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The 1920s museum-sponsored expedition film: Beguiling encounters in an all-but-forgotten genre

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Many natural history museums, including the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), enthusiastically adopted the young medium of motion pictures in the form of the sponsored expedition film. This essay examines *Camping Among the Indians*, shot in the American Southwest in 1927 by Clyde Fisher, AMNH curator (and later Chairman of the AMNH Hayden Planetarium), and Ernest Thompson Seton, wildlife illustrator, children's book author, and founder of the Woodcraft League (1902) and the Boy Scouts of America (1910). Co-sponsored by the Woodcraft League, *Camping Among the Indians* serves as a revealing case study in reconstructive film history, and the extant footage and sparse documentation of its exhibition illuminate the unique situation of the museum sponsored exhibition film as a vital, if overlooked, area of ethnographic filmmaking.

Keywords: expedition film; museums; Native Americans; Woodcraft League; Boy Scouts; ethnographic film

The historiographic challenges presented by the tragic loss of so much motion picture material from the silent cinema period are magnified when we turn to the little-discussed genre of the museum-sponsored expedition film. With limited storage space, few funds to transfer the footage onto safety stock, and scant information on where and by whom the footage was shot, museum-sponsored expedition film has often fallen through the historical and preservationist cracks. The uncertain status of the films themselves – souvenir travel footage and anthropological record, visual accounts of disappearing peoples and evidence of complex intercultural contact – transforms expedition footage into something of a film hydra, each head representing a different stakeholder involved in the complex context of their production and exhibition.[1] Some of this footage has survived, however, and has remained dormant in the archive for almost 100 years. A beguiling example I analyse in this essay is a film entitled *Camping Among the Indians*, housed at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

In the summer of 1927, Clyde Fisher (Figure 1), associate curator of visual instruction at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), and Ernest Thompson Seton, acclaimed naturalist and founder of both the Woodcraft League of North America in 1902 and the Boy Scouts of America in 1910, embarked on a three-month AMNH/Woodcraft League-sponsored expedition to the American Southwest. The two men brought a motion picture camera with them and filmed

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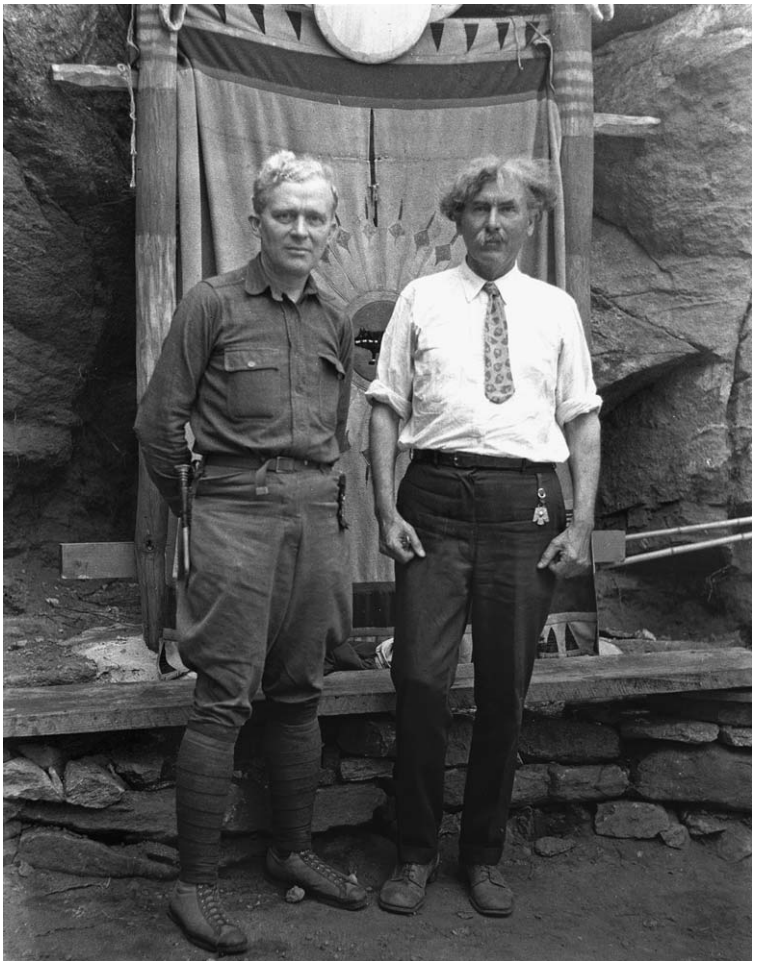


Figure 1. Clyde Fisher and Edward Thompson Seton, Negative # 258610. Courtesy American Museum of Natural History.

Native American sign language, material culture, a corn dance at Santa Clara, and several dances from the Annual Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial, an event that began in 1922 and continues to this day, providing a showcase of Native American arts, cultures, and traditions that attracts thousands of tourists and indigenous people.[2] All that remains of their filmmaking is a 22-minute edited extract called *Camping Among the Indians*. As is the case with much museum-sponsored expedition filmmaking of the era, parts or possibly all of the footage Fisher shot was shown in public programs during 1927 and 1928 and then, from the archival record at least, quickly faded into obscurity.

Camping Among the Indians has an unusual claim to fame, however. It is highly likely that footage Fisher shot of Native American pottery-making by the famous Southwestern potter Maria Martinez (Figure 2) appeared in a free-standing viewer-activated device installed at the AMNH in 1930 called the Dramagraph (aka the 'Automatic Motion Picture Projector'; Figure 3), which permitted museum-goers to

Figure 2. Maria Martinez holding up a finished pot, circa late 1920s. Negative # 297372B. Courtesy American Museum of Natural History.

watch motion pictures in the exhibition gallery as opposed to a separate screening room or auditorium.[3] The four-and-half-minute film, 'Pottery Making on the Rio Grande', could be seen by visitors after they pressed a button on the device; the film would then automatically rewind, ready to be used by the next visitor.[4] An automatic counting register allowed the museum to monitor how many times a day the film was seen. A legacy of the peep-home viewing devices such as the kinetoscope and mutoscope of the early cinema era and a forerunner of the contemporary use of video walls, flat panel displays, and touch-screen computer interactives in museum galleries, the Dramagraph was cutting-edge for its time (if plagued with technical problems), a new way of using moving images in the gallery to supplement static displays. But *Camping Among the Indians* is significant for other reasons beyond the four-and-a-half minutes of pottery-making used in the Dramagraph.

For starters, the enigmatic *Camping Among the Indians* is representative of an all-but-forgotten mode of non-fiction cinema: the expedition film, footage shot as part of museum-sponsored expeditions that was never subject to the industrial protocols of the Hollywood film or even the newsreel. *Camping Among the Indians* does not fit easily into traditional film histories; in fact, it is barely a film at all, since we have few clues for piecing together what it might have originally looked like; there is no record of it ever being shown in an autonomous film screening at the AMNH (it was only used to illustrate a lecture); it has this quirky claim to fame in relation to the Dramagraph; and no one, as far as I can ascertain, has ever reviewed or written about it or deemed it worthy of analysis. Bits of it are lost – including demonstrations of the sign language – or were deliberately excluded from

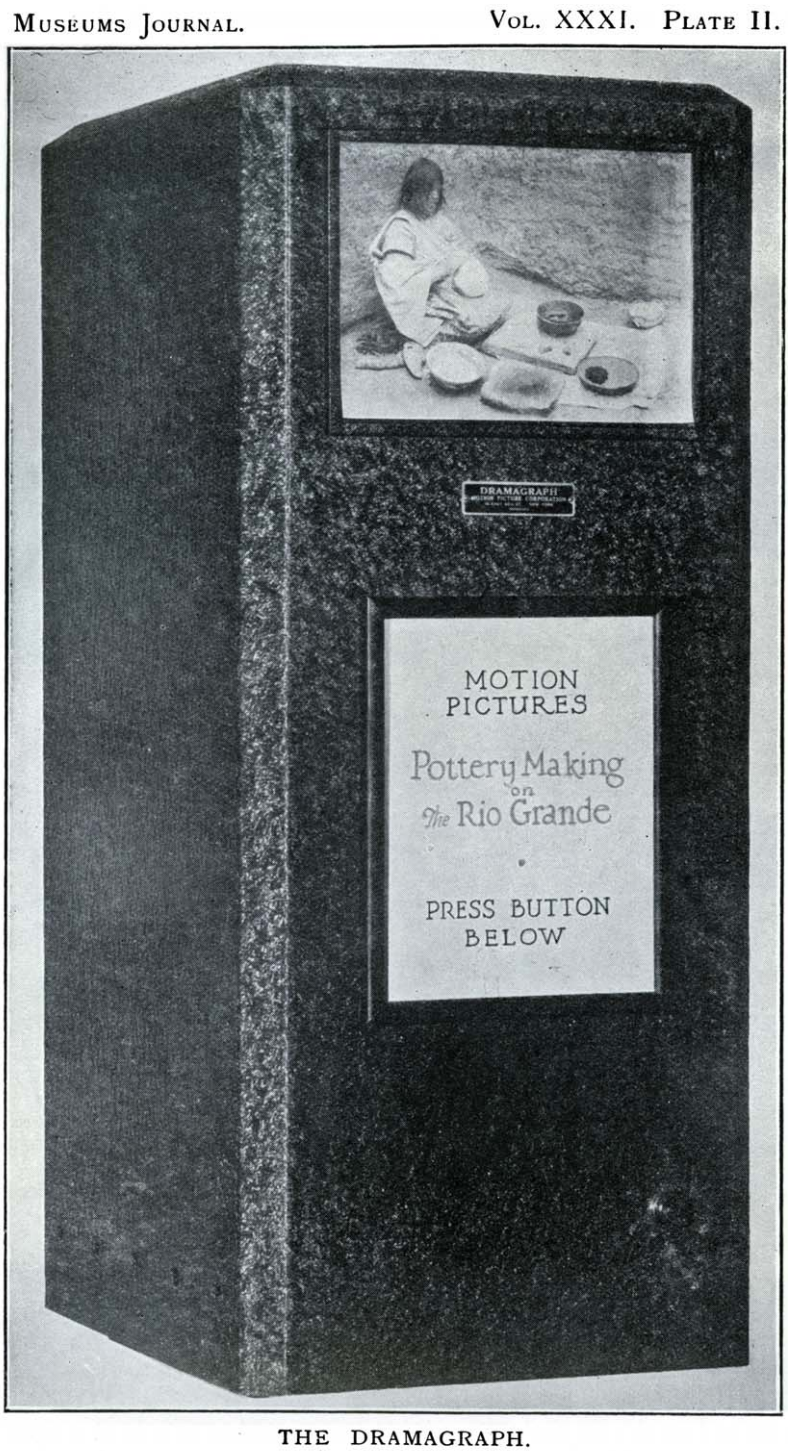


Figure 3. The Dramagraph ("Automatic Motion Picture Projector"). Showing *Pottery Making on the Rio Grande* in the North American Indian Hall, American Museum of Natural History, c. 1930.

the 22-minute version archived at the AMNH, and we have no way of knowing how one of its architects, Clyde Fisher, integrated the footage into several lectures he delivered in 1927 and 1928.[5]

In light of the fact that so little fictional, let alone non-fictional, film shown in early non-theatrical settings is extant, the mystery surrounding the editing and exhibition of expedition footage such as *Camping Among the Indians* can be considered par for the course. It is, however, curious that an institution with a vested interest in visual education, and a vibrant education department that made and distributed films for education, didn't do more to promote *Camping Among the Indians* or even schedule a private screening for curators (notice of internal screenings was sent out in the form of internal memoranda to heads of department, and there is no reference to *Camping Among the Indians*). The film seems to have garnered little response at best; it was not even screened as part of a huge Potlatch at the AMNH in spring 1928 – a fact that is curious indeed.

I am reminded here of Jonathan Auerbach's characterization of cinema's first 20 years in his 2007 book *Body Shots: Early Cinema's Incarnations*, in which he argues that by 1915,

> virtually all the fundamental questions about the medium [cinema] seem to have been essentially resolved: whether film would tell stories or record 'reality' (tell stories), how spatiotemporal articulations would be achieved between shots (parallel editing, shot/reverse shot, and 180-degree cuts), where movies would be shown (nickelodeons and then palaces), and what audiences would do as they watched them (keep silent and identify with the characters on the screen).[6]

While Auerbach is obviously referring to Noel Burch's idea of cinema conforming to an institutional mode of representation by the transitional period, it is nevertheless striking that *Camping Among the Indians* eschews virtually all these criteria (audiences watching footage in the Dramagraph might not even have remained silent as they stood watching the excerpt). At 22 minutes, *Camping Among the Indians* can provide no more than a snapshot of the visual highlights of this expedition, a moving postcard from Fisher and Seton to the AMNH. This may not be a glib analogy; like the cinema, the postcard 'functioned to re-inscribe the body in new modes of seeing', as film scholar Lauren Rabinovitz argues, and despite their material differences (including scale and the inscription of movement) the two forms are intimately connected, with cinema expanding the visual field of the postcard through movement and editing.[7] In the context of Western-looking relations and ethnographic representation, whether that image was represented in a postcard or a film may have been less important than how it appropriated certain precinematic conventions and normalized ways of seeing Native Americans.

Notwithstanding *Camping Among the Indians*'s obscure legacy at the AMNH, my goal in this essay is to consider how the Woodcraft League – which Seton defined in the *Manual of the Woodcraft Indians* as a 'character making movement with a blue sky method, for all ages and both sexes' – and a programme of visual education at the AMNH propped up this film, both literally in terms of co-sponsorship and discursively in terms of their imbricated ideological agendas.[8] I'm also interested in excavating some of the fantasies at play around this film; for example, was the Woodcraft League, with its focus on 'swimming, boating, camping, forestry, nature-study, scouting, photography etc' according to the 1915 *Manual of the*

Woodcraft Movement, also an organization that legitimized 'playing Indian' in the style of Peter Pan's adventures in Neverland (J.M. Barrie's character was contemporaneous with the founding of the Woodcraft League in 1902), or did this influence play second fiddle to the longer-running Noble Savage narrative with its implied critique of Western culture? What fantasies of nature, performance, and primitivism are being entertained in the Woodcraft and scouting movements, and how might they end up inscribed in *Camping Among the Indians* and the larger genre of ethnographic cinema?

Beyond these questions, which for matters of expediency cannot be fully addressed, I am interested in how the personal careers and predilections of Fisher and Seton are implicated and refracted in *Camping Among the Indians* and why they turned to film to record their encounter with Native Americans in the Southwest as opposed to photography and nature writing, fields in which both men were far more experienced. Did their involvement in the scouting movements of the 1920s – especially the Woodcraft League, which Seton founded – suggest why they titled their film *Camping Among the Indians*, and does the camping refer to Fisher and Seton's stay at the Intertribal ceremony at Gallup where hundreds of Native Americans and Euro-Americans camped for the duration of the Ceremonial, or was the title given by an anthropology or education curator at the AMNH some time later? Moreover, how might Woodcraft-sponsored events at the AMNH and the museum's endorsement of this movement have been at the fulcrum of debates over whether or not the film should be made in the first place and how it would be exhibited? For example, was Fisher motivated to shoot material that he knew would go down well with AMNH administrators and audiences, or did Seton press for footage that would help promote the Woodcraft movement? How collaborative was the filmmaking? – Fisher is credited as cinematographer, although it is unclear from the archive what role each man played in the selection of scenes to be filmed or whether community members were compensated for appearing on camera. There are, of course, inherent risks involved in importing an auteurist model, which film scholars elaborated in the distinct cultural context of the Hollywood film industry, into the production lexicon of the museum-sponsored film. In the case of expedition film, however, Fisher and Seton *were* the central architects of the motion picture; and while it is unclear what role either man played in post-production, this was their baby. This essay therefore examines *Camping Among the Indians* as a productive case study in museum-sponsored expedition film, not because it was an especially remarkable or important expedition but because of its connection to the boy's club movements of the 1920s and the fact that we can trace its uses in museum-based visual education at the AMNH.

Camping Among the Indians: A topos of the expedition film

An important place to begin when considering museum-sponsored expedition filmmaking from the 1920s is how it bears the marks of its conditions of production and exhibition and whether these marks are distinct from other types of ethnographic filmmaking from the era. W.J.T. Mitchell's 2005 book *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* is a useful primer here (and a methodological reversal from the earlier auteurism), especially his argument that images are not just capable of creating meaning but also have certain *wants* – both in terms of the kinds of claims they make upon us, and the kinds of claims we make, or are

expected to make, upon them. Asking what *Camping Among the Indians* wants from us is clearly not the same as speculating about what Fisher and Seton were hoping to accomplish by making the film, as Mitchell explains:

> It is crucial... that we not confuse the desires of the picture with the desires of the artist, the beholder, or even the figure in the picture. What pictures want is not the same as the message they communicate or the effect they produce; it's not even the same as what they say they want. Like people, pictures may not know what they want; they have to be helped to recall it through dialogue with others.[9]

Figuring out what *Camping Among the Indians* wants therefore requires examining both textual and intertextual clues relating to its reasons for being; for example, its primary want could be its desire to be read as a visual record of what Fisher and Seton saw during the expedition, the classic power differential 'their lives through our eyes'. Or perhaps the film wants us to forget about its looking relations derived from a *de facto* model of the colonial gaze, and look instead at how its strength derives from the power of its performers to claw back some agency and repurpose the meaning of the film. Or maybe its pedigreed status under the auspices of the AMNH and the Woodcraft League bear down so heavily on the film that it is unable to enunciate its wants because it is always already spoken for by these two authorities?

We could even construct a hierarchy of wants in which the official record-keeper obligations of the film is primary and all residual uses secondary. Schematically this could work, and might even account for how most museum-sponsored film was used institutionally; but it cannot adequately explain how *all* expedition footage was used in the museum world, nor even how footage might have been used *during* the actual expedition to both members of the travelling party as well as the indigenous peoples represented on film? Robert Flaherty showed footage he had shot to the participants of *Nanook of the North* (1922), although he was by no means the first to pioneer a more participatory form of image-making. Even earlier, British anthropologist Alfred Cort Haddon brought lantern slides he made of the Torres Strait islanders in 1888 back to the islands with him in 1898 when he returned for a follow-up expedition, this time also shooting five short films of the islanders and visiting Australian Aborigines.[10] Or what about expedition footage that was never screened at all, or maybe to just a few curators back at the sponsoring institution?

Camping Among the Indians strikes one as an incredibly organized, efficient, and disciplined film. Fisher's skill as a cinematographer is adequate for the task, and – except for the shooting of a War Dance in Taos, when his subjects are framed awkwardly and Fisher seems torn between wanting to film the adobe buildings in the background on the one hand and the dancer who keeps popping into the frame in the far right of the foreground on the other – he does a good job panning, reframing, and occasionally moving in for closer shots of the performers. Little is superfluous in this film: Fisher records dances and the material cultural practices of a number of tribes in a systematic way with no thematic logic other than the dancing which serves as a *leitmotif* throughout, and the choreography, skill of the performers, and foregrounding of some of the most popular dances as important cross-cultural events within the community is made evident through the camera's location and framing. Some of the dances seem to be performed just for Fisher's camera, with few spectators around, while others – such as the corn dance at Santa

Clara and Intertribal Ceremonial – are obviously part of large intercultural public celebrations.

Camping Among the Indians begins with a poignant Buffalo Dance performed by six children ranging in age from 5 to 14, a cultural anomaly given that this dance was traditionally performed by Plains Indians asking the Great Spirits for blessings on the eve of a buffalo hunt, rather than by members of Southwestern tribes. This endearing start to the film – Fisher is adept in capturing the boys' evident joy in performing the dance for his camera – works as a synecdoche for both the Woodcraft League and AMNH's interlaced agendas of promoting Native American culture and spirituality, an agenda that is arguably reinforced by the visual anachronism of seeing Plains children dancing in front of a Southwestern adobe (in other words, dressing up as an Indian and dancing can be done by anyone, even Indians, anywhere).[11] The Buffalo dance serves, therefore, as an open invitation to children and even adult spectators back at the AMNH who may be filled with nostalgia for adventure-filled games of cowboys and Indians to dress up and play Indian. But at the same time as the scene works as an effective trailer for the adult Native American dancing that appears throughout the remainder of the film, the Buffalo dance conjures up a sense of *déjà vu* in terms of iconic representations of Native Americans dancing in traditional regalia, and one cannot help but think of Thomas Edison's 1894 *Buffalo Dance* featuring 17 Native Americans from Buffalo Bill's travelling troupe shot in Edison's Black Maria studio in New Jersey.[12]

The Buffalo dance not only introduces us to the photogenic children but also to Fisher (and his entourage, including Seton), since the smiling faces are not simply signs of unselfconscious delight but an explicit acknowledgement of the act of filming (even though we don't actually see Fisher or Seton in front of the camera). I am reminded here of ethnographic filmmaker and theorist David MacDougall's idea of *all* photographic images being inherently reflexive in so much as they always refer to their moment of creation, the encounter between filmmaker and filmed, which, he argues, is extended, by a 'kind of triangulation, in which each successive scene further locates the author in relation to the subjects'. A film is therefore riddled with signs of 'who and where the author is in the responses of the people being filmed', to quote MacDougall; and while the signs may be difficult to interpret individually, as the film progresses they accumulate direction and meaning.[13]

This is an interesting idea to explore in relation to *Camping Among the Indians*, and while not all scenes are as reflexive as this, we are certainly aware not just of *what* Fisher sees during this film but *how* he sees his subjects and how they see him, a point suggested in the frame enlargement of Maria Martinez and a young girl who stares directly at the camera (Figure 4). Can we discern in the choice of subjects, shooting style, and what nonfiction film theorist Bill Nichols calls a documentary film's axiographic space[14] – in other words, the intersubjective encounter of filmmaker and subject discerned from such factors as the proximity of the camera to subject and the subject's demeanour – a way of constructing encounters with Native Americans that is coterminous with Seton's 1928 bestseller *Nine Important Principles of Woodcraft*, which emphasized camp life and Indian crafts?[15] In relation to Nichols's idea of axiographics, Fisher seems well within the film subjects' comfort zone, and, with the exception of a scene in which Apache men and women look a little uncomfortable and stare straight at the camera, there is no evidence that ethical lines have been crossed. However, there is a scene roughly halfway into the film following the corn dance at Santa Clara when we see an obviously important

Figure 4. Maria Martinez and unidentified young girl returning the camera's gaze, Negative # 297354. Courtesy American Museum of Natural History.

Native American tribal leader dressed in a white shirt interact with an elderly white man with glasses, a Stetson, and cigar, who is accompanied by a white woman wearing a headscarf, white shirt, and black vest and tie, who seems very relaxed throughout the scene – perhaps because she knows the native men, or is flattered by the presence of Fisher's camera (she puts her arms on the shoulders of a young Indian girl and toward the end of the scene turns her head around to check to see if the camera is still rolling; Figure 5).

The scene is fascinating in that it seems to exist for no other reason than to foreground the encounter between the chief and these unidentified individuals, who, one assumes, were also important people, possibly travelling with Seton and Fisher. But this intercultural exchange is also deeply revealing of the film's temporal relations – the fact that we read not only a historical past in the image, but as Philip Rosen argues, a 'different *when* of the spectator', as Rosen explains: 'Since this different "when" cannot be immediately present, it must be "filled in," "inferred," "provided" by the subject'.[16] There is a complex interplay between the *when* of the historical spectator and the *now* of the contemporary viewing subject, that is informed by the film's various sign systems – the Woodcraft League, the AMNH, playing at being Indian, Native American dance and material culture, modernity and gender – and how they are negotiated in the film. In the scene above, the mannishly dressed woman with her arms on the young girl is an interesting counterpoint to the film's opening Peter Pan motif and a poignant reminder of the encroachment of modernity *and* the modern woman, who, far more than the Euro-American men

Figure 5. Frame enlargement from *Camping Among the Indians* (1927). Courtesy American Museum of Natural History.

in the scene, helps us date the film to the mid/late 1920s. Her enigmatic return gaze (flirting with Fischer?) is no doubt the *punctum* of this scene, reminding us that the act of filmmaking is a very human process, with bodies behind cameras; she could also, however, be hoping for her 15 seconds of fame, perhaps fantasizing that her face would appear on the screen at the AMNH in New York City. Issues of self-determination resonate in this film not only in relation to (Native) American identity, but also to gender.

Few would dispute the fact that this scene delivers something of a progressive vision of Euro–Native American relations, eschewing the allochronic tendencies of so many ethnographic films of the time in favour of a coevalness that surfaces in visual reminders of new gender roles for women, the car as an emblem of modern transportation, and Native American ceremonial life constructed less as reified spectacle than as a vibrant intertribal and cross-cultural celebration that the entire family can enjoy, akin in many ways to public programming at the AMNH. However, this vision is undercut by the Woodcraft League and Boy and Girl Scouts movements' condemnation of modernity for stripping young people of essential survival skills and pioneer pluck. In the 'Who Are the Scouts?' section of *Scouting for Girls*, Kodak's 'You press a button and we do the rest' is viewed in pejorative terms – a 'slogan of modern times', to be true, but deeply damaging to American resourcefulness, since we 'only have to press a button nowadays, and someone will do the rest'. Back in the pioneer days, 'there was no button to press. . . and nobody to "do the rest": everybody had to know a little about everything'. The scouts that the

eponymous movement modelled itself on were 'explorers, hunters, campers, builders, fighters, settlers, and in an emergency, nurses and doctors combined', reminding us of the movement's indebtedness – especially in the US context – to survivalist strategies derived from Native Americans and aspects of their cosmology. So while modernity's hallmarks cannot be excised from the historical record at Gallup, their meaning in relation to scouting and the Woodcraft League was fraught.

But the Euro-Americans also become stand-ins for Fisher and Seton in this scene, which ends up serving as a fascinating allegory on the status of museum-sponsored expedition film and may be what differentiates it from film made within a strictly commercial context. Moreover, this candid scene, which captures a glimpse of what it might have been like, as a non-native visitor, to attend the corn dance at Santa Clara, is just one of several of the film's reflexive moments. Many of the dance scenes contain internal spectators, rows and rows of Native Americans and tourists standing along the periphery of the performance space; but there are other quieter self-conscious gestures – including the War Dance in Taos, where we see a woman standing behind the door; a Euro-American girl's face juxtaposed next to a man drumming (in a later scene, it's a young boy in virtually the same set-up); and, perhaps most memorably, a Euro-American man who steps in front of Fisher's camera with his 16-mm film camera for a few seconds during the Santa Clara corn dance. The internal spectators, far from being extraneous detractions, enhance our understanding of what it might have been like to attend the Santa Clara corn dance; these scenes speak of up-close encounters and cross-cultural excitement about the event itself. Fisher's camera achieves what a great deal of home movie footage does: the quotidian enmeshed with moments of gravitas and visual spectacle.

Few would question Fisher's commitment to ethnographic film's iconic *I was here* moment that shores up the evidentiary value of the expedition (and fetish value of the Native American dances and documentary in general); despite the apparent comfort level implied by the interactions between Euro- and Native Americans, their representations in film had changed little from D.W. Griffith's *The Battle at Elderbush Gulch* from 1913. Negotiating all these valences, my goal, however, again drawing inspiration from Mitchell, is to make *Camping Among the Indians* 'less scrutable, less transparent' as an ethnographic film by reading it against and with the grain.[17] But how did Fisher and Seton come to collaborate on this project, and what were some of its informing contexts?

Fisher, Seton and the Woodcraft Movement

How Clyde Fisher and Ernest Thompson Seton decided – years into their friendship and professional relationship – to travel together in the summer of 1927 is not apparent from the archive, although their involvement in the American Boy and Girl Scout movements is an obvious place to start. Born in Sydney, Ohio in 1878, Fisher was a classroom teacher before getting a doctorate from Johns Hopkins University in 1913. He worked as an associate curator in the department of public education at the AMNH from 1913 to 1928 before moving into the astronomy department, serving as head of the Hayden Planetarium from 1935 to 1941. Along with curator and later director of the AMNH, George H. Sherwood, Fisher wrote the 'Nature Study' sections of the 1923 edition of *Scouting for Girls* (the official handbook of the Girl Scouts) and was responsible for all the illustrations for this section, along with the tests in the various subjects, which were supplied by the

museum. In the Foreword to Section XV, the AMNH extended 'a cordial invitation to all Girl Scouts to visit the Department of Education if wishing help in preparation for their Nature Study tests'.[18] Given Fisher's longstanding involvement with the scouting movement in New York City, it's hardly surprising that he should team up with Seton when planning to film Native Americans in the Southwest in summer 1927.

Born Ernest Evan Thompson in 1860 in South Shields, Tyne and Wear, England, Seton turned his family name into a middle name to pique his father whom he had rejected (the name Seton was prominent in the patrilineal line). Immigrating with his family to Ontario, Canada in 1866, Seton returned to the UK in 1879 to study art at the Royal Academy in London (he also studied art in Paris in the 1890s) and after visiting New York in 1883, launched his career as a writer,

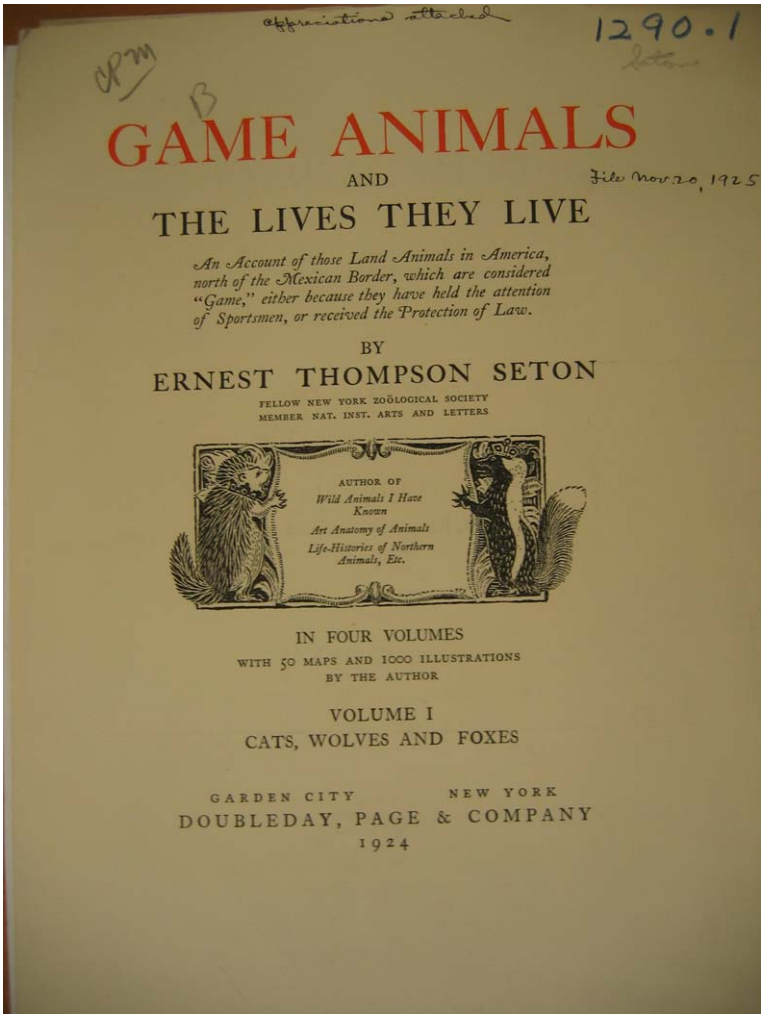


Figure 6. Cover of Edward Thompson Seton's 1924 book *Game Animals and the Lives They Live*.

wildlife illustrator, and naturalist (Figure 6). Seton founded the youth organization the Woodcraft League in 1902 and four years later met Lord Baden-Powell (founder of the international scouting movement), who had read Seton's Woodcraft stories, the first of which was published in *Ladies Home Journal* in 1902 and eventually anthologized in *The Birch Bark Roll of the Woodcraft Indians* in 1906.[19] Seton was instrumental in forming the Boy Scouts of America in 1910 – his descendents claim that Lord Baden-Powell, who created the English Boy Scouts in 1907, borrowed heavily from Seton without giving him due credit – and was the organization's first Chief Scout.[20]

Even though *Camping Among the Indians* is identified as the AMNH Woodcraft Indian Trip [WIT] in the *AMNH Film Archive Catalog*, suggesting that funding came from both the museum and the Woodcraft League (i.e. Seton), in the notice of the expedition that appeared in the 'Report of the President' section of the AMNH's 59th annual report there is no mention of AMNH support and the title is simply 'The Woodcraft Indian Trip'. Of the five expeditions listed on this same page of the 1927 report, all begin with the word 'Expedition' and identify the sponsor – such as J.P. Morgan in the case of 'Expedition to Nevada' and the Jesup Fund (named after the museum's founding President, Morris K. Jesup) in the case of 'Expedition to the Hackensack Valley' – except for the Woodcraft Indian Trip, which is simply called the 'Woodcraft Indian Trip'. In fact, despite including this designation in a heading that appears in capital letters, we are told once again in the five-and-a-half-line summary that 'This was known as the Woodcraft Indian Trip'.[21]

Not wanting to make a mountain out of a molehill, this distinction between trip and expedition provides us with some clues as to the circumstances surrounding *Camping Among the Indians* and how visual media were perceived by the AMNH. In my opinion, the most obvious reason why it was not labelled an expedition is because neither Fisher nor Seton were undertaking anthropological fieldwork in the traditional sense (a version of the then still-emerging participant observation method where anthropologists would live with the community for an extended stay and immerse themselves in the culture), but embarking on a journey for the express purpose of gathering visual data about the dancing and sign language of the American Indian tribes (the sign language did not make it into *Camping Among the Indians*, although it was apparently shown during a children's lecture at the AMNH in 3 May 1928). Whether this distinction was the reason for the designation 'trip' as opposed to 'expedition' is difficult to ascertain, but few would disagree that the word 'expedition' has a great deal more gravity than the word 'trip'; 'trips' are what tourists take, suggesting a relatively short, fun-filled experience, such as 'Win a Trip to Disney' or as *Webster's Dictionary* states 'a single journey or course of travel taken as part of one's duty' such as 'making a trip to the bank'. 'Expedition', on the other hand, is defined as 'an excursion, journey, or voyage made for some specific purpose', evoking greater seriousness of endeavor. The annual report also makes reference to the Woodcraft Indians Trip as extending 'from North Dakota to Arizona, including visits to the Grand Canyon and the Petrified Forest'. Without challenging the significance of the visual research undertaken by Fisher and Seton, it's hard not to at least entertain the possibility of reading the Woodcraft Indians Trip as Fisher's and Seton's summer road trip that culminated in the photographs and film footage shot in the Southwest. Both men probably considered that their expertise in their respective fields was not in doubt; Seton was an expert in Indian sign language, and Fisher an experienced photographer confident enough to shoot

the 16-mm film himself. At the same time, neither man had formal anthropological training, and perhaps for this reason, the museum chose not to call this an expedition in their annual reports.[22]

The title *Camping Among the Indians* may also be a thinly veiled reference to Seton's Woodcrafters affiliation and a nod to the emerging camping and youth club movements in America at the time. The 1924 'Report from the President' in the AMNH annual report made reference to the boys of America needing 'Cave-Man Training' in the 'Whole World of Nature' – an argument that caused quite a stir in the popular press, which ran stories highlighting the cave-man analogy.[23] The museum received letters of support on the topic, including one from Dan Beard (co-founder with Seton and William D. Boyce of the American Boy Scouts) of the Dan Beard Outdoor School, who wrote President Osborn at the AMNH thanking him for 'taking the time to come out and announce yourself a believer in the primitive training that the outdoor world gives to a man, boy or woman'. Camping and the outdoor life developed the five senses and even gave 'longevity to a race', in Beard's opinion. It was for this reason, he claimed, that the Dan Beard Outdoor School had made 'camping and outdoor work, fire-building without matches, shacks, shanty and shelter building, matters of prime importance in scout work'.[24] So while earlier generations may have been frightened by the sight of 'one of our big touring cars… or puzzled as to how to send a telegram' (to quote from *Scouting for Girls*), they knew 'an immense number of practical things that have been entirely left out of town-bred lives, and for pluck and resourcefulness in a tight place it is to be doubted if we can equal them today'.[25] That these groups turned to Native American survival techniques and appropriated traditional skills, such as the making of flint arrowheads, should come as no surprise, and it was Seton's own Woodcraft League formed in 1902 that was at the forefront of these developments.

The website of the Ernest Thompson Seton Institute traces the Woodcraft League to the formation of the first Woodcraft Tribe, established at Windyghoul Estate, Cos Cob, Connecticut in 1902 when Seton, rather than press charges against some local boys who had vandalized his gate, decided to invite them to his estate to re-paint it, and later beguiled them with tales of Native Americans and nature. The boys elected a Chief, Second Chief, a keeper of the Tally and keeper of the wampum, and the first Woodcraft Tribe was established (Seton was known as Chief Black Wolf of the Woodcraft League). The preamble to the 'Nine Principles of Woodcraft' from the *Book of Woodcraft* written by Seton begins with a vision statement for the work of the League:

> This is a time when the whole nation is turning toward the Outdoor Life, seeking in it the physical regeneration so needful for continued national existence – [and] waking to the fact long known to thoughtful men, that those live longest who live nearest to the ground – that is, who live the simplest life of primitive times.[26]

The AMNH played host to various Woodcraft events such as the Blue Sky Potlatch (Figure 7) consisting of a 'Contest and Exhibit in Handicraft and Nature Lore' organized by the Woodcraft League of America in April 1928 and held in the Exhibition Hall of the School Services Building. The AMNH press release called it the 'first potlatch of its kind to be held on the island of Manhattan' and 'probably the first potlatch ever held on the Atlantic Seaboard', defining the event as a 'great get-together, council, powwow, exhibit, contest, gift-giving, or almost anything you

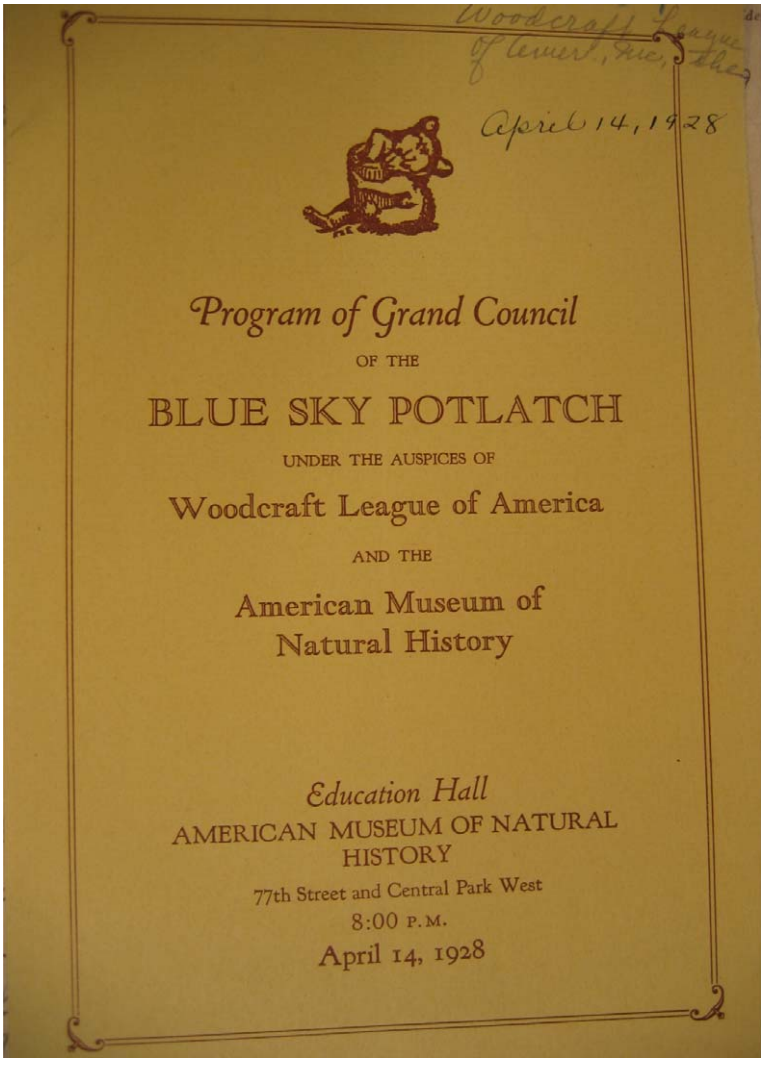


Figure 7. Program of the "Blue Sky Potlatch" held at the American Museum of Natural History, April 14, 1928. Courtesy American Museum of Natural History.

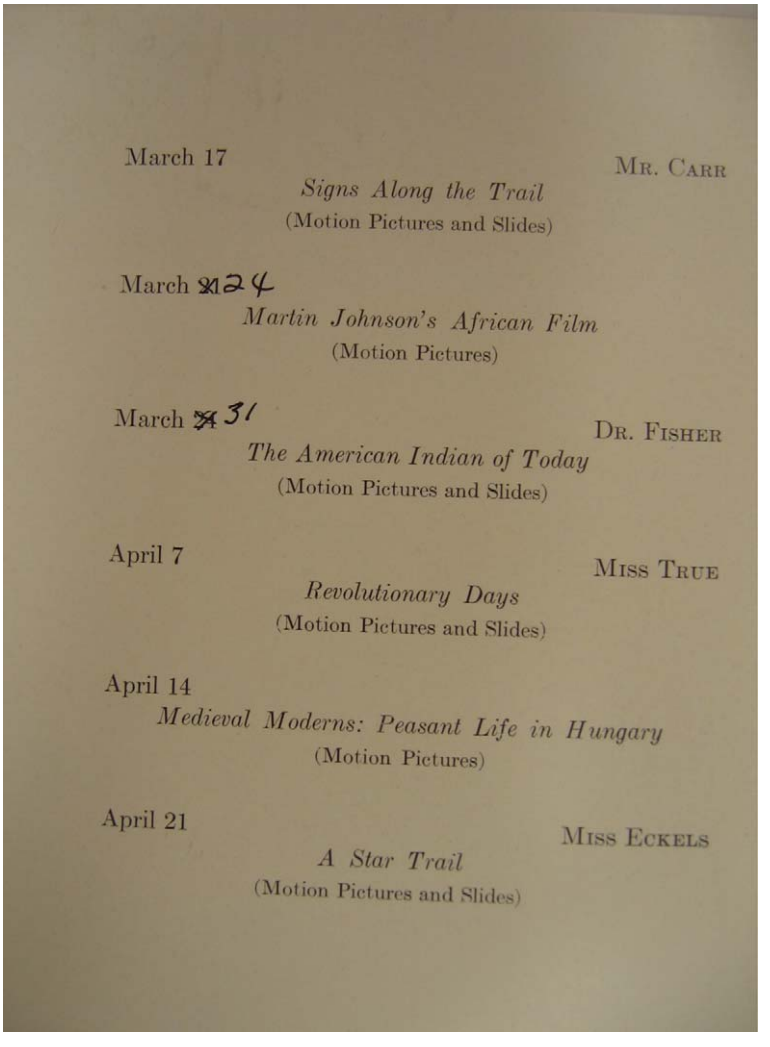
want to call it'.[27] According to a report in the *New York Sun*, participants could enter contests in 'wood carving, modeling, decoration of moccasins, war bonnets, peace pipes, tom toms, totems, totem poles, miscellaneous handicraft, prints, photography of wildlife, posters illuminating outdoor work and original hiking songs'.[28] Invitations were sent to the YMCA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, Salvation Army, Children's Village, Playground Recreation Association and other outdoor organizations to participate in the two-day event, which culminated in a Grand Council in which 'the final judgment between competitors will be given and in which there will be many other opportunities to demonstrate in Scout reports, in Woodcraft, in Indian dancing and in games'.[29] Winners in each of the 25 categories were awarded prizes (Fisher was one of the judges) and their objects dis-

played at the museum. Despite no mention of the Potlatch either being filmed or motion pictures being screened, it is worth noting that shortly before this event – on 31 March, to be precise – Fisher first showed at least some footage from *Camping Among the Indians* as part of a 'Saturday Afternoon Program for Children and Parents' on 7 May. Fisher gave another lecture entitled 'The American Indian of Today' (underscoring the coevalness mentioned above) as part of the 'Free Lectures for the Children of Public Schools' (Figure 8) series, one of eight that fell under the rubric 'Nature and Industries'. The museum's short lecture description is worth quoting in full:

> *Visit* the Indian Reservations from North Dakota to Arizona with Dr. Fisher, Ernest Thompson Seton and their friends.
>
> *Learn* how the Indians talk by signs, put up their tipis, make pottery and bake their bread.
>
> *See* the Navajo, Pueblo and Sioux Indians do their ceremonial dances in fantastic dress of beads and feathers.[30]

While the connection between the Blue Sky Potlatch and Fisher's lecture is not obvious, there is much to be gained from considering how they were part of a broader institutional effort on the part of the AMNH to educate visitors about Native American culture and to promote the Woodcraft League and various youth organizations. Both supported the ideology of salvage ethnography, holding up Native American culture as a mirror to reflect those cross-cultural values worthy of bringing to Euro-American culture; as Seton explained, 'While… it was lessons in the study of our Indians, it was, in the face of it, a great lesson in the study of *ourselves*, and guidance to other leaders who wish to lead young America out of doors'.[31]

The Blue Sky Potlatch and *Camping Among the Indians* were unique ways of experiencing Native American culture; and yet in both events, American Indians were something of absent presences, signified indexically in the case of the film and iconographically in the case of the Potlatch (other than Native Americans who may have participated in the competition and turned up on the day, there was one Indian judge, a woman identified only as Miss Delonia).[32] It is interesting to consider how the aims of the Woodcraft League, which took credit for co-sponsoring the Potlatch at the museum, are re-signified in Fisher's lecture and in the film. The three active verbs at the start of the lecture's promotional summary ('Visit', 'Learn' and 'See') are taken up in turn, with virtual travel, knowledge, and vision the key structuring principles. Audience members are invited to re-enact this journey with Fisher, Seton and 'their friends' ('Visit'), although it is unclear whether the latter are associates of Fisher's and Seton's who accompanied them on the expedition or Native Americans they met along the way. Indeed, the most logical explanation for the word 'friends' may be the fact that this was a children's lecture, and for children, the category of 'friend' is pretty broad. The idea of learning from the lecture ('Learn') comes second, positioned before sight (rather curiously), which appears last ('See'). Somewhat strangely, though, there is reference made to sign language and tipi-making in the lecture that is not in the extant print, suggesting one of three possibilities: that footage of these cultural practices *was* shot by Fisher and Seton,



March 17

MR. CARR

Signs Along the Trail

(Motion Pictures and Slides)

March ~~21~~ 24

Martin Johnson's African Film

(Motion Pictures)

March ~~31~~ 31

DR. FISHER

The American Indian of Today

(Motion Pictures and Slides)

April 7

MISS TRUE

Revolutionary Days

(Motion Pictures and Slides)

April 14

Medieval Moderns: Peasant Life in Hungary

(Motion Pictures)

April 21

MISS ECKELS

A Star Trail

(Motion Pictures and Slides)

Figure 8. "Free Lectures for Children" Calendar showing "The American Indian of Today" lecture that featured footage from *Camping Among the Indians*, March 31, 1928. Courtesy American Museum of Natural History.

but edited out of the extant 22-minute version; that magic lantern slides were substituted for film at this point in the lecture; or that stock footage acquired by the AMNH (or a film made by another curator) was used instead. A reference to 'four reels of excellent motion pictures… [of the] Sioux, Navajos, and Pueblos, as well as some three hundred still photographs', in addition to a mention in the 1927 annual report that the motion pictures had been 'edited and used in several lectures for the public schools', suggests that *Camping Among the Indians* represents just over one-third of the entire footage shot by Fisher on the trip.[33]

But how did Fisher's lecture and *Camping Among the Indians* fit into the museum's programme of visual education? Why, for example, was the film designed simply to supply footage for children's lectures and general audiences at

the AMNH, or was it primarily addressed to professional anthropologists as a document of Native American dances and the intertribal ceremonial life of the Southwest? My hunch is that it served the former goal. Fisher's and Seton's film was produced during a period when ethnographic cinema was inevitably associated with the commercial adventurer epics made by figures like Martin Johnson, Ernest Shoedsack, and Merian C. Cooper, whose films laced Hollywood narrative with scenes of ethnographic spectacle. Nevertheless, given its status as a museum-sponsored expeditionary film with few apparent aspirations beyond serving the museum's mission of collecting visual records of Native American life, how did its filmmakers negotiate these distinct agendas?

Why, for example, was the film never screened on its own (as many other films were at the museum), but instead submerged unannounced within the lecture format or deployed in excerpted form in the Dramagraph? While we don't know with certainty how much of the footage Fisher shot was used in the lecture – the extant film, at just 21 minutes, could easily have been screened in its entirety – he probably showed edited highlights during the 31 March and 7 May 1928 lectures. Footage from Fisher's and Seton's expedition was also shown on 28 December 1928 as part of an afternoon of screenings for the American Association for the Advancement of Science conference, co-hosted by the AMNH and the Teacher's College, to be shown alongside one or two reels shot by Carl Akeley (African gorillas); Martin Johnson (lions and elephants); and AMNH ornithologist Roy Chapman Andrews (dune dwellers). For some reason, Fisher ended up not showing *Camping Among the Indians,* but instead a film about Lapland, even though the rest of the line-up was unchanged. Tracing the exhibition history of *Camping Among the Indians* at the AMNH offers us vital clues for understanding how little the expedition film conformed to the protocols of nonfiction cinema or even ethnographic film; the extant film, while a vibrant indexical trace of the Woodcraft–AMNH trip, tells only part of the story, and, while there are archival traces of the footage in the AMNH, there is still a great deal that is unknown.

Conclusion

In service to the missions of the AMNH and the Woodcraft League, *Camping Among the Indians* represents an effective promotional tool for the study of Native American culture during a period of significant social, cultural, and economic change. The film functions as an advertisement of sorts for its various stakeholders, simultaneously promoting the Intertribal Ceremonial, the AMNH, and the Woodcraft League. And even though we can detect a whiff of salvage ethnography in the film's decision to record so many dances, Fisher and Seton do not hide evidence of modernity and the lived realities of native peoples living in a Southwestern reservation. The film makes the case that the rich visual ceremonial dance culture of the American Indian is *still* worth seeing for yourself (despite the heyday of the Snake Dance bonanza, when thousands of tourists flocked to the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even performing dances at train stations as tourists disembarked), although if actual travel is impossible, the film might serve as an effective substitute.

If a camera on a tripod was a common sight in the Southwest of the 1920s, it was no less engrained into the institutional philosophy of the AMNH; by 1927, the same year *Camping Among the Indians* was made, the AMNH felt completely at ease

appropriating industry-driven motion picture marketing in its annual reports, an issue explored by Peter Decherney and Haidee Wasson with regard to the prestige sought by cinema in relation to museums and the arts, even when referring to lantern slides;[34] the lofty prose in the President's 1927 Report could very well have been lifted straight from *Moving Picture World* or any other industry magazine: 'thousands of pupils', we are told, 'are enabled to visit the haunts of birds, mammals, and other creatures; to see how their neighbors live in other hemispheres as well as their own, and to grasp, in a more comprehensive way, the story of life, past and present, the world over'.[35]

Of course, given the often inflated rhetoric surrounding the pedagogical uses of motion pictures at this time, and even earlier during the silent cinema period, we should interpret cinema's lauded status as driven as much by self-serving agendas as by genuine beliefs in its elevated status above the other related arts; in some instances, the hyperbole is part and parcel of a broader industry-driven effort to recuperate film from its low-brow, mass culture connotations and to legitimize film use in schools.[36] The AMNH doubtless felt quite comfortable buying into this discursive construction of film, and in many respects had few other options given its status as a high cultural institution of refined entertainment; all of the films shown under the auspices of the AMNH had to confer a set of brand associations to the public, otherwise, the costs of appropriating the medium to further the AMNH's mission would have simply been too high, especially if it meant alienating some of the museum's wealthy stakeholders.

The endearing young children performing the Buffalo dances at the start of *Camping Among the Indians* clearly evoke the intergenerational appeal of cultural practices that unite family and tribal members in celebration of their rich cultural heritage, although it's more likely that the 'playing Indian of the scene' aspect was what appealed to Seton and Fisher the most and was celebrated in the Woodcraft League. Even though the Native Americans represented in *Camping Among the Indians* are 'spoken for' by the AMNH and aspects of their material culture viewed *ad infinitum* in the Dramagraph, the film circumscribes a particular moment in the late 1920s when ideas of cultural sovereignty were finding a new lease of life through movements such as the Woodcraft League, whose members took classes at the AMNH (Figure 9). I would therefore argue that the film represents both a consolidation of earlier visual and discursive tropes within the brief history of ethnographic filmmaking as well as a desire to represent encounters and vibrant aspects of Native American life such as the hugely popular Intertribal Ceremonial in Gallup.

Reading *Camping Among the Indians* within the context of the Woodcraft League gives us better insight into how the expedition film, as distinct from other types of ethnographic film at the time, found a small audience and important ally in the American Museum of Natural History. Resurrected from a mute entry in the AMNH's film catalogue, *Camping Among the Indians* has hopefully come alive in this essay, turning into a regenerative text that thickens with each interpretive encounter. It now asks (or wants) so much of audiences that in some ways it is hard to know where to begin, a beguiling transformation characteristically resulting from the sustained scrutiny of the scattered shards of museum-sponsored expedition film.

Figure 9. Woodcraft League members attending a weaving class at the AMNH. Negative # 311880. Courtesy American Museum of Natural History.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. For a discussion of the expedition film, see Staples 2005 and Brown 2001.
2. The Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial occurs every summer and according to the official website. 'Nowhere else on Earth can you experience tribal ceremonial dances, a contest pow-wow, indoor and outdoor arts and crafts markets, all Indian rodeos, a world class hurried art show, opportunities to buy authentic Native American art and jewelry, parades. . . all in one location at one time' (www.gallup-ceremonial.org, accessed 8 September 2010). See Wade (1985) and Jenkins (2004) for historical context on the ceremonial's relationship to the Native American art markets and promotion of spirituality. For more on Martinez, see Marriott 1987; Peterson and Harlow 1992.
3. For more on Martinez, see Marriott 1987; Peterson and Harlow 1992.
4. Fore more on the Dramagraph, see Griffiths 2008, 243–6.
5. My thanks to Peter Decherney for raising some of these issues in his role as respondent to an earlier version of this essay I presented at the Columbia Seminar in Film and Interdisciplinary Studies, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 12 March 2009.
6. Auerbach 2007, 104–5.
7. Rabinovitz 2002, 44–5.
8. Seton 1915, xiii.
9. Mitchell 2005, 46.
10. Griffiths 2002, 127–48.
11. See Griffiths 2001.

12. For more on Edison's early Native American films shot both in the Black Maria and in the field, see Griffiths 2002, 171–84.
13. MacDougall 2006, 3.
14. Nichols defines axiographic space as the 'question of how values, particularly an ethics of representation comes to be known and experienced in relation to space' (Nichols 1991, 77).
15. The nine leading principles included: recreation; camp life; self-government with adult guidance; the magic of the campfire; woodcraft pursuits (riding, hunting, camper-craft, scouting, mountaineering, Indian craft, first aid, signalling, and boating); honours by standards; personal decoration for personal achievement; a heroic ideal; and 'picturesqueness' in everything. From Seton, 'Nine Important Principles of Woodcraft', available at www.inquiry.net/traditional/seton/woodcraft/9_principles.htm (accessed 11 October 2011).
16. Rosen 2003, 50–1.
15. Mitchell 2005, 49.
18. *Scouting for Girls* 1923, 373.
19. Biographical information about Ernest Thompson Seton available at www.etsetoninstitute.org/biography (accessed 11 October 2011). Also see David L. Witt, *Ernest Thompson Seton, The Life and Legacy of an Artist and Conservationist* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs, Smith, 2010).
20. Both Fisher and Seton were married twice; Fisher's second marriage was to the Native American performer Te Ata, while Seton's first marriage to wealthy socialite, traveller, and founder of the women's writers club, Grace Gallati, ended in divorce in 1935 and he married Julia M. Buttree. Each man had two daughters (the second adopted in the case of Seton).
21. Anon., American Museum of Natural History annual report 1927, 99.
22. It was referred to as an 'expedition' in the Minutes of the 'Luncheon Meeting of Trustees, Educational Committee', 5 October 1927, under the heading 'Summer Activities'. The annual report, however, is perhaps the more accurate indicator, since it reflects the museum's public image. Minutes in Box 1237.3, Central Archives, Special Collections, American Museum of Natural History (hereafter abbreviated to CA-SC/AMNH).
23. Anon., American Museum of Natural History annual report, 1924.
24. Letter from Dan Beard to President Osborn, 3 March 1925 (Box 1248.2 CA-SC/AMNH).
25. *Scouting for Girls* 1923, 17.
26. Seton, 'Nine Important Principles of Woodcraft', www.inquiry.net/traditional/seton/woodcraft/9_principles.htm (accessed 11 October 2011).
27. Anon., 'Blue Sky Potlatch Held at American Museum', *AMNH Press Bulletin*, 7 April 1928, p. 1 (Box 1267, CA-SC/AMNH).
28. 'Plan Outdoor Crafts Exhibit: Natural History Museum and Woodcraft League Unite', *New York Sun*, 8 March 1928.
29. 'Blue Sky Potlatch Held at American Museum', *AMNH Press Bulletin*, 7 April 1928, 1–2 (Box 1267, CA-SC/AMNH).
30. 'Free Lectures for the Children of Public Schools', Spring 1928 brochure, description of lecture on p. 6 (BOX 1267, CA-SC/AMNH).
31. Letter from Seton to Sherwood, 4(?) April 1928, in File N-Z 1928 (1267N), Box 1267 (1928–31), CA-SC/AMNH (emphasis added). Two AMNH membership subscriptions were offered as prizes and the AMNH did not charge Seton or the Woodcraft League for any services rendered, viewing the 'work that we did as the Museum's contribution to the meeting'. In response to Woodcraft League Secretary Farida Wiley's request to Sherwood to repeat the event the following year, Sherwood said he would talk with her further about the possibility. Wiley told Sherwood in a letter of thanks that she was disappointed at the turnout, although still felt pleased that it had been pulled off, since organizations 'do not usually care to co-operate in a joint exhibit' (letter from Wiley to Sherwood, 22 April 1928; ibid).
32. Press Bulletin, AMNH, 7 April 1928, p. 2.
33. Anon., American Museum of Natural History annual report, 1927, p. 99.
34. Decherney 2005, 13–40; Wasson 2005.
35. 'The Museum and School Service' in *Building the American Museum, 1869–1927: Fifty Ninth Annual Report of the Trustees* (New York: AMNH, 1928), 98.

36. For a discussion of how discourses of Americanization played out in this debate over cinema and respectability, see Abel 1999.

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