

# Twentieth Century-Fox

Growing up in Los Angeles as a kid in the late 50s, I doubt there were many of my contemporaries who saw so many movies, and so frequently, as I did. My father had diner downtown, and during the summer, undoubtedly to get me out of his hair, he financed my movie-viewing career. Wednesday was the big day. That's that day that all the theaters changed their movies. I'd often see as many as seven films a week. That's why just the name, *Twentieth Century-Fox*, holds a special significance to me. I watched the opening sequence to Twentieth Century-Fox films untold times.

Twentieth Century-Fox was one of the first motion picture production giants to locate in Hollywood. It got its start in 1914 when William Fox filmed *Life's Shop Window* on Staten Island. In December of the following year, a party of Fox players, headed by Winfield Sheeham, left New York to explore the wild and wooly West. Within a few days after their arrival in Los Angeles, they had completed arrangements for taking over the former Selig Studios at 1845 Alessandro St., in Edendale, California.

About July, 1916, the company began the making of comedies. Because of their great success, Fox found that a relocation was necessary for expansion. Consequently, in late 1916, he purchased the former Thomas Dixon Studio, a five-and-one-half acre site at Western Avenue and Sunset Boulevard. New equipment and a generating plant were installed and reinforced with such working apparatus as could be moved from the Edendale studio. Production was growing so rapidly that Fox purchased eight additional acres across the street. The total realty investment for the thirteen and one-half acres was \$215,000.

The Fox facility became large enough to have twenty productions shooting at one time, and, by 1925, the company turned out 83 films. Forty-nine of these were special attractions, while the remainder were comedies. Between 1916-1925, Fox spent \$15 million to produce 660 films on Western Avenue. Its production schedule grew so heavy that in 1923 the company bought 250 acres of land in the Beverly Hills area, and much of the production moved to what was called the Fox Hills Studio. Fox's corporate headquarters, however, remained on Western Avenue. During the 1920s, Fox also developed the *Movietone News* that I remember seeing in the 50s....of course, those were the days when you went to the theater and you could expect to see two movies, a cartoon, news clips, previews of coming attractions, and maybe even a serial segment! Today, triple the price gets you one movie [*the preceding was an editorial comment!*].

Anyhow, Twentieth Century-Fox has certainly left its mark on the entertainment history of this culture. In the 30s, John Wayne made his debut in *The Big Trail*; in the 40s, there was *Tales of Manhattan*; in the 50s, Fox developed the Cinemascope format and came out with such movies as *Beloved Infidel*; the 60s saw *The Sound of Music* and *Doctor Doolittle*; special effects would never be the same after *Star Wars* in the 70s; the 80s saw *Cocoon* and *The Abyss*; and recently Fox presented such blockbusters as *Braveheart* and *Independence Day*. But I couldn't possibly end this without mentioning that it was also Twentieth Century-Fox that made one of my all-time favorite movies...*Miracle on 34th St.*!

