

## **The Changing of Hands: Beginning of the End** (Drawn from *Balboa Films*, pp. 159-178)

The Balboa plant was turned over to creditors, March 25, 1918. Though the studio would continue to be managed by the Balboa trustees, the trust being a corporation of the studio's major creditors, there were a few failed attempts to sell the site and a few successful ones. Most of these sales would be hindered in part by the slump in the market, by buyers with bad credit, and even blocked purposefully at times by the share-holding interests of the Horkheimers who were reluctant to give up the reins of the studio. Despite the changing of hands, people continued to call the plant, from 1918 to 1925, the *Balboa Studios*, and the plant's walls were faithfully repainted with the Balboa name till the plant's demolition in 1925, despite all the new "owners" who tried to reclaim the site. For the last seven years of operation, the Balboa plant never regained the glory of its past, while the creditors failed to find the right buyer, and though the new operators raved about the facilities and made ambitious plans, mismanagement and misfortune blocked Balboa's road to recovery. Throughout those painful seven years of unrelenting decline for the movie industry in Long Beach, H. M. Horkheimer was still waiting eagerly in the wings for one last fling at eternal fame and glory. Unfortunately, with all the failed attempts to recapture its past as a buzzing film center, Balboa Studios never succeeded in netting the right buyer, and all the prospective deals seemed to fizzle out, one after the other, during the sour market, during the difficult times that followed the First World War.

Only three months after the signing of the Armistice to end the Great War, the Balboa plant had been leased, February 1919, by the **New Art Film Company**, headed by George D. Watters, vice-president and general manager of the concern. Mr. Watters had been a prominent figure in show business in the Mid West. The owners of New Art, based in Des Moines, Iowa, would consider purchasing the studio, but the negotiations never finalized. Among others in the staff, there was Fred Sullivan, former general director with Thanhouser Film Company. The first picture was announced in the *Daily Telegram*, February 13, 1919, entitled *The Warning*, directed by Fred Sullivan. The New Art Company had been hiring for its Long Beach productions a number of actors and actresses, including Edward Cecil, Kate Lester, the two leading actors in *The Warning*. In addition, Jack Mulhall, of Famous Players, had been lent to New Art for a lead in the same picture, *The Warning*, by the way, a production backed by the U.S. Government. Other players announced in the *Daily Telegram*, associated with New Art, would be Ann Schaefer, Edward Jobson, Irene Aldwyn, Pauline Curley, Helene Chadwick, a Pathé star, Leo Pearson, Charles Spere, who had starred with Mary Miles Minter, and Gordon Griffith, who had played young Tarzan in *Tarzan of the Apes*. Despite this announcement of great things to come at Long Beach, no more information has been gleaned about *The Warning*, nor the other productions at Long Beach by the New Art Company.

Three months after the New Art Film Company stepped in, its lease would soon be overstepped by interested buyers who would borrow money for the purchase, having trouble in the end to meet their obligations. On April 14, 1919, F. C. Delano, representing the corporation organized for the purpose, among other things, of holding and administering the Balboa property in trust, proceeded to sell the Long Beach studio to William S. Forsyth and Charles M. Furey, also known by their company name, **Master Pictures Corporation**. Messrs. Forsyth and Furey had agreed to borrow from W. J. Conner the sum of \$350,000. An appraisal of the real estate and of the studio properties was made May 2, 1919. The total real estate value was determined at

\$37,563 and the total improvements (buildings and amenities) were appraised at \$326,850, the grand total being \$364,413. Most of the former Balboa Amusement Producing Company was intact for this purchase. However, as an omen of things to come, it appears from cross-referencing and studying the Sanborn maps that some of the real estate, especially on the northeast corner, had already been sold since 1918 in small parcels to some of the expanding retail businesses in the neighborhood, curtailing the studio's former northeastern border that had skirted most of the block along Seventh Street.

Charles M. Furey and William S. Forsyth headed the Master Pictures Corporation, and began to have difficulties making payments by the autumn of 1919, attested by a writ of assignment delivered to them by the Superior Court of California via the sheriff's office, September 20, 1919, by a certain plaintiff, Thomas R. Mills, while the Retail Merchants Credit Association of Los Angeles, associated with the Balboa trustees, another plaintiff against Master Pictures, claimed on October 14, 1919 that the judgement was still in full force and unsatisfied against the debtor. An attachment was served to Master Pictures against money or papers belonging to W. J. Conner, W. S. Forsyth, and B. M. Furey, co-partners of Master Pictures. Interestingly enough, the plaintiffs in the latter case included: the Title Insurance and Trust Company, the Bank of Italy, the National Bank of Pasadena, the Crown City Trust and Savings Bank, R. De MoLouis, the City Center Company, and the Baby Marie Osborne Film Company.

While these financial problems plagued the prospective buyer, Master Pictures was leasing the facilities to various production companies, with significant rosters of players and technicians. For example, at the end of 1919, the **Mercury Comedy Company** started work at Balboa, producing Morante comedies. Milburn Morante's troupe also included: Joe Bonner, juvenile player, H. Hewston, character actor, Ray Hampton, character actress, Grace Gordon and Florence Gilbert, ingénues, Grover Jones, writer and director, Al Morante, assistant director, M. J. Burns, cameraman, T. Caswell, assistant cameraman, R. C. Currier, editor, J. Morante, technical director, and Charles Everett, master of properties (*Daily Telegram*, Dec. 3, 1919, p. 3: 5). The Morante company was so pleased with the studio and its equipment that it encouraged other leasing companies to join them at Long Beach—the Holly Comedy Company--making 2-reel comedies, featuring Syd Smith; the Spinx Serial Company, producing at Balboa a 30-reel serial entitled *The Fatal Thirty*, written by Grover Jones, and the **Texas Guinan Company**, making 2-reel westerns, featuring the woman lead, Texas Guinan.

In January 1920, financially-troubled Master Pictures, through the Board of Trade of Los Angeles, trustees of the studio, was arranging to sell the film plant to the firm of McCauley and Hunt of the International Film Company. The International Film Company was also formed to rent space to independent producers, with W. Welch as the manager of the studio, with three companies making Bull's Eye films. However, once again, obstacles would interrupt ambitious attempts to resuscitate the studio. In February 1920, the *Daily Telegram* announced that both partners of the International Film Company had died. On February 17, 1920, the newspaper explained that John William McCauley, at 63 years of age, a retired broker passed away from pneumonia at his apartments, about two weeks after his partner, George J. Hunt, had died of heart trouble. Sadly enough, Mr. Hunt's son, who had come to Long Beach to attend the funeral from Bridgeport, Nebraska, also died of pneumonia during his train ride home after the funeral.

Nonetheless, by April 1920, movie production involved a total of ten companies leasing the facilities at Balboa: **1) the Morante Motion Picture Company**, directed by Al Morante; **2) the Paragon Pictures Corporation of America**, headed by Fred Jefferson; **3) Acme**; **4) the Columbia Film Company**, with Jack Kiefer as production manager; **5) Special Pictures Corporation**, headed by Ward Lascelle; **6) the David Trattner Production Company**; **7) the Kelsey Company**, producing a 5-reel feature starring Helen Hunt; **8) the Atlas Film Corporation**; **9) the Long Beach Motion Picture Company (a.k.a. Long Beach Studios, Inc.)**; **10) the Marie Osborne Film Company**. According to Marc Wanamaker, that same year, the **Edith Sterling Productions**, with William J. Beckway as cameraman, was also using the Balboa Studios. Many of these companies considered purchasing the studios, but none did.

In March 1920, the *Daily Telegram* described some of the productions underway at Balboa by the companies leasing the studio. The David Trattner Production Company was operating at the Balboa, presenting Irene Hunt, a well-known former Griffith star, in an interesting series of 2-reel comedy dramas, from the pen of Miriam Michelson, author of *In the Bishop's Carriage*. David Trattner was president of the company, and E. M. Rosenthal was vice president, with Erwin Trattner, secretary and treasurer, and Shields Lawson as business manager. In the series there would be 26 stories, formerly published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, concerning the adventures of a local newspaper woman. Along with Irene Hunt, the leading parts would include Clyde McCoy, who had worked as director and actor with Oakley and Selig productions. The first episode would be called **“Back on the Job,”** directed by Fred A. Kelsey, associated with the **Majestic and Reliance production companies**, with Ed Gheller as cameraman.

At the time, the **Paragon Film Company** was the oldest established production company using the Balboa Studios, reportedly expected to purchase the entire plant, according to the *Daily Telegram*, April 7, 1920, as explained by the company's general manager and supervisor, G. Le Roi Clarke. Mr. Clarke stated that Paragon produced 2-reel situational comedies and that the staff had found the Balboa equipment, particularly the interior sets, very “desirable.” The article continued to give Mr. Clarke's favorable impression of the site: “And also it is advantageous for a comedy concern to be located here where those ever popular beach and bathing girl scenes can be ‘shot’ and many comic ‘stunts’ worked out on the Pike amusements” (20). The same article names the latest comedy filmed by Paragon, calling it *Bill and Coo and Ouija Board*, Paragon's first release produced at the Long Beach studios.

Unfortunately, once again, by April 13, 1920, the *Daily Telegram* reported that managers and directors of the diverse companies at the Balboa plant were despairing, like H. M. Horkheimer in the wings, hoping for a turn in the market. To encourage all the “boosters” trying to promote the floundering movie industry in Long Beach, the *Daily Telegram* on May 12, 1920 announced enthusiastically the promise of a recent production:

...a comedy picture made in Long Beach by a local company from the Balboa Studios. The title of this picture is **“A Barnyard Romance,”** and because of the exclusive Long Beach scenes portrayed in the picture and the local people who are seen as spectators wherever the many different scenes were being enacted, it is believed that the picture will attract large audiences at every performance it is shown at the Strand. (p. 3: 5)

Having more trouble than anticipated to find a reliable buyer, by August 1920, the creditors of the old Balboa Amusement Producing Company organized themselves and proposed forming a new film corporation themselves. Their film company would be worth \$500,000, the creation of the new firm to be settled through Los Angeles and Long Beach brokerage offices. The new company would be called the **Long Beach Studios, Inc.** The brokers were estimating more than an 8% return on the proposed investment. The plan was to issue \$250,000 worth of preferred stock, paying \$150,000 for the plant and using \$100,000 as working capital. A bonus of one share of common stock with every share of preferred stock was also proposed. The Los Angeles Wholesalers' Board of Trade, the assignee, was in charge of the big plant, while it was being leased to the various producing companies described above.

Even if business was slow in 1920 for the film producers in Long Beach, Marc Wanamaker of Bison Archives affirms that the **Atlas Film Corporation** was renting space at Balboa, making a comedy series with the famous silent screen star, Chester Conklin. In addition, the city still managed to draw other companies to town, even to other parts of town. According to the *Daily Telegram*, December 18, 1920, in an article entitled, "Site For Film Studio Leased Here By New R. D. Picture Firm," **R. D. Films, Inc.** was leasing, building, and equipping a studio site for production of 1-reel comedies, at the rate of one a week, on the west side of Coronado Avenue between Anaheim and Fourteenth Streets. Articles of incorporation for the R. D. Film company were reportedly filed that week, with a capitalization of \$100,000. The manager of R. D. Films would be Denver Dixon, formerly a star of Vitagraph westerns. The assistant manager would be Clyde McClary, and the directors were to be A. F. Devereaux and S. B. Drum of Long Beach and W. C. Rae of Pasadena (p. 11: 1).

In February 1921, Harry Corson Clarke at the Hotel Virginia did an interview for the *Daily Telegram* extolling Long Beach as the best spot in the Southland for film work. Mr. Clarke was a promoter and a booster for the film industry in Long Beach. He was especially impressed with the Balboa Studios, where the Milburn Morante Comedy Company was still busy making 1-reelers. Mr. Clarke commented about the large capacity for film-making at the studio and the actual shortage of producers utilizing the space and the accommodations. This movie promoter was much impressed, exclaiming in his own words, "looking over this big plant, a credit to Long Beach," Mr. Clarke added, "there should have been 10 companies at least working there" (Feb. 2, 1921, p. 17: 3).

Mr. Clarke was a world traveler and a showman, well acquainted with the Morante "family" and its international team:

It's a small world. I've encircled it four times and each time it seems to grow smaller. I hadn't met 'Mil' Morante since the old days when his father, Joseph (Dad) had his two boys, Mil and Al, out with the first Edison moving picture machine, giving shows thru the Middle West. And now they have as smooth a working company as I have seen in many a day.

Milburn is the star, Tom Gibson writes and directs, and is a wizard at the megaphone, Al Morante Gibson's right hand assistant director. Miles Burns, a cameraman de luxe whom I had the pleasure of meeting in the Hawaiian Islands, is ably assisted by 'Spike' Vanderpool; while sets that are sets are built by our old friend 'Dad' Morante and furnished by one of the best property men in the

business, Chas. (Shorty) Everett, I know as he was with me in Australia. Alfred (Tex) Hueston is a wonder with makeup and rated as an A1 character actor while Ray Hampton as a character actress has few equals. I tried to corral this lady for my last world's tour but she had gone to Alaska. Then there is Harry Belmore, a good all round man, George Gyton, a young actor I met in New Zealand, and Joe Cush at the switchboard, "Joe" was one of my staff in Denver. (p. 17: 3)

In the same article, Mr. Clarke reminded the Long Beach business community of the advantages of the film industry's growth in the city:

Taken as a whole, this outfit is a credit in Long Beach. They work in Long Beach, they spend their money in Long Beach. It's a Long Beach institution, and, Oh, you Long Beach boosters! With this little band as a start, get busy, do some shouting and let's place Long Beach on the map as a moving picture producing center. It can be done.



**At Balboa Studios: Left, William Bertram, with, right, Baby Gloria Osborne, sister of Baby Marie Osborne. Photo, courtesy of Marie Osborne-Yeats.**

The Morante company made a departure from comedies to begin filming a series of western dramas. Milburn Morante would star in the series, supported by Evelyn Nelson, with Morante's 4-year daughter as "the baby." After the first Morante western was released in early 1921, *Hearts of the Range*, seven westerns were scheduled for production, beginning, March 1921, by the film company based in Long Beach. Later, articles in the *Daily Telegram* would

cover the company's travels to Madera County to shoot on location for scenes photographed in the rugged and sylvan terrain. All the interior shots, of course, were filmed at Balboa. In the town of Raymond, in Madera County the film crew set up headquarters.

June 22, 1921, the *Daily Telegram* reported that the **Long Beach Motion Picture Company** had also gone to Hornitos on location. William Bertram was directing the picture, a mining story. The cast included Leo Maloney, Dixie Lamont, Gus Scoville, and 35 other actors. The company would spend a total of about two weeks, after which the troupe would move on to Wawona. While at Hornitos, the Long Beach Motion Picture Company brought the old ghost town to life, re-enacting in the mining story the Gold Rush days, inviting all the inhabitants of the surrounding country for one frolicking evening, with a huge display of entertainment. It was estimated that around 2,000 persons attended the dance. An old gold miner who joined the festivities, Emilio Campodonico, living in the Hornitos area had not seen so many people at one time in the town since the good old days.

That same month, June 1921, negotiations began between the industrial bureau of the chamber of commerce and the Balboa Amusement Producing Company seeking a long term lease of the film studios. With local capital, the trustees would organize a local film company called the **Long Beach Comedy Company**, to be directed by Fred A. Jefferson, starring Le Roy Clarke. If the negotiations were to succeed, the company would hire around 50 persons to begin productions within six weeks. Obviously, businessmen would support the film industry, even at the end of June 1921, after the first oil gushers already began to change the course of history for Long Beach.



*Daily Telegram*, Aug. 20, 1921: Fred A. Jefferson, owner, handing over check for new 1922 Columbia, while wife, Mrs. Jefferson, looks on.

It appears that the new company did not materialize, as indicated by the *Daily Telegram* on July 26, 1921. We see some of the same names as the early predictions for the Long Beach Comedy Company, for example, George Le Roi Clarke, in the starring rôle, but the name of the company is **Meteor Pictures Corporation**. Mr. Clarke had finished his contract with Paragon Pictures, having done fifty-two 1-reel slapstick comedies for the **Reelcraft** series. His leading lady would be Celeste Zimlick, supported by fellow actors, George Austin, Harry Belmore, Hazel Tranchell, Tiny Harding and Amelia Gilson. A. B. Montgomery was general manager, and Eddie Welch was business manager. Fred Jefferson would be directing, with George Clarke co-directing, along with Eddie (Dutch) Blake, as cameraman. The company had a board of directors that included: A. B. Montgomery, Charles E. Philippi, E. W. Welsh, Amelia P. Gillson and J. L. Darnall. The company had rented space at Balboa. In fact, the Meteor Pictures Corporation was capitalized at \$50,000, being the first enterprise to file articles of incorporation under the new state law requiring the original copies of the articles be sent to the secretary of state. Under the old law, the secretary of state received the first copy, while the county clerk received the original copy.

In August 1921, the *Daily Telegram* announced the first film completed by the **Long Beach Motion Picture Company**, in a private showing. William Bertram was the author and the director of this film, *The Dashing Ranger*, and it helped launch a whole series of films that romanticized and glamourized the Canadian Mounted Police. Leo Maloney, had the leading part, performing sensational stunts on horseback, including a crossing he made along a two-board trestle 60 feet high, leaping also off a building through a wooden awning. Dixie la Monte was the leading lady, Harry Bellmour would be the heavy, and Gus Scoville would play another leading

character. This is the film and the series that began its filming at Hornitos, in Mariposa County, full of the Gold Rush ambiance of 1849. In fact, the production company had leased the hotel at Hornitos for one year, to be able to continue filming future productions there. At the time of this announcement in the *Daily Telegram*, the Long Beach Motion Picture Company was working on a cooperative basis, not having incorporated as yet, with no paid officers, sharing as partners in the financial returns (Aug. 12, 1921, p. 17: 1).

That summer, Long Beach boosters imagined “a second Hollywood” as Long Beach might grow to be a formidable center of the motion picture industry, but it was also the same summer of gushing oil madness and mushrooming oil derricks all over the city. Before petroleum would displace the capital invested in the movie industry at Long Beach, the city fathers were still actively inviting studios to the city. The manager of the industrial bureau of the Long Beach Chamber of Commerce, Mr. George Alisey Brown, announced that seven motion picture companies were planning to locate in Long Beach that year, including the **Long Beach Community Producers**, the **Olympian Production Company** of New York, and the Meteor Pictures Corporation, the latter already established in Long Beach by July 1921. Mr. Brown claimed that better rental and living conditions in Long Beach, along with the amenities of the sea air and the Pike amusement zone were attracting the movie folk to the city. It was also claimed that Hollywood studios were facing difficulties in expanding their lots, due to prohibitive real estate costs mounting in Los Angeles, already the biggest metropolis in the state of California. The movie boosters and business-friendly chamber of commerce in Long Beach were trying to draw the movie communities to the seaside resort where there were still plenty of building sites at reasonable prices.

As a point of reference, that same summer, on September 12, 1921, Fatty Arbuckle would be held for murder. Though no longer working in Long Beach, the popular comedian had a long association with the city’s entertainment business. But by April 18, 1922, the Ebell Club in Long Beach endorsed a move against all of Arbuckle’s films. Even in Long Beach, Roscoe could not escape persecution. However, in 1921, it was the Morante company that was busy producing comedies and dramas at the Balboa Studios.

The general manager of the Morante Producing Company, F. D. Fowler, left for the nation’s financial capital, New York, February 1922, to sign a contract for a series of 5-reel comedy dramas, a contract worth a stunning \$126,000. At the time, the Morante company was producing 5-reel dramas in Long Beach under contract with George Chesbro, who distributed the pictures through the **Clark-Cornelia** agency. The Chesbro contract called for eight 5-reel pictures, and by February 6, 1922, just four days after William Desmond Taylor’s murder, the fourth picture in the series was already completed. The Chesbro contract concerned the northwestern mounted police, with the scenarios written by J. Inman Kane, a former Long Beach High School student. The continuities were handled by Richard Gilson and the productions were directed by Tom Gibson, formerly working at Universal and other Hollywood studios. Other members of the cast in the mounted police series included Alfred Hewston, formerly with Fairbanks and Universal, Vivian Rich, a former Fox star, Mr. and Mrs. M. L. Barber, Frank Coffray, Henry Arris, and E. L. MacManigal. The local Long Beach papers explained that the Morante company was a closed corporation, having sold no stock, owned by a group personally interested in the future of movies at Long Beach. The exteriors were filmed in the Lake Tahoe area and in the mountains near

California Hot Springs. Interior scenes, of course, were produced at the Balboa Studios. The fifth picture of the Chesbro contract was entitled *Menacing Past*, directed by Gibson, to be released in March 1922.

In addition, by February 1922, the holding company that managed the Balboa Studios had big plans, starting with repairs to entice film activity at the site, the city bidding once more to become a center in the motion picture industry of Southern California. J. E. Logan and E. F. Thorine purchased the studio and its surrounding grounds, along with other Long Beach capitalists, putting into escrow \$115,000 in fulfillment of the terms of an option taken earlier, December 15, 1921. This move did not please Florence Horkheimer and her brothers. In response to this action, Florence Horkheimer tried to impose an injunction to restrain the receiver from passing title to the new owners, claiming her interests as part owner had not been protected. A hearing was scheduled in Los Angeles to determine whether the Horkheimer injunction would prevent the transfer of property to the collective group of capitalists. The money for the purchase was already in escrow, and all indicators favored the new buyers. The Morante company was leasing the studio, as well as a second company, and a third producing company was expected to commence the filming of 5-reel comedies at the Balboa Studios. All these steps forward to accelerate film production at Balboa motivated the eager capitalists. At the same time, expanding Long Beach businesses were snatching up studio property whenever they could, diminishing with time the original dimensions of the shrinking studio grounds. The Drummer Manufacturing Company on the eastern section of Sixth Street, at the Balboa quadrangle, was awaiting action of the court before moving their offices and work rooms into larger quarters inside some of the Balboa buildings.

Following the injunction suit by his sister, and following the murder of William Desmond Taylor in February 1922, H. M. Horkheimer, one of the movie pioneers of Southern California, was back in Long Beach for the first time in many years. H. M. had just returned from a trip to New York, returning to Los Angeles County via New Orleans. The local papers revealed, March 4, 1922, their conjectures about H. M.'s visit to Long Beach, where he stopped at the Hotel Virginia, meeting with local businessmen and old associates. Not only did reporters wish to interview H. M. about the new scandals involving the former stars of Balboa's glory days, so much in the news—Taylor and Arbuckle, but the *Daily Telegram* also had hoped to question H. M., the pioneer producer, about his dealings back East, where he had been given a contract to produce five pictures at a cost not to exceed \$300,000. It was understood that Florence wanted very much to retain the ownership of the studio, and perhaps all three of the Horkheimers would return to work at the studio they had once made world-famous.

The injunction suit filed in the Los Angeles court had possibly precipitated H. M.'s visit to Long Beach, the Horkheimers hoping perhaps to prevent the transfer of the Balboa property from the receivers, those in whom the control had been vested. Exact reasons for the Horkheimer return to Balboa could not be ascertained, since H. M. left before the reporters could question him on the matter. Despite the injunction, alas, the sale of the Balboa Studios would go through. Even four years after the Horkheimers had departed, the Balboa Studios were considered in fairly good shape, and the property was deemed still of very high value. Only H. M. seemed to be much changed physically, having put on weight, resembling considerably his rotund father, Morris.

All the negative publicity in filmdom around 1922—Wallace Reid’s overdose, William Desmond Taylor’s murder, and Fatty Arbuckle’s scandal—would provoke a movement to return in the entertainment business to moral programming and fundamental Christian values, especially noticeable among movie makers in Long Beach, trying to clean up Hollywood’s image. Several producers came to town to film religious movies, under the auspices of Long Beach and Los Angeles ministers and members of the chamber of commerce. One such company, the Scripture Film Company was mentioned in the *Daily Telegram*, April 1, 1922, claiming that Long Beach had become one of the main centers for this movement specializing in Christian film-making. It was not specified whether the organization would use the Balboa Studios, since it had recently changed hands. However, the article in the paper was enthusiastic about the possibility of having a zoo established in Long Beach, if the animals for their productions were left for public viewing by The Scripture Film Company.

In addition, in 1922, Tod Sloan, hailed as the greatest jockey America had ever known, was also considering Long Beach as a base for moving making. While staying at the Hotel Virginia, Sloan mentioned plans to produce films at Balboa, saying to the *Daily Telegram*:

Just what my future plans are I cannot say at this time. But this I will say, that Long Beach is a real city, and I should think, ideally located for the filming of high class pictures. As soon as I have more time I will look into the situation and come to a definite conclusion. (Apr. 20, 1922, p. 21: 4)

However, Tod Sloan would not be the one to try to revitalize the film plant in Long Beach. By May 1922, another hat was tossed into the ring.



**The Hotel Virginia (1907-1933) at Ocean Boulevard and Magnolia Avenue on the bluff overlooking the beach. The Pike amusement zone appears to the left.**

On May 24, 1922, the *Daily Telegram* announced that Hampton Del Ruth, the famous director for Sennett and Fox, would be in charge of new film productions and that the sizable Balboa

plant would be remodeled. Mr. Del Ruth had a formidable reputation, and many hoped he would have what it takes to bring the stagnant film industry at Long Beach to its former days of glory. As one of the best-known directors in the industry, Del Ruth would be making 5-reel features and a number of shorter length comedies, with all-star casts.

Hampton Del Ruth had been in Long Beach at the beginning of the movie industry, even starring in one of Long Beach's earliest films, *On Matrimonial Seas* (1911), produced by the original movie company of Long Beach, **The California Motion Picture Manufacturing Company**, the first such company both originating in California and having its headquarters in the Sunshine State. By 1922, however, Hampton Del Ruth returned to Long Beach as a seasoned filmmaker with many credits to his name.

With his reputation for making "clean" films, Hampton Del Ruth was much praised in the local press. He had started his movie career at the Selig-Polyscope Company and directed the first filming of Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*. For six years, Mr. Del Ruth had been in charge of productions at the Mack Sennett Studios, making some of the first feature-length comedies. As production manager there, Del Ruth made over 700 of the popular Keystone farce comedies. Most remarkable among these early comedies figures the movie entitled *Tillie's Punctured Romance*, starring Charles Chaplin, Marie Dressler, and Mabel Normand. Mr. Del Ruth was also responsible for the production of one of the most popular films of the silent era, *Mickey*, as well as *Skirts*. After his work with Sennett, Del Ruth became managing director two years for the William Fox Sunshine Comedies.

J. E. Logan and his associates had purchased the studios in Long Beach from the receivers who had taken over the Horkheimer enterprise. In May 1922, Logan and Thorine sold the Balboa Studios to a group of businessmen, with production headed by Hampton Del Ruth. This new corporation would drop the Balboa name, christening itself the **Long Beach Studios Corporation**, with their released films boasting the trademark "Made in Long Beach." The incorporation papers were filed on June 19, 1922. These new incorporators included A. H. Brewster and B. P. Glenn of the Brewster-Glenn Insurance and Bond Company of Los Angeles, Mr. Glenn being the more prominent member of the group. Having helped organize the Chamber of Commerce of Long Beach, Mr. Glenn was a well-known entrepreneur in the city, as well as a director of the California Bank in Los Angeles. Earlier, Mr. Glenn had also been a representative of a railway company, the Salt Lake Railroad, the track of which ran straight through the Balboa property to the end of the line, where Long Beach had an open market with livestock, a rodeo and carnival atmosphere very close to the studio site. The other incorporators were various Long Beach and Los Angeles businessmen, who would invest heavily to improve the film plant in the sum of about \$50,000, adding roofing over the open stage adjoining the glassed-in studio, entirely remodeling and re-equipping the laboratories, and rewiring the studio to provide direct current for more artificial lighting.

The new corporation announced many ambitious plans and featured many exciting programs to make once more the movie industry in Long Beach both prolific and "clean." Not only was the studio buzzing with remodeling and rewiring, but the incorporators intended to acquire about 20 acres of property in or near Long Beach to be used for large exterior sets, street scenes and spectacular effects. Furthermore, on May 25, 1922, the *Daily Telegram* announced the arrival of

other producing companies that would lease the Long Beach plant, including, as a sign of the scandalized times in Movieland, religious filmmakers who were determined to keep the business respectable, such as the Historical Films Company, in which Mr. Brewster and Mrs. Glenn were said to be interested. In fact, Mr. Logan insisted on producing educational and biblical pictures, the slogan to characterize the plant to be "A Clean Studio for Clean Films." The Historical Films Company would provide film programs for churches and schools, to include an educational feature, a biblical film, a short comedy, and a travelogue. However, no records have been found of the Historical Films Company productions in Long Beach, nor those of another religious producer of films also mentioned in the same article, the Commonwealth Company, specializing in biblical photoplays, supplementing them with other educational features, as well as, according to the same article, the **William Thompson Company** that had reportedly just completed a Bible subject production at Long Beach.

Besides the Morante company already on site for a number of years, continuing to specialize in 5-reel westerns with Vivian Rich, there was also the **Bob Horner** organization also starting film productions in Long Beach with the new incorporators. On June 11, 1922, the *Daily Telegram* announced that Bob Horner would begin a series of five feature western photoplays and an Arabian spectacle movie. Contracts had been finalized with "Ranger" Bill Miller and Patricia Palmer to do the leading parts in the series. The first picture was named *Twin Six O'Brien*. Mr. Miller was reportedly among the first cowboys to play leading parts in motion pictures. He had begun as an extra in the Lubin company, after arriving from Texas to California. Miss Palmer had been with the Famous Players-Lasky corporation before joining the Horner company. Mr. Horner, himself, happened to be without legs, the result of a train accident when he was a youth, but this handicap never prevented him from becoming a successful film producer specializing in western movies.

In a move to mix movie stars with the Long Beach crowd, the local post of the American Legion presented, June 26, 1922, "A Night in Movieland," at the Long Beach studio. Long Beach business associations were eager to support the movie industry in town, looking forward to a highly entertaining and enthusiastic evening of spreading the movie fever in town.

In fact, on June 19, 1922, the *Daily Telegram* was predicting that the Long Beach Studio Corporation was planning to produce films more extensively than had the Horkheimers at the height of their prolific output of films. The Long Beach paper reported that incorporation papers had been filed and the Balboa Studios would thereafter be renamed the **Long Beach Studios**. Again, the organizers were: A. B. Brewster, B. P. Glenn, Hampton Del Ruth, L. Davis and L. C. Thorne, all of Los Angeles. These organizers would be the directors of the corporation, with the controlling interest, while associates from Long Beach would be financial backers. At the time of this announcement other companies were already at work, including the **Milburn Morante** group, the **Starke-Statter Corporation**, the **Commonwealth Pictures Company** and the "**Bill**" **Thompson** organization, while several other producing companies were also still negotiating for use of the Long Beach Studios. In addition, the Starke-Staller organization, with Pauline Starke as their star, planned to produce a series of eight 7-reel pictures, one of which was entitled *Pawnee Bill*.

Hampton Del Ruth was hoping for a revival of the movie industry in Long Beach, to begin shooting his first picture around July 20, 1922. On June 26, he and his wife, also a movie star by the name of Alta Allen, registered at the Hotel Virginia, where H. M. Horkheimer had also resided during his tenure as chief at Balboa Studios. For his first Long Beach production, Del Ruth had decided on a cast that included many notable film celebrities: Henry Walthall, James Kirkwood, Lon Chaney, and Anna Q. Nielsson, with Alta Allen also in the Del Ruth productions. Mr. Del Ruth was the principal stockholder in the **Long Beach Studios, Inc.** He predicted, in an article entitled "Picture Making Will Start Soon; All-Star Casts," many productions, beginning the first year with four special 5-reel pictures with an all-star cast and twelve 2-reel comedies, then, "During our second year we will double our production" (*Daily Telegram*, June 27, 1922, p. 4: 5).

On July 28, 1922, the widow of the screen idol, Wallace Reid, who herself had played at Balboa Studios during the Horkheimer years, known then as Dorothy Davenport, would be doing some promotional work with Hampton Del Ruth for the Long Beach Studios, Inc. The *Daily Telegram* explained that Hampton Del Ruth would direct an impromptu picture, inviting every person in Long Beach interested in entering the motion picture field. Some of the stars participating in the impromptu film were to include Lon Chaney, one of the greatest character actors, Milton Mills, popular leading man, Henry Walthall, Tully Marshall, popular character man, Alta Allen, and Irene Rich. The production chief would be Mr. Del Ruth, the director, Tom Gibson, and the cameraman, Elmer G. Dyer. In short, Mr. Del Ruth was inviting the public to an open and gigantic screen test, again mixing the stars with the general public. The event was considered a novelty. It drew a crowd of 1,000 persons, conducted by a team of movie boosters: Mrs. Reid, Mr. Gibson, Eugene Wither, dramatic editor of the *Daily Telegram*, C. E. Freshwater, assistant manager of the Empire Theatre in Long Beach, Edward Marshall, the nationally-known artist and correspondent of *Variety*, the vaudeville and movie trade journal, along with H. R. Connor and Henry Rhea, publicity directors of the Empire Theatre. In scope and ambition, it was the kind of publicity stunt that the Horkheimers might have devised. Mr. Gibson told the *Daily Telegram* on July 30, 1922:

Instead of employing some actress who has already achieved stardom and bringing her to Long Beach to appear in our productions, we are going to find some Long Beach girl who shows possibilities and give her every opportunity to go far along the road to screen fame. I believe these screen tests will be invaluable in starting our search for worthy local talent, and they may result in the discovery of a real star. Some of the best known screen stars today have been developed after such tests, and this particular one seems especially promising. The large participation in the event indicates that all Long Beach is interested in Southern California's greatest industry and in giving this city a prominent place in it.

Of course, camera tests had been done before, but seldom under such a great mixture of celebrities and open to such a large public. Consequently, the experiment was watched closely by the film industry in Southern California. Mrs. Reid gave the women a discussion on screen technique and helped them with their appearance before the camera. She answered questions put to her about the business in general and about her famous and deceased husband, Wallace Reid. Mrs. Reid also worked with the small children before the camera. The impromptu film would

then be filed in the studio library to be available for casting directors of the dozen companies located at the Long Beach plant. The *Daily Telegram* outlined the conditions of the invitation:

Everybody has the cordial invitation of all concerned in making the event's success to participate in the tests and informal reception. There are no requirements and no entrance formality, other than to be at the Empire theatre at 11 o'clock. (p. 9: 4)

The same article finished with a flourish:

Come to Mrs. "Wallie" Reid's "Movie Party." Empire Theatre lobby at 11:00 a.m. tomorrow. 10 people will be chosen for an actual appearance in a forthcoming production.

The newspaper articles described the open screen test as a raving success. As a result, the *Daily Telegram* announced the choice of twenty women who showed the most promise. However, it was decided to ask the public to help in the "star search." On August 3, 1922, in an article entitled, "Leading Screen Candidates Will Be Given Roles," Gibson and Dyer were searching for a new star, if possible from local talent, if that person were to have the qualities and the proper screen presence, placing the winners in one of two categories, including bit parts and leading rôles. The studio was waiting for the return of Patricia Palmer from Wyoming, where she was on location with the Lasky company, working with Mary Miles Minter, Tom Moore and Eugene O'Brien. Upon Palmer's return, then Tom Gibson at the Long Beach Studios, Inc., would direct, with Elmer Dyer as cameraman, the next "Ranger Bill" photoplay using the ten lucky women selected from the star search.

Since the studio authorities found it impossible to pick from the large number of candidates, audiences at the Empire Theatre were asked to watch the screen test and to vote by secret ballot, using code numbers pinned to the candidates to identify the women on the screen. The top ten would be given parts immediately, while the other ten of the twenty winners would stand an excellent chance of receiving parts later. Everybody participating—women, men, boys, and girls—would be considered for future movies, the screen test being kept in the studio library. On August 9, 1922, The *Daily Telegram* announced the names of the top ten women: 1) Caroline Geiger; 2) Alice Jean Wood; 3) Irene Cadmus; 4) Audrey Homer; 5) Helen Kelly; 6) Linnette Brown; 7) Irene Shupe; 8) Alta Lenore; 9) Winifred Nimmo, 10) Betty Gayton (p.11: 1).

Not only was the new studio attempting a comeback for Long Beach's movie industry, but Hampton Del Ruth made every effort to prepare a smash hit to get the ball rolling. Hampton Del Ruth himself had penned an original scenario for his star-studded production, *The Marriage Chance*, including such famous players of the silver screen as Alta Allen, Milton Sills, Irene Rich, Henry Walthall, Lon Chaney, Tully Marshall, Nick Cogley, and Laura La Varnie.

Hampton Del Ruth's wife, Alta Allen, took the lead in the film. She was a resident of Long Beach, a city that pleased her, revealed in an interview for the *Daily Telegram*, August 20, 1922:

I'm very much in love with Long Beach. You see my home is here, and I really think it's grand to be able to live by the ocean. What is my hobby? Well, I like to study vocal music and classic dancing. I play tennis, too. (B: 5).

While playing the lead in a musical revue in San Francisco, Miss Allen had been discovered by William Fox. For Fox, Alta Allen had played the leading part in *Skirts* in a Sunshine Comedy

film. Afterwards, she had starred opposite Gareth Hughes in *The Lure of Youth* and with the French comic movie star, Max Linder, in his American productions, *Seven Years Bad Luck* and *Be My Wife*.

On the other hand, Milton Sills was preparing to teach as a college professor before he decided to become an actor for the silver screen. Playing opposite Miss Allen in *The Marriage Chance*, Milton Sills had originally planned a career in academia, studying philosophy at Chicago University. He had been a teaching fellow there, before mounting the stage to become a thespian. The scholarly Mr. Sills imagined movies becoming more evolved and cultured, presenting in time more Shakespearean works and other classic productions. Besides performing on stage and screen, Mr. Sills enjoyed hunting, fishing, and all sorts of sports.

Also among the stars of *The Marriage Chance* figured Henry B. Walthall. Henry B. Walthall had become famous for his part as the Little Colonel in Griffith's classic masterpiece, *The Birth of a Nation*. After a successful career on stage, Walthall broke into the movies in 1909. In fact, Henry B. Walthall had worked a short spell with Balboa, under contract with the Horkheimers. Other films with Henry Walthall include *The Raven* and *The Avenging Conscience*. While working at Long Beach in 1922, Walthall was known to rise early and to be splashing in the surf by 6:00 o'clock in the morning. He worked long and hard hours for Del Ruth, but he, like Mr. Sills, would also enjoy the manly sports of hunting and fishing, especially in the high Sierras or some nearby mountain stream.

Among other leading actors in *The Marriage Chance*, Tully Marshall had worked on the stage for 30 years, starting his theatrical career as a call boy in San Francisco. He had played with many great stars in stage productions, such as "Paid in Full," "The City," and "The Talker," being a director and producer for a while. Eventually, he went back to acting, working in pictures with Norma Talmadge, Jane Grey, and Seena Owen. In addition, Mr. Marshall worked for Griffith, including *Sable Torch*, *The Devil's Needle*, *The Streets of Paris*, and *Intolerance*.

For all the major rôles in *The Marriage Chance*, Hampton Del Ruth had selected seasoned and well-known actors skilled in doing character parts and slip-stick comedy. Del Ruth intended to use most of the same star-studded cast in future pictures, his intention to keep all the Long Beach productions of the highest quality. The stakes were high, but the prospects looked awfully good. The Long Beach boosters and much of the established Hollywood crowd were rooting for a return to the former prosperity that the Horkheimers had attracted to Long Beach the previous decade. Consequently, the stage was being set when four promising contracts were signed for feature Long Beach-made pictures. At the Long Beach Studios, August 22, 1922, A. H. Jage, assistant manager of the United States branch of the **American Releasing Corporation**, and J. E. Logan, general manager of the **Long Beach Studios, Inc.**, signed the contracts to assure the success of the films being produced by Hampton Del Ruth. *The Marriage Chance* had already been sold to William H. Jenner, the Pacific coast manager of the American Releasing concern.

The efforts of the Long Beach Studios, Inc., seemed relentless and untiring. At the Lions' Club in Long Beach, September 8, 1922, Hampton Del Ruth, supervising managing director, Byron P. Glenn, president, E. C. Bennett and R. C. Logan, general manager of the Long Beach Studios, Inc., comprised the guests of honor at the weekly meeting of the club, held at the Hotel Virginia.

Each presented a speech on the movie industry, promoting the ambitious plans of the new concern at the former Balboa Studios. In an article appearing in the *Daily Telegram*, September 8, 1922, Mr. Glenn described the studio as the best equipped on the Pacific coast, potentially the best in the world:

The motion picture industry is the most abused, the most criticised business in the world. It is because of the mystery and the lure which surrounds movieism. People are anxious to know what is going on behind the high board fences of the studios and are allowing their imaginations to run wild. (p. 27: 6)

He continued to emphasize to the members of the Lions' Club the continuing growth of the film industry and its world capital located in Southern California:

About Los Angeles there are approximately 200 producing companies and 65 studios. The value of the yearly output is \$200,000,000. About 50,000 people are constantly employed. The motion picture houses in the United States number about 25,000.

In the hurry and flurry of all the promises and contracts made by the Long Beach Studios, Inc., the *Daily Telegram* announced, October 18, 1922, in an article entitled, "Eastern Capitalist And Local Director Associated In Plans," that the day before, October 17, 1922, all existing contracts and future contracts of the Long Beach Studios, Inc., were sold to R. S. Baddeley, an Eastern capitalist. A special Pullman car, bearing in gold letters the names of the Long Beach Studio and the name of the director, Del Ruth, would be touring by train the country, advertising Long Beach, its film studio, the studio's first movie, *The Marriage Chance*, the stars, along with a motion picture projector to show moving pictures of Long Beach. On the national railroad tour, Hampton Del Ruth was accompanied by Mr. Baddeley, the new owner, several personal friends of Mr. Baddeley, and Thurlow W. Brewer, a former Essanay manager and director. The same promises as outlined earlier by Del Ruth were announced by the new owner: 1) production of four feature films with all-star casts; 2) the contracts for the release of these productions were already signed; 3) twelve 2-reel comedies to be filmed each year; 4) all movies to be personally directed by Hampton Del Ruth. In addition, Mr. Baddeley stated that very morning that leasing contracts would be negotiated with prominent producing companies, resulting in the studio at Long Beach being actively engaged throughout the year, year after year. Mr. Baddeley was totally convinced of the profitability of investing in Long Beach's dormant but potentially successful movie studio:

I have become a California enthusiast and have decided to make a business connection which will enable me to spend a large part of my time here. It is a surprise to me that a plant of this magnitude has been allowed to stand idle so many months and I have become interested to the extent that I can assure production from this time on. I have contracted with Hampton Del Ruth and have tentative contracts for future productions with some of the leading artists. I can assure the public of Long Beach that the best of pictures will be produced here and that the features which will follow "The Marriage Chance"—a success already—will be a credit to this city and this community. (p. 14: 1)

Unfortunately for Hampton Del Ruth and the Long Beach film industry, *The Marriage Chance* was an enormous box-office flop. In November 1922, Hampton Del Ruth, noted director, and backers purchased the **Balboa/International Film Company**, and the name was changed to the

**Hampton Del Ruth Studios.** O. A. Greybeal owned the greatest share of the studio. Despite all of Del Ruth's efforts to revive the former glory days of the Balboa Studios, there appear no other newspaper articles about Hampton Del Ruth continuing to do other productions in Long Beach. He, like his ill-fated predecessors, eventually threw in the towel.

However, Hampton Del Ruth's removal from the scene did not spell the end of attempts to kick start the movie industry in Long Beach. The *Long Beach Press* reported, January 25, 1923, in an article entitled, "Shoot First Scenes in New Universal Peace Story Soon," that the **Super-Feature Film Corporation** would be leasing the site, starting to film its educational films at the Balboa Studio. Super-Feature's first movie in Long Beach would be an 8-reel anti-war movie, conceived in response to the mounting tension after the economic slump in Europe and the implementation of the unsuccessful Treaty of Versailles. The corporation doing the picture included a board of directors, unnamed in the article, all Long Beach businessmen, and all of the scenes were scheduled to be shot in and about Long Beach, "and some of the strongest scenes will be 'shot' among the Signal Hill oil derricks" (p. 7: 6). This is the first time, Long Beach's new face as a petroleum town was planned as a setting for a movie. Supposedly, the corporation had already acquired international rights to the story, and one of the features already done by the Super-Feature Corporation, outside of Long Beach, had been shown in most Long Beach churches before touring the country. This completed film by Super Feature was entitled *Palestine*, a 6-reel educational film also spurred by the Great War, but Super-Feature planned to cut *Palestine* to four reels, adding two new reels to be filmed in and about Long Beach. No other information has been retrieved regarding Super-Feature's film productions in Long Beach.

Then the long-awaited return of the Horkheimers was finally realized. The changing of hands had come full circle. On March 30, 1923, the *Long Beach Press* announced the former owner would resume production in Balboa's remodeled buildings: "Balboa Studios Sold to H. M. Horkheimer; Will Make Pictures." This announcement breathed new hope into the financially-troubled and disappointing decline of the once-famous studio. The article claims that H. M. purchased the studio from O. A. Greybeal for \$300,000. When the committee of creditors was formed in 1918 to take over the Horkheimers' holdings, Mr. Greybeal had been a member of that committee, to become later the sole owner, after the parade of potential buyers and renters, by purchasing the holdings of all the other associates in the committee. At the time of this announcement, H. M. was living in Los Angeles, with his office in the Loew State Building. Of course, H. M. was expected to move his offices as a producer back to the Balboa Studio. H. M. announced eloquently his pleasure in working with the citizens of Long Beach, along with the prospect of returning to do films in Long Beach:

I came to this city because I like it and want to help it. I don't ask anything of the municipality but its moral support. I expect to employ from 300 to 500 people, and from time to time thousands of extras. I presume that my payroll will run close to \$30,000 per week.

On every picture I put out there will be a trailer attached which shall read, "Made in Long Beach." (p. 8: 3)

The article concluded by stating that H. M. would be the sole supervisor of the studio, though he would not be directing productions as he had in the past. H. M. would spend all his time overseeing the work of the plant, diligently bringing it back into the superior working conditions

that had brought fame and fortune to Long Beach's movie industry in the past. The article claimed that observers considered the buildings at Balboa Studios as adequate for the largest productions, containing sets of considerable value. H. M., nonetheless, planned remodeling the site to restore parts of the studios that had been converted to other commercial uses, as the studio grounds had begun to shrink with the encroaching spread of other businesses all around. The same article mentioned two serials to be among the first in line under H. M.'s supervision, with production to start within thirty days.

However, on May 13, 1922, the newest director at the Balboa Studios was named in the *Long Beach Press*, without the article mentioning H. M.'s connection to that director. A. S. McCarthy, with experience as a director in Hollywood, would open a company of his own in Long Beach. Was he cooperating with H. M., or was H. M. only leasing the site to Mr. McCarthy? While busy gathering his crew and preparing for the leasing of several stars from the Hollywood studios, Mr. McCarthy intended to use local talent for the supporting rôles in his films. Like H. M. and Del Ruth, McCarthy announced a similar slogan for his films: "Long Beach Made and Played" (F5: 3). His first feature would be a mid-west story, the scenario having been written by C. P. Huntsman of Long Beach.

Mr. H. M. Horkheimer's name does reappear a few days later, May 17, 1923, again in the *Long Beach Press*, in an article entitled "Studio Closed To Wrestling Match." H. M. Horkheimer had offered to allow his studio to hold a wrestling match. Afterwards, H. M. changed his mind, abiding by the judgement of the city council. H. M. also issued a statement, explaining that he would have to respect the city's wishes, though regretting, no doubt, the lost revenues, by not holding the match. The promoter of the match, Mr. Daro, had earlier obtained a license from the city clerk to put on the bout, having made arrangements with H. M. Horkheimer, manager of the studios, to hold the match on the studio grounds. The reasons for the objections on the part of the city council are not explained, other than some parents denounced the violent sport to be performed at the site; however, Mr. Horkheimer had written the city council asking for their approval, despite the license already obtained, apparently to remain in good stead with the council. Mr. Horkheimer's diplomacy did not seem to impress anybody, however, and Mr. Daro was the greatest loser since he had invested good money to arrange and advertise the match, and the last minute cancellation, the day before the scheduled event, must have caused Mr. Daro much chagrin.

Mr. Horkheimer issued a statement to the sports reporter of *Long Beach Press*, explaining his position on the whole affair:

I am most willing to do anything to help Long Beach, for charity or anything else that comes under my observation, and which tends to benefit the city. I think I have stated most clearly in my letter that I would take no chance of violating any of the views of the council—and I have therefore refused to allow the match to be staged, since the city council failed to approve the request of Mr. Daro.

I am sure that citizens of Long Beach have every faith and confidence in their mayor, their manager and their chief—the very fact that these citizens have elected them, is proof sufficient of the confidence they repose in them—and it would therefore be most unfitting in me to suggest to them what they should allow and what not to allow. If their opinion is good enough for the citizens, it is good

enough for me—and I am therefore abiding by their unanimous vote in disapproving the match.

I sincerely hope you will give me space enough in your paper to bring my viewpoint on this matter before the notice of the public. (p. 14: 8)

After the cancelled wrestling match, there appeared no news about the studio, till November 1923, and H. M. Horkheimer's name never again figured in any other reports about the studios after May 1923, nor was there any more mention of making movies at Balboa, despite the renovations during 1923.

No news in this case was not good news. Instead of movie productions, on November 23, 1923, the local lodge of Elks would use the Balboa Studios for a Christmas charity circus. An army of decorators completed the constructing of booths along the sides of the "big top," a real circus tent placed at the front of the main stage of the studio, decorated in red, white, and blue. The receipts would go to the Christmas charity fund and also defray the expense of the big convention to be held the following year by the Elks. In addition, all the automobile agencies in Long Beach would display their models at the week-long circus spectacular, where booths and fifteen acts, including trapeze artists, trained dogs, acrobatic skaters, contortionists, prize fighters, musicians, and of course clowns. How and when H. M.'s goal to revive the studio evaporated, we cannot say, but quite literally the Long Beach studios had degenerated into a charity case, full of buffoons swaggering on location, a veritable *danse macabre* before the final blow. The circus lasted seven days, attended by more than 65,000 persons. It was a symbolic farewell to the Balboa Amusement Producing Company. Soon the final curtain would close. For the loyalists of Balboa, the circus may very well have served as a disguised wake, in the tradition of the Irish or the revelers of New Orleans, as "the saints come marchin' in," during which the deceased is saluted with drink, frolic, and much merriment in the streets.

The interment was delayed another year. In the meantime, the laying of the shroud could not drown out completely the noise and rumble of demolition. On December 8, 1923, Charles W. Harlow purchased the plot from O. A. Greybeal. Horkheimer was never mentioned during this period of mourning. Sadly enough, H. M. never succeeded in reviving the studios, never able to claim them once again as his own, probably only acting as manager of the studios owned by Mr. Greybeal. Not only had H. M. hoped for a revival, but so did the Long Beach press in March and May of 1923. How does one explain H. M.'s involvement at the studios, except as a temporary manager for Mr. Greybeal, throughout the spring of that year? Nonetheless, the last remaining parcel of Balboa Studios, by then reduced to a mere two and a quarter acres at the northeast corner of Sixth and Alamitos Avenues, was sold to Mr. Harlow, a local oil man and financier, for \$260,000.

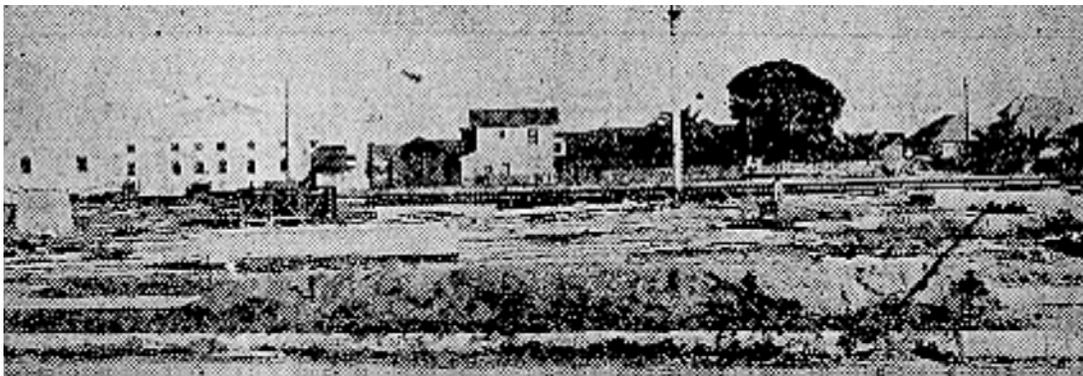
As a result, the big stage and other film property would be removed, the ground cleared, and the property subdivided into business lots. The interment was performed as simply as that. There were no tears and no eulogies at this burial. There was no funeral pyre nor any hymns sung to commemorate the passing of this golden age in early cinema. The flattened remains of the once-proud Balboa Studios would be further subdivided into twenty-one lots, with a frontage of 243 feet on Alamitos and another 231 feet on Sixth, with a depth of 418 feet. Mr. Harlow reportedly had already purchased all the previous parcels of the studio grounds a few months before the

circus came to town, for approximately \$100,000, the total of all the tracts worth an impressive \$360,000, indicating that the value of the studio property had never really fallen since the Horkheimers relinquished their control, even though the grounds had been diminished in size over the years.

When the buildings on the last tract just described were razed, all the earlier parcels had already been resold to various neighboring businesses. At the time of demolition involving the glassed-in studio and surrounding buildings, the other corners of the former Balboa quadrangle had already been replaced by a two-story building of nine stores and eleven apartments where once stood the Balboa offices. In addition, the big stage had been replaced by a bungalow court, and on another slice of the grounds already loomed the Palmdale Apartments. The last section of the former studio to be redeveloped would be the two-and-a-half acre tract purchased by Mr. Harlow, who planned to subdivide it for more apartment buildings and store fronts.

After the Horkheimers left Long Beach in 1918, Balboa Studios only enjoyed one last shot at a revival with Del Ruth's attempt to bring back the old glory days, in 1923, when the Security Bank took possession of the studio, selling it to O. A. Greybeal, a wealthy Wyoming oil man who planned to restore Balboa's former prestige with the elaborate and much publicized production of *The Marriage Chance*. Supposedly, *The Marriage Chance* was a good feature picture, but its release proved to be a box-office dud, in spite of all the hoopla and the transcontinental train ride to advertise the picture and Long Beach. In fact, though Greybeal allowed the production of several other pictures in Long Beach, he decided never to release any others, and once and for all, Mr. Greybeal would leave the movie business, to become a real estate tycoon. In the end, Mr. Greybeal profited from the sale of his property in Long Beach, even if he had to surrender the entire Long Beach film plant to demolition, making himself and the gravedigger rich men.

Finally, Balboa's obituary was published in the *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1925. There was even a photograph showing the flattened remains of the "Famous Film Factory," where the glassed-in studio once reigned, with the heading, "Long Beach-Balboa Studios Fall in Path of Progress":



March 22, 1925: "Long Beach-Balboa Studios Fall in Path of Progress." From the *Los Angeles Times*: "Remains of Famous Film Factory."

Unimaginative workmen at Long Beach have written “finis” to an early phase of the motion-picture industry. With the final demolition of the old Balboa Studios there has passed out of existence the cradle in which many cinema stars, past and present, first pantomimed their way into the hearts of a not too exacting public. Gone are many of the stars—gone are the Horkheimer Brothers and gone is the Balboa Studio. (II: 10)

The same obituary recounted the amazing rise and fall of the studio during the Horkheimers’ reign:

But the fall of the studios was as meteoric as the rise. Reaching its heyday in 1916, when as many as ten companies were working on its stages, there was every promise that the fortunes of the Horkheimers and those who worked for the enterprising brothers were made. Production became too rapid, however, and finally Pathé Frères, through which Balboa films were being distributed and marketed, issued a warning to the Horkheimers to slow down, but it was too late.

Then came the big slump and in the vaults of the studios there were no less than seventeen completed pictures which the Pathé interests were unable to dispose of. Work on the big stages stopped with a bang, and actors, actresses, camera men, property men and the host of others who had cast their fortunes with the Horkheimers were out of work. (II: 10)

The obituary attempted to describe the last days of Balboa Studios, frozen in suspended animation, unwilling to pass on to the afterlife, till Mr. Harlow abandoned altogether the idea of making movies. After the circus had paraded for one week like a cortège in one of Federico Fellini’s magical spells, the studio was emptied of its movie-making wares and nailed shut. An eerie silence took over the site, till total demolition irrevocably transfigured Balboa’s towering frame forever:

[Then] followed a period of inactivity. Stage props and furniture, rugs and furnishings to the value of many thousands of dollars, were stored in the property rooms and the latter were nailed shut. There was silence on the big 100-foot square stage, broken only by the football of the night watchman or the sudden noises of the studio cats in hot pursuit of a rat. In the vaults there lay fourteen of the seventeen unsold pictures costing thousands of dollars to make.

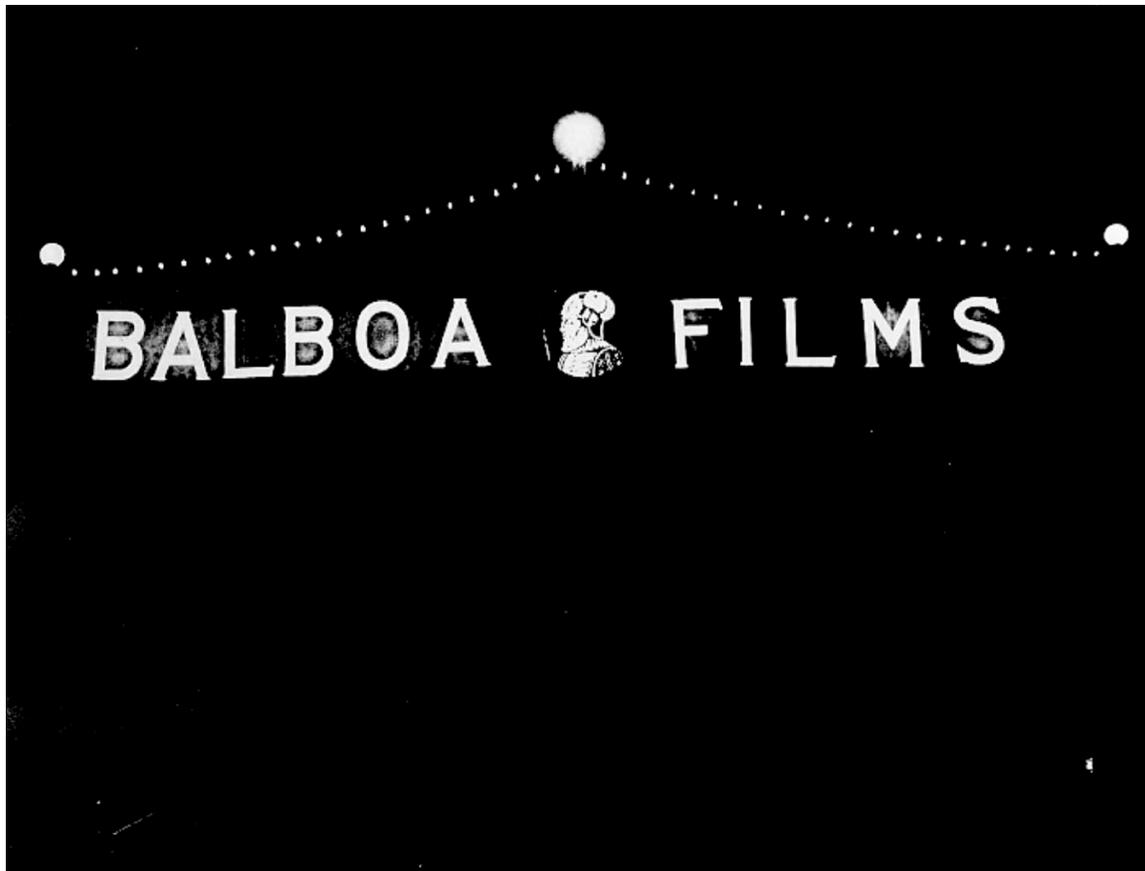
Then came Charles W. Harlow, wealthy oil producer who, realizing the rapid development and growth of Long Beach, purchased outright three acres of the studio grounds, together with the buildings and their contents. The fourteen pictures were sent to New York by representatives of the oil producer and there sold.

About a year ago [circa March 1924] the contents of the studios were at public auction and hundreds of men and women gathered to bid for the elaborate sets of furniture, the framed pictures, hundreds of statues, swords, spears, rugs, bedding and the thousands of other things that stage directors and property men find use for in the making of cinema thrillers. (II: 10)

This poignant closing chronicled the passing of an age in Long Beach. The Balboa Amusement Producing Company, once so prominent in early cinema, was fast becoming a faded memory. Nonetheless, from 1910 to 1923, the Long Beach film plant offered the venturesome pioneers a ticket to fame and glory. By a strange set of circumstances, some still unexplained, suddenly the

Horkheimers took a sharp and undeserved turn toward obscurity and defamation. The majestically glassed-in studio, the jewel of the plant, was the last to vanish, its 100 square-foot structure having weathered the tide for eight years, from 1917 to 1925, without a single supporting column to impede interior photography. During the plant's glorious but brief career, more than \$2,000,000 were invested in the studio. However, the prolonged economic slump destroyed the Horkheimers' reign in Movieland as it would also destroy a few years later Charles Pathé's film empire throughout the world. A new guard would reign in Hollywood. In fact, the changing of hands at Balboa attests to the numerous and vigorous attempts made to revive Long Beach's once major film plant.

It's still an unfinished story, and the final years of inactivity remain essentially an enigma. What really prevented the studio's revival after the Horkheimers left in 1918, or after H. M. returned in 1923, despite the many other businessmen, producers, and directors who tried vigorously to make the film plant hum, all marveling till the very end at the film plant's enormous potential? Though the Horkheimer Brothers have journeyed since to the Elysian Fields beyond, may their memory live forever in Movieland, and may these pioneer movie-makers, H. M. and Elwood, know at last the undying fame and glory they themselves bestowed to Hollywood when she was still only a babe in the cradle.



**Balboa's studio sign illuminated at night, shining like stars in the heavens. Photo, courtesy of Marc Wanamaker.**