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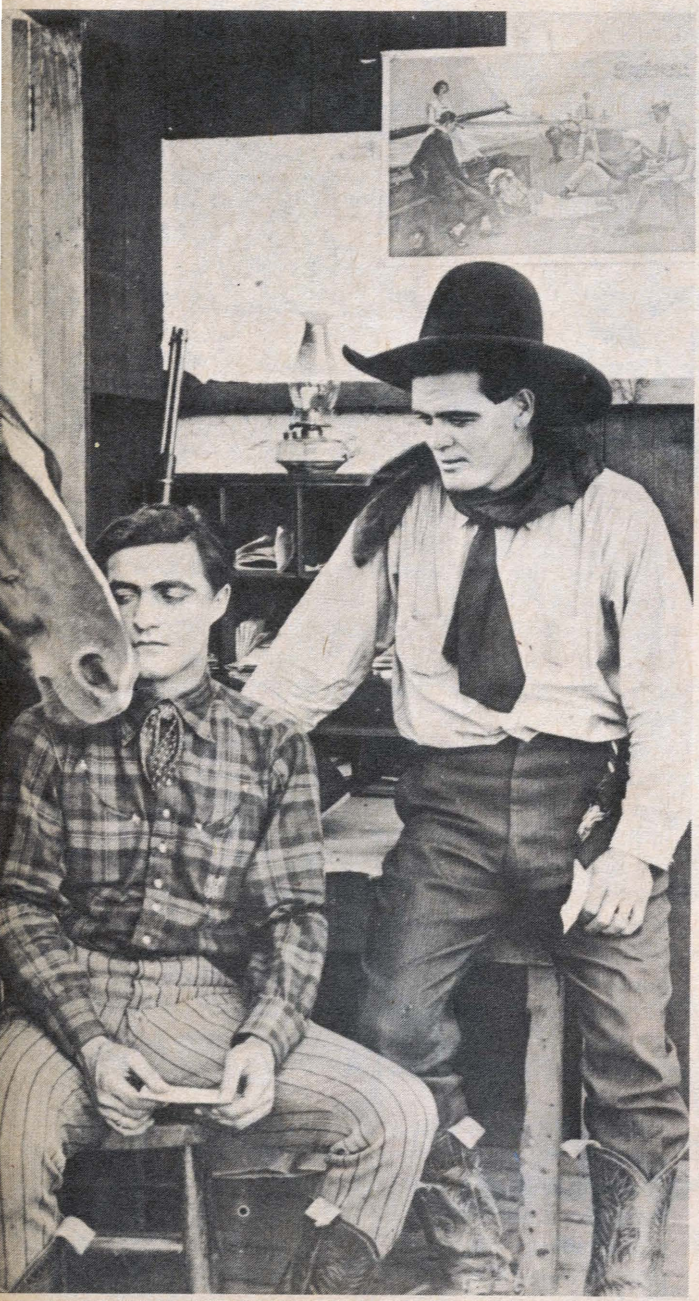
Death In The Morning

TOM MIX: BUDDING WESTERN STAR

During his years, 1910-1917, at Selig-Polyscope, Tom Mix achieved an authentic taste of cowboy Americana he was never able to capture again.

by Robert S. Birchard



Tony and Sid Jordan comfort Tom as he moons over a picture of the girl of his dreams in TEXAS RYAN (1917).

Tom Mix's early years read very much like a Mark Twain odyssey, heavily salted with strains of Horatio Alger, Jr. Born January 6, 1880 at Mix Run, Clearfield County, Pennsylvania, Tom was the son of Ed and Elizabeth Mix. His father had been a member of the famed 7th Cavalry, but throughout Tom's youth he was employed as stablemaster for Pennsylvania industrialist, J. E. Du Bois. Tom, of course, learned to ride almost before he could walk.

At age eighteen, Tom left home. He would later say, with tongue in cheek no doubt, that he left because he couldn't stand the smell of the animals in his father's stable; but in reality, he had been indentured to Du Bois's foundry, and the prospects of factory life did not appeal to him.

Tom Mix's military record has long been a matter of dispute, but it would seem that he did serve in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, and that he saw action in the Philippine Insurrection and was a member of the American Expeditionary Force sent to China in the Boxer Rebellion. Wounded at the battle of Tien Tsin, he was shipped home and mustered out of the service.

After his hitch in the Army, Tom drifted to the Southwest, where he found work as a bartender, a cowboy, a lawman in a series of non-permanent construction camps, and finally as a Wild West show performer, becoming the foreman of the famed Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch Show in 1906.

Leaving the 101 Show in late 1908, Mix married Olive Stokes, of Dewey, Oklahoma his third marriage. For the first months of their marriage, the couple lived on the Stokes family ranch, eventually moving to Colorado, where Tom had a job as sheriff in a construction camp. It was here that Tom received his first movie offer.

The offer came from Wild West show promoter, W. A. Dickie, who was then employed by the Selig-Polyscope company to provide stock and cowboys for Western pictures. Dickie knew Olive Mix, and he had seen Tom perform. He wrote, asking if Tom would be interested in appearing in "moving pictures." The reply was affirmative, and Dickie wrote again, asking the couple to meet the Selig company in Flemington, Missouri.

Colonel William N. Selig's Chicago based Selig-Polyscope Company was one of the most successful of the early motion picture concerns. Established before

An open ceiling barrom set at Newhall, California in 1916. Left to right: George Pankey, Sid Jordan, Vic Frith, Boxx Glenn, Joe Ryan, Banty Caldwell, Mix, unknown, Chet Ryan, Pres Frith.

the turn of the century, Selig had ridden out the first series of bitter patents fights, and in 1907, under the aegis of George Klein, had joined with the other major producers of the day to form the Motion Picture Patents Company, also known as General Film, but more commonly called "the film trust."

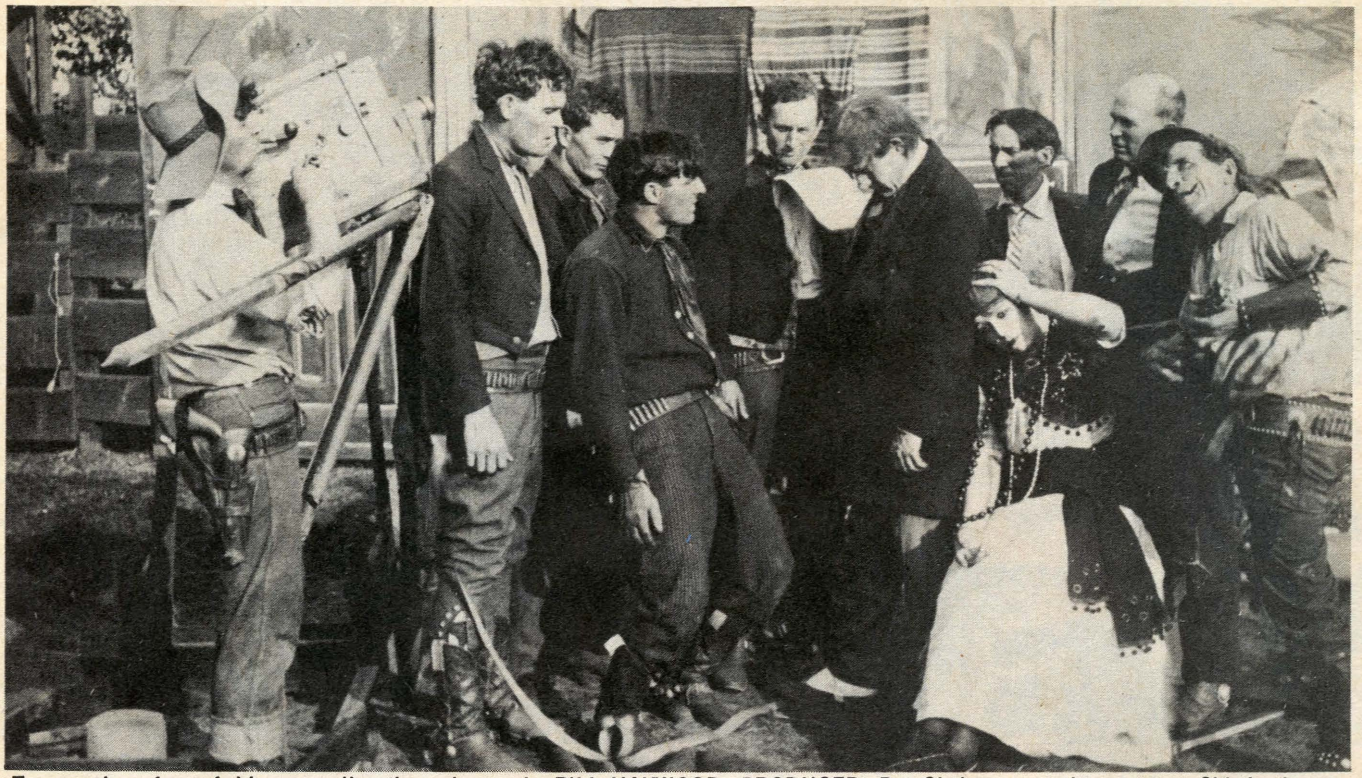
With this newly found security, Selig greatly expanded his operation. He was the first producer to establish permanent studio in Florida, and the Diamond S Ranch at Prescott, Arizona for the production of Westerns, (the ranch name derived from the Selig trademark which consisted of an "S" enclosed in a diamond). In addition to these permanent facilities, Selig also sent out travelling units to shoot pictures on location.

The company that Mix and his wife met at Flemington was one of these travelling units, and the month spent there resulted in a picture called *THE RANGER RIDERS*. Mix, it is said, was not particularly impressed with his image on the screen, but he was approached by his old friend, Colonel Zack Mulhall, with an offer to appear in Mulhall's Wild West Show. Tom accepted the offer, and in September and October of 1910 he played the Appalachian Exposition with the show at Knoxville, Tennessee.

Back in Chicago, Colonel Selig saw *THE RANGE RIDERS*, and was greatly impressed with Tom Mix. Selig and his studio head, Tom Nash, looked Mix up on their winter trip to Florida, and asked Tom to rejoin the Selig organization. Mix agreed, and over the winter of 1910-1911 he appeared, largely in supporting roles, in a series of jungle pictures with Kathlyn Williams, of which *LOST IN THE JUNGLE* and *BACK TO THE PRIMITIVE* are typical.

The spring of 1911 found Mix back in Oklahoma, where he briefly took the job of night marshal for the town of Dewey. Summer brought out Selig's traveling

Tom Mix and company at the Selig Zoo in Los Angeles. (1916)

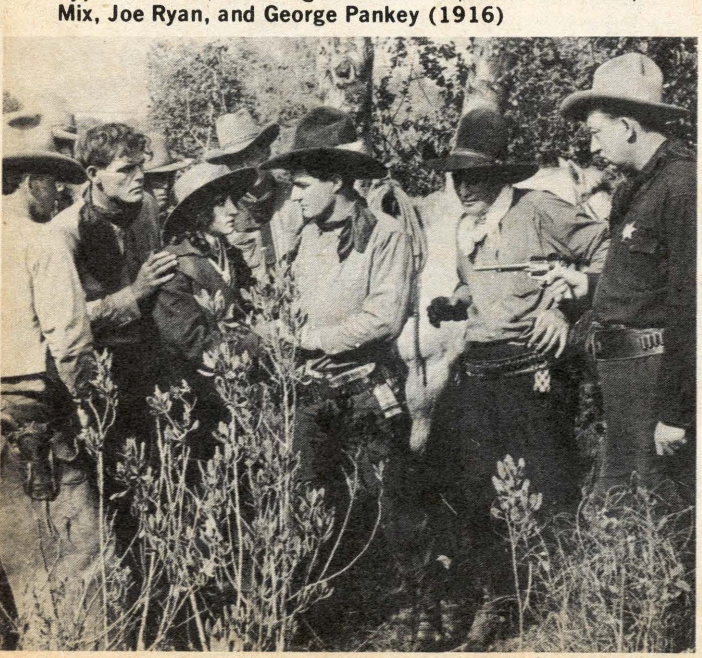


Tom makes fun of his own directing chores in BILL HAYWOOD: PRODUCER. Pat Chrisman at the camera, Sid Jordan to Tom's left and George Fawcett with head bowed.

companies, and this time they came to Mix, in Oklahoma. In July, perhaps the most famous of all the Mix-Selig westerns was made, *RANCH LIFE IN THE GREAT SOUTHWEST*. Mix was not, as some historians have stated, merely an extra in this film. Essentially a documentary, the picture showed a series of ranch practices and stunts. Olive Mix was shown roping a calf, and Tom bulldogged a steer for the camera. Posters for the production showed Tom bringing down the steer, and he received billing as "U.S. Marshal—Tom Mix."

Tom took a break from picture work in 1911-1912, joining the Young Buffalo Ranch Wild West Show on a tour through the northeast and Canada. His wife accompanied him on the tour, but she later returned to Oklahoma to give birth to their daughter, Ruth, who was born on July 13, 1912. Tom again went with Selig, this time going to the Diamond S Ranch and becoming a member of William Duncan's unit. Duncan wrote, directed, and starred in a series of one-reel Westerns for Selig, and was later to become a top serial star and director. The year and a half that Mix spent with Duncan served as a training ground for his future starring work.

Typical scene, showing Sid Jordan, Victoria Forde, Tom Mix, Joe Ryan, and George Pankey (1916)



By mid 1914, Selig considered Mix to be ready for a series of his own, and to launch this series he put Tom in two special productions, *CHIP OF THE FLYING U*, a three-reeler, and the five-reel feature, *IN THE DAYS OF THE THUNDERING HERD*. Colin Campbell, who directed Selig's famous version of Rex Beach's *THE SPOILERS*, directed these two efforts, and both were exceptionally good Westerns.

The Mix series itself, however, was somewhat less ambitious. The first, a single-reeler appropriately titled *THE REAL THING IN COWBOYS*, was released on September 29, 1914, and set the pattern for all that was to follow in the next two and a half years.

Mix's output was immense. His unit turned out a single-reel picture every week, along with a series of special two and three-reel productions, which were produced simultaneously with the regular output and released at four-week intervals. The vast majority of Mix's films were Western comedies, not hell-for-leather shoot-em-ups. In them Tom began to develop the screen personality that was to make him a world-wide favorite.

Mix directed most of his pictures himself:unfortunately, though his talent as an organizer of scenes was not undeveloped, he had little regard for camera placement, maintaining the "front-row-center" point of view of so many early movies. Details of action were largely lost through this unimaginative use of the camera. *BILL HAYWOOD—PRODUCER* **(Continued on page 47)**

part of the time under chloroform, while his unshakable will fought to live. In his delirium, he made it clear that he had known for a long time that he was marked for death. He also spoke of the slave powers against which he had battled so long, and who had sent him to his death.

When the massive body could stand no more, he died murmuring, "I die. Protect my honor."

The day was Friday, September 16, 1859.

San Francisco went into a period of deep mourning, unparalleled in its history. Bankers, merchants and shopkeepers closed their doors and cross-draped them in black.

On Sunday, 30,000 people crowded into Portsmouth Squard and adjoining streets for the funeral. The casket was mounted on a catafalque in the Square, and Colonel Baker delivered an eloquent eulogy. Afterward, every man in San Francisco followed the casket to Lone Mountain. Even his enemies paid him this last respect, for the Chivs were brave men themselves and silently admitted that Broderick had been a great man.

Only Terry was absent. He was not the kind to accord a fallen enemy honor or respect. It was this bitterness, this lack of humility, even in an era of frequent duels, that ruined Terry. Men shunned him. Although he continued to practice law, his cases were second rate. What had been potentially one of the most brilliant careers in California was finished.

Broderick had won, ironically, even in death. •

SMOKE SIGNALS

(Continued from page 4)

know that on any subject pertaining to the old west any opposing side of contentions can easily find supporting facts. Very often we find two sets of facts, all opposed. Then it is a matter of choosing those that seem more reasonable and probable. Otherwise it is a matter of drawing straws or pitching a coin to select the facts to be used.

In TRAILS AND TRIALS OF A TEXAS RANGER by W. W. Sterling you will find a complete rundown on the Cortez case and the murder of Brack Morris. General Sterling was at one time Commander of the Texas Rangers and had access to their records. I depended largely on his facts because the newspapers of the time and county records were all prejudiced to one side or the other. No county record in West Texas would I, as a researcher, ever accept without corroberation. I feel that Sterling certainly had the facts straight on Cortez.

I am sorry that you are unhappy with us but hope you continue to read TRUE FRONTIER and its companion magazine, REAL FRONTIER despite it.

Sincerely,
Maurice Kildare

TOM MIX: BUDDING WESTERN STAR

(Continued from page 28)

(1915) is a good example of this. In this film cowboy Tom takes over the direction of a stranded picture troup. Tom writes a script, and then sets to work trying to put it on film. He explains the scenes to the actors, they take their places, and Tom pulls out his six-gun and fires a shot into the air to start the action. The shot scares the stock which proceeds to wreak havoc with the set. Played in one long shot, the humor of the scene is lost in the overall chaos.

In fairness to Mix, however, it must be said that his talent as a director did progress. A comparison of *ROPING A BRIDE* (1915) and *ROPING A SWEETHEART* (1916) serves to demonstrate this. The earlier picture suffers from the same static treatment that characterized *BILL HAYWOOD—PRODUCER. SWEETHEART* is a different story altogether. The camera seeks the most interesting part of the action; close-ups and travelling shots bring life to this little comedy. Mix was truly maturing as a filmmaker and comedian.

It was during this period that Mix began to build a stock company of hand-picked cowboys. The company included Leo Maloney, Joe Ryan, and Floyd (Wally Wales) Alderson, who later became Western stars themselves. Others in the group were Dick Hunter, Boss and Goober Glenn, George Pankey, Pat Chrisman (who served as Tom's foreman), and Dopey Dick Crawford.

Mix found Crawford in Arizona. He was an exceptional Western artist, but he was also a dope addict. Mix got Crawford 'likkered up,' and kept him drunk for three weeks to get him over the withdrawals. After the "cure," Tom gave Crawford a job, and he was never known to take dope again.

The one remaining member of the original Mix company is Sid Jordan, who was with Mix from 1913 on.

"We worked from a script," Sid recalls, "because Tom had to remember what he had to do. Sometimes he would add some more stunts to make the picture more daring. We had to do the stunts the hard way then, but I don't remember anybody being really hurt at Selig, just the usual bumps and scrapes from a day's work."

Working methods were informal to say the least. In one film a cowboy would be an extra, and in the next he might actually co-star with Mix. Hats, clothes, and horses were exchanged among the company to provide a greater variety in the pictures. In fact, Tom Mix's own Tony,

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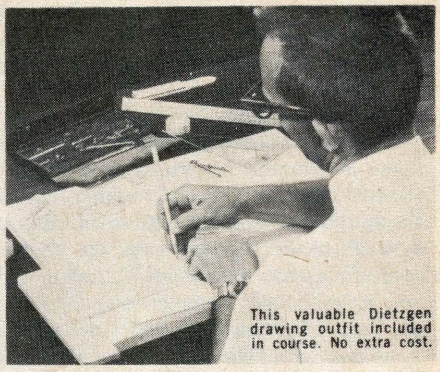

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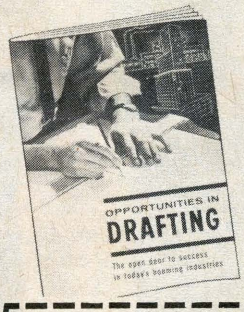

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the wonder horse, was ridden by the heavy in several Selig films.

In 1915 Mix brought his company to California, first to Edendale, near the Selig studio, and later to Newhall. It was at this time that Victoria Forde, later to be the fourth Mrs. Mix, became Tom's leading lady.

Throughout this year Selig's total output remained constant, with the release of some two hundred pictures. But by 1916 the fortunes of Selig were foundering, and the studio combined its output with that of several other producers in the former trust, first under the K-E-S-E (Kalem-Edison-Selig-Essanay) banner, and then with the V-L-S-E (Vitagraph-Lubin-Selig-Essanay) combine. The Selig-Tribune Newsreel became the studio's only regular release. Mix's pictures alternated with Selig's other productions at the rate of one or two a month.

Mix moved his company to Las Vegas, New Mexico, concentrating on the production of two-reel pictures, but the continuing decline of the Selig company forced his return to Edendale. By the end of 1916, the Tom Mix Westerns were virtually the only entertainment releases of the company.

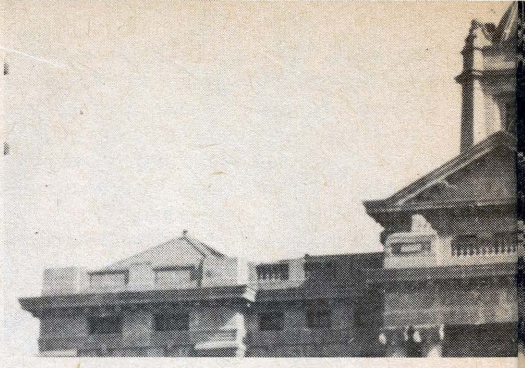
Tom knew the end was near. He also knew that his popularity would permit him to find another producer with very little trouble. But Tom had a great loyalty toward the Colonel, who had given him his big break. He also insisted that any deal with a new producer would have to include the Mix stock company.

The end came when Selig sent an efficiency expert to the Mix lot to investigate ways of further trimming production costs. Tom told the story that the only way the "expert" could find to trim costs was to not feed oats to the horses that did not work in the day's shooting, but no doubt the efficiency expert suggested trimming several of the cowboys from the payroll.

Mix would not stand for this and, with Victoria Forde, guaranteed the wages of the entire company while he sought a new producer. He signed with William Fox in early 1917, with assurances on his company and his stock.

Mix's greatest success lay ahead, but it was at Selig that he developed his talents and screen personality. Mix was never to lose control over the production of his pictures altogether, but neither was he to have the same freedom that he had at Selig. Mix would go on to pioneer the so-called "streamlined" Western, and create a new type of Western picture—but the Selig comedies were themselves unique. Rough as they are, the Selig pictures are infused with an honesty and charm—they are a picture of ranch life by a cowboy, and in their way, perhaps, as valuable as all the thousands of Westerns that have been produced in the fifty plus years since they were first shown in nickelodeons across the nation. •

Tom dressed as a woman in A WESTERN MASQUERADE. (1916)



PORT OF MISSING MEN

(Continued from page 40)

in Billy's safe. That's why Billy kilt him."

It was a hearsay conversation lacking in permissible court evidence, but it provided a motive and a link to the floating fleet. Besides, Billy had a reputation for bragging just to scare people. Yet the appearance of the victims in the harbor coincided with Gohl's venture in the area.

Another piece of information to be added to Chief Dean's file was brought by Paddy to Dean's kitchen late one night. The Irishman asked the Chief if he had heard anything about a Polish family at Lone Tree Point. When Dean said he hadn't, Paddy related Gohl's latest brag. Three hardcases had slaughtered the Polish family's cattle and had raped the seventeen-year old daughter. Gohl said he had heard some sailors talking about it, but Paddy couldn't understand why sailors would go so far out of Aberdeen to cause trouble. Lone Tree Point was an area better known to local people.

Taking a motorboat to Lone Tree Point the next morning, Chief Dean and Detective K. Y. Church told the Polish family they had heard about the incident. At first the Polish farmer fearfully denied the story until Dean, while looking around the farm, was unable to find the three cows owned by the family. The farmer admitted what had happened, but he couldn't identify the men. The descriptions of the three men fitted Gohl and two of his friends, John Hoffman and Charles Hedberg.

Through Gohl's elaborate grapevine, he learned of Dean's visit to the Polish family. Gohl knew he had told only one person about the incident at Lone Tree Point: Paddy McHugh.

Gohl went downstaris to the bar where the Irishman was tending bar. Leaning toward Paddy, he coldly commented, "So you've been rattling your cup to Dean about that Polack family."

The stocky Irishman covered his fear and surprise by laughing rather nervously. "Himself, you say? I wouldn't give the law the time of day."

"Then how is it, you being the only person I told, that Dean has been out questioning them Polacks?"

"Ah, man, I wouldn't know—unless Hedberg or Hoffman's been bragging. They talk a lot when they're drunk, you