



Smithsonian

*National Museum of the American Indian*

Harry Wright's ethnographic films from Mexico

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## Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	
Administrative Information .....	1
Biographical / Historical .....	2
Scope and Contents .....	2
Arrangement .....	3
Names and Subjects .....	
Container Listing .....	

## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	National Museum of the American Indian
<b>Title:</b>	Harry Wright's ethnographic films from Mexico
<b>Date:</b>	1939-1946
<b>Identifier:</b>	NMAI.AC.429
<b>Creator:</b>	Wright, Harry, 1876-1954 (Producer) Myers, Edwin Forgan (Photographer)
<b>Extent:</b>	38 Film reels (16mm)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	This collection includes 13 16mm films, consisting of 38 reels, produced by Harry Wright and filmed by Edwin Myers between 1939-1940 among the Yoeme (Yaqui), Lacandon Maya, Purepecha (Tarasco), Oxchuc Tzeltal Maya (Occucero), Tzotzil Maya, Chamula Maya, Lachiguirí Zapotec [Tehuantepec], and Tacuate communities. These were part of two series' titled <i>The Harry Wright Ethnographic Series: Indian Tribes of Unknown Mexico</i> and <i>Harry Wright's Mexican Indian Series</i> .

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Gift of Mildred H. Walter, 1974.

### Related Materials

A collection of Wright's films were donated to the Library of Congress by Ruth B. Wright and 39 reels were transferred to Betacam SP tapes and sent to the Cineteca Nacional in Mexico.

### Available Formats

The majority of the films are included on two VHS videocassettes (#3 and #4) that were part of a film preservation project by the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation in the 1980s. This collection of 12 videocassettes can be found in the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation ethnographic film collection, NMAI.AC.001.001.

### Processing Information

Processed by Rachel Menyuk, Processing Archivist, 2023.

### Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Harry Wright's ethnographic films from Mexico, NMAI.AC.429; National Museum of the American Indian Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution.

### Restrictions

Collection is closed until the materials have been digitized.

## Conditions Governing Use

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## Biographical / Historical

Harry Wright was born in Bedford, Virginia in 1876. Following the death of his father, Wright began working for the Joseph Iron and Equipment Co. and was sent by the company to Mexico in 1900. His brother, Samuel Bolling, joined him in 1902 and the two started their own Foundry "La Consolidada S.A." which made both brothers millionaires within five years. Wright developed a passion for filmmaking, becoming a founding member and president of the Cinema Club de México, in 1937. Wright built his own private projection room in Mexico City, the "Kraal Theatre" which held a collection of more than two thousand films and became a meeting place for amateur filmmakers.

In the late 1930s, Wright hired photographer Edwin Forgan Myers to travel to indigenous communities in Oaxaca, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Pueblo and Hidalgo to shoot material for sixteen travelogues. Myers, born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1901, arrived in Mexico in 1932 and held the position of "Sports Director" at the Mexico City Country Club between 1933 and 1938. Financed by Wright, Myers travelled through some of the most remote and inaccessible regions of Mexico with the purpose of "preserving for posterity the customs, dances, religious ceremonies, and the life of these little-known Indian tribes, before they totally disappear." The travelogues were shot in 16mm and organized into two series: The Harry Wright Ethnographic Series: Indian Tribes of Unknown Mexico and Harry Wright's Mexican Indian Series. Wright added audio to the films in a specialized studio between 1941 and 1943 and would screen the shorts at his Kraal Theater in the early 1940s.

Harry Wright's collection of films was eventually purchased by the Library of Congress from Ruth B. Wright, the widow of Harry Wright's nephew, Harry Wright Conger. A second collection of Wright's films from Mexico, formerly in the possession of Edwin Myers, was gifted to the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation by Mildred Walter, in 1974.

Sources:

Acosta, Magdalena. "Indian Tribes of Unknown Mexico una serie etnográfica pionera," *El ojo que piensa. Revista de cine iberoamericano* Núm. 13 (Julio/Diciembre 2016).

Arrendondo, Isabel. "Telling Stories About Unknown People in Faraway Countries: US Travelogues About Mexico in the 1930s and 1940s," *Storytelling in World Cinemas, Volume 2*. Columbia University Press, 2013.

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## Scope and Contents

This collection includes thirteen films (38 reels) that were shot in 16mm between 1939 and 1940 as part of an expedition funded by Harry Wright and filmed by Edwin Myers. Sound was later added in post-production between 1941 and 1946. The original films were organized into two series: The Harry Wright Ethnographic Series: Indian Tribes of Unknown Mexico and Harry Wright's Mexican Indian Series, but since this collection is incomplete, the films are currently organized by catalog numbers assigned by the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation: 3015-3024, 3026-3027, 3043.

The films include the following titles: *Yaqui Deer Dance* (1 reel); *Voladores: Dance of the Flying Men* (2 reels); *Five Mexican Dances* (1 reel); *Lancandonos: A Lost Tribe of Jungle Savages* (4 reels); *Tzintzuntzan: The Tarascan*

*Indians Re-enact the Passion Play at Tzintuztan* (1 reel); *The Tzeltals Have Many Strange Customs* (4 reels); *The Unknown Taquate Indians* (4 reels); *Tenejapenos Cling to Pagan Rites* (5 reels); *Tehuantepec* (5 reels); *Rain Fiesta of the Tzotzil Indians* (4 reels); *Zincantecos: They Look like Arabs* (4); *Chamula Pow-wow in Honor of their Black Monkey Ancestors* (2 reels); *In the Village of Huachinango, Puebla: Typical Mexican Fiesta* (1 reel). Many of the titles of these films include terminology that is no longer used, or appropriate, to describe the Indigenous communities represented in them.

The films, narrated by Myers and Wright, were made among the Yoeme (Yaqui), Lacandon Maya, Purepecha (Tarasco), Oxchuc Tzeltal Maya (Occucero), Tzotzil Maya, Chamula Maya, Lachiguir Zapotec [Tehuantepec], and Tacuate communities. Many of the films show Myers interacting with community members who are demonstrating everyday activities as well as rituals for special occasions.

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## Content Warning

Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

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## Arrangement

Arranged by catalog number.

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Chamula Maya
- Lacandon Maya
- Lachiguir Zapotec [Tehuantepec]
- Purepecha (Tarasco)
- Tzeltal Maya
- Tzotzil Maya
- Yoeme (Yaqui)

Cultures:

- Chamula Maya
- Lacandon Maya
- Lachiguir Zapotec [Tehuantepec]
- Purepecha (Tarasco)
- Tzeltal Maya
- Tzotzil Maya
- Yoeme (Yaqui)

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## Container Listing

- Reel 1                    3015: "Yaqui Deer Dace", 1939-1946  
1 Film reel (color, silent; 16mm, 4 minutes)  
Producer:            Wright, Harry, 1876-1954  
Creator:             Myers, Edwin Forgan  
Notes:                Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.  
  
Culture:              Yoeme (Yaqui)
- Reel 2;  
Reel 3                    3016: "Voladores: Dance of the Flying Men", 1939-1946  
2 Film reels (color, sound; 16mm, 6 minutes)  
Producer:            Wright, Harry, 1876-1954  
Director:             Myers, Edwin Forgan  
Notes:                Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.
- Reel 4                    3017: "Five Mexican Dances", 1939-1946  
1 Film reel (color, silent; 16mm, 5 minutes)  
Producer:            Wright, Harry, 1876-1954  
Director:             Myers, Edwin Forgan  
Notes:                Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.
- Reel 5;  
Reel 6;  
Reel 7;  
Reel 8                    3018: "Lancandones, A Lost Tribe of Jungle Savages", 1939-1946  
4 Film reels (color, sound; 16mm, 34 minutes)  
Producer:            Wright, Harry, 1876-1954  
Director:             Myers, Edwin Forgan  
Notes:                Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.  
  
Culture:              Lacandon Maya

- Reel 9 3019: "Tzintzuntzan: The Tarascan Indians Re-enact the Passion Play at Tzintuztan", 1939-1946  
1 Film reel (color, silent; 16mm, 10 minutes)  
Producer: Wright, Harry, 1876-1954  
Director: Myers, Edwin Forgan  
Notes: Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.  
Culture: Purepecha (Tarasco)
- Reel 10;  
Reel 11;  
Reel 12;  
Reel 13 3020: "The Tzeltzals Have Many Strange Customs", 1939-1946  
4 Film reels (color, sound; 16mm, 21 minutes)  
Producer: Wright, Harry, 1876-1954  
Director: Myers, Edwin Forgan  
Notes: Ethnographic series #12. Indian Tribes of Unknown Mexico.  
Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.  
Culture: Tzeltal Maya
- Reel 14;  
Reel 15;  
Reel 16;  
Reel 17 3021: "The Unknown Taquate Indians", 1939-1946  
4 Film reels (color, sound; 16mm, 16 minutes)  
Producer: Wright, Harry, 1876-1954  
Director: Myers, Edwin Forgan  
Notes: Ethnographic series #4. Indian Tribes of Unknown Mexico.  
Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.
- Reel 18;  
Reel 19;  
Reel 20;  
Reel 21;  
Reel 22 3022: "Tenejapenos Cling to Pagan Rites", 1939-1946  
5 Film reels (color, sound; 16mm, 13 minutes)  
Producer: Wright, Harry, 1876-1954  
Director: Myers, Edwin Forgan  
Notes: Ethnographic series #15. Indian Tribes of Unknown Mexico.  
Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

Reel 23;  
Reel 24;  
Reel 25;  
Reel 26;  
Reel 27

3023: "Tehuantepec", 1939-1946  
5 Film reels (color, sound; 16mm)  
Producer: Wright, Harry, 1876-1954  
Creator: Myers, Edwin Forgan  
Notes: Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.  
Culture: Lachiguiri Zapotec [Tehuantepec]

Reel 28;  
Reel 29;  
Reel 30;  
Reel 31

3024: "Rain Fiesta of the Tzotzil Indians", 1939-1946  
4 Film reels (color, sound; 16mm)  
Producer: Wright, Harry, 1876-1954  
Director: Myers, Edwin Forgan  
Notes: Ethnographic series #10. Indian Tribes of Unknown Mexico.  
Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.  
Culture: Tzotzil Maya

Reel 32;  
Reel 33;  
Reel 34;  
Reel 35

3026: "Zincantecos: They Look like Arabs", 1939-1946  
4 Film reels (color, sound; 16mm, 14 minutes)  
Producer: Wright, Harry, 1876-1954  
Director: Myers, Edwin Forgan  
Notes: Ethnographic series #13. Indian Tribes of Unknown Mexico.  
Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

Reel 36;  
Reel 37

3027: "Chamula Pow-wow in Honor of their Black Monkey Ancestors", 1939-1946  
2 Film reels (color, sound; 16mm, 8 minutes)  
Producer: Wright, Harry, 1876-1954  
Director: Myers, Edwin Forgan  
Notes: Indian Tribes of Unknown Mexico.  
Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.  
Culture: Chamula Maya



Reel 38

3043: "In the Village of Huachinango, Puebla: Typical Mexican Fiesta", 1939-1946

1 Film reel (silent; 16mm, 10 minutes)

Creator: Wright, Harry, 1876-1954  
Myers, Edwin Forgan

Notes: Please note that the language and terminology used in these films reflects the context and culture of the time of its creation and includes what is considered derogatory and harmful language today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.