are a hallmark of NHF.

And Karan, an innovator and creative thinker, you set the standard for NHF as an organization. You've charted an n ambitious course, constantly organizing outreach and bringing new projects, and along with David, embracing risk and change.

Both of your leadership has made NHF a small organization with a huge impact, at the forefront of many issues in our field.

Congratulations to you both on your achievement.