

Discovering

Old Hollywood

by Gregory Paul Williams

Cliff Wesselmann Collection
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L-R: Carole Lombard in her Hollywood Boulevard home decorated by Williams Haines, 1933; Delivery

boys outside the Hollywood Citizen-News on Wilcox Avenue below Selma Avenue, 1933; Cecil B. DeMille, Marlene Dietrich and Clark Gable at the first Lux Radio Broadcast from Hollywood, 1936; Hollywood Boulevard looking west from inside the Taft Building, 1925. (Images reprinted with permission from BL Press, LLC.)



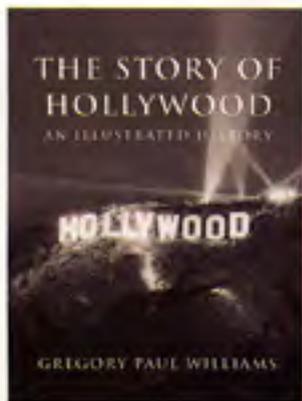
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Coming from Greece, Alex Williams arrived in Hollywood in 1915; the same year, D.W. Griffith turned movies into motion pictures with *The Birth of a Nation*. Griffith made his movie at Triangle Studios at Sunset and Virgil. Alex Williams set up business with two brothers-in-law named Linardos at Sunset and Gordon, next to the Poverty Row studios. It wasn't the movies, but The Linardos Brothers Market sold groceries to them along with anyone else in the neighborhood. Alex Williams was my grandfather.



It took my father Dino and I fifteen years to create *The Story of Hollywood: An Illustrated History*. Released this fall, it chronicles the legendary place that gave its name to show business. Our first book *The Story of Hollywoodland* was fairly simple. But it was so much fun, we thought we'd try something bigger. *The Story of Hollywood* follows our hometown from dirt until today.

Writing the book made me fall in love with Hollywood all over again.

During our research, we found an aerial photo that shows The Linardos Brothers Market. Taken in 1922, the old Paramount/Lasky lot is in the foreground at Vine and Sunset. Silent movies were golden then and Paramount was the most golden of the studios. In the middle of the photograph, you can see Poverty Row at Gower Gulch. The family store is a

block after that. My dad's oldest brother, Harry, spent his infancy in one of the upstairs' apartments. (Today's developers make a big deal about apartments above retail; my grandparents did it in 1922.) Beyond the store is the Beesemyer ranch at Sunset and Bronson where the Warner Brothers built their first Hollywood studio.

Hollywood's story swept me up from the start with its characters and events. Some of the writing helped me connect family stories I had heard growing up: Uncle Harry delivered groceries to Harry Cohn and Jean Harlow; Uncle George told of seeing Gable and Lombard trying on cowboy hats in Matson's on Hollywood Boulevard; Dino said the only time he saw his father cry was when Alex lost ten thousand dollars in the Guaranty Savings and Loan default. Gilbert Beesemyer, who grew up on his parents' ranch and founded Guaranty, caused the failure. A lot of trusting Hollywood citizens lost their savings at the start of the Depression. Beesemyer went to prison. Scientology now owns his Guaranty Building at Hollywood and Ivar.

Some of the research connected me to my own past. My first impression of Hollywood Boulevard came as a young child on shopping trips with my mom. As we headed for the posh Broadway Hollywood, I would stare at the Hody's restaurant sign at Hollywood and Vine. Its brightly painted clown with a spinning beach ball nose totally mesmerized me. But we never ate in the restaurant. It turns out that in 1933, Carl Laemmle, founder of Universal Studio, opened the Coco Tree Café in that building designed by architect Richard Neutra. *The Story of Hollywood* documents this corner and more along Hollywood's major thoroughfares.

Originally, Dino and I had planned to license the photographs; there are over eight hundred in the book. Like dummies, we hadn't taken photos of Hollywood for all of our years here. Much of that Hollywood is only a memory now.

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So we went to every library collection we could find and looked at every Hollywood photo they had, incorporating many of them into the book. (We also fell in love with photo librarians.) The project, however, went up a notch when the collection of a photographer named Cliff Wesselmann came to us.

Cliff Wesselmann was a Los Angeles newspaper photographer from the 1920s to the early '60s. He spent a large part of his career at the Hollywood Citizen News on Wilcox. Wesselmann went to premieres, radio broadcasts, Academy Award ceremonies and murder scenes. He photographed Hollywood streets for the fun of it. When he died in the '60s, his heirs abandoned his photos and negatives, about eighteen thousand of them, in his San Fernando Valley home that was about to be demolished. Hollywood camera-store owner Jim McCrary saved the collection, storing it in his attic for close to thirty years. When he heard of our book, he sold us the collection, most of it never-before-seen 4X5 negatives.

Truthfully, *The Story of Hollywood* merely sketches the story of this famous place. Writing the book made me fall in love with Hollywood all over again. When Paris Hilton gets a DUI at Wilcox and Selma while heading to Sunset and Orange for an In-N-Out burger, Hollywood is still creating characters and events to write about.



Author Bio.

Gregory Paul Williams is the author of the new book *The Story of Hollywood, an Illustrated History* now available at bookstores nationwide and online at www.storyofhollywood.com. Greg was born in the shadow of the Hollywood sign, attended Hollywood High School and is a professional puppeteer. His credits include *Men In Black I and II*, *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*, *Beakman's World* and his own original productions. www.puppetstudio.com