



## THE MUSEUM OF WESTERN FILM HISTORY

### Tom Mix

January 6, 1880 – October 12 1940



Thomas Edwin Mix, born Thomas Hezikiah Mix was an American film actor and the star of many early Western movies between 1909 and 1935. Mix appeared in 291 films, all but nine of which were silent movies. He was Hollywood's first Western megastar and is noted as having helped define the genre for all cowboy actors who followed.

#### Early Years

Thomas Hezikiah Mix was born January 6, 1880 in Mix Run, Pennsylvania, about 40 miles north of State College, Pennsylvania, to Edwin Elias and Elizabeth Heistand. He grew up in nearby DuBois, Pennsylvania, where his father, a stable master for a wealthy lumber merchant, taught him to ride and

love horses. He spent time working on a local farm owned by John DuBois, a lumber businessman. He had dreams of being in the circus and was rumored to have been caught by his parents practicing knife-throwing tricks against a wall, using his sister as an assistant.

In April 1898, during the Spanish–American War, he enlisted in the Army under the name Thomas E. (Edwin) Mix. His unit never went overseas, and Mix later failed to return for duty after an extended furlough when he married Grace I. Allin on July 18, 1902. Mix was listed as AWOL on November 4, 1902, but was never court-martialed nor apparently even discharged. His marriage to Allin was annulled after one year. In 1905, Mix married Kitty Jewel Perinne, but this marriage also ended within a year. He next married Olive Stokes on January 10, 1909, in Medora, North Dakota. On July 13, 1912, Olive gave birth to their daughter Ruth.

In 1905, Mix rode in an inaugural parade led by Seth Bullock with a group of 50 horsemen, which included several former Rough Riders. Years later, Hollywood publicists would muddle this event to imply that Mix had been a Rough Rider himself.

Mix was appointed the Town Marshal of Dewey, Oklahoma in 1912. After working a variety of odd jobs in the Oklahoma Territory, Mix found employment at the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch, one of the largest ranching businesses in the United States, covering 101,000 acres, hence its name. The ranch had its own touring Wild West show in which Mix appeared. He stood out as a skilled horseman and expert shot, winning national riding and roping contests at Prescott, Arizona in 1909, and Canon City, Colorado in 1910.

Tom Mix began his film career as a supporting cast member with the Selig Polyscope Company. His first appearance was in a short film titled **The Cowboy Millionaire**, released on October 21, 1909. In 1910 he appeared as himself in a short documentary film titled **Ranch Life in the Great Southwest** in which he displayed his skills as a cattle wrangler. Shot at the Selig studio in the Edendale district of Los Angeles (now known as Echo Park), the film was a success and Mix became an early motion picture star.

Mix performed in more than 100 films for Selig, many of which were filmed in Las Vegas, New Mexico. While with Selig he co-starred in several films with Victoria Forde, and they fell in love. He divorced Olive Stokes in 1917. By then, Selig Polyscope had encountered severe financial difficulties, and Tom Mix and Victoria Forde both subsequently signed with Fox Film Corporation, which had leased the Edendale studio. Mix and Forde married in 1918 and they had a daughter, Thomasina Mix (Tommie), in 1922.

## Mixville

Tom Mix went on to make more than 160 cowboy films throughout the 1920s. These featured action-oriented scripts contrasted with the documentary style of his work with Selig. Heroes and villains were sharply defined and a clean-cut cowboy always "saved the day." Millions of American children grew up watching his films on Saturday afternoons. His intelligent and handsome horse Tony also became a celebrity. Mix did his own stunts and was frequently injured.

Back in 1913 Mix, the king of cowboys moved his family to a ranch he purchased in Prescott, AZ. called Bar Circle A Ranch. Mix spent a lot of his downtime at this ranch when taking a break from filming many of his old western movies. A number of the movies were actually filmed in the Prescott, AZ home to the 'World's Oldest Rodeo'. During this time, Mix had success in the local Prescott Frontier Days rodeo. In 1920, he once took the first prize in a Bull Riding contest. Today, his Bar Circle A Ranch developed into a master-planned community called Yavapai Hills where there's still a street named 'Bar Circle Ranch Road'.

## Tom Mix, 1925

Mix's salary at Fox reached \$7,500 a week. His performances were not noted for their realism but for screen-friendly action stunts and horseback riding, attention-grabbing cowboy costumes and showmanship. At the Edendale lot, Mix built a 12-acre shooting set called Mixville. Loaded with western props and furnishings, it has been described as a "complete frontier town, with a dusty street, hitching rails, a saloon, jail, bank, doctor's office, surveyor's office, and the simple frame houses typical of the early Western era." Near the back of the lot an Indian village of lodges was ringed by miniature plaster mountains which were said to be, on screen, "ferociously convincing". The set also included a simulated desert, large corral, and (to facilitate interior shots) one ranch house with no roof.

Mix played hard-to-get, threatening to move to Argentina to make films or joining the circus, but eventually, he signed with FBO, although he eventually left the studio for Universal due to salary disputes with FBO studio head Joseph P. Kennedy. He said of Kennedy that he was a "tight-assed, money-crazed son-of-a-bitch". In 1929, Mix was a pallbearer at the funeral of Wyatt Earp (during which he reportedly wept).

## 1930s

Mix appeared with the Sells-Floto Circus in 1929, 1930 and 1931 at a reported weekly salary of \$20,000. He and Forde divorced in 1931. Meanwhile, the Great Depression (along with the actor's free-spending ways and many wives) reportedly had wiped out most of his savings. In 1932, he married his fifth wife, Mabel Hubbell Ward. Universal Pictures approached him that year with an offer to do talkies, which included script and cast approval. He acted in nine films for Universal, but because of injuries he received while filming, he was reluctant to do any more. Mix then appeared with the Sam B. Dill circus, which he reportedly bought two years later (1935).

Mix's last screen appearance was a 15-episode sound Mascot Pictures serial, *The Miracle Rider* (1935); he received \$40,000 for the four weeks of filming. Outdoor action sequences for the production were filmed primarily on the Iverson Movie Ranch in Chatsworth, Calif., on the outskirts of Los Angeles.

The site was known for its huge sandstone boulders, and one of them later became known as Tom Mix Rock when it was discovered it had been used in *The Miracle Rider*. In the episode, Mix was filmed descending from the top of the rock, with boot holes carved into the rock to assist the actor in making the descent. The rock and the boot holes, although unmarked, can be found in the Garden of the Gods Park in Chatsworth.

Also that year, Texas governor James Allred named Mix an honorary Texas Ranger. Mix returned to circus performing, now with his eldest daughter Ruth, who appeared in some of his films. In 1938, he went to Europe on a promotional trip, leaving Ruth behind to manage his circus.

Without him, however, the circus soon failed, and he later excluded her from his will. Mix had reportedly made over \$6 million (equivalent to \$104 million in 2015) during his 26-year film career.

## Radio

In 1933, Ralston-Purina obtained his permission to produce a Tom Mix radio series called *Tom Mix Ralston Straight Shooters* which, but for one year during World War II, was popular throughout most of the 1930s through the early 1950s, well after Mix's death. Mix never appeared on these broadcasts (his voice, damaged by a bullet to the throat and repeated broken noses, was not fit for radio) and was instead played by radio actors: Artells Dickson (early 1930s), Jack Holden (from 1937), Russell Thorsen (early 1940s) and Joe "Curley" Bradley (from 1944). Others in the supporting cast included George Gobel, Harold Peary and Willard Waterman.

The Ralston Company offered ads during the Tom Mix radio program for listeners to send in for a series of 12 special Ralston-Tom Mix Comic books available only by writing the Ralston Company by mail.

Most of Mix's radio work has been lost over the years; recordings of only approximately 30 scattered episodes, and no complete story arcs, survive.

## Death

On October 12, 1940, after visiting Pima County Sheriff Ed Echols in Tucson, Arizona, Mix headed north toward Phoenix on U.S. Highway 80 (now Arizona State Route 79), driving his 1937 Cord 812 Phaeton. He stopped to call his agent at the Oracle Junction Inn, a popular gambling and drinking establishment, then continued toward Phoenix. About eighteen miles south of Florence, Arizona, Mix came upon construction barriers at a bridge washed away by a flash flood. Unable to stop in time, his car swerved twice, then overturned in a gully. A large aluminum suitcase containing money, traveler's checks, and jewels, situated on the package shelf behind his head, hurled forward and struck him, breaking his neck. He was 60 years old.

His funeral took place at the Little Church of the Flowers in Glendale, California, on October 16, 1940, and was attended by thousands of fans and Hollywood personalities. Tom Mix was interred in the Forest Lawn Memorial Park Cemetery.

A small stone memorial marks the site of his death on State Route 79, and the nearby gully is known as "Tom Mix Wash". The marker bears the inscription: *"In memory of Tom Mix, whose spirit left his body on this spot and whose characterization and portrayals in life served to better fix memories of the old West in the minds of living men."*

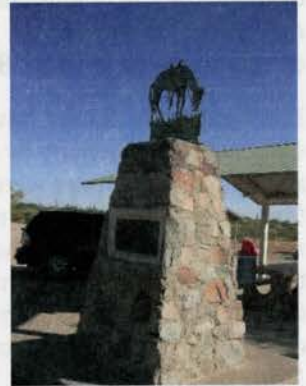
## Legacy

Tom Mix was acknowledged "King of Cowboys" when Ronald Reagan and John Wayne were young, and the influence of his screen persona can be seen in their approach to portraying cowboys. When an injury caused football player Marion Morrison (later known as John Wayne) to drop out of the University of Southern California, Tom Mix had helped him find work moving props in the back lot of Fox Studios. That was the beginning of Wayne's own Hollywood career.

Mix made 291 movies throughout his career. As of 2007, only about 10% of these were known to be available for viewing, though it was unclear how many are now considered lost films.

## Tom Mix memorial plaque

For his contribution to the motion picture industry, Tom Mix has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame at 1708 Vine Street. His cowboy boot prints, palm prints and the hoof prints of his horse, Tony, are at Grauman's Chinese Theatre at 6925 Hollywood Boulevard. In 1958 Mix was inducted posthumously into the Western Performers Hall of Fame at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. In 1959 a 'Monument To The Stars' was erected on Beverly Dr. (where it intersects Olympic Blvd. and becomes Beverwil) in Beverly Hills. The memorial consists of a bronze-green spiral of sprocketed "camera film" above a multi-sided tower, embossed with full-length likenesses of early stars who appeared in famous silent movies. Those memorialized include Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Will Rogers, Conrad Nagel, Rudolph Valentino, Fred Niblo, Tom Mix, and Harold Lloyd.



There is also Tom Mix museum in Dewey, Oklahoma and another in Mix Run, Pennsylvania. Between 1980 and 2004, 21 Tom Mix festivals were held during the month of September, most of them in DuBois, Pennsylvania.

## Cultural references

Bruce Willis played Tom Mix in the 1988 Blake Edwards film *Sunset*, with James Garner as Wyatt Earp. The film was very loosely based on the fact that Earp and Mix knew each other when Earp was serving as a consultant during the silent film era.

Wikipedia - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom\\_Mix](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Mix)

## Tom Mix's Horse – “Tony” The Wonder Horse

The first horse to bear the name “The Wonder Horse,” Tony was the companion of actor Tom Mix. He starred in over two dozen silent and sound films during his career, becoming a celebrity in his own right. When Mix placed his handprints in the cement outside Grauman's Chinese Theater in 1927, Tony's hoofprints were placed alongside them. He was the first horse to be given equal billing with his human costar, and was featured in the title of three movies: ***Just Tony*** (1922), ***Oh! You Tony*** (1924), and ***Tony Runs Wild*** (1926). Tony is listed as appearing in thirty-four films between 1922 and 1932.



Tony was famous in part because Mix, the film industry, and the media were able to anthropomorphize him. In the films, his horse-ness was continually reaffirmed; at the same time so was his ability to understand language, what was going on around him and why.

Tony is most known for his intelligence and ability to perform remarkable stunts, many of which would not be allowed today due to the danger involved. Tony performed in the years before the American Humane Association oversaw the use of animals on American productions. Since animals do not 'agree' to be actors (cannot verbalize agreement) the American Humane Association began to oversee how animal labor was created, filmed, and commercialized in 1940, 8 years after Tony's retirement.

Mix reportedly did not have to train Tony, but simply show him what to do for each feat. Mix could convey any sort of message to the pony by touches of the hand or fingers on Tony's neck. Although there is speculation that whips, strong bits, and spurs were used. Such stunts included untying Mix's hands, opening gates, jumping over high fences, getting tangled in ropes, loosening his reins, rescuing Mix from fire, jumping from one cliff to another, and running after trains. In the 1926 film ***The Great K & A Train Robbery*** (Fox Film Corporation), Mix jumps Tony through a glass window into a building and rides him alongside a speeding train. In the film ***Trailin'*** (Fox Film Corporation, 1921) Mix and Tony have a bridge slashed from under them, and uncut footage shows the pair tipping over to the river below. Tom Mix and Tony the Wonder horse jump through a window on set of the film ***Hell-Roarin' Reform*** (1919). Tony retired from the film industry in 1932 at the age of twenty-two when he was slightly injured on the set of his last movie, ***The Fourth Horseman*** (1932). He outlived Tom Mix, dying in 1942 at the age of 40, two years to the day after Mix was killed in a car accident. Tony's passing was noted in the New York Times. Tony's longevity as a movie horse is remarkable due to the lack of veterinary care available in those years, and because of the strenuous stunts that were not regulated.