

Footage Library of the Year

Historic Films: Total online access for iPads, iPhones and Androids

Historic Films Archive is a small but industrious stock footage archive located on the eastern end of Long Island, New York. In business since 1991, they provide hundreds of thousands of clips to award-winning documentaries, television programmes, commercials and feature films. Their library of musical performance and entertainment footage spans a century and contains over 50,000 individual performances from television's most important networks and programmes.

The collection of stock footage spans the years 1895 to 2015 and consists of over 35,000 hours of news, lifestyles, travel, fads, fashion, home movies, celebrity 'red carpet' events, vintage television programmes, commercials, interviews, silent films, training films, military films, industrials and cartoons. In 2009, after two years of research and development and during one of the country's worst financial down-turns, Historic Films recruited an outstanding team of web developers who spent the next two years customising a web-based platform for stock footage clients and now, unlike many of its competitors, Historic Films' Archive presents its clients with the option to access and view an entire document/film while giving them the ability to select the precise shot they want.



Personal touch

Historic Films strength has always been in its dedicated multi-tasked staff that do in fact still answer the phone to customers and in many cases have been with the company since its early inception.

The same team of developers recruited back in 2009 is still there. In 2014, Historic saw an obvious trend. Clients were no longer tied to their desktops for research and had become en masse mobile. The greatest increase in traffic coming to the website was now from iPads, iPhones and Android devices yet this sector was not being served as the video playback was not compatible on these devices.

So, in 2015, Historic Films re-tooled and re-launched its website to allow for tablet and smart phone device compliancy. It now allows users of iPhones, iPads and Android devices to stream footage and make selects while accessing all of the same great features that desktop users have always enjoyed. Historic is now fully searchable anywhere at any time on any device. No "App" required.

...and 'The President's Tale'

Founder, Joe Lauro, reveals his strategies for success at Historic Films

Were you in at the start of Historic?

What is now Historic Films began as A.R.I.Q. Footage Inc. in early 1991 with Richard Plagge from Fox Movietone as my partner. After Richard passed away in 1994, I partnered with Andrew Solt and changed the name of the company to Historic Films Archive, Inc. With the change of name we also changed our focus to incorporate holdings of musical performance film/video and general show-business/entertainment oriented archival material.

How have you seen/been involved with the evolution of the company?

Every inch of footage at Historic Films was purchased or chosen for representation by me – that's the fun part of my job. I have been a collector of antique jazz-blues and country 78 rpm records since I was a kid and I incorporate the same collector instincts I use to finding rare recordings and dealing with other collectors in acquiring and ferreting out rare film and video properties for Historic. The challenge of discovery is what keeps me here!

You have a wide variety of genres and different archives

Yes, a small company should be diverse – it just increases the chances of having your material licensed by a large spectrum of producers and productions.

Has this been by chance or conscious planning?

If it were up to me I would only handle music footage, pre-1966 kodachrome/technicolor films, lifestyle footage and pre-1934 nitrate newsreels! ...but I am not as a business man as daft as my tastes!

What's the secret of widening your archive?

I am motivated by constant film surprises – I am a film junkie – I need to see new, rare, unusual and provocative footage or performances almost constantly or I get very bored!

How diverse are the sources?

We find footage from the bottom of dumpsters, under the beds of aged collectors still living with mom – or from national television networks – no one or place is spared!



Joe Lauro

You have obviously invested heavily in digitising whole films etc. is that a 'long tail' policy ie. A long time in coming to fruition?

As everyone in the industry understands, technology changes constantly – I remember, around 1993 or so when competitors of mine were selling out their companies and jumping ship largely because of the change to digital. The outrageous expense AND the fear of new technology was daunting – we just sat back and waited for it to shake out – I mean, the Pioneers were the ones with the arrows sticking out of their backs! We waited until the technology was a bit more stable and affordable and paid close attention to the platforms being used by our larger competitors. We then got to work to design our own platform that would serve our specific long-form needs. So yes, it was a long time coming but we were paying close attention while we waited and what we came up with has worked well for us and our clients.

Yet your website is accessible to a whole variety of traffic?

Yes, tablets, phones, laptops and desktop Macs and PCs . We are now 100% responsive being cross-platform and browser compliant. You do not need an App for our website to function well on your mobile device. It has been designed specifically with that ever more mobile end user in mind and we will continue to evolve and adapt to meet that need within our industry.

Is that already paying back?

Absolutely. In the first six months of 2014, approximately 16% of all traffic coming to our site was from a mobile device. As of 2016 that number is now 31% for the same six month period. That is a significant increase. This was an obvious trend that we had followed for the two years leading up to the re-development, so our motivation to make the switch and our objectives to move forward were clear. The clients told us what they needed and we listened.

In all this hi-tech development, where does personal service fit in, in the Historic Films philosophy?

The core staff at Historic has been with us a minimum of ten years and as much as twenty plus years on our sales and research team. Our researchers are historians who have a deep knowledge and love for cinema and its many tentacles. Whichever researcher you work with at Historic Films will know the answer to your question and if not, will find someone on our staff who does. We still answer the phones ourselves! (and it has been a very conscious decision to keep it that way) – after all, this IS a service business and I think that part of it gets lost with some of the larger companies in the field.

Are there any other 2016 achievements to rank alongside the FOCAL International Award?

A documentary film we produced at Historic Films – *The Big Beat: Fats Domino and the birth of Rock n' Roll* was selected by *American Masters*, which is a highly regarded nationally broadcast PBS documentary series, for its 2016 line-up . It has also been submitted for a Grammy Award.

What is your long-term 'view from the bridge' for Historic?

To try to get sites like YouTube to pay attention to visual copyright holders and allow us to share revenues on the tens of thousands of clips currently streaming that we own, which they are allowing record companies to keep ALL of the revenues on... **it's thievery!** This is something that all content owners should be paying closer attention to. Actually, that's in the pet peeve department isn't it! – View from the bridge is to keep on diversifying our archive and adapting our client access to make it as easy as possible for people to find and license our footage.

Is the aim then to take on the 'big boys' or carve a distinctive reputation of a different sort?

The bigger they are, the harder they fall! We just keep rolling along and are not as interested in taking on the Goliaths out there. We are more interested in excelling at what we do so that we can keep doing it well and as efficiently as we can.

Joe Lauro
President, Historic Films Archive, LLC
www.historicfilms.com

Anthea Carr
anthea@historicfilms.com