**Porter, Edwin S. (b. April 21, 1870 Pennsylvania, U.S.A; d. April 30, 1941, New York, New York, USA)**

Edwin Stanton Porter was an American film exhibitor, producer and director. He started his career in cinema in 1896 as a traveling exhibitor and moved on to become the motion picture operator of the New York Eden Musee wax museum. He also built motion picture machinery, which he continued doing until well after his retirement in 1925. As an operator and programmer, Porter edited short films into programs with narrative structures, effectively acting as producer and director. When the Edison Company was reorganized in 1900, he was hired to improve their cameras and projectors, but quickly became a cameraman, producer and director. He produced over a 100 short films for Edison by collaborating with theatre-trained directors and became an important driving force behind the creation of more modern, elaborate multi-shot films, the most famous of which is undoubtedly *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). Musser and Everson see Porter as a technician at heart; an editor who did not fully grasp the possibilities and principles of editing or acting, but had an instinctive understanding of “continuity,” or the safeguarding of smooth continuous action through the combination of fragmented shots. Though Porter had been instrumental in lifting cinema out of what Tom Gunning has dubbed the “cinema of attractions” era, he never realized his full potential since he was unwilling to invest himself in the narrative film. When his methods had become antiquated in 1909, Edison fired him.

**References and further reading**

Musser, C. (1991) *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company*, Berkeley & Oxford: University of California Press.

- (2005) *Edison: The Invention of the Movies*, New York: Kino Video & MoMA.

Musser, C. (1990) *The Emergence of Cinema: the American Screen to 1907*, Berkeley & London: University of California Press.

Gunning, T. (1990) “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Cinema, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde,” in Elsaesser, T., ed., *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, London: British Film Institute: 56-62.

Everson, W.K. (1998) *American Silent Film*, New York: Da Capo Press.

(A solid account of early American cinema, focusing on the different modes of production as well as on cinematic auteurs such as Porter.)

**Selected Works:**

*The Kiss* (1900)

*Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (1902)

*Jack and the Beanstalk* (1902)

*The Gay Shoe Clerk* (1903)

*The Great Train Robbery* (1903)

*What Happened in the Tunnel* (1903)

*Life of an American Fireman* (1903)

*The Whole Dam Family and the Dam Dog* (1905)

*Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (with Wallace McCutcheon, 1906)

*The ‘Teddy’ Bears* (1907)

*Tess of the Storm Country* (1914)

**Paratextual Material**

- Most of Charles Musser’s wonderful book on Porter can be found here (<http://books.google.be/books?id=s9OQ3WUqQS8C&printsec=frontcover&dq=before+the+nickelodeon&hl=en&sa=X&ei=uGhaU6y8NM2AyQOZj4HQCQ&ved=0CDEQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false>)

- Watch *The Great Train Robbery* and other Porter films at the Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/details/TheGreatTrainRobbery_555>)

- Porter and his films for Edison in their original context via the Media History Digital Library’s Lantern search tool (<http://lantern.mediahist.org>)

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