

## HODKINSON, HAYS AND HOLLYWOOD [1921-1922]

Compiled by:  
Charles Stepczyk, Paramount Archives

Before the Fatty Arbuckle scandal broke and spilled down into Hollywood in Sept of 1921, William Desmond Taylor, President of the Motion Picture Directors' Association, introduced William Wadsworth Hodkinson at a meeting of the organization earlier in the year in February. Hodkinson, one of the founders of Paramount, ran the W. W. Hodkinson Corp, which over its run distributed more than 130 independently-made films between the years 1918 and 1924, [some of which were also distributed by Pathe, including at least a few in 1922].



Amongst the exhibitor topics of the day, Hodkinson spoke a bit about the "rising wave" relative to "sex movies, reformers, blue laws, and censorship". Hodkinson preached to some degree a form of self regulation amongst his peers:

*"I believe that you gentlemen, if you grasp the significance of this, if you realize the parts that you are playing in making these elements up and serving them out to millions of the public--shaping their minds and their thoughts--if you take yourselves seriously to that extent and realize that your influence is more potent than that of the school teacher or the educator in any other branch, and fight that in your individual way. Fight for certain standards of cleanliness and decency in this business"*

*that you want preserved in your home and in society generally, the standards that you would want followed in the theaters if your children were going to the theaters."*



The next year in January of 1922, Will Harrison Hays Sr. started to make sizable headlines, including over at the NY Times as he stepped down from his Postmaster General job in order to move to Hollywood to potentially clean up the film business. Hodkinson also had the closing quote in the article on Hays by the NY times, in which Hays was being insured for a record two million dollars prior to starting the job:

*"The motion picture business is in a critical stage where it will either take permanent form or disintegrate. In taking its permanent form, however, it is going to diverge sharply from the old form of waste and inefficiency which characterized its early days. Mr. Hays has a big job ahead of him."*

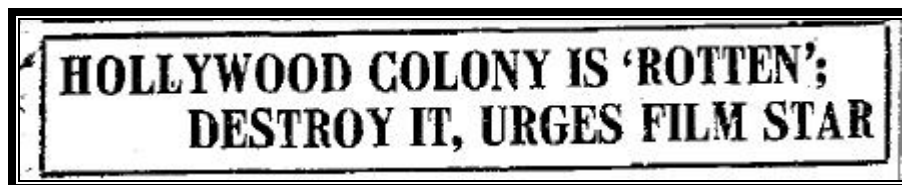
A few weeks later on Feb 1, 1922 another scandal rocked Hollywood as William Desmond Taylor [head of the MPDA] was slain in his residence by an unknown assailant, at first believed to be Mabel Normand, pictured below.



Outlandish headlines appeared as many other moderate to smaller “scandals” were also thrust into the headlines. Papers and reformers across the nation damned Hollywood to varying degrees, seemingly at its sensationalistic worst in locales like Ada, Oklahoma and Atkinson, Kansas where a 17 year old “psychic girl” declared in February that a catastrophe that would “level the city” over the next five years for “the sins of Hollywood.” Entertainingly corny the article went on: “Recent small tremors should awake the city to its coming doom.”



A Universal star, Frank Mayo, even chimed in with some choice words for the film colony that February. He appeared in several headlines: "Burn it up! The Hollywood Film Colony is a pernicious influence. Scatter it, abolish it--something ought to be done. Burn it up, I say!"

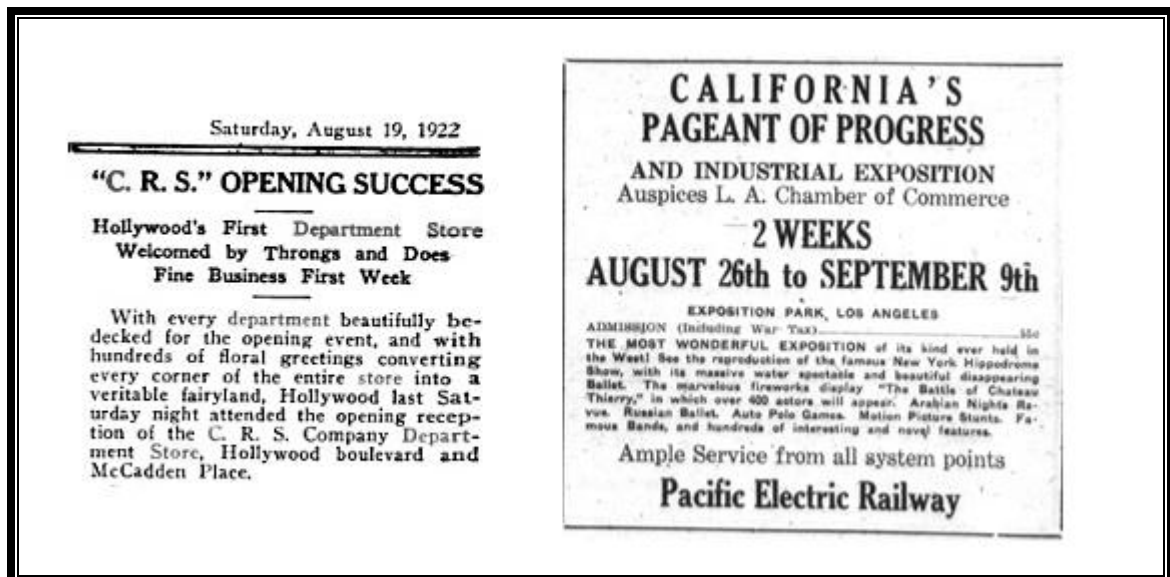


Mayo prattled on further and of course, Adolph Zukor defended, "There's no more immorality in the Hollywood Colony than the New York Stock Exchange. Isolated cases of scandal in Hollywood are taken and magnified. That's because the film folk are more familiar to the public than any other class of people."

Frank Mayo's name in large lettering appeared on the marquees for his new western, "Tracked to Earth" which released the following month in March and would interestingly enough be seen on a background marquee in the "Hollywood Snapshots" short later in the year.

In mid-July of 1922 Will H Hays finally arrived in Hollywood to see for himself how the "wheels go round", creating quite a bit of excitement and chatter.

The "*Hollywood Snapshots*" short framing sequence looks to have been filmed the month after Hays' arrival, possibly near the tail end of August, or likely in September of 1922 as seen by the event banner for "*California's Pageant of Progress*" hanging over the street and shots of the new CRS Dept store, which had a rushed opening that occurred on August 12th, 1922.



The lost Metro feature, "*Trifling Women*" had a release date in early November of 1922, with most theaters seemingly receiving it later in the month and beyond according to the majority of newspaper articles I've run across. If the 45 second snippet used in "*Hollywood Snapshots*" was being used to generate interest in the feature film, the "*Hollywood Snapshots*" short would have most likely been

turned around quickly [as most shorts usually do] and released in October or likely to coincide with the November feature release around the last few months of 1922.



Other frequently released shorts called "*Screen Snapshots*", that may have been a model for "*Hollywood Snapshots*", seemed to be popular at the time, and offered similar content, likely distributed by Pathe per the mark in the bottom left corner of the advertisement shown above. One of these short films in mid-1922 featured 'Pal - Canine Star of Pictureland', an animal who rose to prominence early in the year in the Wallace Reid film for Paramount, "*Rent Free*". The dog would later be shown in the "*Hollywood Snapshots*" short as well.



Paramount had its own short underway called 'A Trip Through Paramount Town' showing a variety of film stars from its stable, which released around July/Aug of 1922, when Hays arrived to start his clean-up work. An improved and lengthier description of the short has just been uncovered from the Fort Wayne News Sentinel dated July 30, 1922:

*The picture opens with views of the Paramount studios at Long Island City and in Hollywood. Mitchell Lewis, Ethel Wales, and Lucien Littlefield start out on a sight seeking jaunt through the Hollywood Studios, and during the half hour journey see every star and director on the Paramount list, many of the scenes showing the screen idols at work in scenes in many of the big pictures. They first peep at Elsie Ferguson at work on her set and then drop in on Alice Brady, rehearsing a boudoir scene. The scene then shifts to a polo field where Jack Holt is shown leading a drive in his favorite sport. In the magic gardens of "make believe" May McAvoy is shown plucking eatables from a wonderful delicatessen tree and serving dainty lunch to Guy Oliver, Clarence Burton, Helen Dunler, and Charles Ogle. Theodore Roberts, not invited to the party, consoles himself with his newspaper and inevitable cigar. Inside the studios the visitors see Mary Miles Minter, Tom Moore, and director John Robertson directing a scene from "The Cowboy and the Lady" while on the adjoining set they see the classic features of Agnes Ayres coming into life as a modern Galatea aided-and-abetted by Casson Ferguson and Sylvia Ashton. The visitors are then whisked to the desert where George Melford is directing the opening scene in "Burning Sand" showing Wanda Hawley, Milton Sills, and Robert Cain with a background of a thousand players. In a courtyard set of George Fitzmaurice's production "To Have and to Hold", Betty Compson is found dreaming of the famous characters she has taken in "The Miracle Man", "The Green Temptation", "The Bonded Woman", and "The Little Minister", flashes of each of the star's parts being shown. Nearby Fitzmaurice is rehearsing Bert Lytell and Theodore Kosloff in a fencing scene.*

*Our little jaunt to the land of the "shadows" continues through the remainder of the studios and in a clever connected way is shown Thomas Meigan, Marion Davies, Dorothy Dalton, Anna Q. Nilsson, T Roy Barnes, Conrad Nagel, Julia Faye, Wallace Reid, Bebe Daniels, Rudolph Valentino, Lila Lee, Gloria Swanson, Leatrice Joy, Jeanette McPherson, Leis Wilson, and George Fawcett, each at work on a scene or some interesting characterization.*



Paramount was so taken with this format in late 1922, as they announced a feature length version, which would take a year to produce. They wrote the following in the advertisement for this film, when it released a year later in 1923:

*“Hollywood” is not an imitation. It is the original motion picture story of Hollywood. The idea of making an picture story showing the stars and celebrities of the screen in their real surroundings was announced by Paramount in Nov, 1922. The picture was scheduled to be produced in 1923. Nearly a year was spent in making “Hollywood”.*

*After Paramount’s preliminary announcement was made, other companies began the production of pictures in imitation of the “Hollywood” idea. These other pictures were speedily produced and shown to the public before “Hollywood” could be completed.*

*“Hollywood” is the original picture story of the screen and has a cast of 30 REAL stars and 50 screen celebrities.*



One of the stars who pops up in this lost Paramount feature is the Reverend Neal Dodd, who was pastor of the *Little Church Around the Corner* in the Los Feliz area of Hollywood, and whose church gets a brief feature in "*Hollywood Snapshots*". One article from 1922 follows here in which Neal Dodd defends the Hollywood Colony and another is from the same timeframe proclaiming that church attendance is at an old time high; Erich von Stroheim being one notable attendee amongst many.

### Attendance at Church Not Falling Off

By Malcolm Stuart Boylan.

Twenty-two churches in Hollywood were filled at Sunday and midweek services and the wits who urged retaliatory measures against the so-called reform elements are apparently backing into safe and sane citizens.

Erich von Stroheim arose in time Sunday morning to attend early mass at St. Brendan's church on Western avenue and to arrive at the hospital by 10 a. m. where Mrs. von Stroheim is a patient.

### Film Folk's Pastor Denies That Hollywood's Morals Are Loose

**Arbuckle Scandal Did Not Originate There Nor Did Taylor Live in Community, Minister Points Out.**

**H**OLLYWOOD'S moral character was defended today by the Rev. Neal Dodd, pastor of the film colony's "little church around the corner." The minister's advice to many movie stars declared there are some among them who are "not saints," but most of them are excellent men and women.

By THE REV. NEALE DODD  
Rector of St. Mary's of Angel Episcopal Church.

Written for the United Press.

HOLLYWOOD, Cal., Feb. 9.—I wish personally to refute the charges that Hollywood is a community of loose morals and fastidious conduct.

The terrible murder of William Desmond Taylor is held as Hollywood's door, but as a matter of fact he did not live in Hollywood, although he worked here. The dr-

unkle affair did not happen in Hollywood, but in San Francisco, 100 miles away. The shooting of Paul Kinney, another director, took place outside Hollywood.

As pastor of a church which numbers among its congregation many prominent film folk, I am in a position to study their conduct. As a rule I find these excellent men and women. Admittedly, there is an element in Hollywood, as in every other community, which does not conduct itself in the most saintly fashion. But its members are of a universal type and should be condemned universally, not only after they move out to Hollywood.

### DOPE SITUATION IS NOT SO BAD IN HOLLYWOOD

LOS ANGELES, Cal., Feb. 9.—Investigation of dope traffic in Hollywood, made on orders of detectives following the slaying of William D. Taylor, completely disproved sensational stories that the narcotic situation in the film colony was the worst in years. Detective Sergeant Lloyd R. Yarrow told the United Press today.

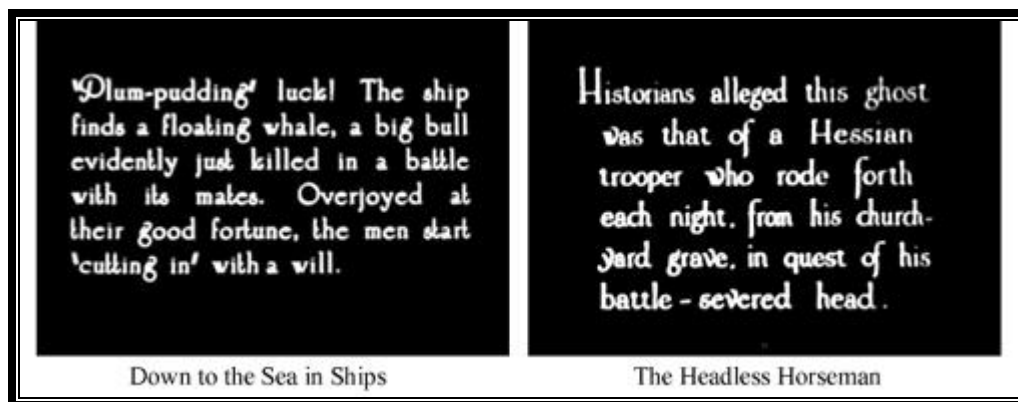
"Admittedly there are dope dives in Hollywood," Yarrow said, "but we find that they are patronized almost exclusively by people who do not live in that section."



### A possible genesis for Hollywood Snapshots:

If we can assume that the 'HF' on the intertitles likely stands for Hodkinson Films, then it makes sense that this particular distributor could produce a short touting the wholesome side of Hollywood and the humanistic traits found amongst the various members of the community as a whole. Looking back to Hodkinson's speech in 1921 to the MPDA, the creation of this short practices the proactive course of self-regulation he was preaching, and in turn seems oddly geared not just as a promotional touting one studio, but created to battle the scandalous stereotypes and in turn the reformers who were looking for any opportunity that would allow them to push their agenda of regulation. Stars in the short mainly seem to come from Metro and Paramount, and even Universal in the case of Frank Mayo, and there really isn't any one studio consistently mentioned throughout. This seems to suggest a somewhat neutral ground trod by someone like Hodkinson who could bring all these elements together.

Two of Hodkinson's larger pictures from 1922, "*Down to the Sea in Ships*", and "*The Headless Horseman*" did not have the distinctive intertitles as seen in the "*Hollywood Snapshots*" short, suggesting the intertitles were created by the producer or director and likely not the distributor as Hodkinson acted.



My best informed guess it that "*Hollywood Snapshots*" was a very rare release produced by Hodkinson [possibly distributed by Pathe] that offered entertainment and humor in the familiar and popular "*Screen Snapshots*" style, while scratching a few backs in the industry by previewing a competitors film, and showcasing stars under a variety of contracts. The main goal ultimately, may have been the presentation of Hollywood as a wholesome place full of down-to-earth moralistic people, while painting the scandals of the past as isolated incidents to a national audience. Only the uneducated bumpkins would even bother looking for scandal in Hollywood now, right? The short might also have doubled as a community service film so to speak, that several studios didn't mind helping out with, positioned conveniently just after the arrival of Hays in July.

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