



the Lumière brothers:  
top, Auguste; above, Louis

On the evening of December 28, 1895, the Lumière Cinématographe opened to the paying public in the Salon Indien of the Grand Café, 14 boulevard des Capucines, Paris, France. This date marks the generally accepted birthday of the movies. Four months later, on April 23, 1896, Edison's Vitascope (actually not invented by Edison, but by another American Thomas Armat) premiered in New York City at Koster & Bial's Music Hall, now the site of Macy's. Ever since, there has been a fierce debate over who actually invented cinema. The Lumières or Edison? The French or the Americans? Edison had patented his Kinetoscope (horizontal film movement) as early as 1891. Even earlier, in 1888, a French inventor by the name of Augustin Le Prince patented the first practical moving camera. (Le Prince's mysterious disappearance in 1891 on a moving train prior to the first public demonstration of his invention has only fuelled a controversy that his death was no accident, but actually foul play.)

Conspiracy theories aside, it is generally acknowledged that Edison was uncharacteristically short-sighted when it came to the potential of moving pictures. He was deeply involved in the development of the phonograph and did not bother to patent his Kinetoscope in Europe. He viewed his invention as no more than a toy for the amusement of the working class. The Lumière brothers (Louis and Auguste), however, understood cinema's scientific and commercial potential, and by "dabbling" with Edison's "toys" invented a functional projector and moving camera by the spring of 1895. Following the Lumières' historic screening at the Grand Café, Edison realized his oversight, and embarked on a determined effort to control all aspects of the film business in America during its chaotic first 10 years. However, he lost forever the bragging rights to the discovery of cinema. The Lumières' invention established the brothers as the most influential

men in motion pictures in the world, eclipsing the importance of Edison. One hundred years later, this pre-eminence has been reinforced by the official international recognition of the centenary of cinema in 1995, and not 1996. This recognition gives credence to Gallic perseverance and implicit acknowledgement that the Americans no longer need to claim responsibility for inventing cinema. One hundred years later, they own cinema.

Canada has its own dates to celebrate, and its own particular spin on the "who came first?" debate. The official (and only) history of early Canadian cinema, *Embattled Shadows*, by film historian and scholar Peter Morris (published in 1978), cites July 21, 1896, as the first screening of an Edison film, *The Kiss* ("starring" Canadian actor, May Irwin), at an outdoor showing in Ottawa. In 1984, an outraged film scholar from Quebec discovered that the first date was actually June 28, 1896, when the first Lumière film was screened in Montreal. And so another French-English controversy entered the public discourse, with dreary and predictable results. When I spoke to Peter Morris about this, he acknowledged his oversight. The earlier date had simply slipped through his otherwise immaculate research.

In the spirit of post-referendum *rapprochement*, *Take One* acknowledges both dates (and a third which occurred in Toronto, August 31, 1896, when *The Kiss* first screened at Robinson's Musée on Yonge Street), with a Special Issue. *Take One No. 12* (Summer 1996) will focus on 100 Canadians who have made a significant contribution to the history of cinema. Montreal's luminous Norma Shearer rose to become one of the premiere stars of Hollywood during the twenties and thirties, while her brother, Douglas, was one of the most respected and honoured (12 Academy Awards) sound men in Hollywood. Fay Wray, from Card-

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ston, Alberta, achieved immortality in the arms of King Kong, while Vancouver's Raymond Burr did the same, playing the wife-killer in Hitchcock's classic *Rear Window*. Toronto's Mary Pickford became "America's Sweetheart," and Jim Carrey, from Jackson's Point, Ontario, is now the highest paid actor in Hollywood. From Mack Sennett to James Cameron, Claude Jutra to Atom Egoyan, Walter Huston to Donald Sutherland, Canadians have made a remarkable contribution to cinema throughout the century, and *Take One* will celebrate them all ●