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Home Movie Day helps old film reels see the light of day



Submit a movie and you can finally find out what's on all those old movie reels in your attic!

By: [Jessie Schiewe](#) | September 21, 2011 - 4:00 pm

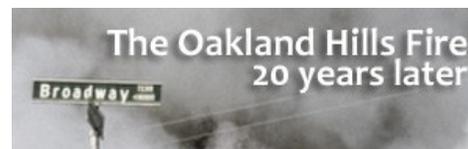
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Home movies are easy to define. According to Pamela Jean Vadakan, a former film collection assistant at the Pacific Film Archive, home movies are "personal moving images shot by an amateur (non-professional) of familiar subjects and familiar places."

Home movies are also easy to make. Given the plethora of modern filming devices that exist today, all you need is a smart phone, digital camera, or camera-recorders to get the job done.

And this worries Vadakan. What is to become of all the home movies that were made before the invention of SIM cards and Youtube? Where are all of the home movies that you can't watch on



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your DVD player or VCR player? "This is one of the dangers of technology moving forward so fast," she says. "We make things obsolete."

Home movies have been around for close to one hundred years, and yet many people forget that the precursor to the modern DVD disc was literally, a reel of film. "It's much easier to make and share home movies using your phone than it was for someone in the 1950s who made home movies using 16mm equipment," Vadakan says.

As a result, most home movie reels are forgotten—hidden in boxes, smothered in closets, and tucked away in basements. Some people inherit them and some people buy them from flea markets as kitsch for their homes. Regardless of why or where people have them, almost nobody ever watches these films. Why? Because you can't just pop them into your VCR or laptop. You need a vintage movie projector to screen them.

Nine years ago, a group of film archivists on the East Coast banded together to address this problem. Their solution: Home Movie Day, an annual event celebrated in local venues worldwide for the sole purpose of screening, in designated public places, home movie reels shot using 8, 16, and super8 millimeter film. Everyone is encouraged to submit movies and there are no requirements, except that the movies may not be pornographic.

"Home Movie Day is an opportunity for people to think about their own personal records, and recognize the value of their memories and do as much as possible to ensure something is saved," says Vadakan.

For the last four years, Vadakan has hosted Home Movie Day events at the Pacific Film Archive and has screened over 100 local film submissions, as well as films from the museum's archive. "It's great to have it at a local archive or museum because it makes the archive feel relevant in a way that you are bringing film out into the open and opening the archive up to the public," she says.



Home Movie Day is about reliving memories and bringing the community together.

This year the East Bay Home Movie Day event will be held at a new location: the Oakland Museum of California. "It's an opportunity to bring more people into the mix," says Vadakan, who hopes that the new location will attract new viewers and encourage more people to submit home movies for show.

This year's event will be held on Saturday, October 15th from 12:30 PM to 5:00 PM and will be divided into two parts: screenings of home movie submissions from the public, and screenings of a particular set of recently-discovered home movies shot between 1935 and 1946 by Ernest Beane, an African American Pullman porter from Berkeley. The films, which were donated by Beane's granddaughter to the African American Museum, show footage of Beane's family, friends, and old East Bay neighborhoods, as well as the various towns and cities that he visited while working on the railroads.

"They're incredibly charming," says Vadakan. "It's this very real moment with people just being themselves, being comfortable and being natural in their everyday lives. He knew all of his subjects and he knew his neighborhood, so there's just this realness about them."

Beane's films also have an additional importance because he was African American. "For that time, it was very rare for African Americans to have access to that kind of equipment, and he shot with both 8mm and 16mm film," she says. "He was very committed."

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Because there is no sound to Beane's films, jazz musician Marcus Shelby and his quintet will perform an original score throughout the screening of the Beane films. Home Movie Day is a celebratory affair, says Vadakan, and a way to bring the community together through movies, music, and old memories.

"It's not about what your movie is about or how great of a filmmaker you are," says Vadakan. "All home movies are special in their own way and we'd love to see them."

Home Movie Day will be held on October 15, from 12:30 to 5:00, in the James Moore Theater at the Oakland Museum of California. Admission to the screenings is free with museum admission, or for anyone who submits a movie. The museum is still accepting home movie drop-offs by appointment. To make a drop-off appointment, please email oaklandhomemovies@gmail.com or call (510) 318-8596. Movie submissions will also be accepted the day of the event from 11 am to 12:30 pm.

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