

# SurveyLA

Los Angeles Historic Resources Survey

## LOS ANGELES CITYWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

Context: Entertainment Industry, 1908-1980

Theme: Filming Locations Associated with the Motion Picture and  
Television Broadcasting Industries, 1908-1980



*Prepared for:*

City of Los Angeles  
Department of City Planning  
Office of Historic Resources



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## **PREFACE**

This theme is a component of Los Angeles' citywide historic context statement and provides guidance to field surveyors and others in identifying and evaluating historic resources relating to filming locations associated with the motion pictures and television broadcasting industries. Refer to [www.HistoricPlacesLA.org](http://www.HistoricPlacesLA.org) for information on designated resources associated with this theme as well as those identified through SurveyLA and other surveys.

## **CONTRIBUTORS**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This theme, "Filming Locations Associated with the Motion Picture and Television Broadcasting Industries," examines the history of the practice of location filming in movies and television.<sup>1</sup> Resources associated with this theme are found outside of the boundaries of a motion picture or television studio lot or production plant and may include buildings, sites, streetscapes, and cultural landscapes.

Much of the theme narrative relates to motion picture location filming, which began in the first decade of the 20th century. Television location filming came later with the advent of the industry and its growing popularity in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The narrative provides a framework for the evaluation of properties that may be significant under this theme, but does not attempt to provide a comprehensive list of eligible properties. Moreover, the sheer volume of filming activity which has taken place in Los Angeles over the last century precludes a comprehensive or detailed discussion of individual sites. The locations noted here serve as representative examples of broad patterns and trends within the practice of location filming as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of individual entertainment mediums and their history and development within the industry see the theme "Industrial Properties Associated with the Entertainment Industry." This theme also includes information on filming activity at individual studios.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on individual buildings which have appeared in film see the "Selected Bibliography."

## **Evaluation Considerations**

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

- Properties significant for their architectural quality may also be evaluated under themes within the “Architecture and Engineering” context.
- Sites and other open spaces may also be evaluated as Cultural Landscapes.
- Properties may also be significant under one of the ethnic/cultural themes of the citywide historic context.

## **HISTORIC CONTEXT**

In looking back at the development of location filming, the *Los Angeles Times* once offered the following riddle: “How can you be in two places at once? When you are filming on location.”<sup>3</sup> The *Times* went on to explain for its non-industry readers that “shooting on location does not necessarily mean going to the actual site indicated in the film script...The company may travel no farther than Malibu Lake to shoot what looks like Canadian scenery. Going on location simply means leaving the studio lot.”<sup>4</sup>

While it is generally acknowledged that the film industry arrived in Los Angeles with the establishment of the first motion picture studio, it was actually location filming which first brought filmmakers to California at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and marked the state’s entrance into the production of motion pictures. Today, filming on location is so commonplace within the world of film and television production that viewers are accustomed to seeing – and some even expect to see – streets, houses, public buildings, and other places they recognize.

At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when commercial travel was limited and cross-country trips were both expensive and inefficient, seeing pictures filmed on location offered moviegoers a view of the world beyond their front door, past the limits of their own city or town. For many Americans, their first glimpse of Southern California – and many other places – came from the silver screen. Consequently, location filming played an influential role in shaping the American publics’ perception of Southern California and defining the character and identity of Los Angeles. The widespread dissemination of moving images of Los Angeles inspired migration and motivated the development of commerce and industry in the city. And as the medium evolved and narratives became more complex, filming in natural surroundings and every day, real-life environments aided in creating a feeling of authenticity and contextual richness to motion pictures. Today, the continued practice of location filming (and over 100 years of activity in Southern California) reflects the evolving trends and production methods of the movie industry.

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<sup>3</sup> “Location Filming Makes Economic Sense,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1982.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

## **Origins of Location Filming**

The practice of location filming originated and then evolved with the development of two early motion picture genres: the actuality film and the narrative Western. The actuality film was the first to showcase the landscape and scenery of the American West to the movie-going public. Within a decade, motion pictures had evolved into a more complex narrative form which could encompass multiple genres. Among them was the narrative Western, an increasingly popular theme. In fact, by 1909, the Western accounted for 21 percent of all films produced in the United States.<sup>5</sup> While location filming was utilized in all genres of narrative film, it was the Western where location and setting were most critical to the development of the visual aesthetic and character of the film and, as a result, most reliant upon location to enhance authenticity and create a successful, believable picture.

## Development of Actuality Films

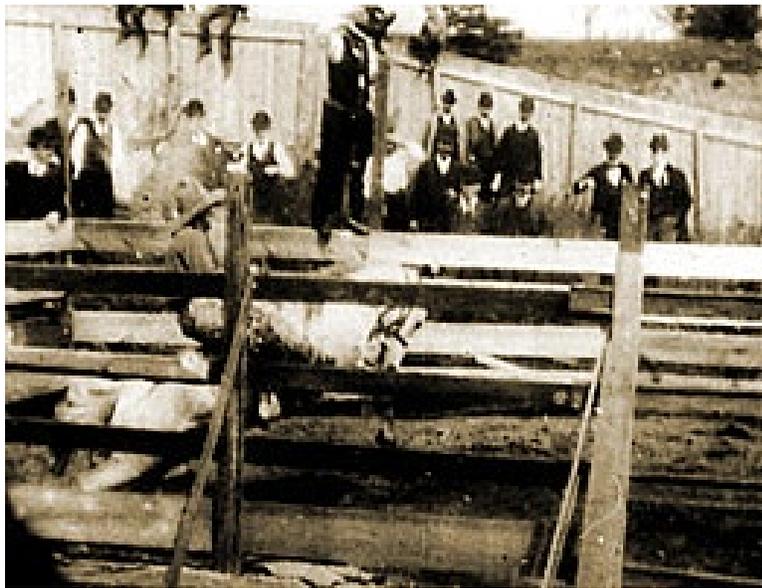
The origins of location filming are closely linked to the beginnings of the film industry itself. The practice originated in the 1890s with the development of “actuality films,” which emerged concurrently with the development of projected cinema – the exhibition method associated with the industry today. Actuality films were a type of non-fiction documentary film which utilized footage of real locations, people, and events, but lacked any narrative organization or structure. Most actualities were typically only a few minutes in length and featured scenes from everyday life which would have been familiar to most moviegoers, but would still have been considered novel when viewed as a moving image on a screen.

While it is believed that actualities were likely pioneered by the Lumière brothers in France, Thomas Edison was the first filmmaker to experiment with the type in the United States. Edison began recording actualities in 1891 in his New Jersey laboratory where he filmed athletes, prizefighters, vaudeville performers, and other entertainers. Actualities produced by Edison include two of the earliest recorded Native American dances on film, *Sioux Ghost Dance* and *Buffalo Dance*, both filmed in 1894.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew A. Erish, *Col. William N. Selig, The Man Who Invented Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 53.

<sup>6</sup> “Overview of the Edison Motion Pictures by Genre,” *Inventing Entertainment: The Early Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies*, Library of Congress, accessed November 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/edison-company-motion-pictures-and-sound-recordings/articles-and-essays/history-of-edison-motion-pictures/overview-of-the-edison-motion-pictures-by-genre/>.



A frame from *Bucking Broncho* (1894), believed to be the first motion picture filmed outdoors. (Library of Congress) (Image has been tinted for clarity.)

In 1894, Edison moved outside, and produced what is believed to be the first motion picture to be filmed outdoors – *Bucking Broncho*, recorded in a specially-constructed corral adjacent to Edison’s studio. Logistics made traveling much further difficult as Edison’s existing camera equipment was heavy and cumbersome, making it virtually impossible to transport.

By 1896, Edison had developed a portable camera designed for shooting outdoor scenes, and that same year his assistant, William Heise, used the new camera to film

the first motion picture to be shot on location in the United States. *Herald Square*, less than a minute in length, depicts the bustling activity of a New York City street.<sup>7</sup> Although films such as *Herald Square* may seem quite ordinary to 20<sup>th</sup> century audiences, they were quite popular with a generation unfamiliar with the concept of realistic moving images.<sup>8</sup>

That same year, the Edison Company began filming trains and railways, producing films of train routes to Buffalo and Niagara Falls.<sup>9</sup> Edison’s efforts were aided by the support of the Lehigh Valley Railroad Company and, as actuality films grew in popularity, this arrangement was not uncommon. The following year, Edison Company filmmakers James White and Frederick Blechynden traveled west, capturing scenes in San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, Yellowstone National Park, Colorado, and New Mexico. The trip was facilitated and partially subsidized by transportation companies interested in promoting tourism, including the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad; the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad; and the Mexican International Railroad.<sup>10</sup> As film historian Charles Musser explains:

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<sup>7</sup> “The First Film Shot in New York City,” *New York Times*, April 18, 2015, accessed October 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/19/nyregion/the-first-film-shot-in-new-york-city.html>. *Herald Square* is generally acknowledged to be the first film shot on location in the United States, although historical accounts contend that filmmakers may have been shooting elsewhere sooner. According to a historical account included in the *Film Daily Year Book* in 1922, the first effort of a film company to “seek location” came in 1895, when Otway Latham traveled to Mexico to capture a bullfight and a religious festival. See the 1922 *Film Daily Year Book* (New York and Los Angeles: The Film Daily, 1922), 21, accessed June 2018, archived online at <https://archive.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> “Overview of the Edison Motion Pictures by Genre.”

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*, vol. 1 of the *History of the American Cinema*, ed. Charles Harpole (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 234.

These commercial arrangements repeated those already established with important railroad companies in the East. Many of the resulting films featured the railroads themselves in their most heroic settings...While some presented hotel accommodations, most featured natural beauty or tourist sights...With travel expenses paid, White and Blechynden toured the Far West, stopping in Denver and sweeping south into Mexico, where they photographed a bullfight.<sup>11</sup>

The American West proved to be a popular locale for actualities. Both Edison's company and Biograph Company produced actuality films of Buffalo Bill parades, cowboys herding and branding cattle, and scenes in Yellowstone National Park.<sup>12</sup> One of the most prolific filmmakers of actualities, however, was also the man who pioneered the motion picture industry in Southern California – William N. Selig. According to biographer Andrew Erish, Selig may have produced more Western-based actualities than any other company during the first decade of commercial cinema.<sup>13</sup> Selig's work was also distinguished from that of his predecessors through his focus on "exploiting the state's unique geography,"<sup>14</sup> rather than on people and their activities. The production of these Western "scenics," as they were sometimes called, paved the way for the development of the narrative Western genre.<sup>15</sup>

Depicting a wide variety of scenic views and locations, actuality films and "travelogues" became extremely popular with moviegoers. They were also popular with filmmakers. With travel at least partially subsidized by transportation companies, and without the need to pay for actors' salaries, costumes, or sets, actualities and travelogues became less expensive to produce than "acted" or narrative films. Consequently, actuality films were the most frequently-produced film type in America at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> However, after almost a decade of widespread exhibition, the novelty of moving pictures was no longer sufficient to sustain repeat viewers' interest. A wider variety of output was necessary, and filmmakers began to experiment with narrative genre films. By 1908, manufacturers had moved toward an output which consisted primarily of fictional narratives.<sup>17</sup> In addition to a demand for greater variety in content, Robert Allen's research indicates that an important cause for this was the fact that narratives could be made in a central location and on a predictable basis, making possible a start to the "efficient and profitable mass production"<sup>18</sup> that would eventually come to define the motion picture industry.

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<sup>11</sup> Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 234. Biograph was also known as American Mutoscope and Biograph Company. It was founded in 1895 by William Kennedy Dickson and active only until 1916

<sup>12</sup> Erish, *Col. William N. Selig*, 31.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 32.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>16</sup> "Overview of the Edison Motion Pictures by Genre."

<sup>17</sup> David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985), 113.

<sup>18</sup> Bordwell et al., *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 113.

### Development of the Narrative Western

While filmmakers experimented with many narrative genres during the first decade of the 20th, one theme in particular spurred the evolution of location filming as a production practice – the narrative Western. The Western allowed filmmakers to capitalize on the public’s growing fascination with the exotic and colorful American West. Andrew Erish explains the phenomenon taking place at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Late-nineteenth-century literature, painting, and theater reflected a widespread interest in the American West. Authors O. Henry, Bret Harte, and Owen Wister, painters George Catlin and Frederic Remington, and Buffalo Bill Cody’s touring wild west extravaganzas helped shape the imagery, romanticize the inhabitants, and exploit the conflicts, thus establishing the popular, stylized, notions of the West. It’s not surprising, then, that filmmakers would also capitalize on existing Western themes and iconography for a growing audience.<sup>19</sup>

As a genre, the Western lent itself particularly well to location filming because its overarching themes were evocative of a specific time and place and the landscape was critical to defining the aesthetic of the type.

According to the trade magazine *Nickelodeon*, Selig and his followers were attracted to making Western narratives in the West because “certain phases of life in the West, where passions had been strong and the will unchecked by law, gave a plausible basis for melodrama,” and because “the [exotic] West was not the [familiar] East.”

*Monography* tied the international popularity of the Western to its visual “dash and action” and straightforward, easy-to-follow narratives. It also recognized that the Western was grounded in myth. “It does not matter if the story is only slightly different from what they have seen before. This is the America that they have long imagined and heard about.”<sup>20</sup>

The public’s interest in the American West, combined with the motion picture industry’s move to more complex dramatic narratives, gave rise to the development of the narrative Western film. However, many of the aspects which defined the character of early Western films were recreated from demonstrations of Western culture which were already duplications themselves, such as Buffalo Bill Cody’s traveling show. Selig, on the other hand, believed that it was possible to “improve upon the dubious locations and fancifully costumed, inexperienced horsemen” shown in early Westerns filmed at East Coast studios. “Such films, [Selig] thought, would be more realistic and believable when produced

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<sup>19</sup> Erish, *Col. William N. Selig*, 31.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

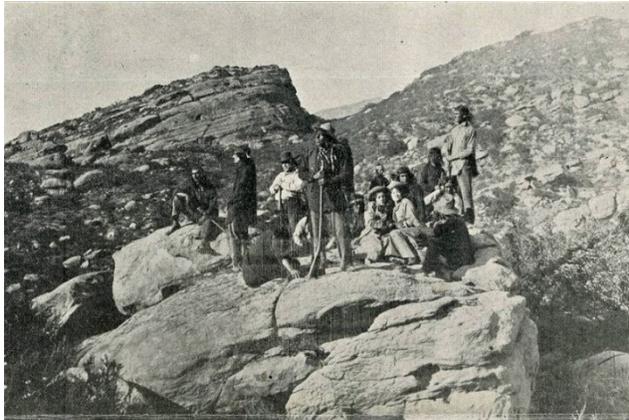
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in genuine western locations, and he gambled that sufficient numbers of moving picture patrons would concur.”<sup>21</sup>



Left: Still frame from William Selig's *The Outbreak*, filmed on location in 1911 (Margaret Herrick Library Digital Collections);  
Right: Garden of the Gods Historic District, Lower Iverson Ranch, Chatsworth (SurveyLA)

Selig spent the next several years traveling periodically from his Chicago studio to Colorado to film a succession of narrative Western films on location, which garnered widespread recognition for their realism and authenticity. His practice of routinely filming stories on location defined the standard for the genre, leading the *New York Dramatic Mirror* to admit that “there is something indefinable in the Western country, as the Chicago producers have shown us, that is almost impossible to counterfeit in the East.”<sup>22</sup> In setting the bar, Selig opened to criticism other directors and producers who did not film on location. In critiquing Edison's *The Pony Express* (1909), the *Mirror* noted that the film's Western setting and narrative “are obviously located on Eastern farmland, with little to suggest either the plains or the mountains of the west...The best acting is done by the horse that plays dead.”<sup>23</sup> As more and more emphasis was placed on authenticity East Coast filmmakers seeking to create “Eastern Westerns”<sup>24</sup> were routinely called out by the industry press. In one account, the *Mirror* critic wrote of Lubin's Philadelphia-made *Cowboy Argument* (1909), “A cowboy picture acted in Eastern country is not as satisfactory as one performed in the West, where mountains and plains and the character of the buildings are in harmony with the subject.” Similar complaints began to dominate the popular discourse on Westerns. By 1910 [the] backlash against foreign-made Westerns had spread to include unrealistic domestic product, which became known as “Eastern Westerns,” and even more pejoratively, “Jersey scenery.”<sup>25</sup>

Filmmakers responded to the call for authenticity by following Selig's lead and undertaking their own excursions to film on location. These efforts to film an authentic Western, along with the success of Selig's other films made in Los Angeles, spurred industry migration westward to California.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>22</sup> As quoted in Erish, *Col. William N. Selig*, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Erish, *Col. William N. Selig*, 53.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 52.

### Development of Early Location Filming Practices

As the development of narrative films replaced actualities around 1908, the practice of location filming began to evolve in both form and function. In fact, the 1910s – the first full decade of narrative film production utilizing multiple scenes and camera setups – also marked the first of two distinct periods of growth and innovation in the development of location filming. Spurred by developments in production methods as well as technological advancements within the industry, the practice became more sophisticated and adaptable. Concepts introduced and refined during this period included the “second unit” or “location unit,” which dispatched a second filmmaking crew to shoot footage on location that would later be combined with footage filmed on a soundstage. This type of expansion allowed the manufacturers to retain certain aspects of the popular scenic and topical films – which depicted a particular incident or event – while making sure production schedules were met.<sup>26</sup> Studios also began to make a greater effort to organize their approach to filming in key locations as production roles evolved. The choice of exterior sets had passed by 1913 from the director’s concerns into the hands of the assistant director, or more often thereafter to “location men,” and by the mid-teens it was common for studios to undertake in-depth research to identify potential filming locations and develop photographic reference files of hundreds of locales.<sup>27</sup>

What truly expanded the scope of location filming during this period, however, was improved lighting technology, which allowed location filming to take place at night.

Throughout the teens, studios sought a combination of techniques that would make location shooting at night more practical. At the time most night scenes were simply shot during the day and then tinted blue, with possibly an intertitle to indicate the time of day. In 1915, both portable floodlights and generators were available for night shooting, but these were still too expensive for general use...But by 1919, with the introduction of high-powered arcs (recently invented as searchlights for military use) and better portable generators, the system became cheap enough to be feasible. From that year on, it was much more common to find night for night scenes in Hollywood films done outside the studio.<sup>28</sup>

With the introduction of more efficient and authentic lighting, by 1920 location filming was fully established as a production practice.

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<sup>26</sup> Bordwell et al., *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 121-122.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 263.

## Early Location Filming in Southern California and Los Angeles

The practice of location filming first commenced in California, and in Los Angeles in particular, when Edison filmmakers James White and Frederick Blechynden toured the state on a railroad company-sponsored excursion in 1897. At least three of the actuality films they created on that expedition were recorded in Southern California: *California Orange Groves, Panoramic View*; *Through the Tunnel*, which was filmed near Santa Monica; and *South Spring Street, Los Angeles*. Just over thirty seconds long, *South Spring Street* represents the first moving picture to be filmed in Los Angeles.<sup>29</sup>



A still from *South Spring Street, Los Angeles, Cal. (1897)*, believed to be the first film shot on location in Los Angeles. (Library of Congress)

Although it is believed that other actuality films may have been filmed in Los Angeles after the turn of the century, location filming did not begin in earnest in the area until after the development of narrative pictures. The movement to narrative film pictures on location in Southern California was inaugurated by the efforts of William Selig. Selig's *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which was filmed in 1907 and included outdoor scenes recorded at Laguna Beach by director Francis Boggs.<sup>30</sup> *Monte Cristo* was an adaptation of the popular theatrical production of the time, which was based on Alexandre Dumas' novel of the same name.<sup>31</sup> Andrew Erish describes how the company came to film in Southern California:

The highlight of the theatrical version of *The Count of Monte Cristo* occurs when protagonist Edmond Dantes escapes years of island imprisonment and safely crawls ashore to freedom, raises his arms and declares, "The world is mine!" Selig and Boggs agreed that this famous scene should be photographed not in the studio but on an actual beach...[They] shared a radical vision of how the inclusion of such a realistic moment in *Monte Cristo* amidst an otherwise artificial theatrical presentation might have a transformative effect on the audience and cinema in general, attracting new

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<sup>29</sup> The film can be viewed in full on the Library of Congress website at <https://www.loc.gov/item/00694306/> (accessed October 2017). See also "This 1897 Film Was the First Movie Made in Los Angeles," KCET Lost LA, accessed October 2017, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/lost-la/this-1897-film-was-the-first-movie-made-in-los-angeles>.

<sup>30</sup> Researchers have historically disagreed on the specific location utilized by director Boggs and cameraman Thomas Persons; while Selig biographer Andrew Erish believes there is definitive evidence and documentation that the filming took place at Laguna Beach's Three Arches rock formation, others have hypothesized that the site may be located in La Jolla or the Pacific Palisades. See Erish, 78 and 244; and Karie Bible, Marc Wanamaker, and Harry Medved, *Location Filming in Los Angeles, Images of America* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 72.

<sup>31</sup> The film is sometimes referred to by the shortened title of *Monte Cristo*.

spectators and thus equipping Selig with the financial resources and prestige he needed...<sup>32</sup>

Boggs and cameraman Thomas Persons traveled to Los Angeles to film the sequence in the last months of 1907. After an eventful shoot where the amateur stuntman hired by Boggs nearly drowned, *The Count of Monte Cristo* was released on January 30, 1908. While the film received favorable reviews, the insertion of the location shots, which marked a turning point in the development of cinematic language and production, went unmentioned.<sup>33</sup>



*Dantes (here, played by a local amateur stunt double) emerges from the ocean in the climactic scene of William Selig's *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1908). The picture, was the first narrative film to be recorded in Southern California. (Fandor.com)*

Boggs and the Selig Polyscope 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 called Pershing Square, 520-530 South Olive Street), as well as surreptitiously-filmed footage of Lucky Baldwin's Santa Anita Park racetrack, recorded in the final three days before the park's closure.<sup>34</sup> 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."<sup>35</sup> The film also highlighted Selig's practice of inserting location shots into films, a production method which would soon become routine. As Andrew Erish

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<sup>32</sup> Erish, *Col. William N. Selig*, 78.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 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. Santa Anita Park burned down in 1912; it was rebuilt and reopened in the 1903s.

<sup>35</sup> Erish, *Col. William N. Selig*, 82.

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observes, “the inclusion of scenes staged at a genuine racetrack enhanced the film’s authenticity, subtly suggesting to the spectator a real slice of life. This was an aesthetic that William Selig imparted to each of his directors and that would become a foundational component of virtually all subsequent commercial filmmaking.”<sup>36</sup>



*Santa Anita Racetrack in as it appeared in 1909 when William Selig filmed  
The Heart of a Race Tout. (Los Angeles Public Library)*

The Selig Company filmed several pictures at their first facility before relocating to permanent quarters in the Edendale neighborhood of Los Angeles in August 1909. Selig’s hope was to routinize the company’s productions and increase the output of their popular Western films to one per week.<sup>37</sup> According to Andrew Erish, “The establishment of the first studio in Los Angeles was prompted in part by the demand for a steady flow of geographically realistic Westerns.”<sup>38</sup> Although setting up a satellite studio on the other side of the country from Chicago was not without risk, Selig was confident that the venture would pay off, telling reporters that the Los Angeles property was selected to “get our best scenic effects from. We believe in giving the public the most realistic picture we can get, and we’re spending a lot of money on it, too. But it will come back.”<sup>39</sup>

Selig’s films benefitted from a worldwide distribution network, and soon images of Southern California were splashed across screens from Pennsylvania to Paris. Audiences took notice – and so did Selig’s fellow filmmakers.

These narrative productions were how most audiences initially encountered California in general and Los Angeles in particular. The films of Selig’s Los Angeles unit displayed a variety of scenery unlike that found in the European film capitals or the northeastern hub of the American industry, scenery that, as in the earlier Colorado Westerns, was

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 85.

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integral to the narrative. The sheer volume of releases showed that Boggs and company were unimpeded by weather conditions. Audiences clamored for more, and the curiosity of Selig's competitors, both old and new, was piqued. It was becoming apparent that Los Angeles production was a major factor in Selig's growing prominence within the industry.<sup>40</sup>

From the industry's standpoint, Los Angeles had, in effect, become the star of Selig's productions. It was perhaps not surprising that, by 1912 "virtually every American motion picture company" had followed Selig to Los Angeles,<sup>41</sup> with *Moving Picture World* observing that "the Selig forces have lead the California rush, and thither they have lured the rest of the colony."<sup>42</sup> Many of the arriving studios were producing Westerns, with the goal of emulating Selig's popular style and sharing in his success; some studios even simply restaged some of Selig's most popular productions.<sup>43</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* noted that "despite the tremendous output of cowboy and Indian pictures, the local directors say that the demand for them, especially in Europe, is still greater than for any other class."<sup>44</sup>

Westerns, however, were not the only genre which could be improved by filming on location. Southern California's varied topography allowed for a wide variety of films to be made. As a 1911 article in *Moving Picture World* described it, "Within a twenty-mile radius of Los Angeles may be found conditions suitable for exteriors from a tropic to a frigid background, and from desert to jungle."<sup>45</sup> One of the most popular



Road in Griffith Park, Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 942. (Los Angeles Public Library)

early filming locations was Griffith Park (4730 Crystal Springs Drive, L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 942). The Selig, Bison, Kalem, and Biograph companies all shot Western films on location there.<sup>46</sup> Other popular locations included the beaches of Santa Monica and Venice, where "there may be taken resort comedies with an Atlantic City or Coney Island background,"<sup>47</sup> or alternatively, marine dramas, which were popular subjects for Selig and Biograph. Religious pictures also utilized the nearby missions, including the Mission San Fernando Rey de España (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 23, State Historical Landmark No. 157, and listed in the National Register). Early residential neighborhoods such as West Adams and Fremont Place offered more domestic depictions.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>42</sup> Richard V. Spencer, "Los Angeles as a Producing Center," *Moving Picture World*, April 8, 1911.

<sup>43</sup> Erish, *Col. William N. Selig*, 89.

<sup>44</sup> As quoted in Erish, *Col. William N. Selig*, 56.

<sup>45</sup> Spencer, "Los Angeles as a Producing Center."

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

While filmmakers felt they had found an advantageous setting in Los Angeles, the relationship was a mutually beneficial one. In October 1909, the *Los Angeles Times* noted, “As an advertising proposition the Selig Company is giving California a good deal of free publicity, because its pictures are used all over the world.”<sup>48</sup>

According to [Francis] Boggs the California pictures are giving better satisfaction than the outdoor pictures taken anywhere else. For this reason practically all of the outdoor work of this company will be done in California. The success of this company will have a tendency to bring others of these companies here so that in another year or so California, and especially Southern California, will be getting much free advertising through the moving picture shows.<sup>49</sup>

Because of the number of motion picture companies filming in Los Angeles, and the high volume of films being produced, Los Angeles soon became, as film historian Kevin Brownlow once declared, “the most photographed town in the world.”<sup>50</sup> The widespread exposure and favorable promotion the city received through its repeated appearances on film contributed to the growth of the local motion picture industry, to be sure, but it also contributed to the growth of Los Angeles as a whole. The city’s economy, population, and tourism were all defined by its continued presence on the silver screen.

It was footage of the Los Angeles area, appearing in the first films to be made in California that precipitated the incredible population explosion. Cameramen would select the prettiest street corner, wait until the light was right, and, when they saw the movie, a few hundred more disillusioned Easterners and mid-Westerners would pack their bags.<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, for all the boosterism of the *Los Angeles Times* and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, there was no greater promoter of the city than the medium it had helped to create. Film succeeded where promotional pamphlets fell short, displaying the beauty of the Southern California landscape in all its natural glory to audiences all over the country. Audiences responded, and soon moviegoers and moviemakers alike were flocking to Los Angeles.

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<sup>48</sup> “New Plays Without Words Are Put on Film Here,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 1909.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Foreword by Kevin Brownlow in John Bengtson, *Silent Echoes: Discovering Early Hollywood Through the Films of Buster Keaton* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

### **Location Filming in the Major Studio Era<sup>52</sup>**

While the formative first decade of the film industry had been characterized by experimentation and competition amongst many small independent production companies, by the 1920s producers had begun to seek greater profits and more market control. Many of the pioneering studios of earlier years consolidated operations or were acquired by larger competitors. This process ultimately resulted in eight studios dominating the American motion picture industry. Known as the “Big Eight,” these companies included Columbia Pictures, Famous Players-Lasky (now known as Paramount), Fox Film Corporation (now known as Twentieth Century Fox), Metro (now known as Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer), RKO Pictures, United Artists, Universal Pictures, and Warner Brothers.

With the formation of the Big Eight, and the development of the vertically-integrated production model, the practice of location filming began to evolve.<sup>53</sup> Studios were now able to dedicate substantial financial resources to the construction of larger and more permanent production facilities, as well as the acquisition of large tracts of land which allowed for the development of expansive backlots. This allowed executives to control the circumstances of production in a much more efficient way that capitalized on recent technological advancements.

The firms began a steady exodus from location shooting into the studio and back lot after the mid-teens. One 1916 writer pointed out that producers used to go away to shoot foreign scenes; now they were done in the United States “where the producers have better laboratory facilities, understand the light better, can secure experienced players – and save time.” With a particular standard for the quality film, location work even miles away became more difficult and expensive. Negative development, lighting control and cost, electrical current access, location set problems (low ceilings in houses which hampered quality lighting arrangements), and transportation of large labor staffs and more equipment all decreased location shooting’s desirability. Besides, better set construction, with the use of miniatures and glass shots when necessary, adequately represented exterior locales and “local color” sets.<sup>54</sup>

The economy of reusing standing sets on the backlot was preferred by cost-conscious studio executives; Sam Goldwyn is said to have remarked, “A tree is a tree. Shoot it on the backlot.”<sup>55</sup> With longer films, more actors, sets, and crews were involved in the shooting process; any savings of time saved commensurately large amounts of money in salaries and traveling costs.<sup>56</sup>As a result, by the beginning

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<sup>52</sup> Also see the theme “Industrial Properties Associated with the Entertainment Industry.”

<sup>53</sup> Vertically integrated production companies have the ownership of the means of production, distribution and exhibition of the film by the same company.

<sup>54</sup> Bordwell et al., *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 125.

<sup>55</sup> “Location Filming Makes Economic Sense,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1982

<sup>56</sup> Bordwell et al., *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 219-220.

of the 1920s, “the elaborate construction of foreign locales was taking place habitually in the studios.”<sup>57</sup> While location filming did not cease entirely during the 1920s and 1930s, the practice was utilized less frequently by the major studios and was more likely to be undertaken by independent filmmakers who did not have the resources of the Big Eight at their disposal.

Although studio attitudes towards location filming may have begun to shift, it remained the preferred practice for some of the industry’s most popular and influential comedic filmmakers. Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, and Charlie Chaplin all incorporated location filming into their films and considered the practice to be a vital part of motion picture production.<sup>58</sup> The three men all rose to prominence during the silent film era for their distinctive character-driven comedies, which relied heavily on physical comedy, elaborate slapstick stunt sequences, and extensive chase scenes filmed in now-iconic locations around Los Angeles. One of the most famous examples of the period is Harold Lloyd’s *Safety Last!* (1923). While Lloyd filmed extensively in the Hill Street tunnels (not extant) in many of his earlier films, he rose



Harold Lloyd in *Safety Last!* (1923), filmed at the Western Costume Company building. (WesternCostumeResearch.com)

to new heights with *Safety Last*, whose climax sees Lloyd dangling from a clock face several stories above the ground. While the final scene was ultimately a composite which utilized trick sets built atop three different buildings in Downtown Los Angeles, as John Bengtson notes, “although the danger was minimized, Lloyd was just as high in the air as he appeared to be during these scenes.”<sup>59</sup> The film’s iconic clock set was built atop the Western Costume Company building at 908 South Broadway (contributor to the National Register Broadway Theatre and Commercial District), and many of the surrounding buildings seen as Lloyd hangs in midair remain extant today.

The films of Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and others reveal that by the 1920s location filming was no longer defined by a single genre, and that the practice had evolved beyond merely providing a scenic backdrop which communicated the character and aesthetic of a genre film. Indeed, as motion picture narratives became more complex, filmmakers were beginning to utilize locations in different ways. Filming on location could now play an integral role in shaping the narrative itself, with

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> John Bengtson provides a thorough and exceptionally detailed account of location filming undertaken by three of the silent film era’s most prominent actors - Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, and Harold Lloyd – in his series of books on the subject. For further information on locations utilized by the actors in each of their films, see Bengtson, *Silent Echoes: Discovering Early Hollywood Through the Films of Buster Keaton* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2000); *Silent Traces: Discovering Early Hollywood Through the Films of Charlie Chaplin* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2006); and *Silent Visions: Discovering Early Hollywood and New York Through the Films of Harold Lloyd* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> Bengtson, *Silent Visions*, 114.

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specific sites influencing the plot and structure of the film. One of the most enduring examples of slapstick comedy is also one of the most iconic examples of location filming: *The Music Box* (1932), starring the comedic duo Laurel and Hardy. The short film includes a climactic scene depicting the two comedians attempting to carry a piano up a steep flight of stairs located immediately to the south of 939 North Vendome Street in the Silver Lake neighborhood.



Left: Still frame of the Vendome-Descanso Public Stairway in *The Music Box*, 1932 (National Film Registry, Library of Congress); Right: The Vendome-Descanso Public Stairway, Silver Lake (SurveyLA)

The practice of filmmaking was forever transformed with the release of *The Jazz Singer*, filmed on the Warner Brothers lot in 1927. The film represented the first feature-length film to be recorded with synchronized dialogue. The advent of sound triggered a shift in location filming practices as well. Silent films had relied heavily on visual presentation to communicate the narrative. The early styles, such as slapstick, which had most effectively incorporated location filming, began to fall out of favor. However, location filming continued to flourish in other ways. Most studio properties were expanded to include extensive backlots, where many location scenes were filmed.<sup>60</sup> At the time, space on studio lots was



*The Executive Office Building, at the Old Warner Brothers Studio, circa 1927, 5800-5858 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 180 (Bison Archives)*

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<sup>60</sup> Columbia Pictures was the only major motion picture studio of the Big Eight that did not have a backlot.

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“not a problem,” the *Los Angeles Times* later noted.<sup>61</sup> “Sets, constructed for one movie, remained standing for future use: a jungle on Lot 3, chateaus on Lot 2. Elsewhere, turn-of-the-century New York.”<sup>62</sup>

Location filming that did take place outside the major studio properties expanded along with the development of Los Angeles. Construction activity undertaken to meet the demands of the city’s population boom offered the motion picture community an ever-widening array of architectural styles, property types, and settings. One of the more popular natural locations during this period was Upper Franklin Canyon Park, which served as the setting for the memorable hitchhiking scene in *It Happened One Night* (1934), starring Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert.



Left: Still frame of Upper Franklin Canyon in *It Happened One Night*, 1934 (National Film Registry, Library of Congress); Right: Reservoir in Upper Franklin Canyon Park Historic District, filming location for film and television since the 1930s (SurveyLA)

While the surrounding landscape had offered a variety of natural location options, those filmmakers desiring a more metropolitan setting had been largely limited to Downtown Los Angeles. Now, newly-built communities and commercial centers of the 1920s and 30s became focal points for filming activity. With the establishment of Westwood Village and the University of California Los Angeles campus, locations in the western portion of the city became increasingly popular. By the 1940s studio location departments noted the Westwood area as one of the more popular location sites in Los Angeles.<sup>63</sup>

During the 1940s, and continuing to the present day, New Chinatown, which was first developed in the late 1930s, also became a popular site for location filming.<sup>64</sup> Among the earliest films produced in the area were an early film *noir* starring Gene Tierney and Walter Huston called *The Shanghai Gesture* (1941), and *Dragon Seed* (1944), which starred Katharine Hepburn. As more gritty genres like film *noir* began to take hold in film and television in the years following World War II, Chinatown’s unique mix of urban landscape

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<sup>61</sup> “Location Filming Makes Economic Sense,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1982.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Bible, et. al., *Location Filming in Los Angeles*, 83.

<sup>64</sup> For more information about Chinatown and Chinese Americans in the entertainment industry, see the *Chinese Americans in Los Angeles Historic Context*.

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and exotic architecture frequently stood in for the “‘exotic’ cities of the Far East or a seedy underworld of crime and deception,” with Jeremy Backlar noting that “there are only a few films shot in Chinatown that have nothing to do with crime at all.”<sup>65</sup> Chinatown continues to be a popular place for location filming to this day.

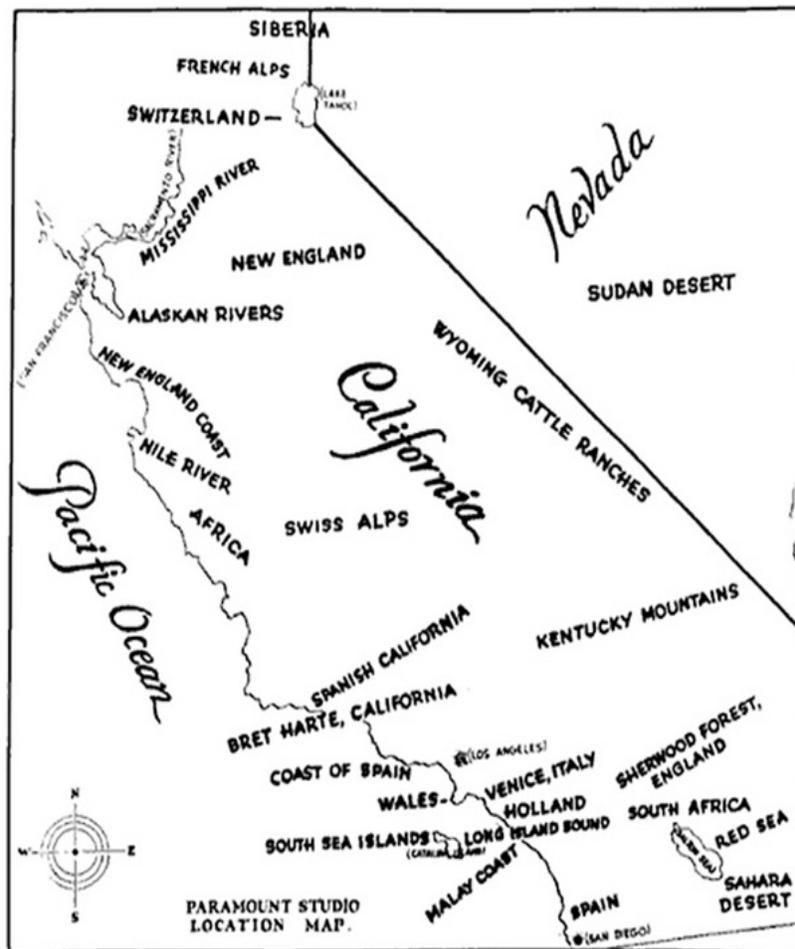


*Left: Still frame of Shanghai Gesture, 1941 (classicmovierev.com); Right: Still frame of Dragon Seed, 1944 (blogspot.com)*

Location filming continued apace throughout the 1930s and 1940s, with filming activity taking place across the city. Studio location departments created and used maps of the Southern California region to quickly identify areas that could double for sites around the world. It was the United States' entrance into World War II and the resultant restrictions on production activity that would eventually alter the course of location filming activity in Los Angeles.

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<sup>65</sup> Jeremy Backlar, “As Seen in Film and TV: Revisiting Iconic Locations in Chinatown,” KCET Field Guides, August 2, 2010, accessed August 2019, <https://www.kcet.org/food-living/as-seen-in-film-and-tv-revisiting-iconic-locations-in-chinatown>.



*Paramount Studios location map, 1938. Reproduced from The American Film Industry, Tino Balio, ed.*

### Development of the Movie Ranch

In the 1930s, studios also began to capitalize on the surrounding Southern California landscape that had served the industry pioneers so well by purchasing their own “movie ranches,” which were primarily located in the San Fernando Valley where more extensive or complex location filming activity could take place. Six of the Big Eight studios owned ranches; Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and United Artists were the only two companies who did not own additional property. The ranches typically stood in for a variety of locations and appeared in a wide array of films under the guise of different settings and backdrops.

Independent movie ranches were established as well to meet the needs of independent producers. One of the most well-known is the Iverson Movie Ranch in Chatsworth (1 Iverson Lane). First utilized as a filming location in the 1910s, the ranch was originally developed from a 500-acre homestead owned by Carl and Augusta Iverson and eventually became a prominent filming location for Western films and

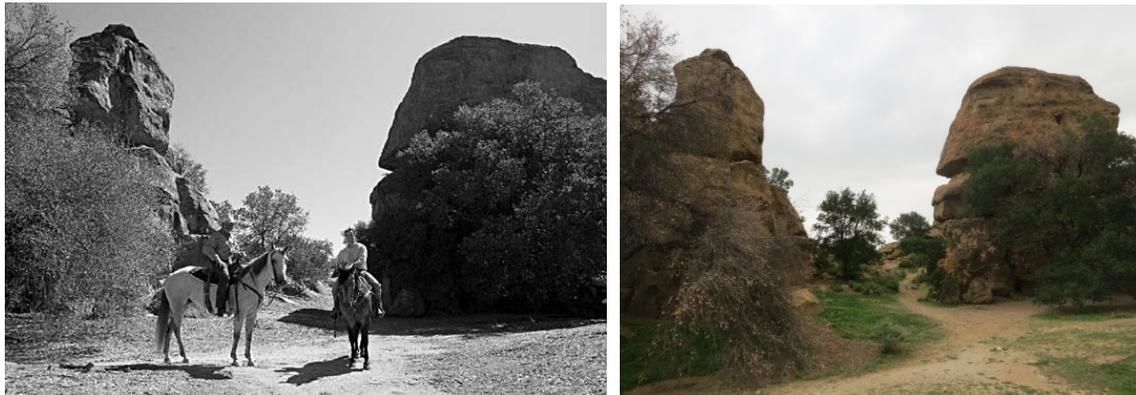
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television shows. Once dubbed “the most shot-up movie location ranch in motion picture history,”<sup>66</sup> historian Jerry England estimates that as many as 2,000 motion pictures and television shows have utilized the Ranch for some or all of their outdoor scenes over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, making it “one of the most recognizable sites to movie viewers of all generations.”<sup>67</sup>



Left: Still frame of an unidentified Western filmed the Garden of the Gods, Lower Iverson Ranch, circa 1950 ([movielocationsplus.com](http://movielocationsplus.com)); Right: Garden of the Gods Historic District, Lower Iverson Ranch, Chatsworth (SurveyLA)

“In its heyday,” writes England, “in addition to the magnificent rock outcroppings, rugged chaparral, and oak tree landscape, the ranch had miles of scenic chase and insert roads, a complete adobe village, a western street, and a ranch set that included a ranch house, bunkhouse, barn and other outbuildings. It also had many small buildings that were used as miner cabins, outlaw shacks and stagecoach relay stations.”<sup>68</sup> The most distinctive rock features and natural land formations, which served as the backdrop for countless films and television shows, eventually acquired their own nicknames that were associated with their most famous appearances, such as Lone Ranger Rock, Batman Rock, Zorro’s Cave, and Buster Keaton’s Bathtub.<sup>69</sup> One of the most recognizable features is The Garden of the Gods, which has appeared in such television shows as *The Lone Ranger* (1949-1957), *Hopalong Cassidy* (1952-1954), *Have Gun – Will Travel* (1957-1963), and *Bonanza* (1959-1973).

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<sup>66</sup> Jerry England, “Iverson Movie Location Ranch,” Cowboy Up, accessed August 2019, [https://www.cowboyup.com/Iverson\\_Ranch.html](https://www.cowboyup.com/Iverson_Ranch.html).

<sup>67</sup> Jerry England, “Iverson Movie Location Ranch – Chatsworth, California,” A Drifting Cowboy, accessed August 2019, <https://a-drifting-cowboy.blogspot.com/2011/10/iverson-movie-location-ranch-chatsworth.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

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Another popular filming location in the same area was the Chatsworth Reservoir. Although not technically a purpose-built movie ranch, the reservoir – which was originally known as Chatsworth Lake – became the site of frequent filming activity as early as the 1920s. Early films made at Chatsworth Reservoir included William S. Hart’s *Three Word Brand* (1921), Mary Pickford’s *Tess of the Storm Country* (1922), and Howard Hughes’ *Hell’s Angels* (1930).



Left: Still frame from William S. Hart’s *Three Word Brand* (1921) with Chatsworth Reservoir in the background ([a-drifting-cowboy.blogspot.com](http://a-drifting-cowboy.blogspot.com)); Right: Chatsworth Reservoir Historic District (SurveyLA)

### Location Filming in the Postwar Era

Filming on location during World War II was initially encouraged by wartime economy measures in production, and it was facilitated by the fact that military demand had resulted in the production of more portable and versatile equipment.<sup>70</sup> As with many aspects of the motion picture industry, the practice of location filming subsequently underwent a marked shift in the years following World War II. There were several factors which accounted for this trend, including changes in studio finances and production practices, technology, and audience. This era marks the second period of growth and development in location filming and reflects the expansion of the practice as modes and styles of film production evolved and commercial television was introduced.

#### Development of Postwar Location Filming Practices

One of the primary factors that enabled the expansion of location filming beginning in the 1950s was the development of new technologies – some adapted from wartime uses – that made the practice more efficient and feasible. Once the war ended, manufacturers created equipment and film stocks that helped location filming.<sup>71</sup> Cameras were the least changed, and cinematographers remained reluctant to embrace lightweight or combat cameras until the 1960s. However, greater advancements took place in lighting and film developing which, working in tandem, created a new aesthetic for postwar films.

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<sup>70</sup> Bordwell et al., *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 349.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

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Several companies began to supply powerful photoflood units, which proved to be a great idea for location filming because they could run off house current.<sup>72</sup> Paramount and Du Pont also developed a method called latensification, which converted underexposed film to an acceptable printing quality.<sup>73</sup>

It is now possible to shoot location scenes in office buildings, narrow halls, alleys, etc., using only a few photofloods for illumination and, by giving the negative the latensification treatment, insure an acceptable print. Moreover, it is possible to achieve print quality in such footage that makes it no problem at all to edit it with scenes shot with normal studio lighting.<sup>74</sup>

New camera lenses utilizing different focal lengths also created a greater depth of field that allowed cinematographers to capture more visual space on location. Aided by these new technologies, location filming in the postwar era played a substantial role in defining a new visual aesthetic of gritty realism in film. The new moody, atmospheric look influenced the development of new styles in motion picture and television production, including the film *noir* and the police procedural drama.

### Postwar Location Filming in the Motion Picture Industry

With the dissolution of the vertically-integrated studio system in the late 1940s, motion picture production became increasingly decentralized throughout the 1950s as studios began to divest their assets. Studios were also struggling with a steep drop in profits after posting record-breaking attendance numbers in 1946, at the same time as inflation and domestic production costs were rising. With one eye on profits and the other on cost, industry attitudes regarding scenery and sets began to change, and the expansive, self-contained backlots were no longer seen as the most economically efficient method of filmmaking. "Constructing exterior scenes may be prohibitively expensive, visually unrealistic or impossible," observed the *Los Angeles Times*. "A vast desert horizon or snow-covered mountains are more feasible to visit than to create."<sup>75</sup>

Audiences, now more sophisticated and no longer satisfied with mere recreations, had come to expect that filmmakers would travel to them. As the *Los Angeles Times* observed:

Ever since World War II and the camera's technical advances, the faking of well-known backgrounds hasn't been good enough. Too many Americans know how London, Paris, Rome and Algiers looked. Blocked currencies were an economic reason to film stories against their actual backgrounds and in time we've become so used to the true locales that false fronts won't do.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 350.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> "Location Filming Makes Economic Sense," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1982.

<sup>76</sup> "Location Filming Mixed Blessing," *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 1967.

The “blocked profits” to which the *Times* referred concerned industry profits from the production of American films during World War II. The American dollar was strong against foreign currency during the war, and the United States dominated the global motion picture industry. As a result, the amount of capital leaving foreign countries through American film productions far exceeded the amount returned through the export of foreign films, and foreign countries were losing money on American productions. Attempting to stem the tide of deficit, some countries enacted laws limiting the amount of money that could be returned overseas, requiring instead that a percentage of the profits be reinvested locally. And, in response, many American motion picture companies began to film overseas during this period in order to reclaim some of their investment.

Overseas filming as a result of blocked profits laid the groundwork for a trend that was further encouraged by the quest to seek out increasingly authentic locations and “actual backgrounds” with greater economy. Location filming, and filming activity in general, undertaken by American film companies shifted to foreign countries to cut costs and increase profits. As filmmakers fled Hollywood, the movement eventually came to be known as “runaway production.” In a somewhat ironic twist, the same principles that had motivated the development of location filming in the United States – filming outside of a studio environment to enhance authenticity and cut costs – would prove to be the industry’s own undoing.

As production increasingly moved abroad, filmmakers at home in Hollywood and Los Angeles generally were wrestling with postwar expansion problems. During the population boom of the postwar era, the value of and demand for real estate in Southern California exploded. At the time, the motion picture business was one of the few industries in Southern California that continued to retain large parcels of undeveloped land, which studios utilized for filming outdoors on ranches or backlots. As the cost of constructing and maintaining standing sets grew, so did the value of the land they occupied.<sup>77</sup> Eventually, it became more cost-effective for the cash-strapped studios to sell off their backlots and ranches for residential development and take their location filming back to the streets. This move coincided with the rise of the film *noir*, and filmmakers were able to capitalize on the city’s rapidly changing postwar landscape, pairing moody, atmospheric lighting with Los Angeles’s back alleys and deserted streets.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> “Location Filming Makes Economic Sense.”

<sup>78</sup> For a related discussion of the noir genre in literature see also the “Writers and Residency in Los Angeles” subtheme of the “Literature” theme.

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Some of the most well-known examples include *Criss Cross* (1949), which filmed scenes at Union Station (800 North Alameda Street, L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 101, National Register of Historic Places) and Angels Flight Railway (351 South Hill Street, National Register of Historic Places); and *Double Indemnity* (1944), which filmed scenes at 6301 Quebec Drive and 1825 North Kingsley Drive.



Left: Still frame of 6301 W Quebec Dr. in *Double Indemnity*, 1944 ([classicfilmNoir.com](http://classicfilmNoir.com)); Right: 1825 N Kingsley Dr. (SurveyLA)

### Location Filming in the Television Industry

As television found its way into more homes across the United States in the 1950s, the commercial television industry began to evolve from live programming toward filmed programming. This shift allowed scripted-content genres, such as dramas and comedies, to flourish in the mid-1950s. Additionally, it was around this time that television filming and production activity began to relocate from New York City to Hollywood and Los Angeles generally, and the “concerted move to products of the Hollywood factory system altered the look and production of programming.”<sup>79</sup> Even after the transition to filmed programming, though, many of the earliest television shows – such as *I Love Lucy*, the first routinely-filmed television program – were shot within the controlled environment of a television studio. On the whole, action/adventure shows prevailed as the popular genre of the day, and in what must surely have seemed like a callback to the early days of film, once again the Western emerged as one of the most popular genres in programming. The late 1950s saw an exponential rise in the number of action-oriented Westerns on television, including *Cheyenne*, *Gunsmoke*, *Maverick*, *Have Gun – Will Travel*, and *The Rifleman*.<sup>80</sup> Although filming was still primarily limited to the studio, the Western’s natural inclusion of outdoor action sequences began to signal the forthcoming trend of filming on location for television, and sequences for many of television’s early Westerns were filmed amidst the surrounding landscape of Southern California at movie ranches owned by studios or independent producers.

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<sup>79</sup> Horace Newcomb, ed., *Museum of Broadcast Communications Encyclopedia of Television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004), 1835.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

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While location filming for television did not begin in earnest until the late 1960s, the transition of production activity to Los Angeles and the establishment of a more stylized, “factory system” production sparked one of the earliest trends in location filming for television – the location-based establishing shot. The establishing shot, typically shown as the first shot of a scene or episode, visually alerts the audience to where the scene is taking place. Even when television shows were filmed entirely within the studio, location-based establishing shots helped set the tone for the scene and the show and lend some degree of authenticity to the narrative.

Although the location-based establishing shot was utilized across all genres, some of the most memorable to television audiences were those which included a particular residence that was associated with the show’s characters – a trend that continues to the present day. One of the earliest examples is the home of Ozzie and Harriet Nelson, who starred along with their sons in *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1966). The Nelsons resided at 1822 North Camino Palmero in the Las Colinas Heights neighborhood of Hollywood, in a home the couple had purchased in 1941. *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* was originally developed as a radio show, and the Nelsons brought the sitcom to television in 1952. By that point, their own home was so suited to the Nelsons’ personae as the quintessential, all-American family that their actual residence was used for the establishing shot during the opening credits of the show, and the interiors – which were filmed on a sound stage – were recreated from the family’s real-life rooms. The show still holds the record today as television’s longest-running live-action sitcom,<sup>81</sup> and the Nelsons continued to reside there even after the show ended; Ozzie Nelson died in 1975, and Harriet Nelson eventually sold the home several years later.



*Ozzie and Harriet Nelson Residence at 1822 North Camino Palmero (SurveyLA)*

Location-based establishing shots continue to be utilized today, and over time homes like the Nelsons’ which were used for establishing shots that opened a popular show became some of the most recognized and beloved homes in the country. In addition to the Nelson residence, other popular shows with prominent location-based establishing shots in Los Angeles include *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962-1971, 750

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<sup>81</sup> The television show *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* tied this record in 2017 when it was renewed for its thirteenth and fourteenth seasons.

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North Bel-Air Road), *The Brady Bunch* (1969-1974, 11222 West Dilling Street), and *The Golden Girls* (1985-1992, 245 North Saltair Road).



Left: The Brady Bunch residence at 11222 West Dilling Street as it appeared onscreen (NPR/Getty Images);  
Right: The Golden Girls residence at 245 North Saltair Road as it appeared onscreen (Pinterest)

### Location Filming in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century

#### Development of Later Location Filming Production Practices

While location filming activity had expanded in the years following World War II, by the 1970s the practice had become a victim of its own success. In 1974, the Los Angeles Board of Public Works instituted a “one-stop permit” center at City Hall, which drastically reduced the time required to obtain the necessary permits for location filming. In 1976, the Board eased restrictions on film production in residential areas of the city, lifting the time limit per day and allowing continuous filming for more than seven days in a row. Coupled with the proliferation of “cop and detective shows using authentic backgrounds,”<sup>82</sup> the expedition of filming permits and easing of conditions sparked further growth in location filming. However, location operations eventually became unwieldy and too frequent for the residents in the city’s most popular filming locations. In the mid-1970s the *Los Angeles Times* reported that residents of the Venice neighborhood objected to “having their neighborhood transformed into a ‘battleground’ for filming. They say they are inconvenienced when alleys are blocked off and even feel endangered when high-speed chase scenes are filmed over the picturesque canal bridges.”<sup>83</sup> “The most vociferous complaints,” observed the *Times*, “seem to come from neighbors, who don’t like the idea of having their streets closed temporarily and don’t care for the noise and the extra cars and trucks competing for available parking spaces.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> “A Cottage – or Mansion – Industry: Homes Before the Cameras,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 1976.

<sup>83</sup> “Cities Weigh Location Filming Value,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 1975.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

Location Filming for Motion Pictures in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century

While television production would continue to fuel the practice of location filming in Los Angeles (and residents would continue to protest), throughout the 1970s and beyond, location filming for motion pictures was moving further afield and away from Southern California, and taking revenue with it. The migration – which in some ways echoed the industry’s first pilgrimage to California at the end of the previous century – had initially been sparked by a desire for more authentic locations. As location filming outside of Southern California became more commonplace, competition for the industry’s business became increasingly spirited.

Cities outside California and other states are offering cooperation, free locations, services and even tax rebates to lure location filming to their areas. In return they want the money left behind in the way of rented hotel rooms and equipment, employment and other local expenditures that can pump thousands, or even millions, of dollars into local economies.

“It’s found money,” said Bill MacCallum, director of the Arizona Motion Picture Development Office and president of the nationwide Association of Film Commissioners. “[Film companies] don’t pollute the air. You don’t have to build schools, sidewalks or sewer systems to accommodate them. They take advantage of what’s available. The only real residue is the money they’ve spent. And everybody has made a killing while they’re here.”<sup>85</sup>

Runaway production had become a full-fledged phenomenon, and a very real issue for the motion picture industry. A UCLA Economic Impact Report gave a conservative estimate that location filming in California netted \$1,051,000,000 in direct film expenditures in 1979 alone.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the “ripple effect” of local business stimulation meant that the full economic impact of runaway production could cost Los Angeles over three billion dollars a year.<sup>87</sup> Industry and government officials took steps to retain industry activity and promote filming within California, but as the *Los Angeles Times* noted, “At least part of the exodus, spurred by improved portability of equipment and a desire to use real settings instead of contrived sets, is inevitable.”<sup>88</sup>

Although California still led the country in location filming activity throughout the 1970s, state and local government offices across the country – armed with the “official wisdom that production companies spend about one-third of a film’s budget on location”<sup>89</sup> – began to compete more aggressively for location filming projects and their accompanying revenue. State and local officials in communities

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<sup>85</sup> “Hollywood’s Dollars Go on Location,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1984.

<sup>86</sup> “Location Filming Makes Economic Sense,” March 28, 1982.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> “Hollywood’s Dollars Go on Location.”

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

outside California established film commissions and other liaison offices to help promote and manage filming activity in their area. By 1979 every state “had such an agency, commission, or governmental unit.”<sup>90</sup>

#### Location Filming for Television in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Beginning in the 1960s, after a decade of experimentation and rapid industry growth, television programming began to stabilize. Television series had longer average runs than shows in later decades, and the number of cancellations began to decline steadily.<sup>91</sup> Series were also routinized into seasonal production schedules, which standardized many of the costs and scheduling issues associated with programming.<sup>92</sup>

The popularity of action/adventure programming continued to prevail and even increased in the 1960s, although themes and storylines began to shift toward international espionage and detection, reflecting the political climate of the Cold War era. International spy stories that seemed to echo real-life Cold War experiences were extremely popular.<sup>93</sup> The second most popular dramatic prime-time program of the era was the detective show; while some programs featured more thrills than others, the detective program always offered a few sequences filled with action and danger.<sup>94</sup> Realistic police and detective dramas became popular in the early 1970s.

Although there had been earlier efforts to film on location for television production, these were mostly limited to the filming of early Westerns. Television production began to venture off the soundstage and onto the streets beginning in the late 1960s,<sup>95</sup> and the prevailing action/adventure genre created ideal opportunities for incorporating real-life scenery into pursuits, rescues, and other high-stakes action sequences. At the same time, technical innovations in film stock, cameras, and sound equipment lead to greater flexibility for television producers in designing the look of their programs.<sup>96</sup> Consequently, filming on location became more feasible and efficient, and programs began using location shooting to create more exciting visuals and dramatic chase sequences.<sup>97</sup> Many of the shows which premiered during this period were based on concepts that drew their characters into the outside world: the beat patrol cop, the homicide detective or the private detective, or the medical examiner or technician. These occupations allowed the protagonists to interact with a variety of different characters every week and expanded the opportunity for filming on location in a range of settings and situations. In addition, many of these shows were set in Los Angeles, which marked a definitive shift in the development of location filming.

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<sup>90</sup> “Location Filming Makes Economic Sense.”

<sup>91</sup> Newcomb, *Museum of Broadcast Communications*, 1835.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 16.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 15.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Entertainment Industry/

Filming Locations Associated with the Motion Picture and Television Broadcasting Industries, 1908-1980

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Officers stop a speeder at the Silver Lake Reservoir in the first season of *Adam-12* (episode 24, "Boy, the Things You Do for the Job," 1969). (Wildbell.com)

Although earlier films had been set in Los Angeles, it was more likely that location filming had been utilized to substitute for some far-flung locale evoked by the Southern California landscape. This time, the city simply played itself, lending an air of gritty realism and authenticity to programming which reflected the turbulent political and cultural climate of the period. Among the action/adventure shows which defined the character of location filming of the era were *Dragnet* (1951-1959, 1967-1970), *Adam-12* (1968-1975), *Columbo* (1968, 1971-2003), *Emergency!* (1972-1979), *The Rockford Files* (1974-1980), *Quincy M.E.* (1976-1983), and *CHiPs* (1977-1983).

The greatest shift in programming through the late 20<sup>th</sup> century took place during the late 1970s. In an effort to draw in younger viewers, action/adventure programming shifted toward more high-concept, fantasy-oriented premises that offered some degree of escapism<sup>98</sup> with shows such as *Charlie's Angels* (1976-1981) and *Fantasy Island* (1977-1984). One of the most successful fantasy programs of the late 1970s was *Hart to Hart* (1979-1984), which filmed extensively throughout Los Angeles. The show depicts the escapades of Jonathan and Jennifer Hart (played by Robert Wagner and Stefanie Powers), a married millionaire pair of amateur detectives. While each episode included footage of the Harts' adventures in and around Los Angeles, the pair were also frequently depicted at their expansive Bel-Air estate. The residence used for the filming of the Hart house was an actual estate at 3100 North Mandeville Canyon Road in the Brentwood community.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>99</sup> Completed in 1941 by noted architect Paul Revere Williams, the property had once been home to actors Dick Powell and June Allyson.

## **Eligibility Standards for Filming Locations Associated with the Motion Picture and Television Broadcasting Industries**

**Summary Statement of Significance:**

Resources evaluated under this theme are significant in the areas of Entertainment, Social History, and/or Ethnic History. Location filming played an influential role in shaping the American public's perception of Southern California and defining the character and identity of Los Angeles. The widespread dissemination of moving images of Los Angeles inspired migration and motivated the development of commerce and industry in the city. Location filming also served a very real and distinct purpose. As the medium evolved and narratives became more complex, filming in natural surroundings and every day, real-life environments aided in creating a feeling of authenticity and contextual richness in motion pictures, and later, television production. Today, the continued practice of location filming in Los Angeles reflects the evolving trends and production methods of the film and television broadcasting industries.

**Period of Significance:**

1908 – 1980

**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 1980, the end date for SurveyLA. The end date may be extended over time.

**Geographic Location:**

Citywide

**Area(s) of Significance:**

Entertainment, Social History, Ethnic History

**Criteria:**

NR: A

CR: 1

Local: 1

**Associated Property Types:**

Commercial  
Residential  
Industrial  
Institutional  
Cultural Landscape  
Site  
Other

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**Property Type Description:** Resources significant under this theme may include buildings, structures, sites, and cultural landscapes. Some may be recorded as historic districts.

**Property Type Significance:** See Summary Statement of Significance above.

### Eligibility Standards:

- Filming location of a significant motion picture or television production
- Is a separate and independent location outside the boundaries of a motion picture or television studio
- Motion picture or television production location must be proven to be significant within the entertainment industry

### Character Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character physical and character defining features from the period of significance
- May be important as the filming location of an early motion picture
- May be the long-term filming location of a significant television production
- May have served as a location for the filming and/or production of multiple motion pictures and/or television shows over time such that the location has become iconic
- The location may have played an integral role in shaping the narrative of a significant film, with specific influence on the plot and structure
- May also be a significant example of an architectural style and/or the work of a noted architect/designer
- May also be a significant cultural landscape
- May be significant for ethnic/cultural associations
- 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 Setting
- Integrity is based on the period during which the film or television show associated with the property was exhibited or aired for the first time
- Original use may have changed
- Adjacent land uses may have changed

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