

CHAPTER 8

COMMON PROBLEMS WITH ALL STUDIOS

When we created our first production code book in 2007, it had 18,000 codes and was developed completely from lists that we had acquired from several reputable sources. Since that time, we have been continually modifying and expanding the original lists because we were USING THEM as we were going through literally tens of thousands of stills.

Our *2013 Movie Still Identification Book* has 45,400 production codes and the VAST majority were taken directly from the stills. And I can tell you that taking them DIRECTLY from the images has shown every kind of crazy variation imaginable. Because of this, we think it would be beneficial for YOU to see a couple of the oddities that were common to all studios and might help you understand some of the unusual marks that you might see.

When you first start using production code numbers, you will immediately recognize the huge amount of inconsistencies. We gathered these codes from a WIDE variety of sources, such as studio records, lists from dealers and collectors AND going through tens of thousands of stills. BUT, the problem isn't from the wide variety of sources: the problem is within the studio system.

PRODUCTION

These codes were used for control at THAT particular time for THAT particular purpose. They didn't take into consideration that maybe different people who created different stills from the Key Set would write the numbers differently, OR that when the distributor remade the stills for press releases, they would write it a different way, OR, if it was redistributed later by a different distributor, or even a distributor in a different country, that the codes would become slightly different.

You have to remember that at the time these stills were originally released, people were just doing their job and there was NEVER EVER a single thought that MAYBE... 40... 50... 60 ... or more years down the road someone might have trouble figuring out what this still was. Their only thought was to do their job and promote the film.

We've learned some very important lessons while compiling production codes. When oddities arise, you basically have to be a detective to search for clues. Sometimes it is written one way and then another. If you don't find it under one listing, try it under a slight variation, etc.

When we first started, I thought that I would just contact the studio archives and they could quickly clear up any problems. So, my first encounter was trying to identify some cast members on some early stills from the teens.

1. The stills had a studio stamp, the title, a recognizable star, a well-known director and a good production code number, so we "thought" this wouldn't be too much of a problem.

Ed and Susan Poole

PRODUCTION

After our initial search, none of the regular sources had the cast members, so we contacted the studio archivist. We sent over the title and production code and received a shocking report:

THEY HAD NO RECORD OF THAT PRODUCTION EVER BEING MADE THERE.

We said: “Wait, here’s a copy of the stills with the studio stamp and you can see the production codes!” The studio archivist said:

WE HAVE NO RECORD OF THAT.

After some additional discussions, we came to the conclusion that it was fairly common for the production company to use their own system and THEN the studio would completely re-number and re-title the project.

The problem is that the documentation during production was basically eliminated and NO records kept. Sometimes, identifying pre-release stills CAN GIVE YOU NIGHTMARES!

Here are some other examples common to all studios:

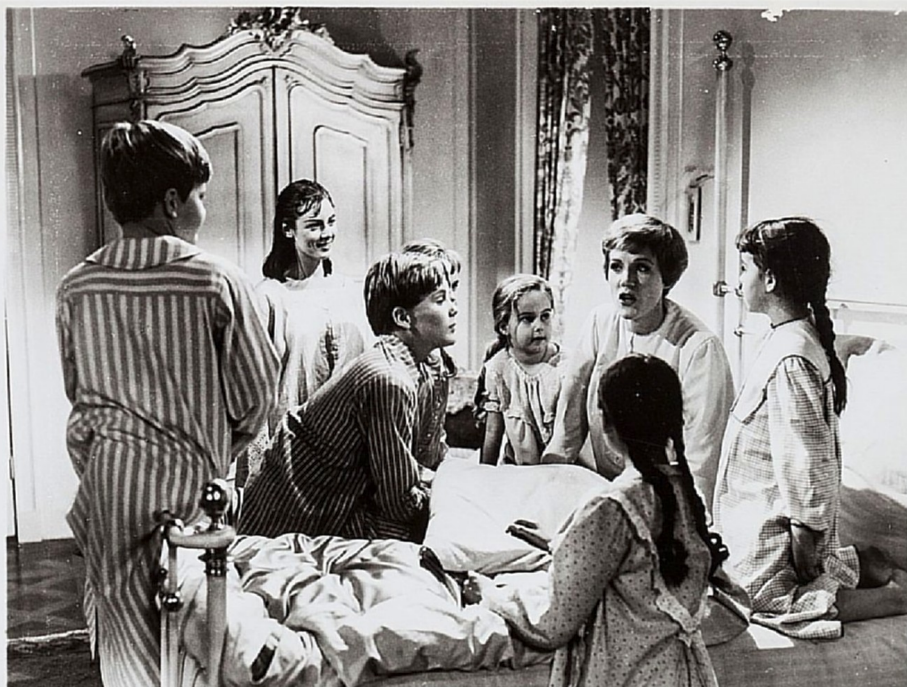
Problems With NSS Number Confusion

Since we were just talking about National Screen Service, let’s start off with an NSS problem.

1. The images on the following pages feature stills from the classic musical *The Sound of Music*, starring Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer.

Ed and Susan Poole

PRODUCTION



Copyright © MCMXLI 20th Century-Fox Film Corporation. All rights reserved. Permission granted for newspaper and magazine reproduction. (Printed in U.S.A.)

20th Century-Fox Presents
"THE SOUND OF MUSIC"
A Robert Wise Production
Filmed in Todd-AO and DeLuxe Color

79/7 Maria (JULIE ANDREWS), governess of the seven Von Trapp children, calms them during a thunderstorm by singing "My Favorite Things."

Below is a close up of the bottom of the still.



79/7 Maria (JULIE ANDREWS), governess of the seven Von Trapp children, calms them during a thunderstorm by singing "My Favorite Things."

If you asked poster collectors, the majority would say that the 79/7 is the NSS number.

That is until you showed them another still from the film, such as the one on the next page.

PRODUCTION



Copyright © MCMXLVII, 20th Century-Fox Film Corporation. All rights reserved. Permission granted for newspaper and Magazine reproduction. (Printed in U.S.A.)

20th Century-Fox Presents
"THE SOUND OF MUSIC"
A Robert Wise Production
Filmed in Todd-AO and DeLuxe Color

79/44 Julie Andrews, Christopher Plummer and the seven children sing at the Salzburg Music Festival prior to their escape from the Nazis.

Below is a close up of the bottom of the still.



79/44 Julie Andrews, Christopher Plummer and the seven children sing at the Salzburg Music Festival prior to their escape from the Nazis.

It shows the number 79/44. That's right. 79 is the production code number and NOT the NSS number.

In the 1960s, some studios started "printing" production codes with still descriptions on **some** of

Ed and Susan Poole

the stills. It wasn't consistent. This practice gained popularity and is now the norm for a lot of newer stills distributors, such as Disney.

Mistakes on Studio Issued Stills

Here is a problem that happens often and is rarely caught except for major films. When studios send out their press materials, it would be expected that their employees would know what they are doing, or at least know when something is blatantly wrong. Collectors rely on the studio tag and rarely double check the production code number to make sure.

Check out the following still from the award winning film *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner* starring Spencer Tracy and Sidney Poitier:



Copyright © 1967, Columbia Pictures.
All Rights Reserved. Permission
granted for Newspaper Magazine
reproduction. PRINTED IN U.S.A.

COLUMBIA PICTURES Presents A STANLEY KRAMER PRODUCTION SPENCER TRACY - SIDNEY POITIER - KATHARINE HEPBURN
in **GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER** and introducing KATHARINE HOUGHTON - Music by DAVID
Written by WILLIAM ROSE - Produced and Directed by STANLEY KRAMER - TECHNICOLOR®

957-102

PRODUCTION

Sidney Poitier doesn't quite look like himself in this shot. According to the production code, this still is for the film *Captain's Courageous*.

Here's another still from *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner*.



1254-98

Copyright © 1967, Columbia Pictures. All Rights Reserved. Permission granted for Nonexclusive Magazine reproduction. PRINTED IN U.S.A.

COLUMBIA PICTURES Presents A STANLEY KRAMER PRODUCTION SPENCER TRACY - SIDNEY POITIER - KATHARINE HEPBURN
in **GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER** and introducing KATHARINE BOUGHTON - Music by SAVAL
Written by WILLIAM ROSE - Producer and Directed by STANLEY KRAMER - TECHNICOLOR®

Ed and Susan Home

Sidney Poitier looked a lot like Mickey Rooney when he was a child. Anyway, you get the point.

When mistakes like this occur on a major title that everyone knows, it is easy to spot the wrong still. But this is not the case when it involves a lesser known title. These stills are normally just passed through because we have a tendency to think that the studio would know their own material.

The point is this. Just because it is issued by the studio doesn't automatically make it correct. The production code on this still clearly states that it is *Boy's Town*. So, it's good to always check the production code as well.

Multiple Production Code Numbers on Stills

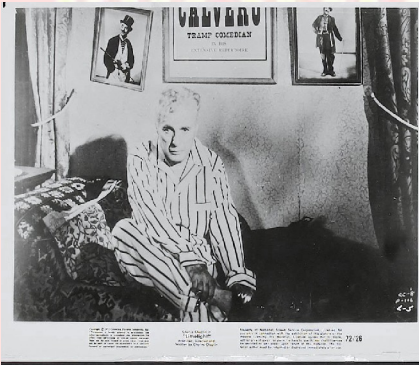
We touched early on a problem of multiple numbers under Independent Distributors. Let's revisit this point, as it was not just an independent distributor problem, but a problem for ALL distributors that handled imports. While we are at it, with our next sample, we can also cover copyright tags.

Shown on the next page are some stills for the 1972 re-release of Charlie Chaplin's *Limelight*.

These stills were distributed by National Screen Service and all of the stills have the NSS service tag and number (72/26) on the bottom right.

All of them also have the production code "L" for *Limelight*.

Ed and Susan Poole



What you can't see is that three of the six have a 1956 copyright on the left with no studio (which is odd since the original release came out in 1952). The other three stills have a 1972 copyright by Columbia Pictures.

REMEMBER: ALL 6 have the 1972 NSS tag and number.

Ed and Susan Poole

PRODUCTION CODE BASICS

Now let's look closer at the top left still, which you can plainly see has 3 production codes in the right corner.



72/26

L-5 is the production code for *Limelight*; CC-8 is bound to be Charlie Chaplin -8, but P-116 – No clue.

We already learned in the Independent Distributor section that every time the stills were handled by a different distributor, the production codes were added and/or taken away at the discretion of that distributor. But now we can add that the copyright tags went along with it also.

Original vs. Reissued Stills

One of the biggest problems with production codes is identifying reissues from originals. When a studio reissues their own film, they just pull the material and send it out again. So, it is almost impossible to tell which release it is from. You can hope that they put different copyright tags on them, but as you saw in the last example, that's not that accurate either.

Ed and Susan Poole

PRODUCTION

Only one major studio went out of their way to renumber their reissues. We cover that in the next chapter on individual studios. The best hope that we currently have is that the reissue was by a different distributor leaving their own mark.

FOR MOVIE STILL

I understand that there is a company in New York trying to come up with a way of dating newer stills by the chemicals that were used to develop them, but I haven't heard any real results yet.

Handwriting Mistakes

Here are a couple of clips from the film, *Hannie Caulder*.

The production code for *Hannie Caulder* is "HC." "HC" = Hannie Caulder - that seems fairly simple. We have gone through a lot of *Hannie Caulder* stills and they were all the same with one exception.

The image below features an enlarged view of the bottom of a still from *Hannie Caulder*. It clearly shows the "HC" code.



in Productions Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Permission granted for newspaper and magazine reproduction. (Made in U.S.A.)

"HANNIE CAULDER"

Panavision®

A Paramount Picture

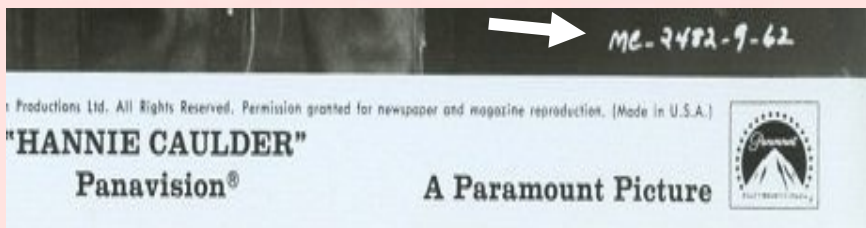


Now let's look at the still clip on the next page.

Ed and Susan Poole

PRODUCTION

The following image also shows an enlarged view of the bottom of a still from *Hannie Caulder*. But this one, for some reason, shows the code as “MC”???



This mistake was probably due to a studio employee copying the code from another still, mistaking the “H” for a “M.”. The problem is that if you only had the one still, you would not notice the error.

Backwards Printing

Here’s a clip of a still from the film *The Bride Wore Red*.



The production code number is actually “997,” which you would see if you hold the still up to a mirror. The code is BACKWARDS.

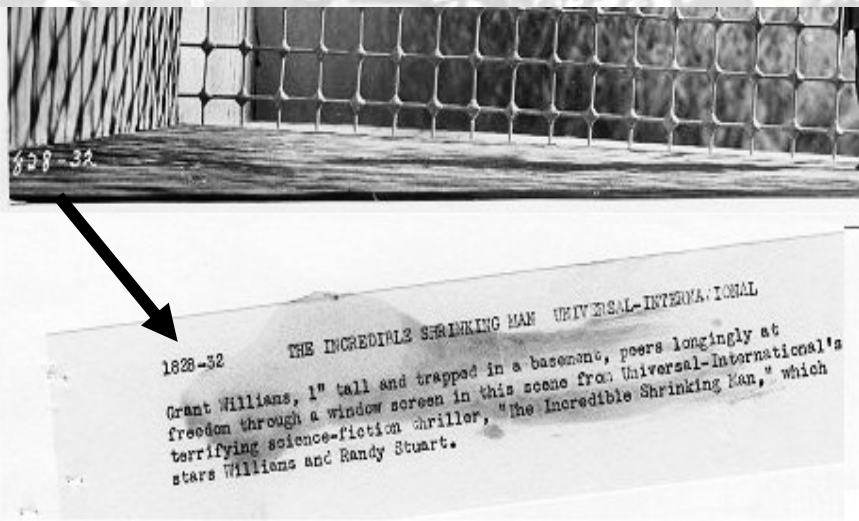
Ed and Susan Poole

PRODUCTION CODE BASICS COLLECTORS

Numbers Chopped

The next clip is taken from a still for the film *The Incredible Shrinking Man*. Fortunately, this is a popular film and should be recognizable to most. However, there is NO identification on the front of the still, and all you have is the production code (which you can see is 828)

Unfortunately, if the identification of THIS particular still was based solely on the production code, it would remain unidentified. Here's why.



The production code on the still, "828" was actually **chopped** at printing. The actual production code, as seen on the snipe that was attached to the back of the still, is "1828." Fortunately, in this particular instance, there was a studio clip on the back side.

Always beware when the production code is very close to the edge, as there is no telling how much could be **CHOPPED!**

Ed and Susan Poole

PRODUCTION

That Little Black Box

We have been asked many times about the little black boxes found on some stills. Here is a sample of a still from the Marilyn Monroe film, *Don't Bother to Knock*. Notice the black box at the bottom right of the still, which has the production code in it.



PRODUCTION CODE BASICS

Now here is another still from the same film, BUT NOTICE, the black box is on the top right.



52/299

*Property of National Screen Service Corp.
Licensed for display only in connection with
the exhibition of this picture at your theatre.
Must be returned immediately thereafter.

RICHARD WIDMARK, MARILYN MONROE in
"DON'T BOTHER TO KNOCK"
Produced by Julian Blaustein Directed by Roy Baker
20th CENTURY FOX Screen Play by Daniel Taradash Copyright 1952, 20th Century-Fox Film Corp.
20th Century Fox Printed in U.S.A. 52/299

So WHY the black box, and does the placement mean anything. i.e. produced in different locations or edited for different reasons, etc? Let's first address the black box.

In Chapter 4, we discussed the marking of stills by the Publicity Department in the making of the Key Set. Occasionally, the production codes would have to be revised AFTER they were etched on a still. The best way to make these changes was to create a black background and make a new one. Yes, these were initially created to make changes.

Ed and Susan Poole

PRODUCTION CODE BASICS FOR MOVIE STILL

Some studios picked up the process to become a regular spot instead of scratching them into the still.

Then if there was a need to make a change, there was already a space to do it.

And as for the placement, I wanted to make sure so I asked an employee who worked in the Publicity Department creating Key Sets. I was told that it was placed where they had more room. There was NO reason other than that.

Before we move on to the studios, let's look at one last area of concern that involves re-makes of films using different actors BUT the SAME codes. Warner Brothers was one of the worse to do this. Numerous times Warner Brothers would re-make a film 5 to 10 years later and then use the same production code for BOTH films.

For example, *Two Against the World* was released in 1932 starring Constance Bennett with the working title of *Higher Ups*. In 1936, Warner Brothers released *Two Against the World* starring Humphrey Bogart.

It was also released under the TV title *One Fatal Hour* and the British title *Case of Mrs. Pembroke*. BOTH the 1932 and the 1936 films used the SAME CODE.

For this reason, when possible, always try to reconfirm the identification by a second source. Once you identify a still by the production code, if there are actors in the still, try to confirm their identity.

Ed and Susan Poole

PRODUCTION STILLS COLLECTORS

If you are a veteran at production stills, then you know that you will run into every scenario imaginable. You basically have to be a detective looking for clues to the identity of THAT still. So any information that can be gleaned from the still, such as distributors, markings on the back, scene explanations, magazine stamps, etc., are potential clues.



CINEMARETRO

**BRINGING
CINEMA
OF THE PAST
INTO THE
FUTURE
IN A NEW
MAGAZINE
DEVOTED TO
60'S & 70'S**

<http://www.cinemaretro.com>

CINEMA RETRO
PO Box 1570
Christchurch
Dorset BH23 4XS England
Tel: + 44 (0) 870 4423 007
Fax: + 44 (0) 1425 273068
solopublishing@firenet.uk.com

USA OFFICE:
PO Box 152
Dunellen, NJ 08812
USA
Tel: + 001 732 752 7257
Fax: + 001 732 752 6959
cinemaretro@hotmail.com

kinoart.net

**ORIGINAL
MOVIE POSTERS
AND LOBBY CARDS**

*12,000 SELECTED VINTAGE
INTERNATIONAL POSTERS
AVAILABLE*

**WOLFGANG JAHN
SULZBURGSTR. 126
50937 COLOGNE
GERMANY
+49 221 1698728**

PRODUCTION

DO YOU HAVE POSTERS YOU WANT TO SELL?

THERE IS NO AUCTIONEER OF VINTAGE MOVIE PAPER WHO HAS LOWER FEES OR WHO DELIVERS CONSISTENTLY HIGHER PRICES THAN EMOVIPOSTER.COM, AND WE ARE THE ONLY AUCTIONEERS WHO CAN TAKE ALL OF YOUR MOVIE PAPER!

EMOVIPOSTER.COM

PO. BOX 874

306 WASHINGTON AVE.

WEST PLAINS, MO 65775

WWW.EMOVIPOSTER.COM

417-256-9616 · MAIL@EMOVIPOSTER.COM

FILM/VIDEO/DVD SUPPLIES



DVD Storage Boxes

VERSApak
Cases for
7 to 10 DVDs



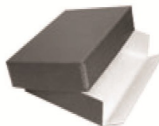
Video Cases



Movie Reel Canisters



Poster Bins



Archival Storage Boxes



Rolled Poster
Maters



Rolled Poster Storage



Lobby Card Products

THE COLLECTION PROTECTION SUPPLY COMPANY

BAGS Unlimited
since 1976

7 Canal St. Rochester, NY 14608
www.BagsUnlimited.com

FREE CATALOG
1-800-767-2247