

Discovering Hollywood's Mysteries: Juvenile Literature from Cinema's Golden Age

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Growing up in a house with a theatre director for a father and a writer-artist for a mother, I was surrounded by the magic of drama, literature, and the movies. If I weren't reading a book plucked from a shelf in our house, I was sitting enraptured in front of a live audience or a black and white film on TV. I rarely went to the library, for our house was full of thousands of tomes. If I wanted to read the play I had just seen, I'd go to my father's study. If I wanted to read the short story which the latest Basil Rathbone Sherlock Holmes' movie was based on, I'd search the piano room. However, there were some books which were almost off-limits. I still remember the mystery surrounding my mother's childhood collection. I always had to ask for special permission to touch her Mickey Mouse Little Big Book whenever I wanted to be transported to a distant planet with Mickey and Pluto.

I was aware of the blending of the Hollywood industry with the publishing world, for Gone With the Wind was my favorite movie and book from the age of 9. However, I didn't find out until my early 20's that my youthful passion for mysteries and love of glamorous stars had been combined in a series of books published by the Whitman Company in the 1940's. A cross-country road trip to see my grandmother one summer unwittingly started me on the path to what is now the heart of my book collection-- juvenile literature and ephemera with the theme of Hollywood and/or comic characters circa 1920-1949. In a tiny junkshop in a long forgotten Ohio town, I spied Bonita Granville and the Mystery of Star Island. Here was the woman I saw in the movies playing Nancy Drew in a mystery book playing herself! It felt as if I were holding a hidden treasure in my hands.

On the way back from Canada, I stopped in another antique store in another town in another state. To my delight, I found Betty Grable and the House of Cobwebs. The two books were published by the same company and author around the same time. This is when it dawned on me--I must have stumbled upon a series. I felt certain there were more out there. I wanted to find them, but I had no idea how to locate the books I suspected were just out of reach. However, luck was on my side; I came

across a third book in the Whitman Authorized Editions for Girls which still had its original dust jacket. On the inside front and back flaps were titles of books I could search for. I became excited reading the names of my future prospective finds. I was also thrilled to learn that besides the editions for girls there were also authorized editions of some of my favorite comic characters. Blondie had a particular place in my heart for I was (and am) a huge fan of the 1930-40's movie series.

Part of the initial pleasure in my search for books was the extreme effort it took to find them. I felt blessed to discover two or three copies in a year. Then, E-bay was founded. Thus, I began to search on the internet using the books whose titles I had discovered. With each find, either in a used bookstore, at an antique stall, or by an internet seller, I would gather the names of more titles. As my collection grew, and, as the internet made it easier to locate hard to find titles, I began to become choosier in the quality of the books I purchased. The first ones I had found were well-loved and jacketless. So, I next searched for copies with dust jackets. Then, I'd continue my search for ones in mint condition.

While on my never-ending hunt I began to come across other children's books with a Hollywood theme. I decided to add them to my collection for they were in keeping with my dream to amass a great store of authentic young adult literature about the movies. Sometimes, it wasn't as easy as clicking a button or paying a salesperson. In Osaka Japan I spied the book Boy's Cinema Annual 1937 in a home furnishings store. I had never come across a cinema annual before. One of the stories inside was the history of how Hollywood got its name. I knew this would be an important addition to my growing collection. However, the book was not for sale; it was a display item. It took me over thirty minutes to convince the sales staff, in broken Japanese, how important this book was to me personally. Now, every time I look at this book, I remember the thrill of the purchase and the perseverance it took to acquire it. This feeling is repeated throughout my collection; each book's story has a special meaning for me.

In my current collection, I now own a copy of every Whitman Authorized Edition for Girls. However my collection is far from complete; I am still looking for books with dust jackets for Gene Tierney and the Invisible Wedding Gift and Dorothy Lamour and the Haunted Lighthouse to name a few. Additionally, I selectively add titles from the Whitman series for boys and the series for comic characters dealing with Hollywood. I also have begun to collect the books from the Motion Picture Chums and Motion Picture Comrades series which deal with the very beginnings of the movie business. Finding all the books in these two series alone will keep me satisfied for years to come. A partial list of my collection has been cited in my bibliography which includes many of my favorite finds.

Currently, I keep my favorite volumes in my grandfather's glass fronted bookcase in my bedroom along with a few of my childhood toys. The books in this case have a soft spot in my heart. They make me dream of a time when I thought life was glamorous yet accessible, adventurous yet safe. Now, as a mother to my niece, I understand my own mother's concern for the care of her books. My collection looks as mysterious to her as my own mother's did to me. My niece loves to look at and "read" my books. When I see her flip through a Blondie Big Book and watch Daisy the dog's antics, I quietly hope she will continue to cherish and grow my collection in the future.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Appleton, Victor. *The Motion Picture Chums First Adventure*. NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1913.

This book deals with the early emergence of cinema houses. A group of entrepreneurial boys decide to open the first moving picture house in their town which begins a great adventure. I particularly enjoy the chapter where a message to a local farmer whose house is on fire is flashed on the screen. As he was not at home, it was assumed he was enjoying himself a film.

Bailey, Matilda. *Dorothy Lamour and the Haunted Lighthouse*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1947.

Barnes, Elmer Tracey. *The Motion Picture Comrades in African Jungles or Camera Boys in Wild Animal Land*. Akron, OH: Saalfied Publishing Co., 1917.

Berke, Helen. *Winnie Winkle and the Diamond Heirlooms*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1946.

Boys Cinema Annual 1937: A World of Adventure in Stories and Pictures. Fleetway House, London, 1937.

It was well worth the culture and linguistic challenge to purchase this book. Along with showcasing the current films of 1937 the book contains stories of Hollywood stars and those who work behind the scenes. I particularly like the story about the history of how Hollywood got its name. I have yet to find a cinema annual in the US, so this is truly a rare find.

Caniff, Milton. *April Kane and the Dragon Lady*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1942.

Dender, Jay. *Tom Harmon and the Great Gridiron Plot*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1946.

Hamilton, Bob. *Gene Autry and the Redwood Pirates*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1946.

Hamilton, Bob. *Gene Autry and the Thief River Outlaws*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1943.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *Ann Rutherford and the Key to Nightmare Hall*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1942.

Ann Rutherford is one of my favorite actresses from Gone with the Wind. She is accidentally mistaken as an heir to a great fortune which puts her life in jeopardy. True to her spunky nature and quick wit she finds the key to unlocking the identity of the true heirs.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *Ann Sheridan and the Sign of the Sphinx*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1943.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *Betty Grable and the House of Cobwebs*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1947.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *Betty Grable and the House with the Iron Shutters*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1943.

Betty's talent as a mystery solver outshines her famous legs. Many of Heisenfelt's mysteries are mediocre reading. This one is actually quite entertaining.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *Bonita Grannville and the Mystery of Star Island*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1942.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *Deanna Durbin and the Feather of Flame*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1941.

Growing up I often thought Deanna was neglected in lieu of Judy Garland. I like to think I have given her back her rightful place as a singing sensation by putting her directly in the middle of my display case.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *Gene Tierney and the Invisible Wedding Gift*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1947.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *Gregory Peck and the Red Box Enigma*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1947.

Gregory Peck's book was one of the hardest books for me to locate. I had to engage in a bidding war for this copy. I suspect most of the books about male stars were read by young boys. This may be why finding them in good condition is a rarity.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *Jane Withers and the Swamp Wizard*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1944.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *John Payne and the Menace at Hawk's Nest*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1943.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *Judy Garland and the Hoodoo Costume*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1945.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *Polly Powers Model: The Puzzle of the Haunted Camera*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1942.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *Shirley Temple and the Screaming Specter*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1946.

Heisenfelt, Kathryn. *Shirley Temple and the Spirit of Dragonwood*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1945.

Growing up Shirley Temple was my favorite child star. This book reminds me Hitchcock's [A Lady Vanishes](#) for the mystery involves Shirley's friends' grandmother's disappearance.

Martin, Edgar. *Boots and the Mystery of the Unlucky Vase*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1934.

Packer, Eleanor. *Jane Withers and the Hidden Room*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1942.

Rogers, Lela E. *Ginger Rogers and the Riddle of the Scarlet Cloak*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1942.

I met Ginger Roger's in Missouri as an undergraduate. At the time, I did not have this book. I wish I had had it then for her to sign.

Snell, Roy J. *Jane Withers and the Phantom Violin*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1943.

Stamm, Russell. *Invisible Scarlet O'Neil*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1943.

Young, Chic. *Blondie and Dagwood's Adventure in Magic*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1944.

Young, Chic. *Blondie and Dagwood's Marvelous Adventure*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1947.

Young, Chic. *Blondie and Dagwood's Secret Service*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1942.

Young, Chic. *Blondie and Dagwood's Snapshot Clue*. Rancine, WI: Whitman, 1943.

True to Dagwood's nature the purchase of a brownie camera gets the family in hot water. As an amateur photographer with a brownie, I enjoyed his enthusiasm for his new toy. I also like this edition for the early cartoon drawings and the comment on the cover: "The Bumsteads of Radio, Movies, and Chic Young's Comic Strip!"

Wheeler, Ruthe S. *Janet Hardy in Radio City*. Chicago, IL: Goldsmith Publishing Co., 1935.

Janet Hardy leaves her job in Hollywood to be an actress on radio. The dust jacket of this edition is stunning.