

## Ford Sterling: “La Crosse’s Movie Star”

In the years just before Europe plunged into World War I, a young man from La Crosse, George Franklin Stich, was starting an almost 25-year career in Hollywood movies using the stage name Ford Sterling. Audiences in La Crosse could visit several theaters in the city and see the hometown boy up on the silver screen performing with some of the biggest stars of the silent film era.



George F. Stich, a.k.a. Ford Sterling

(Courtesy of University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections)

George F. Stich was born in La Crosse on November 3, 1883, although his birth record shows his last name as “Stitch.”<sup>1</sup> On his 1918 draft registration card, he wrote his name as “George Franklin Stich.” It confirms his date of birth.<sup>2</sup> He spelled his last name “Stich” on his 1920 application for a passport, which also confirms his date and place of birth.<sup>3</sup> Contemporary sources often used the spelling “Stitch.”

Some sources give him an incorrect birth year. One newspaper article shortly before he died stated that he was born on November 3, 1886.<sup>4</sup> Another article placed it in 1886 or 1887.<sup>5</sup> His plaque in the

Hollywood Forever Cemetery shows 1882.<sup>6</sup> The [Hollywood Walk of Fame](#) website also has the incorrect year of 1882. [Wikipedia](#) shows 1883 but does not provide a source.

It could be said that La Crosse became the hometown of a famous movie star because of the telephone.

His father, George Stich, came to La Crosse to be the first manager for the Wisconsin Telephone Company in this city. The Wisconsin Telephone Company was organized in Milwaukee in 1877 and slowly expanded to other Wisconsin cities. The first telephone exchange in La Crosse was created in 1881, in the office of the Western Union Telegraph Company, at 108 Main Street. Louis Hambrecker, a clerk for the telegraph company, was the sole switchboard operator. At the time, James Sinclair managed both the telephone and telegraph companies.<sup>7</sup> There were only eight telephones in use in La Crosse in 1881.<sup>8</sup>

George Stich took over as manager of the western division of the Wisconsin Telephone Exchange in 1883.<sup>9</sup> The 1884 city directory shows the telephone company on the third floor of the building at 109 Main Street. Stich was living at 119 S. 10<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>10</sup> This house was demolished years ago and an apartment building stands in its place. The 1885 city directory shows him living in the telephone office at 109 Main Street.<sup>11</sup> By 1888, Stich had taken up residence at 314 N. 4<sup>th</sup> Street, and the telephone office was still at 109 Main Street.<sup>12</sup>

The telephone exchange moved across the street to 111 Main Street to the second floor above the Servis Clothing Store. There were two female operators, "Miss Wimmer and Miss Connors," during the day, while two men, Louis Johnston and Gus Allendorf, worked the overnight shift.<sup>13</sup>

All these early locations for the telephone exchange are no longer in existence. The Radisson Hotel and 100 Harborview Plaza now occupy that area. The former Stich residence at 314 N. 4<sup>th</sup> Street is also gone; this block is occupied by the La Crosse Human Services Building.

By 1890, the telephone exchange had moved to the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Main streets. Stich lived at 533 Main Street.<sup>14</sup> The telephone office was on the second floor of the Stavrum and Hulberg clothing store at the southwest corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Main streets.<sup>15</sup> The ground floor of this building is now the home of The Crow restaurant. The 500 block of Main Street is the location of St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral.



The Western Telephone Company had its offices on the second floor of this building at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Main streets in 1890.

(Photo by Jeff Rand, 2022 December 29)

Soon after his arrival in La Crosse, Stich became involved in local politics. By 1885, he was the alderman for the 2<sup>nd</sup> ward of the city.<sup>16</sup> He made a run for mayor against George Powell in 1887.<sup>17</sup> That was unsuccessful.<sup>18</sup> Stich ran as a Republican for the Wisconsin Assembly against Democrat James J. Hogan in 1888.<sup>19</sup> Hogan edged out Stich by a small margin.<sup>20</sup> During this election, an Indiana newspaper described Stich as “a labor agitator.”<sup>21</sup> George Stich thought of himself as “a great orator,” recalled George H. Gordon, a veteran of local Republican politics.<sup>22</sup>

The Stich family left La Crosse and went to Texas, where George Stich got into the cattle business for a time in the early 1890s.<sup>23</sup> The last La Crosse city directory that shows the Stich family is 1890, so young George would have been about seven years old when they moved away. Another source stated that George Franklin Stich left La Crosse when he was 14 years old, so that would make it 1897.<sup>24</sup>

There is evidence, however, that the elder George Stich had left Texas and moved to Chicago by 1892.<sup>25</sup> He was vice-president of the Western Telephone Construction Company of Chicago in 1895.<sup>26</sup> The 1900 Census has George F. Stich, 41 years old and married for 17 years, renting a room on 43<sup>rd</sup> Street in Chicago. There is no mention of his wife and son.<sup>27</sup>

George Stich was in La Crosse during the summer of 1901 and remained until the fall of 1902. He died of the effects of a stroke shortly after he returned to Chicago. A La Crosse newspaper called him “one of

the city's most prominent business and political characters" during his residence in La Crosse.<sup>28</sup> Another La Crosse newspaper reported that Stich had suffered the stroke while living in Chicago, and his left side was paralyzed when he visited La Crosse for several months in 1901. In this same newspaper, Stich was characterized as "... a smooth worker, and he knew politics from Alpha to Omega, and proved to be a valuable man to the Chicago politicians who wanted to be elected and didn't care how it was done. Stich was supplied liberally with money, and he bought votes, it is said, with a lavish hand."<sup>29</sup>

George F. Stich was just 42 years old when he died on October 7, 1902.<sup>30</sup> He never lived to see his son rise to Hollywood stardom.

According to a La Crosse newspaper columnist some years later, the younger George Stich ran away from home at the age of 17. He "tried the art game until he got hungry" and decided to become an actor. The story was that Stich's acting career began as a clown in the [John Robinson circus](#) and then progressed to a Broadway theater where Mack Sennett discovered him.<sup>31</sup> A 1939 newspaper article stated that he "ran away from home at an early age to join George Hutchinson's Repertory Co." before joining a circus.<sup>32</sup>

George Stich, who had taken the stage name Ford Sterling, told a reporter about his early career in a 1914 interview, and he never mentioned running away from home. He provided a detailed account of his ascent to Hollywood but allowed that he might not have remembered the chronology exactly as it happened.

About the time of his father's death in 1902, George Stich was 19 years old and attending the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. He had parts in theatrical productions at Notre Dame. James O'Neill, a Notre Dame alum, saw Stich in one of those plays and suggested Stich pursue acting as career. Stich went to Chicago and became part of George Whittier's repertory theater company. When Stich decided he wanted to focus on musical comedy, he convinced the manager of a musical comedy production to take him on as an actor and jack-of-all-trades for the company.<sup>33</sup>

According to a La Crosse newspaper columnist, Stich adopted the stage name of Ford Sterling because Sterling, Illinois, was the birthplace of his mother.<sup>34</sup>

That may not be true because his mother's birthplace was recorded differently by several census takers. The 1910 Census has Mary and her son, who is listed as "Ford Sterling," living in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and it states she was born in Kentucky. She has no occupation or profession, and his is listed as "traveling theatre."<sup>35</sup> The 1920 Census shows her place of birth as Ohio.<sup>36</sup> For the 1930 Census, Sterling told the census taker that he was born in New York (not true) and that both of his parents were born in New York.<sup>37</sup> There is a Sterling, Illinois, but its connection to the family is not known.

One summer Sterling joined a carnival or circus trapeze act. Because he was an athlete, Sterling claimed "it came easy to me." He also did a high-wire act, and sang and danced. This experience led to him becoming "Keno, the boy clown" in the John Robinson circus where he performed with a baby elephant and a pig.<sup>38</sup> Another time, Sterling said that he had been "Zeno" the boy clown in a one-ring circus. The name Zeno put him last on the payroll, and, according to Sterling, "about half the time the cash ran out before they got to me."<sup>39</sup>

At some point in his early career, Sterling performed on a Mississippi River showboat.<sup>40</sup>



Ford Sterling

(Photo by Witzel Studio; courtesy of the California State Library)

Sterling also played professional baseball for five seasons in Gulfport, Mississippi; Mobile, Alabama; McKeesport, Pennsylvania; Saginaw, Michigan; Toledo, Ohio; and two seasons in Duluth, Minnesota.<sup>41</sup>

A talented artist, Sterling used pen and ink to create caricatures and cartoons. He created and drew the “Sterling Kids” comic strip that ran in [The Chicago American](#). He also earned money as an illustrator for advertising companies, newspapers, and magazines. Sterling once shared an art studio with painter [George Ford Morris](#).<sup>42</sup> He spent years painting and doing sculpture as a pastime.<sup>43</sup>

But acting was his first love. Sterling performed in stock theatre companies in Chicago; Worcester, Massachusetts; Providence, Rhode Island; Buffalo, New York; Denver, Colorado; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He performed in musical comedies in New York City and “one or two seasons in [burlesque](#),” as well as [vaudeville](#).<sup>44</sup>

There were lean times in his early acting career. For a while, he shared a large attic in a New York City boarding house at 46<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway with [Jack Dean](#), [Dick Bennett](#), [Wallace Worsley](#), and [Herman Leib](#). Sterling slept on top of a baby grand piano.<sup>45</sup>

In his vaudeville acts, Ford Sterling did comedy and singing with a partner. His first act was “Sterling and Woods.” “Sterling & Derr” was another tour in which Sterling portrayed a German comedian. He later played a Dutchman.<sup>46</sup>

It was his vaudeville performances that gave him his break into motion pictures. While looking for a comedian, [Mack Sennett](#) saw one of Sterling’s performances and recruited Sterling for the [Biograph](#) comedy company to join [Mabel Normand](#).<sup>47</sup> This was in New York in 1912.<sup>48</sup> In an interview a few years later, Sterling said, “When I entered the motion picture business I sized up the situation and I knew that it was my field and that I could force my way to the top and that is why I accepted a much smaller salary to start with than I was earning on the variety stage.”<sup>49</sup>

The motion picture industry was in its infancy at the time. In 1890, [Thomas Edison](#) and his assistant, William Dickson, invented a camera and a projector that could make a series of still photos on 35mm film look like they were moving. The [Lumiere brothers](#) in France invented a true motion picture camera in 1895. [Edwin Porter](#), a cameraman who worked for Edison, came up with the idea in 1903 of creating an event to be filmed. By 1911, there were 5,000 theaters in the United States where people could watch motion pictures. In October 1911, the [Nestor Company](#) became the first motion picture company to make its home in Hollywood. Many more would follow.<sup>50</sup>

Mack Sennett, Sterling’s recruiter, got his start in Hollywood because of a gambling debt. He owed \$100 to two bookies in New York, and they cornered him one day. He claimed there was big money to be made in the new motion picture business. Sennett talked them into loaning him another \$2,500 to make four movies. Sennett, Mabel Normand, [Fred Mace](#), and Ford Sterling were soon on a train bound for California. They got off in Santa Fe, New Mexico, obtained an automobile and drove toward the center of town. A Shrine parade blocked the street. In a flash of inspiration, the actors bought a doll that looked and sounded like a baby. Sennett sent Normand into the parade with the doll to accuse one of the Shriners of not supporting the baby they had together. Mace and Sterling went along to support her claim while Sennett filmed the whole episode from the car. The Shriner’s wife was in the parade with him, and she was outraged. Sennett recalled, “The cops came up and were funnier than our actors. When they discovered the hoax, Mabel and the boys got back in the car and we drove away, fast.” The

following day, Sennett rented a store in Los Angeles and created an opening and ending to mesh with the Santa Fe footage for what would become the first of his 700 comedy films.<sup>51</sup>

Sennett called his film company [Keystone](#), with Sterling and Normand as two of his primary actors.<sup>52</sup> Other Keystone actors were [Henry Lehrman](#) and Fred Mace.<sup>53</sup> In the early years, Sennett did not even have a movie studio; he shot films in people's front lawns.<sup>54</sup>

Sometimes, fans could even visit a movie set during the early days of filmmaking. In February 1914, the public was invited to see an old ranch house burn at the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and Coronado Street in Hollywood as part of a movie being made by Mack Sennett. The cast included Ford Sterling, Mabel Normand, Roscoe Arbuckle, and Charlie Chaplin.<sup>55</sup>

Ford Sterling became the chief of the original [Keystone Cops](#). Some of the members of his squad were played by [Hank Mann](#), [Roscoe \(Fatty\) Arbuckle](#),<sup>56</sup> [Bobby Vernon](#), [Chester Conklin](#), [Clyde Cook](#), [Mack Swain](#), and [Jimmy Finlayson](#). According to Fred W. Fox, "... there has never been another knockabout troupe of acrobats, tumblers and muggers like the Keystone Kops."<sup>57</sup> The short Keystone Cops comedy films usually started with a telephone call to the police station from someone in distress. The ragged squad of policemen would assemble in the station to receive their instructions from their harried captain before spilling out into the street to respond to the call. Their madcap foot pursuits and frenetic car chases always featured a multitude of mishaps in their frantic pursuit of the bad guys. Their narrow escapes from disaster often left a path of destruction in their wake.



Keystone Cops, *In the Clutches of the Gang*, 1914  
Ford Sterling is using the telephone; Roscoe Arbuckle on far right  
(Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

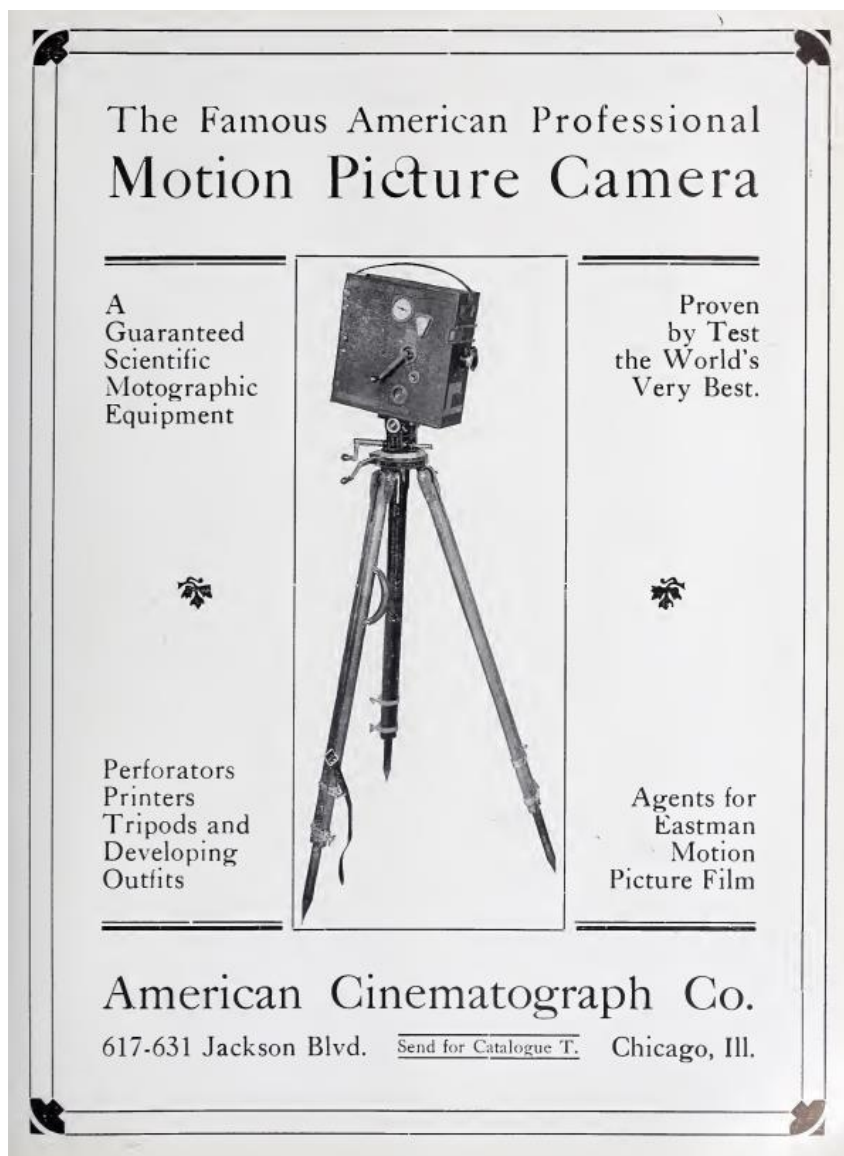
It took three or four days to shoot a 10- to 15-minute short film.<sup>58</sup> The capabilities and cost of early film are the reason silent films make the action look like everybody is on a combination caffeine and sugar high. Films had to be shot at 16-18 frames per second to create the illusion of movement, but the film was projected at 20-24 frames per second.<sup>59</sup> Because of how fast the action appeared on the screen, it required the audience to remain focused so they would not miss anything.



(*Exhibitors' Times*, 1913 June 7, p. 21; courtesy of the Library of Congress)

By early 1913, 30-year-old Ford Sterling was billed as “the principal comedian of the Keystone company.”<sup>60</sup> He would appear in more than 100 Sennett-produced comedies.<sup>61</sup>

Silent films had to tell a story with just pictures, movement, and an occasional bit of projected text. Without audible dialogue, the actors and actresses had to make maximum use facial expressions and movement to convey the action and plot. Silent comedies were especially expressive and animated, and some of the actors, including Ford Sterling, were noted for their physical, almost acrobatic, comedy.



(*Exhibitors' Times*, 1913 July 5, p. 49; courtesy of the Library of Congress)

In those years, Ford Sterling was recognized as “the reigning monarch of film comedians.” [Harold Lloyd](#) called him “the funniest man on the screen,” and [Allan Dwan](#) said Sterling was the “screen’s best pantomimist.”<sup>62</sup> His wire-rim spectacles and goatee chin whiskers made him one of the most recognizable actors on screen. Sterling was credited with being “the original pie hurler of the funny pictures.”<sup>63</sup> According to one story, Sterling, in a comedy about bakeries, threw a custard pie. Audiences

appreciated the obvious reality of the pie splattering in the face of the victim, so a pie in the face became a standard device in slapstick comedy.<sup>64</sup> In another version of this story, Mack Sennett had a nine-foot custard pie baked for [Ben Turpin](#) to throw at Ford Sterling in a Keystone Cops film.<sup>65</sup>

Giving Sterling credit for originating pie throwing is just inaccurate movie lore. Pies in the face were part of vaudeville acts even before silent films, although they became such a staple in Keystone films that Sennett needed his own bakery to supply them.<sup>66</sup> In [Mr. Flip](#) (1909) by Essanay Films, Ben Turpin gets a pie in the face at the end of this short comedy after having spent three-and-one-half minutes sexually harassing almost every female he encounters. This is well before Sterling started in motion pictures. One instance that did involve him was at the end of [The Jazz Band Leader](#) (1913). Sterling's band leader character is pummeled by a barrage of fruits, vegetables, and a pie thrown by heckling audience members.

Ford Sterling did have an unintended role in launching the movie career of the great Charlie Chaplin.


When Ford Sterling demanded more money, Mack Sennett set out to find a new leading man for his comedies. He found [Charlie Chaplin](#), who was making \$50 a week, at a theater in Los Angeles.<sup>67</sup> When Chaplin went to work for Sennett in 1913, he did so for the relatively princely sum of \$125 a week.<sup>68</sup> According to Sterling, it was he who supplied Chaplin with his oversize shoes; Fred Mace provided the baggy pants; and [Charlie Avery](#) gave Chaplin a coat. Chaplin's trademark cane was courtesy of the Mack Sennett wardrobe department.<sup>69</sup>

Charlie Chaplin surpassed Ford Sterling as Keystone's primary comedic actor. Chaplin brought a more restrained style to the screen that used subtlety rather than slapstick to tickle the funny bone. One critic wrote in 1914 that "his acting is such a relief from Ford Sterling's old worn beaten tiresome stuff which got awfully monotonous towards the last."<sup>70</sup>

The timing of Sterling's departure from Sennett and Keystone is cloudy. By some accounts, it was after a year or two.<sup>71</sup> For his draft registration in 1918, Sterling wrote that he was still employed by the Sennett Company.<sup>72</sup> At the time of his death, it was reported that he had been "a star in Mack Sennett's slapstick comedies from 1912 to 1917" and then formed his own production company in 1917.<sup>73</sup>

A contemporary newspaper article stated that Ford Sterling had moved on to the Universal Film Manufacturing Co. in early 1914. He formed a new comedy production group within the company and planned to appear in all the comedies that it created.<sup>74</sup> It appears that these films were known as Sterling Comedies.<sup>75</sup> The first Ford Sterling comedy, centered around an automobile race, was released in the spring of 1914.<sup>76</sup> An overwrought promotional piece called it "the greatest comedy ever flashed on the screen of any motion picture theater in the country . . . hundreds of people have seen this comedy at the American [theater] and without exception satisfaction has been written all over their countenances and many went away with hands held to their sides. Weak hearts are not welcome at this show for laughter is contagious."<sup>77</sup>

# The Standard 1913-A



A Flickerless Machine  
 A Fireproof Machine  
 A Steady Machine  
 A Compact Machine  
 A Reliable Machine  
 The Only Machine

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**American Moving Picture Machine Co.**  
 101 Beekman St.      New York, N. Y.

An early motion picture projector

(*Exhibitors' Times*, 1913 September 27, p. 23; courtesy of the Library of Congress)

About the same time that he formed his own production company, 30-year-old Ford Sterling married 18-year-old [Nora Sampson](#), an actress who used the stage name "Teddy Sampson," on January 3, 1914, in San Diego, California.<sup>78</sup> The five-foot-two-inch, 110-pound actress was born in 1895 in New York City. She graduated from the [Academy of the Sacred Heart](#) in New York before appearing in vaudeville and comic opera. Sampson got her start in Hollywood with the [Majestic-Reliance](#) company and specialized in

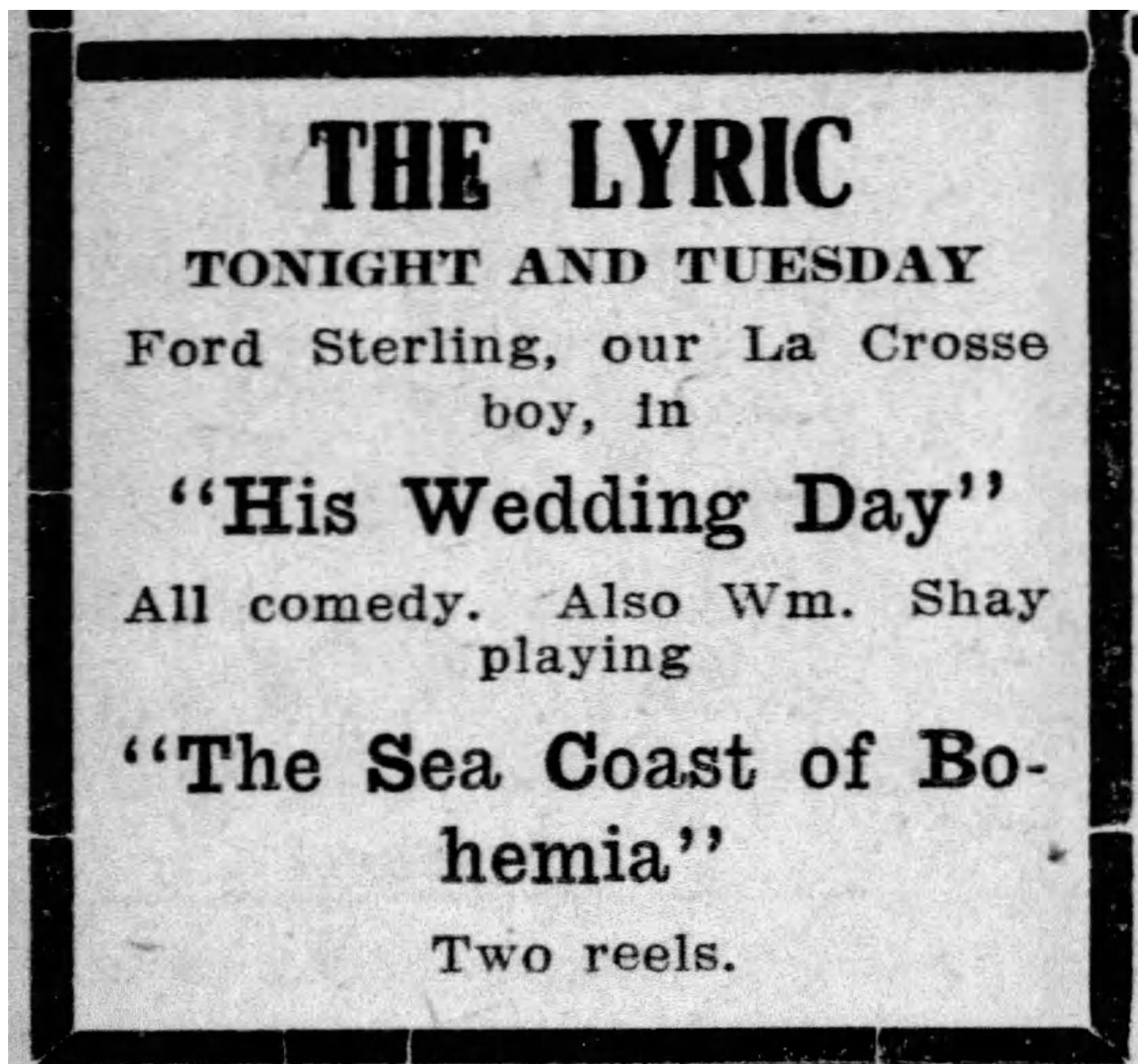
comedies.<sup>79</sup> Her father drove a hansom (horse-drawn) cab from a stand at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in Broadway in New York City. Her brother was a decorated war hero who had served in a French ambulance unit during World War I.<sup>80</sup> “Teddy” Sampson had appeared in some films by [D. W. Griffith](#) and was touted for her ability to play a variety of roles.<sup>81</sup> Sampson was described as “dainty”<sup>82</sup> and “petite.”<sup>83</sup> By the standards of the time, this made her the perfect comedy heroine.<sup>84</sup>



Nora “Teddy” Sampson

(*Who’s Who in the Film World 1914*, p. 158; courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

A reporter for the *Movie Pictorial* weekly interviewed Sterling at his oceanside bungalow in Venice, California, in May 1914. The reporter was surprised that the movie star shared his home with his mother. There was no mention of his wife.<sup>85</sup>



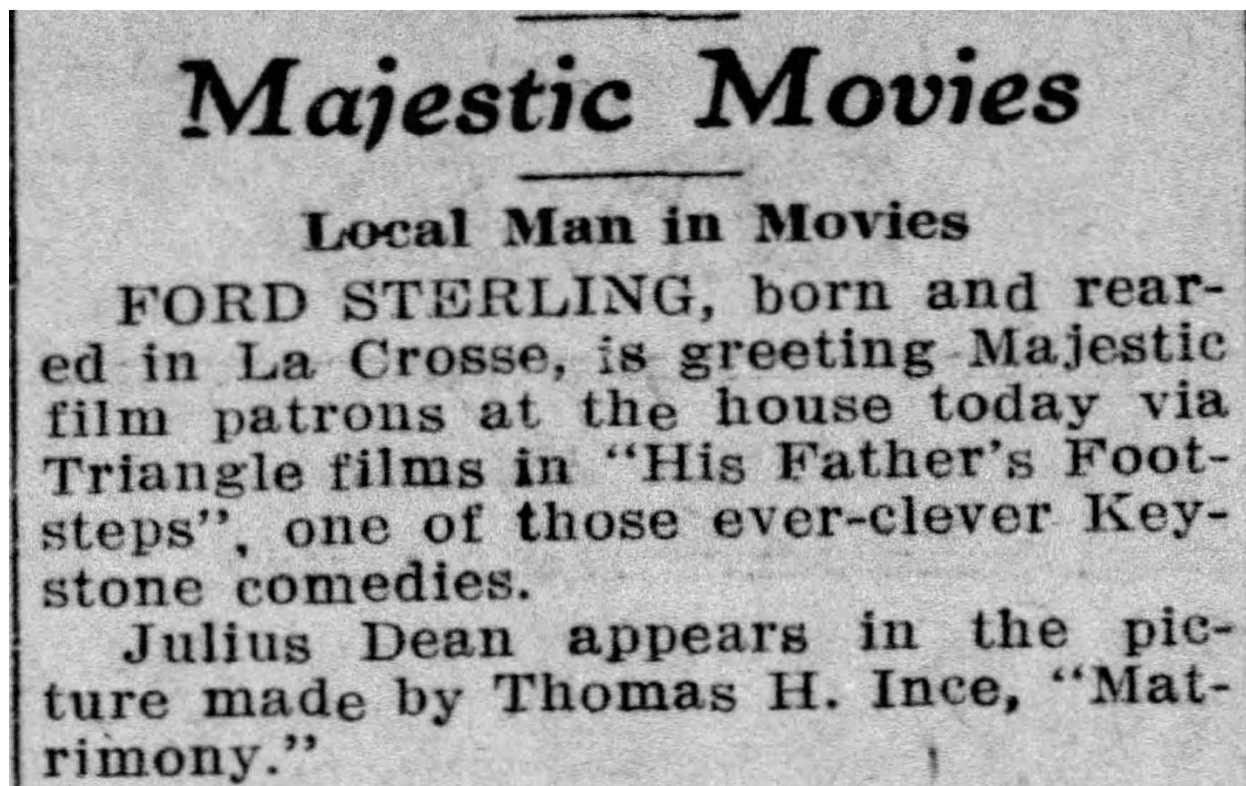
*(La Crosse Tribune, 1914 May 25, p. 4)*

The Lyric Theatre was located at 318 Main Street.<sup>86</sup> It started as the Crystal Theatre in 1907, but the name changed to the Lyric Theatre later that same year.<sup>87</sup> It closed on July 4, 1915, and the building was torn down the following month.<sup>88</sup> It was replaced by the Lynne Tower building at 318 Main Street.<sup>89</sup>



(La Crosse Public Library Archives, PC001-12-27-003)

At the Majestic Theater, located at 514-518 Main Street,<sup>90</sup> an eight-piece orchestra played for the silent movies.<sup>91</sup> This grand movie house opened on January 3, 1910.<sup>92</sup> It was later known as the Wisconsin Theater before a fire in December 1952 gutted it. Offices remained in part of the building that survived until 1972, when it was razed to create room for a parking lot.<sup>93</sup> Ironically, the George Stich family resided just east of this building, on the same block, in 1890, twenty years before Ford Sterling's movies would be shown on its screen. This side of the block is now occupied by the parking lot for St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral.



(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1915 December 25, page 2)

Even after creating his own production group, Sterling continued to perform in Mack Sennett's comedy films. There was plenty of work because Sennett's Keystone company cranked out 520 silent films over a 10-year period, an average of one per week.<sup>94</sup> A typical example was the short comedy *The Little Widow* (1919), with a run time of 20 minutes.<sup>95</sup> Sterling also appeared in Sennett's longer comedy films, such as *Married Life* (1920), which was 50 minutes long.<sup>96</sup> In addition, Sterling was a script writer and director for some movies.<sup>97</sup>

Ford Sterling lived the life of a movie star on and off the screen. He owned a villa on the French Riviera. He was recognized as one of the best-dressed men in Hollywood. Sterling was said to be conversant in four languages. It was reported that he once studied to be a doctor.<sup>98</sup> Sterling was one of the best-known movie-star golfers, and he seldom missed a chance to play in a golf tournament.<sup>99</sup> Later in his career, a newspaper reported that he was studying spiritualism.<sup>100</sup>

**BILLIE BURKE**  
in **"Good Gracious, Annabelle"**  
A Paramount Picture

**WHAT IN THE WORLD DID ANNABELLE DO?**

MERCY ON US!	YOU FLABBERGAST US ANNABELLE!	JIMMINY CRICKETS! HEAVENS AND EARTH ANNABELLE!	WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT OF ANNABELLE! IMAGINE!
CAN SUCH THINGS BE?	DIDN'T YOU HEAR?		

**Added Attraction:**

**FORD STERLING** in **"RIP AND STITCH, TAILORS"**  
The Boy from La Crosse A Sennett Comedy.

**SHOWING THURSDAY, FRIDAY and SATURDAY**

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**LAST TIMES TONIGHT**  
**FRED STONE** in **"JOHNNY GET YOUR GUN"**  
and Sennett Comedy, **"NEVER TOO OLD"**  
Children, 10c; Adults, 20c—Including War Tax.

**LA CROSSE THEATRE**

(La Crosse Tribune, 1919 July 16, p. 4)

The La Crosse Theatre was located at 115-121 S. 5<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>101</sup> Sometime after it closed, the Hollywood Theater opened next door in 1936.<sup>102</sup>



(La Crosse Public Library Archives, PC001-12-25)



This is that location today. 115 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue South (Scenic Center) was the location of the La Crosse Theatre; the Hollywood Theater is the smaller building to the right.

(Photo by Jeff Rand, 2022 December 29)

Although Sterling's movie career was in good shape, his marriage was not. Teddy Sampson sued for divorce in November 1919. She claimed the couple separated in New York on October 8, 1916, and

Sterling went back to Los Angeles. She says she asked him for a reconciliation in early June 1918, but he refused.<sup>103</sup>

In 1920, Ford Sterling, 36 years old and separated from his wife, was living at 5638 Carlton Way in Los Angeles with his 55-year-old mother, Mary L. Stich.<sup>104</sup>

Sterling added to his acting credits by working for every major Hollywood studio from 1920 to 1930. In his career, Sterling appeared in almost 300 films.<sup>105</sup>

**MEN Adored Her Because She Understood  
Man's Code**

**ALMA RUBENS**

In the role of Kate Carewe, a glorious sinner who gave all  
and demanded all—in

**“A MAN’S COUNTRY”**

A ferocious, vivacious little devil who fought as hard as she  
danced, and loved harder.

**ADDED ATTRACTION**

**FORD STERLING in “BLIGHTED CAREER”**

A Keystone Comedy.  
CONTINUOUS SHOW TODAY

COMING—MONDAY, TUESDAY and WEDNESDAY

**ALICE JOYCE**

—IN—

**“THE LION AND THE MOUSE”**

From the famous stage success.  
John Burkett Ryder believed a little mouse could not whip  
a lion. Shirley shows him otherwise in  
“The Lion and the Mouse.”

CHILDREN 6c Adults 15c Lower 20c Including  
Sunday night Balcony Floor War Tax  
Same as Adults

**MAJESTIC**

COMING—D. W. GRIFFITH’S “BROKEN BLOSSOMS”

(La Crosse Tribune, 1919 November 16, page 15)

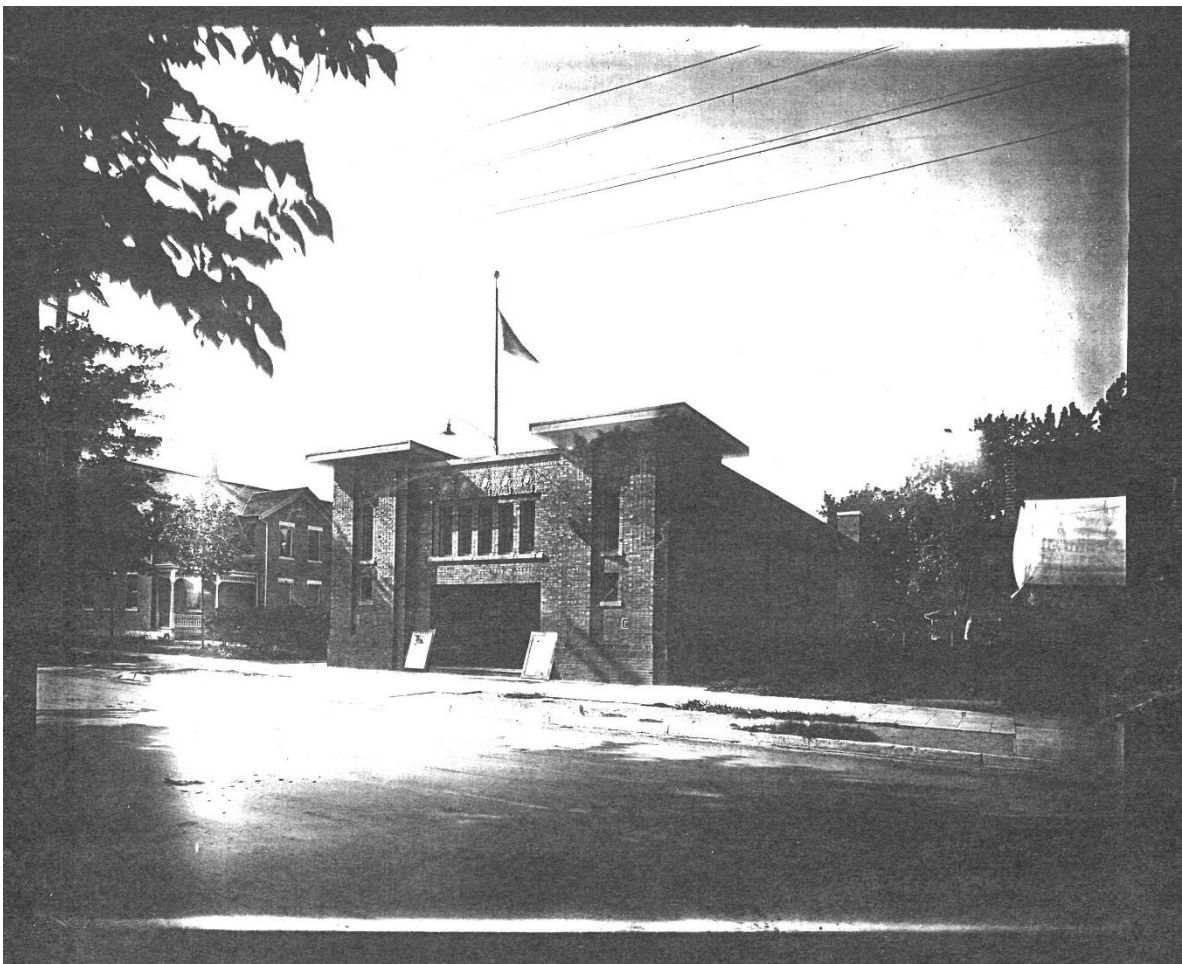
Perhaps to escape the publicity of a divorce, Sterling took a golfing trip to England and Scotland in early 1921. He and another man played on the best courses and visited the top country clubs. While on the trip, Sterling, “an expert photographer,” took photographs of all the best golfers in the world.<sup>106</sup>

Sterling's interest in photography was said to have been spurred by his medical studies and related work with chemicals.<sup>107</sup> Sterling had taken up photography as a hobby when he started his career with Mack Sennett because he did not have time to continue painting. Sterling became an expert in the process of [bromo-oil transfers](#) when only a small number of people in the country were doing it. In June 1921, twenty-six of his photographs were exhibited at the Louvre in Paris.<sup>108</sup> Sterling also won prizes in Art Institute photography competitions.<sup>109</sup>

In an apparent attempt at reconciliation, one source reported that Sterling and his wife took a vacation together to New York in 1921.<sup>110</sup> This appears to have not been successful for long because Teddy Sampson made news in the 1923 divorce case of well-known movie director [Edwin Carewe](#). Carewe's real name was Jay J. Fox, and his wife, Mary Jane Fox, testified that Carewe was having an affair with Teddy Sampson.<sup>111</sup>



(La Crosse Tribune, 1924 April 9, page 10)



(La Crosse Public Library Archives, PC001-12-30)

The Strand Theatre was at 1113 Jackson Street.<sup>112</sup> It had 400 seats and operated from 1916 to 1955. This is now the site of the parking lot for The Soap Opera laundromat on the corner of West Avenue and Jackson Street.<sup>113</sup>

Sterling's marriage to Teddy Sampson seemed beyond repair. In August 1924, Sterling was the one who sued for divorce this time. While listening to the proceedings in court, Mary Stich, Sterling's mother, had a stroke and was taken to a hospital.<sup>114</sup> According to one report, she was stricken while her son was on the witness stand recounting how his wife had deserted him.<sup>115</sup> Mary Stich died at the Clara Barton hospital in Los Angeles on August 8, 1924, at the age of 62.<sup>116</sup> The death of Sterling's mother caused an indefinite postponement of the divorce hearing.<sup>117</sup>



Teddy Sampson

(*Photoplay*, 1922 February, p. 14, photo by Alfred Cheney Johnson; courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Four years later, Teddy Sampson renewed her pursuit of a divorce from her husband. The divorce suit stated that Sterling's weekly income was \$5,000 at that time.<sup>118</sup> That would be over \$87,000 in purchasing power today.

**RIVIERA**  
 North La Crosse  
 LAST TIMES TONIGHT

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**“GALLOPING  
 FISH”**

With **FREDDIE**, the trained  
 Seal, Sydney Chaplin, Ford  
 Sterling, Louise Fazenda and  
 many others.

Lots of laughs and thrills.

—AND—

**“Wings Aflame”**

The Fourth Chapter of  
**“THE IRON MAN”**

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**JACK HOXIE**  
 in **“Gallop in’ Through”**  
 Coming Sunday Only

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1924 October 4, page 5)

The La Crosse Theatre Company operated the Riviera Theatre at 1213 Caledonia Street.<sup>119</sup> It opened on October 17, 1920, as a sister theatre to the Rivoli on the south side. Designed by Parkinson & Dockendorff architects, it featured the Obrecht Sisters’ Orchestra when silent films were playing.<sup>120</sup> It closed in the early 1960s.<sup>121</sup>



The Riviera in 1931

(La Crosse Public Library Archives, PC001-12-28-001)



The same building today

(Photo by Jeff Rand, 2022 December 29)

**CASINO**

**TODAY TO SATURDAY**

Bargain Matinee, 10c—From 11 A. M. to 2 P. M.  
Matinee, 10c and 25c. Evenings, 10c and 30c.

**A KISS IN THE DARK, A RAGING FIRE  
A THRILLING ESCAPE—AND THEN SOME.**

A PICTURE  
PACKED  
WITH  
ROMANCE



—the strange mansion of the Stopes  
—the half-wit, Nicholas, figure of mystery  
—the attack of the alligators  
—the fight for the girl  
—the raging fire  
—the escape to the yacht  
—the battle against the tropical hurricane.

She crept into his heart

FEATURING  
**FRANK MAYO, VIRGINIA VALLI, FORD STERLING**

You will agree with Joseph Hergesheimer, the author of this great story. You, too, will enjoy each stirring moment of "Wild Oranges." It is a tender love story—it is a vivid action drama!

Goldwyn presents  
**The King Vidor Production**

**Wild Oranges**  
By Joseph Hergesheimer

Comedy  
"STARVING BEAUTIES"  
—AND—  
NEWS EVENTS

(La Crosse Tribune, 1924 October 16, page 8)

The Casino Theatre, operated by the La Crosse Amusement Company, was located at 303 Main Street.<sup>122</sup> It was in business from 1911 until the late 1920s. In the 1970s, this was the location of the River City Palace.<sup>123</sup> This location is now a parking lot for the Verve credit union.

**AT THE**  
**Rivoli**

LAST TIMES TONIGHT  
MATINEE, 10c, 25c. NIGHT, 10c, 40c.

**Ford Sterling**  
La Crosse's Movie Star  
Tom Moore, Esther Ralston,  
Florence Vidor

—IN—

**"THE  
TROUBLE  
WITH WIVES"**  
*A Paramount Picture*

IT'S VERY HUMAN, VERY LAVISH  
AND VERY, VERY FUNNY.

—AND—

ADDED ATTRACTION  
For TODAY and SUNDAY—Matinee and Night

**ACKERMAN'S  
MERRY MAKERS**  
EIGHT SONS OF SYNCOPATION  
**A BIG GIGANTIC  
VAUDEVILLE ACT**  
MADE A TREMENDOUS HIT YESTERDAY.  
DON'T MISS IT.

---

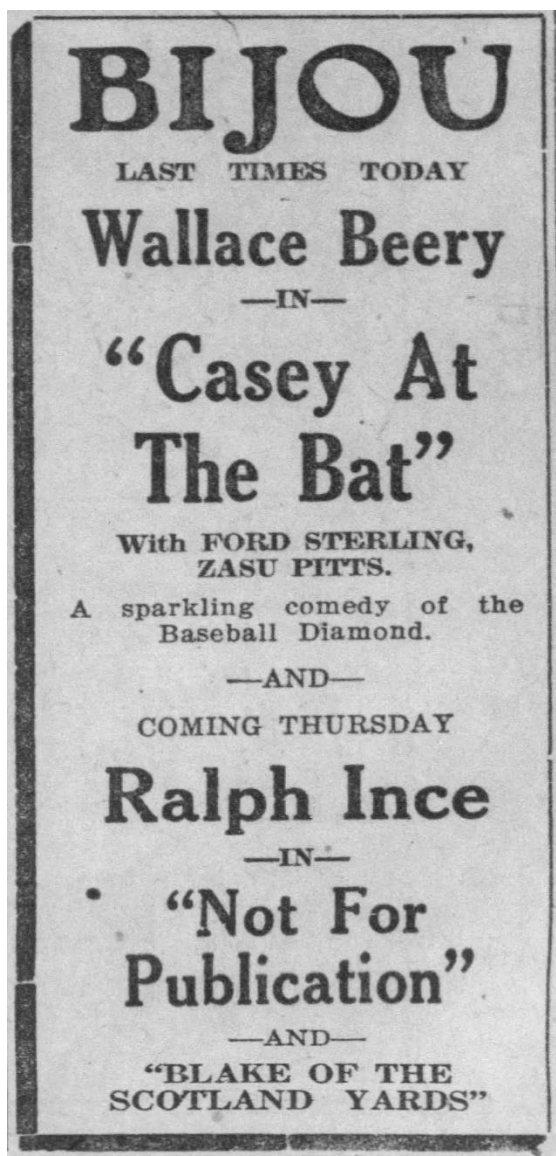
COMING SUNDAY

PAULINE STARKE —IN— **"SUN UP"**  
CONRAD NAGEL

FROM THE PLAY THAT TOUCHED  
THE HEART OF BROADWAY.

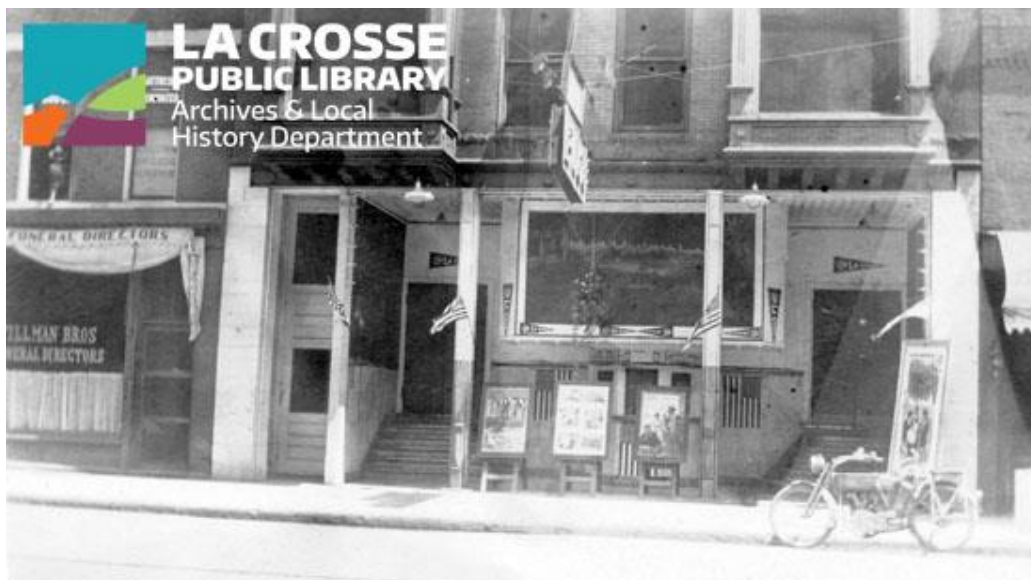
(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1925 September 12, page 5)

Sterling once said, "A man can not (sic) retain his self-respect if he spends his entire life in clowning . . ." <sup>124</sup> Starting in the mid-1920s, Sterling began to include dramas in his repertoire, although he often gave his dramatic characters a humorous twist. <sup>125</sup> Even then, he was described as the "ace of character comedians." <sup>126</sup> One example was the 1927 [Frank Capra](#) film, *For the Love of Mike*. <sup>127</sup>



(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1927 October 12, page 14)

The Bijou Theatre was located at 113-115 3<sup>rd</sup> Street South.<sup>128</sup> It had a long history of live performances before it became La Crosse's first motion picture theater in 1909.<sup>129</sup> It ceased operation in 1921 and became the Kinney shoe store until being remodeled and reborn as the new 500-seat Bijou Theater in August 1926.<sup>130</sup> In early July 1939, the Bijou closed "for the remainder of the summer," and movies booked at the Bijou were instead shown at the Wisconsin Theatre.<sup>131</sup> There is no mention of it again in the local newspaper until June 1943 when a local newspaper columnist wrote, "The Novelty was an all night restaurant, located in the building south of the old deserted Bijou theater on south 3<sup>rd</sup> street."<sup>132</sup> The Bijou had apparently ceased to be a profitable location and never reopened after the summer of 1939.



The Bijou Theatre in 1910

(La Crosse Public Library Archives, PC001-12-22-001)

In October 1927, the Warner Brothers movie *The Jazz Singer*, starring Al Jolson, was the first motion picture with audio of the actors talking. This was a seismic event in the history of the movie industry.<sup>133</sup> Silent films almost immediately went on the endangered species list.

By the late 1920s, motion pictures with audio were becoming more common. The difference was even more stark than football before and after the forward pass. With more emphasis on dialogue and a slow but steady deemphasis on physicality, at least as it had been portrayed in silent films, some Hollywood actors were able to make the transition while others saw their careers quickly fade.

Sterling's first "talkie" was a film titled *Fatal Forceps* in 1929.<sup>134</sup> His first comedy role in a sound motion picture was with [Marilyn Miller](#), [Alexander Gray](#), and [Joe E. Brown](#) in the 1930 comedy *Sally*.<sup>135</sup>



Ford Sterling in *The Fall of Eve*, 1929

(Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Later in 1930, the Internal Revenue Service filed a lien for \$1,714 against Ford Sterling for two years of income taxes.<sup>136</sup> It was also said that Sterling lost most of his money in the stock market.<sup>137</sup>

After a 13-year separation, Ford Sterling and Teddy Sampson reconciled in late 1931.<sup>138</sup>

Warner Brothers studio revived the Keystone Cops franchise in 1935 by bringing back original cast members Ford Sterling, Ben Turpin, Chester Conklin, [Marie Prevost](#), [Vivian Oakland](#), and Hank Mann to make some new films in the mold of the originals.<sup>139</sup>

Sterling continued to appear in some films in the late 1930s, but his health prevented him from doing more work. He appeared in his last film in 1936.<sup>140</sup> This was a movie titled *Alice in Wonderland*.<sup>141</sup>

In June 1938, Sterling entered Good Samaritan Hospital in Hollywood because of [thrombosis](#) in one of his legs.<sup>142</sup> According to a newspaper reporter, Sterling had been in the same bed in Good Samaritan Hospital for over a year because of a heart condition that had been bothering him for two years. Blood

clots in his leg made it necessary to amputate the leg on August 1, 1939.<sup>143</sup> Gangrene had set in, and there was no other treatment.<sup>144</sup> Despite having his left leg amputated above the knee, Sterling was reported to be in cheerful good spirits. Mack Sennett was a frequent visitor.<sup>145</sup>

Although there was hope for a full recovery, his condition soon worsened. Ford Sterling died in the Good Samaritan Hospital during the evening on October 13, 1939, at the age of 56. Teddy Sampson was at his bedside.<sup>146</sup> Ford and Teddy had been living together at 5272 Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles before he was hospitalized. The primary cause of death was a heart attack.<sup>147</sup>

After services at the Pierce Brothers mortuary in Los Angeles, his body was cremated.<sup>148</sup> The chapel was filled to its capacity of 300, and many floral tributes came from others who could not attend. Among the notables who came to pay respects were: Charlie Chaplin, [Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.](#), Harold Lloyd, [Eugene Pallette](#), [Tom Moore](#), [Louise Fazenda](#), Baron Long, [Marshall Neilan](#), [Barney Oldfield](#), Mack Sennett, [Frank Borzage](#), Allan Dwan, [Wesley Ruggles](#), and [Jed Prouty](#). The Rev. Neal Dodd conducted an Episcopal funeral service, and there were two musical numbers.<sup>149</sup> In addition to Sennett, Chaplin, Long, Neilan, Borzage, Moore, and Oldfield, honorary pallbearers were [Earle C. Anthony](#) and F. C. Griffin.<sup>150</sup>

Sterling's ashes are interred in a niche at the Hollywood Forever Cemetery in Los Angeles County, California.<sup>151</sup>

Although they had reunited in life, Ford Sterling and Teddy Sampson were separated after death. Teddy Sampson died at the age of 75 on November 24, 1970, in Woodland Hills, California. She was buried in the San Fernando Mission Cemetery in Mission Hills, California, and her gravestone was inscribed "Nora Sterling," with "Teddy" beneath that name.<sup>152</sup>

Over the course of a prolific career in almost 300 motion pictures, Ford Sterling worked with many of the biggest names in early Hollywood (besides those already mentioned): [Gloria Swanson](#), [W. C. Fields](#), [Claire Trevor](#), [Noah Beery](#), [Norma Shearer](#), [Douglas Fairbanks Jr.](#), [Zasu Pitts](#), [Claudette Colbert](#), Joe E. Brown, [Myrna Loy](#), [Walter Pidgeon](#), Ben Turpin, and even a young [Cary Grant](#).

They were all among the generation of actors, actresses, and movie makers who were part of the first stage in the evolution from exclusively live entertainment to mass entertainment via screens. People no longer had to attend a live theatre or vaudeville production, or wait for a touring theatre company to come to their town; they could see motion pictures in the convenience of their hometown movie house. They also had more than a single opportunity to view it. In the days before radio and television, the movie theater was the main choice for family entertainment.

Silent motion pictures were also the first form of entertainment systematically preserved, although many early films have been lost, so that they could be viewed by generations not yet born. They are part of our cultural legacy.

[Republic Pictures](#), which had formed in 1936, built two new sound stages in 1941. One of them was named for Mabel Normand, and the other one was named for Ford Sterling.<sup>153</sup>

Selected filmographies of Ford Sterling's work can be found on the [Golden Silents](#) website, [Classic Movie Hub](#), the [Internet Movie Database](#), the [TV Guide](#) website, the [Movie fone](#) website, and [Wikipedia](#). Some of Sterling's films can be viewed on [YouTube](#) and the [Internet Archive](#).

Wendy Warwick White wrote a biography entitled *Ford Sterling—His Life and Films* (McFarland, 2007).



Marvel Rea, Ford Sterling, Alice Maison

(Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

In a 1914 interview, Sterling summed up his acting philosophy, which also illuminated the challenge of acting in silent films:

To make a success on the screen . . . the acting must come from the heart and the head. One must be thoroughly conscientious and love the work and one must think, think of every action and every look. There must be a reason for everything done and moreover that reason must be transparent to the audience or it is ineffective. This goes in regard to comedy, slap stick comedy if you will, as well as for psychological drama. With me it has been a matter of continuous study and so it is with others who really succeed and I insist upon those who act with me being intelligent. Every tumble, every apparently foolish bit of business, has some reason for its being done, the result being that even in a knock-about comedy that it is easily followed and has continuity---one rapid fire action leads to another.<sup>154</sup>

Actor [David Niven](#) acknowledged the silent film stars, including Ford Sterling, for what they taught him about the “art of pantomime and timing.” “Modern comedians can learn plenty from studying the technique of these old-time stars,” said Niven in 1948.<sup>155</sup>



Ford Sterling wielding a sledgehammer in *Barney Oldfield's Race for a Life*, 1913

(Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Ford Sterling declared that making people laugh is the toughest job in the world.<sup>156</sup> In his time and in his way, Sterling succeeded in doing that job.

Today, silent films are a historical artifact of interest to a small percentage of people, and pies in the face are passe except for the occasional fundraiser. The only name from this era of Hollywood that is likely to spark a flicker of recognition for most people is Charlie Chaplin. Slapstick comedy has given way to more sophisticated scripts and polished acting with greater emphasis on dialogue and special effects.

Although Ford Sterling is little known today, the term “Keystone Cops” lives on in our cultural lexicon as a synonym for bumbling incompetence. Ford Sterling, a renaissance man, was anything but incompetent. The life of George Franklin Stich was so much more than that, and he should be respected as a person who lived a life of varied accomplishments.

Jeff Rand  
La Crosse Public Library (Retired)

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<sup>1</sup> *Wisconsin Pre-1907 Vital Records Collection*, Microfilm Reel 100, Record Number 944, George F. Stich; Wisconsin Historical Society; transcription, Wisconsinhistory.org (<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Birth/BR2513987> : accessed 2022 December 27). Although his birth record shows his last name as “Stich,” as do other contemporary sources, he signed his name as “George Franklin Stich” on his draft card registration. Wikipedia shows his birth name as George Ford Stich Jr., but it does not cite a source.

<sup>2</sup> “United States World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1918,” images, Ancestry.com (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2022 December 29), card for George Franklin Stich, serial no. 2559, Local Draft Board 14, Los Angeles, California. His death certificate, filled out with information from Teddy Sampson Sterling, is full of errors. His name is listed as “George Ford Stich;” date of birth November 3, 1884 (incorrect year); place of birth is shown as Chicago, Illinois; his father’s birthplace is shown as Chicago, Illinois; his mother’s maiden name is shown as “Mary Kirby” rather than Mary Kelley.

<sup>3</sup> Department of State passport application, image, Ancestry.com (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2022 December 29), application for George F. Stich, no. 24652, 1920 April 23, Los Angeles, California.

<sup>4</sup> E. H. Hoffman, “Curbstone Pick-Ups,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1939 August 27, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> “Ford Sterling, Comedian, Local Native, Has Left Leg Amputated,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1939 August 11, p. 2. This article says Sterling was born in La Crosse “52 years ago,” and that would mean 1887.

<sup>6</sup> Ancestry, *Find A Grave*, database with images (<http://www.findagrave.com> : accessed 2022 December 19), memorial 6682240, Ford Sterling (1882-1939), Hollywood Forever, Hollywood, Los Angeles County, California; gravestone photograph by AJ.

<sup>7</sup> W. F. Goodrich, “Telephone Systems In La Crosse,” A. H. Sanford, ed., *La Crosse County Historical Sketches, Series 4* (La Crosse, Wisconsin: La Crosse County Historical Society, 1938), 63. Goodrich was a manager of the La Crosse Telephone Company from 1902 until his retirement in 1934.

<sup>8</sup> “Phone Business Growth Here Remarkable,” *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1922 November 12, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> *Urban Publishing Company’s La Crosse City Directory for the Years 1885-1886, Comprising An Alphabetical List of Names. . .* (La Crosse, Wisconsin: A. B. Lamborn, 1885) 309, for “Stich, Hon. George F.”

<sup>10</sup> *Jan. 15, 1884 Bunn & Philippi’s La Crosse City Directory Comprising An Alphabetical List of Names. . .* (Winona, Minnesota: Jones & Kroeger, 1884) 221, for “Stich Geo F.”

<sup>11</sup> *Urban Publishing Company’s La Crosse City Directory for the Years 1885-1886*, 309.

<sup>12</sup> *Bunn & Philippi’s La Crosse City Directory 1888-9 Comprising An Alphabetical List of Names. . .* (La Crosse, Wisconsin: Bunn & Philippi, 1888) 362, for “Stich, George F.”

<sup>13</sup> Goodrich, “Telephone Systems In La Crosse,” 63.

<sup>14</sup> *Spicer & Buschman’s La Crosse Directory 1890 Comprising An Alphabetical List of Names. . .* (La Crosse, Wisconsin: Spicer & Buschman, 1890) 246, for “Stich G F.”

<sup>15</sup> Goodrich, “Telephone Systems In La Crosse,” 63.

<sup>16</sup> *Urban Publishing Company’s La Crosse City Directory for the Years 1885-1886*, 309.

<sup>17</sup> *Wisconsin Labor Advocate* (La Crosse, Wisconsin), 1887 March 26, p. 1, c. 2.

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- <sup>18</sup> Albert H. Sanford and H. J. Hirshheimer, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin 1841-1900* (La Crosse, Wisconsin: La Crosse County Historical Society, 1951), 257. This source shows D. Frank Powell as mayor of La Crosse in 1885 and 1886; David Austin was the mayor 1887-1889. George Stich does not appear on this list of mayors.
- <sup>19</sup> E. H. Hoffman, "Curbstone Pick-Ups," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1939 February 26, p. 3.
- <sup>20</sup> "The Walrus," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1925 March 1, p. 3. See also: E. H. Hoffman, "Stories About the Men Who Helped Build City," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1931 March 29, p. 9. This gives the election date as 1888.
- <sup>21</sup> "Wisconsin," *The Argos (Indiana) Reflector*, 1888 November 15, p. 6, c. 3.
- <sup>22</sup> "La Crosse Pioneers Recall Torchlight Parades In Early Political Campaigns," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1934 November 4, p. 1.
- <sup>23</sup> Richard Willis, "Ford Sterling: A Perfectly 'Serious' Funny Man," *Movie Pictorial* (1914 May 23): 14-15; archived at Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/details/MoviePictorialMay-june1914>) : 2023 January 3.
- <sup>24</sup> "Movie Notes," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1925 September 11, p. 9.
- <sup>25</sup> "Illinois, Chicago, Voter Registers, 1888-1892," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:D61F-H62M>) : 23 December 2020), Geo F Stich, 1892.
- <sup>26</sup> "Phone War To Take Shape," *The Chicago Chronicle*, 1895 June 17, p. 1.
- <sup>27</sup> 1900 U.S. census, Cook County, Illinois, population schedule, Hyde Park township, p. 10B, family 184, L. Perkins; image, *AncestryHeritageQuest.com* (<http://www.ancestryheritagequest.com> : accessed 2022 December 28); citing NARA microfilm publication T623, roll 285.
- <sup>28</sup> "George Stich Dies In Chicago," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Morning Chronicle*, 1902 December 23, p. 1.
- <sup>29</sup> "Geo. F. Stich Dead," *The Daily Republican & Leader* (La Crosse, Wisconsin), 1902 December 23, p. 3. This article also states that Stich "died last night." W. J. Scott of La Crosse received a telegram about Stich's death "last night," and it seems to assume that Stich died the same night the telegram was received although Cook County records show his death date as October 7, 1902.
- <sup>30</sup> "Illinois, Cook County Deaths, 1871-1998," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2MQ-HZKY> : 8 March 2018), George F Stich, 07 Oct 1902; citing Chicago, Cook, Illinois, United States, source reference 14863, record number , Cook County Courthouse, Chicago; FHL microfilm 1,239,684.
- <sup>31</sup> C. A. W., "The Walrus," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1921 March 27, p. 9.
- <sup>32</sup> "Sterling Death Mourned by Film Pioneers," *Hollywood Citizen News*, 1939 October 14, p. 9.
- <sup>33</sup> Willis, "Ford Sterling: A Perfectly 'Serious' Funny Man," p. 14-15. See also: W. H. R., "Star Gazing Along Movie Lane," *The Pasadena (California) Post*, 1930 January 10, p. 18. This article states that Sterling "was educated at Notre Dame."
- <sup>34</sup> "The Walrus," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1925 March 1.
- <sup>35</sup> 1910 U.S. census, Atlantic City, New Jersey, population schedule, Atlantic County, 2<sup>nd</sup> Precinct, p. 1A, dwelling 323, family 4, Mary Lee Stich and Ford Sterling; image, *AncestryHeritageQuest.com* (<http://www.ancestryheritagequest.com> : accessed 2022 December 29); citing NARA microfilm publication T624, roll 867.
- <sup>36</sup> 1920 U.S. census, Los Angeles, California, population schedule, Los Angeles Assembly District 63, p. 15A, dwelling 298, family 323, Mary L. Stich and George F. Stich; image, *AncestryHeritageQuest.com* (<http://www.ancestryheritagequest.com> : accessed 2022 December 22); citing NARA microfilm publication T625, roll 106.
- <sup>37</sup> 1930 U.S. census, Los Angeles, California, population schedule, City of Los Angeles, p. 22A, dwelling 375, family 661, Ford Sterling; image, *AncestryHeritageQuest.com* (<http://www.ancestryheritagequest.com> : accessed 2022 December 29); citing NARA microfilm publication T626. The other household member was a 47-year-old Japanese servant. Ford Sterling's father is variously shown as being born in Alabama, Louisiana, and New York in the 1910, 1920, and 1930 census records.
- <sup>38</sup> Willis, "Ford Sterling: A Perfectly 'Serious' Funny Man," p. 14-15.
- <sup>39</sup> "The Pomona (California) Progress Bulletin," 1923 October 2, p. 4.
- <sup>40</sup> "Met Comedian One of Original Keystone Cops," *The Los Angeles Evening Record*, 1928 February 18, p. 9.
- <sup>41</sup> Willis, "Ford Sterling: A Perfectly 'Serious' Funny Man," p. 14-15.
- <sup>42</sup> Willis, "Ford Sterling: A Perfectly 'Serious' Funny Man," p. 14-15.
- <sup>43</sup> "Film Star at Liberty Is Artist," *Long Beach (California) Press*, 1924 August 8, p. 19.

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- <sup>44</sup> Willis, "Ford Sterling: A Perfectly 'Serious' Funny Man," p. 14-15.
- <sup>45</sup> Willis, "Ford Sterling: A Perfectly 'Serious' Funny Man," p. 14-15.
- <sup>46</sup> Willis, "Ford Sterling: A Perfectly 'Serious' Funny Man," p. 14-15.
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- <sup>48</sup> "Ford Sterling, Comedian, Local Native, Has Left Leg Amputated," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1939 August 11, p. 2. This article says Sterling was born in La Crosse "52 years ago," and that would mean 1887.
- <sup>49</sup> Willis, "Ford Sterling: A Perfectly 'Serious' Funny Man," p. 14-15.
- <sup>50</sup> Paul Zollo, *Hollywood Remembered: An Oral History of Its Golden Age* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002), 11-18.
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- <sup>52</sup> Lida Livingston, "Ford Sterling Seen Victor Against Illness," *Hollywood Citizen News*, 1939 August 4, p. 9.
- <sup>53</sup> Willis, "Ford Sterling: A Perfectly 'Serious' Funny Man," p. 14-15.
- <sup>54</sup> Ruth McClintock, "Samuel Goldwyn Now Author; Writes Film History and Romance," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 1923 November 5, p. 17.
- <sup>55</sup> "Ranch House To Be Burned For Movies," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 1914 February 13, p. 22.
- <sup>56</sup> Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle's second wife was Doris Dibble Deane, an actress who was born in La Crosse, Wisconsin. See: <http://archives.lacrosselibrary.org/blog/neighbors-making-history-doris-deane/>.
- <sup>57</sup> Fred W. Fox, "Legacy of Laughs, the Keystone Kops," *Los Angeles Mirror*, 1961 August 1, p. 12.
- <sup>58</sup> Arline Scherer, "Keystone Kop still wears his baggy uniform," *Independent Sun* (Los Angeles, California), 1972 April 23, p. 38.
- <sup>59</sup> Eric Escobar, "The Fi Hall of Fame: Hacking Film – Why 24 Frames Per Second?" Film Independent, 2022 September 27, <https://www.filmindependent.org/blog/hacking-film-24-frames-per-second/#:~:text=Economics%20dictated%20shooting%20closer%20to,is%20sped%20up%3A%20Charlie%20Chaplin>.
- <sup>60</sup> "Famous Movie Stars To Come," *The Long Beach (California) Daily Telegram*, 1913 April 16, p. 12.
- <sup>61</sup> "Ford Sterling, Long Popular Comedian, La Crosse Native, Dies in Hollywood," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1939 October 14, p. 3. This article states that Sterling was with Sennett for eight years, although other primary sources show evidence of an earlier departure.
- <sup>62</sup> "Ford Sterling One of Country's Most Versatile Men," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1926 August 15, p. 4.
- <sup>63</sup> "Ford Sterling and His Wife, Comedians, in Divorce Court," *Oakland Tribune*, 1919 November 30, p. 25.
- <sup>64</sup> Paul D. Berdanier, "How It Began," *Wilmington (California) Daily Press*, 1935 February 22, p. 8.
- <sup>65</sup> Harold Heffernan, "New Bogey Faces Films, Opinion Of Columnist," *The Valley Times* (Los Angeles, California), 1952 August 28, p. 23.
- <sup>66</sup> Anne Ewbank, "How Pie-Throwing Became a Comedy Standard," *Gastro Obscura*, Atlas Obscura, 2018 July 10, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/why-do-people-throw-pies>.
- <sup>67</sup> McClintock, "Samuel Goldwyn Now Author; Writes Film History and Romance," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 1923 November 5. There is disagreement over what year Ford Sterling left Mack Sennett's film company. Some sources say it was 1917; the year 1912 or 1913 is a better match with the primary sources. See also: Bob Thomas, "Chaplin In Last Fade-Out," *The Mirror* (Los Angeles, California), 1953 April 16, p. 44.
- <sup>68</sup> "Forty nine year old," *Hollywood Citizen News*, 1938 July 5, p. 8.
- <sup>69</sup> Ted Taylor, "Cinematters," *Los Angeles Evening Record*, 1924 February 26, p. 16.
- <sup>70</sup> "A Funny Englishman At The Neptune," *Venice (California) Daily Vanguard*, 1914 February 18, p. 8. Chaplin left Keystone after one year because Essanay Studios offered him \$10,000 a week. See: Bob Thomas, "Chaplin Belongs In Walk of Fame: Sennett," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1960 September 3, p. 8.
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- <sup>72</sup> "United States World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1918," images, *Ancestry.com*, card for George Franklin Stich, serial no. 2559, Local Draft Board 14, Los Angeles, California.
- <sup>73</sup> "Movie Funster's Keystone Kop Days Recalled," *Hollywood Citizen News*, 1939 October 14, p. 9.
- <sup>74</sup> "What's In A Name?---\$25.00 For Most Appropriate," *Venice (California) Daily Vanguard*, 1914 March 13, p. 8. In "Sterling Death Mourned by Film Pioneers," *Hollywood Citizen News*, 1939 October 14, p. 9; it states that Sterling left the Keystone company in 1917.

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- <sup>75</sup> R. Dale Armstrong, "Movie Epochs," *Los Angeles Evening Post Record*, 1934 September 22, p. 11.
- <sup>76</sup> "Film Flashes," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1914 March 25, p. 4.
- <sup>77</sup> "Ford Sterling In Two Parts," *The Long Beach (California) Daily Telegram*, 1914 May 13, p. 7.
- <sup>78</sup> "Ford Sterling Being Sued For Divorce," *Evening Vanguard* (Venice, California), 1919 November 18, p. 1.
- <sup>79</sup> "Teddy Sampson 'Different' Type of Player," *Oakland Tribune*, 1921 April 17, p. 11.
- <sup>80</sup> "Town Talk," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 1931 October 24, p. 8.
- <sup>81</sup> "A Better Indian Than a Real One," *The Pomona (California) Daily Review*, 1915 March 31, p. 6.
- <sup>82</sup> "Monterey Theater," *Monterey (California) Daily Cypress*, 1915 October 17, p. 1.
- <sup>83</sup> "A Movie Girl," *Sacramento (California) Star*, 1915 October 21, p. 5.
- <sup>84</sup> "Sad News For Tall Girls With Ambitions," *Oakland Tribune*, 1921 May 1, p. 31.
- <sup>85</sup> Willis, "Ford Sterling: A Perfectly 'Serious' Funny Man," p. 14-15.
- <sup>86</sup> *Wright's Directory of La Crosse for 1915 Containing A General Directory of Citizens, a Classified Business Directory, a Complete Street Guide and Miscellaneous Information* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1915) 383, for "Lyric Theatre."
- <sup>87</sup> "Crystal Theatre Now The Lyric," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1907 November 18, p. 8.
- <sup>88</sup> "Lyric Theater Closes its Doors," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1915 July 5, p. 5; and "Old Lyric Nearly Down," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1915 August 21, p. 5.
- <sup>89</sup> Lou Smith, "Flicks made La Crosse debut in 1909," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1979 May 16, p. 16.
- <sup>90</sup> *Wright's Directory of La Crosse for 1915 Containing A General Directory of Citizens, a Classified Business Directory, a Complete Street Guide and Miscellaneous Information* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1915) 385, for "Majestic Theatre."
- <sup>91</sup> "Famous Stars Many In Majestic Film," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1916 January 10, p. 6.
- <sup>92</sup> "Curtain Rises Tonight Before Gala Audience in Koppelberger's Splendid Majestic Theater," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1910 January 3.
- <sup>93</sup> "Fire-Damaged Building Up for Sale," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1955 December 15; and Lou Smith, "City was regular stop for touring theatre groups," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1979 May 14.
- <sup>94</sup> "Making Comedy Is Tragic Business, Says Sennett," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 1919 March 29, p. 21.
- <sup>95</sup> "The Little Widow," Internet Movie Database, database, (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0010373/>) : 2022 December 22).
- <sup>96</sup> "Married Life," Internet Movie Database, database, (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0011444/>) : 2022 December 22).
- <sup>97</sup> "Met Comedian One of Original Keystone Cops," *The Los Angeles Evening Record*, 1928 February 18, p. 9.
- <sup>98</sup> "Ford Sterling One of Country's Most Versatile Men," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1926 August 15.
- <sup>99</sup> D. Scott Chisholm, "Duncan and Mitchell, Leading British Pros, To Play in California," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 1924 August 13, p. 27.
- <sup>100</sup> "Did You Know," *The Pasadena (California) Post*, p. 15.
- <sup>101</sup> *Wright's La Crosse City Directory 1919* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1919) 392, for "La Crosse Theatre Co."
- <sup>102</sup> Smith, "Flicks made La Crosse debut in 1909," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1979 May 16.
- <sup>103</sup> "Ford Sterling Being Sued For Divorce," *Evening Vanguard* (Venice, California), 1919 November 18, p. 1.
- <sup>104</sup> 1920 U.S. census, Los Angeles, California, population schedule, Los Angeles Assembly District 63, p. 15A, dwelling 298, family 323, Mary L. Stich and George F. Stich; image, *AncestryHeritageQuest.com* (<http://www.ancestryheritagequest.com>) : accessed 2022 December 22); citing NARA microfilm publication T625, roll 106.
- <sup>105</sup> "Ford Sterling, Native Of La Crosse, To Lose Leg," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1939 February 19, p. 1.
- <sup>106</sup> "Sterling to England," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 1920 July 2, p. 31. See also: "Ford Sterling Sails," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 1921 March 31, p. 26.
- <sup>107</sup> "Ford Sterling One of Country's Most Versatile Men," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1926 August 15.
- <sup>108</sup> "Film Star at Liberty Is Artist," *Long Beach (California) Press*, 1924 August 8.
- <sup>109</sup> "Teddy Sampson 'Different' Type of Player," *Oakland Tribune*, 1921 April 17.
- <sup>110</sup> "Teddy Sampson 'Different' Type of Player," *Oakland Tribune*, 1921 April 17.
- <sup>111</sup> "Wife Divorces Carewe," *Los Angeles Evening Post Record*, 1923 June 1, p. 1.

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- <sup>112</sup> *Wright's La Crosse City Directory 1924* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1924) 592, for "Strand Theatre Co."
- <sup>113</sup> Smith, "Flicks made La Crosse debut in 1909," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1979 May 16.  
See also: Lindy Shannon, "Ticket to the past: a look back at the Strand Theatre," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1995 September 28, p. D-10. "It Opens Thanksgiving Day," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1915 November 23, p. 10, indicates that the Strand, which did not have a name at the time, opened on Thanksgiving Day 1915.
- <sup>114</sup> "Mother Has Stroke at Son's Divorce Trial," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 1924 August 8, p. 1.
- <sup>115</sup> "Sterling's Mother Dead," *Los Angeles Record*, 1924 August 9, p. 1.
- <sup>116</sup> "Mother of Screen Comedian Dies," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles, California), 1924 August 9, p. 2. This article refers to her as "Mrs. Mary L. Sterling."
- <sup>117</sup> "Arrange Funeral of Mother of Comedian," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 1924 August 9, p. 3.
- <sup>118</sup> "Asks Decree," *Oakland Tribune*, 1928 January 7, p. 2.
- <sup>119</sup> *Wright's La Crosse City Directory 1924* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1924) 527, for "Riviera Theatre La Crosse Theatre Co."
- <sup>120</sup> "North Side's Movie Palace Opens Today," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1920 October 17, p. 1.
- <sup>121</sup> Smith, "Flicks made La Crosse debut in 1909," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1979 May 16.
- <sup>122</sup> *Wright's La Crosse City Directory 1924* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1924) 218, for "Casino Theatre (La Crosse Amusement Co)."
- <sup>123</sup> Smith, "Flicks made La Crosse debut in 1909," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1979 May 16.
- <sup>124</sup> "Film Star at Liberty Is Artist," *Long Beach (California) Press*, 1924 August 8.
- <sup>125</sup> "Ford Leaves Pie Hurling For 'Drayma,'" *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles, California), 1925 September 23, p. 18.
- <sup>126</sup> "Rivoli Today," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1926 July 11, p. 16.
- <sup>127</sup> "Ford Sterling To Be Featured In Capra's 'Hell's Kitchen,'" *Hollywood Daily Citizen*, 1927 April 30, p. 7. The film's title was later changed to *For the Love of Mike*.
- <sup>128</sup> *Wright's La Crosse City Directory 1928* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1928) 101, for "Bijou Theatre."
- <sup>129</sup> "First Movie In La Crosse Presented 51 Years Ago," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1960 August 27, p. 2.
- <sup>130</sup> "New Bijou Theater Here Will Open Its Doors On Friday," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1926 August 11, p. 6.
- <sup>131</sup> "Movies," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1939 July 8, p. 3.
- <sup>132</sup> E. H. Hoffman, "Curbstone Pick-Ups," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1943 June 6, p. 6.
- <sup>133</sup> Barry Norman, *The Story of Hollywood* (New York: New American Library, 1987), 9. See also: "Bijou Closes Its Doors For Good At Last Show Tonight," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1921 February 27, p. 1.
- <sup>134</sup> "Fascinatingly different," United Artists Theatre advertisement, *The Los Angeles Evening Record*, 1929 October 23, p. 4.
- <sup>135</sup> "Meet the Girl With Everything," Rivoli theatre advertisement, *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1930 March 18, p. 10.
- <sup>136</sup> "Film Stars Named In U.S. Tax Suits," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 1930 October 22, p. 21.
- <sup>137</sup> "Sunny Spirit Bolsters Ill Ford Sterling," *Long Beach (California) Press Telegram*, 1939 August 11, p. 12.
- <sup>138</sup> "Town Talk," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 1931 October 24, p. 8.
- <sup>139</sup> Alanson Wagner, "Slapstick Stars of Bygone Era Back in Films: Keystone Cops Again Cut Capers in Hollywood," *The Long Beach (California) Morning Sun*, 1935 June 3, p. 12.
- <sup>140</sup> Lida Livingston, "Ford Sterling Seen Victor Against Illness," *Hollywood Citizen News*, 1939 August 4, p. 9.
- <sup>141</sup> "Ford Sterling, Long Popular Comedian, La Crosse Native, Dies in Hollywood," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1939 October 14, p. 3. This article gives his age at death as 55.
- <sup>142</sup> "Ford Sterling, Long Popular Comedian, La Crosse Native, Dies in Hollywood," *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune*, 1939 October 14.
- <sup>143</sup> Livingston, "Ford Sterling Seen Victor Against Illness," *Hollywood Citizen News*, 1939 August 4.
- <sup>144</sup> "Sterling, Famous Comic, Loses Leg," *Daily News* (Los Angeles, California), 1939 August 11, p. 12.
- <sup>145</sup> "Sunny Spirit Bolsters Ill Ford Sterling," *Long Beach (California) Press Telegram*, 1939 August 11, p. 12.
- <sup>146</sup> "Ford Sterling, veteran film comic, dies," *Daily News* (Los Angeles, California), 1939 October 14, p. 7. This article incorrectly states he was 52 years old when he died.

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<sup>147</sup> "California, County Birth and Death Records, 1800-1994," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QGP6-6NZH> : 2021 March 1), George Stich in entry for George Ford Stich Aka Sterling, 1939. This death certificate has several errors: his middle name, year of birth, age, birthplace, birthplace of his father, and possibly his mother's middle name.

<sup>148</sup> "Rites today for Ford Sterling," *Daily News* (Los Angeles, California), 1939 October 17, p. 6.

<sup>149</sup> "Ford Sterling's Rites Draw Film Notables," *Hollywood Citizen News*, 1939 October 17, p. 9.

<sup>150</sup> "Last tribute paid to Ford Sterling," *Daily News* (Los Angeles, California), 1939 October 18, p. 20.

<sup>151</sup> Ancestry, *Find A Grave*, database with images (<http://www.findagrave.com> : accessed 2022 December 19), memorial 6682240, Ford Sterling (1882-1939), Hollywood Forever, Hollywood, Los Angeles County, California; gravestone photograph by AJ. The plaque over his niche gives an incorrect year for his birth.

<sup>152</sup> Ancestry, *Find A Grave*, database with images (<http://www.findagrave.com> : accessed 2022 December 30), memorial 6682852, Teddy Sampson (1898-1970), San Fernando Mission Cemetery, Mission Hills, Los Angeles County, California. This website has 1898 for her birth year, and this is incorrect because the date on her gravestone is that incorrect year. Her birth certificate confirms other sources that her birth year was 1895.

<sup>153</sup> "Meet the Independent Major," *Hollywood Citizen News*, 1941 February 21, p. 25.

<sup>154</sup> Willis, "Ford Sterling: A Perfectly 'Serious' Funny Man," p. 14-15.

<sup>155</sup> Lowell E. Redelings, "One Minute Interviews," *Hollywood Citizen News*, 1948 April 23, p. 18.

<sup>156</sup> "Making 'Em Laugh Is Serious Business," *Venice (California) Daily Vanguard*, 1915 July 28, p. 4.