



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
AMERICAN JEWISH
HISTORY

NEWS RELEASE

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Early Filmmaker Sigmund Lubin Celebrated in *Now Showing: "Pop" Lubin's Silent Film Empire*

The National Museum of American Jewish History will open ***Now Showing: "Pop" Lubin's Film Empire***, on Sunday, September 22. *Now Showing* will tell the story of Jewish filmmaker Sigmund Lubin (ca. 1841-1923) and his production company, Lubin Manufacturing Company, which was based in Philadelphia with studios across the country. It will include artifacts ranging from publicity stills and behind-the-scenes photos to posters and films and will run through February 7, 2014.



Portrait of Sigmund Lubin
National Museum of American Jewish History
Donated by Jean M. Fulton in honor of Dr. Deborah M.
Pressman and Cecilia Lubashur Neuman.

A passion for scientific experimentation and innovative technology—along with a strong ambition to achieve the American dream—led this spirited German Jewish immigrant to become a central figure of the film industry in its most nascent stages.

Arriving in the United States during its centennial year, Lubin peddled eyeglasses across America before settling in Philadelphia in 1885. He began making magic lantern slides as a side venture in his optical shop, and after viewing early motion picture demonstrations at a trade fair, was hooked on the new medium. In the late 1890s Lubin bought an early camera and began to experiment by creating films in his backyard.

Soon he was marketing his own camera equipment, opening theaters, and distributing films, eventually establishing a network of studios that stretched across the country.

The crown jewel of this empire was Betzwood, a dignified estate outside of Philadelphia that Lubin planned to turn into a model industrial village—and the greatest movie studio of the day. Beloved by employees who called him “Pop” Lubin, he shared his success by providing generous salaries, medical benefits, and free hot lunches to all of his workers. He even paid salaries to some of his retired actors.

Lubin produced over 3,000 silent movies during the two decades of his film career. From the 1896 short film *Horse Eating Hay* to 1916's *The Light at Dusk*, the final Lubin Manufacturing Company release, his studio's repertoire ranged from educational films, dramas, and disaster movies to mysteries, comedies, and epic war films. A combination of calamities, including a spectacular fire in his North Philadelphia film studio, forced him to declare bankruptcy and return to ophthalmology in 1916.



Photograph, behind-the-scenes from a Lubin production
National Museum of American Jewish History
Donated by Jean M. Fulton in honor of Dr. Deborah M. Pressman and Cecilia Lubashur
Neuman

Though Sigmund Lubin may not be a household name, he was a hero to the generation that built Hollywood in the 1920s. When Lubin's former associates—including luminaries such as Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, Louis B. Mayer, Samuel Goldwyn, and many others—learned that his widow was penniless and in declining health, they honored Lubin's memory by raising funds to assist her. In an interview, Cecil B. DeMille later recognized Lubin for rescuing the first feature film shot in Hollywood, *The Squaw Man*, from severe technical problems.

Now Showing: "Pop" Lubin's Film Empire will tell the story of a scion of the early days of commercial films through artifacts, photographs, and moving pictures. It will include two films that Lubin

released in 1908 and 1909 to fight antisemitism. In the 1920s, other producers made films in the same vein, including 1922's *Breaking Home Ties*.

The last film produced at the Betzwood studio by Lubin's successors, *Breaking Home Ties* tells the story of Jewish immigrants who flee pre-revolutionary Russia for a new life in America. In contrast to the pervasive negative stereotyping of Jews and the escalating antisemitism promoted by Henry Ford and the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, the film presented Jews as loving family members and portrayed their lives and customs in a sympathetic light.

The only surviving print of this rare silent film – long thought to be lost – was found in a Berlin archive in 1984 by **Sharon Pucker Rivo** of the National Center for Jewish Film and has now been restored. On **September 22 at 7:00 pm**, in conjunction with the opening of *Now Showing*, the Museum will host the Philadelphia premiere of *Breaking Home Ties*. The screening will include a live score composed, arranged, and performed by **Donald Sosin**, whose work as a silent film composer and pianist has taken him all over the United States and to parts of Europe. A discussion will follow, featuring Sosin, **Dr. Joseph P. Eckhardt**, Professor Emeritus of History at Montgomery County Community College, and **Lisa Rivo**, Associate Director of the National Center for Jewish Film.

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The National Museum of American Jewish History, located on historic Independence Mall in Philadelphia, brings to life the 350-year history of Jews in America. Tracing the stories of how Jewish immigrants became Jewish Americans, the Museum invites visitors of all backgrounds to share their own stories and reflect on how their histories and identities shape and are shaped by the American experience. An open door for all, NMAJH honors the past and contributes to a better future by sharing the power of imagination and ideas, culture and community, leadership and service, in ways that turn inspiration into action.

The National Museum of American Jewish History is located at 101 South Independence Mall East at the corner of Fifth and Market Streets in Philadelphia. Museum hours are Tuesday to Friday, 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, and Saturday and Sunday 10:00 am - 5:30 pm. NMAJH is closed most Mondays, including federal holidays and some Jewish holidays. Museum admission is \$12.00 for adults,

\$11.00 for senior citizens and youth, free for children 12 and under, Museum Members, and active military with ID. For information on the Museum, the public may call 215.923.3811 or visit the website at <http://www.nmajh.org>.