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National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum Loans Rare Lobby Cards of Silent-Era Westerns to Dartmouth for Preservation Project

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK – The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum will loan its collection of rare lobby cards from the silent film era - generously donated by historic preservationist, Dwight Cleveland - to be digitized by Dartmouth’s Media Ecology Project.

Lobby cards are some of the earliest marketing materials for films, acting as a cross between film trailer and print advertisement to entice viewers into theaters. Many of these images are representative of the stars, stories and art of the silent film era that are no longer available for viewing. The Library of Congress estimates that 75% of films from the silent era have been lost, with only their lobby cards remaining as proof that these films ever existed.

An accidental meeting between Cleveland and Dartmouth College film professor resulted in an agreement allowing for the digitization and preservation of over 10,000 lobby card images, including those being housed in the Dickinson Research Center (DRC) at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum.

Cleveland lobbied for the DRC’s inclusion in this monumental project, and the DRC and Dartmouth teams are now collaborating to digitally reunite Cleveland’s extensive former collection. Both Cleveland and the DRC are eager to restore access to this genre of media history and consider it an art form worth preserving, ultimately hoping to generate new interest in the subject.

“The Western film genre was vastly popular because of our collective fascination with Western lore especially during the advent of cinema in the late 1890 and early 20th century,” said Cleveland. “Having these originals available for scholarly research will allow us to better understand the conflicts experienced then and now, under new scrutiny, and the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum is the best possible place for these conversations to evolve.”

The project is set to be completed by the end of 2022 and will become a part of Dartmouth’s Early Cinema Compendium, which will feature 15 collections of rare archival and scholarly resources. The compendium will also include more than 7,000 frame samples from early and mostly lost U.S. films, plus access to more than 2,500 archival films across the genres of early cinema.

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About the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City is America's premier institution of Western history, art and culture. Founded in 1955, the Museum collects, preserves and exhibits an internationally renowned collection of Western art and artifacts while sponsoring dynamic educational programs to stimulate interest in the enduring legacy of the American West. The Museum is located only six miles northeast of downtown Oklahoma City at 1700 Northeast 63rd Street. Annual family memberships are available beginning at just \$40. For more information, visit nationalcowboymuseum.org.