

Pittsburgh Sound + Image revives a hidden gem from the roaring 20s



Local arts nonprofit Pittsburgh Sound + Image is working to restore a rare silent film from the 1920's, "Spang's First Century." The film charts the first 100 years of Spang Chalfant & Co., a Pittsburgh iron and steel manufacturer that was an early competitor of Andrew Carnegie's.

Pittsburgh Sound + Image's co-founder and director of programming, Steven Haines, discovered the film back in 2019 when he helped clean out Regent Square Theater, a theater in the East End of Pittsburgh that closed.

Haines said he understood how special the film was when he found there was no information online about the film's existence.

"What's known about this film?" Haines said. "And I find nothing. I mean, literally not a thing on it, and so then, I could immediately tell, OK, this is

probably unique or close to the only thing on this film so this is important."

Haines set the film aside for more than two years until he received a Basic Preservation grant from the National Film Preservation Foundation, a nonprofit founded by the U.S congress to help preserve America's film heritage.

According to Haines, the film vividly captures what Pittsburgh was like a century ago, along with a glimpse into the lives of the city's working-class residents at the time.

"They really documented not just the Spang Chalfant company, but really a lot of the ecosystem connected to the company's pipe making," Haines said. "It's so impressive because we can tell it's Pittsburgh."

Pittsburgh Sound + Image still needs more funding in order to complete the laboratory work to preserve the film. They launched a [Kickstarter campaign](#) to collect any remaining funds, which ends August 10.