

# the Henry George News

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## *A Saga of Movie-Land*

by SYDNEY MAYERS

IN THE early 1900's, a constant need for sunlight and wide open spaces (and desire to escape patent litigation) prompted America's pioneer movie-makers to trek to California, where they acquired "for a song" large areas of farmland and undeveloped acreage on which to produce their cinematic epics. In the years these energetic entrepreneurs filled the avid screens of the nation's film palaces, and were rewarded with unheard of profits. With this denouement to their glamorous activities I have no quarrel; they satisfied a public demand, and no one can gainsay their right to prosper thereby.

However, let us consider now what quietly took place during those hectic days of camera-cranking. Observe, please, one very famous motion picture corporation, which shall be anonymous, since it is merely representative of many others. Some decades ago, this company bought considerable land in a Los Angeles suburb, and there established studios and the other paraphernalia of production. The site *per se*, aside from its practical advantages as a locale, was of comparatively little importance. But California, Los Angeles, the film industry, and other industries developed unbelievably; and millions of people flocked to Hollywood and its environs. And then . . .

Thanks to the advent of television, and to other causes, the movie business suddenly (albeit temporarily) fell upon troublous times. The huge profits of yore disappeared, and those who labored in the trade wept and wailed as their fat salaries petered out. But the land-owning company wailed not, nor did it weep, for a phenomenon known as the pressure of population had been taking place. The result was inevitable. The land that had been "bought for buttons" had so increased in value that, almost unbeknownst, it constituted an asset worth many millions of dollars. Our film company soon discovered that the clouds which darkened its economic horizon had a lining of purest gold: a lining composed of hundreds of acres of uniquely desirable land.

Like the shirt-losing railroads whose land-grants have made them rich in the face of declining business, Hollywood's film moguls can well smile through their tears. Movie attendance may go down and down, but the value (and the price) of their land will go up and up. Which is about the end of my sad story. It is a kind of "whodunit," and "whodunit" — that is, who raised the value of the land sky high — are the people whose need for land is so intense that they must outbid each other for a little piece of it, to live on or to use.