

An Old Film Finds a New Audience

The Story of Mary Gibson Henry's Tropical Valley Expedition Film

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Stan Fox knew he'd landed a great deal that day in 1995. The 1925 Acme 35 millimetre silent film projector he bought at Lund's Auctioneers in Victoria, BC was in pristine condition. What he didn't yet know was that the projector came with two unidentified reels of film.

No one at the auction house knew anything about the origin of the projector or the mysterious film reels. An employee told Stan, "I don't know what they are. They just come with it."



Stan Fox at home with his 1925 Acme 35mm silent film projector. Credit: Caroline Treadway.

Stan, a veteran BC filmmaker and television producer, figured he'd found something special when he finally watched the films on his new projector. But it took some time to piece together the mystery of the film. (To see the digitized version of the two film reels visit [watch](#)).

Stan's detective work included consultation with the Hudson's Hope Historical Society and led him to share the film with his friend and BC Archives archivist Dennis Duffy. We now know that what Stan Fox took home that day are the second and third reels of a three-reel film production. The film features American botanist Mary Gibson Henry's first expedition into northeastern BC in 1931. The whereabouts of the first reel remains unknown.

By 2004, the film was deemed provincially significant and accepted into the BC Archives collection as a donation from Stan Fox. Later, a copy was sent to Hudson's Hope Museum for a 2011 – 13 exhibition about Mary Gibson Henry. Many people in the Peace River region of BC were excited by the film because of the people who are shown in it or were associated with the expedition itself, such as Kaska Dena First Nations guide Charlie McDonald, surveyor Knox McCusker and outfitter Stan Clark.

In 1935, Mary and her husband, Dr. J. Norman Henry, gave an illustrated lecture to the Canadian Geographical Society in Ottawa. The subject: *Story of an Extended Trip Into Northern British Columbia and a Visit to the So-Called 'Tropical Valley'*.



Left to Right: Stan Fox, Caroline Treadway, Susan Treadway and Dennis Duffy in the Native Plant Garden at Royal BC Museum, July 2015. Credit: RBCM, S. Lighter

It is presumed that the film shown in that lecture is the same one Stan Fox successfully bid on 60 years later.

Mary Gibson Henry died in 1967 on a plant collecting trip in North Carolina at the age of 82. The Henry home and its 40 plus acres is now the headquarters for the Henry Foundation for Botanical Research. The Foundation is led by Mary's granddaughter Susan Treadway.

In the summer of 2015, Susan, her daughter Caroline Treadway, and an American documentary film crew, visited the Royal BC Museum. Caroline is producing a new film about her great-grandmother. It was the presence of the

Tropical Valley Expedition film on the Learning Portal that originally enticed the film crew to visit the Royal BC Museum. While the film crew interviewed and filmed historians and botanists at the Museum, the Treadways sat down with Dennis Duffy and Stan Fox.

Twenty years after Stan Fox took home that projector and film, he sat in front of the descendants of the woman at the centre of the film. They talked about the film, about journeys and about the happy accidental purchase that had brought them face-to-face.