

## Tom Mix

1880 - 1940

When talkies arrived, Universal Pictures had a couple of western film heroes on the lot—Ken Maynard and Hoot Gibson. But after the 1929-1930 release season, the contracts of both stars were not renewed and Universal was out of the western film business. A year or so later, the studio recognized the error of its ways and coaxed the biggest western star of silents to return to the screen...and to 'talk'. That man was Tom Mix.

It's difficult to separate the real Tom Mix from the Hollywood version and hype:

- Studio publicity and Mix's own elaborations of his life mention: he was with Teddy Roosevelt in the charge up San Juan Hill in the Spanish American war; he was a Texas Ranger and deputy Marshal; he was in the Philippines; he was in the Boxer Rebellion in China; he fought in the Boer War; etc., etc.
- What we do know is: he was in the Army; he performed with various circuses and wild west shows.
- Les Adams adds: "The Texas Ranger membership is pretty well documented in the Austin archives and the Waco museum, and no one has ever found Tom Mix among the listed. The closest he ever came was in 1935 when Governor Homer Allred made him an Honorary Ranger."

His initial films began around 1909, and most (all) of the early films were 'shorts' (one and two-reelers with a running time of about ten to twenty minutes). As he became more popular, and the cinema medium grew up, the pictures were lengthened to 50-60 minutes (five or six reels). Mix also was credited as director and scriptwriter on many of these films. Around 1917, he began a lengthy stay at Fox and was there through 1928 (Fox's other cinema cowboy during this time was Buck Jones). After leaving Fox, he worked for a year at Film Booking Office (FBO), which was the forerunner of RKO and run by Joe Kennedy Sr., the father of President John F. Kennedy.

Mix's film output from 1909-1929 amounted to 326 silents. He was a genuine Hollywood legend, and his lavish, expensive lifestyle reflected that status. However, to adults and kiddies of that period, the Mix name equalled big screen adventure and thrills. Looking back at the silent movie era, the westerns of William S. Hart were popular and his approach was nitty-gritty, dark, bleak ... some call it realism. But Hart's popularity was waning, due to his age and stylistic approach. At the opposite extreme was Mix—fancy stunts, trick riding, flashy clothes...perhaps best described as showmanship over reality. Tom's approach apparently worked, and his salary at Fox reached \$17,500 per

<http://www.surfnetinc.com/chuck/tommix.htm>

