

The Eastern Script

Shameless self-promotion since 2011

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS



In this issue I offer you some comments on the process of clearing license plates for film & television use. I also found an interesting article to share that goes back in time to early Hollywood and uncovers some interesting strategies used by the big studios to create and reserve movie titles. I was struck by the similarity between their approach and what is now called *cybersquatting* in the land of domain name registrations. So, I have for you a little food for thought on both the clearance side and the title search side in this spring issue.

We benefited from January until May from the many hours spent with not one but two interns this time: Jonathan Vamos and Jordan Baker, both Queen's University students (Jonathan in the Film & Media program and Jordan a History master's degree student). During what had to be the worst winter ever, they both logged many an hour with us down in the dungeon as they huddled over computers clutching hot mugs of tea, the chattering of teeth almost as loud as the gusting of snow against the windows (hey, is this a newsletter or a Dickens novel?), ball & chain attached to their right ankles while they slaved over Rolodex updates. Fond memories for them both, I'm sure. Seriously—they both worked hard on a lot of projects for us and we are very grateful for their support.

Our work with the Canadian Film Centre and the National Screen Institute's emerging filmmaker programs continues into 2014. I was grateful for the opportunity to speak with many of them in both Toronto and Winnipeg earlier this year. Best wishes to all of them as their projects evolve and finally hit the big screens throughout the year. No summer vacation for those guys.

Anne Marie Murphy
President



LICENSE PLATES ON-SCREEN

“We need to clear license plates for the two cars that will be featured throughout the film. How do you do this?”

We answer that question with a question: “Where are the plates from?” If you say New York, off we go to phone or email our contact at the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles to get answers. Often production has specific alpha/numeric combinations they want to use. They might have existing plates from a prop house that had been created for a previous production that they will now re-use in a new geographic setting. Maybe they want something customized that refers to a specific story element (“MUTANT3”—?). The clearance company contacts the motor vehicle registration office in the appropriate setting (New York, British Columbia, Rio de Janeiro) to confirm that the plate is not currently in use there.

It is a sunny day indeed when we discover that we can do the searching ourselves, online, at a website. Anyone who has owned a car is familiar with the often frustrating levels of complexity of the bureaucracy at their local government’s car registration office. Cracking the *who can help* nut with this enquiry can take more than a few phone calls and absolutely more than a minute on hold. Further complication on our end arises when the story is set in a foreign country. We typically have to hire a translator to navigate the foreign motor vehicle bureaucracy in search of answers to our bizarre question.

We recently had the tables turned on us when one of our regular motor vehicle department contacts asked us to do some research for them. They wanted to know how production companies make their film and television license plates. To return years of favors, we collected a sampling of answers, reproduced here:

- 1 “Well the plates are usually vinyl because they are less expensive, sometimes for far background they may be laminate! Some prop people have an inventory of plates from shows gone by and these are usually metal.”
- 2 “I know that in general, when faking signs and that sort of thing, they often use vinyl wraps that would cover existing signs. License plates I’m sure would need to be a bit sturdier, but my gut tells me they’d use a stiff vinyl/styrene/plastic type of thing to put over an existing plate when and if necessary. To be honest I can’t recall a situation where we’ve done this on a show that I’ve worked on, often times we would purchase our own vehicles and register them as our own, so that we would then own the plates and wouldn’t need to hide them.”
- 3 “We make our Film License plates two ways. The first way is just laser printing on a plastic called Styrene, and the second way is also using Styrene but we Vacuform the letters to have raised letters.”
- 4 “I think they are a form of styrene plastic. Some are 3D, and are hot moulded to form the raised letters, and custom cut vinyl stuck on for the colours/art. Some are just flat plastic with numbers/art printed on them or again with the vinyl. That’s all I’ve ever used.”



FEATURED ARTICLE

What's In a Name? The Little-Known Secret of Title Registration in Hollywood

One of our products is title searches (for further details, visit easternscript.com/services). Laying claim to the perfect title involves more than finding the right words to attract the audience you seek. You must also be sure that you do not bump up against a title that might be about to be used by someone else's movie—especially if it's someone big. The article below describes how Hollywood started out tackling the issue of protecting the titles of its movies (born and unborn) and how what is now called the MPAA adjusted its early strategies for protecting the titles it hoped to use.



Excerpt from *Hollywood Renegades* by J. A. Aberdeen

Since 1925, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (commonly known as the Hays Office) maintained the Title Registration Bureau which allowed the member companies the ability to reserve specific film titles, whether or

not the company had any intention on making a movie by such name. Since titles and names were not subject to copyright protection, the title registration division of the Hays Office helped protect its members with self-enforced rules that avoided the duplication of titles and kept the more devious filmmakers from intentionally creating confusion in the marketplace. Unfortunately for the independents, the rule disadvantaged newcomers who effectively found most of the intuitive-sounding titles already reserved by the large studios.

On occasion the title registration created problems even for more established independents. When Chaplin received the copyright for his forthcoming picture titled *The Dictator* in November 1938, he then discovered that Paramount owned the MPPDA title registration. Rather than pay the \$25,000 that Paramount asked in order to transfer the rights to the Chaplin studio, Chaplin decided to alter his title to *The Great Dictator* (1940) instead.

Even though each company was limited to 250 name registrations, the studios were able to tie up thousands of titles using their many subsidiary companies as registrars. On the other hand, the studios claimed it was not fair for an independent producer who released only one or two films a year to be afforded the same registration limit as a studio that released as many of 50 features annually.

In 1943 SIMPP (the Society of Independent Motion Picture Producers) asked for title registration reform. Will Hays told the Society that he was entertaining a substitute plan that would incorporate a sliding scale that allowed larger companies to reserve more titles. However SIMPP felt such a plan would be a deterrent to new producers. Instead the MPPDA agreed to limit the number of feature titles to 100 feature names per company. The self-regulated title registration system, with slight modification, is still in effect in Hollywood to this day.

Credit: *Hollywood Renegades: The Society of Independent Motion Picture Producers* by J. A. Aberdeen Copyright (c) 2014 J. A. Aberdeen, reprinted here with permission from and thanks to the author.

RECENT WORK

BIG SCREEN

CELL “When a mysterious cell phone signal causes apocalyptic chaos, an artist is determined to reunite with his young son in New England”. Based on the novel by Stephen King who also wrote the screenplay. Stars Samuel L. Jackson and John Cusack.

Credit: IMDb's plot summary for the project

LIFE “A photographer for Life Magazine is assigned to shoot pictures of James Dean.” Director: Anton Corbijn. Cast: Robert Pattinson, Dane DeHaan, Ben Kingsley, Joel Edgerton.

Credit: lifethefilm.com

LURE “Grad student Rebecca Markowitz is dispatched to a Nova Scotia prison to interview Eric Daltry, an internet predator accused of killing three women. As she delves deep into Daltry's twisted psyche, Rebecca's thesis and her personal life slowly start to crumble and she finds herself getting in deeper than she ever intended, not only with Daltry, but with her own hidden demons.”

Credit: Producer/Writer Chris Turner

SMALL SCREEN

ATOMIC PUPPET “In Atomic Puppet, when Captain Atomic, Model City's fearless superhero, is transformed into a powerless puppet by his disgruntled sidekick, the hero's powers are accidentally transferred to his biggest fan, 12-year old Joey. Together the two form an awkward and comedic partnership as they strive to become the city's greatest superhero team.”

Credit: Chris Arrant, cartoonbrew.com

THE MOBLEES “The Moblees is a new preschool, live-action television series that gets kids up and moving. The series, which encourages kids to physically play along, is infused with original songs, terrific adventures and an educational focus on physical activity and non-sedantary behaviours.”

Credit: Press release “Sneak Peek Invite: Kids' CBC's THE MOBLEES” at website Momstown Toronto

TINY PLASTIC MEN “Tiny Plastic Men is a comedy series format that will keep viewers entertained with fun nerdy characters and great storylines along with a generous dash of random sketches that let viewers' imaginations run wild all at the same time.”

Credit: Series' promotional website

HELPFUL BOOKMARKS

Find a primer on how to make pemmican! Or use it to fill in this blank: *Canada produces approximately \$ _____ billion worth of potatoes annually.* This website is great, the name says it all: thecanadianencyclopedia.ca

The Goose Gallery provides some backstory for popular nursery rhymes and has lovely illustrations: rooneydesign.com/MotherGoose

Everyone can use a conversion bookmark, this is a handy reference tool: convertit.com/Go/ConvertIt