

Soldiers of the Cross - the first feature length film ever produced



Australia's first film studio The Salvation Army was certainly progressive and innovative in its early approach to spreading the Gospel; the Brass Band - the pop-music medium of the time - is a prime example. However, it is in the area of multi-media presentations that The Salvation Army showed itself as most inventive. Birth of the Limelight Department Captain Joseph Perry, whilst manager of the Ballarat Prison-Gate Home, set up his own photographic studio and dark room. He produced and used his own glass lantern-slides to emphasise his sermons and lectures. Such was the impact of his lantern shows that in November 1891 he was brought to the Melbourne Headquarters by Major Frank Barritt to produce a set of lantern-slides to advertise the forthcoming visit of William Booth to Australia. Thus, led by Major Barritt and Captain Perry, the "Limelight Department" of The Salvation Army was born. LIMELIGHT: THE WORLD'S 1st FILM STUDIO The Limelight Department was the Salvation Army's pioneering film production and presentation unit in Australia.

Between 1892 and 1909 it produced many productions, including 300 films and the major multimedia presentations Soldiers of the Cross and Heroes Of The Cross. The unit also documented Australia's Federation ceremonies in 1901. Australia's first dedicated film studio was created by The Salvation Army at 69 Bourke Street, Melbourne, in a room that still stands preserved much as it was at the turn of the century. Click here to unveil the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's outstanding website about the Limelight film production unit. By 1895 Perry, with his Limelight equipment, had visited nearly every Corps in Australasia, journeying some 46,500 km, presenting religious illuminated shows to some 522 astounded audiences.

Commandant Herbert Booth was appointed as Australasian Territorial Commander in 1897. Upon meeting Joseph Perry he saw the possibilities in an expanded Limelight Department. He enthusiastically authorised the purchase more equipment, including three gramophones, and importantly, a Cinematographe machine. This led to the establishment of Australia's first permanent film production unit and saw some astonishing pioneering achievements, including: Australia's first film studio built at 69 Bourke Street, Melbourne, 1898. First Australian narrative film on social work, entitled Social Salvation, 1898/99. First narrative drama film presentation, consisting of an ingenious mix of moving film, glass-slides, oratory and music.

Soldiers of the Cross premiered at the Melbourne Town Hall in September 1900. First feature-length documentary film, Inauguration of the Australian Commonwealth, 1901.

To see more follow these links:

<http://www.salvationarmy.org.au/en/Who-We-Are/History-and-heritage/Australias-first-film-studio/#sthash.qe3PRuXe.dpuf>

http://www.abc.net.au/limelight/docs/films/5_1_3_01.htm

<http://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/documents-artefacts/soldiers-cross/>