

Mainichi Releases Video Conveying Devastation of 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake

(source: The Mainichi)

TOKYO — The Mainichi Shimbun has released a 19-minute video in which reporters documented the devastation facing the capital and its people immediately after the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake.



Tokyo's Asakusa area near the Ryounkaku building is seen after the September 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake in this frame grab from footage shot by Osaka Mainichi Shimbun reporters and others. ((C) Mainichi Productions)

The silent film was shot by photographers including those belonging to the “motion picture team” of the Osaka Mainichi Shimbun, a predecessor of the Mainichi Shimbun. The film, archived by Mainichi Productions, was recently released to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Great Kanto Earthquake, one of the worst natural disasters of modern Japan.

The film, which shows fires devouring buildings, is introduced with the title: “Scenes as devil’s claws edge toward great Tokyo minute-by-minute on Sept. 1.” The time is given as “From half past noon to late afternoon,” and the footage is credited to “Osaka Mainichi Shimbun’s fearless correspondent motion picture team.” Scenes of collapsed

buildings, fierce flames and smoke follow, apparently shot in central areas of Tokyo including the Marunouchi and Nihombashi districts.



Tokyo's Ueno Hirokoji area is seen immediately after the September 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake in this frame grab from footage shot by Osaka Mainichi Shimbun reporters and others. ((C) Mainichi Productions)

The footage also shows people packing their household goods onto large two-wheeled carts to evacuate. Many are seen huddled in vacant lots. The wrecked Ryounkaku building in Asakusa, a rare 12-story high-rise at the time, is also recorded.

At the time, the Osaka Mainichi Shimbun carried an article announcing screenings of the film in Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto six days after the Sept. 1 earthquake. The events were apparently held in part to solicit donations and send relief supplies, and admission was free.

The film went missing but was rediscovered in 2013, in an underground archive of Kyoto University's Graduate School of Engineering. It is believed to have been donated to the university by the newspaper publisher, as the words "Gift to Kyoto Imperial University/ Osaka Mainichi Shimbun" appear in the film.

(Japanese original by Taisuke Shimabukuro, Tokyo City News Department)