



## **Presentation\* of the Cineteca di Bologna Chaplin Project**

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**\*Please note that this was only an introduction to the 122 slides that accompanied the presentation to illustrate the project.**

The history and adventures of the Chaplin Archive would deserve a paper of its own, considering the circumstances its survival is to be considered almost miraculous.

Long before being referred to as the Chaplin archive, Chaplin's paper fund was already used to taking trips.

When Chaplin was revoked his visa in 1952 his half brothers Wheeler Dryden and Sydney Chaplin inventoried his documents and personal belongings to organise their shipment to Europe. In a letter to Sydney dated October 20th 1953, Chaplin wrote:

Dear Syd,

In the matter of the sale of the studio property it is difficult for me to go into every item. As far as the motion picture equipment is concerned I don't think I need anything of that nature over here because I shall probably rent a studio and all its equipment when I start production. [...]

he then moved on to other belongings, the furniture in his house, his clothes. Even though the letter I am quoting from looks very much like a business letter, it betrays the pain of a man who was dismantling what had been his life in the past 40 years. And he went on:

Now as to my papers on biographical matter, all the early photographs and stills should be shipped and any interesting correspondence such as Einstein's letters etc. should be shipped as well, but a lot of it could be eliminated, I am sure. However so long as we keep all the pictures photos and plates... that's really more important than letters

On November 1<sup>st</sup> 1953 Wheeler Dryden replied:

Dear Charles, 'Shakesperiana', as you know, means "anything specifically connected with Shakespeare or his work." Chapliniana, therefore means anything specifically connected with Chaplin or his work. You haven't expressed your wishes concerning the Chapliniana "props" and materials. Until you decide to donate this Chapliniana to British, French, Italian and other European motion-picture museums, I can store the items in my new living-quarters when I move from the cottage behind sunset house. They would be in the care of a person you can trust – one who realises the tremendous significance of these irreplaceable items and their historic value to posterity". If you consider my attitude sentimental or naïve, please, Charles, give me credit for being sincere and for possessing foresight. With no thought of egotism on your part, you realise, I'm sure, that you will "go down in history.

Well, Wheeler Dryden was apparently right and Chaplin did go down in history quite a lot in fact and that is why his work and art is today being looked at, from so many different angles and points of view. Working in a film archive, our perspective needs to be multi-layered and cover many problematics. Preservation, of course, the urge that we and the Chaplin family felt to alter the somewhat medieval concept according to which something rare should be kept away from the majority of people, and therefore conceiving a way for the Chaplin archive to be accessed without its content being used improperly, assessing and choosing the most appropriate cataloguing description which would have at the same time be suitable for the kind of materials we were to treat and also in line with archival international standards.

The Chaplin Archive documents are described according to the areas and punctuation prescribed by the International Standards for Bibliographic Description of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. For unpublished material we used the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, II edition, revised 1988, drawn up under the direction of the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR, the American Library Association, the Australian Committee on Cataloguing, the British Library, the Canadian Committee on Cataloguing, the Library Association and the Library of Congress, edited by Michael Gorman and Paul W. Winkler. Additional fields of description such as "Type", "Form", "Series" and

“Summary” allow a further description to the document. All words in those fields are indexed and can therefore be retrieved through search keys.

Each bibliographical record has a link to lists of Authors, Subjects, Filmography and Bibliography.

The software adopted allows the retrieval of the catalogue entry together with three-format images. In the past few years, especially after having acquired also the entire Pasolini paper and film archive – we’ve been working closely with other film libraries, in particular the Bibliothèque du Film in Paris (who holds an amazing number of special collections such as Germaine Dullac, Nicholas Ray, Jean Renoir, Francois Truffaut) and the Italian National Film Archive in Rome (who preserves the original documents of the main Neorealism’s authors such as Rossellini and De Santis) and confronted with the debate on the so called “non-film materials” as those kind of collections were once referred to, the term already positioning film materials as the primary and undisputed source of study.

During the 70s and 80s there was a new urge within film archives around the world to restore “endangered” prints and the slogan “nitrate can’t wait” summarised the effort that was made to preserve silent films. At that time, archivists started to look at film related documents as a precious source to reconstruct the history of the print: censorship papers used to trace back the original length of the print, original intertitles, synopses, all necessary tools to an archivist. Extra-film materials - as they are now called in a more politically correct way that to me echoes the extra colonies of science fiction films – have today being recognised as central tools for researchers, film historians, scholars, students and cinéphiles.

The Chaplin archive is an impressive example in that sense, not only for the actual quantity of documents preserved, but also for their variety – from production papers, to shooting and daily production reports, cutting continuities, screenplays, scenarios, preparatory notes, business and personal correspondence, telegrams, storyboards, drawings and sketches, exhibitor books, minutes, contracts and agreements, court reports.

The time span is also rather unique, since the archive covers a time span of almost a century.

In her 1989 book French archivist and historian Arlette Farge describes “Le gout d’archive” (the “pleasure of the archive”) in relation to her work on XVIII Parisian police archives as the pleasure that stems from discovery, from order and disorder and that often consists in mapping and remapping a territory.

In our case this territory does not only embrace Chaplin as an artist and filmmaker but also documents in a very eloquent and tangible way the major transformations of his times both in the film industry – the production and distribution companies monopoly, the flourishing of the studio system, the transition between silent and sound films, different approach to publicity and merchandising strategies, the institution of the Production Code – and in society and politics – the first and second world wars, depression and the new deal, the red scare.

The revolutionary scope of Chaplin as a craftsman of his own works, screenplayer, director, producer, business man, musician and even choreographer (in the case of Limelight) emerges from these materials under a different, sometimes surprising light.

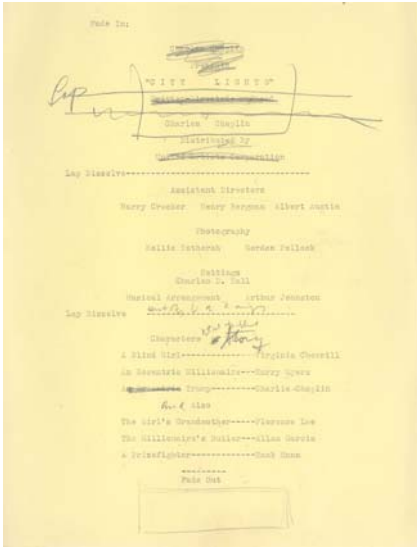
### **A small selection of images from the Chaplin Archive**



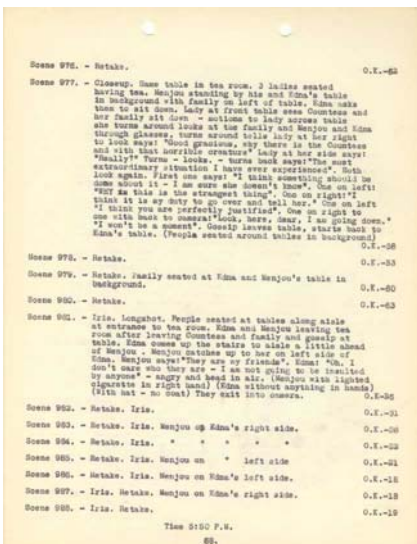
Pencil Drawing - Part of a series of drawing by John Beckman for Monsieur Verdoux, undated  
© Roy Export Company Establishment



Cover of "All Family News Magazine", circa 1940  
© Roy Export Company Establishment



First page of a draft screenplay for *City Lights* with pencil amendments presumably by Chaplin's secretary, undated  
© Roy Export Company Establishment



Shooting report of a cut scene from *A Woman of Paris*  
© Roy Export Company Establishment



Keystone Photo Album, undated featuring *A Film Johnnie*  
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