

HIDDEN GOLD – THE COCKAYNE COLLECTION

1924 Tom Mix News Reel - 16 mm film

By Megan Huff

This is the first of a series of periodic articles on the vast collection of artifacts willed to the City of Glen Dale and contained in the Cockayne Farmhouse.

When Samuel A. J. Cockayne passed away in November of 2001, he left the City of Glen Dale with a substantial gift: his historic family home built in the nineteenth century. The stately home continues to provide those fortunate to have been involved with its preservation with a sense of awe and appreciation for days gone by.

After Mr. Cockayne's death, the Marshall County Historical Society organized a substantial undertaking dedicated to the restoration and preservation of this remarkable farmhouse. Soon after curators began to examine the contents of the house, thousands of treasures were discovered from every generation that had ever lived in it. From antique furnishings, toys and family artwork to the Native American artifacts that were found, the home is a virtual window to the past.

Life for Samuel Cockayne and his sibling was much different than the lives of twenty first century children. The Cockaynes didn't have modern technology to entertain them, and they would have certainly known the meaning of a hard day's work well before most children today go to junior high school. Sitting down and watching a movie would have been a privilege, and surely would have been a special treat for the Cockayne family. During the process of sorting through the artifacts in the home, curators came upon a delicate and dusty 16mm film reel, and upon further inspection, discovered it to be a Tom Mix silent film, a rare find indeed.



Tom Mix was an American icon and, in the early parts of the twentieth century, he was a hero to children all over the country. He was the defining image of the traditional American cowboy, and one of the most famous silent film stars of his time. He made more than 300 western films throughout his career, creating for himself a fortune worth over six million dollars. Tragically, in 1940, Tom Mix was killed in an automobile accident at the age of 60. Throughout his career he sustained a total of 80 injuries, from gunshot wounds to a fractured skull, all as a result of performing his own stunts.

The curators have not yet located a film projector capable of playing the film; however the markings on the reel indicate that it would have been produced in 1924, a year in which Mix starred in a total of eight films. It is unknown exactly how many of Mix's films remain today; it has been estimated that only about ten percent are available for viewing. Sadly, over time, many have been forever lost. One has to wonder if Samuel Cockayne knew just how valuable this original Tom Mix film reel was.

In donating his home to the city of Glen Dale, Samuel A. J. Cockayne has given the Ohio Valley an amazing gift filled with history and heart. Because of the efforts of some very dedicated local citizens, people from all over the valley and beyond will soon

have the opportunity to discover for themselves an integral part of local history in this unique key to the past.

Note: Megan Huff is a respiratory therapist residing in Bethlehem with her husband, Ryan. She has a love of history and was inspired by the Cockayne Farmhouse to write about its many treasures.