

Grauman's

By 1920, forty million Americans were going to the movies each week, and most of the films they saw were being produced in Hollywood. The picture business employed thousands of people, with a total payroll of \$25 million a year. The industry had been active in Hollywood for seven years by 1918. By that time, movies had established themselves as the most accessible, and therefore dominant, form of mass entertainment in America, pushing aside the vaudeville acts, concert singers, and stage plays that toured the country. Film makers were creating "features," running an hour or more, as well as the one- and two-reelers that had been the entertaining staple.

By the early Twenties, enormous, ornate theaters, known as "movie palaces," had been built in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Between 1922 and 1930, Hollywood was to share in this wealth of palaces, with the construction of four of the most beautiful theaters in the country. The first of these, Grauman's Egyptian Theatre, was followed by the Grauman's Chinese Theatre, Warner Brothers Theatre, and finally, the Hollywood Pantages. Each one was both larger and more ornate than the previous. Of the four, Grauman's Chinese Theatre was to become the most famous, perhaps, eventually, the most famous theatre in the world.

For several years, C.E. Toberman had attempted to induce Sid Grauman and his father to locate in Hollywood. The two Graumans had come to Los Angeles and built the lavish Million Dollar Theatre at Third and Broadway. When Grauman finally agreed in 1922, Toberman built the huge Grauman's Egyptian Theatre on Hollywood Blvd. It was named in the same year that the fabulous discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb created an instant society of eager Egyptologists. With the immense success of this theatre, Sid Grauman was looking to build another.



Chinese Theatre

By 1925, plans had been completed for Grauman's Chinese Theatre. It was to be a veritable museum of the Chinese arts, architecture, and culture. Official government authorization was gained for the importation of temple bells, pagodas, Fu Dogs, and rare artifacts.

The theatre had its grand opening on May 18, 1927, when Cecil B. DeMille's *King of Kings* was premiered. Hundreds of fans thronged the streets outside to view the magnificent structure and to seek movie star autographs. It was reviewed in the papers as the grandest opening ever held. The grandeur of the building was beyond the public's imagination. With a magnificently carved ceiling, muraled walls, plush carpeting, and ornate columns, it was by far one of the most beautiful theaters in the world. The Chinese Theatre has hosted more premiers than any other. Opening nights were attended by a wide array of stars, producers, directors, and personalities. Their presence, backgrounded by the dream-like panorama of the Chinese structure, easily made a Hollywood premier the most glamorous and exciting spectacle in the entertainment field.

When Grauman's Chinese Theatre (later renamed Mann's Chinese Theatre) opened in 1927, no one expected it to become one of the biggest tourist attractions in Los Angeles. But when silent screen star Norma Talmadge visited the new theatre and accidentally stepped into a sidewalk of wet cement, it was the beginning of a landmark which is now seen by over two million visitors each year. Over 170 prints are enshrined in the Forecourt of the Stars. The first prints were left by Norma Talmadge, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks. For over 50 years, other Hollywood greats added theirs. Action film star Jackie Chan added his on January 5th, 1997.

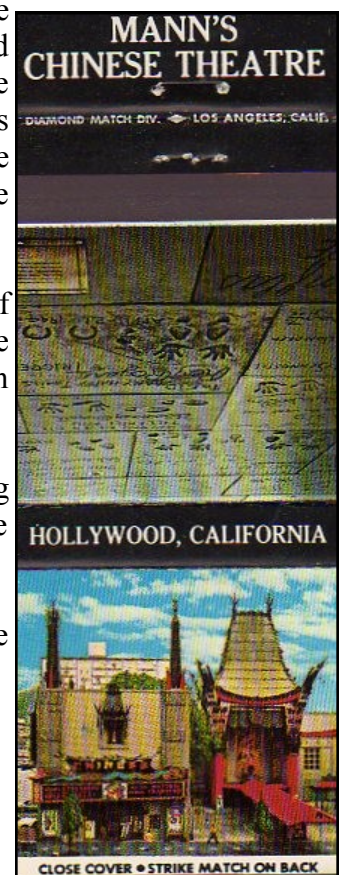
And they're not all hand and footprints. Wander around and you'll see Betty Grable's leg, Jimmy Durante's nose, John Barrymore's profile, Eddie Cantor's eyes, Charlie McCarthy's hat and monocle, Al Jolson's knee, and Harpo's harp. A champagne cork from the Jack Lemmon/Shirley MacLaine ceremony is there, and so is John Wayne's fist. Final selection of celebrities to be footprinted was always the discretion of the theatre owner. Some celebrities, such as Greta Garbo, have been invited and declined; others have sought the honor and been denied.

Many refer to the theatre as one of the only remaining landmarks of legendary Hollywood. There is certainly no other museum or attraction quite like it. The footprints preserve memories from the earliest days of the motion picture industry, projecting a spirit of belonging and a sense of history.

Perhaps children looking at the prints daydream about someday leaving their own, cast forever beside the Hollywood greats. Many visitors try on the prints for size—perhaps they can fill Marilyn Monroe's or John Wayne's!

One thing is certain: Grauman's Chinese Theatre will always be, to people all over the world, a place that forever captures "Legendary Hollywood."

Cover courtesy of Joe DeGennaro



Information courtesy of Hollywood Chamber of Commerce