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SCREENING OF 'LOCKHART FESTIVAL' FILM AT LOCKHART AND AURUKUN

John von Sturmer

It gives me a great deal of pleasure to report on the screening of *Lockhart Festival* at Lockhart and at Aurukun.

Lockhart screening (Thursday evening, 29 January 1976, in the Lockhart Welfare Hall).

It was fortunate that the first screening of the film to the Lockhart community was able to coincide with the first visit to Lockhart of the Institute's Principal, Dr Peter Ucko, and Deputy Principal, Mr Warwick Dix. Also, a number of people involved in the production of the film were able to be present: Curtis Levy, its director and producer; John von Sturmer, anthropological adviser and associate producer; and Athol Chase, who has had the most extensive relations with Lockhart of any researcher, and acted as anthropological adviser for the Lockhart segments of the film. Other researchers with considerable experience in Cape York – Peter Sutton and Percy Trezise – were also in the audience.

The film arose out of the Lockhart Dance Festival, held in December 1973. The Festival was sponsored by the then Aboriginal Theatre Foundation (now Aboriginal Cultural Foundation) and was organised locally by the people of Lockhart, under the guidance of the co-Chairmen of the Lockhart Dance Festival Committee, Mr Jerry Pascoe, and Mr Mick Omeeny.

Dancers were invited from Kowanyama, Edward River, Aurukun, Umagico and Coen, in Cape York Peninsula, and from Groote Eylandt, north-east Arnhem Land. In the event, Coen failed to take up the invitation. However, the acceptance by a group from Groote Eylandt marked an important new phase in inter-community relations, for it represented the first time that Groote Eylandters had danced in Queensland; and relationships between Lockhart and Groote Eylandt have been maintained strongly since.

The Institute expressed an interest in filming the Festival. The approval of the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Islanders Advancement was sought and given. I then talked to the leaders of each of the participant groups, in the company, where desired, of their appointees. The filming was discussed as to its purpose and as to the conditions under which it might proceed. The conditions included:

- (1) no night filming;
- (2) a copy of the film to be given to each participant group;
- (3) archival versions to be prepared of the dancing of each group, and the control of access to the archival version to be in the hands of the group itself, through its leader(s) or his (their) appointees.

A list of leaders and/or their appointees was drawn up. It comprised:

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| Groote Eylandt (Lalara clan) | Gula Lalara (leader) |
| | Don Blitner (appointee) |
| Lockhart (North-side) | Jerry Pascoe (appointee) |
| (South-side) | Mick Omeeny (appointee) |
| (representing Umagico) | Billy Brown; Davis Wilson |
| ?Aplat? (Aurukun) | Jack-Spear Karntin (leader) |
| | Billy Landis (appointee) |
| Wanam (Aurukun) | Peret Arkwookerum (leader) |
| (Edward River) | Stingaree Barney (leader) |
| Win ^y t ^y inam – untu tit ^y (Aurukun) | Keith Woolla (leader) |
| Ti-Tree (Aurukun) | Eric Koo'oila (leader) (absent from meeting; did not agree to filming) |
| Edward River (South-side/Thaa'yorr) | Frank Coleman (leader, 'wallaby clan') |
| | Patrick Rodger (leader, 'duck clan') |
| (Kowanyama representatives) | Bob Frank, Thomas Bruce |

Not only were these people empowered to veto any filming of their group, they were also to be approached for permission for still photography and for sound recording (Mr Bryan Butler, A.I.A.S., was also present at the festival, and obtained a complete sound record on tape).

The normal opening of the beer canteen at 5 p.m. was delayed until after the screening. There is habitually some anxiety surrounding the first screening of a film. Will there be mistakes in the commentary? What will reactions be to seeing newly-deceased relatives? And, in a film of this sort, will one group be jealous of another? Will the producers be accused of favouritism? And so on.

We had been able to forewarn relatives of deceased persons (who had, in any case, been personal friends) and they had been asked if they agreed to the screening or not. Further, one dance had not been considered for the final print because, though it had been clearly acceptable at the time of shooting (it had been danced publicly, in broad daylight), it was blamed for cases of sickness after the Festival. However, other difficulties were impossible to remedy. A tight period of shooting – essentially confined to the late afternoon, over only three days – and poor weather, meant that imbalances and other defects were inevitable.

In the event, we need never have worried. The film was received enthusiastically, and by the children rowdily. There was a general feeling of euphoria afterwards; and, I sensed, a deep feeling of satisfaction in those Lockhart people who had been responsible, in the first instance, for the resurgence of interest in traditional song and dance at Lockhart, and later, for organising the dance festivals. The film seemed to be a vindication of their activities. Everyone talked about the 'old days'; we were all told that we should see the film of 'Old Site' (as a result, a copy has now been lodged in the Institute through the good graces of the Rev. David Thompson); speeches were made; and an extra keg of beer was laid on in the film's honour. The Principal handed over copies of the film to Jerry Pascoe and Mick Omeeny without ceremony; but later, effusive speeches of thanks were made to the Institute for making it all possible.

In short, 'a great night for Lockhart' was the phrase on everyone's lips; and it was a very auspicious entry by the Institute, in a direct way, into the life of Lockhart community. One regret is that we were not able to stay for the planned feast. Alick Sandy, Mick Omeeny, Johnny Brown and Clarence Tuckandidgee had gone out hunting on the morning of the screening and brought back three dugong.

Aurukun screening (Friday evening, 30 January 1976)

From the 'Dugong Hunters of Cape York' the party progressed to Aurukun. The Principal and Percy Trezise were forced to continue on to Laura before the screening; the others, however, were able to be present.

The screening was originally intended for outdoors; however, heavy rain drove everyone into the church. Projector troubles caused long delays, though everyone sat patiently. Just after an announcement had been made that the screening would have to be cancelled, one of the projectors came to life, and the opening scene was greeted with general rejoicing, especially by the children sitting in a group at the front.

The audience reaction was very different to that at Lockhart – and finally very moving. At Lockhart – because there was a lot of excitement at seeing familiar people and things – the audience reception was noisy and good-humoured. At Aurukun – because Lockhart was remote, not familiar: in short, just like other things on the screen – the reception was more subdued. Indeed, the audience was often thoughtful and respectful. People were literally on the edge of their seats for the 'devil dance' *ngangk thant*, performed by Peret Arkwookerun and Jack Coleman. It was entralling to observe. Indeed, the Aurukun audience treated the film sequence exactly as they would have treated a live performance on the dance ground. They brought to it quiet, critical appreciation. There was no derision (as there is for earlier films of Aurukun dancing); and there was no surprised laughter at seeing the familiar in a new context, as it were.

There was excitement and laughter in a couple of places: notably, when the Grootte Eylandters first appear; and when Mathew Gordon, while painting up, is seen to be looking in a mirror. The reaction here was *identical* with the reaction at Lockhart. (The mirror sequence would make an interesting cross-cultural test, i.e. from Aboriginal society to society, for although the reaction was identical at Aurukun and Lockhart, it was faintly bewildering to the watching whites!). But when any of the important local people appeared on the screen, or when the performance was by a non-local group, the audience sat quietly attentive.

Talking to members of the audience after the screening, and during the rest of my stay at Aurukun, I was confirmed in my impressions. Everyone liked the film; there were no worries about loss of dignity, faulty commentary, or poor performances. I was asked where the rest of the footage not included in the final print was. I was able to explain that it was incorporated in the archival versions. I was also questioned about the lack of *win^y t^y inam* dancing. I was obliged to explain that Eric Koo'oilá did not want his dances filmed. Fortunately, Nellie Taisman, who affiliates with the *win^y t^y inam* group, is on film singing *wu-ng* of which she is the leading singer; less fortunately, we were not able to include any of Keith Woolla's group (*untu tit^y*) for insufficient material was obtainable from their single daytime performance. Again, that is recorded in the archival version.

The response was unanimously highly favourable. Over the next few days, many requests were made to me to show the film again. I was in the happy position of being able to tell my questioners that they should see their 'field bosses', for Warwick Dix had distributed three copies of the film — one each to *aplát^y*, *win^y t^y inam*, and *wanam*.

Another common response was that there should be more filming at Aurukun. This was a persistent question. Another was that they should take the film to other communities, for example, Weipa, or down south, to spread the word and to make money. The latter raises some interesting and difficult questions about making films *for* Aboriginal groups, and the *role* of the Institute in general. However, these weighty questions will have to be treated in another report.

THE JACKSON FILM OF 1917

Michael V. Robinson

The cinematographer William J. Jackson made an extensive photographic record of the journey of the North-West Scientific and Exploration Expedition to the West Kimberleys in 1917. Much of his movie film footage included details of the Aborigines of the area, aspects of their traditional culture and of mission-conditions and involvement in the pearling industry. Some of his black and white plates are now in the Western Australian Museum collection but all efforts to locate the film have so far failed.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies is attempting to locate the film and invites readers with any knowledge of it or the expedition to contact either the Institute or the Western Australian Museum.

Little is known about Jackson's background or of his movements after the 1917 expedition. A pamphlet advertising his film in London in 1921 simply notes that he had been associated with Pathe Freres, and the plates in the Western Australian Museum collection suggest that he was a thoroughly competent if somewhat romantic photographer. A description of an early edited version of his film has been found in the Battye Library in Perth and indicates the following material relevant to Aborigines.

Reel One: 'Pearling Film' (2174 feet)

Scenes of Broome and pearling operations including Aboriginal divers, involvement in the industry, conditions in Broome.