

LOS ANGELES CITYWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

Context: Entertainment Industry, 1908-1980

**Theme: Industrial Properties Associated with the
Entertainment Industry, 1908-1980**



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PREFACE

This theme is a component of SurveyLA's citywide historic context statement and provides guidance to field surveyors and others in identifying and evaluating historic resources relating to industrial properties associated with the entertainment industry. Refer to www.HistoricPlacesLA.org for information on designated resources associated with this theme as well as those identified through SurveyLA and other surveys.¹

CONTRIBUTORS

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INTRODUCTION

The motion picture industry played, and continues to play, a significant role in the economic and cultural development of Los Angeles, and a large part of the city's identity is tied to its role as a center of the entertainment industry. The relationship of Hollywood, the concept, and Los Angeles, the place, can best be described as symbiotic. As such, Hollywood is more than a geographic location of industrial building and production facilities. The movie studios and their accompanying support services that make up the "industry" are significant assets to Hollywood and Los Angeles. Over the course of the 20th century, new forms of entertainment found their footing in Hollywood and flourished. Film, radio, television, and sound recording all evolved into major forms of nationwide communication and entertainment under the Southern California sun. In doing so, these mediums transformed the landscape of Los Angeles, and Hollywood in particular, from a sea of citrus groves into a bustling hub of commercial and industrial activity related to the entertainment industry.

This theme examines the development of the motion picture, radio, television, and recording industries as well as associated property types located in Los Angeles² which include: major and independent

¹ See also surveys of the Hollywood Redevelopment Project Area completed by the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA). These surveys were separate from, and not included in, SurveyLA.

² Some resources associated with these industries are located outside of the city of Los Angeles. Locations include the cities of Burbank, Culver City, and West Hollywood. They are referenced in the context narrative where relevant, but are not evaluated as part of this context.

movie studios, radio and television broadcasting facilities, music studios, and support services. The accompanying eligibility standards provide a framework for their evaluation.

Evaluation Considerations:

This theme may overlap with other citywide historic contexts and themes as follows:

- Properties significant for their architectural quality may also be evaluated under themes within the “Architecture and Engineering” historic context.
- Industrial properties may also be evaluated under relevant sub-contexts and themes within the “Industrial Development” historic context.
- Some properties may also be discussed in the ethnic/cultural contexts. In particular, see the “African Americans in Los Angeles,” “Asian Americans in Los Angeles,” “Jewish History,” and “Latino Los Angeles,” contexts.
- Industrial properties may also be significant under the “Labor History” theme of the “Industrial Development” historic context.
- Industrial properties significant for their association with individuals who were influential in the development of the entertainment industry may also be evaluated using the “Guidelines for Evaluating Properties Associated with Important Persons in Los Angeles.”

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Industrial Properties Associated with the Entertainment Industry, 1908-1980

Origins of the Entertainment Industry in Southern California

The most significant factor in the development of Hollywood in the twentieth century was the arrival of the entertainment industry. Regular motion picture production began in Hollywood in 1911, and quickly grew into a significant economic force. As the popularity of motion pictures grew, more physical facilities related to film production were constructed in Hollywood, and the industry contributed significantly to the area's overall industrial growth.

Origins of the Motion Picture Industry

The origins of motion picture production in Southern California are rooted in the arrival of two men from Chicago: Francis Boggs and Thomas Persons. Boggs, an actor and director, and Persons, a cameraman, were representatives of the Selig Polyscope Company and traveled west from Chicago to Southern California in 1907 to film exterior location shots at Laguna Beach for *The Count of Monte Cristo*.³ As film historian Eileen Bowser notes, while Boggs was far from the first to actually make films in California – there had been films shot there in the previous decade – he may have been the first representative of a major company to travel there on location and then return to establish a studio.⁴ Boggs and the Selig company returned to Los Angeles in March 1909 and leased quarters behind the Sing Kee Chinese Laundry at 751 South Olive Street (not extant) in Downtown Los Angeles, constructing the first-ever movie set in the city. The first movie to be filmed at Selig's temporary facility was *The Heart of a Race Tout*, which was released in 1909 and included location shots of nearby Central Park (now known as Pershing Square), and Lucky Baldwin's Santa Anita Park racetrack recorded in the final three days before the park's closure.⁵ The film, which is believed to be the first full-length picture shot entirely in the Los Angeles area, "inaugurated the Los Angeles film industry."⁶

³ See also the "Filming Locations Associated with the Motion Picture and Television Industries" theme.

⁴ Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*, vol. 2, in *History of the American Cinema*, ed. Charles Harpole (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 151.

⁵ Andrew A. Erish, *Col. William N. Selig, The Man Who Invented Hollywood* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2012), 82. While some historians claim that the first movie to be filmed in Los Angeles was Selig's *In The Sultan's Power*, Erish's examination of William N. Selig's correspondence reveals that *The Heart of a Race Tout* was filmed prior to *In The Sultan's Power*, but the latter was released first.

⁶ Erish, *Col. William N. Selig*, 82.



*Scene from the filming of The Heart of a Race Tout, 1909.
(Bruce Torrence Hollywood Photograph Collection)*

At the time, the great film centers in the United States were New York and Chicago, and their associated suburbs.⁷ Both of these locations, as well as those of the lesser filmmaking communities along the East Coast, such as Philadelphia, presented their own difficulties. Chief among these were the challenges of production within a profession governed by the film industry's "patent wars." Thomas Edison's Edison Film Manufacturing Company had dominated the filmmaking profession with its patented camera equipment until a former employee of Edison's, W. K. L. Dickson, formed his own company (commonly known as Biograph) and developed his own camera. Several other filmmakers followed suit, and soon Edison was embroiled in years of litigation in an effort to combat what he regarded as patent infringement and regain control of the industry. After nearly a decade of infighting, in 1908 Edison joined with most of his competitors – which included every one of the major American film production companies, the country's leading film distributor, and the largest supplier of raw film stock – to establish the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC), which served as a cooperative system designed to provide industry domination.⁸ By pooling their interests, the member companies legally monopolized the business and demanded licensing fees from all film producers, distributors, and exhibitors. A January 1909 deadline was set for all companies to comply with the license. By February, unlicensed outlaws, who referred to themselves as "independents," protested the trust and continued business without submitting to the Edison monopoly, using illegal equipment and imported film stock to create their own underground market. The MPCC reacted to the independent movement by forming a subsidiary to block the activities of non-licensed independents, using coercive tactics to confiscate equipment, discontinue product supply to theaters showing unlicensed films, and monopolize film distribution. As the centers of the film industry, New York and Chicago were subject to additional scrutiny from the trust, and filmmakers began to explore filming outside these epicenters to avoid any interference from the MPPC.

⁷ Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema*, 149.

⁸ The following discussion of the Edison patent wars has been excerpted and adapted from J. A. Aberdeen, "The Edison Movie Monopoly: The Motion Picture Patents Company vs. The Independent Outlaws," Hollywood Renegades Archive, http://www.cobbles.com/simpp_archive/edison_trust.htm (accessed November 2016).

In doing so, the independents pioneered the division between East Coast business headquarters and West Coast production operations that would come to characterize the Hollywood studio system.⁹

Also at play was the intersection of weather conditions and the motion picture industry's breakneck production schedule. Elaine Bowser explains:

Under the conditions of an organized distribution system, a producer had to be able to depend on steady production, week in, week out. The long winter months of New York and Chicago presented problems for that kind of production, however, especially among those producers who did not yet have a well-equipped studio and adequate artificial light. The hours of daylight grew too short, the sun too uncertain, and the weather too severe to stay outdoors making movies. As a result, the film producers of Chicago led the way westward in search of landscape and sunshine, while the New Yorkers were more apt to head south when they wanted a place to make films in the wintertime.¹⁰

By contrast, in addition to the mild weather, California offered a diverse and easily accessible array of scenery unmatched by other locations.

[The landscape] was not only spectacular but extraordinarily varied. Summer greenery and winter snow, sunny beaches, barren deserts and rocky mountains were all within a short distance of each other. Florida and Texas could supply the climate for year-round outdoor filming, but they did not have quite the range of scenic choices within a day's trip from the studios. Even the light of California was different, gently diffused by morning mists rolling in from the Pacific or by dust clouds blowing off the sandy hills. The rugged western landscape and the wide-open spaces were felt as enormous attractions in the rest of the world.¹¹

Los Angeles in particular presented additional amenities. Biographer Andrew Arish notes that in addition to its arid climate and variegated geography, Los Angeles supported two full-time theatrical companies and was part of the Orpheum vaudeville circuit, from which additional players, sets, costumes, and props could potentially be recruited.¹² While for the same reasons, San Francisco might have been a more logical destination, the 1906 earthquake had decimated its larger theatrical community.¹³ Historian Kevin Starr also acknowledges that Los Angeles held the advantage over San Francisco for other reasons – its proximity to Mexico.

San Francisco might out-compete Los Angeles County in scenic locations, might have more established actors available, might offer films the energizing and disciplining effects of urban culture; but San Francisco was a legal town, with numerous law offices affiliated

⁹ J.A. Aberdeen, "The Edison Movie Monopoly: The Motion Picture Patents Company vs. The Independent Outlaws." Hollywood Renegades Archive, accessed November 2017, http://www.cobbles.com/simpp_archive/edison_trust.htm.

¹⁰ Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema*, 149.

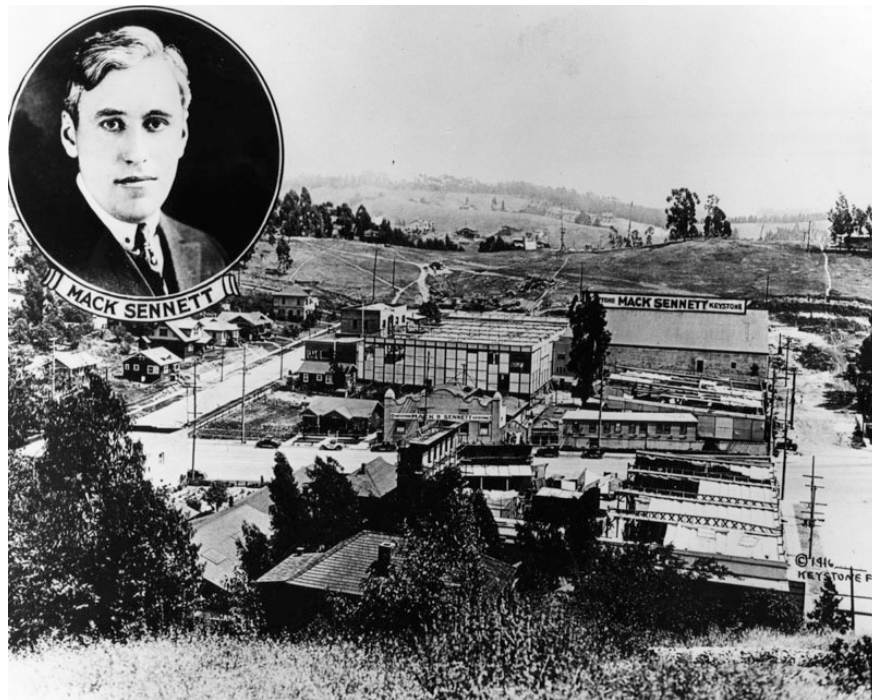
¹¹ Ibid, 151.

¹² Erish, 80.

¹³ Ibid.

with Edison lawyers in the East, and hence a dangerous environment for independents who, if operating in Southern California, were able to move their operations across the border into Mexico, which they occasionally did when harassed by Trust attorneys and thugs.¹⁴

For all these reasons, the nascent film community established in Los Angeles with the arrival of Francis Boggs quickly grew during the first two decades of the 20th century. The Selig Polyscope Company filmed several pictures at their first facility before relocating to permanent quarters in the Edendale neighborhood of Los Angeles in August 1909.¹⁵ Selig's arrival in Edendale was closely followed by that of the New York Picture Corporation that same year, and then the Biograph Company and the Kalem Company in 1910. Indeed, nearly all the major motion picture production companies active at that time arrived in California during the winter season of 1910 – 1911, although the majority still did not intend to stay on indefinitely.¹⁶ However, many companies simply never returned east after their initial expedition to Southern California, and by 1911, Los Angeles began to have a more established film community.¹⁷ One of the most prominent early production companies to settle in Edendale was Keystone Pictures, which was financed by Adam Kessel and Charles Baumann and headed by Mack Sennett. Sennett established the Keystone Studios at 1712 Alessandro Street (now 1712 Glendale Boulevard, Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 256) on a site formerly occupied by Bison Pictures, and constructed the first fully-



Mack Sennett's Keystone Studios in Edendale, 1915. (Los Angeles Public Library)

¹⁴ Kevin Starr, *Inventing the Dream: California Through the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 288-289.

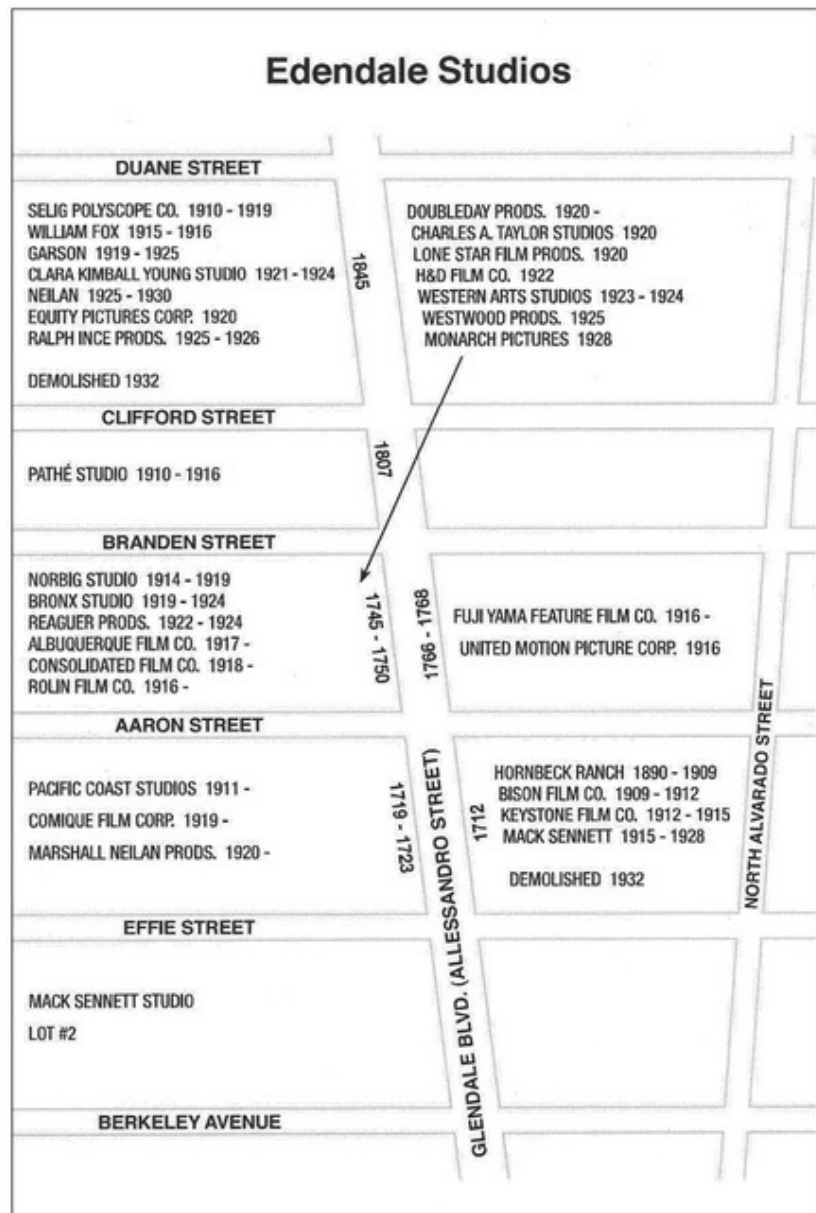
¹⁵ Edendale was the historic name for the community located northwest of Downtown Los Angeles; the area now comprises portions of the present-day neighborhoods of Silverlake, Echo Park, and Los Feliz.

¹⁶ Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema*, 159.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

enclosed stage and studio in industry history. Sennett rose to prominence for incorporating elaborate slapstick sequences and chase scenes into his comedy films, and the studio became a household name with its series, *Keystone Kops*. Keystone also proved to be an important training ground for some of film's most iconic comedic players, including Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, Harold Lloyd, and Charlie Chaplin. Sennett eventually left to form his own eponymous production company in 1917, and Keystone Studios began to decline. The company was eventually dissolved through bankruptcy in 1935.

The westward migration of nearly every major motion picture company did not go unnoticed. As early as November 1910, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that "it is predicted by theatrical men that Los Angeles will be the moving picture center of America that year."¹⁸ In January 1911, industry publication *Moving Picture World* launched its first regular West Coast correspondent, screenwriter Richard V. Spencer.¹⁹ By May 1911, there were ten motion picture companies reported to be operating in Southern California, and another three independent production companies were forming.²⁰ While concentrations of motion picture studios sprang up in Downtown Los Angeles; in Edendale, along Glendale Boulevard near Echo Park; East Hollywood, at the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and Virgil Avenue; and West Los Angeles, along Washington Boulevard, other companies were developing production facilities outside of the limited space afforded by these



Edendale Map, 1910s. Reproduced from Wanamaker's Early Poverty Row Studios.

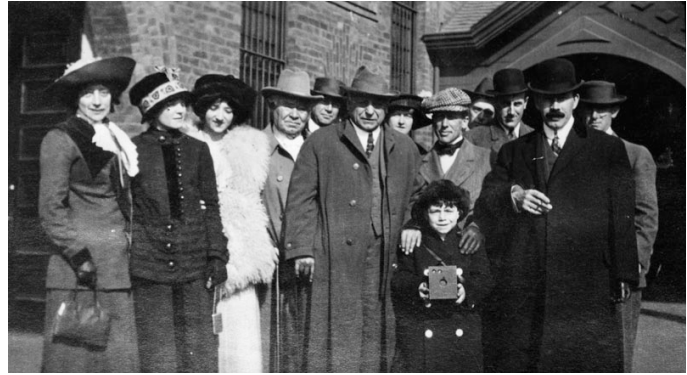
¹⁸ As quoted in Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema*, 159.

¹⁹ Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema*. 159.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

already-developed neighborhoods. Several studios were established in the San Fernando Valley on expansive ranches, and in 1911 pioneer filmmaker Thomas Ince established “Inceville” on the palisades of West Los Angeles. The shoreline and canyons of Inceville provided Ince with a great variety of settings for his Western films, while his isolation in Santa Ynez Canyon and on the Palisades provided him with an independence which he sacrificed when he relocated his activities to Culver City in 1916.

Another location, while not subject to the first wave of motion picture migration which occurred during the winter of 1910-1911, would soon eclipse all other motion picture centers in Southern California – Hollywood. The first motion picture to be filmed in present-day Hollywood was D. W. Griffith’s *In Old California*, which was produced in 1910. However, it was not until the following year that a permanent motion picture studio would be established in the area. David



*The Nestor Film company arriving in Los Angeles, 1911.
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Horsley, a pioneering filmmaker and founder of the New Jersey-based Centaur Film Company, decided to establish a West Coast production unit known as the Nestor Film Company. Horsley was the first film manufacturer to bring three companies to California under the Nestor umbrella – one that produced dramas, another which produced Westerns, and a third which produced comedies.²¹ In 1911 the Nestor Film Company leased a small property at the northwest corner of Sunset Boulevard and Gower Street. The property – which Nestor subsequently purchased – was perhaps best known for its roadhouse, the Blondeau Tavern. The Blondeau property (not extant) also contained a barn, corral, twelve single-room structures, and a five-room bungalow, all of which were quickly adapted for filmmaking.²²



The Blondeau Tavern, c. 1910. (Los Angeles Public Library)

²¹ “Motion Picture Studios of California,” *Moving Picture World*, March 10, 1917.

²² The Blondeau property was demolished in 1937 to make way for the construction of CBS Columbia Square (6121 Sunset Boulevard).

The next several years saw other motion picture studios follow suit and establish production facilities in Hollywood. Perhaps the most notable newcomer was the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Players Company, which established a base of operations in a barn at the corner of Selma and Vine Streets (not extant) in Hollywood in 1913. Although Lasky's Feature Players would later come to be known for the success of its officers – industry leaders Jesse Lasky, Samuel Goldfish (later known as Samuel Goldwyn), and Cecil B. DeMille – as well as its eventual merger with Adolf Zukor's Famous Players to form Paramount Pictures Corporation, at the time the Lasky Players were only one of a number of companies developing facilities in Hollywood. These companies produced "short" features, which were one to three reels of film in length



The filming of the first scene of The Squaw Man at Lasky Feature Players Company, 1914. (Los Angeles Public Library)

and lasted thirty minutes or less. Early film production was focused primarily on short features, but by the late 1910s, "feature-length" films lasting sixty minutes or more were the dominant form. Hollywood's first feature-length motion picture, called *The Squaw Man*, was directed by DeMille for Lasky's Feature Players and released in 1914. By the spring of 1915, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce claimed in an advertisement that eighty percent of the country's motion pictures were produced in Southern California.²³

In October 1915, the courts determined that the MPPC and its General Film division acted as a monopoly in restraint of trade, and later ordered the firm disintegrated.²⁴ This decision motivated growth in the industry, as Eastern money began to invest in movie studios after the MPPC was finally defeated in the courts.²⁵ As a result, the second half of the 1910s was marked by the establishment of new production companies and the consolidation of existing concerns. Several studios which would eventually dominate the industry were first established in some form during this decade, including Universal Pictures in 1915, Warner Brothers in 1918, and United Artists in 1919.

While the American public's growing demand for motion pictures certainly facilitated the American motion picture industry's continued growth, as Arthur Knight explains, producers were also able to capitalize on a set of unique circumstances.

...Hollywood was fast becoming a synonym for all American picture-making. What hastened the process, what actually completed it, was the United States' entry into World War I. When war broke out in Europe, shortages of coal and electricity – plus the fact that cellulose, the film base, was suddenly vitally needed for high explosives – forced virtually all the European studios to shut down. It also added, not coincidentally, to the growing

²³ As cited in Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema*, 162.

²⁴ Aberdeen, "The Edison Movie Monopoly: The Motion Picture Patents Company vs. The Independent Outlaws."

²⁵ Marc Wanamaker, "Historic Hollywood Movie Studios – Part I," *American Cinematographer*, March 1976.

prosperity of the American industry; Europe's film studios may have ceased to function, but this did not reduce the Europeans' craving for wartime entertainment. Hollywood's films and Hollywood's stars brought the war-torn nations of Europe the enchantment, the excitement, the glamour, and the release they so desperately needed; and Hollywood's coffers expanded accordingly.²⁶

As the decade drew to a close, growth within the industry necessitated the expansion of existing motion picture plants, as well as the construction of new facilities.

Origins of Entertainment-Related Industrial Development

As a result of its role in the development of the motion picture industry, Hollywood also became a center for the development of radio and, later, television production when these two technologies were developed in the early 20th century. Shared technologies and innovations which could be utilized by every entertainment medium contributed to the growth and subsequent flourishing of each industry.

The radio broadcasting industry was inaugurated in Southern California in 1902, when local ham radio operators using crystal radio sets and headphones beamed messages between Catalina Island and San Pedro.²⁷ Widespread broadcasting did not begin in earnest, however, until the 1920s, when improvements in sound recording spurred advancements in radio technology, and radio broadcast stations quickly spread throughout the United States.

The development of the recording industry in Los Angeles was a natural extension of the city's prominence within the radio industry, as well as a significant component of the city's entertainment industry as a whole. The transition from silent movies to sound proved to be the catalyst for a boom in popular music, which could now be heard on the radio; the new technology also spurred advancements in sound recording, which revolutionized both the radio broadcasting and recording industries. Before 1900, new music was promoted through public venues, such as dance halls, saloons, and restaurants, as well as through the sale of sheet music. Phonograph records became commercially available in the late 1880s, allowing purchasers to hear recorded performances for the first time. The original "Big Three" record companies, Columbia, Brunswick and Victor emerged in the 1910s. By the mid-1920s, radio surpassed records as the public's main source for popular songs.²⁸

The ability to promote and hear music across a variety of different mediums created an ideal opportunity for not only shared technology, but also for shared promotion. The increased publicity across all platforms created additional demand for content which contributed to the success of the film, radio, and recording industries. The interrelationship between these three mediums and their shared

²⁶ Arthur Knight, *The Hollywood Style*, with photographs by Eliot Elisofon (London: Macmillan, 1969), 17-18.

²⁷ Robert H. Marriott, "As It Was in the Beginning," accessed December 2016, <http://earlyradiohistory.us/1924mar.htm>.

²⁸ Katherine Spring, "Pop Go the Warner Bros., Et Al.: Marketing Film Songs During the Coming of Sound," *Cinema Journal* 48 no. 1 (2008): 68-89.

technology set the stage for the arrival of television in Los Angeles and in turn contributed to its growth and success as another form of entertainment.

Origins of Entertainment Industry-Related Support Services

The first entertainment-related support services to locate to Southern California were not, in fact, related to motion picture production, but rather to distribution – a natural extension of the presence and popularity of existing motion picture theaters in Los Angeles, which were then called “nickelodeons.”²⁹ Film exchanges, while more commercial than industrial in nature, were the first operations to be established in Los Angeles which reflected aspects of the motion picture *production* process, rather than merely the exhibition of films. Film exchanges operated as clearinghouses for the distribution of films; as historian Danny Kuchuck explains:

The studios would ship their prints to film exchanges around the country that served all the movie theaters in that region. The exchanges would have screening rooms and editing benches so theater operators could determine if a movie was suitable for their community, and edit scenes out if needed. Regional sensibilities prevailed in those days, so a scene that was fine in Pittsburgh, for example, might have been deemed unsuitable in Denver.³⁰

One of the first film exchanges to be established in Los Angeles appears to have been Tally’s Film Exchange at 554 South Broadway (not extant), which is noted in Los Angeles city directories as early as 1909.³¹ The exchange was owned by Thomas S. Tally, who operated Tally’s Broadway Theater and was the first exhibitor to show a motion picture on the West Coast in 1897.³² By 1911 several film exchanges were operating and, following the arrival in 1910 of the first East Coast production companies to locate permanently in Los Angeles, the fledgling support services industry was born.

The early establishment and development of the support services industry in Los Angeles lagged behind that of the more sophisticated East Coast and even Midwest



*Tally's Film Exchange, 1909, 554 South Broadway
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

²⁹ The discussion of trends and patterns of development in the support services industry has been greatly aided by information provided in Los Angeles city and street directories, as well as motion picture industry trade annuals and year books. In particular, the *Film Daily Year Book* provides a comprehensive listing of industry resources in the area from 1922 to 1951.

³⁰ “Paramount Film Exchange Building Tour,” from 2016 AMIA Conference, Pro-Tek Vaults, accessed June 2017, <https://protekvaults.com/amia-2016-paramount-film-exchange-building-tour/>.

³¹ This address is a contributing building to the Broadway Theater and Commercial National Register Historic District with a construction date of 1921.

³² *Film Daily Year Book* (New York and Los Angeles: The Film Daily, 1921), 71, accessed June 2017, <https://archive.org/>.

operations, a schism that was driven in large part by the geographical remoteness of Southern California relative to any other established filmmaking or related technological operations. In these metropolitan areas and their surrounding suburbs, it was comparatively easy for support services to be developed alongside production studios – if they did not exist already. In New Jersey, for example, in 1893 Thomas Edison developed the world’s first motion picture production studio, the “Black Maria,” on the grounds of his existing film laboratory, where he already possessed the facilities to develop and print his film product for exhibition. Those film companies that migrated to Southern California in the early 20th century, however, had no resources at their disposal, technological or otherwise. Actors did double-duty building and decorating sets and loading props and scenery; at least one company required that its players know how to use a hammer and saw. While the lack of some resources could be more easily remedied than others, the challenge of locating a facility to edit and develop film remained. Any film negatives had to be shipped back to Chicago or New York for printing, meaning that directors often had no idea if they’d made a successful shot until weeks or even months later. When the Nestor Studios company first took over the Blondeau Tavern, each day’s film had to be developed that night, after dark on the tavern’s screened porch, before it was sent to New Jersey for printing. With circumstances such as these, it is perhaps not surprising that film laboratories and processing plants were the next service to be developed. Producers who were able to construct dedicated permanent facilities for their new Southern California operations frequently included the construction of a film laboratory; independent laboratories were also established by the mid-1910s in areas where production facilities were concentrated, such as Edendale and Downtown Los Angeles.

Once film could be printed and developed on location, a major hurdle had been cleared, paving the way for more efficient production and distribution. Beyond this key step, however, dedicated support services were extremely limited in the first decade of the Southern California film industry, and film companies largely made use of existing commercial operations for their other needs, such as costuming, still photography, and transportation. A supplement to the 1917 *Motion Picture Studio Directory and Trade Annual*, dubbed the “West Coast Section,” provided advertisements for established retailers in Los Angeles and San Francisco who were willing to service the trade. It was not until the early 1920s, when the industry began to flourish, that a full complement of support services was established in Los Angeles.

By this time, most of the major East Coast studios had relocated to Southern California, and many additional independent studios and some rental plants had been established here. The motion picture industry in Los Angeles had grown to include numerous studios dedicated to producing theatrical releases, or motion pictures, which were the mainstay of the entertainment industry. However, the overall demands of the entertainment industry necessitated the development of additional product and content to either support or accompany feature films, serve as standalone promotional material, or diversify a studio’s output. As a result, dedicated production facilities were also developed for non-theatrical releases: short subjects, advertising films, educational and industrial films, cartoons, newsreels, trailers, and other content. Studios and laboratories were also constructed for the creation of production and portrait photography, illustrated title cards, and other matter. Although the more

established film studios were designed to be largely self-sufficient and contained collections of these resources for their own use, these businesses were also constructed independently of the studios to provide ancillary support and to aid independent producers.

Entertainment Industry Development in the 1920s and 1930s

While the formative first decade of the film industry had been characterized by experimentation and competition amongst many small independent production companies, as the industry flourished during the 1920s producers began to seek greater profits and more market control. These motivations gave rise to a period of consolidation when many of the pioneering studios of the 1910s underwent a process of acquisition and merger. This process ultimately resulted in eight studios dominating the American motion picture industry. Known as the “Big Eight,” these companies were:³³

- Columbia Pictures
1438 North Gower Street (now known as Sunset Gower Studios), Hollywood
- Fox Film Corporation (now Twentieth Century Fox)
10201 West Pico Boulevard, West Los Angeles
- Metro (now Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer)
10202 West Washington Boulevard (now known as Sony Pictures Studios), Culver City
- Famous Players-Lasky (now Paramount)
5555 Melrose Avenue, Hollywood
- RKO Pictures
780 North Gower Street (now part of the Paramount Pictures lot), Hollywood
- United Artists (now known as The Lot)
1041 North Formosa Avenue, West Hollywood
- Universal Pictures
3900 Lankershim Boulevard, Universal City
- Warner Brothers (now known as Sunset Bronson Studios)
5800 Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood; 3400 West Riverside Drive, Burbank

Development of Major Motion Picture Production

For nearly two decades, the Big Eight controlled 95 percent of film revenues in the United States and set the standard for film production throughout the world.³⁴ Their rise to dominance in the early 1920s marked the beginning of what is now referred to as “The Major Studio Era,” which is also commonly known as Hollywood’s “Golden Age,” and marks the height of the motion picture industry’s establishment as the prevailing form of popular entertainment. During this period, the motion picture industry was largely defined by the business strategy adopted by the Big Eight studios, which focused on

³³ All of the Big Eight studios have undergone alterations and additions over time, but each studio retains some historic features and resources. Those studios located outside of the City of Los Angeles were not surveyed as part of SurveyLA and are included here for discussion of the overall context.

³⁴ Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 2.

a vertically-integrated production model. Each studio functioned as a self-contained “film factory” which controlled every aspect of motion picture production from development through distribution. Actors, directors, designers, writers, producers, and technicians were exclusive, contracted employees of the studios, supported by a large complement of facility, office, and service workers. The studios maintained all the necessary facilities for the production of their films and the support of their workforce, including support services such as food commissaries and medical clinics, and infrastructure networks such as water, power, and transportation systems. To ensure outlets for their product, the most powerful studios also bought, built, or gained control of first-run theater chains (which operated the largest and most prestigious theaters in major American cities), thereby controlling distribution, screening, and the collection of box office receipts as well.

Leading the Big Eight were five companies that controlled the first-run film market through corporate ownership of prominent national theater chains. The five “major” studios produced first-run films to be shown in the studios’ theaters in major urban markets. These locations offered the greatest potential for profit because they attracted the largest audiences, charged the highest ticket prices, and provided direct access to the nation’s most important radio stations and print media. These five “major” studios were Fox Studios (later Twentieth Century-Fox), located in Hollywood and West Los Angeles; Metro-Goldwyn Mayer (MGM), with production facilities located in Culver City, an incorporated city outside Los Angeles; Paramount Pictures, located in Hollywood; Warner Brothers, located in Hollywood and Burbank; and RKO, the smallest of the five, also located in Hollywood. In addition to the “majors” were three “minor” studios, which did not own theater chains and were therefore more limited in their access to theater bookings. These three “minor majors” included Universal Pictures, with production facilities in North Hollywood; Columbia Pictures in Hollywood; and United Artists, which was located in what is now West Hollywood and functioned largely as a host studio and distributor for independent producers. While the ownership – or lack thereof – in associated theater chains presented the most significant difference between the major and minor studios of the Big Eight, in some cases the major and minor studios also differed in the quality of their product. Major studios tended to focus on higher-budget feature films subsidized by lower-budget films, while the output from minor studios was largely the reverse, involving mostly “B” pictures with a supporting slate of “A” feature films.

The Major Studio era continued through the end of the silent movie era and the origins of talking pictures, which was inaugurated with the 1927 release of Warner Brothers’ *The Jazz Singer*. Indeed, it was the



*Eugenie Besserer and Al Jolson in The Jazz Singer
(Warner Bros. Entertainment)*

smash success of *The Jazz Singer* – the first feature-length film to contain synchronized speaking and singing scenes – which changed the course of filmmaking. When *The Jazz Singer* proved to be a major success at the box office the course of the movie industry was set.

The technological advances which accompanied the introduction of sound necessitated drastic changes to the process of filmmaking and profoundly impacted even the most tangential aspects of the motion picture industry. As Dr. Edwin O. Palmer, a Hollywood historian, explained:

The effect [of sound] on Hollywood can hardly be appreciated. All studios required double walls for sound-proofing. Directors, so vociferous before, became dumb. Actors and actresses were compelled to talk. Schools of voice and diction sprang up everywhere. Tourists were no longer welcome in studios. The pantomimic beauties found themselves out of positions. Popular actors from the legitimate stage flocked to Hollywood. The world's best musicians, both vocal and instrumental, and the earth's renowned authors came.³⁵

The necessary investments to accommodate sound technology further accelerated the consolidation process of the 1920s by favoring the most successful and highly-capitalized studios. In 1927 alone, a heroic \$103 million was spent making movies, up 25 percent from the previous year. Conversions to sound studios after 1928 poured another \$247 million into the regional economy.³⁶

The success of talking pictures also helped sustain the movie industry during the early years of the Great Depression, and despite serious financial troubles associated with the Depression, the film studios continued to grow throughout the 1930s to become one of Southern California's primary industries.

Columbia Pictures³⁷

Columbia Pictures grew out of an independent production company formed by brothers Jack and Harry Cohn and their partner, Joe Brandt. All three men had worked for Universal head Carl Laemmle and were ready to strike out on their own. In January 1924, Brandt and Harry and Jack Cohn established Columbia Pictures Corporation. Brandt was named president of the new company; Jack Cohn was named vice president in charge of sales, and Harry Cohn was named vice president in charge of production. The new name, it was felt, reflected a more refined character. The company also began to

³⁵ Edwin O. Palmer, *History of Hollywood: Narrative – Volume 1* (Hollywood: Arthur H. Cawston, 1937), 257-258.

³⁶ Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 98.

³⁷ The Columbia Pictures studio now operates as Sunset Gower Studios. The property is located within the boundaries of the Hollywood Redevelopment Project Area. The property was identified as eligible for designation during the 2010 Community Redevelopment Agency survey; it was not evaluated through SurveyLA.

establish a series of independent exchanges for distribution, which operated on a percentage of profits basis rather than franchise sales and allowed the company to realize greater profits.

The issue of real estate was addressed more gradually. At the end of 1924, the *Los Angeles Times* announced Columbia's plans to replace its existing rented Waldorf Studios facilities at Sunset and Gower with a newly-erected plant.³⁸ The following year, Harry Cohn personally purchased the facilities at 6070 Sunset, which consisted of two stages and an office building, for use by Columbia. As Cohn historian Bernard Dick later commented, "If Harry regarded Columbia as his studio, it was because he literally bought it."³⁹ The acquisition marked the first of a series of such deals by Columbia, which continued to acquire existing production facilities on the site as well as adjacent land for redevelopment purposes.

In 1926, Brandt and the Cohn brothers made another critical strategic decision which would shape the future of Columbia Pictures. Though Harry Cohn was envious of the success of major studios such as Paramount, Warner Bros., and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, the company opted not to pursue a similar business model, which involved developing theater chains to showcase a studio's films. Instead, Columbia would devote the entirety of its financial resources to film production. Clive Hirschorn explains how this affected the company's bottom line:

While this arrangement removed the financial burden of having to invest in real estate, or having to maintain the upkeep of such investments, it also meant that the product being churned out by Columbia had to maintain a consistently high quality otherwise exhibitors would refuse to book it. The wisdom of this decision was first illustrated in 1929 when, during the Depression, the drop in cinema attendance almost forced both Paramount and RKO into receivership; and again, in 1948, when the Consent Decree prohibited studios from both making and exhibiting their own products. In neither instance was Columbia forced to sell any real estate investments at a loss.⁴⁰

It was this decision which contributed in large part to the company's early financial success, as Columbia's lack of financial diversity, coupled with its propensity for low budgets and little overhead, allowed the studio to funnel all of its profits back into making more films. Harry Cohn also developed further ways to reduce production costs, and throughout its early years, Columbia Pictures was primarily known for its production of a significant amount of low-budget movies. This reputation began to change when Harry Cohn hired director Frank Capra in 1927. Capra's *It Happened One Night* netted the studio its first Academy Awards in 1934, including its first Oscar for Best Picture. Despite his success at the studio, Capra found the facilities at Columbia – which reflected years of ad-hoc occupancy before Columbia's acquisition – to be less than auspicious, and he later described his initial reaction upon his first visit to the lot in his autobiography.

³⁸ "Huge Film Studio Planned," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1924.

³⁹ Bernard F. Dick, *The Merchant Prince of Poverty Row: Harry Cohn of Columbia Pictures* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 44.

⁴⁰ Clive Hirschorn, *The Columbia Story* (London: Hamlyn, 1999), 9.

To a dozen or more shacks forming a square around an inner courtyard, succeeding fly-by-nighters had added additions to additions...two sides were now three stories high; the third, two stories; the fourth, one and a half.

Narrow halls, rising and falling with the uneven levels, tunneled through the maze; partitions honeycombed it into tiny “offices”; afterthoughts of exposed pipes for water, gas, and heat pierced the flimsy walls; criss-crossing electric wires – inside and out – tied the jerry-built structure together to keep it from blowing away.⁴¹

The “back lot” at Columbia was a ramshackle extension of the offices. Within an area not much larger than one big stage at MGM or Warner’s, Columbia had squeezed in three cramped stages, a row of shops, an incinerator, a parking place for trucks, and – into a leftover corner – a cubist’s nightmare of cutting rooms, film vaults, and projection rooms piled on top of each other, and reachable only by steep, exterior iron stairs.⁴²

By the end of the 1920s, Columbia was included as part of the “Little Three” film studios, along with Universal and United Artists. The “Little Three,” along with the “Big Five,” (MGM, Warner Bros., Paramount, Twentieth Century-Fox, and RKO), produced most of the films in Hollywood during the major studio era. In the late 1920s, a power struggle developed between the New York and Hollywood operations of Columbia, culminating in an unsuccessful attempt by Jack Cohn and Joe Brandt to seize control of the studio from Harry Cohn. In 1932, Brandt resigned as company president and sold his shares in the company, after which Harry Cohn became the first executive in Hollywood to serve as production head and president at the same time. Jack Cohn stayed on as vice-president and treasurer, but the brothers never reconciled.

Harry Cohn served would serve as president of Columbia Pictures from 1932 until his death in 1958. Under his stewardship the company expanded almost exponentially during the 1930s, in both physical size and in output of product. During the early part of his presidency, the studio expanded their acreage in Hollywood, acquiring additional land in a piecemeal fashion at Sunset and Gower. In 1935, the company also purchased additional property in the nearby city of Burbank to use as a back lot for location filming. By 1937, Columbia Pictures was producing a feature a week, most of which were B-pictures, short subjects, and popular



*The “back lot” at Columbia Pictures, around 1937
(Courtesy Marc Wanamaker)*

⁴¹ Frank Capra, *The Name Above the Title: An Autobiography* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1997), 81.

⁴² Ibid.

serials⁴³ which were inexpensive to make and generated a steady income stream. It was these films that allowed Harry Cohn to fund the handful of A-pictures per year that would guarantee a successful studio.⁴⁴

The end of the 1930s marked a shift in direction at Columbia Pictures. Frank Capra left the studio in 1939 following the production of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. In the wake of Capra's departure, Columbia languished; directors were reluctant to work for the notoriously hard-driving Harry Cohn. At the same time, as the decade drew to a close, Cohn also "realized more and more that an alternative to borrowing stars at inflated salaries" – as he had done with Claudette Colbert and Clark Gable for *It Happened One Night* – would be to develop his own talent.⁴⁵ Over the next decade, Cohn went on to "discover" some of Hollywood's most iconic stars, whom he cast in Columbia films.

Throughout World War II, Harry Cohn managed to capitalize on the American public's appetite for distraction in the face of wartime news and produce some of Columbia's biggest blockbusters – a trend which continued well into the postwar years. By the end of the decade, Clive Hirschorn observes, "the only link between Columbia Pictures and Poverty Row was geographical."⁴⁶ As the number of televisions in American homes increased in the years following World War II, the number of moviegoers plummeted. Columbia was the first film studio to react to the new medium. In 1948, the studio launched a television subsidiary, Screen Gems. For the first two years Screen Gems – which was headed by Jack Cohn's son, Ralph – avoided film programming and instead concentrated on producing commercials.⁴⁷ By 1952, though, Screen Gems was producing its own programming, and in 1956 began licensing Columbia films to air on television. The division proved so successful that Columbia exited the decade in a better financial position than some of the studio's competitors,⁴⁸ particularly those who had been less prepared for the transition to television.

While Columbia Pictures continued to produce films throughout the 1950s, the changing nature of the film business in the postwar era and the advent of television began to impact the studio's bottom line. Columbia garnered critical acclaim during this period by backing various independent producers and directors such as Elia Kazan, Fred Zinnemann, Stanley Kramer, and Otto Preminger. The studio was making fewer films than ever before, according to Clive Hirschorn, and dozens of employees were laid off.⁴⁹ To Harry Cohn's credit, the studio never ended a year in the red during his lifetime. The late 1950s, however, signaled the end of an era. Jack Cohn died in 1956, and Harry Cohn passed away just two years later in 1958, after years of poor health. That same year, for the very first time, the studio posted a profit loss.

⁴³ Hirschorn, *The Columbia Story*, 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid..

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Bernard F. Dick, ed., *Columbia Pictures: Portrait of a Studio* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 12.

⁴⁸ Hirschorn, *The Columbia Story*, 12.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Abe Schneider, who began at Columbia as an accountant in the 1920s, succeeded Harry Cohn as president. Columbia, like other Hollywood studios, struggled to make a profit in the early 1960s. In 1966, a takeover attempt threatened Columbia's management. Maurice Clairmont, a well-known corporate raider, attempted to gain a controlling interest in the company. When he failed to do so on his own, he joined forces with the Banque de Paris et de Pays-Bas, which owned 20 percent of Columbia, to acquire a majority of shares and take control of the company from Abe Schneider. Unfortunately for Clairmont, the Communications Act of 1934 prohibited foreign ownership of more than one-fifth of an American company with broadcasting holdings, and, at the time, Columbia's Screen Gems unit owned a number of TV stations. The Federal Communications Commission allowed the French bank to buy more shares, but prohibited it from taking "any action looking toward an assertion of control by it alone or in concert with any other person over Columbia," effectively foiling Clairmont's efforts to overthrow Schneider.⁵⁰

In 1968 the studio reorganized, merging Screen Gems with Columbia Pictures Corporation to become Columbia Pictures Industries. The move marked a radical organizational overhaul that would extend into the next decade, a driving force of which concerned the studio's real estate developments at Sunset and Gower. Columbia, which had hosted independent producers on the site since the 1930s, amended its policy to make its Hollywood facility more attractive to independent producers. The company started building mobile units for in-house and independent producers, and by 1970 about twenty production companies were releasing through the studio and twenty-five independents were filming there but releasing elsewhere.⁵¹

The attempt at generating revenue through facility rentals came too late to save Columbia's home at Sunset and Gower. Beginning in 1970, the studio began relocating employees to Burbank, where the company had formed an alliance with Warner Bros. to operate the Burbank Studios. Though an unlikely collaboration, the arrangement allowed each studio to operate independently but lease facilities to the other. At the time Columbia executive Bob Hagel said in an interview, "We made the move because it just didn't make sense to maintain a separate studio anymore. Taxes and utilities and other fixed costs kept going up until it simply became too expensive to just keep the studio open. By combining facilities, we've been able to increase our volume and spread these fixed costs over a broader base."⁵² The fate of Columbia's Hollywood lot was sealed when in 1971, the company posted its biggest loss in history, and 300 employees were laid off. By 1972, Columbia had vacated the property at Sunset and Gower entirely, after nearly fifty years of occupancy.

In the wake of Columbia's exit from the Sunset Gower site, the character of the property shifted with its evolving use. For a time, beginning in 1974, the former sound stages were converted for use as 24-hour-

⁵⁰ Tina N. Grant and Thomas Derdak, "Columbia TriStar Motion Pictures Companies History," *International Directory of Company History*, vol. 12, (St James, MO: St. James Press, 1996), quoted in "Columbia TriStar Motion Pictures Companies History," Funding Universe, accessed April 2015, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/columbia-tristar-motion-pictures-companies-history/>.

⁵¹ Dick, ed., *Columbia Pictures: Portrait of a Studio*, 23.

⁵² "Beginning Not End of Columbia," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1972.

a-day indoor tennis courts for the Hollywood Indoor Tennis Club.⁵³ In 1976, the property was purchased by real estate developer Saul Pick – at the time the largest single landowner in Hollywood - who renovated the site for use as rental facilities for independent productions.⁵⁴ From the 1980s and well into the 1990s, Sunset Gower played host to the production of movies, commercials, and some of the decade's most iconic television shows, including *Full House*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *Blossom*, and the Emmy Award-winning *Golden Girls*. In 2007 the property was acquired by Hudson Pacific, LLC who continues to lease facilities to independent productions.

Fox Film Corporation⁵⁵

Fox Film Corporation was founded by William Fox in 1904 in New York with the purchase of a single store-front nickelodeon. By 1908, Fox owned a chain of fifteen theaters and the Greater New York Film Rental Company, a distribution company which provided films for his theaters and other independent owners. The enterprising Fox realized there was more money to be made in production than in distribution or exhibition, so he opened his own production unit in 1915 in New Jersey.

Like many independent producers of the era, Fox cast his eye on the West Coast, where the climate and the variety of settings were a great benefit to the primitive technologies used by the fledgling industry. Although corporate offices remained in New York, in 1916 Fox leased an existing studio in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Edendale, the former home of Selig Productions. The studio was small, however, within two years Fox had acquired land on the southeast corner of Sunset Boulevard and Western Avenue. The Hollywood facility expanded rapidly until it encompassed over thirteen acres on both sides of Western Avenue.

Fox divided his time between the East and West Coast, expanding his empire in the 1920s with the acquisition of more theatres, which in turn called for more product. Headquarters were opened in Europe and Fox began to produce “newsreels,” sending cameramen throughout the world to capture news stories. The studio in Hollywood continued to be developed with additional buildings, but competing demands for land use in Hollywood limited expansion. Fox continued to put more buildings onto his thirteen-acre site, but expansion space was limited as the surrounding neighborhoods developed.

In 1923, to accommodate location filming, Fox acquired land on the west side of Los Angeles from the Janss Corporation, a major Los Angeles real estate firm which was in the process of subdividing its holdings on the Westside into the communities of Westwood, Brentwood, and Bel Air. The parcel he purchased was bordered by Santa Monica Boulevard to the north, a residential subdivision to the west, the future site of the Westwood Public Golf Course to the east, and Pico Boulevard to the south. He named the area Fox Hills and invited the public to view the “greatest outdoor studio” of the Fox Film Corporation on

⁵³ “Tennis Fever Spreads to Old Film Studio,” *Los Angeles Times* September 1, 1974.

⁵⁴ “Saul Pick, the Invisible Landlord of Gower Gulch,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1981.

⁵⁵ Fox Studios was identified in SurveyLA as an excellent example of a motion picture studio facility and as one of the “Big Eight” motion picture studios in operation during the Major Studio Era in Hollywood.

August 29, 1926. By that time, small clusters of buildings were beginning to appear on the south end of the lot, and film sets were being constructed at the north end.

The 1927 success of Warner Brother's film *The Jazz Singer* ushered in major changes for the film industry. In parallel with Warner's sound innovations, Fox was developing a sound-on-film process eventually known as Movietone, which recorded sound directly on film in contrast to sound-



Fox Studios, c. 1925. (Los Angeles Public Library)

on-disk processes, such as Warner Brother's Vitaphone process used for the *The Jazz Singer*. Sound-on-film processes like Movietone eliminated the need for a separate disk that had to be synchronized with the motion picture image. Although Warners' Vitaphone disk process was the first to be commercially successful, sound-on-film technology would soon become the industry standard.

While other studios scrambled to retrofit their existing facilities for sound filming, Fox chose a new course. On the Westside land he had acquired in 1923 to use for location filming, Fox built a state-of-the-art facility to accommodate sound. In 1928, even as he continued to update the Hollywood lot by adding a new scientific "sound laboratory," construction for the new Fox Hills studio had begun.

The new production facility, valued at over one million dollars, covered almost forty acres exclusive of acreage to the north used for outdoor sets. Construction began in July 1928; four stages and several support buildings were completed by October. That same month, the studio plant was christened "Movietone City," in honor of its pioneering technology, and opened to great fanfare. Unlike the majority of motion picture production facilities in Hollywood, many of which had grown in a largely random fashion based on available space, Movietone City was a planned development.

Laid out much like a small industrial town, the Movietone City studio lot contained production or "factory" buildings in one section, administrative and support services nearby, and a "neighborhood" for important creative staff (writers, artists, important performers, and some producers) separated slightly from the central core. Buildings and structures were laid out on a rectilinear street grid enhanced by small squares and "parks." The architecture was somewhat diverse, yet in each area certain visual unities were maintained. There was the main production complex, with four massive Assyrian/Mesopotamian stages; the administrative "main street," a combination of Spanish Colonial Revival and Moderne structures; the actors and studio services, more utilitarian in style, yet referencing

Period Revival styles, clustered around the periphery of the production complex; and a grouping of residential structures in Period Revival and other styles used as artists' and writers' bungalows.

In 1928, Fox released 55 pictures, produced two newsreels per week, and distributed its product to theaters in over 30 countries. The empire of William Fox was at its height. He controlled studios in New York, Hollywood, and Europe and owned over 2,000 theaters. The Movietone City studio was the crowning achievement, a planned "community" devoted to the new sound technology.

William Fox was not content to only own one of the most successful film studios. In 1929 he began to borrow money against the studio to fund other acquisitions, and was on his way to controlling a major portion of the entire film industry. However, the U. S. Government filed suit against Fox for trying to form a monopoly. Fox was overextended and unable to get extensions on the loans. Several of his creditors prized the valuable patents and real estate of the Fox holdings, and as a result the Fox companies were reorganized or sold. By 1930, William Fox was no longer president of Fox Film Corporation.

Despite the loss of its leader, the Fox Film Corporation remained profitable until the early thirties, when, hampered by inexperienced management and a lack of "bankable" stars, its profitability began to slide. Yet, it still had one of the best physical plants in the business. The studio's attributes proved irresistible to a pair of young producers destined to make names for themselves in film.

After several missteps, Sidney R. Kent, formerly of Paramount Studios, became president of Fox in 1933 to help rebuild the company. He brought in Joseph Schenck and Darryl Zanuck who had partnered to form Twentieth Century Productions. Fox still had the best distribution system in the industry, and it had Movietone City and the facility in Hollywood. Kent and Schenck agreed that Twentieth Century Productions would transfer all its operations, assets (including stars, scripts, writers and production talent) to the Fox Hills studio. A new company was formed in 1935; it was called Twentieth Century-Fox.

After the merger was completed, Zanuck focused attention on two Fox contract players who became major film stars: singer Alice Faye and the seven-year old Shirley Temple. Temple films dominated the box office throughout the 1930s. Zanuck also signed several young performers including Sonja Henie, Tyrone Power, Henry Fonda, Gene Tierney, and Betty Grable whose films would soon become big money-makers for the studio. Focusing on romantic films, comedies, and musicals, Zanuck built Fox back to profitability. With record film attendance during World War II, Twentieth Century-Fox became the third most profitable of the major studios.

The success of Twentieth Century-Fox spurred an expansion to the original Movietone City portion of the studio plant. An additional 100 acres were purchased from the Janss Company in 1936, including a strip along Pico Boulevard which added a southern entrance and the southern half of the Westwood Golf Course, which bordered the studio on the east and ran between Pico and Olympic Boulevard. Ten years later the northern half of the golf course was purchased, bringing the total amount of Fox acreage

to just over 285 acres. Prior to 1950, the studio consisted of an extensive back lot, located north of the present studio between Olympic and Santa Monica Boulevards. This area included several permanent sets. The entire facility was an integrated factory, even to the underground wiring, which ran from the permanent sets to the sound mixing facilities on the southern portion of the lot.

In 1936, Twentieth Century-Fox expanded the production and administrative facilities of the studios. A new executive office building and a property building later named for William Fox were designed in the popular International Style. Four new stages and a power plant almost doubled the production capacity of the facility. Other buildings were added to the main production areas, and some of the open space began to disappear. The commissary was enlarged and a new elaborate Regency Revival stars dressing room was built across from it. This phase of construction did not substantially alter the plan or built form of the earlier portions of the site. In 1946, the company announced record profits but the post-war prosperity would soon fade. Legal challenges, the advent of television, and the rise of independent film production would radically alter the American motion picture industry over the next decade.

Cinema audiences declined dramatically with the advent of television. The Twentieth Century-Fox Corporation divested itself of its theater chain in 1953 and film production was reduced. In an attempt to compete with television, the studio invested heavily in a wide-screen process dubbed CinemaScope and initially found success with wide-screen blockbusters such as *The Robe* and *How to Marry a Millionaire*, both released in 1953. The CinemaScope boost at the box office was short-lived however and by the mid-1950s box office numbers were again down. In 1956 Darryl Zanuck resigned as head of production and relocated to Paris, where he established himself as an independent producer although he would remain a major shareholder in Twentieth Century-Fox.

The Studio would hit its financial nadir in the 1960s. Both 1961 and 1962 were disastrous years in terms of box office returns for the studio. In order to raise some quick cash to offset continuing losses, the studio property was sold to the Alcoa Company in 1961, with Twentieth Century-Fox leasing back sixty-three acres (roughly all of the studio's permanent structures). On the back lot, Alcoa developed Century City, the Westside's first high rise office, entertainment, and residential complex.

In addition, the studio was embroiled in the wildly out of control production of *Cleopatra* starring Elizabeth Taylor that would eventually become the most expensive film ever made when it was finally released in 1963. Another production, entitled *Something's Got to Give*, was also over schedule and over budget due to the chronic delays brought on by its troubled leading lady, Marilyn Monroe. After weeks of filming with little to show for it, the production was shut down. Days before filming was to resume, Monroe was found dead in her Brentwood home. In the summer of 1962, Twentieth Century-Fox released nearly all of its contract star performers.

Recognizing drastic measures were needed, Darryl Zanuck, still the studio's major shareholder, returned to the studio and was installed as chairman. His son Richard Zanuck became president. Under their leadership, the studio was all but shut down and staff was reduced to just a small number of employees.

A very limited number of films proved successful and Twentieth Century-Fox was restored to modest profitability. The enormous success of *The Sound of Music* in 1965 signaled the return of Twentieth Century-Fox as a major studio. Finances, however, would remain rocky with Twentieth Century-Fox posting losses from 1969 to 1971 the year Zanuck retired as chairman.

Construction on the lot in the post-World War II era was limited due to continually shrinking production and lack of funds. In the mid-1950s, the Zanuck Theatre was constructed north of the original stages, and several additional stages were added to the eastern portion of the site in the mid-1960s.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)⁵⁶

The land which comprises the former Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio (and is currently occupied by Sony Pictures Studios) was first acquired in 1912 by the New York Motion Picture Company from the Clark and Sherman Land Company. It was soon sold to Thomas Ince, a noted filmmaker who relocated his Inceville Studios from the beach near Santa Monica to this property, where he formed Ince/Triangle Studios, a partnership between himself, D.W. Griffith, and Mack Sennett.

After Ince relocated to a second studio site in Culver City in 1919, which remains today as Culver Studios, a variety of production companies began to lease the property. One lessee, Samuel Goldwyn's Goldwyn Pictures Corporation, occupied the lot in 1919 and in that year oversaw the construction of eight stages.⁵⁷ In 1924, just as Columbia Pictures was being formed in Hollywood, Louis B. Mayer Studios in East Los Angeles and the Metro Company, an independent firm, joined Samuel Goldwyn to form Metro-Goldwyn Mayer. The merger caused the Metro studios as well as the Mayer companies to relocate in Culver City, establishing the world's largest motion-picture plant. Eighteen or more companies would therefore be producing pictures simultaneously at the studio.



Thomas Ince's Triangle Studios, 1916 (Sony Pictures Museum)

⁵⁶ The MGM studios are located in Culver City, outside of the City of Los Angeles, and were not included in SurveyLA.

⁵⁷ *Sony Pictures Studios Comprehensive Plan*, City of Culver City Final Environmental Impact Report, Volume 1, Fugro-McClelland (West), Inc., October 5, 1992, 2-5.

In his first official public announcement since taking over the executive reins of the newly merged Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio, Louis B. Mayer announced plans for the expenditure of at least \$15,000,000 in 1924 as part of a broad expansion plan. Mayer explained that an increased production schedule, totaling fifty films, mandated the addition of four large stages, the erection of three additional administration buildings, and a large “prop” building. Although already large in size for a studio of its era, Mayer claimed that through the expansion the MGM studio would become the largest and most complete film producing plant in the world.⁵⁸

Although remnants of the studio lot used by Thomas H. Ince in 1915 remain on the lot, MGM was responsible for most of the construction extant today, including the construction of Stage 6 and the adjacent Breezeway. The first phase of MGM’s building program was largely completed in 1925, with most of the departments on the lot having been enlarged and new construction adding an additional fifty structures. Six new stages were added in five months, including fourteen stages totaling 200,000 square feet of space. Each stage was equipped with mechanical devices for handling immense lighting systems.⁵⁹ During a visit to the MGM lot after construction had been completed, Joseph M. Schenck, the head of United Artists, conferred with Mayer and his associates on advancements occurring to the studio’s equipment and facilities. After the visit, Schenck announced his goal of centering all production of his company at the Culver City plant.⁶⁰

Through expansions of both the production schedules and studio facilities, Mayer and Thalberg’s leadership allowed MGM to set standards of excellence in achievement unmatched in the industry during the next three decades.^{61, 62} As one of the most successful film producers of all time, Mayer combined his business savvy, as organizer of the vast and complex MGM studio, with an understanding of the entertainment needs of theatergoers around the world. Mayer rose to the height of his success just as the film industry was at the height of its growth.⁶³

In 1926, one year after finishing its initial expansion program, MGM announced a second that would involve the biggest building program in the history of any studio. The physical expansion again correlated with the production schedule maintained by the company, advertised at the time as the most extensive in the history of filmmaking. This phase of construction, announced in public press releases by Mayer, involved an increase of land area as well as the size of stages and service buildings. New silent film productions such as *The Temptress*, starring Greta Garbo and Antonia Moreno; the technologically advanced production *The Mysterious Island*, directed by Maurice Tourneur with submarine scenes; and a fire-fighting picture, starring Charles Ray and made in conjunction with the fire chiefs of America and Canada, necessitated this major expansion.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ “Millions for Film Program,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1924.

⁵⁹ “Rebuilding of Studio Nears End,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 10, 1925.

⁶⁰ “Schenck to Arrive Here from East,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1925.

⁶¹ “An Architectural/Historical Survey of ‘The Studios,’” prepared by Roger G. Hatheway and Associates for UCLA Extension, Los Angeles, CA, March 1983, 42.

⁶² *Sony Pictures Studios Comprehensive Plan*, 4.6-1.

⁶³ “An Architectural/Historical Survey,” 45.

⁶⁴ “Big Plans at Metro Under Way,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1926.

In 1928 MGM embarked on a third construction phase which involved the expenditure of approximately \$1,000,000. Lasting until 1930, the program included the construction of seven new sound stages and a complete four-acre industrial center. To facilitate the construction of the new buildings, existing buildings such as Stages 2 and 8, once used for the filming of silent films, were demolished. Two glass stages from the silent era were moved in the construction of the sound stages from their original location on Lot #1 to the furthest corner of the ever-expanding industrial center of the lot. As studio shops were often constructed of glass walls for lighting and safety purposes, the reuse of the historic stages was well suited for their design. A wall was built between the stages to connect them into one large shop complex. In the new sound-stage program proposed by Mayer, eleven complete stages for the new technology were constructed as well as a 1,500-seat private sound theater in which talking pictures could be screened.⁶⁵

This third expansion of the studio site is well documented, in particular because of the short amount of time that had passed since the first two phases of expansion. The seven “sound stage” buildings built in 1929 as a result included the Cary Grant Theater and a Scoring Stage, where musical scores were recorded, as well as Stages 3, 4, 5 and 6 and the Breezeway structure. Bringing the number of stages built by MGM during its tenure on the lot to twenty-eight, this expansion reflected advancements in sound technology as well as in the construction of stage buildings and further organization of studio plants. In particular, Stages 6 and 15 were noted as the largest in the world when built and represent the enormity of MGM’s building program. The stages built with tanks for underwater scenes and the on-site theater for publicly screening films display the variety of technologically-advanced structures constructed as the industry raced to embrace sound, color, and camera technology.

Other site improvements proposed by Mayer in 1928 as part of the third expansion of the studio plant included the addition of a spur railroad track from the Pacific Electric line, allowing for the transportation of freight and equipment and also for private cars to be used on location work. The industrial core of the studio plant was also expanded at the time, with the construction of a lumberyard, salvage plant, planing mill, carpenter shop, assembly shop, machine shop, foundry, sheet metal works, pipe shop, plumbing shop, property shop, paint shop, and plaster shop. Two scene docks, three warehouses, two miles of concrete roadways, tool storehouse, a timekeeper’s office, woodwork plant, generator plant, grip and labor shop were also built. Once constructed, the industrial core, where all studio labor units were consolidated, operated on a 24-hour basis.⁶⁶ The core became a one-half mile long street lined with machine, carpenter, plaster, furniture and camera shops, mills, material handling plants and other industrial units.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ “Studio to Spend Million: Seven New Sound Stages, Theater and Industrial Center Planned by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 1929.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ “Film Industry Anchored Here: Recent Construction Outlay Exceeds \$110,000,000,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1930.

By 1930, Los Angeles-area motion-picture companies had spent more than \$110,000,000 in the founding of their studio plants as well as in land acquisition, building programs, and new equipment. In comparison, approximately \$5,000,000 had been spent by MGM alone from 1925-1930. Additions to the plant completed in 1930 included six sound stages, the remodeling of five stages, an addition that doubled the size of the recording building, and new projection and cutting rooms.⁶⁸



Lot #1 at MGM, 1933 (Bison Archives)

In 1934 the expanded studio included six working studio lots encompassing 187 acres and including 28 modern sound stages. MGM was accordingly considered the largest, most complete and sophisticated filmmaking facility in the world.⁶⁹ The main lot was like a city within a city, with its own police and fire departments, telegraph and post office, water tower and well, art department, and laboratory, while the backlot included the mill, electrical, paint and lock shops, as well as wardrobe, make-up, property, lighting, and camera departments. A new commissary built in the 1930s kept productivity high on the lot.

Despite his youth, Irving Thalberg, MGM's head of production, provided much leadership during the company's growth in the 1930s. Thalberg was married to Norma Shearer, whose brother, Doug Shearer, served as head of the MGM Sound Department. On average MGM released 50 films a year and the payroll often reached 5,000. Famous for its musicals, MGM was also known as a studio friendly to young talent, offering schooling on the lot to child stars such as Elizabeth Taylor, Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland, and Roddy McDowell. Locals waited for hours for autographs at the studio's East Gate, as the studio boasted to have "more stars than there are in the heavens."

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *Sony Pictures Studios Comprehensive Plan*, 4.6-1.

A moratorium was declared on building and land annexations during World War II, but from 1950 through the 1960s, Culver City again enjoyed a growth spurt in land development and geographic size. The film industry, however, and the studio system in particular, faltered after the war due to the new technology of television. In 1951 Mayer was replaced by MGM Production Chief Dore Schary. Although MGM added television production units, it declined in film production in the 1960s.

Kirk Kerkorian acquired the studio in 1969, and new president James Aubrey began selling off much of the studio's land. Lot #2, a backlot with facades from movies such as *National Velvet* and *Gigi*, and Lot #3 were sold for housing developments, while an animal farm and plant nursery created by MGM became commercial property. By 1973, the site had been reduced to its current size of 45.76 acres. In the 1980s, the property and studio went through several changes in ownership. MGM became MGM/UA in the 1980s. In 1986, Ted Turner of Turner Broadcasting purchased United Artists and the film library. The lot itself became Lorimar Pictures. Then, in early 1989, Warner Brothers acquired Lorimar and the entire Culver City facility. MGM first moved off the property across the street, and then in 1992 moved to Santa Monica. On January 1, 1990, Sony Entertainment of Japan acquired both the lot and Columbia Pictures. The Sony Corporation at the time made a commitment to the community to renovate the Culver City property.⁷⁰ In August of 1991, the Sony Corporation officially changed the name of the studio from Columbia Studios to the Sony Pictures Studios.⁷¹

Paramount Pictures⁷²

The beginning of Paramount Pictures can be traced to the creation of Adolph Zukor's Famous Players Film Company in 1912. The Famous Players created feature length films adapted from stage plays, which were produced by Zukor. In 1913, Zukor contracted with actress Mary Pickford and established himself as a major player in the movie industry. Zukor would become one of the most important figures in motion picture history, signing major stars, creating and perfecting systems for distributing his films, and arranging mergers and takeovers that would make Paramount a leading company in the industry by the 1920s.

Paramount Pictures was founded in Hollywood in 1913 by William Hodkinson as a small distribution company. Hodkinson planned to distribute approximately 100 films each year, with an agreement for half of those to be provided by Zukor's Famous Players. That same year, Jesse L. Lasky, Cecil B. DeMille, and Samuel Goldwyn created the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Players Company to create a film version of the play *The Squaw Man*, which was the first feature-length Western made in Hollywood. The film was shot in a rented barn on the corner of Selma and Vine Streets.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2-5.

⁷¹ Ibid., 4.6-1.

⁷² Paramount Pictures was identified in SurveyLA as an excellent example of a motion picture studio facility and as one of the "Big Eight" motion picture studios in operation during the Major Studio Era in Hollywood.

⁷³ The original Lasky barn was relocated to the Paramount Pictures lot in 1926, where it was used for many years as a film set and a gymnasium. In 1976, the Fire Marshal required additional parking on the Paramount lot, so the barn was relocated to a vacant parcel on Vine Street. In 1982, Hollywood Heritage took on stewardship of the barn and it was moved to its current location at 2100 North Highland Avenue, on land leased from the Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department.

In 1916, the Jesse L. Lasky Company merged with Zukor's Famous Players, creating the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation. That same year, Zukor acquired Paramount Pictures for his distribution needs. By the 1920s Famous Players-Lasky was one of the largest and most successful studios in Hollywood, with the most technologically advanced equipment in the United States. In 1925, the company name was changed to Paramount-Famous-Lasky Corporation, with Publix theaters as a subsidiary. At the same time, it began to outgrow its location on Sunset and Vine and began looking for a larger site, which was found at the Marathon Street property used and owned at the time by United Studios. This property was originally part of the Hollywood Cemetery (aka Hollywood Forever Cemetery), but had been subdivided for other uses in 1916.



Jesse Lasky contemplating his first studio, which now serves as the Hollywood Heritage Museum. (Los Angeles Public Library)

The purchase was completed in January of 1926. According to newspaper reports, historic aerial photographs, and archival drawings, the existing United Studios stages on the lot were either razed or substantially altered to make way for new facilities.⁷⁴ In early 1926, Paramount embarked on an eight-month, \$750,000 building program which included the construction of what is now considered the historic core of the potential Paramount Pictures Historic District.⁷⁵ In 1929, another building campaign began to accommodate Paramount's conversion to sound production. Construction would continue on the lot through the 1930s and 1940s.

In Hollywood's boom period of the 1920s and 1930s, Paramount had the highest profits of any major studio, primarily because of the company's theater holdings. In 1930, reflecting the important role played by the theaters, the studio's name is changed to Paramount-Publix Corporation. In the early 1930s Paramount continued to expand, with more films, theaters, a music division, and investment in a radio network. This diversification also meant that Paramount suffered the most losses during the Depression: by 1932 the studio was \$21 million in debt, and in 1933 it filed for bankruptcy. Several Mae West hits kept the studio from ruin, and in 1935 it re-emerged from receivership and was re-named Paramount Pictures, Inc.

⁷⁴ "Studio Remodeling Begun: Work Starts on a \$500,000 Program of Converting United Film Plant Into Lasky Institution," *Los Angeles Times*, March 29, 1926. According to this article, the only existing building to be retained was a laboratory.

⁷⁵ Paramount Pictures was recorded as a potential historic district through SurveyLA in 2015.



*Hollywood Cemetery (top) and Paramount Pictures (bottom), 1928
(Paramount Pictures Archives)*

The studio experienced additional financial problems in the 1940s, as a result of the consent decree which forced Paramount to sell its movie theater holdings. Paramount did have successes during this period with films by established directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, Billy Wilder, and Cecil B. DeMille, along with new stars such as Audrey Hepburn, Dean Martin, and Elvis Presley.

In 1966, the ongoing financial troubles led to a takeover by Gulf & Western, Inc., which was led by Charles Bluhdorn. Adolph Zukor remained at Paramount in an honorary position, while Bluhdorn was formally in charge. Under Bluhdorn, Paramount boosted film production and substantially increased its investment in television production. In 1967, the new Paramount Pictures, Inc. purchased the neighboring lot (RKO) from Desilu Productions.

RKO Pictures⁷⁶

RKO was considered one of the Big Eight film production and theater conglomerates during the heyday of the Major Studio Era in Hollywood. However, RKO never gained the reputation of the top four (MGM, Fox, Warner Brothers, and Paramount) in terms of production quality, associated talent, and size of production facilities.

RKO's history is also marked by greater upheaval and inconsistent leadership than the other major studios. Even though several RKO production heads tried to make RKO into a major player, the studio was never able to sustain these attempts long-term. Because of this disparity, RKO is sometimes known as a "minor-major" studio. RKO did produce many important pictures from every genre, while other studios produced a limited variety based on a more cohesive overall vision. Some RKO examples of genre films include musical (*Swing Time*), western (*Cimarron*), comedy (*Bringing up Baby*), horror (*King Kong*), adventure (*Gunga Din*), and the most influential picture of the entire Hollywood Studio era (*Citizen Kane*).

RKO's stature does not reduce the importance of RKO's place in the history of Hollywood's Golden Age, or the significance of the historic resources located on the studio lot. RKO welcomed a diverse group of individualistic creators and provided them with an extraordinary degree of freedom. Important figures who built their careers at RKO include Irene Dunne, George Cukor, Katharine Hepburn, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Max Steiner, Orson Welles, Robert Mitchum, and Lucille Ball.

The foundation for RKO Studios began in 1919 when the British import/export company Robertson-Cole decided to enter the movie business. Robertson-Cole started as a distribution company, but by 1921 had decided to produce its own pictures. Following the purchase of the 13½-acre property at Melrose and Gower in 1921, Robertson-Cole embarked on a building campaign that included the construction of seven buildings, three of which were stages. At the time United Studios occupied the property next door; this complex would become Paramount Studios in 1926. RKO and Paramount functioned side-by-side for many years, separated only by a fence.

In 1922, Robertson-Cole was reorganized and renamed the Film Booking Offices of America (FBO), functioning as a distributor and minor movie producer. FBO produced modest films that could be made quickly and cheaply. Compared to MGM, Paramount, and Fox, the studio was a secondary player. After several leadership changes FBO's fortune was expected to change when Joseph P. Kennedy bought a controlling interest in the company in 1926 and planned to elevate the quality of its pictures. In 1928, RCA, led by David Sarnoff, acquired a substantial interest in FBO in order to have a platform for their "Photophone" technology that was developed to compete with Western Electric's system for creating sound pictures.

⁷⁶ The RKO Pictures studio now operates as part of Paramount Pictures. Paramount Pictures was identified in SurveyLA as an excellent example of a motion picture studio facility and as one of the "Big Eight" motion picture studios in operation during the Major Studio Era in Hollywood.

This merger helped FBO's fortunes, but the company was still vulnerable to takeover bids that were prevalent in Hollywood in the late 1920s. FBO was particularly susceptible to takeover because it lacked a major theater chain to distribute its product, the cornerstone of its competitors' success. To alleviate this threat Sarnoff and Kennedy purchased the Keith-Albee-Orpheum circuit of vaudeville theaters, resulting in the creation of the Radio-Keith-Orpheum Corporation, which was one of the largest mergers in the history of the American film industry, resulting in the birth of a \$300 million corporation.

David Sarnoff wanted the company to forge an alliance between radio and the movies, so RKO productions were trade-named "Radio Pictures." To reinforce the concept, RKO adopted a giant radio tower perched atop a globe, beeping out its signal of "A Radio Picture." The new logo and an aggressive advertising campaign in 1929 helped to separate the new RKO from the reputation of its predecessor FBO.

1929 marked another building campaign on the studio lot, as \$500,000 was spent on constructing and modifying studio spaces to accommodate talking pictures. Despite the stock market crash, Sarnoff was optimistic that RKO would succeed as an entertainment conglomerate combining film, vaudeville, radio, and television.

In 1929 RKO released *Rio Rita*, which was the studio's largest and most expensive production. The film was a huge hit, and launched RKO into the most successful period in its history. The early 1930s marked a period of expansion for RKO, with the construction of additional stages on the Gower Street lot. In 1931, RKO purchased Pathé, including its Culver City studio, newsreel, distribution network, and contract performers. That same year David O. Selznick became the head of production. Selznick was responsible for bringing director George Cukor, Katharine Hepburn, and Fred Astaire to RKO, and under his leadership the quality of RKO's pictures began to improve.

By 1933, however, RKO was on the verge of financial collapse, and was placed under receivership to the Irving Trust Company. The function of the Irving Trust was to participate in the formulation of economization and reorganization plans to get the studio back on its feet. RKO remained in receivership into the 1940s.

In the mid-1930s production head Pando Berman discovered the chemistry between Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire and decided to pair them in *The Gay Divorcee*. This film was the beginning of their legendary partnership, and Rogers & Astaire musicals kept RKO afloat during the middle years of the Depression. A series of leadership changes and disputes between corporate leaders and creative talent led *Time* magazine to call RKO "Hollywood's most mismanaged studio" in 1934.

By 1935 the effects of the Depression were beginning to lift, and RKO's board authorized \$500,000 for studio expansion. The work, completed in 1936, added three sound stages, dressing rooms, scene docks, film vaults, and a three-story office building.

In 1939 RKO produced the best films in its history, with *Gunga Din*, *Love Affair*, *Bachelor Mother*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Unfortunately for RKO, this accomplishment was diminished by the success of all the other major studios in that year, which is widely considered the greatest year in film history. By the end of 1939 RKO was once again in financial trouble, and the studio entered another period of upheaval with more leadership and philosophy changes. 1939 was also the year that the United States government began investigating Hollywood business practices as well as the potential conflicts created by the studios also serving as distribution companies and theater owners. The constant upheaval caused Rogers & Astaire to end their relationship with RKO.

There were, however, signs of promise during this period. In 1939 RKO signed Orson Welles to a contract to direct films for the studio. In 1940 it was finally freed from receivership, and in 1941 Orson Welles released his seminal film *Citizen Kane*. The films' alleged portrayal of media mogul William Randolph Hearst resulted in a boycott of coverage of RKO by all Hearst papers, as well as a series of unflattering portraits of Welles in their pages, which severely damaged the film's proceeds. The "Citizen Kane" controversy coincided with another troubled leadership period, and by 1942 RKO was nearly bankrupt. RKO would temporarily rebound with the production of escapist films during and immediately following World War II.

The end of RKO was foretold in 1948, when the studio was sold to tycoon Howard Hughes. Hughes ran RKO until 1957, and in less than ten years completely destroyed the company. RKO's output was drastically cut, and while a few pictures received critical acclaim, the studio's work during this period was mostly known for its astounding failures.



RKO Studios, 1948. (Bison Archives)

In 1957 Universal-International took over distribution of RKO's important pictures. All production was halted, and most employee contracts were terminated. Later that same year RKO's Gower Street and Culver City filmmaking plants were sold to Desilu's Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, and the studios were used for television production. Desilu owned the RKO lot from 1957-1967, and from 1962-1968 filmed "The Lucy Show" on Stages 21 and 25. In 1967 Desilu sold the Gower lot to Paramount Pictures.

***United Artists*⁷⁷**

Prior to the construction of any buildings on the site, the portion of land that would become the studio was owned by G. Allan Hancock, a real estate investor whose extensive holdings included much of the original Rancho La Brea. In 1919 Hancock sold ten acres to D. A. Anderson who in turn leased the property to early film producer Jesse D. Hampton, who produced feature films on the site between 1919 and 1922. Hampton acquired the property outright in 1921.⁷⁸

In 1922, Hampton sold the property to Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, two of the most prominent stars of the silent movie era, and the property became known as the Pickford-Fairbanks Studio. In 1919, Fairbanks and Pickford, along with comedian Charlie Chaplin and director D. W. Griffith, had formed United Artists Corporation, an independent distribution company to distribute their own films and ensure the four principal stakeholders complete control over the content of their films, as well as a larger share of profits. The entry of Fairbanks and Pickford into the studio business and their efforts to establish a new distribution system are key events in the industry's development, and United Artists became a major player in Hollywood. Ethan Mordden explains the company's role:

This is often thought of as a studio, but UA was one only in the modern sense of a releasing organization, a logo without a lot. UA did in fact have that most basic of studio parts, a production factory. But in the main UA didn't make films so much as distribute them. This in itself was of vital importance to any production company not berthed with a studio, for how else was any major proprietor to get his films into theatres? The quickie lots, churning out their programmers and serials, were contentedly locked into their "neighborhood" network. But nay producer who made movies competitive with those of MGM, Paramount, Or Warner Brothers faced their domination of the important screens. United Artists was their way in...⁷⁹

In 1925, producer Joseph Schenk joined United Artists, arranging for the company to distribute the films of his wife, Norma Talmadge. Schenk later reorganized the company, creating subsidiaries known as Art Finance and Art Cinema. Art Cinema established its headquarters at the Pickford-Fairbanks Studio.⁸⁰

In 1924 producer Samuel Goldwyn left Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and formed his own production company, leasing space at the Pickford-Fairbanks Studio. Goldwyn was a major figure in the history of motion picture production from its earliest era through its changing organizational and economic structure as a founder of MGM. In 1926 he became a partner in UA and the following year, the Pickford-Fairbanks Studio was renamed United Artists.⁸¹ By 1938, Goldwyn had gained a controlling interest in United Artists and

⁷⁷ The United Artists studio now operates as The Lot. The Lot is located in the City of West Hollywood and, therefore, is outside of the area included in SurveyLA.

⁷⁸ "Cultural Resources Technical Report, Proposed Amended Comprehensive Development Plan, The Lot," prepared for the City of West Hollywood by Historic Resources Group, January 2005, 13.

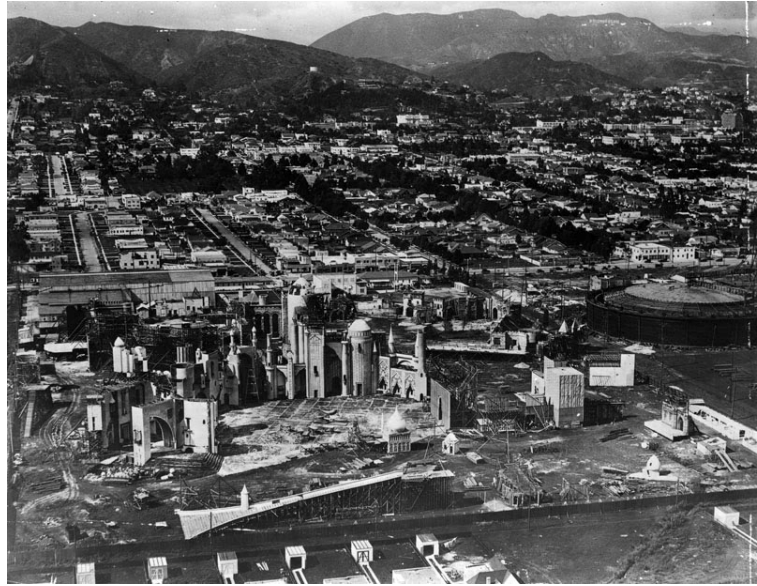
⁷⁹ Ethan Mordden, *The Hollywood Studios* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 191.

⁸⁰ "Cultural Resources Technical Report," 13.

⁸¹ Bruce T. Torrence, *Hollywood: The First 100 Years* (Hollywood, CA: Hollywood Chamber of Commerce & Fiske Enterprises, 1979), 90.

renamed the studio after himself.⁸² The property continued to be known as the Samuel Goldwyn Studios until its purchase by Warner Brothers in 1980.⁸³

The lot included a concentration of administration buildings on Santa Monica Boulevard to the north and on Formosa Avenue to the east, several bungalows for the use of the studio's stars and owners, and a large sound stage near the northwest corner of the site. The main portion of the lot, to the south, was used as a "back lot" on which enormous outdoor sets were built for films such as *Robin Hood* (1922) and *The Thief of Baghdad* (1924). As the site became more developed, more permanent buildings were constructed south of the earlier buildings, reducing the size of the back lot. The Pickford Building, originally a prop and storage building, was built in this area in 1927.⁸⁴



United Artists backlot c.1923, sets from The Thief of Baghdad in the foreground (British Film Institute)

Universal Studios⁸⁵

Universal Studios was the creation of Carl Laemmle, who began his film career in 1906 when he converted a Chicago storefront into a nickelodeon he named "The White Front Theatre." Within two months, he had opened a second theatre. The Laemmle theater chain was followed by the Laemmle film service which shortly became the largest film exchange in the United States. He challenged the control of the Motion Picture Patents Company, which held a monopoly on motion picture production through its patents on camera and projection equipment, taxing exhibitors heavily for their use. Laemmle declared himself an independent and formed the Independent Motion Picture Company (IMP) in 1909 to produce his own films.

In 1912, Laemmle created a coalition of film companies called Universal Film Manufacturing Company (Universal), which included Powers Picture Plays, New York Motion Picture Company (Bison Life), Nestor, Champion and Rex Company as well as his own company IMP.⁸⁶ During that year, Universal established three studio facilities in the Los Angeles area: one in Hollywood at Sunset and Gower, one in

⁸² "Cultural Resources Technical Report," 13.

⁸³ "Warner Bros. Pays \$35 Million for Goldwyn Lot." *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 1980.

⁸⁴ *Historic Structure Report, Paint Shop Building, Warner Hollywood Studios*, prepared for Warner Brothers Pictures, by Historic Resources Group, December 1998, 4.

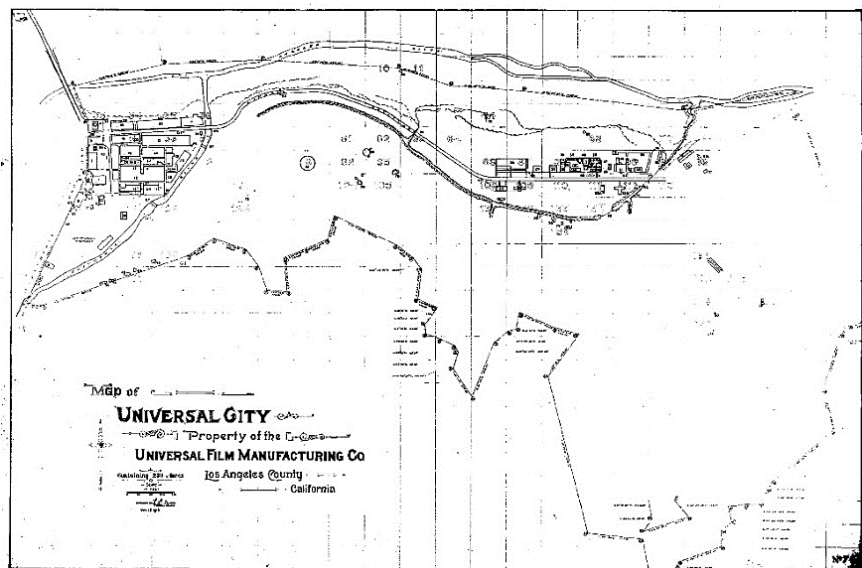
⁸⁵ The Universal Pictures studios are located in Universal City outside of the area included in by SurveyLA. Universal City is an unincorporated area within the County of Los Angeles.

⁸⁶ A certificate of incorporation for the Universal Film Manufacturing Company was signed on April 30, 1912.

the Edendale neighborhood, and one at the Oak Crest Ranch in the Lankershim Township, which is now part of Universal City. Makeshift stages were set up on the Oak Crest Ranch property and the production of western films began at the studio in 1912. On December 6, 1912, an informal studio opening was held. Construction of a permanent studio lot on the Oak Crest site began in 1914 with the relocation of several small buildings from the Sunset Gower (former Blondeau Tavern) studio.

Over the next two years, Laemmle incrementally purchased 230 acres of ranch lands in Lankershim Township, including the Oak Crest Ranch. During this period, Laemmle acquired sole control of Universal and sold all of his theaters to concentrate on film production and distribution. On March 15, 1915, Laemmle's Universal Film Manufacturing Company formally opened the Universal Studio lot, at the time the largest and most modern facility designed for the production of motion pictures. Known as Universal City, it consisted of a 300-feet by 65-feet main stage; a 200-feet by 50-feet second stage; an administration complex located on the Lankershim Boulevard frontage designed in the popular Mission Revival style; costume, makeup and dressing rooms; a laboratory; a theatre; a post office; a hospital; a restaurant; a fire department; carpentry, paint, and property shops; a barber shop and manicure parlor; a studio arsenal; horse corrals; blacksmith and harness shops; an ice plant; barracks which provided quarters for twenty people; and a studio zoo. There was also a 150,000-gallon concrete reservoir at the rear of the ranch as well as a 500,000-gallon reservoir at the summit of Universal City's highest hill. These facilities allowed the studio to perform every aspect of motion picture production on the property. Furthermore, because Laemmle believed that the public was more likely to watch films if they could see how they were made, he instituted a public studio tour which included the viewing of movie making in progress from observation stands built adjacent to the stages, touring the back lot, and a box lunch, all for an admission price of twenty-five cents.⁸⁷

A 1916 site plan of Universal City shows the general layout of the studio's facilities. Built resources are largely confined to the northern portion of the property, with stages, administrative offices, and production support buildings clustered in the northwest corner near Lankershim Boulevard. The backlot area containing outdoor sets for exterior filming is located to the east. A single road connects the backlot to the administration/production



Universal City site plan, 1916. (Courtesy Universal Studios)

⁸⁷ Hirschorn, *The Columbia Story*, 13.

area. Despite continued growth and redevelopment throughout Universal City's history, the general configuration of administration and production facilities located at the northwest of the property, with the backlot located to the east has continued at Universal Studios to the present day.

Historic photographs from the late 1910s and early 1920s reveal a fairly compact cluster of administrative and studio service buildings constructed near Lankershim Boulevard. Most were constructed in a fanciful Mission Revival architectural style. This collection of one- and two-story buildings, which included the main administration building, ancillary offices, dressing rooms, editing and screening rooms, a hospital, a post office and a restaurant, suggested a small town. Large, barn-like stage buildings, wood-frame shop and storage buildings and a lumber mill were located immediately to the east. These larger scale buildings and structures were utilitarian in design and revealed the industrial nature of motion picture production.



Universal Studios, Lankershim entrance, 1917. (Courtesy Universal Studios)

In its first year, 250 films were produced at Universal City, with Laemmle dividing his time between corporate headquarters in New York, Universal City, and Europe to promote his product internationally. Production oversight was a constant issue; Laemmle needed a capable assistant, and found one in young Irving Thalberg, hired as a secretary to a senior executive in Universal's New York office. In July of 1919, Thalberg accompanied Laemmle to Universal City, where he became convinced that the studio was suffering from poor management. Thalberg soon recommended that a single person be appointed to coordinate all production on the lot, and Laemmle responded by appointing Thalberg. Within six months Thalberg had become the general manager and effective head of the California operation.

By the end of 1920, Universal had profits of \$2.3 million, less than that of the other major studios but still substantial. Determined to bring Universal's profits closer to that of the other major studios, Thalberg tried unsuccessfully to convince Laemmle to upgrade his feature production for the first-run

market. Laemmle resisted high-budget features because of their dependence on high-priced talent. He did not believe in the star system, and refused to offer lucrative multi-year contracts.

By the end of 1922 Thalberg had supervised the production of over 100 films and had reorganized the operation of the studio. Under his supervision, Universal had increased its prestige by adding first-run features including the lavish and critically acclaimed *Foolish Wives* (1922), directed by Erich von Stroheim. However, relations between Thalberg and Laemmle were increasingly strained because of their differing strategies for Universal's future and Laemmle's unwillingness to make Thalberg a partner in the studio. In February of 1923, Thalberg left Universal to join Louis B. Mayer, who would soon form Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, where Thalberg would become head of production. After Thalberg's departure, Universal would continue to produce a handful of first-run films such as the horror classics *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), both with Lon Chaney. Laemmle continued, however, to concentrate the majority of Universal's resources on films for the second-run market.

As Universal grew and prospered in the 1920s, additional production facilities were constructed. Important additions included a steel frame stage building (Building #3251 or Stage 28), and a reinforced concrete Power House (Building #2243), both constructed in 1924. An additional stage building, known as "Stage E" (Building #2228) was constructed in 1925. During Universal's early days, outdoor sets were distributed in a haphazard manner near the stage buildings as well as in the backlot. As the studio continued to grow, space near the administration and production areas became more constrained and outdoor sets were increasingly concentrated in the backlot.

In 1927, the success of Warner Brother's *The Jazz Singer* changed the course of filmmaking. Sound pictures required new technology, resulting in a complete overhaul in the film maker's craft. Major investments were needed by all the studios to keep their product viable, and in 1928 Universal began a large building program that began when a drainage channel was installed underground. The studio tour was suspended as the crowds interfered with sound control. The construction of several soundproof stages, including Building #2223, Building #2225, Building #2265, Building #2345 and Building #2315, were the cornerstone of the late 1920s building program. These new or reconfigured stage buildings utilized steel frame and concrete construction methods that were considerably more substantial than the barn-like early stages constructed before the need for soundproofing. Additional improvements included new office buildings, expansion of the electrical department, a new lumber mill, two fire stations, six new projection rooms, and lighted billboards. Additionally, all main roads on the lot were paved and sprinkler systems were added to all nine stages in case of fire. Aerial photographs of the lot circa 1930 reveal an expanded and more substantial-looking production area and backlot than was present in previous decades.

Universal had continued success with horror films with the advent of sound. However, despite these successes, Universal suffered massive losses during this period due to the economic depression and poor management. Unable to meet debt obligations, Laemmle lost control of the company in March 1936.

Universal was taken over by investor J. Cheever Cowdin and Laemmle ended all association with the studio. Under the new management, film budgets were reduced and directors and production supervisors were kept on a very short leash to control costs. Universal lost \$1.6 million in 1936 and \$1 million again in 1937. In response, Cowdin hired two ex-RKO executives, Nate J. Blumberg and Cliff Work, to run the studio. Together they brought Universal back to profitability by the end of 1938. Expansion



Universal Studios in 1939, with backlot visible at top. (Courtesy Universal Studios)

of the studio property slowed somewhat during this period but improvements continued, including major renovations of two stages (Building #3250 and Building #2228) in 1939. It was also during the late 1930s and early 1940s that a collection of small office buildings and bungalows – used mostly by producers – was formed just south of the main gate entry off Lankershim Boulevard. Residential in scale and design, this producer's area resembled a small suburban neighborhood.

Universal's financial turnaround was due in large part to the signing of popular performers such as Deanna Durbin and Abbott and Costello under long-term contract, something Laemmle had always resisted. Also notable were a popular series of Sherlock Holmes films starring Basil Rathbone, and a string of Technicolor B-films set in exotic locales that starred Jon Hall and Maria Montez. By 1945, Universal was a solid profit maker, releasing an average of one film per week. Anticipating selling the studio, Cowdin used the profits for improving the studio facilities. Two new stages were built, existing buildings were enlarged, and the roads were widened. A 1944 studio site plan details the studio lot at the end of World War II. It confirms that the basic studio configuration established in 1916 remained intact with administration and service buildings located along Lankershim Boulevard; stages, technical buildings and production support located immediately east; and the backlot sets located to the far east.

On October 1, 1946, Cowdin and Blumberg announced that Universal had been sold to International Pictures Corporation to form Universal-International Pictures Corporation. The new management fired most of the old Universal staff, and increased budgets on first-run features. Studio system rules were thrown out as freelance talent and independent producers were welcomed. Beginning in 1950, Universal's income rose for eight straight years while the other leading studios watched their income

decline. Universal added 140 acres at the eastern end of the studio property during the 1950s, almost doubling the size of the backlot and making it the largest movie studio in the world.

The president of Decca Records gained majority control of Universal-International in 1952, making it a subsidiary in Decca's entertainment conglomerate. By 1958, however, Universal-International was again losing money. In December of 1958, Universal-International sold the then 367-acre studio property to Music Corporation of America (MCA) with a lease-back arrangement for facilities needed for film production. At the time, MCA operated as a talent agency, led by founder and chairman Dr. Jules Stein and president Lew Wasserman. In 1962, MCA left the talent agency business to focus on the expanding business of film and television production. That same year, MCA completed its acquisition of Universal-International and consolidated its motion picture, television, and recording entities into one large entertainment complex with headquarters at Universal City.

MCA added new permanent sets and equipment at Universal City and upgraded the sound stages. By 1962 the acreage of the lot had also been expanded. The original Mission Revival front office and administration complex on Lankershim Boulevard was demolished to make way for a new complex of buildings including a 14-story world headquarters building for MCA, the Bank of America Building, a new post office, and a new commissary.

The facilities and personnel at Universal City proved to be well-suited to television production and the studio greatly increased its emphasis on television production. Hit shows, included *"Alfred Hitchcock Presents," "Leave It to Beaver," "The Virginian,"* and *"Ozzie and Harriet."* Universal's profits (including feature film and television production) increased significantly between 1961 and 1962. After 50 years under the shadow of the major studios, Universal had become the leader in both television and film production.

On July 4, 1964, MCA re-opened the Universal Studios Tour to the public. Visitors rode a bus through the site to view stages, stunt shows, and movie sets. The tour proved to be enormously popular, becoming a major tourist attraction. In 1972, fifteen acres were added to the tour area to allow several full-scale production demonstrations. A 340-seat theatre (the Alfred Hitchcock Theatre) was built and the outdoor amphitheater (originally built to showcase stunt demonstrations) was expanded for use as an outdoor concert venue. The "neighborhood" of small office buildings and office/service bungalows located south of the Main Gate near Lankershim Boulevard was also gradually removed during the 1970s as the land was made available for two new office buildings. Most of the office buildings and bungalows, originally constructed between the late 1920s and early 1950s were relocated to other parts of the property, with the majority ending up in the northern part of the lot along River Road.

The 1980s and beyond brought further changes. In 1982, the amphitheater was redesigned, enlarged, and enclosed. It reopened as a state-of-the-art 6,200-seat indoor theater which now hosts concerts and special events. In an effort to link all the entertainment venues in Universal City, MCA developed Universal CityWalk, a pedestrian promenade which opened in 1993. The two-block long pedestrian

promenade features more than three dozen retail shops, specialty restaurants, and movie theaters. On June 8, 2008, a fire broke out at Universal Studios which destroyed several buildings and set areas including the New York Street Substation (Building #6152), the New York Restrooms (Building #6153), the King Kong Building (Building #6194), and a Film Vault Building, (Building #6197).

Beginning in the 1990s and throughout the 2000s, MCA participated in several mergers and acquisitions that shifted the ownership of Universal Studios to other parent companies. Today, Universal Studios is owned by NBC Universal, which is majority-owned and managed by Comcast.

Warner Brothers⁸⁸

Warner Brothers Studios was formed by brothers Harry, Albert, Sam, and Jack Warner. Following their first hit "*My Four Years in Germany*" in 1917, the Warners purchased their first studio site at Sunset and Bronson in Hollywood. While there they produced the first film with synchronized music in 1925 followed by "*The Jazz Singer*," the first "talkie," in 1927. This achievement was commemorated with the designation of the studio's Executive Office Building at 5800 Sunset Boulevard as Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 180, the site of the first talking film. The building is also listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The innovation of sound secured Warner Brothers Studios. By the end of the 1920s the studio had bought out the Vitagraph Company and had taken over its Prospect and Talmadge studio lot in East Hollywood.

The profits from "*The Jazz Singer*" also enabled the studio to acquire First National Pictures and its studio lot in in 1929. Founded in 1917, First National Pictures had purchased the ranch land in 1926 and commissioned the Austin Company to build a studio. Upon acquisition of the studio lot, Warner Brothers renovated the 40 existing buildings. By 1930 Warner Brothers, which owned three major studio lots, was one of the most powerful film producing companies in the history of the film industry.



Warner Brothers West Coast Studios, c. 1930. (Corbus Images)

⁸⁸ The Warner Brothers Hollywood studios now operate as Sunset Bronson Studios. The property is located within the boundaries of the Hollywood Redevelopment Project Area and, therefore, is outside of the area recorded through SurveyLA.

Warner Brothers Studios is located on a 144-acre lot bounded by Olive Avenue, California Street, Hollywood Way and the Los Angeles River in Burbank. Renovation, expansion and new construction on the lot have been underway for two years and new plans have been announced. The only studio other than Universal with a backlot, the Warner Brothers backlot is intact and most of the existing sets date from circa 1930.

Development of Independent Motion Picture Production

While the Big Eight studios dominated the American motion picture industry, alternative production facilities also existed and even flourished. These venues could generally be divided into two broad categories: independent studios and rental plants. Independent studios were established by motion picture production companies which were not associated with the Big Eight Studios. Some of these companies could trace their origins to the early days of the film industry, when “independent” production companies were established as a rejection of the Edison patent monopoly and the long arm of the MPCC. However, by the late 1920s, in Southern California, the term “independent” reflected those smaller operations that had not joined the trend of mergers and acquisitions that resulted in the Big Eight and their business model of vertical integration. It is worth noting that in the late 1910s and the early 1920s, there was comparatively little difference between the operational model of most motion picture production companies. Many companies utilized the vertically-integrated model of distribution, although their network of distribution might consist of only a handful of theaters. It was not until the late 1920s that the scale of mergers – often involving companies which had already previously expanded through other acquisitions – became much more significant. As historian Ethan Mordden observed, “As we consider the respective styles of Paramount and Warner Brothers, MGM and RKO, Fox and Universal, we must remember that these were simply the overwhelming outgrowths of an industry founded on small operations.”⁸⁹

Indeed, the greatest distinction between the Big Eight studios and their independent counterparts was the size of their operations and distribution networks. Ironically, as the industry – now defined by the Big Eight – continued to evolve through the late 1920s and early 1930s, the major studios utilized their not-insignificant influence to foster the kind of distribution monopoly that producers had sought to reject from the MPCC only ten years earlier. However, during this period, motion picture production on the whole increased, in part due to the rise in popularity of a new programming format: the double feature. With the growing demand for new content to fill the schedule, independent producers were able to flourish alongside their major studio competitors, and many independent production companies were established during this time. Some existed only fleetingly before being dissolved or acquired by a larger concern. However, several companies stood out; important independent production companies of the period with facilities that remain extant today include Clune Studios (now operating as Raleigh Studios, 5300 Melrose Avenue), Vitagraph (now operating as Prospect Studios, 4151 Prospect Avenue), and Metro Pictures (now operating as RED Studios, 846 N. Cahuenga Boulevard).

⁸⁹ Mordden, *The Hollywood Studios*, 174.

Clune Studios⁹⁰

Adolf Zukor founded Famous Players in New York in 1912 in partnership with the powerful theatre impresarios, the Frohman Brothers.⁹¹ They produced short and feature-length productions and, in 1915, the company established Famous Players Fiction Studios at 5300 Melrose Avenue, the former farm of W.B. Brown. Its first feature, *A Girl From Yesterday*, starred Mary Pickford and was directed by Allan Dwan. Shortly thereafter, Zukor teamed up with Jesse Lasky to form Paramount. Later in 1915, the Raleigh Lot was acquired by William H. Clune, a Los Angeles theater owner, with his profits from the D.W. Griffith film, *Birth of a Nation*. The first film his company shot on the lot was *Ramona*.



Clune Studios, around 1916. (Bison Archives)

Clune made just two pictures on the lot before leasing out the facility to independent producers. However, the Clune family retained ownership of the property until it was acquired by Raleigh Enterprises in 1979. Throughout the 64 years of Clune family ownership, the studio was leased and operated under several different names. Walt and Roy Disney started their sound recording company, Walt Disney/RCA-Photophone, on the lot in 1928. Other tenants over time have included Paralta Studios, Douglas Fairbanks Studios, United Studios, Paramount, Prudential, Sherman, Schulberg, California Studios, Producers Studio, Jim Henson and the Henson Companies, and Tec-Art Studios. In its earliest days, while the silent era was still in full swing, an early owner or tenant constructed one of the world's first soundstages – complete with a glass top so the stage could be lit with natural light, without ambient noise to disrupt the production of movies with sound. Movies filmed here include *A Star Is Born* (1937) with Janet Gaynor; Best Picture winner *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946); the cult classic *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962); and Best Picture winner *In the Heat of the Night* (1967).

As television swept the industry in the 1950s and 1960s, the facility was adapted to the new technology and became a popular venue for top television producers. Some of television's most notable early shows and pilots were filmed at the studio, including *Superman*, *Gunslinger*, *Perry Mason*, *Death Valley Days* and *Have Gun Will Travel*.

⁹⁰ Clune/Raleigh Studios was identified in SurveyLA as significant as one of the earliest motion picture studios in Los Angeles; associated with the origins and early development of the entertainment industry in Southern California. Originally Clune Studios, the property has been in continuous operation as a motion picture production facility since it opened in 1915, and is thought to be the longest continuously operating motion picture studio in the nation.

⁹¹ Discussions of Clune Studios and the subsequent development of the Clune property, as well as the discussions of the history of Metro Pictures and the subsequent development history of the Metro property, have been excerpted and adapted from E. J. Stephens and Marc Wanamaker, *Early Poverty Row Studios*, Images of America (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 83-86, and "Raleigh Studios – Pioneers of Film," accessed December 2016, <http://www.raleighstudios.com/home/365-discover-hollywood>.

In 1979, Raleigh Enterprises acquired the property from the Clune family, which at the time was being operated as Producer's Studios. While the site was originally acquired to serve as the location for a new retail store, the executives at Raleigh opted instead to undertake an expansion program, guided by a master plan, and remodel of the facilities for leasing purposes. At that time, no new sound stages had been built in nearly three decades, and the plan included a comprehensive renovation of the property's historic buildings as well as construction of new support facilities and offices. Today, the site operates as Raleigh Studios.

Metro Pictures

The Metro Pictures Corporation – not to be confused with Metropolitan Pictures, another production company – was established by a group of film producers and distributors in New York City in 1915. Metro Pictures functioned as more of a distribution operation, subcontracting with independent producers to supply motion pictures.⁹² The shareholders included Louis B. Mayer, who resigned from the company in 1917. In 1918, Mayer returned to Los Angeles and formed Louis B. Mayer Productions to produce his own films. Meanwhile, Metro Pictures followed the westward migration of filmmakers to Los Angeles and permanently relocated its principal operations from New York to Hollywood in 1917.⁹³



Metro Studios, c. 1920. (waterandpower.org)

Metro took over the property at the corner of Eleanor Street and Lillian Way, which had first been developed by the Climax Film Company as a motion picture studio in 1914 and more recently had been home to Lone Star Studios, a subsidiary of the Mutual Film Corporation and home to production for Mutual's biggest star, Charlie Chaplin. Metro's acquisition expanded rapidly into the surrounding neighborhood and eventually included a main lot with an administrative building and a Japanese garden, along with three backlots. One of these backlots, then known as Metro Pictures Back Lot #3, remains in continuous operation today as an independent production facility on Cahuenga Boulevard. Buster Keaton and Ramon Navarro were subsequent tenants of the site, and some of the most notable "swashbucklers" and comedies of the silent film era were made on the site. In 1924, Metro merged with two other production companies to become Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), which relocated its headquarters to the new MGM lot in Culver City, and moved many of the Metro's studio buildings to the new site. The former Metro backlot changed hands over the years and by 1946 was undergoing new

⁹² Scott Eyman, *Lions of Hollywood: The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer* (Simon & Schuster, 2005), 43.

⁹³ "Frivols.: Metro Moving West," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1917.

construction as Equity Studios, which was being developed primarily as a rental plant for independent producers. In 1947, the property was renamed Motion Picture Center Studios; under this moniker the facility hosted filming of movies starring Lloyd Bridges, Marlon Brando, Gary Cooper, and Kirk Douglas.

In 1953, after the success of the first two seasons of *I Love Lucy*, Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball were looking for a permanent facility to house their ever-expanding production company, Desilu, which had already generated a pair of *I Love Lucy* clones, *Our Miss Brooks* and *I Married Joan*, both of which had debuted in 1952. It was Desi Arnaz's dream to transform a studio into a state-of-the-art television factory dedicated to the assembly-line production of half-hour comedies forged in the Desilu style, and such an operation would require more space and support than their current, temporary facilities at the nearby General Service Studios. By the summer of 1953, Lucy and Desi Arnaz had negotiated a long-term lease with the owners of the Motion Picture Center Studios, which would eventually come to be known as the Desilu-Cahuenga Studios. No sooner was the lease signed than the Arnazes initiated a multi-million-dollar facelift of the production facility. For many years, the Desilu-Cahuenga Studios were the only production facility in Hollywood equipped for and devoted to the filming of shows with a live studio audience, such as *I Love Lucy*, *The Lucille Ball-Desi Arnaz Show*, and *The Danny Thomas Show*, as well as shows fronted by Jack Benny, Red Skelton, and others.⁹⁴

In 1960, Paramount studios began to lease the facility to accommodate its overflow production, and the decade saw the production of such shows as *My Favorite Martian*, *I Spy*, *Hogan's Heroes*, and *That Girl*. The studio changed hands again in the 1970s, and for a time was known as the Cinema General Studio before the facility was purchased in 1974 and renamed Television Center Studios. A subsequent purchase in 1984 established Ren-Mar Studios, and a number of notable television shows of the 1980s and 1990s were filmed on the site, including *General Hospital*, *The Golden Girls*, *Seinfeld*, and *Ally McBeal*, as well as the films *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*.

In 2010, Ren-Mar Studios was purchased by Red Digital Camera Company, and the facility was renamed Red Studios Hollywood, which continues to operate independently today.

Vitagraph⁹⁵

Vitagraph was one of the earliest producers of motion pictures, having been established in 1897 when reporter J. Stuart Blackton interviewed Thomas Edison, who talked Blackton into purchasing one of his projectors and some film.⁹⁶ A short time later, using the equipment he purchased from Edison to go into direct competition with him, Blackton founded the American Vitagraph Company with his business partner, Albert E. Smith. Vitagraph eventually became one of the founding companies of the MPCC,

⁹⁴ "Desilu Cahuenga Studio," accessed December 2016, <http://www.lucyfan.com/desilucahuenga.html>.

⁹⁵ Vitagraph/Prospect Studios was identified in SurveyLA as an excellent example of an independent studio facility in Hollywood.

⁹⁶ The discussion of the history of Vitagraph and the subsequent development history of the Vitagraph property has been excerpted and adapted from Stephens and Wanamaker, *Early Poverty Row Studios*, 67, 75-76, and "History," The Prospect Studios, accessed December 2016, http://studioservices.go.com/prospectstudios/history_and_news.html.

which was established to resolve the intellectual property disputes with Edison that had plagued the early years of the industry.

Vitagraph opened its first Southern California studio in Santa Monica in 1911, but in 1915 relocated to the corner of Prospect Avenue and Talmadge Street in Hollywood (4151 Prospect Ave). Originally, the silent film plant included two daylight film stages, support buildings, and many exterior film sets. In 1925, Vitagraph's co-founder Albert Smith sold the company to the Warner brothers, and in 1927 the property became known as the Warner East Hollywood Annex. The facility was utilized for many large-scale Warner Brothers productions throughout the 1930s and 1940s that included large water tanks, ships, and backlot sets.



Vitagraph Studios, 1926 (waterandpower.org)

In 1948, the property was sold to the newly formed American Broadcasting Company (ABC), and the property transitioned into the new world of television as ABC Television Center. ABC also relocated its local television station KECA-TV (later KABC-7) to the property. As ABC Television Center, the studio evolved into a network transmission center as well as the home of many successful and long-running television series. In 1984, ABC coordinated worldwide coverage of the Los Angeles Summer Olympic Games from the lot. In 1996, ABC became part of the Walt Disney Company; at that time the studio was renamed The Prospect Studios. In continuous operation as a film plant since 1915, the property underwent a major renovation in 2002 to position its facilities for the future and new technical innovations.

At the same time as independent studios like Clune, Metro, and Vitagraph were developing, there also existed a number of independent producers who chose to remain not necessarily motivated by financial reasons, but by the autonomy allowed by working outside the system. Independent producers such as Charlie Chaplin, Hal Roach, Samuel Goldwyn, David O. Selznick, Walt Disney, and Walter Wanger

maintained freestanding operations. Thomas Ince, another pioneer filmmaker, established his own production facility known as Inceville on the palisades of West Los Angeles in 1911. The shoreline and canyons of Inceville provided Ince with a variety of settings for his Western films while his isolation in Santa Ynez Canyon and on the Palisades provided him with an independence which he sacrificed when he relocated his activities to Culver City in 1916 (later MGM).⁹⁷

By the 1930s, independent films were not entirely separate from the studio system in which filmmaking was controlled from the first draft of a script to a film's distribution in theaters. From 1935 to 1945 independent film, though conceived in the mid-1920s, is more accurately called unit production, and its independence relied on a producer's ability to underwrite production through bank loans and not through a major studio's financing system. Producers considered themselves independent if they formed a corporation for the purpose of creating a single film. The film's production team, from writers to craftsmen, formed a unit. Working in these units allowed production team members to work in multiple positions, circumventing the studio system's division of labor and the mob influence over the unions. Independence, in short, could facilitate not only profit sharing but also individualistic and innovative approaches to narrative structure, plot resolution, and film style.⁹⁸

In the early 1930s several major studio executives broke away from the big studios where they worked and formed their own smaller studios. Part of their motivation was financial, but egos were also at play. Zanuck at Warner Brothers disagreed with specific management policies. Selznick at Paramount found the studio system itself alienating. Selznick and Wanger at MGM felt independence held the promise of enabling them to produce films on subjects that couldn't otherwise be approved. Most of all, as former studio executives, these men felt entitled to complete control over their films. Though they operated autonomous companies with no major studio financing, Zanuck, Selznick, and Samuel Goldwyn followed the major studios' mode of production and stylistic norms to produce the same genre films that held sway at the majors.⁹⁹

Over time, some independent operators sought to organize their efforts to promote individual production. In 1941, eight producers – Charlie Chaplin, Walt Disney, Samuel Goldwyn, Alexander Korda, Mary Pickford, David O. Selznick, Walter Wanger, and Orson Welles – came together to form the Society of Independent Motion Picture Producers (SIMPP). SIMPP had its origins in the great antitrust battle between the U.S. government and the large Hollywood studios which enveloped the industry in the late 1930s.¹⁰⁰ Though most of the independent producers distributed their films through the Big Eight studios, the independents opposed the studio monopolies, and joined the side of the Justice

⁹⁷ "Historic Context Statement: The West Los Angeles Subregional Planning Area of the City of Los Angeles," prepared by Historic Resources Group for the Los Angeles Conservancy, revised September 14, 1990.

⁹⁸ The discussion of independent films in the 1930s has been excerpted and adapted from "Historic Resources Survey, Hollywood Redevelopment Project Area," prepared for the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles by Chattel Architecture, Planning & Preservation, Inc., February 2010, 77.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ The discussion of the origins of SIMPP has been excerpted and adapted from J. A. Aberdeen's "The Formation of the Society (1941 & 1942)," Hollywood Renegades Archive, accessed December 2016, http://www.cobbles.com/simpp_archive/simpp_1941formation.htm.

Department in attacking the majors. The independent producers joined together to fight the studios collectively, and to use the society to help secure a place for independents in an industry dominated by big business. When the government temporarily called off the antitrust suit in 1940, the independents decided to join together. The unification of the independent producers in Hollywood had been rumored several times since 1940 when the government's consent decree took effect. Whenever any of the prominent producers were queried about their plans to organize their own trade organization, they admitted only that such an alliance was "under discussion." The Society began to take shape in secrecy throughout 1941.

The Society's mission was to protect the freedom of the independent producer in an industry dominated by major studios.¹⁰¹ The members of SIMPP had diverse talents that included acting, writing, and directing; they became producers in order to secure their creative and financial freedom.¹⁰² Later, during the 1940s and 1950s, SIMPP grew from the exodus of contract talent who left the studio system to turn freelance; the organization showed them how to secure their freedom by forming independent production companies.¹⁰³

Following the dissolution of the Big Eight at the end of the 1940s, the film industry became increasingly focused on independent production throughout the 1950s. Non-studio affiliated producers would develop and produce films with the studios providing production facilities, financing, and distribution. Independent producers had always been part of the film industry but during the Studio Era, their contribution was only a small percentage of total film output. As overall film output declined in the 1950s and 1960s, independent production became the norm, and the film studios no longer needed to support all aspects of film making internally.

Development of Motion Picture Rental Plants

Rental plants functioned as motion picture production facilities which were not affiliated with a particular studio or company, and did not produce or distribute films directly. Instead, profits were generated solely from the leasing of the plant's equipment and facilities to other studios or independent producers. While films produced in the first half of the twentieth century are generally associated with the strict on-site control of the major studio era, rental plants nonetheless filled a distinct niche in the industry for several reasons.

First, demand simply outweighed supply at every level of the industry. Given the skyrocketing popularity of major motion pictures, by the 1920s filmmaking had become an attractive venture in Los Angeles. As historians E. J. Stephens and Marc Wanamaker observed, the production of the first full-length motion picture in a Hollywood studio, Cecil B. DeMille's *The Squaw Man*, "turned the trickle of producers

¹⁰¹ J. A. Aberdeen, "The SIMPP Research Database," Hollywood Renegades Archive, accessed December 2016, http://www.cobbles.com/simpp_archive/index.htm.

¹⁰² J. A. Aberdeen, "The SIMPP Research Database."

¹⁰³ Ibid.

arriving in Hollywood into a torrent.”¹⁰⁴ Independent producers – both those seeking their shot at fame and those who had already established themselves in New York or Chicago – began to make their way to Hollywood, and all of them were looking for production space.

At the same time, as films continued to gain in popularity as an entertainment medium, even the most established studios experienced difficulty in meeting the demand for new product. While the climate and environment of Hollywood certainly lent itself to year-round production, finite studio facilities did not, and constructing additional facilities required investments that many studios did not wish to make. Major renovation or construction projects might also require existing facilities to be shut down for the duration. As a result, some studios leased space at rental plants for their overflow productions that could not be accommodated on their own studio lot. This allowed for studios to expand their production without straining their own resources, and also to improve their own facilities if necessary without losing filming time.

Rental plants also provided an attractive venue for film stars in search of a home. While some A-list stars, such as Harold Lloyd, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks, produced their own films at independent studios, rental plants also provided opportunities and resources for actors who were otherwise contracted to major studios or other independent producers. Furthermore, rental plants provided an equal-opportunity venue to producers of films of every distinction. Those enterprising individuals arriving in Los Angeles with little or no assets or experience who could not hope to align themselves with one of the major studios, or even one of the more established independents, were compelled to strike out on their own and rent production facilities, an often temporary arrangement which lasted only as long as it took to complete the film – as inexpensively as possible. Due to the concentration of tenants who faced similar financial challenges, clusters of these facilities came to be known as “Poverty Rows.” The most famous of these was established at the southeast corner of Sunset Boulevard and Gower Street, a site which later became the headquarters for Columbia Pictures.

More established filmmakers, however, who wished to remain competitive with the major studios, leased space from rental studio plants, whose plant owners were motivated to invest in updated facilities and new technologies so they could command higher prices. While the rental plant business flourished among several large studios such as Educational Studios, Grand National Studios, and the Motion Picture Center Studios, one of the earliest and most successful was Hollywood Studios.

Poverty Row

The “original” Poverty Row in Hollywood was located at the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and Gower Street. The property at the southwest corner of the intersection was first developed in 1917 by film industry pioneer William Horsley. Horsley had already found success in the fledgling film industry when he established Nestor Studios, Hollywood’s first motion picture studio, with his brother David in 1911. William Horsley’s initial development efforts were focused westward along Sunset Boulevard and

¹⁰⁴ Stephens and Wanamaker, *Early Poverty Row Studios*, 10.

southward along Gower Street, and included the construction of a number of motion picture production facilities, which Horsley sold or leased to filmmakers not associated with a major studio. By the mid-1920s, Poverty Row had reached its heyday; studios along Beachwood Drive were occupied by a number of independent producers, including the Stern Film Company, the Kinemart Production Company, O.K. Productions, Phil Goldstone Productions, and Bischoff Comedies.¹⁰⁵ Other independent production companies operating in the area which have “long since passed into oblivion” included Loftus Features, L-Ko Motion Picture Company, Sterling Motion Picture Company, Quality Pictures Corporation, Frances Ford Studios, Waldorf Productions, Paulis, Century Film Company, Wilnat Studios, Wade Productions, California Studios, Bischoff Comedies, Choice Productions, Snub-Pollard Productions, Goodwill Studios, and Chadwick Pictures Company.¹⁰⁶ Existing facilities along Poverty Row were incorporated into the development of the Columbia Pictures studios beginning in 1924, when Columbia executive Harry Cohn began purchasing property along the block to develop his own motion picture production facility.

For many independent producers, the foray into filmmaking on Poverty Row often proved to be short-lived. An examination of city directories from the 1920s and 1930s as well as *Los Angeles Times* articles from the period reveals that the tenancies of most Poverty Row production companies were brief, with some companies lasting only a year or less before relocating or disappearing entirely. In some cases, this was a happy occasion that marked the growing success of a production company or one of its stars. In the words of the *Times*, “More than one executive who was destined to ride on a later morning through its boundaries with averted face, learned the value of a dollar in Poverty Row.”¹⁰⁷ Stars such as Fred Thomson, Ken Maynard, and Betty Compson all put in time on Poverty Row in an effort to launch – or, in Compson’s case, rebuild – their respective careers.

Hollywood Studios

Hollywood Studios, which now comprises the site of the present-day Sunset Las Palmas Studios at 1040 North Las Palmas Avenue, was established in 1919 by prominent real estate developer C. E. Toberman, who partnered with venture capitalist C. W. Bradford and film industry executive John Jasper to develop a motion picture rental plant, which they dubbed Hollywood Studios. The concept, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, was to develop a facility “where independent producers can work by renting all studio space, technical equipment and properties necessary to the making of pictures.”¹⁰⁸ The men were able to call on Jasper’s notable experience from the early days of the motion picture industry, where he started his career in the laboratory of pioneering filmmaker David Horsley. Jasper progressed to become manager of the Horsley studio before leaving to join Charlie Chaplin’s operations. While working for Chaplin, Jasper oversaw the successful development of Chaplin’s own distinctive studio at 1416 North La Brea Avenue (Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 58), which had commenced construction in 1917. Jasper played an important role in developing the rental studio as a distinct property type. An early *Los Angeles Times* article credits Jasper with conceiving “the idea exemplified in these studios, of

¹⁰⁵ Stephens and Wanamaker, *Early Poverty Row Studios*, 41.

¹⁰⁶ Torrence, *Hollywood: The First 100 Years*, 87, 90.

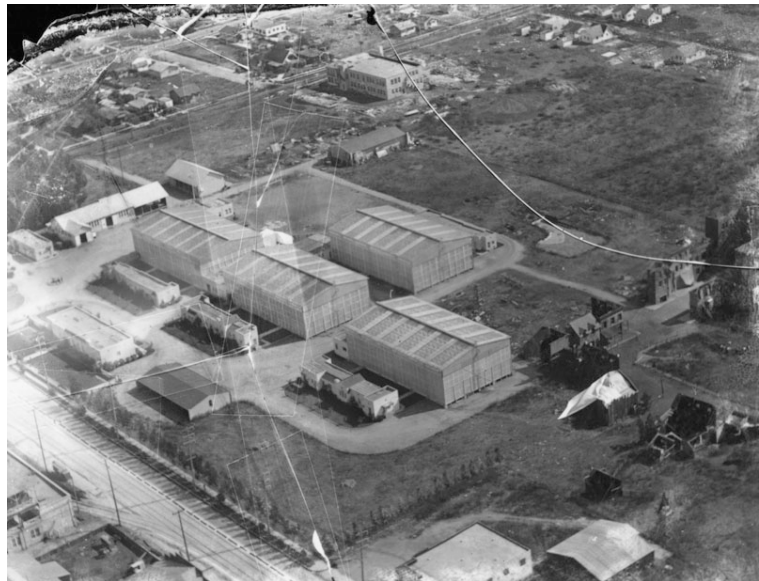
¹⁰⁷ “‘Poverty Row’ Rolls In Gold,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 1929.

¹⁰⁸ “Huge Film Deal Revealed,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1923.

enabling the independent producer of moderate means to make pictures with facilities equal to those of larger organizations.”¹⁰⁹

Almost from the start, Hollywood Studios proved successful at attracting prestigious tenants. Among the first to lease space on the site were noted producers Allan Dwan and King Vidor. Harold Lloyd followed soon after and became one of the studio’s most enduring tenants. By 1923, the *Los Angeles Times* noted that “some of the biggest pictures of recent years of the independent producing field have been made” at Hollywood Studios, including films featuring stars like Pauline Fredericks and Will Rogers.¹¹⁰ Howard Hughes also became a tenant, and portions of his earliest pictures were filmed on the lot.

Hollywood Studios changed hands several times in the 1920s. In 1925, the property was purchased by Al and Charles Christie and became known as Metropolitan Studios, and then Metropolitan Sound Studios. The Christie brothers were responsible for converting the studio’s production facilities for sound to meet the demand for “talking” pictures, and it was under their stewardship that the studio was modernized with the most up-to-date technologies for both filmmaking and sound recording. A radio studio was added to the site for the production of radio programs in 1932. That same year,



Hollywood Studios, 1924 (Los Angeles Public Library)

the Christies went into receivership and were forced to liquidate their assets, including the Metropolitan Sound Studios. The property was sold to General Service Studios, Inc., a division of Western Electric. According to J. A. Aberdeen, the powerful Western Electric division of American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) acquired the sound-equipped lot at Metropolitan Sound Studios to add to its extensive holdings that dominated early talking films.¹¹¹ To avoid antitrust scrutiny, Western Electric transferred the Metropolitan property to another of its subsidiaries known as General Service Studios, and the property was subsequently given the same name. However, the government eventually busted Western Electric's “talkie empire,” and ordered AT&T to sell General Service Studios in 1941.¹¹²

While Western Electric’s ownership of the General Service Studios was short-lived, the company’s stewardship of the property marked, perhaps, its most well-known and productive period. It was during

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ “Huge Studios Change Hands,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1923.

¹¹¹ J.A. Aberdeen, “Benedict Bogeaus and the General Service Studio (Hollywood Center Studio),” *Hollywood Renegades Archive*, accessed December 2016, http://www.cobbles.com/simpp_archive/benedict_bogeaus.htm.

¹¹² Ibid.

this time, in the years prior to World War II, that the studio began to host productions for some of the industry's most well-known talent, including Mae West, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Cary Grant, Fred Astaire, and Douglas Fairbanks. Indeed, as early as 1936, the *Los Angeles Times* noted that "good old General Studios" had, at one time or another, "been announced as the future headquarters of practically every producer in the business."¹¹³

Following the court's order for AT&T to sell General Services, it was eventually purchased by a producer who was already very familiar with the property – Benedict Bogeaus, who had filmed *The Thief of Baghdad* there in 1940.

Bogeaus outbid Edward Small for control of the studio in the spring of 1942 after General Service was put on the market. Actually, Bogeaus underbid Small, acquiring control of the property for \$460,000 (and \$200,000 of liabilities) by promising to allow the government to use the facility for defense purposes. Under Bogeaus' control, General Service soon became a popular alternative to the more stately Goldwyn lot that usually operated at capacity. By 1945 the General Service Studio housed 21 independent producers, most of whom released their films through United Artists, and many of whom became members of SIMPP.¹¹⁴

Following World War II, in July 1946 Bogeaus invited William Cagney, brother of actor James Cagney, to become a one-fifth owner of the General Service Studio, and in 1947 the two men began to sell their interests in the General Service Studios to their managers, the Nassour brothers.¹¹⁵ During this period stars such as James Cagney, James Stewart, Henry Fonda, Ava Gardner, the Marx Brothers, and Marilyn Monroe filmed pictures at the lot.

By 1950 James, George, and Ted Nassour had gained control of General Service, and began to focus on television production.¹¹⁶ Their television clients included, most notably, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, who took over Studio 2 as the "Desilu Playhouse" to film the first two seasons of *"I Love Lucy."* Actress Eve Arden also filmed *"Our Miss Brooks,"* a television series produced by Desilu, on an adjacent stage. Lucy and Desi Arnaz remained at General Service Studios for two seasons before departing to relocate *"I Love Lucy"* and *"Our Miss Brooks"* to their own dedicated facility in 1953. Other tenants included Ozzie and Harriet Nelson and Gracie Allen and George Burns; Burns would remain on the lot until his death in 1996 at the age of 100. The studio became a production hub during the early years of television, a trend which continued into the 1960s. Later shows filmed at the lot included *"Perry Mason," "Mr. Ed," "The Beverly Hillbillies," "The Addams Family," "Petticoat Junction,"* and *"Green Acres."*

¹¹³ "A Town Called Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1936.

¹¹⁴ Aberdeen, "Benedict Bogeaus and the General Service Studio."

¹¹⁵ Ibid. Contemporary accounts also sometimes spell the brothers' surname as "Nasser."

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

The Nassour brothers continued to operate the General Service Studios for several decades before finally selling in the late 1970s. In 1976 the General Service Studios property was purchased by Glenn Spiedel and Ellison Miles through their Esquire Holding Company, and the site became known as the Hollywood General Studios. However, the partnership between the two men eventually dissolved after the company incurred an operating loss of nearly \$500,000 in just ten months. Glenn Spiedel left the company, and the studio was sold to director Francis Ford Coppola, who sought to renovate the property as the headquarters for his American Zoetrope Studios. Coppola's ambitious plans were cut short when financial difficulties forced the studio to the edge of bankruptcy. Coppola eventually sold the property to Canadian real estate developer Jack Singer in 1984, who embarked on a series of extensive renovations to update the property and its facilities, which were renamed Hollywood Center Studios. In 2017, the studio was sold to Hudson Pacific Properties and renamed Sunset Las Palmas Studios.

Developments in Support Services

Studio directories reveal that geographic concentrations of production facilities which had developed in the 1910s, including Edendale, East Hollywood, Downtown Los Angeles, West Los Angeles, and Hollywood, all contained sufficient demand for ancillary services to locate in their respective areas. Many of the earliest support operations were developed near the initial hubs of studio activity in Edendale and Downtown. However, as production migrated westward to Hollywood in the 1920s, it appears that associated operations were sometimes slow to follow. Technological support services related to film manufacturing, processing, and printing were the first support facilities to be established in Hollywood. Other services related to props, costumes, and scenery continued to operate in Downtown. It is likely that these operations were originally associated with the legitimate theater, and had merely expanded their existing business to include the motion picture trade. As a result, while some businesses appear to have either relocated to Hollywood or opened additional locations there, their continued operation in Downtown cannot be said to be indicative of film industry trends.

By the late 1920s, motion picture support services operated almost exclusively out of Hollywood. Support service operations outside of Hollywood were limited, though there were exceptions. Mitchell Camera Company, a prominent manufacturer of motion picture cameras, first established in Hollywood in 1919 before relocating to a purpose-built factory in what is now the city of West Hollywood in 1929. The ongoing development of film exchanges also moved away from Hollywood: in 1924 the Gore brothers, who were Los Angeles theater owners, announced plans to construct a dedicated film exchange building spanning the entire block at the southeast corner of Vermont Avenue and Washington Boulevard in South Los Angeles. The Film Exchange Building (1900 South Vermont Avenue, not extant), it was noted, was planned as "offices of various local film exchanges which require a certain type of building for their business."¹¹⁷ The goal was "to house all of the film exchanges in the city of Los Angeles on one side of the street and in one block and to provide each exchange with a ground floor store suitable for their requirements, with an alley in the rear to facilitate delivery."¹¹⁸ In concentrating

¹¹⁷ "Cinema Block Is Planned," *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1924.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

operations to one facility, the brothers claimed, they had secured assurances from insurance company engineers that they would be able to reduce fire insurance premiums for exchange operators to one-sixth of the going rate.¹¹⁹

Many support services which established operations during this period acquired existing industrial buildings which could be easily fitted for their use. Although many of these buildings were modest utilitarian structures, some buildings were designed in popular architectural styles of the period. One particularly notable example is the building acquired by Mole-Richardson, a technical lighting manufacturer, at 932 North La Brea Avenue (not extant). Originally designed in 1930 by prominent architects Morgan, Walls & Clements for the Moderncraft Laundry Company, the building was subsequently purchased by Mole Richardson and later became known as the Studio Depot.

Developments in the Radio Broadcasting Industry

Development of Early Radio Broadcasting

Several radio stations were established in Los Angeles in the early years of the 1920s, before Hollywood became a national radio center. The most prominent of these stations were KNX, KFI, KHJ, and KFWB.

KNX was first developed in 1919 when Fred Christian, an ex-Marconi shipboard wireless operator, established a five-watt transmitter in his Hollywood home. Christian was initially granted the call sign 6ADZ. Christian began broadcasting on September 10, 1920, playing recorded music borrowed from area record stores in exchange for on-air acknowledgements. Broadcasting from his “studio” – originally a back bedroom of his home near Hollywood Boulevard and Normandie Avenue – Christian became the city’s first disc jockey. The station changed both frequencies and call signs several times before launching as KNX in May 1922. In 1924, KNX commenced regular broadcasting from the Studebaker Sales Building at 6116 Hollywood Boulevard (not extant). In 1929, KNX became a 5,000-watt station, and in 1932 it was boosted to 10,000 watts under the ownership of the Western Broadcasting Company, which broadcast from the Paramount lot on Marathon Street in Hollywood. Another power jump to



*KNX, c. 1935. The structure has since been largely demolished; only the façade remains intact.
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

25,000 watts came in 1933 when KNX moved its studios to the Otto K. Oleson Building at Vine Street and Selma Avenue. In 1935 KNX moved to a new building at 5939 Sunset Boulevard (primary façade extant).

In 1922, two notable developments implemented by the United States Department of Commerce spurred the expansion of the radio industry in Southern California. First, the department divided the United States into three broadcast regions, and Los Angeles became the principal broadcasting center in the West.¹²⁰ Second, the department also began issuing commercial broadcasting licenses, and a number of additional stations were soon established in Los Angeles. Along with KNX, two other prominent stations launched that same year: KFI, owned by Earle C. Anthony and KHJ, owned by C. R. Kierulff & Company. Several years later, another notable station was established with the launch of KFWB. KFWB was launched in 1925 when Warner Brothers established an onsite radio station at their film studio on Sunset Boulevard. The studio viewed KFWB as a powerful means of promoting their films:

Hollywood's awareness of radio's potential as a medium for film publicity grew rapidly in the late 1920s, and Warner Brothers led the way. Sam Warner, whose interest in radio's technological strides put him in contact with Western Electric's regional manager Nathan Levinson, purchased Western Electric radio transmitting apparatus and set up station KFWB...in March of 1925. Warner Brothers used this station to promote the current Warner Brother line-up of films and stars...¹²¹

Harry Warner had proposed that the entire motion picture industry set up radio stations in 1925. Warner Brothers was apparently so pleased with KFWB that it established a second station in New York City in 1926, and organized a cross-country tour with a portable transmitting device later that year.

These four stations – and, in particular, KNX and KFWB – served as the precursor to the subsequent development of Hollywood as a nexus of radio broadcasting activity. The foundation was laid for the industry's growth in Hollywood in 1926 with the creation of the network system. Using telephone lines under a contract with the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T), two new radio networks were created that year to link stations across the country. The first network to form was the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) founded by the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) in 1926. It was soon joined by the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) network, which was formed in 1927. A third, smaller national network, the Mutual Network, was established in 1934, joining NBC and CBS. The American Broadcasting Company (ABC) was established in 1944 as the result of an antitrust suit against NBC.

Hollywood stations quickly joined the developing networks. KFI joined the NBC network in 1927 and KHJ joined CBS in 1929. In 1933, KFI and KECA were established as NBC Red and Blue network affiliates at the RKO stages at Melrose and Gower, and in 1936, the Mutual network contracted with local station

¹²⁰ Gregory Paul Williams, *The Story of Hollywood: An Illustrated History* (BL Press, LLC, 2005), 245.

¹²¹ Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 33-34.

KHJ, which had previously been affiliated with CBS; CBS in turn made local station KNX an affiliate. KNX was the first CBS affiliate in Southern California. KFI, also a part of a national radio broadcasting company, was the first station to broadcast from the Hollywood Bowl, and became part of NBC's Red Network in 1927.¹²² Now, all three national networks had established their presence in Los Angeles.

Although Warner Brothers' radio station KFWB did not join a network, it was still a major player in the industry, promoting young film stars and developing new radio talent. One element of the company's strategy was to broadcast radio programs from movie theaters and invite the public free of charge. One of the locations Warner Brothers used for such radio broadcasts was the Warner Brothers Hollywood Theater at 6423 Hollywood Boulevard (Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 572),¹²³ which was completed in 1928 and located just over a mile away from the station's headquarters. In 1929, Warner Brothers installed radio towers on the roof of the building, and it appears that KFWB broadcast from both its original location as well as the theater throughout the 1930s.

The Golden Age of Radio

After the "disorganized experimentation" of the early days, by the late 1920s the radio business was evolving into a "thriving entertainment industry controlled by some of the largest and most powerful corporations in America."¹²⁴ It is this period which is generally recognized as the "Golden Age" of radio broadcasting. Indeed, radio developed as a major medium of the entertainment industry after 1927, and radio became an important part of daily American life. After the stock market crash of 1929, the nation's radio business not only survived, but increased its revenue as newspapers folded.¹²⁵ President Roosevelt's weekly "Fireside Chats," which first aired in 1933, gave increased importance to radio broadcasting. News, weather reports, and concerts became radio staples in the 1930s, and airwaves were also used for police bulletins, college instruction, airport information, and ship-to-shore-communication. In the 1930s, at least ten radio stations were broadcasting in Los Angeles: KMTR (broadcast at 570 kc.); KFI (broadcast at 640 kc.); KEHE (broadcast at 780 kc.); KHJ (broadcast at 900 kc.); KFWB (broadcast at 950 kc.); KFVD (broadcast at 1000 kc.); KNX (broadcast at 1050 kc.); KRKD and KGER (broadcast at 1360 kc.); and KECA (broadcast at 1430 kc.).¹²⁶

Despite the growing presence of radio in Los Angeles, the establishment of Hollywood as a national radio center did not truly take hold until 1937, as the cost of producing and broadcasting radio programs directly from Hollywood was simply too high. Prior to 1937, AT&T, which controlled the phone lines responsible for the networking of radio stations, had a fee structure which effectively charged West Coast radio studios double the cost East Coast studios paid for transmission. After a series of high-level

¹²² Leonard Pitt and Dale Pitt, "Radio Broadcasting, History Of," in *Los Angeles: A to Z: An Encyclopedia of the City and County* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 414-415.

¹²³ The Warner Brothers Theater is also a contributor to the Hollywood Boulevard Commercial and Entertainment Historic District, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

¹²⁴ Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 33.

¹²⁵ Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 248.

¹²⁶ Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration, "Los Angeles: Radio," *California in the 1930s: The WPA Guide to the Golden State*, 1939 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 207.

negotiations between AT&T and the new Federal Communications Commission, AT&T agreed to change its fee structure. The result was lower rates for transmission of radio programs originating on the West Coast. With the change in the rate system, the big networks began plans to build studios in Hollywood. As radio gained prominence, it began to draw entertainment talent from the theater and the movies, and the radio and motion picture industries became increasingly intertwined. Access to well-known film talent was important to the success of early radio programming, and at the same time movie studio heads pursued the possible promotional opportunities that radio provided for the film industry, including promoting and exhibiting film talent on the radio. As radio began developing its own stars, the studios also produced a series of films featuring radio talent.

Established stars of the theatre began to recognize the tremendous power of radio and were gradually moving over into the new medium. At first legitimate theatre actors and Hollywood stars had frowned upon radio as beneath their dignity, but as the number of radio receivers in the United States increased into the millions, these very same performers changed their views.¹²⁷

The attitudes of the stars were not the only objections to be overcome, however. Film exhibitors, who had feared audiences would stay home rather than attend the movies, were stridently opposed to film stars making radio appearances. After a brief period of prohibiting film stars from the radio, Hollywood studios soon recognized the power of the medium and ignored the exhibitors' protests. Ultimately, it was the advertising agencies – "radio's true owners"¹²⁸ – that successfully bridged the divide between the radio and film industries. Variety shows and radio plays such as the *Lux Radio Theater*, sponsored by advertisers and hosted by a cavalcade of Hollywood stars, rose to prominence in the mid- to late 1930s and provided a vehicle for promotion from every angle.

World War II effectively ended the golden age of radio broadcasting. During the war, the ban on all non-essential electronic manufacturing resulted in a 50% decrease in the sale of radios from 1941 to 1943. After the war, radio's appeal was further eclipsed with the growing popularity of television. By 1948, radio profits continued to decline as television lured away advertisers, and eventually local radio stations around the country began to refuse to renew their network affiliations, bringing an end to the once-powerful network system.

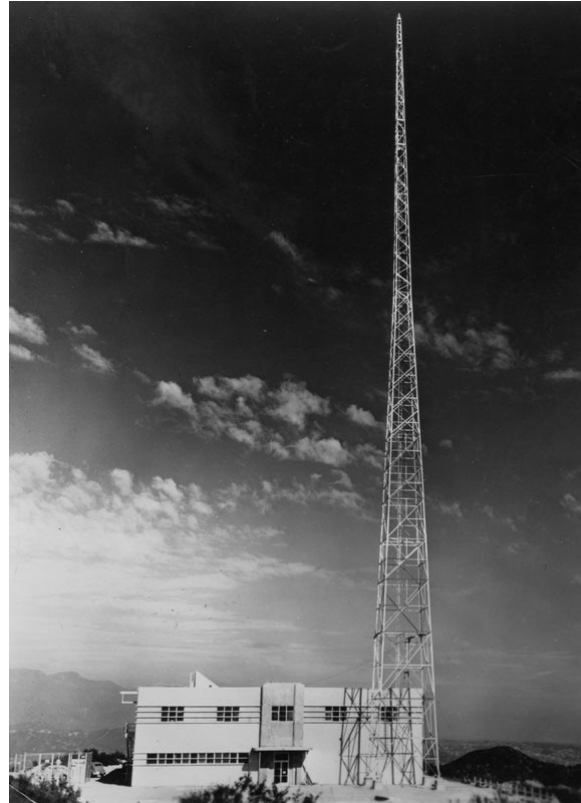
¹²⁷ Irving Settel, *A Pictorial History of Radio* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1960), 75.

¹²⁸ Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 248.

Developments in the Television Broadcasting Industry

Television arrived in Hollywood in 1927, when Los Angeles inventor Philo T. Farnsworth developed the first electronic television system in his home laboratory on New Hampshire Street in East Hollywood.¹²⁹ Don Lee, a Cadillac dealer who also helped pioneer the radio broadcast industry in Los Angeles, applied for a construction permit for the first television station on the West Coast in 1930.¹³⁰ Lee engaged the services of 24-year-old Harry R. Lubcke, an electrical engineer who had worked with television inventor Philo T. Farnsworth, and gave him the title of Director of Television of the Don Lee Broadcasting Company.¹³¹ In December 1931, W6XAO-TV went on the air from the eighth-floor transmitter at the Don Lee Broadcasting System headquarters, at Seventh and Bixel Streets (1076 West Seventh Street, not extant), atop Lee's Cadillac dealership.¹³² Lee aired an hour of programming per day, which consisted mainly of filmed action sequences and closeups of movie stars.¹³³ The station eventually built a small studio on the second floor so it could use performers, and broadcast poetry readings set to music.¹³⁴

The 1930s marked a series of firsts for the television industry in Los Angeles: the first film ever shown on television, *The Crooked Circle* starring Zasu Pitts, was aired in 1933, and the first soap opera, *Vine Street*, was broadcast in 1938.¹³⁵ Soon, Lee's television operations required more studio space, and in 1939 Don Lee Broadcasting purchased a 20-acre site atop Mount Cahuenga in the Hollywood Hills and erected a studio and transmitter, which were completed in 1940 (3800 West Mt. Lee Drive). Lee – who died in 1934 – and his early efforts were commemorated when Mount Cahuenga was renamed Mount Lee in his honor.¹³⁶



*Transmitter antenna and station building at Mount Cahuenga for Don Lee's W6XAO, circa 1938.
(waterandpower.org)*

¹²⁹ Joel Tator et al., *Los Angeles Television* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 8.

¹³⁰ "Early Television Stations: W6XAO/KTSL/KNXT," Early Television Museum, accessed December 2016, <http://www.earlytelevision.org/w6xao.html>.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Tator et al., *Los Angeles Television*, 9.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Developments in the Sound Recording Industry

With the advent of talking film production in the 1920s, major music publishers found a lucrative new outlet; it was now possible to market individual songs from films through three different mediums: phonograph records, sheet music, and radio broadcasts.¹³⁷ The ability to promote and hear music across a variety of different mediums created a successful symbiotic relationship between the three industries.

This relationship continued throughout the 1930s, during the Golden Age of radio broadcasting. Radio stations often hired full orchestras to accompany their broadcasts, and eventually those ensembles became the focal point of the show. At the same time, live music was becoming a key feature of Hollywood nightlife. The Earl Carroll Theatre (6230 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 1136) and Florentine Gardens (5951 Hollywood Boulevard), both opened in 1938 and featured dinner shows with musical entertainment. Upscale Hollywood hotels had rooms with a jazz or blues singer and a backup band.¹³⁸ The Palladium (6215 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 1130 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places), opened in 1940 and has a kidney-shaped dance floor, featured the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra on opening night.

Entertainment Industry Development During World War II

The United States' entry into World War II followed the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Wartime austerity had a dramatic impact on the landscape of Los Angeles. Residential construction was largely halted for the duration of the war, and existing businesses and manufacturing operations were converted for the production and distribution of materials essential to the war effort. Motion picture production was curtailed by travel restrictions, materials shortages, and blackout regulations, and the industry was compelled to economize.

Since Los Angeles served as a major point of departure for combat in the Pacific, Hollywood became a hub of entertainment and tourism for GIs passing through town before leaving for the battlefield.¹³⁹ Area hotels were booked solid, and the United Servicemen's Organization (USO) opened three Hollywood outposts in 1941. The famed Hollywood Canteen also opened in 1941 at 1451 North Cahuenga Boulevard, offering visiting servicemen an opportunity to be served by their favorite film stars. With travel during wartime restricted to essential business only, visits from servicemen actually saved many Hollywood nightspots from going under during the war.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Spring, "Pop Go the Warner Bros."

¹³⁸ Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 264.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 270.

Developments in the Motion Picture Industry

Movie theaters provided an inexpensive escape from the struggle of economic hardship. Film attendance grew during World War II as films proved the perfect vehicle to boost civilian morale and cheered the Allied Forces to victory. The motion picture companies of the Studio Era hit their peak of profitability in 1946, when the five major studios posted profits that would not be matched again (in real dollar terms) until the 1970s.¹⁴¹ By this time, however, the Big Eight's industry dominance had already begun to falter. There were several factors which accounted for the studios' weakening grasp. In the late 1940s, the major studios were impacted by the House Un-American Activities Committee investigating questionable loyalties among the film community, which created divisions within the industry. Additionally, by the end of the decade, the Big Eight studios found themselves in a tenuous legal position. The studios had been under investigation by the Federal Trade Commission for antitrust violations since 1921. In late 1940, a consent decree had ended the government's antitrust suit against all the major studios. The decision allowed movie studios to retain their theater chains in exchange for a limitation on the block booking of films.¹⁴² The decision also marked the beginning of the end of the Big Five's fully-integrated structure. In 1948, the five major studios were ordered to divest themselves of their theater chains after the United States Supreme Court ruled that the studios' continued ownership of theaters was in violation of federal antitrust laws.¹⁴³ RKO was the first company to divest itself of its theaters; anticipating the impact of further litigation on company finances, Paramount soon followed suit. The other three majors – Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Warner Brothers – refused to comply with the divestiture, until a Federal Statutory Court decision the following year forced their hands. The decision broke up the vertically-integrated business model that had defined the operation of the five major studios and signaled the end of the Major Studio Era.

At the same time, the widespread availability of television had already begun to threaten the studios' monopoly on visual entertainment. With the advent of television, movie audiences decreased dramatically, forcing the motion picture studios to downsize substantially. To compete, the studios focused their efforts on making films as unlike television as possible, experimenting with wide-screen formats, improved sound systems and 3-D.¹⁴⁴

Developments in Support Services

Operations in Hollywood continued to flourish throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s. Support facilities continued to play an important role in the motion picture industry after the collapse of the vertically-integrated studio system following World War II. Many internal support services were the first to be eliminated as the major studios struggled to cut costs, creating a greater demand for independent

¹⁴¹ Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 79.

¹⁴² J. A. Aberdeen, "Part 3: The Consent Decree of 1940," *The Independent Producers and the Paramount Case, 1938-1949*, Hollywood Renegades Archive, accessed December 2016, http://www.cobbles.com/simpp_archive/paramountcase_3consent1940.htm.

¹⁴³ Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 79.

¹⁴⁴ Mordden, *The Hollywood Studios*, 370.

services in the area. Additionally, as the process of filmmaking diversified and studios ceded control over various aspects of film production in later years, these facilities proved to be a valuable resource for a growing number of increasingly independent filmmakers, a trend which continues to the present day.

Developments in the Television Broadcasting Industry

At the time of Don Lee's first broadcasts, there were only five television sets in the city.¹⁴⁵ Few people then grasped the power and influence which television as a medium would eventually wield. One of the earliest adopters of the form was, perhaps surprisingly, Paramount Pictures. Realizing the potential competition that television might pose for motion pictures, in 1939 Paramount filed permits to construct an experimental television station, W6XYZ-TV, next to their studio lot at Melrose and Bronson. However, it is unclear if a purpose-built studio was constructed at this time, as W6XYZ-TV did not begin broadcasting until 1942. In 1947 the station was converted to a commercial station named KTLA and became the first such commercial television station west of Chicago. KTLA initially operated out of an existing Paramount facility at 721 North Bronson Avenue, which was demolished in the 1990s.

Developments in the Sound Recording Industry

Live musical acts and orchestras which played at local venues in the late 1930s and early 1940s received widespread publicity, and soon big band music became a radio programming staple as well. Live orchestras led by bandleaders like Tommy Dorsey, Stan Kenton, and Ray Anthony were broadcast coast to coast by CBS from venues near CBS Columbia Square, including the Hollywood Palladium and the Earl Carroll Theater. Other musical acts including Irving Berlin and Bing Crosby also broadcast concerts directly from CBS Columbia Square (6121 Sunset Boulevard, City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 947).



*Columbia Square, shown here in 1948.
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The growing trend of broadcasting musical performances brought increased attention to singers, musicians, and bandleaders, who often became celebrities in their own right. Record company executives soon came calling, eager to capitalize on the already-established relationship between the radio and recording industries.

¹⁴⁵ Tator et al., *Los Angeles Television*, 9.

Record companies arrived from New York. Columbia, Decca, and Dot Records opened West Coast branches on Vine Street. Columbia signed Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington. Decca had Bing Crosby, Guy Lombardo, and the Mills Brothers. Many of the companies kept their recording studios at 7000 Santa Monica Boulevard near La Brea Avenue.¹⁴⁶

By 1942, music accounted for seventy-five percent of radio airtime.¹⁴⁷ That same year, Capitol Records was founded in Hollywood by Glen Wallichs and songwriters Johnny Mercer and Buddy DeSylva. From the start, Capitol strayed from typical recording company behavior by cooperating fully with radio disc jockeys, providing them with sample records of each release.¹⁴⁸ Once a record-manufacturing ban was enacted during World War II, the company kept itself afloat with performances and broadcasts.¹⁴⁹ In the years following the war, however, the industry's presence in Los Angeles began to evolve.

Songwriters filled offices along Selma and Argyle Avenues, making the intersection a West Coast Tin Pan Alley. In the Hollywood Recreation Center, across from NBC on Vine Street, Irving Berlin and Sammy Cahn maintained Hollywood offices. Oscar Levant and fellow RKO songwriters preferred to work ringside at the Legion Stadium.

One enterprising composer, L. Wolfe Gilbert in the Cinemart Building, headed ASCAP [American Society for Composers, Authors and Publishers], charging composer royalties for stations playing music over the air. "Wolfe" led a formidable organization that soon found a rival, BMI, located on Selma Avenue.¹⁵⁰

The identification of popular songs with mainstream artists increased sales of those songs and promoted the artists associated with them. Licensing agencies like the ASCAP and the MPPA (Music Publishers Protective Association) ensured that users paid a licensing fee for both performances and recorded music.

¹⁴⁶ Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 266.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 267.

¹⁴⁸ Torrence, *Hollywood: The First 100 Years*, 225.

¹⁴⁹ Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 267.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Entertainment Industry Development in the Postwar Era

By the 1950s, motion picture operations began to relocate to other areas, and the major industry in Hollywood shifted to tourism. During the late 1950s the famous Capitol Records Building was constructed at 1750 North Vine Street (Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 857) and the Hollywood Walk of Fame (Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 194) was created on Hollywood Boulevard as a tribute to actors, directors, and other contributors to the entertainment industry.¹⁵¹

Developments in Support Services

Many of the support services which had originally been established for the motion picture industry continued to operate following the film community's exodus from Hollywood in the second half of the 20th century. Indeed, subsequent entertainment industries established in Hollywood benefitted from the existing network of support services. While the particular needs of each industry differed, the fact that Hollywood had emerged as the nexus of sound technology research and development in the early days of the film industry meant that other industries could benefit from highly-skilled and experienced technicians who continued to work locally. This is evidenced by the fact that the development of the recording industry in Hollywood was spurred in part by the appeal of existing high-quality support services.¹⁵² Other production-related services, such as costuming, props, and scenery construction, were also able to continue operating because many existing studio facilities were converted for television production, creating a distinct need for similar services.

Developments in Television Broadcasting

The manufacturing demands of World War II delayed the widespread popularity of television; by 1946, it was estimated that there were only 400 television sets in the Los Angeles area.¹⁵³ However, advances in technology and manufacturing, as well as the postwar consumerism boom, contributed to the explosive growth of the television industry in the years following the war.

This period of industry growth was inaugurated in June 1946, when the FCC held hearings in Los Angeles to consider applicants for commercial television stations. There were eight applicants for the seven commercial channels allocated to Los Angeles. The applicant pool included experimental stations owned by Television Productions Inc., a subsidiary of Paramount Pictures; the Don Lee Broadcasting System; American Broadcasting Company (ABC); the National Broadcasting Company (NBC); Earle C. Anthony; Dorothy Schiff; and the Times-Mirror Corporation. Another applicant, the Hughes Tool Company, later withdrew its application. All seven were granted licenses as well as construction permits. Paramount was the first to begin commercial broadcasting, with the launch of KTLA in 1947. The six other initial

¹⁵¹ Capitol Records and the Hollywood Walk of Fame are also located within the National Register Hollywood Boulevard Commercial and Entertainment District. The Walk of Fame is located on Hollywood Boulevard between North Gower Street and North La Brea Avenue and on Vine Street between Sunset Boulevard and Yucca Street.

¹⁵² Torrence, *Hollywood: The First 100 Years*, 255.

¹⁵³ Tator et al., *Los Angeles Television*, 11.

stations soon followed, launching in 1948 and 1949 following the completion of their facilities. In addition to KTLA, these stations included KTSN, KLAC, KFI, KTTV, KNBH, and KECA.

KTLA

Paramount had been involved in television since 1939 when it began experimental television station W6XYZ. In 1947, W6XYZ changed its name to KTLA and became the first commercial television station west of Chicago. At first, KTLA was broadcast from the Paramount lot on Melrose Avenue, from a purpose-built television studio adjacent to the company's film studio. Paramount subsequently acquired the former Warner Brothers plant and relocated KTLA's operations there. According to veteran news reporter Stan Chambers, who has worked for KTLA since December 1947, the KFWB radio towers were moved in 1954. The tower on the east side of the Administration Building was moved to 5800 Sunset Boulevard. The tower on the west side was dismantled and removed from the site.

In its new location, the old radio tower was put to new use. No longer useful as an antenna for transmitting radio signals, the tower was transformed into a sign for the new television station. Just as the letters KFWB were initially attached to the tower, the letters KTLA and the number "5" were added to the tower. Separated from the other tower and placed at the corner of the lot, the tower assumed the role of a marker of the television station's lot and an informal monument to the station's importance. Over time, the tower has become a well-known symbol of the television station on Sunset Boulevard.

After owning the station from its inception in 1947, Paramount sold its license and television facilities to Golden West Broadcasters in 1964. Three years later, Paramount sold the entire site to Golden West. The site changed hands again in 1982 when Golden West sold it to Kohlberg, Kravis, Roberts, and Company, an investment banking firm. In 1985, the Tribune Company (the current owners) assumed control of the station and the site.

KTSN

KTSN, the second station to launch, had its origins in Don Lee's experimental station, W6XAO, which had first aired in 1931. When Mutual/Don Lee Broadcasting was granted the second commercial license, the station's call letters were changed to KTSN. To house the company's newly-licensed operations, ground was broken in 1947 on a new studio facility at 1313 North Vine Street, which was billed as the first plant built for television.¹⁵⁴ The 118,000-square-foot building, constructed at a cost of three million dollars, featured four large audience studios as well as smaller facilities for radio.¹⁵⁵ The facility opened in 1948; there, KTSN introduced one of its highest-rated and longest-running television programs, *Queen for a Day*, which was hosted by Jack Bailey.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

After 1949, Channel 2 – the channel on which KTSL was broadcast – was purchased by CBS. At the time William S. Paley, head of CBS, wanted all of the network’s television stations to be on a Channel 2, believing that viewers who turned on their sets would always start there.¹⁵⁶ At that time, KTSL became a CBS-affiliated station and its call sign was changed to KNXT.

KLAC

The third station to launch was KLAC, which first aired in September 1948. The station shared space with its sister radio station, which also used the call letters KLAC, in a hacienda-themed building near Cahuenga and Santa Monica Boulevards (1000 North Cahuenga Boulevard; largely demolished).¹⁵⁷ It was there that Al Jarvis and station owner Don Fedderson pioneered talk shows with Betty White as Jarvis’s on-air partner.¹⁵⁸ The station’s call sign was later changed to KCOP after it was sold to Copley Press; KCOP moved from their original location on Cahuenga Boulevard to existing buildings at 915 North La Brea Avenue (not extant) in 1960.

KFI

The fourth station, KFI, was launched from the KEHE radio building at 141 North Vermont Avenue (not extant).¹⁵⁹ Earle C. Anthony, the exclusive local dealer for the Packard Automobile Company in Los Angeles, bought the station and built its studio across from Virgil Junior High School. Affiliated with NBC, KFI debuted with a three-and-a-half-hour variety show emceed by actor Adolphe Menjou.

In 1951, RKO acquired the station and the call letters were changed to KHJ-TV. Its sister radio station, KHJ-AM, was also owned by RKO and they both broadcast from the former NBC facility on Melrose. Between 1989 and 1995, the station was owned by the Walt Disney Company. At that time the call letters were changed to KCAL. In 1995, Disney purchased Capital Cities/ABC, which owned KABC. Because of FCC anti-trust restrictions, Disney was unable to own both stations, so they sold KCAL to Young Broadcasting. In 2002 KCAL was sold to Viacom, the parent company of CBS and Paramount, and moved into the CBS Columbia Square facility at 6121 Sunset Boulevard. The KCAL building is now part of the Paramount Pictures Main Lot, and is used as office space.



KHJ Radio, KCAL Television, 5515 W Melrose Ave (HistoricPlacesLA)

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 47.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 27. Only one building of the complex remains extant.

¹⁵⁸ Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 298.

¹⁵⁹ The discussion of the early history of KFI has been excerpted and adapted from Gregory Paul Williams, *The Story of Hollywood: An Illustrated History* (BL Press LLC, 2011), 289-290.

KTTV

The fifth station to launch, KTTV, began broadcasting on January 1, 1949 with a telecast of the Rose Parade. The Times-Mirror Corporation and CBS jointly owned the station, although each had applied for and received a license from the FCC. Originally, the Times-Mirror Corporation had partnered with the Pasadena Playhouse to supply entertainment programming, but the relationship fizzled before a station could be constructed. CBS attempted several times to buy out the Times-Mirror Corporation, but finally divested itself from KTTV and purchased KTSL. KTTV then became independent and is now a Fox affiliate.



*Toberman Storage Company Building,
1025 N Highland Ave (HistoricPlacesLA)*

The station's first home was on the top floor of the Bekins Storage building at the corner of Santa Monica and Highland (1025 North Highland Avenue); eventually, the station moved to the old NBC radio facilities in the former Capitol Records Building at 5515 Melrose Avenue, and then later relocated to the former Nassour Studios lot at the southeast corner of Sunset Boulevard and Van Ness Avenue.¹⁶⁰ In 1996, the station moved near the Fox network headquarters in West Los Angeles and vacated their longtime home at Nassour Studios, which was then known as Metromedia Square. The Los Angeles Unified School District subsequently purchased the property and the complex was later demolished.

KNBH

After NBC ended its affiliation with KFI and obtained its own commercial license, the company launched KNBH in 1949 as the sixth local television station in Los Angeles.¹⁶¹ The station broadcasted out of a studio in NBC's Radio City Studios at Sunset Boulevard and Vine Street. Although the television facility was small, NBC installed a half-million-dollar kinescope recording process. It was officially the first network television studio on the West Coast. (At the time network television, which consisted mostly of variety shows, broadcast list from New York.)

KNBH raided KTLA for Shirley Dinsdale and her ventriloquist dummy pal, Judy Splinters. Dinsdale and Splinters moved to KNBH for \$1,000 per week, which was \$750 more than Dinsdale had been earning at KTLA – making her one of the highest-paid performers on television. NBC also aired Groucho Marx's memorable show, *You Bet Your Life*, from this studio. The station's call letters were changed to KRCA in 1954 and then to KNBC in 1960. In 1962, the station relocated to the newly-built NBC Studios (also known then as NBC Color City) in the City of Burbank.

¹⁶⁰Tator et al., *Los Angeles Television*, 28.

¹⁶¹ The discussion of KNBH has been excerpted and adapted from Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 290.

KECA

Of the initial seven television stations allocated to Los Angeles, KECA was the last of these to go live, in September 1949.¹⁶² Originally located at the southeast corner of Highland and Sunset (1440 North Highland Avenue), the station was purchased from Earle C. Anthony by ABC that same year; the station's call letters represent Anthony's initials.¹⁶³ Looking for a home for their new West Coast flagship station, ABC president Leonard Goldenson inspected the abandoned Vitagraph/Warner Brothers lot on Prospect Avenue, which he described as "falling apart." ABC bought the crumbling studio (4151 Prospect Avenue) and invested in improvements and equipment. With twenty acres, the site gave ABC the largest network facility in Hollywood. The station remained at the facility, later known as Prospect Studios, until 2000. By then, Capital Cities/ABC had been purchased by the Walt Disney Company, which moved the station to Burbank.

Television history was made in 1951 with the premiere of *I Love Lucy*, the pioneering sitcom featuring Lucille Ball and her real-life husband, Desi Arnaz. The show, which ran for six seasons, employed for the first-time technologies which would eventually become commonplace within the genre. It was the first show to employ the three-camera method and was also the first show to be shot on 35mm film in front of a studio audience. The pilot was filmed at CBS Columbia Square, and when the show began regular filming production was relocated to General Service Studios (now known as the Sunset Las Palmas Studios), where the Arnazes and their company remained for two years. In 1953, the couple relocated operations to leased facilities at Motion Picture Center (now known as RED Studios) and dubbed the property "Desilu Studios," where filming remained for seasons three through six.



Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz on the set of I Love Lucy in 1952, at General Service Studios, now Sunset Las Palmas Studios. (Los Angeles Public Library)

¹⁶² Tator et al., *Los Angeles Television*, 8.

¹⁶³ The discussion of KECA has been excerpted and adapted from Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 292.

Entertainment Industry Development in the Late 20th Century

By the 1980s the Hollywood community was in a state of economic decline. The Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles established the Hollywood Redevelopment Project Area in 1986 to encourage development in the area. Among the goals of the agency were to revitalize Hollywood's historic core and preserve historically significant buildings.

At the dawn of the new millennium, Hollywood began to experience a resurgence that continues today. The establishment of the City's Adaptive Reuse ordinance greatly facilitated the reuse of under-utilized historic buildings into new housing. New, large-scale mixed-use projects – Hollywood & Highland (including the Kodak Theater), the Renaissance Hotel, the W Hotel at Hollywood and Vine – along with the Metro Red Line subway stations, have helped to revitalize Hollywood's streets and its economy, bringing with it an influx of new residents and tourists, higher rents, and new development pressures.

Developments in the Recording Industry

In the 1960s, the recording industry experienced a marked shift – and so did Hollywood – with the advent of rock 'n' roll music. As Bruce Torrence explains, "the area had enjoyed an active youth-oriented live music scene even before the rock era broke,"¹⁶⁴ thanks to influential clubs like Cosmo Alley and the Ashgrove, which hosted folk musicians, and Soul'd Out on Sunset Boulevard. However, Torrence observes, "when the Beatles came to the Colonies and rock plugged itself in, the Hollywood cultural scene became as electrified as Bob Dylan's guitar."¹⁶⁵

These young musical talents attracted fresh audiences to the recording industry. Bruce Torrence noted that "the record business, which had never pushed the sale of long-playing albums before, developed sophisticated new marketing techniques to exploit them. They told the students of America that if you loved your rock stars, you'd buy their LPs, and the youth of America obeyed."¹⁶⁶ The result, Torrence claims, put to rest any skepticism the music industry establishment may have had about embracing this fresh new sound. "Whatever the old-timers thought of rock's aesthetics and social content, it had the power to bring jobs, talent, and dollars to Hollywood."¹⁶⁷

David W. Lawhon, president of manufacturing for Capitol Records, and Robert Karp, the company's chief legal counsel, explain the evolution of Hollywood as the recording capital. "The recording business was not a very affluent business until the Sixties – until rock hit the scene. Most [older] artists did not make a living from making phonograph records...the record business was sort of a sideline," says Karp. But with the appearance of performers who did make most of their living as recording artists, the record companies wanted to be where their stars were.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Torrence, *Hollywood: The First 100 Years*, 252.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 253-255.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 252.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 255.

Since “the recording industry survives on its artists and its music, not on its factories and distribution systems,” Lawhon acknowledges, “they need to be where their talent is.”¹⁶⁹ At the time, the talent was in Southern California. Local groups, including the Byrds, Canned Heat, the Velvet Underground, Johnny Rivers, the Mamas and the Papas, the Standells, Tim Hardin, Frank Zappa, and the Doors, were becoming major players on the national music scene.¹⁷⁰

As a result, by the mid-1960s, record labels had increased their presence in Los Angeles significantly. Prior to the early 1960s only the four major record labels staffed offices on the West Coast, and the music industry was still largely dictated by the East Coast.¹⁷¹ Within a few years, however, “recorded music [had] formed the heart of Hollywood’s continuing entertainment business.”¹⁷²

The conditions in Hollywood were ideal for a renaissance. Film production companies, once the industrial mainstay of the area, had already begun to relocate their operations elsewhere or convert their existing facilities for other types of production. However, Hollywood still “had a name that was associated with entertainment,” and proved to be an attractive venue.¹⁷³ “Hollywood had new office space and was building more, both in Hollywood proper and along the Sunset Strip. Support services were excellent; Los Angeles had the best concentration of studio musicians and production engineers, and a wealth of legal talent to serve the record community.”¹⁷⁴

According to Bruce Torrence, the fact that few major recording companies, aside from Capitol Records, were Hollywood fixtures before 1964 actually helped spur the recording boom in the area.¹⁷⁵ Herb Alpert and Jerry Moss founded A&M Records in 1962, and in 1966 relocated their offices to Charlie Chaplin’s former film studio at 1416 North La Brea Avenue (Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 58). Independent record companies “lined Sunset. Liberty, Dot, Imperial, Crystal, and Specialty opened their doors to anyone auditioning original material.”¹⁷⁶ The Beatles, who at the time held all of the five top spots on the music charts, played the Hollywood Bowl in 1964. It was an exciting, dynamic time in the industry.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 252.

¹⁷¹ Jac Holzman and Gavan Davis, *Follow the Music: The Life and High Times of Elektra Records in the Great Years of American Pop Culture* (Santa Monica, CA: First Media Books, 1998), 57.

¹⁷² Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 320.

¹⁷³ Torrence, *Hollywood: The First 100 Years*, 255.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 252.

¹⁷⁶ Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 320.

As the decade went on, an “accelerating migration” of producers and record companies from New York, Nashville, Chicago, and Detroit arrived in Los Angeles.¹⁷⁷ As record companies began to establish themselves and gain power and influence, many began to expand and diversify their interests in the entertainment field – a move which, notes Bruce Torrence, “necessitated a move to Los Angeles.”¹⁷⁸ Labels like Motown Records, Liberty (later known as United Artists), and Elektra all established operations in Los Angeles. Motown operated out of offices at 6290 Sunset Boulevard before moving to the newly-built Sunset Media Tower (6255 Sunset Boulevard) in 1972. Liberty Custom Recorders established offices and a recording studio at 1556 North La Brea Avenue before relocating to 6920 Sunset Boulevard (not extant), and Elektra established an office and recording studio at 962 North La Cienega Boulevard. Musician Ray Charles also developed his own recording studio and office building at 2107 West Washington Boulevard (Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 776). Independent producers did as well, sparking the development of independent recording studios, a business model which operated in much the same way rental motion picture plants had decades earlier. Most of these producers were already well-known in their field for their expertise and innovation in sound recording technology; among the most notable was Milton Tasker “Bill” Putnam, a pioneering record producer from Chicago who had already won acclaim for his use of innovative recording technologies, including the first use of tape repeat, the first multiple voice recording, and the first use of artificial reverb; he often crafted his own equipment when what was available did not achieve the effect he was looking for. Many of Putnam’s clients -- who were finding work in the burgeoning postwar recording industry in Los Angeles -- encouraged him to open a recording facility on the West Coast.



Ray Charles Worldwide Offices and Studios, L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 776 (Office of Historic Resources)

Putnam was an early adopter; he relocated to Los Angeles in 1958 and established the Universal Recording Corporation that same year. He selected two properties for development: Abe “Bunny” Robyn’s Master Recorder facility was acquired (535 North Fairfax Avenue), and the property at 6050 Sunset was leased. United Recording opened at 6050 Sunset in 1959 and soon hosted such acts as Nat King Cole, Dean Martin, Bing Crosby, Johnny Mathis, Jan and Dean, The Righteous Brothers, Bobby Darin, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Ray Charles. One of the most notable clients to come through the door was Frank Sinatra, whom Bill Putnam met in 1960. Sinatra, whose contract with Capitol Records that same year, formed his own record label, Reprise, and set up the company’s offices upstairs at 6050 Sunset. Sinatra became so enamored with Putnam’s expertise that from 1960 to 1964, Putnam was on retainer

¹⁷⁷ Torrence, *Hollywood: The First 100 Years*, 256.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

to Sinatra to handle virtually all of his recording sessions. His recordings at United's Studio A were some of his most well-known, and included "That's Life," "Strangers in the Night," and "September of My Years."

Within two years of its opening United Recording at 6050 Sunset was operating at capacity. In 1961, United acquired a controlling interest in Western Recorders, Inc., which was located two buildings to the



Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys directs a take from the control room during the recording of "Pet Sounds" at Western Recorders in 1966. (Getty Images)

east at 6000 Sunset. The building was subsequently renovated and included three studio spaces designed by Bill Putnam: Studios One, Two, and Three. Both facilities now functioned as part of the United Recording complex; 6000 Sunset was distinguished from the original by the moniker "Western-United." Throughout the 1960s, the United facilities would play host to some of the decade's most iconic recordings, including The Mamas and the Papas' "California Dreamin'" and "Monday, Monday," as well as The Beach Boys' album *Pet Sounds*.

By the 1970s, "the music of the street people had translated into plush corporate offices up and down Sunset Boulevard."¹⁷⁹ Rock music had transformed both a generation, and an industry. The genre's popularity, however, led to a dramatic increase in bootleg recordings, which the recording industry claimed impacted their profits. In 1971, the United States Congress passed the Sound Recording Amendment to the 1909 Copyright Statute, making sound recordings worthy of copyright protection.

¹⁷⁹ Torrence, *Hollywood: The First 100 Years*, 256.

SUB-THEME: Origins of the Motion Picture Industry, 1908-1919

Development of Industrial Districts and “Motion Picture Zones”

As motion picture production increased in Los Angeles during the 1910s, swiftly becoming one of the city’s fastest-growing industries, the built environment associated with its operation did not find favor with the studios’ neighbors. Longtime Hollywood residents were quick to anger over the area’s initial “dilapidated, fly-by-night” studios established at Sunset and Gower, which presented Hollywood’s “first hint of urban blight.”¹⁸⁰ As early studios consisted of little more than a few utilitarian buildings and some open-air sets situated on large parcels of land, their appearance hardly coincided with the bucolic aesthetic in which the residents of Hollywood took such pride. The issue came to a head with the announcement of construction for a motion picture studio for actor Charlie Chaplin.¹⁸¹ Designed by Meyer & Holler for the Milwaukee Building Company, the studio was to be located at the corner of Sunset Boulevard and La Brea Avenue, directly south of Toberman’s Hollymar Home residential tract. Hollywood’s founding families, led by Toberman, struggled to coexist with “ugly stages next door to lovely homes.”¹⁸² The protesters were denied, however, when the City determined that the permit could not be rejected because “the studio would injure no one in its vicinity and that the claim that it was too near the Hollywood High School was without merit.”¹⁸³ Objections were quieted by the studio’s plan, which called for six buildings “arranged to give the appearance of an English village street” to front La Brea Avenue, with “the studio proper being set well back of these structures and out of view from passers-by.”¹⁸⁴

While the issue of the Chaplin studio was easily resolved, its construction became the catalyst for a larger debate over the physical development of motion picture plants in Hollywood. Gregory Paul Williams recalls what happened next:



*Charlie Chaplin Studio, L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 58
(Office of Historic Resources)*

¹⁸⁰ Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 100.

¹⁸¹ “Charlie Chaplin Will Build Own Film Plant,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 1917.

¹⁸² Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 100.

¹⁸³ “Will Go Ahead: Protests Against Motion-Picture Studio for Hollywood Denied,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1917.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

C. E. Toberman, still smarting over Chaplin's studio across from his Hollymar tract, proposed that all future studios confine themselves south of Santa Monica Boulevard, on land put together from Hancock holdings. Zoning ordinances easily won a consensus between voters who hoped to capitalize on the movies and those who wished them off the face of the earth. Voters not only banned future studios from the vicinity of Hollywood boulevard, but also lumber yards, planing mills, black smith shops, and the freight depot between Ivar Avenue and Cosmo Street. The area south of Santa Monica Boulevard, Seward to La Brea, became Hollywood's industrial area and home to many film laboratories.¹⁸⁵

In addition to the establishment of a specific industrial district, the debate propelled the City of Los Angeles to resolve the growing conflict between residents and studios. Studios found that their expansion and development plans were hampered by both a lack of available land as well as the objections of nearby homeowners; as many studios had been established on undeveloped land in the early days of Hollywood, these same facilities were now surrounded by growing residential neighborhoods. Residents were frustrated by the unsightly appearance of studios as well as the increased noise and disturbance caused by filming activities. As a result, in 1919 the City adopted a zoning ordinance which established twelve industrial districts or "zones" within the city where motion picture studios could be located. As *Holly Leaves*, a local Hollywood periodical, explained, "The demand for such an ordinance grew out of the location of certain studios in residence districts in Hollywood...the intent has been not to interfere with any established studio but to protect other residence districts from the intrusion of business enterprises of this kind."¹⁸⁶

In conference with film producers and other interested parties, twelve zones – which consisted of two large areas and ten small areas – were established around existing studios. Only in several instances were zone boundaries drawn without allowing for future expansion; rather, expansion was directed toward certain areas where land for this purpose was set aside. Seven of the twelve zones were located in Hollywood; one zone of the seven was dedicated to "take care of future organizations entering the film producing business."¹⁸⁷ It was these efforts that led, in large part, to the subsequent flourishing of the film industry in specific locations around Los Angeles and, in particular, to the concentration of production facilities that would be developed in Hollywood in the coming decades.

Development of Early Motion Picture Production Facilities

Many of the companies which followed had also leased or purchased production facilities in the Edendale neighborhood, and the area along Alessandro Street soon became the nexus of motion picture activity on the West Coast. Initially, film companies leased existing warehouses and storage facilities and filmed on outdoor platforms they called "stages." Occasionally these platforms were partially enclosed to provide for production in inclement weather. Several companies expanded on these somewhat

¹⁸⁵ Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 101-102.

¹⁸⁶ "Moving Picture Zones," *Holly Leaves*, February 15, 1919.

¹⁸⁷ "Picture Studio Zone Law Is Adopted," *Los Angeles Herald*, February 13, 1919.

primitive arrangements, building their own production facilities or “studios,” which were tailored specifically to the myriad needs of the filmmaking process. These early studios were often not much more than a ramshackle collection of utilitarian buildings set on open land and surrounded by a high wall or fence. Some of the more sophisticated plants might be distinguished by “signature” main buildings and/or entrance gates designed in the popular architectural styles of the day. Related industrial and commercial enterprises serving the motion picture industry – including film processing, sound technology and recording, make-up manufacturing, camera repair, property and costume storage – were quickly established adjacent to the early studio lots throughout Hollywood. Much of this development occurred within or immediately adjacent to previously established residential areas.

ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS: Origins of the Motion Picture Industry, 1908-1919**Summary Statement of Significance:**

Los Angeles’ identity is inextricably tied to its role in the entertainment industry. The well-known advertising slogan, “The Entertainment Capital of the World” reflects the city’s central place in the motion picture, radio, television, and recording/music industries. Properties evaluated under this sub-theme are significant in the areas of Entertainment and Industry for their association with the beginning of the motion picture industry in Los Angeles, and Hollywood in particular. They represent the earliest facilities used to house motion picture studios prior to the Major Studio Era that began in 1919. Extant examples are extremely rare.

Period of Significance:

1908 – 1919

Period of Significance Justification:

The period of significance begins in 1908, the origin of the motion picture industry in Los Angeles (though resources from this period associated with the entertainment industry are rare) and ends in 1919, the end of the early period in motion picture history and the beginning of the Major Studio Era.

Geographic Location:

Hollywood, Silver Lake, Echo Park

Area(s) of Significance:

Entertainment, Industry

Criteria:

NR: A

CR: 1

Local: 1

Associated Property Types:

Industrial – Early Motion Picture Studio¹⁸⁸
Other

¹⁸⁸ Some early motion picture operations may have been housed at non industrial sites or property types.

Property Type Description: Early motion picture studio developed between 1908 and 1919, prior to the Major Studio Era.

Property Type Significance: See Summary Statement of Significance above.

Eligibility Standards:

- Began operation as a motion picture studio between 1908 and 1919
- Must be proven to have played a significant role in the history and development of the television broadcasting industry
- Operated historically as a motion picture studio

**Character Defining/
Associative Features:**

- Retains most of the essential character defining features from the period of significance
- Was originally constructed as a motion picture studio or was converted from another use
- May be composed of a single building or multiple buildings on a single lot
- These facilities are substantially smaller than studio facilities from the subsequent Major Studio Era
- Typically located in already-established residential and commercial areas

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Feeling, and Association from the period of significance
- The rarity of the property type should be considered when assessing the impacts of alterations.
- Original use may have changed
- Adjacent buildings and land uses may have changed

SUB-THEME:

Motion Picture Industry: Major Studio Era – “The Big Eight,” 1919-1949

Development of Major Motion Picture Production Facilities

By the 1920s, the center of film production had moved west from the Edendale neighborhood into the Hollywood area. Universal, Warner Brothers, United Artists, Columbia, Fox, RKO, and Paramount were among those located in or near Hollywood.¹⁸⁹ As profits from feature-length silent films grew, the film corporations acquired substantial physical facilities. The studio lots of the 1920s and 1930s shared similar characteristics. Resembling industrial plants, they were usually several acres in size and were enclosed by walls or barriers to entry. Inside were enclosed stages and ancillary structures arranged for the most part in ill-defined patterns, due to the constantly changing needs of production. They included facilities for all aspects of movie production from writing to the building of sets to film production through editing and marketing. Several had additional acreage adjacent to the production complex; known as "backlots" these areas housed semi-permanent sets.

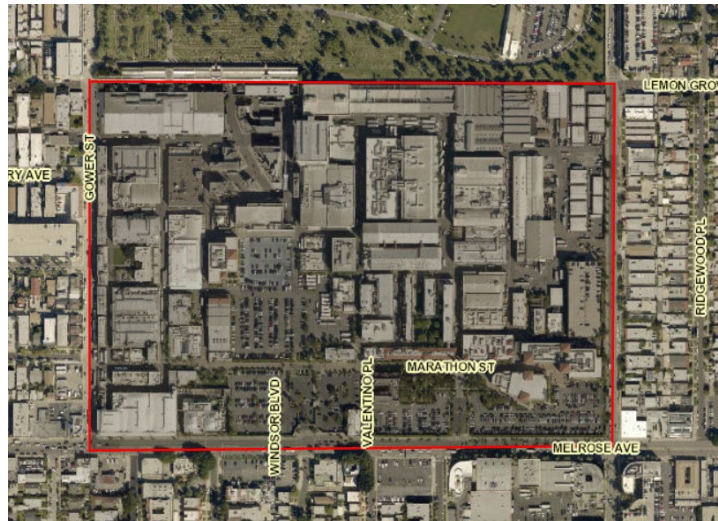
Major renovations took place on most studio lots beginning in 1928 following the advent of sound; each of the majors enhanced their existing plants or built elaborate facilities in the late 1920s. Sound pictures triggered renovations at Paramount, Columbia, MGM, and United Artists. Warner Brothers moved into and enlarged the First National lot in Burbank; Fox built Movietone City in West Los Angeles as the first studio built solely for the production of sound motion pictures.

Sound pictures required new technology for both producing films and their presentation in theaters. Every production facility needed to be soundproofed and fitted with recording equipment, and every theater in America had to be adapted for sound. Major investments were needed by the entire industry to keep its product viable. In this phase of studio development, the studios retrofitted and expanded facilities to accommodate the new technology. Physical plants became more organized. The stages formed the heart of the production area with set building, editing rooms, storage and other technical facilities located close by. Support spaces, offices, dressing rooms, make-up, costume, and art departments were concentrated in areas further removed from the production facilities. Permanent sets, or backlots, were located on the periphery.

Most of the major studios from the Major Studio Era continue to operate, although with considerably reduced physical plants. In some cases, the physical plant of a former major studio still exists, though now operated and owned by a different studio. Among the most intact physical studios are Twentieth Century-Fox, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Paramount, and Warner Brothers Studios. Universal Studios has the largest extant backlot in Hollywood.

¹⁸⁹ MGM, located in Culver City, completed the population of eight "major" studios. Culver City is outside of the City of Los Angeles and was not included in SurveyLA.

Motion picture studios from the Major Studio Era were largely designed as walled industrial compounds with only minimal orientation to the outside. Focused inward, the studio wall contained a collection of utilitarian buildings constructed largely for function and internal use. With the exception of outward-facing administration buildings and ceremonial gates, presentation to the world outside the studio was not considered advantageous. A closed work environment protected the intellectual property of the motion picture studio, and allowed multiple disciplines to work in proximity. Typically, the architectural style applied to a studio lot is not homogenous; buildings are designed in a variety of styles in combination with buildings that are more utilitarian in nature, reflecting the wide range of uses within the studio lot. There is often a hierarchy of primary and secondary streets; primary streets tend to be wider and have curbs and sidewalks, while secondary streets are typically more like alleys in function and appearance. The internal circulation and street pattern within the potential district is a significant character-defining feature of historic motion picture studio lots.



*Top: Paramount Studios, 5555 Melrose Avenue Gate;
Bottom Paramount Studios Aerial (HistoricPlacesLA)*

ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS: Motion Picture Industry: Major Studio Era – “The Big Eight,” 1919-1949

Summary Statement of Significance:

Los Angeles’ identity is inextricably tied to its role in the entertainment industry. The well-known advertising slogan, “The Entertainment Capital of the World” reflects the city’s central place in the motion picture, radio, television, and recording/music industries. Major motion picture studios are significant in the areas of Entertainment and Industry. The “Big Eight” represent the industry’s Major Studio Era and were characterized by their fully integrated business structures with production, distribution, and exhibition of films under full control of the studios.

SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Entertainment Industry/Industrial Properties Associated with the Entertainment Industry, 1908-1980

Period of Significance: 1919 – 1949

Period of Significance Justification: The period of significance begins in 1919, when the Major Studio Era was first established in Los Angeles, and ends in 1949, when the Major Studio Era ends with the landmark Supreme Court decision that major film corporations relinquish their theater holdings (consent decree).

Geographic Location: Hollywood, West Los Angeles

Area(s) of Significance: Entertainment, Industry

Criteria: NR: A CR: 1 Local: 1

Associated Property Types: Industrial – Major Motion Picture Studio

Property Type Description: Motion picture studio developed by one of the “Big Eight” during the Major Studio Era, 1919-1949. These were comprehensive facilities that accommodated all aspects of motion picture production. See also character defining features below.

Property Type Significance: See Summary Statement of Significance above.

Eligibility Standards:

- Began operation as a motion picture studio between 1919 and 1949
- One of the five “Big Eight” motion picture studios located in the city of Los Angeles
 - Fox Film Corp.: 10201 West Pico Boulevard
 - Paramount: 5555 Melrose Avenue
 - RKO: 780 North Gower Street
 - Warner Brothers: 5800 Sunset Boulevard
 - Columbia: 1438 North Gower Street

Character Defining/Associative Features:

- As a whole, retains most of the essential character defining features from the period of significance
- Composed of multiple building and structures on a large super block
- Perimeter defined by high walls, fences, and gates, with restricted access at secure entry points
- Perimeter, public-facing buildings may be designed in architectural styles of the period and may also be significant under themes within the “Architecture and Engineering” context

- Contains a variety of building types for various uses including offices, sound stages, construction facilities, prop storage
- May contain a “back lot” used for large sets and exterior filming

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Feeling, and Association
- The rarity of the type should be considered when assessing the impacts of alterations
- The original facility may have been expanded and altered over time, particularly in the 1920s to accommodate new sound technologies for talking pictures
- These properties may be difficult to observe from the public right-of-way due to perimeter walls, fences, and gates
- Original use may have changed
- Adjacent buildings and land uses may have changed

SUB-THEME: Motion Picture Industry: Independent Studios and Rental Plants, 1919-1980

Development of Independent Motion Picture Production Facilities

Although facilities for independent studios and rental plants were typically smaller and less complex than those facilities operated by the Big Eight, they shared many of the same characteristics. Motion picture studios from this period were largely designed as walled industrial compounds with only minimal orientation to the outside. Focused inward, the studio wall contained a collection of utilitarian buildings constructed largely for function and internal use. With the exception of outward-facing administration buildings and ceremonial gates, presentation to the world outside the studio was not considered advantageous. A closed work environment protected the intellectual property of the motion picture studio, and allowed multiple disciplines to work in proximity. Typically, the architectural style applied to a studio lot is not homogenous; buildings are designed in a variety of styles in combination with buildings that are more utilitarian in nature, reflecting the wide range of uses within the studio lot as well as the organic, piecemeal nature of development over time to suit individual tenants. Stages and ancillary structures are arranged for the most part in ill-defined patterns, due to the constantly changing needs of production. There is often a hierarchy of primary and secondary streets; primary streets tend to be wider and have curbs and sidewalks, while secondary streets are typically more like alleys in function and appearance. The internal circulation and street pattern within the potential district is a significant character-defining feature of historic motion picture studio lots. Several independent studios and rental plants had additional acreage adjacent to the production complex; known as "backlots," these areas housed semi-permanent sets.

Major renovations took place on most studio lots beginning in 1928 following the advent of sound, and these undertakings were not limited to the major players. Rental plants in particular were eager to develop technological enhancements attract more tenants and command higher prices. Sound pictures required new technology for both producing films and their presentation in theaters: every production facility needed to be soundproofed and fitted with recording equipment, and every theater in America had to be adapted for sound. Major investments were needed by the entire industry to keep its product viable. In this phase of studio development, the studios retrofitted and expanded facilities to accommodate the new technology. Physical plants became more organized. The stages formed the heart of the production area with set building, editing rooms, storage and other technical facilities located close by. Support spaces, offices, dressing rooms, make-up, costume, and art departments were concentrated in areas further removed from the production facilities. Permanent sets, or backlots, were located on the periphery.

SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Entertainment Industry/Industrial Properties Associated with the Entertainment Industry, 1908-1980



Some independent studios and rental facilities from this period continue to operate as production facilities, although physical plants have been reduced or converted for other production uses, such as the former Hollywood Studios (now Sunset Las Palmas Studios, 1040 North Las Palmas Avenue),



Top: Hollywood Center Studios Gate, 1040 N Las Palmas Ave; Bottom: Exterior view of Hollywood Center Studios building (HistoricPlacesLA)

ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS: Motion Picture Industry: Independent Studios and Rental Plants, 1919-1980

Summary Statement of Significance:

Los Angeles' identity is inextricably tied to its role in the entertainment industry. The well-known advertising slogan, "The Entertainment Capital of the World" reflects the city's central place in the motion picture, radio, television, and recording/music industries. The motion picture industry played, and continues to play, a significant role in the economic and cultural development of Los Angeles. Properties evaluated under this theme are significant in the areas of Entertainment and Industry. They encompass any film production plant that dates from the Major Studio Era or later, excluding the "Big Eight" studios. Although operational models were similar, the greatest distinction between the Big Eight studios and their independent counterparts was the size of their operations and distribution networks.

SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Entertainment Industry/Industrial Properties Associated with the Entertainment Industry, 1908-1980

Period of Significance: 1919 – 1980

Period of Significance Justification: The period of significance begins in 1919, when the Major Studio Era was first established in Los Angeles, and ends in 1980, the end date for SurveyLA. The end date may be extended over time.

Geographic Location: Hollywood, Studio City, Echo Park, Chatsworth, Central City

Area(s) of Significance: Entertainment, Industry, Ethnic Heritage¹⁹⁰

Criteria: NR: A CR: 1 Local: 1

Associated Property Type: Industrial – Motion Picture Studio

Property Type Description: Motion picture studio developed after 1919, but not one of the “Big Eight” motion picture studios. These studio facilities were smaller than their “Big Eight” counterparts and did not contain the same variety of property types. See also the character defining features below.

Property Type Significance: See Summary Statement of Significance above.

Eligibility Standards:

- Originally constructed as a motion picture studio
- Began operation as a motion picture studio after 1919
- Not one of the “Big Eight” motion picture studios
- Must be proven to have played a significant role in the history and development of the motion picture industry

Character Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character defining features from the period of significance
- Comprised of multiple buildings and structures on a single site
- Perimeter defined by high walls, fences, and gates, with restricted access at secure entry points
- Perimeter, public-facing buildings may be designed in architectural styles of the period and may also be significant under themes within the “Architecture and Engineering” context
- Contains a variety of building types for various uses including offices, sound stages, construction facilities, prop storage

¹⁹⁰ Associations of this subtheme with ethnic/cultural themes are not known at this time.

- For the National Register, properties associated with events that date from the last 50 years must possess exceptional importance

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Feeling, and Association from the period of significance
- Original use may have changed
- Adjacent buildings and land uses may have changed
- The original facility may have been expanded and altered over time to accommodate new sound technologies for talking pictures
- These properties may be difficult to observe from the public right-of-way due to perimeter walls, fences, and gates

SUB-THEME: Radio Broadcasting Industry, 1922-1945

Development of Radio Broadcasting Facilities

For a time, many early radio stations were broadcast from film studio lots using available sound stages, as was the case with KFWB. The first radio stations established in the early 1920s used large steel towers with call letters attached to transmit their broadcast signal. Their size and shape identify them as AM radio towers; all of the early radio stations broadcast in AM (amplitude modulation) during this period, as FM (frequency modulation) radio was not widely broadcast until after World War II. These early towers were located at the site of the broadcasting station and often came in pairs, situated on top of buildings or flanking the broadcasting station.

This location of radio towers at the site of broadcast is unique to this early period in radio history and reflects the limited technology of the time. By the late 1920s, towers no longer had to be located at the broadcast site, because telephone lines could be used to carry signals and towers could be relocated to more remote locations, like hilltops. Telephone lines were used to link stations into networks, a major technological development which made nationwide broadcasts and a national audience possible.



Mount Lee Radio Antenna, 3800 W Mt. Lee Drive (HistoricPlacesLA)

In the late 1930s, when national radio networks such as NBC and CBS began to establish operations in Los Angeles, the character of broadcasting facilities constructed during this period began to change. Both networks constructed expansive, prominent studio facilities near the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and Vine Street, an area which was quickly becoming a nexus for broadcasting activity in Hollywood. As historian Gregory Paul Williams observed, “Hollywood’s two radio centers made the district every bit a rival to New York for radio production.”¹⁹¹ CBS constructed its \$2 million studio known as Columbia Square at the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and Gower Street, and NBC built its headquarters (not extant) at the intersection of Sunset and Vine on the former site of the Paramount studio lot. Both of these facilities included broadcast studios that accommodated large orchestras, state-of-the-art control rooms, and audiences of 300 or more.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Williams, *The Story of Hollywood*, 257.

¹⁹² Torrence, *Hollywood: The First 100 Years*, 169.



RCA Victor radio broadcasting facility, 7000 W Santa Monica Blvd (HistoricPlacesLA)

The decline in radio broadcasting in the years following World War II, however, resulted in a number of changes to the built environment, including the demise of larger radio broadcast studios and towers. Larger studios were converted for television production or for use as offices, and some were demolished entirely to make room for new development.

ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS: Radio Broadcasting Industry, 1922-1945

Summary Statement of Significance:

Los Angeles' identity is inextricably tied to its role in the entertainment industry. The well-known advertising slogan, "The Entertainment Capital of the World" reflects the city's central place in the motion picture, radio, television, and recording/music industries. Resources evaluated under this theme are significant in the areas of Entertainment, Communications, and/or Industry for their association with the origins of the radio broadcasting industry in Los Angeles. Due to its leading role in the motion picture industry, Los Angeles (and specifically Hollywood) became a center for radio production in the early twentieth century. The introduction of widespread radio broadcasting in the 1920s marked a turning point in the development of popular media created for widespread consumption, and by the 1930s radio had become a prevailing form of mass communication as well as a popular and innovative medium for entertainment. Radio broadcasters in Los Angeles were able to capitalize on the city's burgeoning motion picture industry and create a distinctive interrelationship between film and radio that set Los Angeles radio programming apart from its competitors.

Period of Significance:

1922 – 1945

Period of Significance Justification:	The period of significance starts in 1922, when Los Angeles became the primary radio broadcasting center in the West and the first radio stations in Los Angeles were established (KFI, KNX, KHJ). It ends in 1945, when the advent of the television era lead to the decline of the radio industry.		
Geographic Location:	Citywide with concentrations in Downtown and Hollywood		
Area(s) of Significance:	Communications, Entertainment, Industry, Ethnic Heritage ¹⁹³		
Criteria:	NR: A	CR: 1	Local: 1
Associated Property Type #1:	Industrial – Radio Transmission Facility (Antenna)		
Property Type Description:	Radio antenna that began operation between 1922 and 1945. See also character defining features below.		
Property Type Significance:	See Summary Statement of Significance above.		

Eligibility Standards:

- Began operation between 1922 and 1945
- Was a radio transmission facility (antenna)
- Must be proven to have played a significant role in the history and development of the radio broadcasting industry

Character Defining/Associative Features:

- Self-supporting or cantilevered tower designed to support a radio broadcast antenna
- Located on the ground or on a building rooftop
- May be supported or anchored by stays or guys
- May be mounted on an insulating base
- Typically constructed of steel, but may also be constructed using reinforced concrete
- May have parallel or tapered sides
- Earliest examples were located on top of prominent buildings in urban areas where the broadcast facility was located
- Later examples were located in remote locations, such as local hilltops

¹⁹³ See also the Ethnic/Cultural themes of the Citywide Historic Context.

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Feeling, and Association from the period of significance

Associated Property Type #2: Industrial – Radio Station/Broadcasting Facility

Property Type Description: Radio broadcasting and production facility originally constructed to house radio production between 1922 and 1945.

Property Type Significance: A radio station/broadcasting facility is significant under this sub-theme if it was constructed specifically as a radio broadcast facility and was used for radio production for an extended period of time.

Eligibility Standards:

- Was constructed during the period of significance
- Originally constructed to house radio production
- In use as a radio broadcast and production facility for an extended period of time
- Must be proven to have played a significant role in the history and development of the radio broadcasting industry

Character Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character defining features from the period of significance
- May be composed of one large building or multiple smaller buildings designed to house office space and production facilities
- Some facilities may include accommodations for a live studio audience; those will be distinguishable by their size, and may also have associations with the television or motion picture industries
- May be located near major motion picture studios
- Often designed in architectural styles of the period and may also be significant under themes within the “Architecture and Engineering Context”

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Feeling, and Association from the period of significance
- May have been expanded or altered to accommodate changing technology and/or television production
- Original use may have changed
- Adjacent buildings and land uses may have changed

SUB-THEME: Television Broadcasting Industry, 1931-1980

Development of Television Broadcasting Facilities

Facilities associated with television broadcasting in Los Angeles were developed within a unique physical context. Unlike its industry predecessors of film and radio, television – both as an industry and as a technology – evolved as a natural extension of previous innovations. In contrast, early motion picture producers and radio broadcasters were compelled to construct purpose-built facilities where there literally once were none in order to address the specific functional needs of their business. The physical development of properties associated with these early operators reflect the simultaneous development of technologies and methods which came to define their respective industries.

As a later innovation, the television industry benefitted from construction techniques and production methods previously established and refined by its industry predecessors of film and radio, as well as the presence of existing facilities. These facilities could be readily applied, with some modification, to the construction of television broadcasting facilities. As a result, in the early days of television, it was hardly necessary to construct a purpose-built television plant, as early television broadcasting efforts were easily adapted to existing radio facilities and infrastructure.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, those stations affiliated with a major broadcasting network like ABC, NBC, or CBS, were often housed in converted facilities at the network's radio headquarters; it was only the independent stations or those owned by other, smaller networks which sometimes constructed new television production plants. Stations also relocated or moved between facilities as they were acquired or dropped from individual networks, and the facilities themselves often changed hands. However, over time, as the industry flourished and productions grew in size and scale, nearly every television station either relocated to larger existing facilities or built new plants specifically designed to accommodate the most up-to-date technologies for television production.

Conversion of Existing Production Facilities

Of the seven initial television stations launched in Los Angeles between 1947 and 1949, four were established in previously-existing facilities: KLAC, KTTV, KNBH, and KECA. Some existing movie studio plants, such as the Warner Sunset Studios (now KTLA), were converted for use in television production. In 1958, KTLA relocated to the old Warner Brothers lot on Sunset Boulevard, which Paramount had purchased in 1954. They continue to be housed in the building that was originally constructed for Vitaphone and then used by Looney Tunes. KCOP moved from their original location at 1000 North Cahuenga Boulevard to existing buildings at 915 North La Brea Avenue (not extant) in 1960.

None of the other older stations in Los Angeles are located in their original facilities; however, several still stand and would be significant in the history of television provided they retain their integrity from the period of significance. The others include: Don Lee Broadcast Studio in Hollywood (1313 North Vine Street) was home to KTSL (now KCBS) from 1947-1951 and home to California Community Television (later KCET)

¹⁹⁴ "Historic Resources Survey, Hollywood Redevelopment Project Area," 52.

from 1965-1971; CBS Television City in the Fairfax District (7800 Beverly Boulevard) remains the home of KCBS since 1952; the Old Warner Brothers Studios on Sunset Boulevard (5800 Sunset Boulevard) has been home to KTLA since 1958; and Prospect Studios (4151 Prospect Avenue) was home to KABC from 1949 until 2000.



CBS Television City, 7800 W Beverly Blvd (HistoricPlacesLA)

Construction of Purpose-Built Facilities

Purpose-built facilities were constructed in 1947-1949 for some of Los Angeles's seven initial radio stations, including KTLA, KTSN, and KFI. KTLA, owned by Paramount, was housed in a new studio constructed by Paramount adjacent to their existing film plant. KTSN and KFI, both owned by independent broadcasters, were established in newly-constructed facilities: KTSN at the Don Lee Playhouse at 1313 North Vine Street, and KFI at a new facility adjoining its sister radio station on Vermont Avenue (141 North Vermont Avenue, not extant).

The most prominent examples of dedicated construction, however, were developed in the early 1950s. These facilities are distinguished from their earlier counterparts in both size and scale as well as location. While most early television broadcasting facilities were established in Hollywood, by the early 1950s increased production demands required more space. As networks began to plan for larger dedicated facilities, they followed in the earlier footsteps of the film industry and began to shift their bases of operation to areas outside Hollywood. Their design reflects the evolving innovations of the television industry; new studios constructed by NBC and CBS both were developed specifically to accommodate the increased technological demands of color broadcasting.

This building activity was due, in part, to East Coast concerns: by the late 1950s New York television studios were considered antiquated and no longer adequate to meet the needs of current television production. As a result, major networks began relocating their primary operations to California. These efforts included CBS's significant investment in the construction of Television City, which was designed to address the latest physical and technological needs of television production.¹⁹⁵ The growing popularity of television prompted CBS to build "Television City" in the Beverly-Fairfax area, which opened for production in 1952, followed by the purchase of the CBS Studio Center at 4024 Radford Avenue in the Studio City neighborhood in 1967. NBC's "Color City" opened in 1955 in the City of Burbank.

¹⁹⁵ Jeff Greenfield, *Television: Prime Time, News, Sports* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980), 65.

ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS: Television Broadcasting Industry, 1931-1980

Summary Statement of Significance:	Los Angeles' identity is inextricably tied to its role in the entertainment industry. The well-known advertising slogan, "The Entertainment Capital of the World" reflects the city's central place in the motion picture, radio, television, and recording/music industries. Resources evaluated under this theme are significant in the areas of Communications, Entertainment, Industry, and/or Ethnic History. Due to its leading role in the motion picture industry, Los Angeles, and Hollywood in particular, became a national center for television production in the early twentieth century. A television studio is significant under this sub-theme if it was used primarily as a television broadcast and production facility for an extended period of time. This includes television studios that were originally constructed as radio facilities.		
Period of Significance:	1931 – 1980		
Period of Significance Justification:	The period of significance begins in 1931, when the first television station was established in Hollywood, and ends in 1980, the end date for SurveyLA. The end date may be extended over time.		
Geographic Location:	Hollywood (with a concentration on Sunset Boulevard), Wilshire (Beverly/Fairfax), Silver Lake		
Area(s) of Significance:	Communications, Entertainment, Industry, Ethnic History ¹⁹⁶		
Criteria:	NR: A	CR: 1	Local: 1
Associated Property Types:	Industrial – Television Station/Broadcasting Facility		
Property Type Description:	Television studio and broadcasting facility both purpose built or converted from other uses.		
Property Type Significance:	See Summary Statement of Significance above.		

¹⁹⁶ See also the Ethnic/Cultural themes of the Citywide Historic Context.

Eligibility Standards:

- Was constructed or used during the period of significance
- Used primarily as a television broadcast and production facility for an extended period of time
- Must be proven to have played a significant role in the history and development of the television broadcasting industry

Character Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character defining features from the period of significance
- May be composed of one large building or multiple smaller buildings designed to house office space and production facilities
- Some facilities may include accommodations for a live studio audience; those will be distinguishable by their size, and may also have associations with motion picture industry
- May be located near major motion picture studios
- Most significant facilities were constructed during the 1940s and 1950s
- May also be a significant under themes within the “Architecture and Engineering” context.
- Many of these sites are still in use as television broadcasting and production facilities, although some may have been converted to other uses
- For the National Register, properties associated with events that date from the last 50 years must possess exceptional importance

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Feeling, and Association from the period of significance
- Original use may have changed
- Adjacent buildings and land uses may have changed
- The original facility may have been altered or expanded over time to accommodate changing technologies.

SUB-THEME: Recording Industry, 1925-1980

Development of Sound Recording Facilities

Several different property types have been associated with the recording industry in Los Angeles throughout the 20th century. These include recording studios, corporate towers, and record pressing plants. Unlike other industries within the entertainment business, the physical plants associated with the recording industry were often dedicated to a single specific purpose. While the vertically-integrated motion picture studios met every production need under the umbrella of a single studio property, the functions of the record industry required separate and distinct facilities for both recording and production. Recordings were made in-house at a recording studio and then sent to an off-site pressing plant to be made into records. While major record companies would build both types of facilities for their own use, a variety of independent studios and plants were also constructed. Eventually, recording studios were included in prominent corporate towers, but pressing plants remained a separate operation. One example is the industrial building located at 960 N La Brea Avenue which operated as a record pressing plant for Brunswick Radio Corporation.

In the 1950s, space requirements for recording became more flexible because of new technology; many recording studios were located in buildings not originally constructed for that purpose. Sound labs for Sound City Studios, where notable artists including Nirvana, Fleetwood Mac, and Neil Young among others recorded their albums, were housed in buildings originally constructed to be used for office and warehouse spaces. In the mid-1950s and 1960s, however, record companies like Capitol Records and RCA began to erect large corporate headquarters in Hollywood (Capitol Records Building, 1750 North Vine Street; RCA, 6363 Sunset Boulevard). These combined the multiple functions of producing and distributing a record in a single facility. Perhaps the most prominent example of this evolution is Capitol Records. In 1942, Glenn Wallich and songwriters Buddy DeSylva and Johnny Mercer



*Brunswick Radio Corporation Record Press, 960 N La Brea Avenue
(HistoricPlacesLA)*



Sound City Studios, 15464 W Cabrito Road (HistoricPlacesLA)

formed the Capitol Records Company and established their offices on the second floor of the Music City building. By 1954, however, the new company needed larger quarters. Designed by Welton Beckett and Associates and opened in 1956, the 13-story Capitol Records tower at 1750 North Vine Street contained three studios constructed on layers of cork with shock-mounted reverberation chambers underneath and featured a roof beacon which signaled “H-O-L-L-Y-W-O-O-D” in Morse code.¹⁹⁷



*Capitol Records, 1750 N Vine Street,
L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 857
(Office of Historic Resources)*

ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS: Recording Industry, 1925-1980

**Summary Statement of
Significance:**

Los Angeles’ identity is inextricably tied to its role in the entertainment industry. The well-known advertising slogan, “The Entertainment Capital of the World” reflects the city’s central place in the motion picture, radio, television, and recording/music industries. Resources evaluated under this theme are significant in the areas of Entertainment, Industry and/or Ethnic History for their association with the recording industry. Due to its key role in the motion picture industry, Los Angeles (and Hollywood in particular) became a national center for the recording industry in the early twentieth century.

Period of Significance:

1925 - 1980

**Period of Significance
Justification:**

The period of significance begins in 1925, when sound recording began in Los Angeles, and ends in 1980, the end date for SurveyLA. The end date may be extended over time.

¹⁹⁷ Marc Wanamaker, *Hollywood 1940-2008*, Images of America (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 75.

Geographic Location: Hollywood (Vine Street), San Fernando Valley (North Hollywood, Van Nuys), South Los Angeles, West Los Angeles

Area(s) of Significance: Entertainment, Industry, Ethnic History

Criteria: NR: A CR: 1 Local: 1

Associated Property Type: Industrial – Recording Studio

Property Type Description: Studio for sound recording. See also character defining features below.

Property Type Significance: See Summary Statement of Significance above.

Eligibility Standards:

- Was constructed or used as a recording studio during the period of significance
- Must be proven to have played a significant role in the history and development of the recording industry
- Used primarily as a recording studio for an extended period of time

Character Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character defining features from the period of significance
- Buildings are utilitarian in design, with minimal fenestration to protect the sound quality produced within
- Exteriors are often unassuming to maintain the privacy of the artists
- Many are still in use as recording facilities, although some may have been converted to other uses
- Examples from the 1950s and later may be smaller in size due to new technology allowing for more flexibility in recording spaces
- For the National Register, properties associated with events that date from the last 50 years must possess exceptional importance

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Feeling, and Association from the period of significance
- Recording studios may be located in buildings originally constructed for another use
- The original facility may have been altered or expanded over time to accommodate changing technologies
- Adjacent buildings and land uses may have changed
- Original use may have changed

SUB-THEME: Support Services Associated with the Entertainment Industry, 1908-1980

Development of Support Service Facilities

For as long as the entertainment industry has existed, so too has the necessity for supplies and services which support its activities and operations. From the start, the inherent challenges of the production process introduced a demand for support services and ancillary products which have been developed specifically to meet the needs of the entertainment industry. While every genre of entertainment poses a unique set of requirements for which particular products and services have been developed, the role of support services relative to a particular industry is perhaps most evident in motion picture production.

From its earliest days, the making of motion pictures has been a complex process relative to the resources at hand – the values, demands, and challenges of production have expanded in concert with evolving technologies. In the beginning, when films were primitive and production was somewhat ad hoc, an aspiring director might be able to get by with a borrowed camera, a reel of film, and a sunny day. Costumes, scenery, and even players were all components that could be borrowed, repurposed, or otherwise obtained. However, as industry technology evolved, allowing for more complex and varied films to be made, the associated requirements to support these advances also expanded. An examination of trade publications and directories reveals the extent of services necessary to support industry operations; ancillary support services and purveyors listed included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Cameras, parts, and supplies
- Camera repair
- Casting agencies
- Color process laboratories
- Costume fabrics
- Costumers
- Film delivery services
- Film editing machines
- Film (processing) laboratories
- Film libraries
- Film printing machines
- Film recorders and disc recorders
- Film splicing machines
- Film trailers
- Film storage vaults
- Lighting equipment
- Motion picture cables
- Motion picture camera lenses
- Newsreel production
- Portrait and still production photography
- Projection lamps
- Projection rooms
- Raw film stock
- Stage/set scenery
- Studio props
- Title card production
- Trick photography and special effects laboratories

The development of these services paralleled the growth of motion picture production in the first half of the 20th century. While such operations were always critical to the continued success of the film industry, their contributions became especially important as technological innovations became more and more important to the industry's successful growth. Beginning in the 1910s and continuing into the 1920s, the proliferation of film laboratories and other technical support facilities devoted to the production of motion pictures reflected the growing importance of technology within the industry. The advent of sound in 1927 transformed the industry, and support services followed suit. Film processing operations, along with the research and development processes which led to technical innovation – performed largely in film laboratories and other production facilities – became particularly important as the manipulation of film became more and more complex.



*Entertainment Support Service Facility, 1001 N Orange Drive
(HistoricPlacesLA)*



*Entertainment Support Service Facility, 1041 N McCadden Place
(HistoricPlacesLA)*

Along with the growth and development of the studio system and the skill of the cameraman, came the advancement of the film laboratories, one of the most important links in the advancement of the film industry. Film laboratories were where all developing and processing was done. In the early days, the labs handled all the output of the studios, large and small. But with the advent of sound in the late twenties, the independent labs geared their departments to this new development. The major studios had their own labs, but when Technicolor became popular by 1938, many of the studios used the Technicolor Company for almost all of their output. For many independents, however, this was too costly and they used private labs which not only developed their film, but also handled post-production details as well.¹⁹⁸

Support service operations were typically housed within modest utilitarian buildings, usually one story in height, which could be easily fitted for a specific technical purpose as tenant functions evolved. Those facilities which housed more technical operations, such as film processing or research laboratories, or facilities which housed technical materials, such as raw film stock, were frequently distinguished by

¹⁹⁸ Marc Wanamaker, "Historic Hollywood Movie Studios – Part III," *American Cinematographer*, May 1976.

fireproof construction. Many buildings were occupied over time by various tenants within the industry and housed a variety of functions and uses.

ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS: Support Services Associated with the Entertainment Industry, 1908-1980

Summary Statement of Significance:

Los Angeles' identity is inextricably tied to its role in the entertainment industry. The well-known advertising slogan, "The Entertainment Capital of the World" reflects the city's central place in the motion picture, radio, television, and recording/music industries. Resources evaluated under this theme are significant in the areas of Entertainment and Industry for their association with pre- and post-production support services for the Motion Picture industry. The development of these services paralleled the growth of motion picture production in the first half of the 20th century and were critical to the continued success of the film industry. Support service facilities were originally constructed as or served as the long-term location of significant support services.

Period of Significance:

1908 - 1980

Period of Significance Justification:

The period of significance start in 1908, the origin of the motion picture industry in Los Angeles (though resources from this period associated with the entertainment industry are rare), and ends in 1980, the end date for SurveyLA. The end date may be extended over time.

Geographic Location:

Hollywood, West Los Angeles, and North Hollywood, with concentrations in:

North La Brea Avenue (700-1000 blocks)

West Santa Monica Boulevard (6000-7000 blocks)

North Highland Avenue (700-1500 blocks)

North Citrus Avenue (900-1100 blocks)

North Mansfield Avenue (900 block)

North Orange Drive (900-1000 blocks)

North Sycamore Avenue (1000 block)

North Vine Street (900-1600 blocks)

South Vermont Avenue (1800-2200 blocks)

Area(s) of Significance: Entertainment, Industry

Criteria: NR: A CR: 1 Local: 1

Associated Property Type #1: Industrial – Support Service Facility

Property Type Description: A property that houses a support service (including pre- and post-production facilities) for the motion picture industry. Support service operations were typically housed within modest utilitarian buildings, usually one story in height, which could be easily fitted for a specific technical purpose as tenant functions evolved. Those facilities which housed more technical operations, such as film processing or research laboratories, or facilities which housed technical materials, such as raw film stock, were frequently distinguished by fireproof construction. Many buildings were occupied over time by various tenants within the industry and housed a variety of functions and uses.

Property Type Significance: See Summary Statement of Significance above.

Eligibility Standards:

- Was constructed or used during the period of significance
- Originally constructed as, or is, the long-term home of a significant support service
- Must be proven to have played a significant role in the history and development of the entertainment industry

Character Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character defining features from the period of significance
- Support services includes prop houses, costumer houses, film laboratories and processing plants, vendors of camera and lighting equipment, makeup and wig suppliers
- May be industrial, commercial, and/or a converted residential building
- May be located adjacent to a motion picture studio or other entertainment-related property
- May be the long-term home of a continuously-operational support services enterprise
- For the National Register, properties associated with events that date from the last 50 years must possess exceptional importance

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Feeling, and Association from the period of significance
- Original use may have changed
- Adjacent buildings and land uses may have changed
- The physical relationship between the property and the motion picture studio or other entertainment-related property may not be apparent as the original facility may no longer be extant

Associated Property Type #2: Industrial – Support Services District

Property Type Description: An intact grouping of properties that house support services (including pre- and post-production facilities) for the motion picture industry.

Property Type Significance: A grouping of properties is significant under this sub-theme if it includes a substantial concentration of support service facilities for the motion picture industry.

Eligibility Standards:

- A definable geographic area composed of a substantial number of support service properties developed adjacent or in proximity to a motion picture studio or other entertainment-related property
- Must be proven to have played a significant role in the history and development of the entertainment industry

Character Defining /Associative Features:

- As a whole, retains most of the essential character defining features from the period of significance
- Support services includes prop houses, costumer houses, film laboratories and processing plants, vendors of camera and lighting equipment, makeup and wig suppliers
- May include industrial, commercial, and/or converted residential buildings
- The physical relationship between the area and the motion picture studio may still be apparent
- As a whole, conveys a visual sense of the overall historic environment from the period of significance
- For the National Register, must possess exceptional importance if less than 50 years of age.

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Feeling, and Association from the period of significance
- May include some buildings from outside the period of significance
- The use of some individual buildings may have changed over time
- The physical relationship between the property and the motion picture studio or other entertainment-related property may not be apparent as the original facility may no longer be extant
- Contributors to a district may have a greater degree of alterations than individually significant properties

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