

Marius Sestier Collection

Under the direction of M Marius Sestier

Within a week of Marius Sestier's Salon Lumière opening in Sydney on 28 October 1896, it was flourishing beyond expectations. And though not the first presentation of moving pictures in Sydney or Australia, it was Australia's first cinema. Sestier presented the Lumière Cinématographe to Sydney and the quality of image, content and presentation was extraordinary.

The Salon Lumière was open from midday through to late evening with screenings every 30 minutes. Once seated in the electrically-lit room, the light would be turned off at precisely the half hour and the first image would be thrown onto the screen.

This allowed patrons to drop in at any time to view the current program, and long queues often extended down and across Pitt Street. Unlike the competitors, whose limited evening screenings were part of a program dedicated to live performance, Salon Lumière only screened films.

Sestier was one of the 23 frères Lumière operator/representatives to travel the world. While many of the representatives travelled to other European countries, Sestier was one of a small handful who travelled beyond Europe. Marius Sestier, with his wife Marie-Louise Sestier, travelled first to India and then on to Australia.

Sestier also made 19 films in Australia. In 2005, Coralie Martin, an intern of the NFSA's Research Program identified two films made in Australia by Marius Sestier in 1896 which were not in the NFSA's Collection.

She identified the two films after assessing the NFSA's holdings of frères Lumière films against the holdings of the Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC) in France. The NFSA then undertook negotiations with the CNC for copies of the films and they arrived in May 2006. One film was from the Melbourne Cup Carnival Series shot in Melbourne in 1896 and was added to the titles already held. The other was of a burlesque (comic) roller skater also made in 1896.

The Melbourne Cup film was readily identified as the weighing-in for the Cup, in which the jockeys ride their horses to the weighing room on the Flemington racecourse and are weighed for correct weight before the race. The second film of a roller skater, *Patineur Grotesque*, was unknown to NFSA curators as there had been no previous mention of this film in Australia.

Patineur Grotesque

Patineur Grotesque was made in Prince Alfred Park, Sydney, New South Wales, in 1896. And though it was not screened in Australia until 17 March 2010, it is thought to be Australia's earliest surviving film.

When frères Lumière representative to Australia, Marius Sestier, arrived in Sydney in mid September 1896 one of his tasks was to not only show films but to make films. With his Australian concessionaire, Henry Walter Barnett, the pair made Australia's first film *Passengers Leaving SS Brighton* at Manly in Sydney. The first screening of that film at the Salon Lumière on 27 October 1896 was a success and Sestier announced more local films to come. Sestier added to his Australian-produced films with 15 films of the Melbourne Cup Carnival.

Comment [A1]: M.

Comment [A2]: It was as much C. B. Westmacott's and H. Walter Barnett's as Sestier's.

Comment [A3]: It opened on 28 September 1896

Comment [A4]: Joseph MacMahon opened Australia's first "cinema" in Brisbane on 26 September 1896.

Comment [A5]: There was no organisation of this name. This is a pretentious use of French. And it does not acknowledge the contribution of the Lumière brothers' father, Antoine.

Comment [A6]: Where is the evidence for the accuracy of this number?

Comment [A7]: Cinématographie

Comment [A8]: What is the evidence for this date?

Comment [A9]: Weighing-in takes place after a race.

Comment [A10]: Weighing-out takes place before a race.

Comment [A11]: Comma missing

Comment [A12]: filmed

Comment [A13]: How many times is this going to be repeated?

Comment [A14]: "Patineur Grotesque" may well have been the first.

Patineur Grotesque, aka *The Humourous Rollerskater* or *The Burlesque Roller Skater*, was made in Prince Alfred Park, Sydney but the exact date is still unknown. Despite this, the film's first screening was not in Australia, but in Lyon, France on 28 February 1897. It is believed that the film had never been screened in Australia until 2010.

Comment [A15]: Humorous

Comment [A16]: filmed

Comment [A17]: So it may be Australia's earliest motion picture.

Comment [A18]: It was another film, which featured more than one skater, that was shown in Lyon on this date.

Patineur Grotesque was found and restored by the Magyar Nemzeti Filmarchivum (the Hungarian National Film Archive) in 1966 but not identified as an Australian-produced film. It was during the production of the 1996 Bibliothèque du film (BIFI) publication *La Production cinématographe des Frères Lumière* that the film was listed as part of Sestier's work in Australia.

Comment [A19]: cinématographique

The film is one minute long and the action takes place in the centre of the frame. A man in costume on rollerskates performs for a gathering crowd. As part of the act the skater trips and falls, then drops his hat. As he attempts to retrieve the hat he continues to fall about revealing a white hand motif on the seat of his pants as he bend over and flips his coat tails. When, finally, the hat is restored to his head, the act is completed.

Comment [A20]: bends

Burlesque rollerskating had been included on the stage since the 1880s in Australia and around the world. A burlesque rollerskater was often hired to perform at outside venues such as skating rinks, circuses, aquariums or other places of amusement.

Comment [A21]: What is the evidence for this statement?

Now also recognised as Australia's first comedy film, it is interesting to note that French film historian, Georges Sadoul, in his 1973 rewrite of *L'invention du Cinéma*, refers to *Patineur Grotesque* as the forerunner to the work of Charlie Chaplin and Max Linder.

Comment [A22]: Though filmed as "actuality".

Film curator Sally Jackson began a project to research *Le Patineur Grotesque*, and in the process gathered much new information about Marius Sestier's time in Australia, in India and his life in France.

Comment [A23]: Now the title has "Le" added.

Her research involved the examination of original documents in Australia and France, poring over contemporary newspapers and magazines and linking names through genealogical processes. It revealed a much different story to what we knew.

This research has provided the basis for a celebration of the man who brought the cinema to Australia. In 2008, contact was made with Marius Sestier's descendants, who then visited in March 2010 and brought with them their great-grandfather's papers and photographs. The NFSA has conserved, scanned and preserved the documents and photographs. This historic visit was marked by an event, Salon Lumière, on Wednesday 17 March 2010 in the NFSA's Arc Cinema.

Comment [A24]: Sestier was one of several, and certainly not the first.

View further notes about *Le Patineur Grotesque* on [australianscreen](#).

Salon Lumière

On 26 September 1896, within a fortnight of their arrival, the Sestiers had organised a preview of the Lumière Cinématographe at George Musgrove and JC Williamson's Lyceum Theatre on Pitt Street, Williamson having donated the theatre for the afternoon preview. Subsequent reports of the preview promised the public a show not to be missed.

The Salon Lumière was situated at 237 Pitt Street, Sydney, a few doors down from the Lyceum Theatre. This two-storey building of five rooms had, throughout its life, provided premises for a tailor, a shoe shop, a fancy goods store and warehouse, as well as a studio for Stewarts

Comment [A25]: It was nearly opposite the Lyceum Theatre.

Comment [A26]: Contemporary photographs show very much otherwise.

Photographers. Prior to the opening of the Salon Lumière, the ground floor of 237 Pitt Street had been a branch of Lewis Phillips Auctioneers.

As auction rooms the premises provided a sizeable open space for seating, with chairs placed towards the large 10-by-12 foot screen with its highly decorated ornamental frame. Under the management of CB Westmacott, Musgrove and Williamson's Sydney theatre manager, together with high society and theatrical photographer Henry Walter Barnett, the program presented by the Sestiers consisted of 12 films with new programs being constantly offered.

It was on the Salon Lumière's last night, 27 October 1896, that Australia's first film *Passengers Leaving the SS Brighton* at Manly was screened with the promise of more Australian films to come. The next day the Sestiers and Walter Barnett left for Melbourne to fulfil other commitments and where they would work together at the Melbourne Cup Carnival, shooting 15 films.

With the departure of the Sestiers and Barnett and the closing of the Salon Lumière at 237 Pitt Street, Australia's first cinema closed, but only for a short while. Capitalising on the Salon Lumière's excellent reputation and screening format, new tenant - and cinematographe competitor - James McMahan, reopened 237 Pitt Street as the Salon Cinématographe. Although successful, the Salon Cinématographe could not repeat the phenomenal success of the Salon Lumière.

'We never dreamed ...!'

Documents from Marius Sestier's family and colleagues provide valuable information about this time.

In Bombay, the Sestiers advertised for a local interpreter and someone who could teach them English. The first half of a scrapbook is their English lessons and it shows how they struggled with the differences between French and English. The second part of the book is full of press cuttings of their shows in Bombay.

In Adelaide, the Lumière Cinématographe was the headline act at the Theatre Royal over all the other acts, including their one-time competitor Carl Hertz. Hertz was the first person to show films in Australia, in Melbourne on 17 August 1896.

The Sestiers kept scrapbooks of all their tours. In the book of their Sydney season it shows that they also kept tabs on their competitor, Harry Rickards at the Tivoli.

The French Connection

In 2006, film curator Sally Jackson appealed via a genealogical website for the whereabouts of descendants of French pharmacist and frères Lumière representative to Australia, Marius Sestier. In late 2008, Sestier's great-granddaughter, Madame Petitbois, replied via email.

Through Sally Jackson's contacts in Paris, Madame Anne and Monsieur Jacques Canal, a meeting was arranged with the Sestier family. They gathered in Sauzet, Marius Sestier's birthplace, in December 2008 to meet with the local historian Madame Milon. Family members shared information and photographs and Madame Milon passed on information about their ancestors. The group took a tour through the village and Jacques Canal filmed both the meeting and the tour.

Comment [A27]: What is the evidence for this?

Comment [A28]: Westmacott was not Williamson and Musgrove's (Sydney) manager.

Comment [A29]: It is unlikely that Mme. Sestier had anything to do with the presentations.

Comment [A30]: Material here is a repetition of that in the ninth paragraph.

Comment [A31]: Or maybe not.

Comment [A32]: Joseph MacMahon was first, in Brisbane.

Comment [A33]: This is not true: MacMahon had enormous success at 237 Pitt St, which continued well into 1897.

Comment [A34]: What is the evidence for this assertion? There is nothing to suggest this in Sestier's books.

Comment [A35]: There is no indication that the French-English exercises in the book had any connection with the visit to India.

Comment [A36]: Lumière

Comment [A37]: On some occasions only; on other days Hertz was top of the bill.

Comment [A38]: Taken literally, this "their" refers to "all the other acts".

Comment [A39]: one-time

Comment [A40]: Hertz was the first person to show projected motion pictures in Australia. Motion pictures were first presented with Edison's kinetoscope in November 1894.

Comment [A41]: I think we know this by now ...

In late 2009, the family agreed to the NFSA's access to Marius Sestier's original documents relating to his career as a frères Lumière representative in India and Australia between 1896 and 1897. The collection comprises two scrapbooks of press cuttings from Australia; one exercise book of press cuttings from India and his English language lessons; two bank books and one notebook of accounts and daily activities. Other personal and family history items such as photographs, Sestier's 1902 driver's license, and his military record were also included. This is the first time these documents have been placed in a collecting institution's hands.

Comment [A42]: Repetition; it all adds to the word count.

The Australian Connection

A search for the provenance of original frères Lumière films in the NFSA's collection revealed a direct link to Marius Sestier through a Franco-Australian family in Perth. The Antoine family held the films until the 1950s when they passed out of their care, resurfacing in 1979 as part of an STW9 documentary *Our French Connection*. The Antoine connection was through an uncle, Monsieur Georges Boivin, who acquired the films directly from Marius Sestier in 1897. Through a daughter, Julie Dyson, the family are kindly making available documents and photographs relating to Sestier's time in Australia.

Read more of Sally Jackson's [research](#) about the Marius Sestier Collection at *Screening the Past*.

Comment [A43]: Mostly speculation.

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