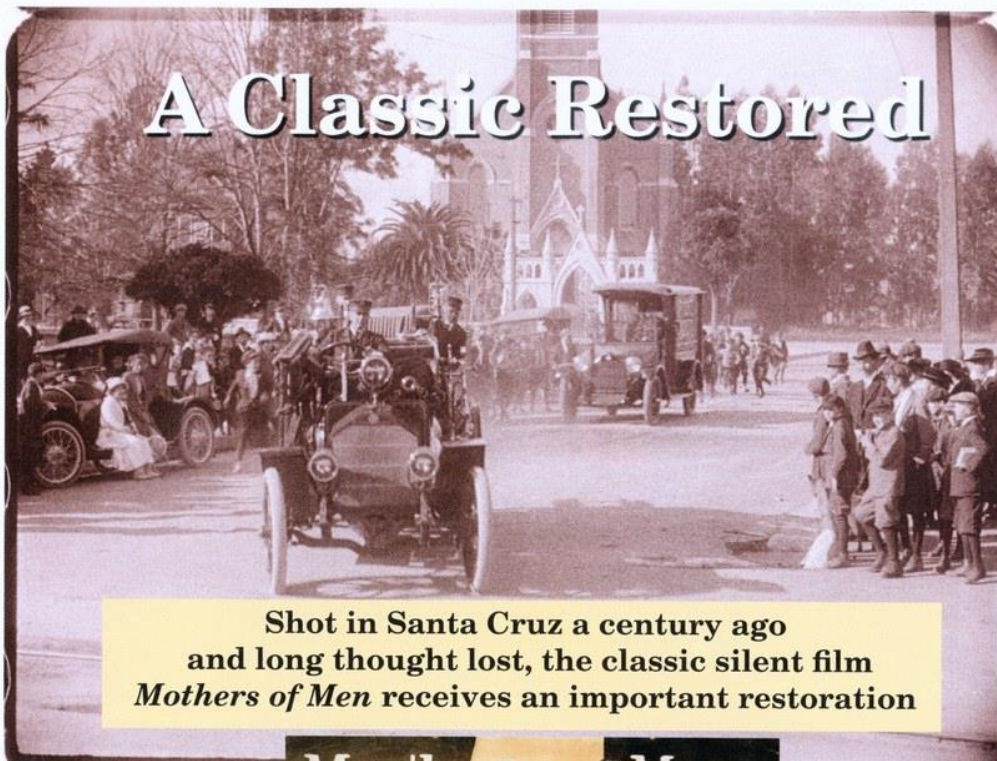


A Classic Restored

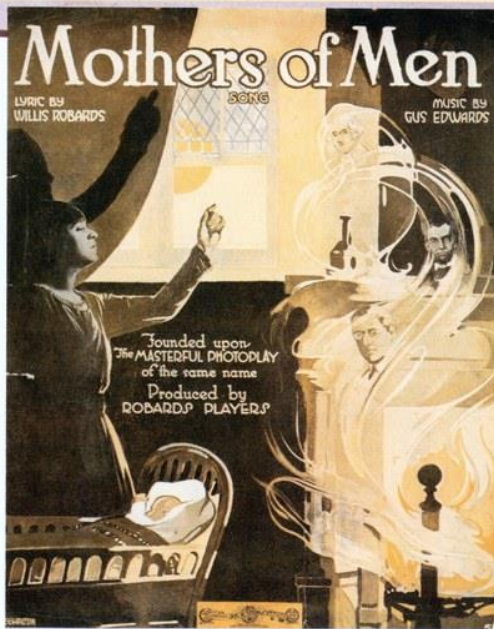


Shot in Santa Cruz a century ago
and long thought lost, the classic silent film
Mothers of Men receives an important restoration

Courtesy of The San Francisco Silent Film Festival

By Peter Crooks

Long before “The Lost Boys,” there was “Mothers of Men.” On the list of important films shot in Santa Cruz, this silent movie has long been the region’s lost ark—like many films produced in the early decades of cinema, it was long thought to be lost forever. But now, thanks to Santa Cruz native and film archivist James Mockoski, local historian Ross Gibson, and UC Santa Cruz film professor Shelley Stamp, “Mothers of Men” will soon be seen again on the silver screen. The “three-legged stool,” as Mockoski refers to himself and his colleagues, has spent the past two decades on this labor of love—and thanks to some luck, much dedication, and crowdfunding donations of more



(Above) The sheet music cover art printed for the song *Mothers of Men*.

(Top) A 1917 scene of police and firemen racing through Mission Plaza past Holy Cross Church in Santa Cruz.

than \$50,000, the film is being restored, digitized, and will soon be available for future film lovers to watch and appreciate.

Filmed in 1917, “Mothers of Men” takes a remarkably progressive look at the women’s suffrage movement of its day. In the film, the voters in California have elected the state’s first female governor. When her husband is wrongly convicted of a murder, the new governor has to decide how to handle the struggle between her personal and political obligations.

“The film was seen as a way to help the women’s movement. The hope was that it could be used to help push the movement,” said Mockoski. “The film is about what happens after women have

Courtesy of The San Francisco Silent Film Festival



ably 90 percent of them are gone," said Mockoski. "That makes it so much more surprising that we have a film that shows Santa Cruz and the downtown. Some of the footage depicts the founders of Santa Cruz, from the mayor, to the district attorney, to Fred W. Swanton, the developer who built the Beach Boardwalk."

It was this local angle that caught the attention of local historian Ross Gibson, who wrote a Santa Cruz history column in the San Jose Mercury News for many years.

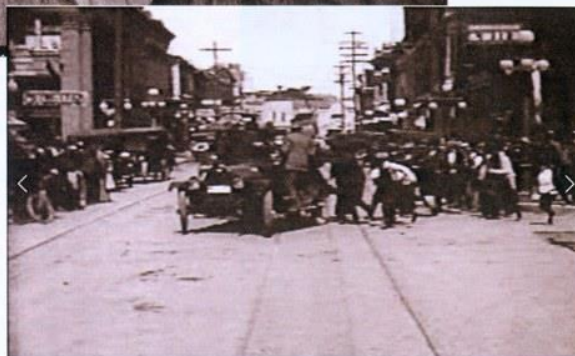
"In 1994, I wrote about the film, explaining that if there was ever a film that we would want to find about Santa Cruz history, it was this," said Gibson. "With all the local residents and locations, I thought we might have luck tracking it down, so I asked readers if they knew anything about it to please contact me. I did not hear back from anyone."



power."

While fascinating for its politics, "Mothers of Men" is equally as mesmerizing due its footage of downtown Santa Cruz, nearly 100 years ago.

"Very few films of that period survived, prob-



Courtesy of The San Francisco Silent Film Festival

(Top) A scene shot looking south from Natural Bridges, (Crown Arch) north of Santa Cruz. (Center) Hollywood actress Dorothy Davenport (center) as Clara Madison, in *Mothers of Men*. (Bottom) A scene from the film on Pacific Avenue in Santa Cruz.



Courtesy of The San Francisco Silent Film Festival

(Above) A scene from *Mothers of Men* filmed on Fred Swanton's front porch.

Two years after Gibson published his column, however, he was contacted by an enthusiastic student at UC Santa Cruz — Mockoski — who had heard about the film from his professor, Shelley Stemp. Mockoski, who would go on to become the film archivist for Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope Studios and work on restorations of "Apocalypse Now" and "The Outsiders," was determined to find the film.

After two years of searching, Mockoski did find it, only it wasn't called "Mothers of Men." In 1921, the film had been rereleased under a new title, "Every Woman's Problem," and there was a print in the British Film Institute in England. For \$700, Mockoski obtained a grainy VHS copy of the film.

"It definitely paid off, because it was exactly what we were looking for," said Mockoski. "It was so powerful to see something like that we knew existed all those years for the first time."

Over the past decade, Mockoski, Gibson, and Stamp have worked tirelessly to raise money for the restoration of "Mothers of Men." Their investigation of the original production continued to offer surprises, such as the revelation that the original movie was not released in black and white but tinted in color. (The restored version will be treated to replicate the color tinting.) Mockoski even unearthed sheet music of a song written to accompany the film's release.

More than twenty years of effort came to fruition in June, when the restored version of *Mothers of Men* was screened in

the San Francisco Silent Film Festival at the city's Castro Theater. Plans to show the film in Santa Cruz are still in the works.

"It's wonderful that people will not only be able to see the film, but see it in a magnificent venue like the Castro Theatre," said Gibson. "The giant screen in a real movie palace will bring out details in the film that will be tremendously impactful."

Mockoski fine-tuned the film to make sure every detail is as accurate as possible to the original 1917 version.

Mockoski said that the film provides an invaluable look at Santa Cruz's past, but also emphasizes the movie's remarkably contemporary message.

"'Mothers of Men' comes out at a very good time for the 2016 election," said Mockoski. "Here is a film that portrays the first elected female governor of California, and it was filmed 100 years ago. It is interesting to screen this film to show how far we have come—or haven't come in some cases. You would think that these issues would have come and gone, but they're still very much in our current political arena."▲

Future Screenings

- ▲ Turner Classic Movies
October 4, 2016
- ▲ City of Santa Cruz
October 13 at Del Mar Theatre
- ▲ Museum of Art and History,
Santa Cruz, November 4, 2016.

Location, location, location

"Mothers of Men" was shot in 24 different Santa Cruz locations, plus two in Berkeley and one in Sacramento. When you watch the film, look for these sites. Visit the website (mothersfilm.com/local-locations) to see what was shot at each location.

Branciforte (Eastside)

- ▲ De Laveaga Film Studio
(golf course, Stroke Center Drive, near 911 Building)
- ▲ Branciforte School (Branciforte Avenue & Water Street)
- ▲ 'Perla Villa' Fred Swanton House
(520 Soquel Ave.)

Beach Front

- ▲ Casa Del Rey Hotel
(Beach & Cliff streets)
- ▲ Boardwalk Casino
(Beach & Cliff streets)
- ▲ Golden Gate Villa (924 Third St.): Interiors, as governor's office.

Front Street

- ▲ The Armory (Soquel & Front streets)
- ▲ Birkenseer's Chinatown (720 Front St.)
- ▲ Front Street City Hall
(now Museum of Art & History)
- ▲ Fire Department Yard
(lobby of Museum of Art & History)
- ▲ 1917 Santa Cruz Fire Engine and Ambulance
- ▲ Santa Cruz County Court House
(Pacific Ave. & Cooper St.)
- ▲ 1890 Santa Cruz County Jail (site of Museum of Art & History office wing)
- ▲ Leonard Building (115 Cooper St.)

Pacific Avenue

- ▲ Leask's Seaside Store (now Cinema 9 at Pacific Ave. & Church St.)
- ▲ County Bank Building
(1502 Pacific Ave. at Cooper St.)
- ▲ People's Bank (1515 Pacific Ave.)
- ▲ Pacific Avenue north of Cooper Street

Mission Plaza

- ▲ The Leslie Brick Building
(155 Mission St.)
- ▲ Holy Cross Church & Plaza (seen from Mission & Emmett streets)
- ▲ Holy Cross School (163 Emmett St.)

Mission Hill

- ▲ J.F. Simpson House (site of the Presbyterian Church on Mission Street)
- ▲ Piedmont Court (260 High St.)

West Cliff Drive

- ▲ Crown Arch Natural Bridge (West Cliff Drive & Woodrow Avenue)