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Hollywood



Hollywood is a neighborhood located in Los Angeles, California, that's also synonymous with the glamour, money and power of the entertainment industry. As the show-business capital of the world, Hollywood is home to many famous television and movie studios and record companies. Yet despite its glitzy status, Hollywood has humble roots: It began as a small agricultural community and evolved into a diverse, thriving metropolis where stars are born and dreams come true—for a lucky few.

Hollywood's Humble Origins

In 1853, a small adobe hut was all that existed where Hollywood stands today. But over the next two decades, the area became a thriving agricultural community called Cahuenga Valley.

When politician and real estate developer Harvey Henry Wilcox and his second wife Daeida moved to Los Angeles from Topeka, Kansas in 1883, he purchased 150 acres of land west of Hollywood and attempted to try his hand at ranching.

His efforts didn't go well, however, so in 1887, he filed plans with the Los Angeles County Recorder's office to subdivide the land. Soon, Prospect Avenue and upscale homes sprung up.

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H. J. Whitley

By the turn of the century, Hollywood had a post office, markets, a hotel, a livery and even a street car. In 1902, banker and real estate mogul H. J. Whitley, also known as the “Father of Hollywood,” stepped in.

Whitley opened the Hollywood Hotel—now the site of the Dolby theater, which hosts the annual Oscars ceremony—and developed Ocean View Tract, an upscale residential neighborhood. He also helped finance the building of a bank and was integral to bringing electricity to the area.

Hollywood incorporated in 1903 and merged with Los Angeles in 1910. At that time, Prospect Avenue became the now-famous Hollywood Boulevard.

How Hollywood got its name is disputed. According to one story, after Harvey and Daeida Wilcox learned there was an Ohio town called Hollywood, she named their ranch the same and the name stuck. Another story states H. J. Whitley came up with the name while honeymooning in the area in 1886.

Whichever story is correct (if either), all three people played an important role in the famous city’s development.

Hollywood Film Studios

The first film completed in Hollywood was 1908’s *The Count of Monte Cristo*, although production of the film began in Chicago. The first film made entirely in Hollywood was a short film in 1910 titled *In Old California*.

By 1911, the first movie studio appeared on Sunset Boulevard. By 1915, many major motion-picture companies had relocated to Hollywood from the East Coast.

Hollywood was an ideal place to produce movies since filmmakers couldn’t be sued there for infringing on motion picture film patents held by Thomas Edison and his Motion Picture Patents Company. It also had warm, predictably sunny weather and diverse terrain perfect for movie backdrops.



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Hollywood Sign

The Hollywood sign is a must-see tourist attraction, although it didn't start out that way. It was originally a clever electric billboard advertising an upscale suburban neighborhood in what is now the Hollywood Hills.

The sign originally said, "Hollywoodland," and was erected in 1923 by Los Angeles Times publisher and real estate developer Harry Chandler at a cost of \$21,000. Each original letter was 30 feet wide and 43 feet tall and attached to telephone poles. Four thousand light bulbs illuminated the massive marquis.

The sign was supposed to last just one and a half years; however, it became part of Hollywood's culture and remained. During the Great Depression, the sign deteriorated. It was partially restored in 1949 and the last four letters removed. In the late 1970s, the sign was restored again and has been featured in countless movies, including Superman, Mighty Joe Young and The Day After Tomorrow.



Golden Age of Hollywood

The Golden Age of Hollywood was a period of great growth, experimentation and change in the industry that brought international prestige to Hollywood and its movie stars.

Under the all-controlling studio system of the era, five movie studios known as the "Big Five" dominated: Warner Brothers, RKO, Fox, MGM and Paramount. Smaller studios included Columbia, Universal and United Artists.

The Golden Age of Hollywood began with the silent movie era (though some people say it started at the end of the silent movie age).

Dramatic films such as D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and comedies such as *The Kid* (1921) starring Charlie Chaplin were popular nationwide. Soon, movie stars such as Chaplin, the Marx Brothers and Tallulah Bankhead were adored everywhere.

With the introduction of movies with sound, Hollywood producers churned out Westerns, musicals, romantic dramas, horror films and documentaries. Studio movie stars were even more idolized, and Hollywood increased its reputation as the land of affluence and fame.

During World War I, after President Woodrow Wilson declared war on Germany, the Big Five jumped on the political-propaganda bandwagon.

Often under pressure and guidance from the Wilson administration, they produced educational shorts and reels on war preparedness and military recruitment. They also lent out their wide roster of popular actors to promote America's war efforts.

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By the 1930s, at the height of Hollywood's Golden Age, the movie industry was one of the largest businesses in the United States. Even in the depths of the Great Depression, movies were a weekly escape for many people who loved trading their struggles for a fictional, often dazzling world, if only for a couple of hours.

Despite the tough economic times, it's estimated up to 80 million Americans went to the movies each week during the Depression.

Some of the greatest films made in all of Hollywood history were made in the late 1930s, such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Jezebel*, *A Star Is Born*, *Citizen Kane*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Stagecoach* and *Wuthering Heights*.