



## EPISODE 4 2004 - KING KONG CAMERA, LAKE BAY, WASHINGTON.

Wes Cowan: Our first next story will focus on the making of a Hollywood movie classic.

“King Kong” Trailer: We’re millionaires, boys! I’ll share it with all of you! Why, in a few months it will be up in lights on Broadway: “Kong- the Eighth Wonder of the World!”

Wes: Its 1933. The movie “King Kong” storms into theatres at the height of the Great Depression. Audiences soon forget their troubles as they watch in horror and fascination. On screen, Kong rampages through New York City... climbs the city’s tallest building... and reaches into their very homes! Now, 70 years later, a man thinks he owns the camera that brought “King Kong” to life. Miles away from the glitz and glamour of Hollywood- on the shores of Lake Bay, Washington- movie camera fanatic Sam Dodge has what he hopes is an authentic piece of Hollywood history.

Sam: I love old movies, and I love old movie cameras... I came across this camera at an auction in England... This is a Mitchell Standard camera. The look is pretty classic Hollywood-- the four lens turret, big Mickey Mouse ear film magazine... And I just really want to know what the history is behind this camera.

Elyse: Hi Sam, Elyse. I’m Elyse Luray... and Wes Cowan and I have come to Lake Bay to investigate. Wow. Look at this. Nice.

Wes: Boy, classic silhouette. Huh?

Elyse: So, Sam, what do you know about this camera?

Sam: This is a Mitchell camera, from 1927. Can you hold this?

Wes: Sure.

Sam: Once I had the camera for awhile, I realized that I probably could find out who the original purchaser was. And, I’ll show you the serial number... it’s on the movement inside. Its 66.

Elyse: Oh, I see!

Wes: Oh yeah, there it is.

Sam: And so I called somebody and found out that this camera was purchased by Eddie Linden.

Elyse: And he is...

Sam: And Eddie Linden was the cinematographer on “King Kong”.

Wes: You’re kidding me!

SAM: No!

Elyse: What’s your question?

Sam: I want to know if it worked the picture... The owner worked the picture; I want to know if the camera

Get more on History Detectives at: [www.pbs.org/historydetectives](http://www.pbs.org/historydetectives)



EPISODE 4 2004 - KING KONG CAMERA,  
LAKE BAY, WASHINGTON.

worked the picture.

Elyse: Wow. That would make this quite a piece of memorabilia!

Wes: Yeah, and it's so cool! What else do you know about it?—

Sam: When I got the camera it had been working as an animation camera... and this animation cel came with the camera.

Elyse: "Alice in Wonderland"!

Sam: Oh yeah.

Wes: Elyse, how old are those cels? I mean, I don't know anything about animation cels.

Elyse: They're from the 70's. This camera's been used for a long time!

SAM: Yeah, most people in Hollywood haven't had careers as long as this camera's career!

Wes: No kidding! Ready Elyse?

Elyse: We'll see what we can do!

Wes: While Elyse heads to San Francisco to find out more about Sam's camera, I'm headed to Hollywood to get the story on "King Kong". While there have been many imitators and sequels over the years, there is only one "King Kong". Released in March of 1933, Kong helped to usher in the golden age of Hollywood. The most spectacular aspect of the movie was the work of Oscar winning animator Willis O'Brien. I've come to the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles to meet O'Brien's protégé: Oscar-winner and legendary animator Ray Harryhausen...Ray, Wes Cowan! ...maybe he can shed light on this mystery.

Ray: Hello!

Wes: Ray will never forget the first time he saw "King Kong"... the movie that inspired his career.

Ray: That was in 1933 when I was 13 years old... - and the curtain opened with Max Steiner's magnificent introduction... "King Kong": the 8<sup>th</sup> Wonder of the World"!

Wes: Ray, why do you think "King Kong" had such a great impact back in 1933?

Ray: Nothing like it had been put on the screen. And it wasn't just the technical virtuosity of seeing a big gorilla carrying Faye Wray around in his hand; it was the structure of the screenplay! They took you by the hand from the depression and led you into the most outrageous fantasy story that's ever been put on the screen.

Wes: Willis O'Brien and his team pioneered a number of techniques that defined movie special effects for the next 50 years. Using "stop motion animation", O'Brien choreographed the performance of his Kong puppets one frame at a time. Edwin or "Eddie" Linden was born in Wisconsin and found work shooting silent films in Hollywood. Ray says that O'Brien personally hired Eddie as chief cinematographer for "King Kong"- which meant he possessed certain qualities to work with stop motion.

Get more on History Detectives at: [www.pbs.org/historydetectives](http://www.pbs.org/historydetectives)



## EPISODE 4 2004 - KING KONG CAMERA, LAKE BAY, WASHINGTON.

Ray: Number one, you have to have patience... because you are actually shooting a series of still pictures. With O'Brien's technique, with a jointed figure which was about that high, you could animate it... You'd get them into a certain pose, and that pose suggests the next pose. So there's a lot of creativity on the set-

Wes: You know, we have Eddie's camera...It's a Mitchell Standard... is the Mitchell Standard the kind of camera that would have been used on stop motion?

Ray: Yes! I used a Mitchell that was, I think it was number 20. An ancient Mitchell, silent Mitchell. I used that all my career. We've always found the Mitchell a very steady camera.

Wes: So Mitchell cameras were ideal for the stop-motion animation featured in "King Kong". But did Eddie Linden's own Mitchell capture those images?

Elyse: To find out what cameras were used on "King Kong", I've come to the home of Sprague Anderson, an expert on early motion picture cameras - and the Mitchell standard. So tell me, Sprague, how was the Mitchell Standard used in the film industry?

Sprague: It was used for everything in the industry. From the time it came out in 1921 up to today!

Elyse: So they were used in the silent films?

Sprague: Oh yeah! When this camera was first sold in 1921, that's all they were making. It would have been used extensively by a silent film cameraman. It was a much more physical process. For instance, they drove the camera! There were motors available, but they preferred the hand crank.

Elyse: Hand cranked?

Sprague: The hand crank would go here, if you used a motor it would go here. And this was all you had to have to run your camera. (holds up hand crank attachment)

Elyse: Can I try?

Sprague: Sure! Much better than a motor.

Elyse: So this is how they did it in the silent films?

Sprague: Sure, two turns per second. That's a little fast! There you go!

Elyse: We have a Mitchell Standard that we know was owned by Eddie Linden and we're trying to find out if it was used on "King Kong". Is there any way we can find out?

Sprague: Okay, what do you know about it?

Elyse: One thing that I know is the serial number is 66.

Sprague: Well, that's good! We're lucky, because the Mitchell company records have survived all through the years here... and we can look it up. Ah! Look at this. Serial number 66... Eddie Linden. He bought it somewhere just after the beginning of 1926.

Get more on History Detectives at: [www.pbs.org/historydetectives](http://www.pbs.org/historydetectives)



## EPISODE 4 2004 - KING KONG CAMERA, LAKE BAY, WASHINGTON.

Elyse: Now, what is H.S.?

Sprague: H.S. is the high speed movement which would be very good to have.

Elyse: Sprague describes the high speed movement as a variable speed motor, perfect for the effects work done on "King Kong".

Sprague: It could do anything. It could go from zero to 128 frames per second in either direction. And this camera has layer after layer of built-in special effects features, that's one of the things that made it so popular. And if you worked on "King Kong", that would be the camera to have!

Elyse: Oh really!?

Sprague: Oh yeah!

Elyse: Is there anything I can look for to prove definitely that he used his camera on "King Kong"?

Sprague: Yeah, the best way would be to get a hold of one of the old camera reports, especially from the special effects department. They would want to keep track of everything in a special effects shot and they would be particularly interested in knowing which camera was used in case there was some kind of problem. At the top of the report they would always list the camera's serial number.

Elyse: Well, that's a great lead!

Sprague: Sure!

Elyse: Thank you. I'm traveling to Los Angeles to meet RKO archivist Randy Gitsch. He was the records man at RKO and the last person to handle the Kong paperwork.

Elyse: Randy, I can't help but ask - why was "King Kong" so important to RKO Radio Pictures?

Randy: RKO really needed a hit picture. It was in dire straits, financially. It was a new company, it had made a profit in its second year, 1930, but '31, '32, these were the throes of the Depression. In '32 it lost over \$10 million. "King Kong" ended up costing \$672,000, quite a bit of change for a picture that was an effects picture in 1933. It ended up making, however, \$1.7 million, which was a great return. So "King Kong" really helped them get out of the Depression.

Elyse: Wow, that's incredible. Well, Randy, the real reason I'm here is because I'm looking for the camera reports from the original negatives from "King Kong", and I was hoping that you could tell me where they might be.

Randy: Well, I think they're probably in a landfill by now, Elyse. Those camera reports, keep in mind back then in the 30's, studios, once they cut and printed a picture, they didn't keep out-takes... there would be no real value to those camera reports, learning what Take 2 was like, or Take 5, how that was different. We didn't have those in the RKO Archives in the 1980's and I'm sure they had disappeared years prior to that. I think they're long gone.

Elyse: Hmm, so I've hit a dead end?



## EPISODE 4 2004 - KING KONG CAMERA, LAKE BAY, WASHINGTON.

Randy: I think you have.

Elyse: Okay, I need a new approach. Randy told me that RKO had its own camera department. Which means it's more likely that Eddie's camera was needed on Kong if the studios cameras were already busy. So first I want to check the Mitchell Company's sales records to find out how many Mitchell's RKO bought. RKO... number 165... RKO... 234. Okay, they owned 12 Mitchell Standards at the time they filmed "King Kong". That seems like quite a few. But how busy was the studio that year? The American Film Institute records provide this information. Wow. RKO had 35 films in production in 1932. That's an amazing amount of work. And here's something: according to the 1975 book "The Making of King Kong", they sometimes had 10 cameras working on "Kong" at any one time. They must have needed to bring in cameras from the outside!

Wes: I've tracked down cinematographer Russ Alsobrook, an expert on the history of movie cameras. With a unique collection of production stills, Russ confirms that Mitchell cameras were used on "King Kong".

Russ: Well, I can guarantee that Mitchell's were used on the set of "King Kong"... Here's a prime example of a multiple camera set up on "King Kong"... this is a Mitchell Standard...

Wes: And, is Eddie Linden in this picture?

Russ: Actually, Eddie Linden is in the far left, and he appears to be directing the photography of the entire crew.

Wes: Cool.

Russ: Now, this is a prime example of a Mitchell being used in the Skull Island sequence- this is a really good shot that shows all the detailing all the way down to the little metal logo on the side of the motor. And of course, the Mitchell's were used extensively in the effects work, here's a Mitchell Standard with a bi-pack magazine arrangement and they're shooting a miniature of the airplanes that Kong is swatting from the sky as he climbs the Empire State Building

Wes: If Eddie Linden owned his own Mitchell Standard that he would have used it on the set of "King Kong"... his personal camera?

Russ: I think its very likely because all the top cameramen in town were buying the Mitchell's in the 20's when they first came out and that became their personal camera that they took on all their productions. I mean, you don't spend \$5,000 on a camera and then let it sit in the garage; you want the studio to pay the rental on it. And especially on something like Kong where they used upwards of a dozen cameras on some scenes, I don't think the RKO camera department could supply every camera that was needed. Because they were servicing other movies at the same time. So, in all likelihood, Eddie would have brought his camera.

Wes: So it's a strong possibility that he would have used it.

Russ: I'd say it's a strong probability!

Wes: This is great circumstantial evidence that Eddie did use his camera but I want to see it in black and white. So I've searched the library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences in Los Angeles. Oh look at this, this is great... Here's an ad from Time Magazine, May 7, 1934... for Listerine toothpaste...

Get more on History Detectives at: [www.pbs.org/historydetectives](http://www.pbs.org/historydetectives)



## EPISODE 4 2004 - KING KONG CAMERA, LAKE BAY, WASHINGTON.

"Whiter teeth quick!". And here is a picture of Eddie with his Mitchell Standard camera... and the caption: "King Kong" and "Son of Kong" added to the reputation of Edward Linden, their chief cinematographer.' Great stuff! And what else is here... pictures... Then I found something that just might clinch the deal for Sam.

Sam: Oh, wow...

Wes: But here is the good news for you. We found something else that you are going to be very interested in. This is Eddie Linden's obituary. And you should know first that he died doing what he loved... he died on the set. But listen to this: "A long time member of the American Society of Cinematographers, Mr. Linden was especially known for his work in special effects and trick photography. It was his camera which filmed the spectacular "King Kong".

Sam: That's fabulous!

Wes: Now, understand this could be just a turn of the phrase, but we really do believe that this was one of the cameras that was used to film "King Kong".

Sam: That's a special camera. I really knew it was going to be a special camera!

Wes: Now we've got something else, right?

Elyse: Yes, we have a present for you. To thank you for letting us go on this great journey and bringing us back to our "King Kong" days... We have a game, it's from 1963... its an original game in its box in mint condition.

SAM: (laughs) Oh, that's fabulous!

Elyse: It goes perfect with your camera!

Wes: Well, thanks for letting us do the research, it was a great story.

Elyse: It was a lot of fun!

Wes: After "King Kong", Eddie Linden worked on two more Willis O'Brien pictures... then returned to making "B" movies. Willis O'Brien's career never again reached the heights of "King Kong"... but he was finally honored for his work in 1949 with the first Oscar ever presented for special effects.

ENDS