



It's the spirit of Hollywood carrying on; the transition from cowpath to mother-of-pearl lane; a complete history of Hollywood and many of the people in it

BY SARA HAMILTON

FROM blacksmith's shop to frog's legs dinners. At four dollars a wiggle.

From cowpaths to star sapphire lane. In a few short years.

From nutty hamburgers to the Trocadero. At twenty-five bucks a Troc.

The Strip! That fantastic fever blister of Hollywood. Shopping lane of the stars. That bit of swank that begins with a mortuary and ends with a bridle path and bruised rear ends. A strip of land, polka-dotted with chinchilla wraps from Paris and headache tablets from the local drugstore. A jewel box roadway that connects Hollywood with Beverly Hills, while millions of lights in the city below wink and blink and nod. In numb bewilderment.

The spirit of Hollywood carrying on! That gay, irrepressible, unaccountable spirit that exists nowhere else in the world and cannot be downed. That may one year break out in a place called Malibu, then slow down to normalcy only to ignite in some other part of the city.

And this year it's "The Strip"—the only place in the world where the word means a shopping lane and not an

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undress act. Where shoppers strip to shop and shops change hands every other Tuesday. Where ladies in abbreviated shorts stand before jewel-box windows of uncut emeralds, bandanas over their heads and an itch in their palms.

The Strip! Where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt because thieves break through and steal everything anyway.

It began with a cow. Only heaven knows what will end

it. Flossy, a rich brown and white (luggage tan and eggshell to Hollywood) was wont to wander down a path, between an orange grove on the north and a lemon grove on the south, to nibble the rich green grass on what (as heaven is my judge) turned out to be a Colonial mansion, now home of hot dogs, on the Hollywood end and Gloria Swanson's twenty-room manse A.B. (After Beery) on the Beverly end.

In her journeys to and fro in search of contentment for her faucets, Flossy wore quite a path for herself, little dreaming that a mere handful of years later a long, low, agonizing contraption bearing a gentleman called Clark Gable would go whizzing down the old cowpath, macadamized within an inch of its life, fanning the breeze with his ears as he whizzed.

Flossy is but a memory in Hollywood today, but a lively memory. For instance, there's the inebriated star who recently lurched from the Trocadero door to behold an overplump, overdressed actress in a brown caracul wrap and a fantastic headdress.

The star took one look and, clutching his forehead, cried, "My God, Flossy's back."

THE transition from cowpath to mother-of-pearl lane is a complete history of Hollywood and many of the people in it. It's all there in the story of this bit of land. A hard cider beginning and a champagne ending, all written in the history of The Strip and the stars who strip it.

For instance, there's the same small-town, wrong-side-of-the-track beginning in many a star's life that characterizes The Strip. Once a part of Sherman, a village sandwiched between Hollywood and Beverly Hills, it was called—oh, shades of stars who were once called Mulligan, Cassin and Bloomestein—just "The Neck." Plain old "The Neck," where most people claim pain. The Adam's apple of "The Neck" was a blacksmith's shop on a prominent corner where certain male citizens of Sherman gathered in the evening for a chat and a bit of gossip concerning the "gol darn movin' pitcher stars" that went ridin' by.

Belonging to the county, "The Neck" was the shortest distance between two joints and hence its narrow, dusty roadway received most of the travelers from Hollywood to Beverly Hills. Directly behind the small frame shops, unpretentious stores, hamburger stands, bottling works and the potteries (a little local industry seemed not out of place) that lined the roadway stood the modest homes—some plain houses, some nice houses, and a few shacks with goats in the back yards.

And then one night a momentous thing happened. A frame house (that clung to the back of "The Neck" like a carbuncle and had eventually become a speak-easy called, of all things, La Boheme) was raided. Like a

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flock of frightened sheep, the customers, among them one Billy Wilkerson, took to the cellars till the local constable moved on.

And in that cellar that night was born the idea that thundered around the world, bringing on jewelers from Paris, art dealers from Vienna, beauty experts from London, Paris and Buenos Aires to establish, on this weird little strip of land, shops of such elegance and beauty they have no rivals anywhere. It was in the cellar of the "speak" that night that Billy Wilkerson, entranced by the rare coolness of the place, decided here was the spot to store the precious wares for his swanky Hollywood café called The Vendome. What was more natural, then, than that Wilkerson should open a night club above the stored wines and the whole shebang became the renowned Trocadero.

Not since the old Russian Eagle (once a colorful café whose best customer had been Rudolph Valentino) had Hollywood seen such a spot as the Trocadero, with its elegant wine list, its rare foods (at even rarer prices), its oyster bars, its chefs from Delmonico's and later the Waldorf, its captains from the Continent and its movie stars from the good old Middle West all dressed up and tighter than two drums. Whooppppee!

In rapid succession two more things happened. George Hurrell, now Hollywood's best-known photographer, rented a studio on The Neck and The Neck was widened, scrubbed behind the ears to permit miniature shops, swanky restaurants, art galleries, shops of suede, of jade, or ivory to spring up.

But again, typical of nouveau riche Hollywood and its nouveau riche inhabitants, too much elegance happened too soon. For, like the swanky folks with the old pappys who tread the white carpets in sock feet and chew Old Plug like a horse does hay, reminders of yesterday still cling to the glittering boulevard, now definitely termed The Strip. And therein lies the charm of the place—and the charm of Hollywood and the people in it. That closeness to the earth earthy that all the Chanel No. 5 cannot drown out. That blending of back yard and clothes-line wash with Georgian fronts and marble balustrades.

Where else, I ask you, can one purchase a bit of suede from Voris, a robin's-egg sized ruby from Flato's, a high colonic, a psychic reading, a custom-built car and a darn good funeral at reasonable prices, and all in the same block? Where else but The Strip?

ONE day came an event in the life of The Strip that will go down in history as the great onward sweep of agents to The Strip. Agents—theatrical, hysterical, radio, operatic, fantastic, big, small, middle-sized agents—all madly dashing for dazzling white-fronted offices on The Strip. On came the William Morris', the Orsatti boys, the Sam Jaffes, the Hal Cooleys, the Zeppo Marxes, the Tom Fixdales, the Bing Crosby family, all bent on outdoing the other agents



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in high-class swank. Limousines whammed to a stop before gorgeous-fronted buildings, while slack-clad stars (with sable coats over the dungarees, have no fret, little one) flew in and out of buildings like mad, as agents flew in and out among the clients, even mad-der.

Why there was a time, and well can I remember it, when at the trembling of the earth natives knew an earthquake, no less, had lit in their midst. Today, they're not so sure. It could just as easily be the Orsatti boys and their clients, the Ritz brothers, in a conference.

And, oh-gentlemen, what is a story on The Strip without those strip conferences. Where twenty-two telephones in one suite of offices ring to the tune of "God Wants Me For A Sunbeam"; where secretaries break out in sobs any hour of the day or night; and a high-priced star demands his agent secure him rental for the use of his gallstones.

"I had 'em all through the picture, didn't I?" he wails. "They paid Gable for the use of his car, didn't they? All right, no one's going to use my gallstones and not pay."

Where one agent retires, in the midst of bedlam, to his barber chair erected in the shower and there the barber shaves away while water trickles merrily over the whole goddam proceedings, so help me.

THE STRIP! Where everything is dated from the robberies. "Let's see," a friend muses, "when did Mary break off her engagement to Mrs. Smith's husband? Was it right after the Roach jewelry robbery or the bank stick-up?"

The Strip! Where stars erect buildings for relatives and tenants. Where, outside the Crosby building, Larry Crosby greets brother Bing with a vague nod of remembrance and Bing greets brother Everett with a faraway wondering look, and Everett greets Larry with a frozen pineapple glance, and Pa Crosby, glancing over the whole situation, wonders how one small frog in one guy's throat could bring on such an aftermath as this. "I Surrender, Dear."

The Strip! Where one can eat in any language under the sun. Little Hungary with its strumming guitars. The Cock'n' Bull with its steak and kidney pies and Errol Flynn between the crusts. The Bublickki with Vodka, White Russians, and Stan Laurel getting married again to Illiana between sour cream servings and borsch sprees. The Bali with native drinks and Bruzz Fletcher stingers. The Villa Nova with Italian spaghetti and a real oven outside, smack on The Strip's front, for baking hot bread, so help my Aunt Agnes' liver trouble!

Lamaze, once a pottery shop where a lot of potting still goes on within. Where the silver stars in the faded blue awning are more anemic than the reduced stars who enter. Where Marcel, the proprietor, greets one and all with a happy smile and a four dollar dinner charge.



The Strip! Where the night clubs stick to the letter "C," so the dishes and silver initialed in "C" can be shifted from one spot to another in a hurry. The Clover Club, the Club Continental, the Casanova, The Century Club, twinkling in and out like the grinning Cheshire cat, with the "C" marked cutlery one night turning up two blocks east of the Asia Bazaar (where everyone buys silk shirts), and the next night gleaming for dear life on tables five blocks past the Porter Blanchard Silver Shop. Where night-club proprietors and performers go down to Frances—Fine Food and eat their meals anyway.

THE STRIP! The only place the stars can shop in comfort or be photographed by Hurrell, before Bill Haines' gorgeous Georgian front, with no interruptions for autographs. There are no passersby to ask.

"No birds were flying overhead

There were no birds to fly."

Where Eddie Cantor took one pop-eyed look at the empty pavements and, grabbing up his ash trays, closed out his antique shop and moved somewhere else. Where people passed.

I doubt also if anywhere in all the world there could be a janitor such as The Strip's. A whiz-bang, snappy lad who leads an orchestra, does a Russian dance and sings "Flat Foot Floogie with the floy-floy," between sweepings. Twenty-four, handsome, and movie-struck (even the janitors catch it), singing Billie Page came down from Seattle to Hollywood to get in Movies and ended on The Strip, sweeping out. At night he leads his orchestra, runs out for a bit of vacuuming, dashes back for a Russian whirligig, runs out to help carry out an agent gone beserk, goes back for a song and returns to finish cleaning up race track forms that litter The Strip like snow in "Way Down East."

Billie's wife and two assistants aid in the melee that averages the singing janitor from six hundred to seven hundred dollars a month, to say nothing of taking out in trade slacks from Mariani, sport coats from Davis, tonsils from Doctor Smith and a promise of a knockout funeral from a local undertaker.

THE STRIP! Where directly behind the swankiest row of shops stands a forgiving little church with inhabitants strolling in and out, in and out, for the soul's sake. And where the clock on the mortuary bears no hands, but whose pendulum swings to and fro, to and fro over the one word, Service.

Darrin from Paris, in the old bottling works. Fashion designer of luxurious automobile bodies in whose back shop sit Chester Morris, Dick Powell, Clark Gable, day after day, watching their

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old cars become tomorrow's killer-dillers. Where the long, low, breathtaking car body of the Countess di Frasso's swankiest Rolls Royce is being transformed into bewitching lines while, not ten feet away, a hen is laying an egg in an old brown chicken coop, Model "T."

And next to Darrin's home of swank, on the bench before the corner drug-store, sit the old-timers, shirt-sleeved and gray-haired, oblivious to the whirling and passing of limousines with their revealing glimpses of furs and jewels and glamour and elegance, discussing again, in voices dimmed with age, the amazing ups and downs of the McKinley administration.

They say, as Hollywood flits by; "Yes sir, them was the days."

Apartments, new and terrific, cling to a hillside, too dumbfounded to slide into unconsciousness.

Night settles down on The Strip! Below, in the city, myriads of lights twinkle and shine on The Strip. The jewels of Flato sparkle and gleam, catching the reflection of a jeweled perfume bottle in the Art de Beaute (Beauty Parlor to you, Toots). Furs, rare paintings, art objects, gowns de Beaute, potted plants on the outside walls of the Normandy towers belonging to agents waft an air of ultraclegance over it all.



And then, as it was ever thus in Hollywood, down from the hills comes the same old skunk that's been coming down nightly since Flossy was a bawling calf and over the whole ultrarefined magnificence he wafts his tail in complete and utter disdain, leaving behind an odor that will linger for many generations to come.

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