

The Montclair Footage

Description: three movie cans, each containing one reel of 35mm nitrate film, black and white, no sound. Each can has a faded label with "SPACE DOOM HENDERSON 1932" written on it; they were apparently from a set of five (the canisters are numbered 1, 2, and 4). The film was clearly professionally preserved, and kept under conditions designed to limit its degradation: most of the footage remains usable. Every physical detail of the cans and film is compatible with them being from the 1930s.

The reels themselves show various outdoor scenes (each reel holds twelve minutes of footage):

- Reel one is a wide, establishing shot of an odd-looking city of concrete and brick overlooking a river. Powered boats and antique airplanes can be seen, but the city itself remains unidentified throughout the continuous shot.
- Reel two (from the same camera and angle) also shows the city. At three minutes, two seconds, there is a flash of light -- and then the unmistakable appearance of a mushroom cloud over the city. The following shock wave rattles the camera, but does not topple it. The detonation is compatible with a Hiroshima-style atomic bomb.

- Reel three was either filmed on different cameras, or else one camera was put on a truck bed and moved around. The footage is not continuous, instead being a series of static panoramic shots of devastated buildings and human casualties. The people look vaguely European, but the signs are in no known language (and, again, there is no sound) and there is no indication where these scenes were shot. The images of the dead and injured are graphic, and consistent with the effects of surviving a nuclear blast.

The Montclair Footage was discovered in an auction sale earlier this year: the previous owner was a reclusive and obsessive collector of old filmstock. Where *she* got the Footage from is anybody's guess: while she meticulously documented her ongoing film preservation projects, information on the *acquisition* of those films is conspicuously absent (larceny was likely involved, somehow). The earliest date in the files associated with the Montclair Footage is 1985, so the films are at least that old.

Presumably the Montclair Footage is a fake, but it's a very good one. The film buff who was going through all the footage to assess it is also a historian specializing in the American nuclear program, so she knows perfectly well what an A-Bomb blast looks like -- and its effects on

human tissue. She even has a security clearance that let her look at classified tests, and none of *them* match up with the footage here, either. One phone call later, and the Montclair Footage was passed along to the appropriate shadow government agency.

And They ended up scratching their heads, too: this footage is simply not compatible with any atomic bomb test, ever. It looks real, and it feels real, but it really can't *be* real. But neither is it an obvious or even unobvious fake: the film could be possibly faked today (although that's not guaranteed), but the FX state of the art in the mid 1980s simply wasn't up to the challenge. Unless that date's part of the fake, too. But if it's a well-constructed practical joke, what's the payoff?

And... there was a movie project back in the early 1930s called "Space Doom." The director (Gunther Henderson) had been somewhat prominent in the silent movie era, only to lose funding when talking pictures became the industry standard. *Space Doom* might have still been produced, except that a fire in 1932 wrecked Henderson's studio. After that, he just... disappears from the records.

Get used to that a lot, by the way. Investigating the silent film era is an exercise in exasperating frustration. Nobody kept any records, the narrators are nigh-universally

unreliable, and elderly nitrate film has a tendency to catch on fire, and sometimes explode. So, have fun figuring out if this is really documentary evidence of a nuclear bomb, detonated ten years early! Or, alternatively, what in God's name was so important that it required a fake like *this* to be made. That's worth checking out, too.

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