



☞ Peverell Marley, cinematographer, Cecil B. De Mille, and Kay Johnson examine the famous 'box' out of which have come so many stars.

De Mille's Magic Box

*The Story of an Old Camera
—but What a Camera!*

By
Charles Carter

MUCH has been said about the number and variety of things which sprang out of a box opened by an inquisitive lady yclept Pandora. Modern science, however, is putting to shame the greatest flights of imagination uttered by the original authors of the ancient Greek myths.

In Hollywood, for instance, there is a box through which has passed over \$25,000,000 in cash money.

Out of this box unknown personalities from a score of different states and countries have scampered to become world-renowned figures.

From this modern Pandora container has arisen from a financial shoestring one corporation valued at over \$30,000,000; and it has contributed definitely to the success of three other immense institutions.

This mysterious box is Pathé Professional Camera No. 5, veteran of all the thousands of cameras in Hollywood; credited with having photographed more productions, accounted for more dollars of production cost, and the introduction of more great stars, than any other piece of picture-taking mechanism.

Pathé Professional Camera No. 5 is the proud possession of Cecil B. De Mille. While this director now has dozens of cameras, this antique 'box' occupies the place of honor in his collection, housed in a special vault at the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio with which De Mille is now associated.

It was bought for about \$1600 in the fall of 1913. \$1600 is not much money in pictures today—but then it was over 20 per cent of the total capital which Cecil De Mille and Jesse L. Lasky collected as the nucleus of the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company, later to become the main production unit of the now enormous Paramount company.

For a year and a half the new Lasky company had no other camera. Therefore the immediate success of the company traces back to the half a dozen original productions, "The Squaw Man," "The Virginian," "The Call of the North," "What's His Name?" "The Man from Home" and "The Rose of the Rancho"—made at a time when two cameras to a company was an unheard of luxury.

Pathé Professional No. 5

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photographed all of the first forty pictures produced by Cecil B. De Mille, and a dozen or more by other directors. On the last fifteen De Mille productions it has been used at some time or other during their making.

While \$25,000,000 is the estimated production cost which has passed through the slow and old-fashioned F. 3.5 lens of the box, this amount would undoubtedly be doubled if it were possible to compute the fortunes made by stars who rose to fame through it.

The Marquise de Falaise, for instance, (Gloria Swanson) thought \$75 a week an amazing salary when she came from bathing girl comedies to play the lead in "Don't Change Your Husband."

A test was made by this camera of a bit-player in "The Birth of a Nation." The result was the signing of Wallace Reid for leading rôles opposite Geraldine Farrar—and the start of the most meteoric and tragic career in all picture history.

Bebe Daniels, in person, seemed a rather awkward youngster—but the Pandora's box of the movies demonstrated that she had a remarkable screen personality. From barely more than a bit in "Male and Female" the black-haired Bebe has soared to the luxury of town cars and a home at an exclusive beach where land is valued at dollars to the inch rather than the foot.

Half the weight and size of the present modernized cameras, and with one-fourth their convenience and range of action, Pathé Professional Camera No. 5 is responsible for some of the greatest technical advances which movies have known.

Credited with being one of the first bits of 'effect lighting' in films is a scene with Raymond Hatton in "The Warrens of Virginia." Mary Pickford and Jack Holt

were the principals of "The Little American" in which the camera participated in the first use of artificial lights to film a night scene at sea (the sinking of the Lusitania). It likewise participated in the first successful camera to 'spot' color at will on a picture scene (the illuminated jewel in "The Devil Stone").

Made on one of the basic patents of picture-making Pathé Professional Camera No. 5 has only fundamentals in common with the present machines. Where its cost was \$1600, your modern outfit, with all lenses, motors, sound recording equipment, etc., runs its cameraman about \$6000.

"If cameras had cost that much in 1913 there would have been no Lasky company!" drily remarked Cecil B. De Mille, whose first picture, "The Squaw Man," cost \$15,000—and brought the financial shoe-string of the tiny new concern almost to the breaking point.

Today four lenses can be changed on a modern camera in less than five seconds.

In 1913 it was a fifteen minute job to put on a new lens. Therefore, the majority of the 6,000,000 feet of film exposed by the old camera ran past a 2 inch F. 3.5 lens, just one-half as fast as the lightning quick F.2 lenses now employed.

As an example of the rapid advances made in camera equipment let it be said that where Gloria Swanson required eight lights for a scene in "Male and Female" Mr. De Mille needed but four spots of illumination for the photographing of Kay Johnson in a similar set-up of "Dynamite" which De Mille has just finished at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. (Yes, we *are* drawing a parallel between the bath-tub scenes of these two pictures—made 12 years apart!)

Names have been given of a half a dozen celebrities whom Pathé No. 5 intro-

duced to film fame—but there are scores more. It met Thomas Meighan, for instance, in "Kindling"; Julia Faye in "The Woman God Forgot"; Florence Vidor, "Old Wives for New"; Noah Beery, "The Whispering Chorus"; Lew Cody, "Don't Change Your Husband"; William Boyd, an extra, "Why Change Your Wife"; Agnes Ayres, "Forbidden Fruit"; "Fool's Paradise"; Conrad Nagel, Jacqueline Logan, Mildred Harris; "Saturday Night," Leatrice Joy; "The Ten Commandments," Rod La Rocque.

Blanche Sweet, Rita Jolivet, Victor Moore, Bessie Barriscale, Dustin Farnum, Theodore Roberts, Robert Edeson, Theodore Kosloff, Elliott Dexter, Ina Claire, Marie Doro, Mae Murray, Wanda Hawley, Helen Jerome Eddy, Bryant Washburn and Marjorie Daw are still other famous faces first photographed by the busiest camera filmdom has known.

It doesn't work so much now, this Pathé No. 5. It is old-fashioned in relation to the highly modern cameras which can do everything but mix you an ice cream soda. It can't do some of the very involved trick stuff now demanded, but its fundamental picture-making quality is nowhere impaired.

So it is that Cecil De Mille religiously uses it at some point in every picture he makes, and it is his intention to do so until the antiquated wooden box folds up from old age, the ravages of wood-eating termites—or what have you.

When the box fails De Mille will remove the Karl Zeiss lens and put it in the safest safe deposit vault he can find. For it will be the one imperishable reminder of the sturdy outfit which stood by him when he was pioneering in pictures—and which has made him a fortune beyond his fondest early dreams.

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seventeen years of the most de luxe sort of life before Fate handed him a 'sock on the nose.'

He grinned when I talked to him about it.

"I was well on my way to being a very agreeable, well-mannered, more or less useless rich man's son," he said. "At that time my dad's death was a dreadful tragedy but the financial failure was the best thing that could have happened to me.

"The saving thing about our situation was that we had been taught not to despise work. We had never had to do anything, but dad had always jumped on any tendency we showed towards snobbishness. So when the crash came my brother and I just looked at each other, and the next day we applied for a job at the nearest railroad yard as mechanic's helpers.

"After four months I went on a long cruise in the Standard Oil tanker, 'Caddo.' When I got back I roomed with a boy named Steve Janney, who was recently killed. He was in the show business, and inside of two weeks he had talked a friend into giving me a chance in 'The Mask in the Face,' a William Faversham production. I did seven different characters in this piece, for five dollars a week each, or thirty-five dollars. Then followed seventy-two weeks in stock, a tremendous experience, and then Broadway again!"

A succinctly stated story, but one which

would be all the more remarkable to you if you could see this youngster face to face. He doesn't look at all like one who has worked blindingly hard to achieve a success. In fact, his Biff in "So This is College" is Robert Montgomery to the life; a vivid, very modern, very self-possessed, very charming young American. To all appearances he has never had a care in the world.

But let him state his philosophy of life.

"I don't know whether I would recommend my experience for all youngsters," he said. "Certainly I frequently regret that I had to pass up four years in the big university for which my father had entered me when I was still a baby. Also there were many times when I came, through inexperience, mighty near to making mistakes which might have ruined my life. It is safest to take the college route, to be under discipline during formative years. There is no doubt of that. On the other hand the school of life is a forcing school. Through sheer necessity you plunge along faster, if you get the right start. If you can keep your head, college can be dispensed with. But it is a great gamble. My boy, if I have one, will go to college. I wouldn't want to take the chances with his life that I did with mine."

Sounds like an old graybeard, doesn't he?

At twenty-five he has packed more into a life than most men accomplish in fifty years.

Between seventeen and his present age he has fought, and won, the most difficult personal battle he will ever have.

You can take your hat off to Robert Montgomery, who became a stage star, and is attaining stellar rank on the screen, despite the early handicap of being born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

He remembers with pleasure his carefree days; but he looks forward with even keener anticipation to the time when he can enjoy luxurious living again—this time on the money won by the magic of his work as a creative artist.

He was a nice young lad of seventeen, that son of a rubber magnate. But he's a far more powerful personality at twenty-five as Biff in "So this is College" and Andy McAllister in "Untamed."

"I had only had my chance in 'The Mask in the Face' two days when I knew that acting was what I always wanted to do," he told me. "I wanted to progress as rapidly as possible, so I inquired of older actors. They said, 'Go out in stock,' and I did. In seventy-two weeks I did seventy-two different characters in seventy-two different plays, and over fifty of them were old men! This character work, and the whole variety of experience, was my 'college,' the only college I have had in the show business. That sort of thing is hard work, but it all seems rosy in retrospect, particularly as I seem to be getting ahead."