

The Origins of “Living Pictures” in Denmark

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“Living Pictures” arrived in the summer of 1896

2026 marks the 130th year anniversary since the first “living pictures” were shown in Denmark. On 7. June 1896, the first “Kinoptikon” shows began operating in Copenhagen. This took place in painter and manufacturer Lauritz Vilhelm Pachts’s (1843-1912) Kjøbenhavns Panorama Kinoptikon, set up on the Town Hall Square in a large temporary pavilion entirely made of wood. The premiere took place 7½ months after the Brothers Skladanowsky’s public premiere of their Bioscop on 1. November 1895 in Berlin and less than 6 months following the premiere of the Cinématographe by the Brothers Lumière in Grand Café in Paris on 28. December 1895.



Kjøbenhavns Panorama Kinoptikon, July 1898. Color by AI. Picture: Peter Lars Petersen / Peter Elfelt. Public domain

Researching Denmark’s pioneer cinemas from scratch

The work of documenting Denmark’s pioneer cinemas began from scratch in 2020. Behind this work lies very thorough preparatory work, so all the stories have now been revised to an unprecedented level of detail. The work has been made possible by, in general, delving deeply into all Danish newspapers since 1895. It is the digitization of newspapers that has made it possible to read them online, to document and cross-check the stories, and follow the development in the individual cinemas, which also includes the people behind it (most of whom have been forgotten). During this extensive research work, many exciting details have come to light. Details that, in some cases, shake the history of cinemas and film in Denmark. In literature and

journals published prior to our extensive research, there have been some certain truisms about early Danish cinema history, on the shoulders of which all subsequent books and dissertations have stood. In several places, it has been shown that information has been deficient and, in some cases, completely wrong. Errors, omissions and inaccuracies which have then been uncritically repeated decade after decade can now finally be rectified.

This paper summarizes the first 10 years of cinema with moving images projected onto a wall or screen, a concept which was completely new to Denmark in the summer of 1896. For the full story, visit biografmuseet.dk

1887 – 1896 Zoetropes, Magic Lanterns and slides

“Living Pictures” – or “Moving Pictures” -- first appeared in Danish variety shows, and special exhibitions, in many places all over Denmark. Although it was not yet the “reel” thing we now associate with the concept of “cinema”, audiences were treated to Zoetropes, Magic Lanterns, illusions, wax figures, slides and that kind of thing.

As early as 1876 a young man and photographer, Constantin Philipsen (1859-1925), was showing slides in Svendborg. He continued with his slide shows here in Denmark and also in the USA. 22 years later, in 1898, the same Philipsen would be instrumental in introducing moving pictures to Danes and by 1904 he opened Kosmorama in Copenhagen, the first permanent cinema. He would follow that up with nearly 25 additional cinemas all over Denmark.

The First Place with “living photographs”

“Kjøbenhavns Panorama” started in a former art gallery which opened on 26. March 1893, designed by architect Thorvald Bindesbøll (1846-1908) in today’s centre of Copenhagen, the City Hall Square (then under construction). As originally planned, it was to have a brief lifespan of only two years, but actually survived until 1900, at which time it was demolished for the completion of the square.

Pacht named his exhibition space after the former short-lived painted circular “Panorama” (1881-1889), a few streets away. Pacht was a successful entrepreneur and exhibited a collection of slide shows from around the world, including Edison’s phonograph, and from 26. December 1894¹ four Edison Kinetoscope viewing machines. His guests were treated to a first impression of what was yet to come.

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For the Danish premiere of "Living Pictures", Pacht originally considered buying the French Cinematograph² and the Lumière films he had seen in Paris. Unable to do that, he turned to film pioneer Birt Acres in London, who made Pacht a better offer.

Pacht named his new attraction "Kinoptikon", probably a Danish version of the English word "Kineopticon", the 35mm projector from Birt Acres' (1854-1918) in London. The first seven films also came from Acres and included "Rough sea at Dover" (1895) and "The Derby" (1895)³.

This historic event took place on 7 June 1896. Pacht must therefore be considered Denmark's true cinema and film pioneer, as it was he who brought the first *moving* pictures to Denmark.

A few days after the premiere, the Danish King Christian IX (1818-1906) arrived to see the new attraction, which in 1896 was considered quite a curiosity.

On the same day as the Kinoptikon opening, but much lesser known, were the "Bioscopic" shows at the amusement place called Wodroffslund in Frederiksberg -- only 1000 meters away from Pacht's "Kinoptikon". The new "Living Pictures" were likely the finale portion of a variety program consisting of live music and performing artists, as illustrated in the newspaper advert on the day of the opening. The shows, which played five nights, could have been open-air, as they were scheduled at 22:30 in the evening. Kinoptikon and Wodroffslund were the first places to present living projected pictures in Denmark.

On the 11. June 1896, four days after Kinoptikon, the brothers Emil Skladanowsky & Max Skladanowsky (1863-1939) demonstrated their "Bioscop" in Tivoli gardens. These shows of seven short films, each with a running time of less than 48 seconds, lasted around 15 minutes. Their performance took place at the open-air Pantomime Theatre every evening at 21:45 for nearly two months.

The "Bioscop" was the closing act of the Tivoli Revue 1896. It is rumoured they made a short film in

Tivoli during their stay titled "Lustige Gesellschaft vor dem Tivoli in Kopenhagen". If correct, that would have been the first film made in Denmark. Following the Tivoli engagement, their demonstration tour continued to Stockholm, Sweden.

One month later, on the 7 July, Henri Gerard and Charles Marcel, two young journalists from Paris, presented their "Kinematograf" (Danish version of the French word Cinématographe) in Koncertpalæet, Copenhagen. For two weeks, they presented a program with French titles and films by Thomas Edison, some of which were even advertised as being in color (hand colored) - a first! Danish journalists gave the Kinematograf some great reviews despite flickering images and some instability like they saw in Tivoli. They were especially pleased to see exotic dancing beauties on the screen. Gerard and Marcel performed in Stockholm 21. July 1896.

The first shows were mostly a mix of slides and living pictures and often lasted between 15 and 25 minutes -- some even with added sound effects from Edison's Phonograph or music instruments.

The First Danish Films and a Pictorialograph

Very soon "Living Pictures" were also presented outside Copenhagen. James Hansen (1864-1909) from Nykøbing Falster was one of the first. In January 1897⁴ he travelled from town to town with his equipment and presented his "Fonograf", a combination of lectures about Thomas Edison and 15 minutes of film. James Hansen continued his tours until 1907, bringing film to many corners of Denmark.

Beyond James Hansen, brothers Ib and Laurits Pasgaard toured Denmark with living pictures as early as 1897. The big Varieté theatres like Cirkus Varieté, Arena and National (Scala) in Copenhagen adopted living pictures as part of their program. Cities like Svendborg, Aalborg and Aarhus (as early as November 1896 with Edisons Fonograf and "Kinetofon") also got a taste of the Kinematograf in 1897.

In 1897 Pacht acquired a 35mm camera to make his own films for his Kinoptikon. Some research from 1997⁵ indicate it could have been a Pictorialograph from J. W. Rowe & Co., England (1897). Pacht photographed places and events, including a tram ride⁶ in Copenhagen, and premiered his first four short films in his own Kinoptikon on 26. December 1897. The premiere of the first Danish film productions is well documented in newspapers from that time⁷.

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Travelling Showmen and Constantin Philipsen

1898 was an historically exciting year. In February, Pacht turned his Panorama into a make-shift film studio to film actress Charlotte Wiehe (1865-1947) performing some scenes from her theatre play at the nearby Scala ⁸. The film with Mrs. Wiehe is the first one shot in Denmark that contains a certain amount of direction and staging.

In May, Pacht travelled with his friend, photographer Peter Lars Petersen (1866-1931), on a trip to Germany to film prince Christian (1870-1947) and princess Alexandrine of Mecklenburg-Schwerin (1879-1952). Pacht was filming with his [possibly] Pictorialograph, and Petersen took still photographs. More about Peter Lars Petersen later in this story.

Constantin Philipsen re-appeared in August 1898, when he premiered "The American Biograph" in Slagelse ⁹ - where "biograph" was the name of the 35mm projector. A word which would later be transformed into the Danish word *Biograf*, which has since been synonymous with cinema in Denmark. Projection equipment (probably a "Vitascope" from Edison) and film were delivered by Charles Urbans Warwick Trading Company in London. Later in September he moved his show to the Cirkus Variété in Copenhagen, here to be presented as "The American Wargraph" - combining the words *Warwick* and *Biograph*. Between 1898 and 1904, Philipsen toured Denmark and Norway with this.



Wargraph shows at the Cirkus Variété in Copenhagen. Projectionist was an English gentleman, Mr. Alfred James Gee.

In 1904 Philipsen opened the first permanent cinema in Denmark and went on to open cinemas all over Denmark. In 1912, he converted the former central station into a cinema palace with 1780 seats and named it Palads Teatret. It ran continually until the edifice was demolished in 1917. It was replaced in 1918 by the new and even bigger Palads, right next to it and still in function today (2026) as a multiplex. Alongside Pacht,

Philipsen is considered the most important Danish cinema pioneer.

At the same time in the late 1890s, the success of Wargraph at Cirkus Variété – opposite the station and Scala – was so massive that plans to demolish the building were abandoned. The Cirkus building also still exists although rebuilt after a massive fire in 1914.

The projectionist was a certain English gentleman, Mr. Alfred James Gee (1878-1970), who arrived in Denmark at the age of 20 (1898). Originally in partnership with a fellow Englishman, Mr. Gee travelled for Philipsen with "The American Wargraph" / "The American Biograph" in Denmark for several years primarily in spring and autumn, always returning to Cirkus Variété during winter, as the Cirkus was operating as an actual circus in the summertime. These months, Gee, unable to rest, continued showing films in Tivoli and – like Skladanowsky before him – also made a few films of his own. Mr. Gee married an American girl by the name “Daisy” Gilford (1884-1936), had two daughters and stayed in Denmark for the rest of his life. Although having a permanent residence in Copenhagen, Gee received a life-long cinema license to run a cinema in Aalborg. Alfred Gee became a member of Cinema Veterans, UK (1903) in 1924.

German cinema pioneer, producer and director Mr. Oskar Messter (1866-1943) was entertaining the audiences at Scala’s “Kosmograf” by the end of 1898 and returned regularly until 1905. In October, Arena theatre in Tivoli displayed their American “Triograph” on the largest screen at the time – nearly 10 meters wide, according to the advertising.

Projecting nitrate film in those days was a hazardous job for the projectionist -- and the audience. Projectors were very simple, had no spools, and the film ran straight down into a basket. Films were only 16-18 seconds / 15 meters long, at 16 frames pr. second. Films had to be rewound by hand after every performance. When electricity was unavailable for the carbon light source, limelight, which required a mix of oxygen and acetylene gas, was used instead. Lamphouses were isolated with asbestos, and change of carbons could result in explosive fires if a hot used piece hit the basket with film. Moreover, the projector and projectionist were often located in the same room as the audience!

The art of film projection advanced with the invention of the projection room, however, they were often very small and built with little consideration of the working conditions. The projectionist had to work without ventilation of the room, and tolerate the heat from the light source as well as transformers etc.

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Enter Holger Gleesen and a royal photographer

In early 1899, Pacht left Panorama Kinoptikon and moved his activities to the ‘Panoptikon’ building next to Tivoli, although now equipped with a cinema operating primarily as a wax museum. Pacht, not really interested in moving pictures any longer, handed over his 35mm camera to his friend and photographer Peter Lars Petersen.

At the same time, Mr. Holger Gleesen (1863-1920) took over Kinoptikon, films and projection equipment from Pacht. Later the same year he opened Panorama Hafnia on Amagertorv in the opposite direction on 3. September 1899. With a program of slides from far away countries and moving pictures, he is to have Peter Lars Petersen as his sole supplier of Danish films. On opening day, he presents Petersens first three short films: “Badende drenge i Skovshoved”, “Cyklesammenstød ved Nørrevold” and “Dampere lægger til i Havnegade”. The best is yet to come.

Petersen had been photographing the royal family since 1892 and quite sensationally brought his new Cinematograph¹⁰ film camera to Bernstorff Castle just outside Copenhagen in early September 1899. The Danish King had invited, among others, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia (1869-1918) and Tsarina Alexandra (1872-1918), the Prince and Princess of Wales (later King Edward VII (1841-1910) and Queen Alexandra (1844-1925) of the UK). Petersen immortalized the visit on film. It premiered a few weeks later at Panorama Hafnia on 23. September 1899 titled “De kongelige skal fotograferes”. The royal family never imagined it was going to be shown publicly and had behaved accordingly. The film - less than two minutes long - was a massive success and played for six weeks. In 1920 during an interview Elfelt explained that “De kongelige skal fotograferes” was one of his first.

The first dramatic film caused a furor

By 1900 “living pictures” had lost some of its’ novelty appeal, and audiences began declining. Some films however, made an impression. On 14. January 1900 Panorama Hafnia premiered Peter Lars Petersens “Den Østrigske barnemorderskes sidste dag”, a dramatic film in two acts inspired by real events only two weeks prior, when convicted child murderer Juliane Hummel was hung on 2. January 1900 in Vienna, Austria. The film caused a furor because the audience did not appreciate films based on real events like this. Neither did the audience notice it was actually a Danish location and photographed on a snowy day across the streets from Christiansborg castle. “Barnemordersken” was Petersens only attempt to make a dramatic film, and it

soon disappeared into oblivion. In interviews¹¹ many years later after becoming a Royal Photographer in 1901 and changing his name to Peter Elfelt, he disowned this particular film, admitting it was of bad taste, feeling no need to be associated with it.

Before so, Constantin Philipsen, on the road, had bought the rights for the film, and retitled it “Den Østrigske morderske Fru Hummels henrettelse” or just “Fru Hummels henrettelse” before becoming “Henrettelsen” in its afterlife. Philipsen cleverly used the bad press to his own advantage in advertising¹².



Panorama Hafnia 14. January 1900 premiere of “Den Østrigske barnemorderskes sidste dag” by Peter Lars Petersen / Peter Elfelt

A word for cinema yet to come

At the turn of the century, in 1900 and 1901, “moving pictures” continued to fan out through most regions in Denmark with film shows being presented in hotel ballrooms, inns and locations temporarily adapted for cinema use. By this time the average running time of a film was still less than 7 minutes, but the audience was growing increasingly tired of the films (mostly documentaries) and were demanding more content. It is still too early for the first permanent cinemas to appear. And indeed, the word “Biograf”, the Danish word for cinema had not even been adopted yet.

After the closure of Panorama Hafnia in April 1900, Elfelt opened his own Kinoptikon on 13. November 1901, literally a stone’s throw from Town Hall Square.

He continued showing mostly his own slides and films from Hafnia, including ever-popular films with bathing ladies and a few new documentaries, with the hugest success being an actress in the dressing room. The life of Elfelt’s Kinoptikon was also short-lived, however, and he closed it again on 31. May 1902.

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Four years later in 1906 Elfelt opened a permanent cinema almost on the same address by the name Kinografen.

The first attempts to open a permanent cinema

By 1902, six years had gone by with film having been merely an added attraction for variety shows, a sort of grand finale with moving pictures. Until now, no one had dared to open a place with a program exclusively of film, but on 22 June 1902, Constantin Philipsen launched the Odeon Theatre in Copenhagen (or more specifically Frederiksberg) with a program based on just two films - expanding during the summer with a third - no slides or other forms of entertainment. That is the very definition of a cinema, and as such Odeon should be considered the first actual cinema in Denmark in a brand-new, durable construction built of wood. The opening sensation was “Les sept châteaux du diable”, a French production from 1901 by Ferdinand Zecca distributed by Pathé Frères. With a running time of 13 minutes, it was also the longest film yet seen in Denmark. Odeon closed three months later, however, but Philipsen now became the Scandinavian agent of films from Pathé Frères.



Odeon, the first real cinema in Denmark opened in 1902.

Voilà Pathé Frères & Georges Méliès' Star Film

Philipsen continued his touring, this time in Norway under the headline “Det Udødelige Teater” with French films from Pathé Frères debuting at the Casino Theatre in Copenhagen. This was just a few weeks before the opening of Odeon, on 20. April 1902 with just one film, namely “Passionsskuespillet fra Oberammergau”, or in French, “Vie et passion du Christ” in the version from 1899. It was responsible for the peculiar name now given the roadshow which translates to “The Immortal Theatre”.

Among others was also a catalogue from Georges Méliès' Star Film (handled by Pathé) including the director's "Le voyage dans la Lune" from 1902. Méliès was already well known in Denmark with his 1896 comedy “Une nuit terrible” opening in Pacht's Kinooptikon as early as 25. December 1896. The Danish

premiere of "Voyage" takes place six months later in Aalborg on 24. May 1903, when Philipsen returned to Denmark.

Traveling men and the first permanent cinema Kosmorama

Visitors David Fernander (1883-1935) & Rasmus Hallseth (1879-1940) from Bergen, Norway toured Denmark (mostly Jutland) from October 1904. James Hansen continued his traveling presentations, and several other itinerant showmen also got into the business. By 1904, we estimate almost every citizen had the opportunity to see a movie somewhere in their neighborhood. All temporary locations had colorful names like "Kaufmanns Elektro Biograf-Teatret", "Kinematografen Edisons levende billeder" or "The American Bioscope" to name just a few.



In Maribo in late October 1899, James Hansen is on the road with his lecture about Thomas Edison and life sized “living pictures”.

In May 1904, Philipsen made another attempt to open a permanent cinema on Vimmelskaftet in the middle of Copenhagen. The Olympia was open less than a month, and Philipsen knew it was to be a temporary setup. He finally had success when he opened Kosmorama on 17. September 1904. Despite his attempts with Odeon (1902) and Olympia, the Kosmorama is largely considered to be the first permanent Danish cinema.

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The next cinemas and Ole Olsen

Following the opening of Kosmorama in 1904, 14 new permanent cinemas opened nationally in 1905 in Copenhagen, Frederiksberg, Aarhus, Horsens, Odense, Randers and Aalborg. All but one were store-front cinemas with the exception in Horsens, like Odeon, being built of wood but only in operation for a couple of months.

In April 1905, Ole Olsen (1863-1943) opened Københavns Biografteater with Alfred James Gee and the exact same seating capacity as Kosmorama, a little more than 150 guests. Olsen is no stranger to the world of show business. He had shown moving slides as early as 1886 and had been associated with a travelling circus. Because of disagreements with Olsen, Gee left the cinema just a few months later.

New cinemas and the birth of Danish film industry

60 new cinemas opened in 1906 and many more places like Frederikshavn, Kolding, Lemvig, Nakskov, Roskilde, Skanderborg, Skive, Svendborg and Viborg were all happy to have their own local cinema. With some closures, by the end of 1906 there were 49 established locations showing moving pictures all over Denmark, most of these store-front cinemas.

For some time, audiences had been complaining about an almost endless line of travel films and documentaries. Seeing all the nice content with dramatic storylines that arrived from France, England and to some extent USA, Ole Olsen saw an opportunity to start a company he called “Ole Olsens Film-Industri”, aimed almost immediately at export as his primary focus, and the Danish market being only secondary. One of Olsen’s first productions was the farce “Et opløb på Frederiksberg” which premiered on 24. March 1906 in his own cinema. Among the cast is a young (20) actor by the name Jean Pierre Carl Buron (1886-1955) who in 1911 changed his name to Jean Hersholt. He moved to the USA where he had a long and distinguished career. Many years later the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences created the “Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award” in his honour.

Ole Olsen renamed his production company to “A/S Nordisk Films Kompagni”, with the first film under the new name being “En tur gennem Strøget” (1906), a short documentary aimed at tourists. “The Lion Hunt”, the following year became a world sensation but also another domestic scandal in the same league as “Henrettelsen”, with the film being prohibited in Denmark until 1908 and Olsen losing his cinema license, but not the right to produce films.

Nordisk Film still exists as a production company and as the most important cinema exhibitor in Denmark, Norway and Sweden with more than 250 screens in Scandinavia. In fact, on 6. November 2026 Nordisk Film celebrates its official 120th anniversary.



Nordisk Film was established in 1906. Picture: Thomas Haverslev

Similarly to Olsen in Copenhagen, in March 1906 photographer Thomas S Hermansen (1867-1930) was setting up a company called “Dansk Kine Foto Film-Industri” in Aarhus. Hermansen was selling film cameras and “Kinematografer” (projectors) from Pathé Frères and distributed titles from Gaumont and others. The concept of monopoly did not seem to apply in these early years. “Fra Marselisborg” is the first film released by Dansk Kine Foto Film-Industri and opened the new Fotorama cinema in Aarhus along with a bouquet of other shorts on 1. July 1906. In January 1908 Hermansen sold all his cinema- and film interests of his company to a somewhat smarter consortium renaming it “A/S Fotorama” in 1910.

Until the collapse in 1918 due to the war and some interference by Nordisk Films Kompagni headhunting the talents, Fotorama was a major film production company in Denmark, alongside Nordisk,

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releasing all local titles from Olsen under an agreement resolving a copycat issue regarding two versions of the famous “Den hvide slavehandel” (“The White Slave Trade”, 1910). The original was the one from Aarhus. Not that this was anything new: films were remade by others looking almost identical, as has been the case from the very beginning of cinema with a certain gardener and his hose.



A third production company called “Biorama” was soon established by Søren Nielsen (1853-1922). He opened the Biorama cinema in Copenhagen in November 1905 as the 10th cinema in Denmark, followed by several other venues, including the first and only cinema in Odense -- for a considerable time -- despite being quite diminutive. The same can be said about all other film companies opening and closing during the 1910s, as the supply of new Danish films was limited.



Interestingly, Dansk Kinematograf Fabrik began to manufacture 35mm projectors in 1906. This company, lasted much longer, existing until around 2012.

1907 and onwards with Asta Nielsen & Carl Th. Dreyer

The year 1907 marked the peak of cinema openings in Denmark, with over 100 new cinemas inaugurated during the course of the year. Still mostly store-front cinemas, and some of which still exist to this day, many years after the closure of the actual cinemas. Haslev Biografteater 60 km south of Copenhagen was built as a cinema, in bricks and a byzantine or perhaps oriental looking style. Although the cinema closed in 1930, the building still exists as a shop. By the end of 1907 there were around 142 operational cinemas.

By the end of 1910 the entire cinema industry model as we know it today -- with import, distribution,

licence and censorship -- was largely established all over Denmark.

That same year Asta Nielsen (1881-1972) starred in her first film “Afgunden” (“The Abyss”), which premiered at the Kosmorama. She was a Danish actress and one of silent film's biggest stars. The music for “Afgunden” was composed by Mr. T. H. Rasch, house pianist at the Kosmorama. At that time the Kosmorama was managed by Hjalmar Davidsen (1879-1958), who would go on to run the Alexandra Theatre in central Copenhagen until his death in 1958.

Asta's debut was directed by her future husband (1912-1919) Urban Gad (1897-1947), who on 2. April 1923 re-opened the Metropol Theatre behind the still operating Palace Hotel on Town Hall Square. The cinema was located “backwards” with the front towards an alley, and was renamed Grand Theatre. She moved to Germany in 1911 where she starred in nearly 70 movies. Die Asta, as she became known, returned to Denmark in 1937. She applied for a cinema license 13 times but never got one and she never worked again.

As of 2026, the original Grand cinema (#3) is largely intact and is by location the oldest cinema in Copenhagen with the alley being identical to the much more beautiful looking Mikkel Bryggers Gade.

Carl Th. Dreyer (1889-1968) was a Danish film director and screenwriter. Dreyer is considered by many to be the first great director of Danish cinema. Dreyer directed his first films in 1919 but started writing film scripts in 1912. In 1952 Dreyer, then age 63, was awarded the license to run the still-operating Dagmar cinema, from 1939. It is at the other side of Town Hall Square, at the corner of Jernbanegade and next to the location of the short-lived Panorama from the 1880's on the grounds of a former theatre.

Dreyer banned smoking in his cinema, but was generally neglecting maintenance right up until his death in 1968. Except for some of his own (“Gertrud” (1964) being his own last film), Danish films were rarely shown in Dagmar before 1969. Dreyer's reasoning, such as it was, was that no one else could match his own talent. He preferred to make money and screen popular, foreign titles, especially of US origin, of which “Gone with the Wind” had its opening here in 1958 some 20 years after the world premiere, but that's a different story.

As of 2026, Dagmar is being run by Nordisk Film, and the almost original screen #1 (only without the balcony), is very popular.

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Haslev Biografteater (1907-1930) is one of the first purpose built cinemas in Denmark. Picture, 2024: Thomas Hauerleslev

Epilogue

During 130 years of Danish cinema, more than 1170 cinemas have opened, and nearly as many have closed again. The largest number of cinemas occurred during 1957 with almost 470 in operation. The 1950s was, by far, the best decade for cinemas in Denmark. Since the early 1990s the number has levelled off at about 170 cinemas.

The authors of this page feel the story about the original Danish pioneer cinemas and the pioneers themselves now has been investigated more thoroughly than ever before. Surprisingly this research clearly shows how “living pictures” were essentially shown *all over* Denmark during the first eight years by many travelling Danish and foreign entrepreneurs.

As mentioned in the beginning, biografmuseet.dk challenges conventional wisdom in a few areas of history and exposes some inaccuracies which have been uncritically repeated over past eight decades by cinema historians and enthusiasts alike.

Who made the first film in Denmark? Well, it turns out to be Lauritz Vilhelm Pacht who must be credited with this honour, and not Peter Lars Petersen (From 1901 Peter Elfelt). Petersen’s short clip “Kørsel med Grønlandske hunde”, historically attributed as being the first Danish film does indeed exist, but has never been shown publicly in a cinema.

The assertion about “Kørsel med Grønlandske hunde” being the first comes exclusively from Margurite Engberg and an unidentified conversation with Elfelt. It also refers to Elfelt's scrapbooks and film list of his entire film catalog, which unfortunately, in addition to Pacht's films, also contains the foreign ones that both Kjøbenhavns Panorama and Holger Gleesen at Panorama Hafnia had included on their program, when Petersen in 1900-01 took over all the films from both cinemas.

Elfelt himself is quoted in interviews as saying Pacht was the first to make “living photographs”. Elfelt mentions his own first film endeavors in 1899 which all premiered at the Panorama Hafnia - being the honest gentleman he was.

Furthermore, biografmuseet.dk’s research department has documented the exact premiere date and correct title of the infamous “Den Østrigske barnmorderskes sidste dag” nowadays “Henrettelsen”, often believed to have premiered ‘no later than 1903’. Cinema historians have been unable to find the correct title and premiere date - for decades!

At the same time, Petersen’s drama has been frequently assumed to be only a fragment of a longer film. However, based on newspaper reviews of the day¹³, and several more in the following weeks when the film was screened in cities across the country, it must be noted that the version that has survived to this day can be said to be either complete or very close to it. You can compare the narrative of the film through existing contemporaneous articles and newspaper reviews.

Adding insult to injury, the existing print and official version seen online these days is mirrored horizontally! It is unknown whether it was a creative choice by Peter Elfelt.

Read about more inaccuracies, the pioneers, cinemas, projectionists, premiere lists and much more on biografmuseet.dk

Notes:

¹ Politiken, 26.12.1894

² Dannebrog, 17. maj 1896

³ Newspaper advert Wednesday 1. July 1896

⁴ Sorø Amts-Tidende, april 1897

⁵ Objektiv, #77

⁶ Dannebrog, 17.12.1898

⁷ Dagbladet København, 27.12.1897

⁸ Dannebrog, 17.02.1898

⁹ Slagelse-Posten, 2. August 1898

¹⁰ B.T., 28. January 1920

¹¹ B.T., 28. January 1920

¹² Haandværkerforeningens Festsal, Aarhus, September 1900

¹³ Horsens newspaper, 24. February 1900