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Thayer Soule and Travelogues at Mechanics Hall

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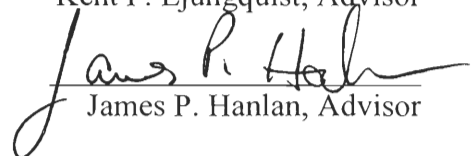
Bruno D'Elia

Bruno D'Elia

Date: June 20, 2002

Approved:

Kent P. Ljungquist, Advisor



James P. Hanlan, Advisor

Abstract

Thayer Soule was one of the most prominent travelogue lecturers to have ever come to Mechanics Hall in Worcester. His career began in the late 1930's under the tutelage of Burton Holmes and continued into the early 1990's, when he retired. Although Soule learned much from Holmes, he taught much more, by introducing new technologies and modernizing the travelogue business. Soule's career included the heyday of the travelogue business from the 1960's to the 1970's.

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Introduction

Traveling has always been an important part of man's behavior. Ever since he learned to walk, he moved around to new places, either to seek food to sustain himself, or out of mere curiosity. Almost as important as the trip itself was communicating news about the travels to all the others who had not gone. For many centuries this was done by word of mouth to close friends and relatives. As traveling for leisure became more common, people began to write about their trips in newspapers. Soon afterwards, sometime in the early to mid 1800s, someone decided to make presentations describing their trips to live audiences and the travelogues were born.

The most common definition of a travelogue, or travel lecture, is any film presentation accompanied by a live narrator. Essentially, a travelogue only exists when both film and lecturer are together. The film by itself would be nothing more than a video. Topics can be far ranging but are generally limited to a type of "guided" tour of any given geographical place. The first lectures were small, and held at churches or other social meeting places, and were called travel lectures. During these lectures, the lecturer gave accounts of his trips abroad, relying on props and costumes for a visual element. A previous IQP goes in depth into the main travel lecturers of this period. This IQP picks up where the previous left off, at the transition from Burton Holmes to Thayer Soule. This transition is especially significant since not only does it represent the passing of generations between two of the most prominent travelogue lecturers to date but it also represents the changing times. Holmes was the final lecturer to use still photography and black and white photography. As such, Soule spearheaded many innovations in the

travelogue business such as color motion pictures and was around during the peak years of travelogue popularity, which occurred in the 1960s and 1970s.

Mechanics Hall has also been an important part of the travelogue circuit right from the beginning. This circuit is made up of all the venues that host travelogue series. Since its inception, Mechanics Hall has sponsored many different cultural and entertainment activities. These activities were, and still are, an important part of the local cultural agenda. Among these activities were the travelogues, which had a constant presence there for over a century, until the series was terminated in 1994.

This IQP seeks to explore how the travelogues changed over time at Mechanics Hall and in the US from the 1950's up to the present day. It will also look into possible motives for the decline in the popularity of travelogues.

In order to do this, some general aspects of travelogues will be examined. These will be: a brief history of Mechanics Hall and its activities in Worcester, a biography of Thayer Soule, a history of camera technology, and the history of the professional travelogue industry. Following these sections, an analysis of possible motives for the decline in the popularity of travelogues will be provided.

The methodology consists of researching all relevant sources to find information on travelogue history. This includes library sources, both public and WPI, internet sources, and the private collection of Joseph Lemire. Another important source of material for the project came from two interviews. One is with Thayer Soule, one of the leading travelogue lecturers of his time, and the other is with Joseph Lemire, a Worcester resident who attended travelogues for many years and has first hand accounts of the travelogue presentations.

Background on Mechanics Hall

Mechanics Hall was built in 1857 in order to provide a meeting place for the Worcester County Mechanics Association. The Mechanics Association was made up of a group of Worcester citizens who were employed in manual labor such as artisans, tradesmen, pipe-fitters, and factory workers. They felt they needed an organization that would help them keep up with the new skills demanded of an ever-changing industry. Thus, on Feb. 5, 1842, the Mechanics Association was established with an initial membership of one hundred and fifteen people. Over the next decade or so, the Mechanics Association sponsored lecture series, collected technical books for a library (since most people could not afford to buy books themselves), and began teaching classes in areas such as mechanical drawing and the reading of blueprints (Erskine 6,7).

In 1848, the Mechanics Association decided to have a mechanical arts fair. This first fair was held at the Worcester and Nashua depot on Lincoln Square. Two more fairs were held in 1849 and 1851, but this time at the Merrifield buildings. The success of all three fairs, and the fact that the Mechanics Association did not have a place of its own to hold these fairs, drove them to the idea of building a hall for the Mechanics Association (Erskine 10).

A committee headed by Ichabod Washburn was formed in 1854 to determine where the hall would be constructed and how it would be financed. They decided on a lot on Main St. By mid 1855, construction had begun, with the cornerstone being laid in September. The hall was completed nearly a year and a half later and was dedicated on March 19, 1857. It became a symbol of pride for Worcester industrialists.

For the half century, Mechanics Hall enjoyed much success and was in constant use. It was used for classes, programs, lectures, and housed a library. The lectures were especially popular with up to five lectures per week at times. The lectures were based on a variety of topics, such as agriculture, physics, travel, and pretty much anything that might draw an interested crowd. Some of the early travel lecturers of the period were Bayard Taylor, John Stoddard, and Burton Holmes (Christenson 4,5). These three men helped shape the format of travel lectures and were very popular at the time. The first lecturers, such as Bayard Taylor, relied mostly on their verbal descriptions and costumes during their lectures. John Stoddard took things one step further by introducing slides into his show. The slides would be a mainstay of travel lectures until the advent of motion pictures.

The success of Mechanics Hall, however, began to fade as other venues were constructed and drew away a lot of its business. The Boys Trade School was opened in 1908 and began teaching all the classes that before were taught by the Mechanics Association. By the 1940's, the Hall had become no more than a sports hall (Erskine 30). Wrestling and boxing matches were held until the advent of television, which caused attendance to diminish greatly. The Hall was then leased as a skating rink, no doubt its low point since its construction.

There was a certain revival of popularity in Mechanics Hall driven by the travel lectures of Burton Holmes. This managed to draw more members and kept the Hall in service through troubled times. Many attempts were made to sell the Hall but there were no takers. By the 1970's it was decided that the Hall should undergo a restoration and, in 1977 Mechanics Hall was re-dedicated. The Hall began to be used again for cultural

events and an extensive lecture series was established. Mechanics Hall continues to be used for many events but the lecture series were terminated in 1992. Before the series was terminated, nearly 340 lectures were presented. Over the fifty year period from 1944 to 1994, when the series was ended, there were an average of seven to eight presentations per year with a peak of eleven presentations in 1990 (see appendix A). The topics covered the entire world but the great majority were about countries in Europe, with Asia coming in second (see appendix A). Attendance was good, with most presentations bringing in over half the capacity of Mechanics Hall, which comes out to around 800 to 900 people (see appendix F).

Thayer Soule

Thayer Soule's recollection of his interest in travel and travel lectures goes back to his earliest memories. It was from his early exposure that he developed into one of the most prominent travelogue lecturers of this century. He brought many innovations in technology and in establishing a tried and proven format for producing and presenting travelogues.

Soule was exposed to traveling by his grandparents. Although he never met his grandfather (he passed away before Soule was born), he had great influence on him and his family. His grandfather was one of the biggest dried apple transporters in America at the time. His grandmother showed Soule the pleasures of traveling and taught him these three tips, which Soule still follows:

- 1) get the cheapest room in the best hotel;
- 2) eat at the best restaurants;
- 3) live well and when the money is gone, go home.

Soule was also exposed to photography when he was young. He happened to live in Rochester, NY, the headquarters of Eastman Kodak, so it was natural that he was surrounded by people interested in, or related to, photography. Another strong influence on his formation as a photographer was his father, who was a commercial artist. He taught Soule the finer points of composition, color and perspective in photography.

In 1924, at seven years of age, the first of two events that led to his interest in travel lectures occurred. His parents took him to a Chautauqua tent in Wolcott, NY, to watch a travel movie. Carveth Wells presented "Africa's Mountains of the Moon". Soule said that after this night he made the decision to become a travel lecturer. The enthusiasm

generated by this experience led him to present his own travel lecture to his parents and close friends. He used a balopticon projector to project postcards he had, together with some narration.

Over the next few years Soule taught himself the basics of filming. Then, in 1935, he presented his first travel lecture to a big audience. The lecture's theme was Haiti, as he had been there during the summer after his high school graduation. He used a combination of thirty slides and nine minutes of motion pictures (with a three-minute color section) in his presentation. For the motion picture section, he used an Eastman model K camera. With it he could shoot twelve minutes of black and white video. He also used the new Kodachrome film for the color segment but, due to its high cost at the time, he was limited to only three minutes. He presented his show at schools, churches, and other places around town. Over the next couple of months he gave his show ten times, without ever being paid at any of them. This changed in January of 1936. He presented his Haiti travelogue at his first professional appearance in Christ Church. He was paid five dollars and did a few more presentations afterwards with a top fee of twenty-five dollars.

Soule entered college after the summer of 1935. He attended Harvard, in Cambridge, Mass. It was during his college years that Soule established many of his most rewarding relationships. In February of 1936 the second major event occurred. He was in Boston's Symphony Hall to see Burton Holmes' presentation on Rio de Janeiro. The presentation became a turning point in his life, as he decided at that moment that his future lay in the business of travel lectures. Soon thereafter, he met Burton Holmes in person and established what was to become a twenty-year partnership and relationship.

The year of 1936 was very busy for Soule. Not only did he meet Burton Holmes, but he produced his second travelogue and signed a contract to present his travelogues. This new travelogue was filmed on a trip to Mexico and was an all motion picture presentation. In the fall of 1936, Soule met Mr. Handley, of H. Handley Management. He signed a contract that would end up lasting his entire career. Mr. Handley soon found many dates for Soule to present his travelogues in the area. Among these were churches, women's clubs, and private schools in the Boston area. The new business drove Soule to produce new travelogues. In 1937 he produced a travelogue on Brazil and Peru and in the following year he produced one on the Belgian Congo.

Soule's relationship with Burton Holmes was formalized in 1937 when Holmes agreed to take him as his protege. Holmes offered steady work to Soule as a production assistant on his upcoming trip to Africa in 1938. Soule had to decline as he was still in college and could not take the time off. The following year Soule graduated from Harvard with an AB degree, magna cum laude in romance languages, and with minors in geography and public speaking. With school out of the way, Soule could now accept Holmes' offer and thus began his nineteen-year formal association with Holmes. Soule became Holmes' assistant, filming the motion pictures (which Holmes hated to do) while Holmes would take the still pictures. He was paid one hundred and fifty dollars a month.

Thayer Soule had a big break the following July. At the start of the month Soule left for Europe, en route to Italy, Venice, and other places in the Mediterranean. He was going to meet up with Holmes to film footage for a new movie but soon after arrival he received the bad news. Holmes would not be able to join Soule because of an accident which had seriously injured his leg. Because of this, Soule was left with full

responsibility to shoot the film that was needed. He gathered enough film and pictures for two full travelogues, one on Holland and the other on the Mediterranean. Back in New York, he and Holmes set about preparing the travelogues. Most of the film ended up being useless as they were of poor quality but the hand colored slides (a nifty technique used to liven up places) were of good quality.

After completing both films, Soule returned to Rochester to work on his own films and to do some lecturing on his own. He remained there until Christmas, when he returned to New York and had another good break. Holmes asked him to help with the narration of the Mediterranean travelogue. It appears Holmes was beginning to feel the age and wear of fifty years on the road and saw in Soule his successor. Holmes allowed Soule to speak for twenty minutes at each of the travelogue presentations at Carnegie Hall, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and Symphony Hall in Boston. This last venue was, in a certain way, coming full circle for Soule, since it had been there, four short years before, that Soule had seen Holmes for the first time and made the decision to become a travelogue producer.

In 1940, Soule continued lecturing and once again shot new travelogues for Holmes. They were called "In Our United States" and "Seven Wonders of the West". Both were shot with 16mm Kodachrome, as a sort of bet for Soule to demonstrate how good color film, Kodachrome film, could be. The films came out perfectly and, when Holmes finished viewing the final cuts of both travelogues all he said was, "Well, papa's got to go back to school!" Soule had instantly and definitely converted Holmes to color film.

The period leading up to his service in the army was definitely one of meager times. Although Soule was working almost round the clock with Holmes, he had little time to present his own travelogues and make money. On top of the 150 dollars Holmes paid to him, Soule was able to pull in \$830 in 1940 and \$1600 in 1941. Even for those days that was a small amount and, to survive Soule, needed alternate forms of income. One of these came in the form of work with Mrs. Homer Strong. She was an avid collector of pretty much anything she could get her hands on, but especially toys, paintings, furniture, bookplates, and doll houses. Her doll house collection would become the largest in the world. Soule's job was to photograph and catalog her enormous collection. This service provided steady income to Soule for nearly thirty years.

Soule joined the Marine Corps Photo Division in December of 1941 and was then commissioned into active duty on February 2, 1942. He went to the Pacific war as photographer for the Marine Corps. He returned from the war three years later, in November of 1945.

The war period had been one of growth for the travelogue business. The audience base had grown and more speakers had begun presenting travelogues. This put Soule in a great position, since he was also ready for the demands of becoming a full time lecturer. Although Soule spent the Christmas period at home, Holmes was busy setting up next season's dates (dates were set up at least a year in advance). He booked an amazing 187 dates for the 1946-1947 season. Since the 1945-1946 season was underway (seasons last from September to March) Soule was not busy presenting travelogues and set about preparing for the upcoming season, which promised to be extremely busy. He shot three new films called "Mexico", "The Great Southwest", and "The Road to Panama".

The next few seasons were a learning period for Soule. He started touring on Holmes' "Circuit" of travelogues, which was comprised of four major series. They were: California, which began in mid September; the East-Midwest, which began in late October; the East, which began in mid January; and to finish off, the Midwest, which began in late February. Soule was part of Holmes' "Circuit" until 1957, the year Holmes passed away. Although Soule followed this specific schedule, other travelogue presenters were free to set up their own season the way to best suit their own needs.

As Soule began to present more and more travelogues during the season, Holmes had to coach him so that Soule would give the most entertaining and rewarding experience possible. This included pointers and tips such as how to give a proper introduction. Holmes was pretty hard on his grammar, diction, and even the facts presented. Holmes knew that Soule was a Harvard graduate and, as such, expected a sophisticated presentation worthy of such a graduate. On the issue of proper presentation, Soule quotes Holmes as saying, "Remember, the PA system only makes things louder. It doesn't improve your diction or correct mistakes. It just makes your voice loud enough so everyone can hear you, and all of your mistakes." The grooming and nurturing provided by Holmes became the foundation for Soule's extremely successful career.

Burton Holmes passed away in 1957 and, as a consequence, Soule began presenting on his own. Although Soule was presenting on his own, he was not producing the travelogues alone. He was married twice. His first wife was Nancy Parks, who unfortunately passed away a few years after they got married. She accompanied Soule on all his production trips and would even take the kids along when possible. Nine years after her death, Soule remarried to Ruth Parks, with whom he remains to this day.

Soule remained in the travelogue business until 1995, when he decided to retire. During this period, he produced 25 travelogues (see appendix C) and presented over 4800 shows. Of these, his favorite to produce and present was “Venice and the Italian Lakes” (see appendix E). The audience for all these shows put together was an astounding 3,414,370 people. Soule presented on average 144 shows a year, with a peak number of 197 in the 1983-1984 season.

Travelogues: Uses of Technology

The camera is an integral part of the presentation of any travelogue. It is the camera which captures and conveys a visual image to go along with the live narration of the travelogue speaker. In the early days of travel lectures, the lecturer depended on local costumes, dress, and props to transmit the images and feeling of a faraway land. The next step in the development of travelogue technology came with the introduction of still cameras. This enabled the audience for the first time to see a distant land instead of relying on their imagination to paint a picture in their minds. Finally, the motion picture came into play, and the lecturer was able to transmit even more vividly the images of other countries.

The equipment used by travel lecturers has not developed extensively in the past sixty years. Most of the progress came in the field of projectors, which have become increasingly powerful and more efficient. The cameras used have also had a few improvements, but the 16mm format remained unchanged until a few years ago. In the past five years or so digital cameras have begun creeping in on the market, slowly replacing the 16 mm camera in some instances.

Up until the 1940's, most travelogue producers used 35mm black and white film for both still pictures and motion pictures. For still photography, the 35 mm Leica camera was the most popular camera. The Leica had certain design features that made it preferable over other cameras. First, the camera was small and easy to handle. Second, its design incorporated a short focal length and a very good lens which provided a large amount of exposure and allowed greater luminosity to enter the camera. This allowed

indoor pictures to be taken solely with the available lighting and with no flashes (Collins 223).

During this period there was no color film in existence, but this did not mean one could not have a color presentation. If the lecturer was using still photographs, the black and white slides could be hand colored one by one. It was a slow process but it was widely used before the advent of color film. One interesting effect of this technique is that many times viewers would not see the photographed locale as it actually was. It was common practice to color in dark or rainy skies to make it seem that there was sunny weather. Soule even quotes Burton Holmes, his mentor, as once saying, “By jove, look at that! It’s not the way it was, but that’s the way it should have been!” (Soule 36).

Up until the late 1930’s and early 1940’s, the 16mm format was not widely accepted in the travelogue business and most preferred 35mm film for motion pictures. This happened because of its small size, which made for difficult editing. Before being converted, Burton Holmes used to refer to 16 mm film as spaghetti (Soule 41). The 35mm was more than twice as wide and consequently much easier to handle during editing. The conversion to color film began in 1935. That year, Eastman Kodak introduced Kodachrome, a color film. It was available for both still (16/35mm) and motion photography (16mm). Thayer Soule immediately became an avid fan of the motion picture version of 16mm Kodachrome. One major reason Soule embraced this innovative technology so quickly was his young age. He was 18 at the time. Despite Soule’s enthusiasm, 16mm film was not widely accepted, especially since most travelogue producers were still accustomed to using slides and still photographs and all

previous attempts at producing quality, amateur color film had only been mildly successful (Collins 214).

A few years later, in 1940, Thayer Soule showed one of his 16mm films (a format which he had used most of his life) on the Mediterranean to Burton Holmes, one of the leading figures in the travelogue business. Holmes was instantly converted. He left behind the 35mm format that he had been using for nearly forty years. This would be one of the biggest single improvements in travelogue equipment, and the format of 16mm Kodachrome is still in use today. During this same period, around the mid 1940's, Holmes dropped slides from his show, preferring the quality of motion pictures. As to equipment, Holmes and Soule used 35mm Leica cameras for still photographs until they discontinued its use completely in favor of the 16mm Cine Kodak Special Mark II for motion pictures. Soule bought this camera in 1950 and used it until his retirement in 1995. The camera (together with the collection of all the travelogue films he produced) is now kept in the Smithsonian Institution (see appendix D).

One significant problem that existed with the Kodachrome film until recently is that it is a positive film. This means that no copies could be made and the original had to be treated with much care. If the original somehow got lost or damaged, there was no replacement available. Nowadays copies can be made from the original without losing quality.

More recently, digital cameras have slowly begun replacing the traditional 16mm format. Although it has become quite popular, it will probably never completely substitute the 16mm camera, which is very popular among the camera purists. The digital camera has advantages and disadvantages compared to 16mm film. Among its

advantages are the low production costs. Whereas total production costs using 16mm film runs between \$30,000 and \$50,000 for one complete travelogue, the cost with digital cameras runs between \$10,000 and \$20,000 (IMPALA, <http://www.travelfilms.net/>). This makes an enormous difference since it means that a travelogue lecturer will be earning a much larger profit margin on each travelogue. Although the production costs are lower for the digital camera, initial capital expenditure becomes a problem. Production, post-production, and projection equipment are significantly more expensive. Another drawback is that this type of camera is not as rugged as 16mm cameras. This may become a problem when filming in exotic or faraway places.

The projectors, on the other hand, have seen some improvement in the last five decades. Back in the 1940s, the double arc projector was the standard. Although arc projectors are still in use today, the arcs used back then were not very efficient. They lasted at most forty-five minutes before burning out and needing a carbon change. This led to the definition of the current format of travelogues. Since most travelogues were around eighty minutes long, a carbon change was needed halfway through the show. As a result of this, intermissions were incorporated into the show. These intermissions became an integral part of the show, providing a short break to socialize and meet the lecturer. Although carbons no longer need to be changed, this format of two forty-minute sections with an intermission has remained to this day. Besides the improvement in carbons, projectors have become much more reliable and portable. Soule describes some of the early projectors he saw as weighing nearly two hundred pounds. This is a load no travel lecturer could be expected to carry, since he normally travels alone and must carry all of his equipment with him. At the time the only portable projectors were not very potent,

thus limiting the size of the projection and the size of the audience. Soule himself used an Ampro 16mm Arc projector for over twenty years. The projector was quite large and had to be broken down into four pieces for transportation but gave incredible results (Soule 47). Even though they were cumbersome to lug around, he carried this projector to all his presentations and would leave it in each venue for a week (which was how long he usually spent in one city).

Travelogues: Industry Organizations

The industry of travelogues has gone through extensive changes since its early days. In the beginning, around the early to mid-1800's, travelogues were simple matters, having a solitary speaker in front of his audience talking about faraway lands with nothing more to show than local costumes from the area visited. Today, it has matured into an established, though small, market with many speakers showing color film together with their narration along with organizations encouraging and promoting the industry.

Up until the late 1940's and early 1950's, most travelogue producers ran one man shows. Not only did they have to shoot and produce their films; they had the arduous task of trying to set up a schedule of presentations. This was not so easy, since the lecturer had to take into account many things, such as distance between cities, availability of dates, and interest in the films he had to present. This last one was especially important, since a lecturer would not be able to present in a city if another lecturer had already done a presentation on a similar topic or destination. There were some benefits over not having a booking agent such as saving on commissions and being able to plan all the details of the season (Soule 138). If a lecturer was lucky, or had enough resources, he might have an agent to take care of the scheduling tasks.

The early fifties brought about the first major changes in the industry. These would slowly consolidate the industry and lead to a boom and peak in popularity in the 1960's. The first step was the creation of Associated Film Artists (AFA) in the early 1950's. It was a loose association of speakers with one common booking agent, working for the interest of all involved (Soule 140). This signaled a significant change in the industry and a new cooperation between speakers, since up to that point most speakers

would book themselves or have an agent representing only a handful of speakers. These agents were not very efficient, since they were not knowledgeable of the importance of routing and scheduling for the speakers. AFA hired Yetta Glazer as their agent for the entire association. She was very capable, since she was a wife of one of the speakers and knew the problems normally associated with booking a touring schedule. By 1958, AFA was the best booking agency for travelogue speakers in the country.

Eventually AFA closed in 1966. To replace it, Thayer Soule set up Film Lectures Inc. (FLI). Its function was similar to that of AFA in that its main purpose was to help with the members bookings for the season. FLI enjoyed a few years of success then went into decline because of internal troubles. By 1975, all members except for Soule and one other speaker had left to re-establish the AFA. In 1980, FLI was extinguished and Soule joined the FLA.

The same year FLI was set up, the Film Lecturers Association (FLA) was created. The FLA was not a booking agency like the AFA and FLI. Its main purpose was to bring together speakers so that they could gain more bargaining power and fight for higher fees (Soule 144). There was some controversy over membership in the FLA. Membership was extremely limited, because the members believed that, in the fight to raise fees, many big accounts would be lost, so they only allowed well established speakers who would not suffer too much if they lost a few dates to join. In response, the left out speakers created the International Film Presenters Association (IFPA) in 1969.

All this left a certain amount of confusion and mistrust among the speakers. This caused a consolidation to occur in the 1970's. The IFPA became IMPALA (International Motion Picture and Lecturers Association) in 1970. Together with FLA, IMPALA held

the first travelogue symposium in 1970. At this symposium, all the speakers had a chance to meet and discuss the problems and issues concerning them. By 1972, IMPALA was organizing annual conventions where speakers could showcase their films to potential sponsors.

In 1977, a major consolidation occurred. IMPALA, FLA, and the PTFDA (Prof. Travel Film Directors Association) all formed a partnership under one name, INTRAFILM. Although the three organizations continued to exist on their own, INTRAFILM took on the responsibility of organizing the annual travelogue conventions. Membership numbers in each of these associations floated between twenty and forty people. Nowadays, IMPALA has around twenty members (IMPALA website) and INTRAFILM has thirty-four (INTRAFILM website), although there are quite a few speakers that are members of both groups. The purpose of these conventions was to bring together speakers and let them promote their films to possible customers. These conventions were always held in December and alternated location between East and West coast cities.

Magazines and trade journals also played a part in promoting the exchange of information between speakers in the travelogue industry. The first journal to give space to travelogue speakers was The Program; a magazine specialized in platform speakers. Exposure was not too great since there was never much material written about travelogues. This changed with the issuing in 1976 of The Performer; a magazine devoted solely to travelogues. By 1986 its name had changed to Travelogue. This magazine runs to this day and is an important source of information about the travelogue industry.

The Weakening Popularity of Travelogues

The travelogue industry enjoyed many years of popularity at its peak. This period lasted from the 1960's through to the 1970's. Lectures were always full and there were many well established lecture series spread across the country. Beginning in the 1980's, though, the attendance began dropping and numerous small lecture series were cancelled. Only the larger series survived. There are a couple of reasons that led to this, such as the beginning of the "information" age, which means that almost any piece of information a person might want is only a touch of the fingers away, and ironically, one of the factors that at first boosted popularity, later caused its decline.

Perhaps the single most important factor in the decline in attendance at travelogues was television. In the early days of the travelogue business, TV did not even exist. As a result, people looked for entertainment in other places. They went to fairs, debates, or just stayed home to socialize with family. Another source of entertainment was the travel lecture. It could keep someone busy for over two hours, including intermissions and other socializing. The travel lecture sponsors would many times look at the ethnic makeup of cities to determine what topic to present, thus securing a good size audience (Ruoff).

The advent of the motion camera was at first a blessing, since it enabled the lecturers to present more vivid and lifelike images of their topic destinations. The new format of the travel lectures with motion pictures, called travelogues as a result, began drawing larger audiences and, by the 1960's and 1970's, had strong series all over the country.

Ironically, the motion picture, which boosted travelogue popularity, also created the TV business. The travelogues resisted at first probably because people were accustomed to attending travelogues and because TV at this point did not offer programs to directly compete with travelogues. Soon enough, though, TV programs dealing with travel and nature began to spring up, on shows such as those made by the National Geographic. Now people have the option of either going out to see a travelogue or watching similar programs on TV or videocassette, and people have chosen the comfort of their homes, thus cutting into the number of people attending travelogues (Soule interview).

A more recent factor in the decline of travelogues was the advent of the internet. The internet has probably done as much damage as TV shows, if not more. With the internet, people can find any kind of information they desire about almost any place on earth. A simple search on a search engine yields hundreds of websites on the topic of travel. With so much information so readily accessible, few people would go to the trouble of locating and attending a travelogue nowadays.

Another possible reason that has contributed to the decline of travelogues is the fact that nowadays, more people have the means to travel than ever before. Traveling has become much easier and more convenient. Airplane flights connect virtually the entire world and most places are easily accessible. Tourism has grown immensely and many people who before might have attended a travelogue might actually take the trip themselves now. Whereas in the 1950's there were only about 25 million people traveling by plane, in the 1990s that number has jumped to over half a billion passengers per year (see appendix D).

Finally, there is the fact that many series simply ran out of steam. Most series were started by people enthusiastic about travelogues. This ensured relatively good organization for many years. What happens next is that these original founders either get too old, too tired, or simply don't have the time to put in the effort necessary to organize a lecture series (Soule 143). When no one with the same enthusiasm steps in to replace them, the series simply dies out.

The travelogue industry enjoyed a peak followed by a sharp decline in popularity, and now it has reached a mature and stable point. A big part of the reason for this is the advent of mass media and widespread access to information. People nowadays can watch TV shows, videocassettes, and search the internet to find quickly the specific information they might need. It is not so much that travelogues have simply died out, but that certain functions, such as information on travel destinations, have been replaced by other sources, leaving the travelogue with the main purpose of providing entertainment.

There are not as many series as before but most of the ones existent are well established with captive audiences. These audiences are normally made up of elderly people in search of some kind of entertainment and a place to socialize with other people in their situation. Many retirement homes sponsor trips to watch travelogues where they are available. Some of the attendees are so loyal that a few years ago an award was given to a group of ladies who had been attending travelogues at the Denver Museum of Natural History every year for fifty years (Ruoff).

Conclusion

Thayer Soule has been one of the most influential figures in the travelogue business. He introduced many changes, such as color motion pictures and industry organizations, which brought about the expansion in the number of series. The development of his career went practically hand in hand with that of the industry as a whole. As he became well established and famous, the industry grew to its largest, and as he approached his final years before retirement, the industry showed signs it wasn't as strong as before. This decline was fueled by many factors, such as the advent of TV, the internet, growth in tourism, and the changing times.

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Notes on Electronic Sources and Joseph Lemire's Private Collection

The Geographic Society of Philadelphia and the Geographic Society of Chicago are associations which sponsor travelogue series. Their websites contain information on lecture dates, lecture topics, and other related material.

Both the IMPALA and INTRAFILM websites are dedicated to travelogue producers. They contain information on how to get started as a travelogue producer and also contain lecture dates.

The private collection of Joseph Lemire contains a wide range of information. Here is a partial list of its contents:

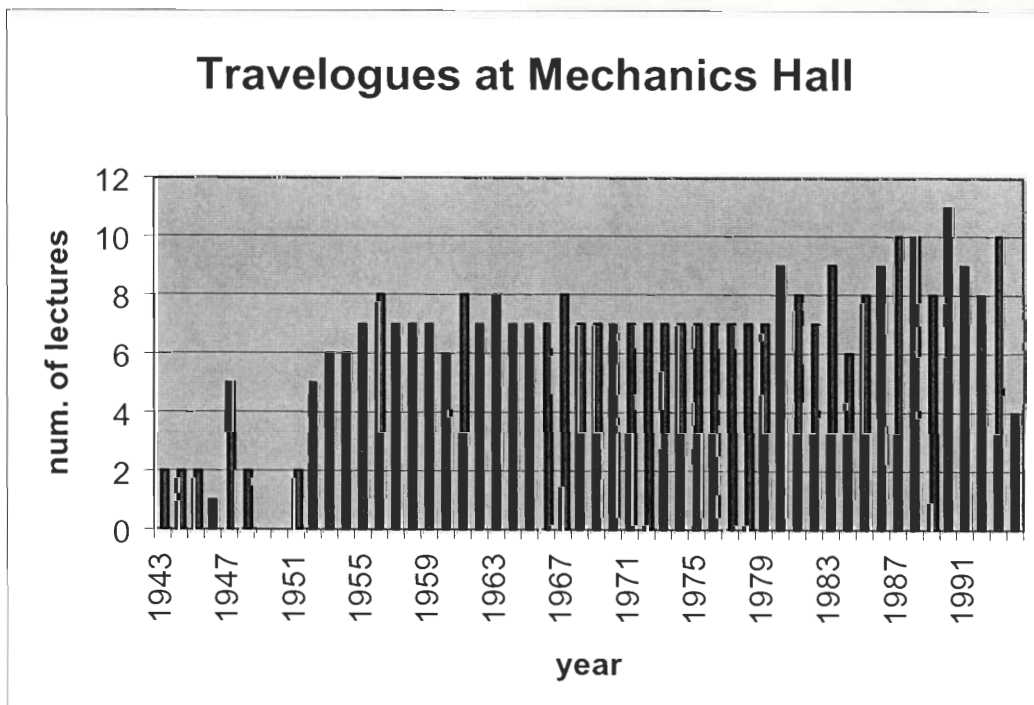
- Mechanics Hall Annual reports
- Mechanics Hall Bylaws
- Mechanics Hall travelogue schedules and announcements
- Printout from a database containing month, year, title, and lecturer
- Various IQPs relating to Mechanics Hall
- Personal Correspondence

Appendix A: Travelogues at Mechanics Hall through the 20th Century

Table 1: Number of Travelogues per Year: 1944-1994

year	# of travelogues	year	# of travelogues	year	# of travelogues
1944	2	1961	8	1978	7
1945	2	1962	7	1979	7
1946	1	1963	8	1980	9
1947	5	1964	7	1981	8
1948	2	1965	7	1982	7
1949	0	1966	7	1983	9
1950	0	1967	8	1984	6
1951	2	1968	7	1985	8
1952	5	1969	7	1986	9
1953	6	1970	7	1987	10
1954	6	1971	7	1988	10
1955	7	1972	7	1989	8
1956	8	1973	7	1990	11
1957	7	1974	7	1991	9
1958	7	1975	7	1992	8
1959	7	1976	7	1993	10
1960	6	1977	7	1994	4

Chart 1: Number of Travelogues per Year: 1944-1994

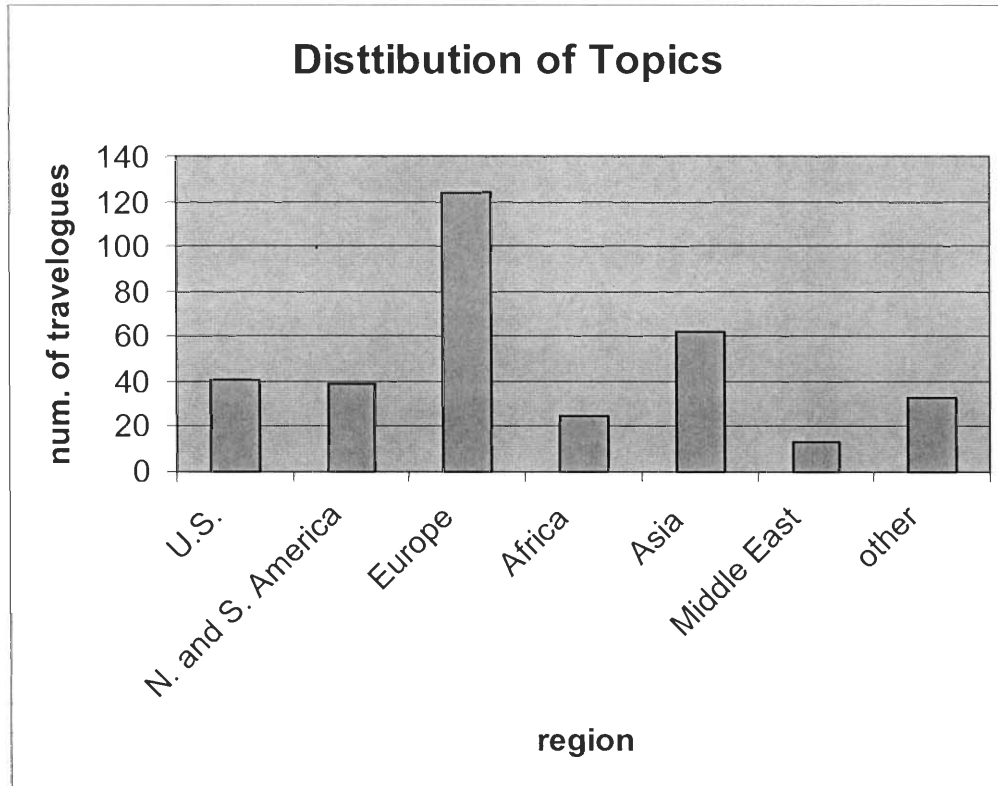


Appendix B: Geographic Distribution of Topics

Table 2: Distribution of Travelogues per Continent

Region	number of travelogues
U.S.	41
N. and S. America	39
Europe	124
Africa	25
Asia	62
Middle East	13
other	33
combined total	337

Chart 2: Distribution of Travelogues per Continent



Appendix C: Thayer Soule's Lectures at Mechanics Hall

Table 3: Thayer Soules' Appearances at Mechanics Hall

date	title
Jan 7,1953	The Congo
Jan 6,1954	Around South America
Jan 5,1955	Mexico
Jan 11,1956	Cairo to Baghdad
Jan 9,1957	Charm of the South
Jan 15,1958	Hawaii
Jan 14,1959	Switzerland
Jan 18,1960	Rainbow Lands of Central America
Jan 16,1961	Venice and the Italian Lakes
Jan 15,1962	Footloose in France
Jan 21,1963	Byways of Britain
Jan 13,1964	Magic of the Mediteranean
Jan 4,1965	Trailing Lewis and Clark to Oregon
Jan 10,1966	Magic of the Mediteranean
Nov 21,1966	The Pacific,then and now
Apr 22,1968	I love Mexico
Jan 12,1970	Railroads are Fun
Apr-72	Switzerland,off the Beaten Track
Apr-73	Cape to Kenya
Nov-73	London to Venice
Apr-75	Yugoslavia
Apr-76	The Andes
Oct-76	Mexico,Wonderful Mexico
Apr-78	Japan
Apr-80	Escape to the South Seas
Nov-81	Mediteranean Odyssey

Appendix D: Air Travel Statistics

Table 4: Number of Domestic and International Passengers per Year: 1952-2001

*note: all numbers in thousands of passengers

Year	domestic	international	year	domestic	international
1952	25,176	2,391	1977	222,289	18,043
1953	28,901	2,745	1978	253,957	20,759
1954	32,529	2,919	1979	292,700	24,163
1955	38,221	3,488	1980	272,829	24,074
1956	41,937	4,068	1981	265,304	20,632
1957	45,162	4,304	1982	274,382	19,760
1958	48,298	4,772	1983	296,721	21,917
1959	54,958	5338	1984	321,047	23,636
1960	56,351	5,906	1985	357,109	24,913
1961	56,900	6,112	1986	393,864	25,082
1962	60,739	7,079	1987	416,831	30,847
1963	69,366	8,032	1988	419,210	35,404
1964	79,139	9,381	1989	416,331	37,361
1965	92,073	10,847	1990	423,565	41,995
1966	105,789	12,272	1991	412,360	39,941
1967	128,479	14,020	1992	431,693	43,415
1968	145,774	16,407	1993	443,172	45,349
1969	158,405	13,493	1994	481,755	47,093
1970	153,662	16,260	1995	499,000	48,773
1971	156,195	17,474	1996	530,708	50,526
1972	172,452	18,897	1997	542,000	52,724
1973	183,272	18,936	1998	559,653	53,232
1974	189,733	17,725	1999	582,880	53,079
1975	188,746	16,316	2000	610,600	55,550
1976	206,279	17,039	2001	570,127	52,003

Appendix E: Thayer Soule Interview

Q: How has the technology in the field of filming affected the development of the travelogue?

A: Technology has had a great effect on travelogues, primarily making our tools much lighter and easier to use, but also giving vastly improved screen images. In the last three years, digital imaging has eliminated film entirely, making our work even easier and better, with no film involved at all in shooting, editing, or projection.

Q: Has it become easier to become a travelogue producer since the time you entered the field?

A: It is much harder to enter the field now than it was in the 30's, and infinitely more expensive. We now need a much longer lead time than we did then, or even twenty years ago.

Q: After moving to an all film format, did you ever go back to using slides in your presentations?

A: I still give slide shows to small audiences around here. Slides are my first love, and in many ways, much better suited to our work. The public, however, wants motion pictures. Even today slides are difficult to present to large audiences. We can't get enough light on the screen. Motion pictures are much brighter, especially when presented digitally.

Q: Did slides simply become outdated?

A: Slides did not become outdated. They are still used extensively, especially in multi-media shows, but those are commercial applications. I don't know anyone presenting slides in the travelogue field today- too much equipment to carry around.

Q: Do you think new technologies such as cable TV, the internet, and videocassettes have affected the popularity of travelogues?

A: Cable, the internet, and videocassettes now provide a huge selection for our audiences, and make it far easier to stay home. They have severely cut our in-person audiences.

Q: What did you think of the travelogue series at Mechanics Hall in Worcester?

A: I greatly enjoyed all my visits to Mechanics Hall. Our picture always looked good there, the PA system was fine, and the audience was always appreciative. Hospitality by the committee was outstanding, a thoroughly delightful time, every time. In the glory days of the 50's and 60's we always had a full house.

Q: What type of person usually attended the travelogue series in Worcester? (young, old, students, retired, workers)

A: As everywhere else in the country, the Worcester audiences were usually over fifty years old. This has always been true, since 1893.

Q: Over the years, did you notice any changes in the popularity of the travelogues in Worcester and across the US?

A: There is no doubt that the travelogue audience is disappearing. Popularity peaked in the 1960's, and has been going downhill steadily ever since. I think the world has just moved on. The field gave me a great time and a fine living for sixty years. Not many occupations could do that, outside of corporations.

Q: Your last presentation in Mechanics Hall was in 1981, what was the reason, if any, for you to stop coming to Worcester?

A: My last time in Mechanics Hall was in 1981. I was not asked back after that, but don't know why. I remained in the business until 1995, when I retired to write books (five so far).

Q: I read your book On the Road With Travelogues: A sixty Year Romp, and you tell a story that once you almost were not allowed to do your presentation because the arc projector provided a fire hazard. Did conditions improve after the renovation in 1977?

A: Our problem with an alleged fire hazard from our arc projector was due to the fire marshal's lack of information about safety film, which at the time was fairly new. There was no danger, but he thought there was. We never had trouble anywhere else, or ever again in Worcester.

Q: Do you think that the travelogue business has established a niche market or is it threatened by new technologies(cable TV, internet, videocassettes) that could ultimately lead to their fading away?

A: Travelogues will be around for years, but the great days are over. We don't make enough good shows, and there are too many other things to do that require the audience to spend less time, and make less effort. Part of the trouble is that traveloguers don't take advantage of their personal appearance. They are usually just a voice in the dark, not a personality on the stage. That is our fault, not of the audience.

Q: From the lecturer's point of view, what was the main purpose of the travelogue both to himself and to the public?

A: The main purpose of travelogues has always been fun, for both the producer and the audience. They are entertainment, and of course we always hoped they were educational as well.

Q: Do you think there will be any long-term importance of the travelogue films?

A: Travelogues are now an intimate record of the world as it has been over the years. My films are now in the Smithsonian, where they are used for research.

Q: What has been your most memorable travelogue to produce?

A: The film that was most fun for me to produce and present was "Venice and the Italian Lakes".

Q: What has been your most memorable presentation? What city? When? What travelogue?

A: My most memorable presentation was the showing of my fiftieth anniversary film for the National Geographic Society in Constitution Hall, Washington DC. The Society made a great fuss, and we had a capacity crowd of about 3500.

Q: Do you plan on doing any more travelogues or have you retired for sure?

A: I have retired from the field, but still show slide shows to small groups around here.

My occupation now is author.

Appendix F: Joe Lemire Interview

Q: For how long did you attend the travelogues at Mechanics Hall?

A: From about 1987 to 1993. I retired in 1993.

Q: Most of those lectures are documented in your collection?

A: Yes, that's correct. Almost all of them from at least 1950 on, I have full documentation. I have material mailed by Mechanics Hall and I maintained a list of people who attended the lectures. Every year before the series began, they would get a mailing that the Mechanics Hall staff would put together. They would send out mail describing what the films were going to be and the prices for tickets, and they would send in money for the tickets and they would repeat that every year. Also, when they came to the travelogue they would receive a handout. You will find that in my collection.

Q: Did you attend many of the lectures you have documented?

A: Yes, as a matter of fact, on occasion I would introduce the speaker. When Jill Fuller was not there or could not do the introduction I would take her place.

Q: How were the introductions?

A: I would just introduce them by mentioning if they had been to the Hall before briefly mention the film he was going to present and then call him onto the stage.

Q: How long were most of the lectures?

A: They lasted roughly one and a half hours. Most of them were shown on two reels with an intermission so that the projectionist could change reels. And the reels lasted 60-70 minutes if I remember correctly. During the intermission people would talk, have coffee, and have a dessert of some kind. The intermission lasted about fifteen to twenty minutes.

Q: What was your impression from them? Were they well attended? Full house?

A: Yes, they were well attended. Towards the end the attendance dropped to some extent but not that much. We would usually get about 800 to 900 people to come in. The Hall seats about 1500 people. People could buy season tickets, which were for all the films in the series, which was usually made of ten films, but which at times dropped to eight. Or you could come in and just pick an individual film you wanted. So we had both series holders and people there for whichever one they liked.

Q: Series tickets were valid for a year?

A: Yes, they were for that particular series. The series started in September and ended in April.

Q: What kind of people (young, old, working class, students) usually attended?

A: A good many were elderly. There were some young people but most of them were elderly. They had either been to these places or wished they had been.

Q: Did the audience attend the travelogues thinking of them as informative lectures or did they take it as pure entertainment?

A: It was both. Some of the speakers were humorous. It was entertainment, and an occasion to meet friends, a social gathering.

Q: Did people travel from other counties to attend the travelogues or was it limited to a Worcester audience?

A: Well, I suspect it might have been mostly from the Worcester area and surrounding towns.

Q: Over the years, did you notice any rise or decline in the popularity of the travelogues?

A: I suspect that, I can't remember offhand now, but I think you are right. Some places were more popular than others, and that had a bearing on attendance. Jill Fuller, she was the director, still is, she could select the films they wanted to show. I think she chose them from a national organization of film lecturers. They would get information about what films were available and they would select what films and speakers they wanted to hear. Some speakers were very popular, like Ken Richter. I think he is now deceased or living in New York. He appeared at the Hall I think fourteen times over the years. You will see this on the printout. I have a database called Powerbase/Dosbase, this was before SQL, courier language. You could enter the data and get all kinds of reports. I have reports with the speaker, topic and years. It's all there in the boxes.

Q: Were some lectures better attended because of the subject country? Did ethnic groups have ant effect?

A: Well, that was a factor, definitely. If it was Italy for instance, the Italians from Shrewsbury Street would come in. Because you didn't have to have a season ticket, you could come in on an individual basis any time you wanted. And so, that had a bearing. Japan was always popular. Some were more popular than others. I suspect that Iceland might not be as popular as say Paris.

Q: Do you think interest just wore off or were there any concrete factors leading to the end of the travelogue series at Mechanics Hall?

A: It's hard to say, I don't know. I can't tell you exactly why at the end, why Mrs. Anderson decided to end the series. I left in 1993; the last lecture was in 1994.

Q: Was it an eight lecture series?

A: Originally it was ten. Then towards the end it dropped to eight.

Q: Would it be a different speaker every time?

A: Yes, a different speaker, a different lecture. Many speakers would return, but they wouldn't show the same film. Most of the speakers, like Ken Richter, filmed all over the world, so he always had a different film when he came in. The speakers were popular, interesting. Some were quite fascinating, and they spoke as the film progressed, narrating what you were seeing on film.

Q: So it's kind of like a travel video but with live narration?

A: That's right. That's basically what it was.

Q: Was there much interaction between the speaker and the audience?

A: Not during the film showing of course, but at the intermission the speaker would normally come downstairs and talk with the people. They would ask questions about the film.

Q: Did you ever see any of Thayer Soule's travelogues?

A: Thayer Soule, no, I never saw any of his travelogues, but I did include a book in the collection called On the Road, by Thayer Soule. He was one of the more frequent speakers. I suggest you write him a letter. There is an article about Mechanics Hall in the book by the way. It mentions his coming here. He knew Burton Holmes. Burton Holmes was a pioneer, I don't know if you are familiar with him. He came to talk at the Hall many times. But he only came under the auspices of the Hall once, towards the end of his career. I think it might have been 1951. All the other times he came under his own auspices, 1890 and before. He would have an advance group of two people, booking him in towns. He would stay in Worcester for about a week and give three to four films. The original travelogues were only lectures until film was developed...the actual predecessors of the travelogues were lectures. People would just lecture from the Mechanics Hall stage. Mechanics Hall didn't open until 1857 but the Worcester County Mechanics Association had another place in the city somewhere, and I think the very first speaker was a gentleman by the name Elliho Burrick, who spoke in 1842. So that's how long it was...At first they weren't so much on countries but lectures on different topics. Eventually they evolved into travel topics.

Q: Were there lectures given on other topics besides travel?

A: Yes. The Hall was also famous; you might want to check some of the other IQPs. I have some that I have put in there (the collection). It lists all the people that have come to Mechanics Hall to speak, very famous people by the way. Admial Byrd was there, some of the most famous people in the world came to speak at Mechanics Hall.

Q: What other things were going on besides travel lectures?

A: Pro wrestling, they played basketball there before it was restored. The Hall was restored in 1976; it was closed for a while. Julie Fuller was instrumental in getting that done. They are in the process of working on it right now. There were other lectures, and you find some of the most famous people in the country came to lecture at Mechanics Hall.

Q: Did you notice any over time, such as stylistic changes?

A: Not particularly. Each speaker narrated what you saw on the film. Some were perhaps more entertaining than others. They would joke around but pretty much just narrated what you saw on the screen.

Q: Did different speakers focus on different aspects or topics?

A: Yes, they all did that. Most of them belong to a society, an organization; I'm not sure of the name. They knew what the others were doing and would try not to duplicate it.

Q: Was there variety in the lecturers and topics or was it limited?

A: Mechanics Hall had control over that. Julie Fuller could book whatever she wanted. So, she knew what she had booked previous years and would avoid booking the same country. There was always a variety from year to year. The organization the Hall belonged to would send booklets of all the speakers that were on tour, of all the films they had available, and the Hall would pick the ones they wanted.

Q: So it was the Hall that chose as opposed to the lecturer saying here is what I've got, when do you want me to come?

A: Yes, that's right. That avoided the same country from being shown over and over again.