

PROPOSAL FOR
THE FORGOTTEN MOGUL:
The Incredible Story of Jesse L. Lasky
FIRST GENTLEMAN OF HOLLYWOOD

by
Betty Lasky
and her father
Jesse L. Lasky

IN 1997 I completed Part One of a revision of my father's memoir, *I Blow My Own Horn*, which was published by Doubleday in 1957. The working title of my book is *The Forgotten Mogul: The Incredible Story of Jesse L. Lasky, First Gentleman of Hollywood*. I submitted these 54 pages to Michael Hamilburg, a respected literary agent, and received the following response:

"Dear Betty,
This is going to be wonderful when it is published. I believe that it will. Keep me posted as it develops.
All the best,
Michael."

An association with The Hollywood History Museum (then under construction) occupied much of my working hours during subsequent years. Realizing the importance of continuing the memoir, I took leave of the museum.

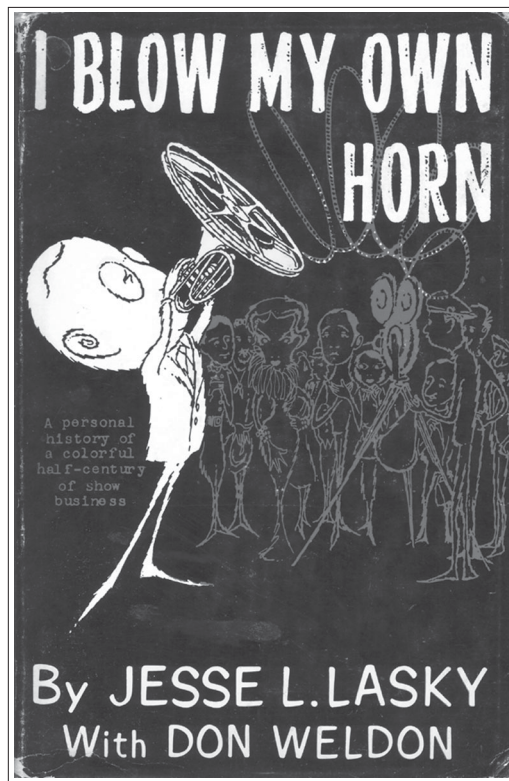
The subject is timely—for example, an in-depth documentary on Cecil B. DeMille helmed by Kevin Brownlow, eminent British documentarian, film historian and author. He interviewed me. Scott Eyman, the prominent author of film biographies, is writing the authorized biography of DeMille, a five-year project for which he has already interviewed me. Peter Jones Productions

produced a TV documentary on Sam Goldwyn, for which I was interviewed. It is based on A. Scott Berg's acclaimed biography *Goldwyn*, published by Knopf in 1989.

In the '50s when Doubleday published my father's memoir, autobiographies of Hollywood personalities were in their infancy. Research sources were practically non-existent. Film encyclopedias had yet to be compiled. There was little knowledge of the silent era. Myths took precedence over facts; thus, countless errors crept into the memoir.

Doubleday (who selected the writer Don Weldon to work with my father) was primarily interested in show-business anecdotes, whereas my father would have preferred many more pages devoted to his personal life.

My revision supplies all the missing elements that are part and parcel of current autobiographies, including numerous quotes from letters and periodicals; historical data, documents that were not available in the '50s; rare photos; and possibly, new information that will be of interest to film historians, since my father's life was a veritable history of the movies. ❖



"My reading of [*I Blow My Own Horn*] as well as the Lasky-related items in the DeMille archives, has resulted in a tremendous respect for a man who, in my opinion, was one of the few genuine human beings in the motion picture business."

James V. D'Arc, Curator
Arts & Communications Archives
Brigham Young University, Utah

ABOUT BETTY LASKY

BETTY LASKY, a third-generation Californian, is the daughter of film pioneer and Paramount founder, Jesse L. Lasky. Her mother, Bessie Mona Lasky, was a well-known California artist whose 32 paintings of the California missions are in the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. Her late brother, Jesse L. Lasky, Jr., was a poet, novelist, and screenwriter of over 50 films, including every DeMille film (but one) from *Union Pacific* through *The Ten Commandments*.

Betty began her writing career as a screen story analyst for RKO Studios, the Selznick Company, and the Hamilburg Agency. Later she worked for *The Players Showcase* Magazine as movie editor and writer. In the 1970s her interest in film history crystallized when she joined forces with famed public service attorney Terrys T. Olender to rescue and salvage the film artifacts stored in the Lincoln Heights Jail by the City of Los Angeles after the big projected Hollywood Museum project collapsed in 1965. While developing a plan to distribute this priceless film memorabilia, she became acquainted with the major film archivists and librarians in the country.

Consequently, when Prentice-Hall asked her to write the story of RKO, the Hollywood film company that produced such great films as *Citizen Kane*, *King Kong*, and the Astaire-Rogers musicals, she felt she had the background necessary to tackle a complex film



TOP: Betty with Charlton Heston at the opening of the Lasky-DeMille barn, December 13, 1985. BOTTOM: At the barn, after being interviewed for a Norwegian documentary, December 2, 2001. Left to right: Hollywood historian Marc Wanamaker; Miles Kreuger, president of the Institute of the American Musical; Betty; interviewer Niels Petter Solberg; Kay Tornborg, president, Hollywood Heritage.

company history. Her book, *RKO—The Biggest Little Major of Them All* (published by Prentice-Hall, 1984), is the stormy history of the last major studio to be established in Hollywood, a studio that became the pawn of hard-eyed financiers like Joe Kennedy and Howard Hughes.

In recent years Betty has participated in panel programs for the Southern California Jewish Historical Society (honoring Hollywood's film pioneers); the DeMille Dynasty Exhibition (in Century City and in the California Museum of Science and Industry); and the California Historical Society (on early movie-making in Hollywood). She has put on panel programs and conducted tours for schools and senior groups at the Hollywood Studio Museum (now Hollywood Heritage Museum). She is Honorary Program Chairman for "Evenings at the Barn." In 1988 she curated an exhibition of Hollywood memorabilia in Sacramento that benefited the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial, obtaining Academy awards for display, selecting photos and writing commentary for exhibits.

On many occasions she has been interviewed for

television programs about Hollywood history. Among them: *Entertainment Tonight*; Turner Classic Movies-MGM archival project (subjects: RKO, pioneer woman director Dorothy Arzner; Jesse L. Lasky, Paramount and other studios); Associated Producers, Toronto (the documentary *Hollywoodism* based on Neal Gabler's

book *An Empire of Their Own—How the Jews Invented Hollywood*: CBC, Canada; Channel 4, UK; A&E U.S); Peter Jones Productions (subjects: *Gloria Swanson*, for A&E; *Samuel Goldwyn*, American Masters, PBS; Jupiter Entertainment (subject: *William Desmond Taylor Murder*, for A&E; *City Confidential*).

She has written articles for magazines, among them “Jesse L. Lasky at Fox Studios” for *American Cinematographer* (April 1995). She has contributed a chapter for the Hollywood pictorial, *Hollywood Archive: The Hidden History of Hollywood in the Golden Age* (New York: Angel City Press and Universal Publishing, a division of Rizzoli, 2000). Her chapter is titled “The Roots of Hollywood.”

She has been associated with the Hollywood History Museum in the historic Max Factor Building in Hollywood. There she worked as liaison within the creative community of Hollywood, and wrote articles and timelines on industry pioneers and the history of the community and motion picture studios.

She is currently concentrating on the completion of the revision of her father’s memoir, *I Blow My Own Horn* (Doubleday, 1957). ❖

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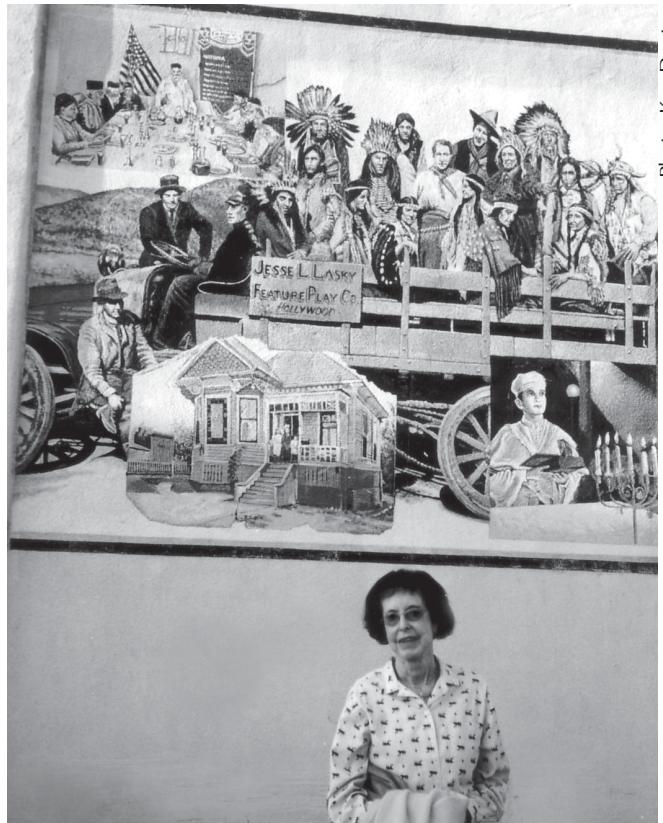
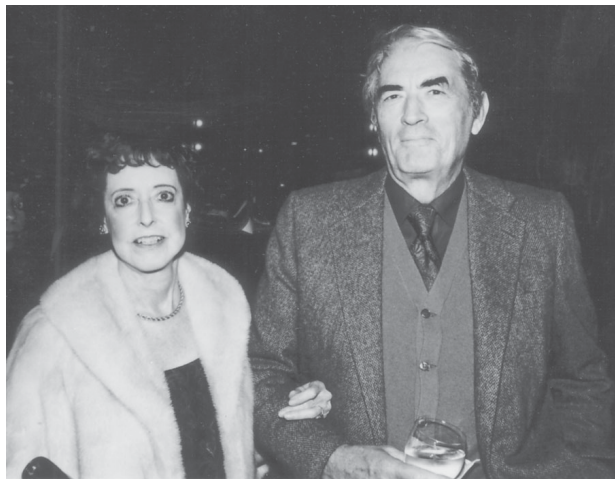
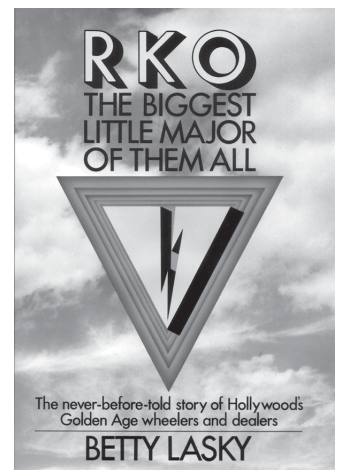


Photo: Ken Denton



TOP LEFT: *Betty and her father after he received the first Milestone Award from the Screen Producers Guild for his historic contribution to the American motion picture, September 12, 1951.* TOP RIGHT: *Betty in front of the famous mural at Cantor’s Deli celebrating the Jesse Lasky Feature Play Co.’s production of The Squaw Man.* LEFT: *Betty with Gregory Peck at the DeMille Dynasty exhibition in Century City, November 5, 1985.* RIGHT: *The cover of Betty’s book.*



JESSE L. LASKY

FIRST GENTLEMAN OF HOLLYWOOD



JESSE LASKY was one of the pioneers of Hollywood's motion picture industry. Born in San Francisco, September 13, 1880, the son of shoe-store proprietor Isaac Lasky, his early years were characterized by failure. Growing up in San Jose, he learned to play the cornet and imagined he would be discovered by John Philip Sousa; Sousa never heard him. In 1899 he followed his hero, Jack London, to Nome, Alaska, after the gold rush, but gold eluded him. In 1901 he sailed to Hawaii and became one of the few non-Hawaiians to play in the Royal Hawaiian Band. Returning home broke, he turned to vaudeville, performing a duo-cornet act with his sister, Blanche, and then started to produce high-class musical vaudeville acts in New York. These were the lush days of vaudeville and the money rolled in. Success in vaudeville led to the loss of Lasky's first for-



Top: Lasky in front of the studio-barn. February 1914.

tune in the Folies Bergère, a lavish Broadway theater-restaurant he built, with Henry B. Harris, that failed after four months. It was a lucky failure, for his destiny lay in Hollywood.

In 1913 the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Co. was launched with Lasky as president, his best friend Cecil B. DeMille as director-general, and brother-in-law Samuel Goldfish (later Goldwyn) as general manager and treasurer. Lasky never dreamed their first movie, *The Squaw Man*, Hollywood's

first feature-length film, would lay the foundation stone of a great industry. For Lasky, unlike other movie pioneers, California was a homecoming. More than that, it was a state of mind—an attitude that influenced almost every aspect of his daily life. He took pride in being a native son of a native son: his father was born in Sacra-

mento where his grandfather had settled in 1848, after a covered wagon crossing on the Oregon Trail.

The Lasky Company, established in a barn on Selma Avenue and Vine Street, prospered and grew into Famous Players-Lasky following a propitious merger—later to become mighty Paramount. Lasky called the years he ruled Paramount with his fiscal-minded partner Adolph Zukor (1916-1932), “the best years of my life.”

He signed stars such as Rudolph Valentino, Maurice Chevalier and Bing Crosby, and supervised over one thousand films. Many bore the personal stamp of his love of adventure and sense of the romantic, and revealed his intense pride in his American heritage—none more so than *The Covered Wagon*, the great western epic; *The Rough Riders*, with the glitter and pomp of Col. Teddy Roosevelt and his motley band of fighters; *Old Ironsides*, a flag-waving vision of Tripoli and pirates and sea battles aboard the gallant old “Constitution”; *The Vanishing American*, an inspiring portrayal of the passing of the American Indian; *Beau Geste*, a spectacular rendering of the adventure, romance and mystery of life in the French Foreign Legion; and *Wings*, spine-tingling epic of the light-hearted flying fighters of World War I, which won the first Academy Award.

During the Depression era Lasky and his company crashed. On the comeback trail as an independent producer he fought to make the films he believed in. Films

like *The Power and the Glory*, a precursor of *Citizen Kane*, brought Spencer Tracy to stardom. *Berkeley Square*, a sensitive, provocative work, considered at the time in a class by itself, gave Leslie Howard one of his most outstanding roles. In the forties, Lasky launched a series of screen biographies: *Rhapsody in Blue*, *The Adventures of Mark Twain* and *Sergeant York*. The latter, a glorious, soul-rousing movie the critics unanimously called “a cinemasterpiece,” became an overnight box-office smash and earned Gary Cooper an Academy Award.

Lasky was on top again; still he fought almost a losing battle to bring *The Great Caruso* to the screen. The movie made a star of Mario Lanza, a mint for MGM—and vindication to its creator, Lasky, for his belief that “a picture with an operatic theme could prove profitable.”

Next, Lasky fought to instill his vision of young America on the march to the tune of high school bands, in the closed minds of Hollywood’s studio heads. It was too late for his last impossible dream. The IRS had a stranglehold on him after snatching his winnings from *Sergeant York*. The genial, gentlemanly showman who represented Hollywood at its best died heavily in debt, his final film project, *The Big Brass Band*, a dream unrealized.

Maintaining his courage and enthusiasm to the end, he said, “You’re never broke if you have an idea.”

He died in Beverly Hills, California, January 13, 1958. ❖



First photo taken after the merger of Famous Players-Lasky, 1916. Left to right: Jesse L. Lasky, Adolph Zukor, Samuel Goldfish (Goldwyn), C.B. DeMille, and Al Kaufmann.

FORMAT OF THE BOOK

PART ONE: "In The Twilight Years"

ALREADY completed, it is told in my voice and encompasses:

- My father's life in the 1950s and a look back at what he represented in Hollywood's early days.
- Revealing glimpses of his marriage, with relevant quotes from my mother.
- His uphill journey as an independent producer after he was ousted from Paramount in 1932, at the height of what I call "the Paramount Wars."
- The triumph of *Sergeant York*, climaxing with a detailed account of the star-studded night at the Coconut Grove in 1951 when he was the first recipient of the Screen Producers Milestone Award "for his historic contribution to the American Motion Picture."
- The tragedy of his tax case over his share of the enormous profits of *Sergeant York*. (I place the blame squarely in the lap of his famous attorney, Loyd Wright.)
- How my father drew on his faith (a blend of Christian Science and New Age thinking) to deal with the loss of his worldly possessions.
- His seven-year-long super-human effort to produce *The Big Brass Band*, intended as a salute to the high-school-band movement.
- His attempts to develop several TV projects, one entitled "Psychic Investigator," obviously 30 years ahead of its time.
- The unforgettable evening when Ralph Edwards featured him on his popular "This Is Your Life" TV show in '57. (The highlight: Maurice Chevalier, discovered by my father in 1929, speaking from Paris.)
- How his life came full circle when he met the illustrious U.S. Navy Band in San Jose—visiting his boyhood haunts, before touring as guest conductor.
- How I donated the Lasky Collection to the great Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sci-



Jesse and his wife Bessie in the early 1930s.

ences in Beverly Hills, and in the process discovered the fascinating new world of film history.

- The goose-bumpy experience of viewing the Lasky Company's first production, *The Squaw Man* (1914), on the 75th anniversary of its release, in the company's former studio-barn (now a museum), where it was produced.
- The dedication ceremony held at Paramount in 1956, when the studio-barn became a California historical landmark, an occasion that reunited the three pioneers (Lasky, DeMille and Goldwyn) for the last time.
- The "father-son" relationship with Don Sartell, young leader of the National Baton Association, that lit up my father's life (in the dusk of his life); their visits to studio sets, as warmly recalled by Don.

- The last Xmas ('57) spent in Desert Hot Springs, and how my father, during the worst stage of his tax case, cheered and inspired a friend of mine who was in a depressed state.

- An account of the next-to-last day of his life (Sunday, January 12), with a nostalgic look back at family dinners—where we used to dine.
- The last day of his life: Edna Davidson's amazing recollection of the talk my father gave about his just-published memoir at her literary salon, held at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. (Despite a meeting scheduled with the IRS later in the afternoon, "he was in wonderful spirits.")

- His last words, an affirmation that his long-cherished *Big Brass Band* would be made, before he stumbled and fell outside the hotel.

- My reaction to the news of his death.
- Don's vivid memory of the funeral; the star turnout; the emotional eulogy delivered by producer Sam Engel; Rabbi Edgar Magnin's telling remarks; the heart-wrenching scene at the crypt involving DeMille, as witnessed by Don. The post-funeral emotional evening, again remembered by Don. ❖

PART TWO: “California Roots”

AFTER completing Part One, I researched and wrote Part Two: “California Roots,” covering my father’s idyllic adolescent years in San Jose, mid-1890s, an environment that distinguished him from the European-, ghetto- or tenement-bred rough-tough moguls: Goldwyn, Zukor, Fox, Mayer, etc. In these pages I emphasized how his father’s overly



Top: Sarah and Isaac Lasky with their children Blanche and Jesse in 1888.
Bottom: Jesse (seated far right) in the Marine Band in San Jose, circa 1897.



easygoing manner of conducting his business (Isaac Lasky is the proprietor of a shoe store), marked by a total disregard for the almighty dollar, had a lasting influence on his son.

Starting in Part Two, 14-year-old Jesse tells the story, although my voice chimes in occasionally to give an opinion or additional information, very much in the style of *Dark Star*, Leatrice Gilbert Fountain’s top-notch biography of her father, legendary silent star, John Gilbert, published by St. Martin’s Press, 1985.

I reveal how Jesse acquired his passion for the cornet as a teenager in San Jose; and although he fails in an attempt to audition for John Philip Sousa when the great bandsman comes to town—it is his cornet that will eventually lead him into show business. “Ike” Lasky’s shoe store goes bankrupt after he is confined to bed with a weak heart; the Lasky family moves back to San Francisco, their home town, before Jesse has finished high school.

The remainder of Part Two deals with Jesse’s feeble efforts to support his mother, Sarah, and sister, Blanche, after his father’s untimely death in 1899. Highlights of this section are a series of harrowing misadventures—chiefly in Nome, Alaska, after gold is discovered: Anvil Creek has been staked to death; Jesse’s cornet lands him a job in a dance hall; he returns home with only a \$25 gold tiepin; sails to Honolulu for an engagement as solo cornetist at \$25 a week in the Orpheum Theatre; he earns passage home after two weeks without pay by playing in the Royal Hawaiian Band—one of the few non-natives (in 1901).

During his absence, Blanche learns to play the cornet. They begin to play duets—debut as professional entertainers: \$50 a week at Shoot-the-Chutes Park, where Jesse gets his first look at a trivial novelty—a quick passage of moving pictures thrown on the lantern-slide screen. The Laskys’ refined musical act is praised by one of the dailies; Jesse, entranced with show business, decides that vaudeville is their future. Mother Sarah runs up military costumes and Colonial powdered wigs and crinolines; she composes letters, a press kit. The only offer comes from the Boston Music Hall, one of the finest theaters in the country. Over the objections, of their relatives—“Vaudeville people live on trains; they’re gypsies without homes”—the Laskys leave for Boston. ❖

PLAN FOR THE COMING YEAR

PART THREE: "Their Future is Vaudeville"

THIS SECTION will follow the Laskys from their failure at the Boston Music Hall, where they appear to be rank amateurs alongside the greatest two-a-day acts in the big-time, to a three-month tour of the Flynn Circuit of summer parks, the dregs of vaudeville. The aging performers, former headliners, are kindly people who help Jesse and Blanche polish their act.

Next stop: New York, the mecca of all theatrical hopes, and representation by the William Morris agency. They gradually get better engagements until they finally make Tony Pastor's, the goal of every vaudevillian. (A young juggler named W.C. Fields is on the bill.) Hermann the Great, who road-shows a spectacular presentation of legerdemain and magic, sees them at Pastor's and engages them for a 40-week season's tour as a curtain piece. Jesse replaces Hermann's manager for the second season and sells the cornet act to a brilliant young



Above: Blanche and Jesse in Vaudeville, circa 1903. Left: Jesse during the vaudeville period.



cornetist, Ben Rolfe, and wife Nellie.

Representing two acts now, Jesse rents office space in the Broadway Theatre; Blanche runs the office while he rushes off to Europe to book Hermann. Jesse is dazzled by the big theaters and Continental musical shows in London and Paris. Now he begins thinking in bigger terms—groups instead of individuals, production numbers staged in the Continental manner, and the producer's profits instead of an agent's commission.

Needing more money to produce his grandiose ideas, Jesse approaches Henry B. Harris who leases and manages the Hudson Theatre. Harris links up with Jesse as a silent partner and offers offices in the theater. Drunk

with the power of the Harris backing, Jesse sends out about 40 acts between 1906 and 1910—with Blanche designing costumes and indispensable as a production assistant.

Successes multiply and the money rolls in. Jesse opens a branch office in Chicago for William Morris and scouts for new acts. He signs a young singer, Al Jolson, and books him in New York.

BESSIE GINZBERG

In 1909 Jesse slows his whirlwind pace to take a vacation with Blanche and Sarah. As they step into the dining room of the Sagamore Hotel at Long Lake, in the Adirondacks, the orchestra leader recognizes him and signals his entrance with the strains of “The Love Waltz,” Jesse’s latest act which is breaking vaudeville records across the country. Heads turn and Jesse finds himself looking into the most lustrous eyes he’s seen in years of appraising feminine beauty. The face, without makeup, under a cloud of auburn curls, has such a spiritual air of innocence and sweetness, that Jesse loses his head. He proposes the very next day, never considering the consequences, never realizing Miss Bessie Ginzberg from Bos-



Jesse and Bessie on their honeymoon,

ton—poles apart from the showgirls he knows—is totally unsuited to his fast-paced show-biz world.

Bessie’s Russian-born father, a diamond merchant, had sent his favorite daughter to Notre Dame Academy to be educated (and protected) by Catholic nuns; piano studies at the New England Conservatory followed.

Her unhappiness after a brief honeymoon in Atlantic City (interrupted by a wire from Blanche urging Jesse to return immediately) is so great that she calls her father repeatedly, begging him to let her come home. Jesse’s total absorption in his theatrical productions precludes his need for a wife; mother Sarah had long ago wrapped her life around him—she manages the household and attends to his personal needs; his talented, strong-willed sister Blanche is his business partner and confidante; the living room is dominated by strangers who speak a foreign language—show-biz lingo. The irascible, conniving Sam Goldfish (Goldwyn), who joins the family circle when he marries Blanche in 1910, is hardly an ambassador of good will.

THE FOLIES BERGÈRE

The day after Bessie’s first child, Jesse Jr., is born, Jesse and Blanche sail for Europe to seek stellar attractions for America’s first cabaret, the Folies Bergère. Jesse has sold Henry Harris on the extravagant idea of building a Continental type of music hall comparable to the opulent entertainment of Leicester Square or the fabulous Folies Bergère and Casino de Paris. Everything about the Folies Bergère, which opens April 27, 1911 (at 46th Street just off Broadway), is unheard of in New York, including the prices; dining to the strains of a concealed gypsy orchestra imported from Europe, followed by a three-hour lavish show; supper patrons being treated to an entirely different cabaret show that concludes at 1 a.m. Among the ten acts are Olga Petrova (later vamp star of Hollywood silents), Elda Furry (the future Hedda Hopper), Ina Claire (later a Broadway favorite), the Pender Troupe of acrobats (which includes 7-year-old Archie Leach, the future Cary Grant), and Mae West, who is such a hit in her first Broadway appearance that Jesse subsequently books her in vaudeville.

Jesse and Henry feel sure they will make a fortune from this venture, but the overhead is astronomical—theaters of the day aren’t air-cooled and the cabaret lacks a dance floor. (The vogue for ballroom dancing, spearheaded by Vernon and Irene Castle, hasn’t begun yet.) The Folies closes at the end of September; Jesse loses about \$100,000—he is broke.



LEFT: *In 1914, in the offices of the Lasky Feature Play Co. Jesse Lasky surrounded by (L-R) directors C.B. DeMille and Oscar Apfel, actors Dustin Farnum, W. Thomas Ross, and Edward Abeles.*

BELOW: *Famous Players, 1916. (L-R) Jesse Lasky, William S. Hart, Mary Pickford, C.B. DeMille.*

CECIL B. DeMILLE

Walking up Broadway in a dejected frame of mind, after the final performance of the Folies, Jesse sees a California mission scene on a billboard advertising Mission Coffee. A plot starts brewing in his mind around the billboard figures. By the time he arrives home his depression has vanished; he will produce an operetta called “California” and engage William DeMille, popular playwright, to write it. Mrs. H. C. DeMille, a play broker of high repute, sees an opportunity for her younger son, Cecil, a jack-of-all-trades in the theater with a short record of failures. William is unavailable, she says, but Cecil might undertake it. The minute Cecil says, “I like that,” after listening to Jesse’s ideas for the story thread of the operetta, Jesse likes *him*—and the two will become as blood brothers.

SAM GOLDWYN

Meanwhile, Sam Goldfish, star drummer for the leading glove company in Gloversville, has caught the nickelodeon fever that invaded the nation’s imagination in the last decade. Transfixed by a two-reel Western picture, *Broncho Billy’s Adventure*, in 1911, Sam has been nosing around the offices of the General Film Co., distributor for Edison’s licensed producing companies. (Together, they dominate the motion picture field, from the camera to the screen, freezing out rival independent movie makers.) At the Laskys’ dinner table Sam can talk of little else but this new-found craze. His brother-in-law should look into the motion picture business, he insists.

THE MOVIES

After the collapse of his grand vision, the Folies, Jesse is in no mood to consider a new venture. “California” is a success and he has continued to collaborate



with Cecil on operettas for “high-class continuous vaudeville theatres”; vaudeville is at its height; the nickel-and-dime storefront theaters strewn throughout working-class neighborhoods offer low-class entertainment—fast comedies and melodramatic chases; also risqué subject matter offensive to churchgoers. These flickering black-and-white short-reelers can hardly be expected to appeal to a showman like Jesse. True, vaudeville houses have added movies to their bills, usually the final number to signal that the program is over and empty the theater; thus, they came to be known as “chasers.”

Jesse is not alone in his thinking. No showman from the illustrious ranks of the theater or vaudeville has fallen for the movie business as yet. Only Charles Frohman, “rising star of theatrical magnates,” had seemed to sense

the possibilities of the new invention, when Edison's "latest marvel," the Vitascope, was introduced way back in 1896 at Broadway's Koster & Bial's Music Hall. Overwhelmed by the shorts that flickered on the screen, Frohman went so far as to tell the *New York Times* that "Mr. Edison's invention would replace the dead things of the stage."

ADOLPH ZUKOR

Not until Adolph Zukor, former penny-arcade operator, now a savvy movie exhibitor, takes the giant step from booking 10-minute movies in vaudeville houses to showing *Queen Elizabeth*, three imported reels (advertised as 4) starring "the divine" Sarah Bernhardt at the Lyceum Theatre on Broadway in 1912, will Jesse start to alter his thinking about the movies. (We may never know if he was among the select few at the private screening arranged by Daniel Frohman, Charles' elder brother, now managing director of Zukor's newly-formed Famous Players Company.)

Zukor is the kind of showman Jesse can admire: a visionary gifted with a perfect sense of timing, some-

thing Jesse lacked when he sold himself and Harris on the ill-fated "Folies." Zukor had spent several years digging into the movie business—he toured Europe where he viewed films of up to five reels and more than an hour in length (such as the Italian "spectacular" *Dante's Inferno*, road-shown in American theaters), that catered to "class" audiences rather than the "masses." Then, absolutely certain that pictures of the right type had a great future, Zukor made the momentous decision to "take big plays and celebrities of the stage and put them on the screen." Edison's "Trust" is losing its iron hold on movie companies; the "independents" (makers of longer films) are gaining ground, defying the Trust. Zukor's 1913 features, *The Prisoner of Zenda* with stage star James K. Hackett, and *The Count of Monte Cristo* starring James O'Neill (Eugene's father), could not have gone unnoticed by the Lasky camp.

JESSE L. LASKY FEATURE PLAY CO.

The Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company, patterned after Zukor's Famous Players, is formed in late 1913, and there is more than one version as to why and how it came

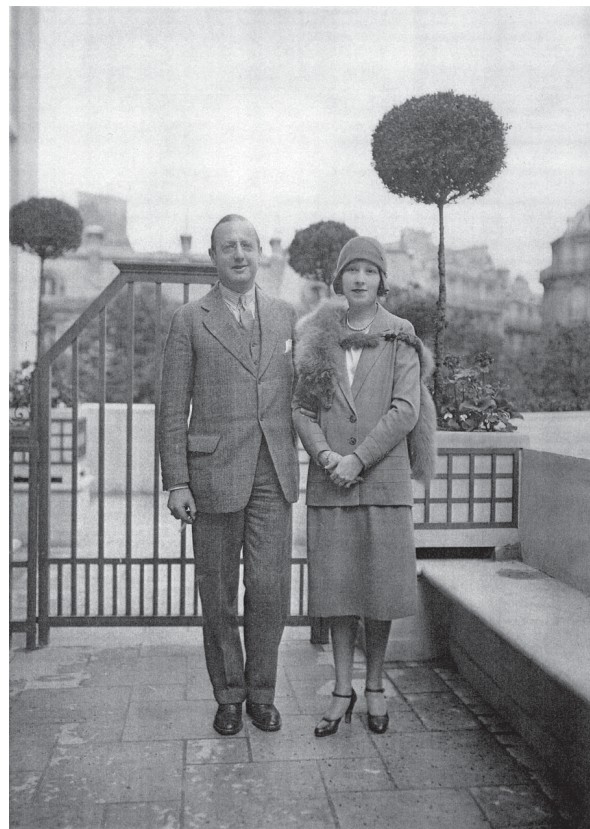
into being. Jesse's version: to keep his best friend Cecil from leaving town, going south of the border where a revolution is flourishing and maybe write about it, is hard to believe. Yet, Cecil is in agreement with this version. The selection of the Lasky Company's first feature, the stage hit, *The Squaw Man*, and leading man, stage hero, Dustin Farnum, follows—almost by chance, according to Jesse.

"We have adopted the motto, 'The World Is Our Studio' . . . We are sending the present company to Southern California and Wyoming for the atmosphere of the story,' Jesse tells the trade journal *The Moving Picture World* in December. . . . It is not our intention always to use famous plays. Eventually we will have stories by authors of recognized standing and written especially for the screen. . . . I believe that the time is coming when the picture will be of greater importance than the theater. . . ." ❖



Paramount Pictures convention at the Ambassador Hotel, 1926 (L-R): Jesse Lasky, the Marquis de la Falaise, his wife Gloria Swanson, unidentified, Adolph Zukor, Sidney Kent (vice president in charge of sales).

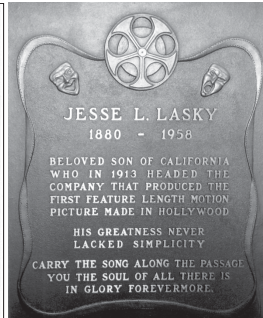
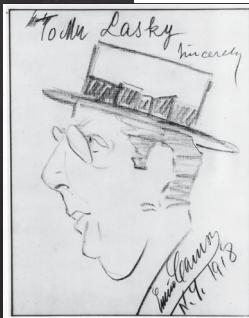
To be followed by
 "The Best Years of His Life"
and
 "There's Life After Paramount"



2061.—BEACH HOME OF JESSE LASKY, SANTA MONICA, CALIF.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: *With Jack Warner; with Bessie circa 1930s; with Gary Cooper and Sergeant York at his residence in Brentwood circa 1940; the plaque on Lasky's crypt at Hollywood Forever Cemetery; a caricature of Lasky by the great operatic tenor Enrico Caruso; with C.B. DeMille at the opening of Cavalcade in 1933; the Laskys' Santa Monica beach house.*



“JESSE L. LASKY
1880 - 1958
BELOVED SON OF CALIFORNIA
WHO IN 1913 HEADED THE
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FIRST FEATURE LENGTH MOTION
PICTURE MADE IN HOLLYWOOD
HIS GREATNESS NEVER
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CARRY THE SONG ALONG THE PASSAGE
YOU THE SOUL OF ALL THERE IS
IN GLORY FOREVERMORE”