

September 11th was a moment  
when America had the sympathy of the world.  
— Tom Ford

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# NEWS-STAR

NEWS OF ROGERS PARK, EDGEWATER, UPTOWN & ANDERSONVILLE

Sept. 11-17, 2013

## North Center was home to world's first commercial movie studios

Worldwide  
industry  
launched  
at Claremont  
and Byron  
in 1890s



BY LAWRENCE HARTMANN

Actors, writers, and a menagerie of animals purchased from a bankrupt circus were once part of a thriving movie studio near the intersection of Western Ave. and Irving Park Rd., on Chicago's North Side.

This glimpse into Chicago's past, plus many other insights into the city's connection with movies and movie makers — up to the present day — can all be found in the excellent book "Hollywood on Lake Michigan: 100 Years of Chicago and the Movies." First published in 1998, a second, updated and expanded edition was published this past June by Chicago Review Press.

At a North Side cafe recently, I sat down for a chat with Michael Corcoran, who is the co-author, along with Arnie Bernstein, of the new edition.

"Chicago is where the movie industry first started," Corcoran said. "The first studios in the world were pretty much here."

According to Corcoran, the Selig Polyscope Co. was the first — or one of the first — motion picture studios in the world. Located just a few blocks west of today's St. Benedict's Catholic Church in North Center, the Selig Co. operated from 1896 to 1919 and was a busy movie factory, putting out westerns, comedies, and Chicago documentaries. And, putting those aforementioned animals to work, the studio also made jungle pictures.

Currently the building that once housed the studio contains condominiums, known as St. Ben's Lofts. A good-sized, attractive, light-brick building on a quiet street, the former Selig studios is at 3900 N. Claremont Ave., at the northwest corner of Claremont Ave. and Byron St.

Though the building is now on a low-key, tree-lined city block, it's not hard to imagine, standing in front of it, that it once teemed

with creative energy inside.

"He was a pretty crazy guy," Corcoran said of William Nicholas Selig, the man behind the studio. "Selig Polyscope" was the name of the early motion picture camera Selig designed — though not, according to Corcoran, without help from across the Atlantic.

"He pretty much stole the design from the Lumiere brothers, and started manufacturing his own camera in Chicago," Corcoran said.

The Lumiere brothers, of France, were, according to Corcoran, some of the "first inventors of the motion picture camera."

(Online, on sites such as YouTube, there are many films available of the Lumiere brothers' early work, such as one that simply records workers leaving a factory in Lyon, France.)

The first successful feature produced by the Selig studio was 1896's "The Tramp and the Dog," about a hobo going door to door looking for a meal, and his inconvenient encounter with a bulldog.



Essanay Film Manufacturing Co. was at 1333-1345 W. Argyle St.

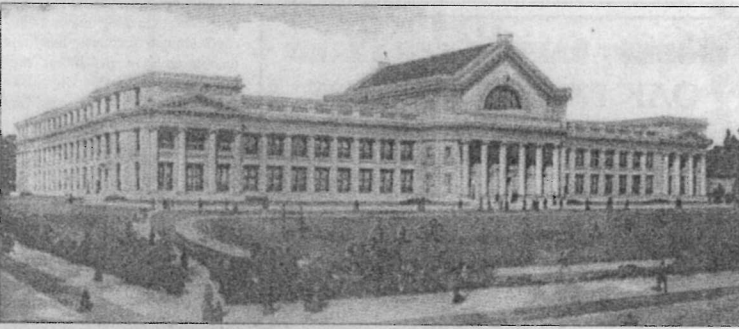
According to Corcoran's book, audiences enjoyed the film — a new medium — as "filler in between acts at Chicago vaudeville houses."

L. Frank Baum, the author of the hit novel of 1900, "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz," worked at the Selig studio. In fact, the North Side facility produced, in 1910, the first film treatment of "The Wizard of Oz," 29 years before the story would become the iconic film musical starring Judy Garland.

The Selig version of The Wizard of Oz story is available on YouTube, as well. It's a short, charming film. One of the things that strikes you as you're watching it is that these actors were vaudeville performers, obviously. They ham it up on the screen as they'd ham

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## Senn HS celebrates 100th, Gala scheduled for Oct. 5-6



Nicholas Senn High School officially opened in February 1913 with an enrollment of 600.

The Edgewater Historical Society is joining in the Centennial anniversary of Nicholas Senn High School, 5900 N. Glenwood, by showcasing some of Senn's most famous graduates in a new exhibit at the Museum.

Senn High School was named for Nicholas V. Senn, a prominent North Side physician who conducted important medical research prior to his death in 1908.

The adjoining Senn Park has existed only since 1947, its location has much earlier historic significance. It was originally the site of the Nicholas Kranz homestead and inn known as the Seven Mile House. According to the Kranz family, Abraham Lincoln attended a caucus of local farmers at the Seven Mile House during his 1860 campaign for the presidency. To honor this legacy, the city donated the Young Lincoln statue by sculptor Charles Keck to Senn Park in 1997.

In addition to brief biographies, the exhibit includes memorabilia such as cartoons from yearbooks, graduation programs, a sample report card, Senn publications and the display of some of the Senn yearbooks in the EHS collection.

The exhibit will be available during normal Museum hours — Saturday and Sunday from 1-4 p.m. — through Oct. 20. For more information call 773-

### Some of the famous Senn HS alumni included:

Cliff Abersson a professional football player with the Green Bay Packers [1946] and Chicago Cubs [1947-49].

Carolos Eire, historian, writer, professor at Yale University, author of Waiting for Snow in Havana, winner 2003 National Book Award, nonfiction.

Jimmy Evert, a tennis coach whose students included Jennifer Capriati and his daughter Chris Evert.

William Friedkin, an Academy Award-winning film director of the The Exorcist and The French Connection.

Comedian Shecky Green.

Herblock (Herbert Lawrence Block) a political cartoonist and 3-time Pulitzer Prize winner, and Presidential Medal of Freedom honoree.

John Jakes first author with 3 books on NY Times Best Seller List.

FAMOUS ALUMNI see p. 4

561-0893.

A special reception will be held during normal Museum hours on the weekend of the Senn Gala celebration, Oct. 5-6.

## Panel looks at City's transportation needs for next 20 years

Despite improvements,  
North Siders should still  
not feel safe riding bikes  
on city streets

BY PATRICK BUTLER

For the first time since the end of World War II, America's love affair with the automobile may be finally cooling off, at least in dense urban areas agreed panelists at a roundtable organized by U.S. Rep. Michael Quigley last week.

During a nearly two-hour exchange organized by the Univ. of Illinois and Rep. Quigley, a member of the U.S. House Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition, panelists from city and state transportation agencies, academia, and civic and consumer groups focused on a future where they expect more people to be riding bikes and taking buses than driving cars.

Innovations like the new Divvy

bike rental craze, the Bus/Rapid Transit line on Ashland and Western avenues, major improvements along the CTA Red Line and even the N. Lake Shore Dr. redo are all part of what Stephen Schlickman of the Univ. of Illinois Urban Transportation Center called part of a shift away from the country's car-centric orientation that has dominated transportation planning for nearly 70 years.

"The tremendous growth in highway and road infrastructure once served our economy well, but really didn't put us in the most sustainable position in the long run. It created a tremendous imbalance for one mode of transportation and we need to correct that imbalance," Schlickman said.

Lee Crandell of the Active Transportation Alliance, a government-funded transportation advocacy group, said anything that makes life easier for pedestrians or cyclists could only help make sustainable transportation easier,

safer and less expensive.

But a lot of work still has to be done as far as Rep. Quigley is concerned.

He is himself a frequent bike-rider and the Congressman said several members of his staff told him they don't feel all-that-safe riding on Chicago streets, which came as no surprise to him. "Two of my three trips today will be on bikes and I don't feel safe on most of the main streets either." He added that he and his wife both feel more comfortable letting their two daughters take the 'L' downtown at night than having them ride their bikes around their neighborhood.

But things are getting better for non-automobile users all the time, said Schlickman, noting the city will be installing 100 miles of new designated bike lanes by 2015. "The mayor has made a really good case for improving bike

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of this is vague, at best - another smaller group of  
 them into buildings. And we're told that they were  
 fervor. And if you live to be a thousand years old,  
 make any goddamned sense?  
 afternoon following the events of September 11, 2001

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it up on the stage. At the drop of a hat, they break into dancing.

Part of the migration of film-making from the Midwest to the West Coast was due to the Western movie genre. In the early part of the 1900s, the Selig studio was producing westerns at its North Side facility. Eventually, William Selig realized that western locales would work better for these kinds of movies than a big city like Chicago. Hungry for better locations for his cowboy and Indian pictures, he sent his first filmmaker out west to California, near Los Angeles.

In addition to the Selig Polyscope Co., the Essanay Film Manufacturing Co. was another major movie studio on Chicago's North Side during the infancy of cinema in America.

Located about a mile north and another mile east of Selig, Essanay, which was so named because of its founders' initials, "S" and "A," was at 1333-1345 W. Argyle St., just west of Broadway. The site is now occupied by St. Augustine's College. The former studio is protected by City of Chicago landmark status, and efforts are underway at the college to preserve the site as an important part of film history.

The Essanay Argyle St. studio, from its birth in 1907 to its demise in 1917, made westerns, like Selig. But its stock in trade was comedy. And it employed one of the greatest film comedians of all time, Charlie Chaplin.

Chaplin was with the studio for several years, but he actually only made one movie at the studio on

Argyle: "His New Job." (Soon after that film, Chaplin went west to the California "satellite" office.)

Available on YouTube, also, "His New Job" is a short, silent work about a hapless character, played by Chaplin, who wanders onto a movie set, and his misadventures there. The film is not easy to follow, but one thing is apparent throughout: Chaplin was made for comedy. The guy is just naturally funny. No wonder he became a legend.

In addition to Chaplin, the Uptown studio also employed others who went on to become bright lights in Hollywood. A young woman from Freeport, IL, in the northwest corner of the state, moved to Chicago during the early years of the 20th century in the hopes of becoming a writer. She eventually became head of the "scenario" department at Essanay. Eventually, she moved west to California, where she became a famous gossip columnist reporting on the emerging stars of the movie business. Her name was Louella Parsons.

In 1914, a pretty Chicago teen was touring the Essanay facilities one day with her aunt, who was a friend of one of the studio's founders. The studio casting director noticed the teen that day, and within days, cast her in her first picture. That attractive young woman was the acclaimed actress Gloria Swanson, who would go on to an illustrious career.

When asked about the movie-making scene in Chicago today, Michael Corcoran was very positive, and said, "I think it's only going to get better." In the last five or six years, he said, there have been

several films shot here, including the new "Jupiter Ascending," and at least seven TV shows, including "Chicago Fire," and "Chicago Blue."

Mentioning the new Cinemaspace studio on the Near South Side, Corcoran said, "Chicago is becoming part of the world consciousness. The more that gets shot here, the more people want to shoot here."

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safety. That's good because we really don't want to lose the congressman to some idiot in a car," Schlickman quipped.

Schlickman didn't mention if he thought it would be less of a loss if an idiot biker or idiot bus driver were to run him down?

Turning to the upcoming re-nomination of the north end of Lake Shore Dr., Chicago Transportation Deputy Comr. Scott Kubly said redoing the landmark roadway results from the move toward "multi-modal" transportation rather than back to the "auto-dominated past."

When it comes to planning the new N. Lake Shore Dr., Kubly added, "we need to take a good long hard look, not at the road we have, but the road we want. We need to think about what the long-term needs are going to be 20 years from now"

And part of any planning will almost certainly have to include more public transportation, said CTA vice president Mike McLaughlin, noting that bus and rapid transit ridership has been steadily rising in recent years.

As he sees it, sustainable transportation is more than just moving people across town more efficiently. "The end goal is livability. If we can move people faster they're going to get out of their cars and that's going to create a more vibrant community. It's not just reducing emissions, but making communities more livable."

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**Pol**

**Man stabbed, R**  
 Police are sorting out who discovered who was near 7700 N. Mar

At the scene the man suddenly appeared coming. He was taken to ambulance to St. Louis.

The man's girlfriend was injured when she fell from a sidewalk bleeding. A 29-year-old victim and the couple in a vehicle had been stabbed.

A second man seen with a couple argued with the man who stabbed the man. Officers were not sure if it was the same film and let the car

**Police involved in**  
**during Albany Pa**  
 On Saturday, Albany, Pa. dark colored SUV, man, 19-year-old, block of N. Christy street. The officer spotted the male victim before the calf and gra. Officers spotted 5300 block of N. Kill two of the offende

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