

= RKO Pictures =

RKO (Radio @-@ Keith @-@ Orpheum) Pictures (also known as RKO Productions , Radio Pictures , RKO Radio Pictures , RKO Teleradio Pictures and , for a short time , RKO Pathé) was an American film production and distribution company . It was one of the Big Five studios of Hollywood 's Golden Age . The business was formed after the Keith @-@ Albee @-@ Orpheum (KAO) vaudeville theatre circuit and Joseph P. Kennedy 's Film Booking Offices of America (FBO) studio were brought together under the control of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) in October 1928 . RCA chief David Sarnoff engineered the merger to create a market for the company 's sound @-@ on @-@ film technology , RCA Photophone . By the mid @-@ 1940s , the studio was under the control of investor Floyd Odum .

RKO has long been celebrated for its series of musicals starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in the mid @-@ to @-@ late 1930s . Actors Katharine Hepburn and , later , Robert Mitchum had their first major successes at the studio . Cary Grant was a mainstay for years . The work of producer Val Lewton 's low @-@ budget horror unit and RKO 's many ventures into the field now known as film noir have been acclaimed , largely after the fact , by film critics and historians . The studio produced two of the most famous films in motion picture history : King Kong and Citizen Kane .

Maverick industrialist Howard Hughes took over RKO in 1948 . After years of turmoil and decline under his control , Hughes sold the troubled studio to General Tire and Rubber Company in 1955 . The original RKO Pictures ceased production in 1957 and was effectively dissolved two years later . In 1981 , broadcaster RKO General , the corporate heir , revived it as a production subsidiary , RKO Pictures Inc . In 1989 , this business with its few remaining assets , the trademarks and remake rights to many classic RKO films , was sold to new owners , who now operate the small independent company RKO Pictures LLC .

= = Origin of company = =

In October 1927 , Warner Bros. released The Jazz Singer , the first feature @-@ length talking picture . Its success prompted Hollywood to convert from silent to sound film production en masse . The Radio Corporation of America (RCA) controlled an advanced optical sound @-@ on @-@ film system , RCA Photophone , recently developed by General Electric . However , its hopes of joining in the anticipated boom in sound movies faced a major hurdle : Warner Bros. and Fox , Hollywood 's other vanguard sound studios , were already financially and technologically aligned with ERPI , a subsidiary of AT & T 's Western Electric division . The industry 's two largest companies , Paramount and Loew 's / MGM , with two other major studios , Universal and First National , were poised to contract with ERPI for sound conversion as well .

Seeking a customer for Photophone , in late 1927 David Sarnoff , then general manager of RCA , approached Joseph P. Kennedy about using the system for Kennedy 's modest @-@ sized studio , Film Booking Offices of America (FBO) . Negotiations resulted in General Electric acquiring a substantial interest in FBO ? Sarnoff had apparently already conceived of a plan for the company to attain a central position in the film industry , maximizing Photophone revenue . Next on the agenda was securing a string of exhibition venues like those the leading Hollywood production companies owned . Kennedy began investigating the possibility of such a purchase . Around that time , the large Keith @-@ Albee @-@ Orpheum (KAO) circuit of theaters , built around the then @-@ fading medium of live vaudeville , was attempting a transition to the movie business . In mid @-@ 1927 , the filmmaking operations of Pathé Exchange and Cecil B. De Mille 's Producers Distributing Corporation (PDC) had united under KAO 's control . Early in 1928 , KAO general manager John J. Murdock , who had assumed the presidency of Pathé , turned to Kennedy as an adviser in consolidating the studio with De Mille 's company , PDC . This was the relationship Sarnoff and Kennedy sought .

After an aborted attempt by Kennedy to bring yet another studio that had turned to him for help , First National Pictures , into the Photophone fold , RCA was ready to step back in : the company acquired Kennedy 's stock in both FBO and the KAO theater business . On October 23 , 1928 , RCA

announced the creation of the Radio @-@ Keith @-@ Orpheum holding company , with Sarnoff as chairman of the board . Kennedy , who withdrew from his executive positions in the merged companies , kept Pathé separate from RKO and under his personal control . RCA owned the governing stock interest in RKO , 22 percent ; in the early 1930s , RCA 's share of stock in the company rose as high as 60 percent . The company 's production and distribution arm , presided over by former FBO vice @-@ president Joseph I. Schnitzer , was incorporated early in 1929 as Radio Pictures . Looking to get out of the film business the following year , Kennedy arranged in late 1930 for RKO to purchase Pathé from him .

On January 29 , 1931 , Pathé , with its contract players , well @-@ regarded newsreel operation , and Culver Studios along with its associated backlot , located more or less next door to the vastly larger MGM lot was merged into RKO proper as Kennedy sold off the last of his stock in the company he had been instrumental in creating .

= = Golden Age studio = =

= = = Early years = = =

Declaring that it would make only all @-@ talking films , RKO began shooting at the small facility FBO shared with Pathé in New York City while the main FBO studio in Hollywood was technologically refitted . In charge of production was William LeBaron , who had held the same position at FBO . The new company 's two initial releases were musicals : The melodramatic Syncopation premiered on March 29 , 1929 . The comedic Street Girl debuted July 30 . This was billed as RKO 's first " official " production ? first to follow the formal incorporation of Radio Pictures , first to be made in Hollywood . A few nonsinging pictures followed , but the studio 's first major hit was again a musical . RKO spent heavily on the lavish Rio Rita , including a number of Technicolor sequences . Opening in September to rave reviews , it was named one of the ten best pictures of the year by Film Daily . Cinema historian Richard Barrios credits it with initiating the " first age of the filmed Broadway musical " . By the end of the year , RKO was making use of an additional production facility ? five hundred acres that had been acquired near Encino in the San Fernando Valley as a backlot for exteriors and large @-@ scale standing sets .

RKO released a limited slate of twelve features in its first year ; in 1930 , that figure more than doubled to twenty @-@ nine . Originally organized as the distinct business entities RKO Productions Inc. and RKO Distributing Corp. , by July the studio was making a transition to the new , unified RKO Radio Pictures Inc . Encouraged by Rio Rita 's success , RKO produced several costly musicals incorporating Technicolor sequences , among them Dixiana and Hit the Deck , both scripted and directed , like Rio Rita , by Luther Reed . Following the example of the other major studios , RKO had planned to create its own musical revue , Radio Revels . Promoted as the studio 's most extravagant production to date , it was to be photographed entirely in Technicolor . The project was abandoned , however , as the public 's taste for musicals temporarily subsided . From a total of more than sixty Hollywood musicals in 1929 and over eighty the following year , the number dropped to eleven in 1931 . RKO was left in a bind : it still had a contract with Technicolor to produce two more features with its system . Complicating matters , audiences had come to associate color with the momentarily out @-@ of @-@ favor musical genre due to a glut of such productions from the major Hollywood studios . Fulfilling its obligations , RKO produced two all @-@ Technicolor pictures , The Runaround and Fanny Foley Herself (both 1931) , containing no musical sequences . Neither was a success .

Even as the U.S. economy foundered , RKO had gone on a spending spree , buying up theater after theater to add to its exhibition chain . In October 1930 , the company purchased a 50 percent stake in the New York 's Van Beuren studio , which specialized in cartoons and live shorts . RKO 's production schedule soon surpassed forty features a year , released under the names " Radio Pictures " and , for a short time after the 1931 merger , " RKO Pathé " . Cimarron (1931) , produced by LeBaron himself , would become the only RKO production to win the Academy Award

for Best Picture ; nonetheless , having cost a profligate \$ 1 @. @ 4 million to make , it was a money @- @ loser on original domestic release . The most popular RKO star of this pre @- @ Code era was Irene Dunne , who made her debut as the lead in the 1930 musical Leathernecking and was a headliner at the studio for the entire decade . Other major performers included Joel McCrea , Ricardo Cortez , Dolores del Río , and Mary Astor . Richard Dix , Oscar @- @ nominated for his lead performance in Cimarron , would serve as RKO 's standby B @- @ movie star until the early 1940s . The comedy team of Bert Wheeler and Robert Woolsey , often wrangling over ingenue Dorothy Lee , was a bankable mainstay for years . Constance Bennett , Ann Harding , and Helen Twelvetrees came over with Pathé . The Pathé acquisition , though a defensible investment in the long term for its physical facilities , was yet another major expense borne by the fledgling RKO , particularly as Pathé 's stock price had been artificially inflated by some prepurchase finagling . After little more than a year of semiautonomous operation within RKO , Pathé was dissolved as a feature production unit .

= = = Success under Selznick = = =

Exceptions like Cimarron and Rio Rita aside , RKO 's product was largely regarded as mediocre , so in October , 1931 , twenty @- @ nine @- @ year @- @ old David O. Selznick visited Sarnoff in New York and convinced him to replace LeBaron as production chief . As the new studio chief Selznick implemented rigorous cost @- @ control measures , championed the unit production system , which gave the producers of individual movies much greater independence than they had under the prevailing central producer system . " Under the factory system of production you rob the director of his individualism " , said Selznick , " and this being a creative industry that is harmful to the quality of the product made " (even though Selznick earned a sour reputation for meddling in director output) . Instituting unit production , he predicted , would also result in cost savings of 30 ? 40 percent . To make films under the new system , Selznick recruited prize behind @- @ the @- @ camera personnel , such as director George Cukor and producer / director Merian C. Cooper , and gave producer Pandro S. Berman , aged twenty @- @ six , increasingly important projects . Selznick discovered and signed a young actress who would become a star created by RKO , Katharine Hepburn . Also enlisted was established star John Barrymore for a few memorable performances . From September 1932 on , print advertising for the company 's features displayed the revised name " RKO Radio Pictures " ; the Pathé name was used only for newsreels and documentaries . That same year , the New York City ? based corporate headquarters moved into the new RKO Building , an Art Deco skyscraper rising high above RCA controlled Radio City Music Hall that was one of the first Rockefeller Center structures to open .

Selznick worked fifteen months as RKO production chief before resigning over a dispute with new corporate president Merlin Aylesworth , and then moved up to MGM to work for his powerful father @- @ in @- @ law , Louis B. Mayer . One of his last acts at RKO was to approve a screen test for a thirty @- @ three @- @ year @- @ old , balding Broadway song @- @ and @- @ dance man named Fred Astaire . In a memo , Selznick wrote , " I feel , in spite of his enormous ears and bad chin line , that his charm is ... tremendous " . Selznick 's tenure was widely considered a success : In 1931 , before he arrived , the studio had produced forty @- @ two features for \$ 16 million in total budgets (an average cost of \$ 380 @, @ 000 per picture) . In 1932 , under Selznick , forty @- @ one features were made for only \$ 10 @. @ 2 million (an average budget of \$ 268 @, @ 000 per feature) , yet with improvement in polish and popularity . He backed several major successes , including A Bill of Divorcement (1932) , with Cukor directing Hepburn 's debut , and the monumental King Kong (1933) ? largely Merian Cooper 's brainchild , brought to life by the astonishing special effects work of Willis O 'Brien . Still , shaky finances and excesses that marked the company 's pre @- @ Selznick days had not left RKO in good enough shape to withstand the Depression ; the movie studio sank into receivership in early 1933 , from which it did not emerge until 1940 .

= = = Cooper at the helm = = =

Cooper took over as production head after Selznick's departure and oversaw two hits starring Hepburn: *Morning Glory* (1933), for which she won her first Oscar, and *Little Women* (1933), director Cukor's second collaboration with the actress. Among the studio's in-house productions, the latter was the biggest box office success of the decade. Ginger Rogers had already made several minor films for RKO when Cooper signed her to a seven-year contract and cast her in the big-budget musical *Flying Down to Rio* (1933). Rogers was paired with Astaire, making his movie debut. Billed fourth and fifth respectively, the picture turned them into stars. Hermes Pan, assistant to the film's dance director, would become one of Hollywood's leading choreographers through his subsequent work with Astaire.

Along with Columbia Pictures, RKO became one of the primary homes of the screwball comedy. As film historian James Harvey describes, compared to their richer competition, the two studios were "more receptive to experiment, more tolerant of chaos on the set. It was at these two lesser majors' ... that nearly all the preeminent screwball directors did their important films? [Howard] Hawks and [Gregory] La Cava and [Leo] McCarey and [George] Stevens." The relatively unheralded William A. Seiter directed the studio's first significant contribution to the genre, *The Richest Girl in the World* (1934). The drama *Of Human Bondage* (1934), directed by John Cromwell, was Bette Davis's first great success. Stevens's *Alice Adams* and director John Ford's *The Informer* were each nominated for the 1935 Best Picture Oscar; the Best Director statuette won by Ford was the only one ever given for an RKO production. *The Informer*'s star, Victor McLaglen, also took home an Academy Award; he would appear in a dozen movies for the studio over a span of two decades.

Lacking the financial resources of industry leaders MGM, Paramount, Warner Bros. / First National and Fox, RKO turned out many pictures during the era that made up for it with high style in an Art Deco mode, exemplified by such Astaire-Rogers musicals as *The Gay Divorcee* (1934), their first pairing as leads, and *Top Hat* (1935). One of the figures most responsible for this was creative Van Nest Polglase, chief of RKO's highly regarded design department for almost a decade. Film historian James Naremore has described RKO as "chiefly a designer's studio. It never had a stable of important actors, writers, or directors, but ... it was rich in artists and special effects technicians. As a result, its most distinctive pictures contained a strong element of fantasy? not so much the fantasy of horror, which during the thirties was the province of Universal, but the fantasy of the marvelous and adventurous."

As a group, the studio's craft divisions were among the strongest in the industry. Costumer Walter Plunkett, who worked with the company from the close of the FBO era through the end of 1939, was known as the top period wardrobe in the business. Sidney Saunders, innovative head of the studio's paint department, was responsible for significant progress in rear projection quality. On June 13, 1935, RKO premiered the first feature film shot entirely in advanced three-strip Technicolor, *Becky Sharp*. The movie was coproduced with Pioneer Pictures, founded by Cooper? who departed RKO after two years helming production? and John Hay "Jock" Whitney, who brought in his cousin Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney; Cooper had successfully encouraged the Whitneys to purchase a major share of the Technicolor business as well. Though judged by critics a failure as drama, *Becky Sharp* was widely lauded for its visual brilliance and technical expertise. RKO also employed some of the industry's leading artists and craftsmen whose work was never seen. From the studio's earliest days through late 1935, Max Steiner, regarded by many historians as the most influential composer of the early years of sound cinema, made music for over 100 RKO films. Murray Spivack, head of the studio's audio special effects department, made important advances in the use of rerecording technology first heard in *King Kong*.

== Briskin and Berman ==

In October 1935 the ownership team expanded, with financier Floyd Odlum leading a syndicate that bought 50 percent of RCA's stake in the company; the Rockefeller brothers, also major stockholders, increasingly became involved in the business. While RKO made a concerted effort to promote Katharine Hepburn's career, her box office record while at the studio was checkered.

Barbara Stanwyck joined the studio's roster ? though Stanwyck would have little success during her few years there while Ann Sothorn enjoyed a career boost . Between 1935 and 1937 Miss Sothorn was paired five times with Gene Raymond out of her seven RKO films . Then , in 1939 MGM finally found a replacement for the deceased Jean Harlow when they hired Sothorn . Cary Grant regularly appeared in RKO films for some years , but was one of the first leading men of the sound era to work extensively as a freelancer , under nonexclusive studio deals .

Soon after the appointment of a new production chief , Samuel J. Briskin , in late 1935 , RKO entered into an important distribution deal with animator Walt Disney (Van Beuren consequently folded its cartoon operations) . From 1936 to 1954 , the studio released Disney features and shorts ; Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) was the highest grossing movie in the period between The Birth of a Nation (1915) and Gone with the Wind (1939) . Following the change in print branding a few years earlier , the opening and closing logos on RKO movies , other than the Pathé nonfiction line , were changed from " Radio Pictures " to " RKO Radio Pictures " in 1936 . In February 1937 , Selznick , now an independent producer , leased RKO's Culver City studio and Forty Acres backlot . In addition to its central Hollywood studio , RKO productions now revolved around its vast Encino movie ranch . Modern sources state that Briskin's departure in late 1937 was due to a decline in the quality of RKO's product , although admitting that the Disney association was beneficial . However , contemporary sources point to a contractual rift between Briskin and Spitz , and Briskin had been offered a three @-@ year contract extension , but had declined .

Pandro Berman ? who had filled in on three previous occasions ? accepted the position of production chief on a noninterim basis . As it turned out , he would leave the job before the decade's turn , but his brief tenure resulted in some of the most notable films in studio history , including Gunga Din , with Grant and McLaglen ; Love Affair , starring Dunne and Charles Boyer ; and The Hunchback of Notre Dame (all 1939) . Charles Laughton , who gave a now fabled performance as Quasimodo in the latter , returned periodically to the studio , headlining six more RKO features . For Maureen O'Hara , who made her American screen debut in the film , it was the first of ten pictures she would make for RKO through 1952 . After co @-@ starring with Ginger Rogers for the eighth time in The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle (1939) , Fred Astaire departed the studio .

The studio's B Western star of the period was George O'Brien , who made eighteen RKO pictures , sixteen between 1938 and 1940 . The Saint in New York (1938) successfully launched a B detective series featuring the character Simon Templar that would run through 1943 . The Wheeler and Woolsey comedy series ended in 1937 when Woolsey became ill (he died the following year) . RKO filled the void by releasing independently produced features such as the Dr. Christian series and the Laurel and Hardy comedy The Flying Deuces (1939) . The studio soon had its own new B comedy star in Lupe Vélez : The Girl from Mexico (1939) was followed by seven frantic installments of the Mexican Spitfire series , all featuring Leon Errol , between 1940 and 1943 . The studio's technical departments maintained their reputation as industry leaders ; Vernon Walker's special effects unit became famous for its sophisticated use of the optical printer and lifelike matte work , an art that would reach its apex with 1941's Citizen Kane .

= = = Kane and Schaefer's troubles = = =

Pan Berman had received his first screen credit in 1925 as a nineteen @-@ year @-@ old assistant director on FBO's Midnight Molly . He departed RKO in December 1939 after policy clashes with studio president George J. Schaefer , handpicked the previous year by the Rockefellers and backed by Sarnoff . With Berman gone , Schaefer became in effect production chief , though other men ? including the former head of the industry censorship board , Joseph I. Breen ? nominally filled the role . Schaefer , announcing his philosophy with a new studio slogan , " Quality Pictures at a Premium Price " , was keen on signing up independent producers whose films RKO would distribute . In 1941 , the studio landed one of the most prestigious independents in Hollywood when it arranged to handle Samuel Goldwyn's productions . The first two Goldwyn pictures released by the studio were highly successful : The Little Foxes , directed by William Wyler and starring Bette Davis , garnered four Oscar nominations , while the Howard Hawks ? directed Ball of

Fire at last brought Barbara Stanwyck a hit under the RKO banner . However , Schaefer agreed to terms so favorable to Goldwyn that it was next to impossible for the studio to make money off his films . David O. Selznick loaned out his leading contracted director for two RKO pictures in 1941 : Alfred Hitchcock 's Mr. and Mrs. Smith was a modest success and Suspicion a more substantial one , with an Oscar @-@ winning turn by Joan Fontaine .

That May , RKO released Citizen Kane , coproducing with director Orson Welles 's Mercury Productions . While it opened to strong reviews and would go on to be hailed as one of the greatest movies ever made , it lost money at the time and brought down the wrath of the Hearst newspaper chain on RKO . The next year saw the commercial failure of Welles 's The Magnificent Ambersons ? like Kane , critically lauded and overbudget ? and the expensive embarrassment of his aborted documentary It 's All True . The three Mercury productions combined to drain \$ 2 million from the RKO coffers , major money for a corporation that had reported an overall deficit of \$ 1 million in 1940 and a nominal profit of a bit more than \$ 500 @,@ 000 in 1941 . Many of RKO 's other artistically ambitious pictures were also dying at the box office and it was losing its last exclusive deal with a major star as well . Rogers , after winning an Oscar in 1941 for her performance in the previous year 's Kitty Foyle , held out for a freelance contract like Grant 's ; after 1943 , she would appear in just one more RKO production , thirteen years later . On June 17 , 1942 , Schaefer tendered his resignation . He departed a weakened and troubled studio , but RKO was about to turn the corner . Propelled by the box @-@ office boom of World War II and guided by new management , RKO would make a strong comeback over the next half @-@ decade .

= = = Rebound under Koerner = = =

By the end of June 1942 , Floyd Odum had taken over a controlling interest in the company via his Atlas Corporation , edging aside the Rockefellers and Sarnoff . Charles Koerner , former head of the RKO theater chain and allied with Odum , had assumed the title of production chief some time prior to Schaefer 's departure . With Schaefer gone , Koerner could actually do the job . He announced a new corporate motto , " Showmanship In Place of Genius : A New Deal at RKO " , a snipe at Schaefer 's artistic ambitions in general and his sponsorship of Welles in particular . He brought the studio much @-@ needed stability until his death in February 1946 . The change in RKO 's fortunes was virtually immediate : corporate profits rose from \$ 736 @,@ 241 in 1942 (the theatrical division compensating for the studio 's \$ 2 @.@ 34 million deficit) to \$ 6 @.@ 96 million the following year . The Rockefellers sold off their stock and , early in 1943 , RCA dispensed with the last of its holdings in the company as well , cutting David Sarnoff 's ties to the studio that was largely his conception . In June 1944 , RKO created a television production subsidiary , RKO Television Corporation , to provide content for the new medium . RKO became the first major studio to produce for television with Talk Fast , Mister , a one @-@ hour drama filmed at RKO @-@ Pathé studios in New York and broadcast by the DuMont network 's New York station , WABD , on December 18 , 1944 . In collaboration with Mexican businessman Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta , RKO established Estudios Churubusco in Mexico City in 1945 .

With RKO on increasingly secure ground , Koerner sought to increase its output of handsomely budgeted , star @-@ driven features . However , the studio 's only remaining major stars under anything like extended contracts were Grant , whose services were shared with Columbia Pictures , and O 'Hara , shared with Twentieth Century @-@ Fox . Lacking in @-@ house stars , Koerner and his successors under Odum arranged with the other studios to loan out their biggest names or signed one of the growing number of freelance performers to short @-@ term , " pay or play " deals . Thus RKO pictures of the mid- and late forties offered Bing Crosby , Henry Fonda , and others who were out of the studio 's price range for extended contracts . John Wayne appeared in 1943 's A Lady Takes a Chance while on loan from Republic Pictures ; he was soon working regularly with RKO , making nine more movies for the studio . Gary Cooper appeared in RKO releases produced by Goldwyn and , later , the startup International Pictures , and Claudette Colbert starred in a number of RKO coproductions . Ingrid Bergman appeared under a variety of hats : on loan out from Selznick in The Bells of St. Mary 's (1945) , the biggest hit of any in @-@ house RKO production

during the 1940s ; in the coproductions *Notorious* (1946) and *Stromboli* (1950) ; and in the independently produced *Joan of Arc* (1948) . Freelancing Randolph Scott appeared in one major RKO release annually from 1943 through 1948 .

In similar fashion , many leading directors made one or more films at RKO during this era , including Alfred Hitchcock once more , with *Notorious* , and Jean Renoir , with *This Land Is Mine* (1943) , reuniting Laughton and O 'Hara , and *The Woman on the Beach* (1947) . John Ford 's *The Fugitive* (1947) and *Fort Apache* (1948) , which appeared right before studio ownership changed hands again , were followed by *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) and *Wagon Master* (1950) ; all four were co -@-@ productions between RKO and Argosy Pictures , the company run by Ford and RKO alumnus Merian C. Cooper . Of the directors under long @-@ term contract to RKO in the 1940s , the best known was Edward Dmytryk , who first came to notice with the remarkably profitable *Hitler 's Children* (1943) . Shot on a \$ 205 @,@ 000 budget placing it in the bottom quartile of Big Five studio productions , it was one of the ten biggest Hollywood hits of the year . Another low @-@ cost war @-@ themed film directed by Dmytryk , *Behind the Rising Sun* , released a few months later , was similarly profitable .

= = = Focus on B movies = = =

Much more than the other Big Five studios , RKO relied on B pictures to fill up its schedule . Of the thirty @-@ one features released by RKO in 1944 , for instance , ten were budgeted below \$ 200 @,@ 000 , twelve were in the \$ 200 @,@ 000 to \$ 500 @,@ 000 range , and only nine cost more . In contrast , a clear majority of the features put out by the other top four studios were budgeted at over a half a million dollars . A focus on B pictures limited the studio 's financial risk ; while it also limited the potential for reward (Dmytryk 's extraordinary coups aside) , RKO had a history of making better profits with its run @-@ of @-@ the @-@ mill and low @-@ cost product than with its A movies . The studio 's low @-@ budget films offered training opportunities for new directors , as well , among them Jacques Tourneur , Mark Robson , Robert Wise , and Anthony Mann . Robson and Wise received their first directing assignments with producer Val Lewton , whose specialized B horror unit also included the more experienced director Jacques Tourneur . The Lewton unit 's moody , atmospheric work ? represented by films such as *Cat People* (1942) , *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) , and *The Body Snatcher* (1945) ? is now highly regarded . Richard Dix concluded his lengthy RKO career with the 1943 Lewton production *The Ghost Ship* . Tim Holt was RKO 's cowboy star of the era , appearing in forty @-@ six B Westerns and more than fifty movies altogether for the studio . In 1940 , Chester Lauck and Norris Goff brought their famous comic characters Lum and Abner from radio to RKO for a six @-@ film run . The Falcon detective series began in 1941 ; the Saint and the Falcon were so similar that Saint creator Leslie Charteris sued RKO . The Falcon was first played by George Sanders , who had appeared five times as the Saint . He bowed out after four Falcon films and was replaced by his brother , Tom Conway . Conway had a nine @-@ film run in the part before the series ended in 1946 . Johnny Weissmuller starred in six Tarzan pictures for RKO between 1943 and 1948 before being replaced by Lex Barker .

Film noir , to which lower budgets lent themselves , became something of a house style at the studio , indeed , the RKO B *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940) is widely seen as initiating noir 's classic period . Its cinematographer , Nicholas Musuraca , who began at FBO in the 1920s and stayed with RKO through 1954 , is a central figure in creating the look of classic noir . Design chief Albert D 'Agostino ? another long @-@ term , who succeeded Van Nest Polglase in 1941 ? and art director Walter Keller , along with others in the department , such as art directors Carroll Clark and Jack Okey and set decorator Darrell Silvera , are similarly credited . The studio 's 1940s list of contract players was filled with noir regulars : Robert Mitchum (who graduated to major star status) and Robert Ryan each made no fewer than ten film noirs for RKO . Gloria Grahame , Jane Greer , and Lawrence Tierney were also notable studio players in the field . Freelancer George Raft starred in two noir hits : *Johnny Angel* (1945) and *Nocturne* (1946) . Tourneur , Musuraca , Mitchum , and Greer , along with D 'Agostino 's design group , joined to make the A @-@ budgeted *Out of the Past* (1947) , now considered one of the greatest of all film noirs . Nicholas Ray began his directing

career with the noir *They Live by Night* (1948) , the first of a number of well @-@ received films he made for RKO . A big money maker were the dark and moody Dick Tracy detective film series ; *Dick Tracy , Detective* (1945) , *Dick Tracy vs. Cueball* (1946) (as " Filthy Flora " , character actress Esther Howard chewed up the scenery in this one) , *Dick Tracy 's Dilemma* (1947) , and *Dick Tracy Meets Gruesome* (1947) , (RKO wanted to title this feature " *Dick Tracy vs Karloff* " , but Boris Karloff nixed that idea , even though he did play the part of Gruesome) .

= = = HUAC and Howard Hughes = = =

RKO , and the movie industry as a whole , had its most profitable year ever in 1946 . A Goldwyn production released by RKO , *The Best Years of Our Lives* , was the most successful Hollywood film of the decade . But the legal status of the industry 's reigning business model was increasingly being called into doubt : the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Bigelow v. RKO* that the company was liable for damages under antitrust statutes for having denied an independent movie house access to first run films ? a common practice among all of the Big Five . With profits at a high point , Floyd Odlum cashed in by selling off about 40 percent of his shares in the company to a group of investment firms . After Koerner 's death , Radio @-@ Keith @-@ Orpheum president N. Peter Rathvon and RKO Radio Pictures president Ned Depinet had exchanged positions , with Depinet moving to the corporate offices in New York and Rathvon relocating to Hollywood and doubling as production chief while a permanent replacement was sought for Koerner . On the first day of 1947 , producer and Oscar @-@ winning screenwriter Dore Schary , who had been working at the studio on loan from Selznick , took over the role .

RKO appeared in good shape to build on its recent successes , but the year brought a number of unpleasant harbingers for all of Hollywood . The British government imposed a 75 percent tax on films produced abroad ; along with similarly confiscatory taxes and quota laws enacted by other countries , this led to a sharp decline in foreign revenues . The postwar attendance boom peaked sooner than expected and television emerged as a competitor for audience interest . Across the board , profits fell ? a 27 percent drop for the Hollywood studios from 1946 to 1947 . The phenomenon that would become known as McCarthyism was building strength , and in October , the House Un @-@ American Activities Committee (HUAC) began hearings into Communism in the motion picture industry . Two of RKO 's top talents , Dmytryk and producer Adrian Scott , refused to cooperate . As a consequence , they were fired by RKO per the terms of the Waldorf Statement , the major studios ' pledge to " eliminate any subversives " . Scott , Dmytryk , and eight others who also defied HUAC ? dubbed the Hollywood Ten ? were blacklisted across the industry . Ironically , the studio 's major success of the year was *Crossfire* , a Scott ? Dmytryk film . Odlum concluded it was time to exit the film business , and he put his remaining RKO shares ? approximately 25 percent of the outstanding stock ? on the market . Before the turn of the year , the Pathé @-@ branded newsreel was sold to Warner Bros. For her performance in *The Farmer 's Daughter* (1947) , a coproduction with Selznick 's Vanguard Films , Loretta Young won the Best Actress Oscar the following March . It would turn out to be the last major Academy Award for an RKO picture .

In May 1948 , eccentric aviation tycoon and occasional movie producer Howard Hughes gained control of the company , beating out British film magnate J. Arthur Rank as the buyer of Odlum 's interest . During Hughes 's tenure , RKO suffered its worst years since the early 1930s , as his capricious management style took a heavy toll . Production chief Schary quit almost immediately due to his new boss 's interference and Rathvon soon followed . Within weeks of taking over , Hughes had dismissed three @-@ fourths of the work force ; production was virtually shut down for six months as the conservative Hughes shelved or canceled several of the " message pictures " that Schary had backed . Once shooting picked up again , Hughes quickly became notorious for meddling in minute production matters , particularly the presentation of actresses he favored . All of the Big Five saw their profits dwindle in 1948 ? from Fox , down 11 percent , to Loew 's / MGM , down 62 percent ? but at RKO they virtually vanished : from \$ 5 @. @ 1 million in 1947 to \$ 0 @. @ 5 million , a drop of 90 percent . The production @-@ distribution end of the RKO business , now deep in the red , would never make a profit again .

Offscreen , Robert Mitchum 's arrest and conviction for marijuana possession ? he would serve two months in jail ? was widely assumed to mean career death for RKO 's most promising young star , but Hughes surprised the industry by announcing that his contract was not endangered . Of much broader significance , Hughes decided to get the jump on his Big Five competitors by being the first to settle the federal government 's antitrust suit against the major studios , which had won a crucial Supreme Court ruling in *United States v. Paramount Pictures , Inc .* Under the consent decree he signed , Hughes agreed to dissolve the old parent company , Radio @-@ Keith @-@ Orpheum Corp. , and split RKO 's production @-@ distribution business and its exhibition chain into two entirely separate corporations ? RKO Pictures Corp. and RKO Theatres Corp. ? with the obligation to promptly sell off one or the other . While Hughes delayed the divorcement procedure until December 1950 and didn 't actually sell his stock in the theater company for another three years , his decision to acquiesce was one of the crucial steps in the collapse of classical Hollywood 's studio system .

= = = Turmoil under Hughes = = =

While Hughes 's time at RKO was marked by dwindling production and a slew of expensive flops , the studio continued to turn out some well @-@ received films under production chiefs Sid Rogell and Sam Bischoff , though both became fed up with Hughes 's meddling and quit after less than two years . (Bischoff would be the last man to hold the job under Hughes .) There were B noirs such as *The Window* (1949) , which turned into a hit , and *The Set @-@ Up* (1949) , directed by Robert Wise and starring Robert Ryan , which won the Critic 's Prize at the Cannes Film Festival . *The Thing from Another World* (1951) , a science @-@ fiction drama coproduced with Howard Hawks 's Winchester Pictures , is seen as a classic of the genre . In 1952 , RKO put out two films directed by Fritz Lang , *Rancho Notorious* and *Clash by Night* . The latter was a project of the renowned Jerry Wald ? Norman Krasna production team , lured by Hughes from Warner Bros. with great fanfare in August 1950 .

The company also began a close working relationship with Ida Lupino . She starred in two suspense films with Robert Ryan ? Nicholas Ray 's *On Dangerous Ground* (1952 , though shooting had been completed two years earlier) and *Beware , My Lovely* (1952) , a coproduction between RKO and Lupino 's company , *The Filmakers* . Of more historic note , Lupino was Hollywood 's only female director during the period ; of the five pictures *The Filmakers* made with RKO , Lupino directed three , including her now celebrated *The Hitch @-@ Hiker* (1953) . Exposing many moviegoers to Asian cinema for the first time , RKO distributed Akira Kurosawa 's epochal *Rashomon* in the United States , sixteen months after its original 1950 Japanese release . The only smash hits released by RKO in the 1950s came out during this period , but neither was an in @-@ house production : Goldwyn 's *Hans Christian Andersen* (1952) was followed by Disney 's *Peter Pan* (1953) .

In early 1952 , Hughes fought off a lawsuit by screenwriter Paul Jarrico , who had been caught up in the latest round of HUAC hearings ? Hughes had fired him and removed his name from the credits of a recent release . The studio owner subsequently ordered 100 RKO employees on " leave of absence " while he established a " security office " to oversee an ideological vetting system . " We are going to screen everyone in a creative or executive capacity " , he declared . " The work of Communist sympathizers will not be used . " As more credits were expunged , some in the industry began to question whether Hughes 's hunt for subversives served primarily as a convenient rationale for further curtailing production and trimming expenses .

In September , Hughes and his corporate president , Ned E. Depinet , sold their RKO studio stock to a Chicago @-@ based syndicate with no experience in the movie business . Once Hughes learned that said company had connections to organized crime , he gained near @-@ total control of the studio in February 1953 at a cost of \$ 23 @.@ 5 million , becoming the first virtual sole owner of a studio since Hollywood 's pioneer days . The studio 's net loss in 1952 was over \$ 10 million , and shooting had taken place for just a single in @-@ house production over the last five months of the year . During the turmoil , Samuel Goldwyn ended his 11 @-@ year @-@ long distribution deal

with RKO . Wald and Krasna escaped their contracts and the studio as well . The deal that brought the team to RKO had called for them to produce sixty features over five years ; in just shy of half that time , they succeeded in making four . The RKO Encino movie ranch shut down permanently in 1954 and the property was sold off . Jack Webb 's NBC television series Dragnet was the last project to film on the rundown movie ranch for an episode entitled " The Big Producer " , where the lot played the part of a crumbling " Westside Studios " . In November , Hughes finally fulfilled his obligations under the 1948 consent decree , divesting RKO Theatres ; Albert A. List purchased the controlling interest in the business and renamed it List Industries . Hughes soon found himself the target of no less than five separate lawsuits filed by minority shareholders in RKO , accusing him of malfeasance in his dealings with the Chicago group and a wide array of acts of mismanagement . " RKO 's contract list is down to three actors and 127 lawyers " , quipped Dick Powell .

Looking to forestall the impending legal imbroglio , in early 1954 Hughes offered to buy out all of RKO 's other stockholders . Convinced that the studio was sinking , Walt Disney ended his arrangement with RKO and set up his own distribution firm , Buena Vista Pictures . Virtual , but not quite actual . Floyd Odlum reemerged to block Hughes from acquiring the 95 percent ownership of RKO stock he needed to write off the company 's losses against his earnings elsewhere . Hughes had reneged on his promise to give Odlum first option on buying the RKO theater chain when he divested it and was now paying the price . With negotiations between the two at a stalemate , in July 1955 , Hughes turned around and sold RKO pictures to the General Tire and Rubber Company for \$ 25 million . For Hughes , this was the effective end of a quarter @-@ century 's involvement in the movie business . Historian Betty Lasky describes Hughes 's relationship with RKO as a " systematic seven @-@ year rape . "

= = = General Tire and studio 's demise = = =

In taking control of the studio , General Tire restored RKO 's links to broadcasting . General Tire had bought the Yankee Network , a New England regional radio network , in 1943 . In 1950 , it purchased the West Coast regional Don Lee Broadcasting System , and two years later , the Bamberger Broadcasting Service , owner of the WOR TV and radio stations in New York City . The latter acquisition gave General Tire majority control of the Mutual Broadcasting System , one of America 's leading radio networks . General Tire then merged its broadcasting interests into a new division , General Teleradio .

Thomas O 'Neil , son of General Tire 's founder William O 'Neil and chairman of the broadcasting group , saw that the company 's new television stations , indeed all TV outlets , were in need of programming . They sought to acquire the RKO library , but Hughes would not sell to General Tire unless they purchased the studio outright . With the purchase of RKO , the studio 's library was his , and rights to the 742 films to which RKO retained clear title were quickly put up for sale . C & C Television Corp. , a subsidiary of beverage maker Cantrell & Cochrane , won the bidding in December 1955 . It was soon offering the films to independent stations in a package called " MovieTime USA " . RKO Teleradio Pictures ? the new company created from the merger of General Teleradio and the RKO studio ? retained the broadcast rights for the cities where it owned TV stations . By 1956 , RKO 's classic movies were playing widely on television , allowing many to see such films as Citizen Kane for the first time . The \$ 15 @.@ 2 million RKO made on the deal convinced the other major studios that their libraries held profit potential ? a turning point in the way Hollywood did business .

The new owners of RKO made an initial effort to revive the studio , hiring veteran producer William Dozier to head production . A needed cash infusion was realized in 1954 when the 89 acre RKO Encino movie ranch was sold off to make way for a new tract home development . During the first half of 1956 , the production facilities were as busy as they had been in a half @-@ decade . RKO Teleradio Pictures released Fritz Lang 's final two American films , While the City Sleeps and Beyond a Reasonable Doubt (both 1956) , but years of mismanagement had driven away many directors , producers , and stars . Other films included Bundle of Joy , a remake of the Ginger Rogers @-@ starring Bachelor Mother which was re @-@ tooled as a vehicle for star couple Eddie

Fisher and Debbie Reynolds . Rogers herself would make a film for the new RKO (The First Traveling Saleslady) and would later comment that " coming back to RKO was like coming back to a picnic you 've been on last week , and pick up the bones all around and see what the ants have taken from the lunch that you left . " The studio was also saddled with the last of the inflated B movies such as Pearl of the South Pacific (1955) and The Conqueror (1956) that enchanted Hughes . The latter , starring John Wayne , was the biggest hit produced at the studio during the decade , but its \$ 4 @. @ 5 million in North American rentals did not come close to covering its \$ 6 million cost .

After a year and a half without a notable success , General Tire abruptly closed down production at RKO for good at the end of January 1957 , and three productions already in progress were never completed . The Hollywood and Culver City facilities were sold later that year for \$ 6 @. @ 15 million to Desilu Productions , owned by Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball , who had been an RKO contract player from 1935 to 1942 . Desilu would be acquired by Gulf and Western Industries in 1967 and merged into G + W 's other production company , Paramount Pictures ; the former RKO Hollywood studio became home to Paramount Television (now CBS Television Studios) , which it remains to this day . The renovated Culver City studio is now owned and operated as an independent production facility . Forty Acres , the Culver City backlot , was razed in the mid @-@ 1970s . List Industries , the former RKO Theatres Corp. , was acquired by Glen Alden Corp. in 1959 . After Glen Alden 's 1967 acquisition of the Stanley Warner theater group , the two chains were merged into RKO ? Stanley Warner Theatres . Cinerama purchased the exhibition circuit from Glen Alden in 1971 .

With the closing down of production , RKO also shut its distribution exchanges ; from 1957 forward , remaining pictures were released through other companies , primarily Universal @-@ International . The final RKO film , Verboten ! , a coproduction with director Samuel Fuller 's Globe Enterprises , was released by Columbia Pictures in March 1959 . That same year , " Pictures " was stripped from the corporate identity ; the holding company for General Tire 's broadcasting operation and the few remaining motion picture assets was renamed RKO General . In the words of scholar Richard B. Jewell , " The supreme irony of RKO 's existence is that the studio earned a position of lasting importance in cinema history largely because of its extraordinarily unstable history . Since it was the weakling of Hollywood 's ' majors , ' RKO welcomed a diverse group of individualistic creators and provided them ... with an extraordinary degree of freedom to express their artistic idiosyncrasies [I] t never became predictable and it never became a factory . "

= = RKO General = =

One of North America 's major radio and television broadcasters from the 1950s through the late 1980s , RKO General traces its roots to the 1943 purchase of the Yankee Network by General Tire . In 1952 , the company united its newly expanded broadcasting interests into a division dubbed General Teleradio . With the tire manufacturer 's acquisition of the RKO film studio in 1955 , its media businesses were brought together under the rubric of RKO Teleradio Pictures . In 1959 , following the breakup of the movie studio , the media division was given the name it would operate under for the next three decades , RKO General . In addition to its broadcasting activities , RKO General was also the holding company for many of General Tire 's (and , after its parent company 's reorganization , GenCorp 's) other noncore businesses , including soft @-@ drink bottling , Muzak (dept. store and elevator piped @-@ in) music , Video Independent Theatre (135 theatres strong) Circuit , hotel enterprises , and , for seventeen years , the original Frontier Airlines .

The RKO General radio lineup included some of the highest rated , most influential popular music stations in North America . In May 1965 , KHJ (AM) in Los Angeles introduced the Boss Radio variation of the top 40 format . The restrictive programming style was soon adopted by many of RKO 's other stations and imitated by non @-@ RKO broadcasters around the country . RKO 's FM station in New York pioneered numerous formats under a variety of call letters , including WOR and WXLO (" 99X ") ; in 1983 , as WRKS (" 98 @. @ 7 Kiss FM ") , it became one of the first major stations to regularly program rap music . In 1979 , RKO General created the RKO Radio Network ,

reportedly the first broadcasting web linked via satellite .

The company 's television stations , for the most part non ? network affiliated , were known for showing classic films (both RKO productions and many others) under the banner of Million Dollar Movie , launched by New York 's WOR @-@ TV in 1954 . In June 1962 , RKO General and Zenith Electronics initiated what became the first extended venture into subscription television service : through early 1969 , Hartford , Connecticut 's WHCT @-@ TV aired movies , sports , classical and pop music concerts , and other live performances without commercials , generating income from descrambler installation and weekly rental fees as well as individual program charges . However , RKO General 's most notable legacy is what may be the longest licensing dispute in television history . It began in 1965 , when General Tire was accused of obliging vendors to buy advertising with one of its stations if they wanted to keep their contracts . More than two decades ' worth of legal actions ensued , eventually forcing GenCorp (the parent company since 1983 of both General Tire and RKO General) to sell off its broadcast holdings under FCC pressure . RKO General exited the media business permanently in 1991 .

= = Later incarnations = =

Beginning with 1981 's Carbon Copy , RKO General became involved in the coproduction of a number of feature films and TV projects through a subsidiary created three years earlier , RKO Pictures Inc . In collaboration with Universal Studios , RKO put out five films over the next three years . Though the studio frequently worked with major names ? including Burt Reynolds and Dolly Parton in The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas , Jack Nicholson in The Border , and Nastassja Kinski in Cat People (all 1982) ? it met with little success . Starting with the Meryl Streep vehicle Plenty (1985) , RKO took on more projects as sole studio backer . Films such as the erotic thriller Half Moon Street (1986) and the Vietnam War drama Hamburger Hill (1987) followed , but production ended as GenCorp underwent a massive reorganization following an attempted hostile takeover . With RKO General dismantling its broadcast business , RKO Pictures Inc . , along with the original RKO studio 's trademark , remake rights , and other remaining assets , was spun off and put up for sale . After a bid by RKO Pictures ' own managers failed , it was acquired in late 1987 by Wesray Capital Corporation ? under the control of former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury William E. Simon and Ray Chambers ? and linked with their Six Flags amusement parks to form RKO / Six Flags Entertainment Inc .

In 1989 , RKO Pictures , which had produced no films while under Wesray control , was spun off yet again . Actress and Post Cereals heiress Dina Merrill and her husband , producer Ted Hartley , acquired a majority interest and merged the company with their Pavilion Communications . After a brief period as RKO / Pavilion , the business was reorganized as RKO Pictures LLC . With the inaugural RKO production under Hartley and Merrill 's ownership , False Identity (1990) , the company also stepped into the distribution business . In 1992 , it handled the well @-@ regarded independent production Laws of Gravity , directed by Nick Gomez . RKO 's next significant release came in 1998 with Mighty Joe Young , a remake of a 1949 RKO movie that was itself something of a King Kong redux . In the early 2000s , the company was involved as a coproducer on TV movies and modestly budgeted features at the rate of about one annually . In 2003 , RKO coproduced a Broadway stage version of the 1936 Astaire ? Rogers vehicle Swing Time , under the title Never Gonna Dance .

In 2003 , as well , RKO Pictures entered into a legal battle with Wall Street Financial Associates (WSFA) . Hartley and Merrill claimed that the owners of WSFA fraudulently induced them into signing an acquisition agreement by concealing their " cynical and rapacious " plans to purchase RKO with the intention only of dismantling it . WSFA sought a preliminary injunction prohibiting RKO 's majority owners from selling their interests in the company to any third parties . The WSFA motion was denied in July 2003 , freeing RKO to deal with another potential purchaser , InternetStudios.com. In 2004 , that planned sale fell through when InternetStudios.com apparently folded . The company 's minimal involvement in new film production continues to focus on its remake rights : Are We Done Yet ? , based on Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House (1948) , was

released in April 2007 to dismal reviews . Later in the year , RKO launched a horror division , Roseblood Movie Company . As of early 2010 , Roseblood 's mission had expanded , according to the RKO website , to encompass the " popular horror / thriller genre ... youth @-@ oriented feature @-@ length motion pictures that are edgy , sensuous , scary and commercial . " The most recent RKO release are Beyond a Reasonable Doubt (2009) , a remake of a 1956 RKO film directed by Fritz Lang and A Late Quartet (2012) . A stage version of Top Hat toured Great Britain in the second half of 2011 . In 2015 RKO released Barely Lethal .

= = Studio library = =

RKO Pictures LLC is the owner of all the trademarks and logos connected with RKO Radio Pictures Inc . , as well as the rights concerning stories , screenplays (including 800 to 900 unproduced scripts) , remakes , sequels , and prequels connected with the RKO library . The television , home entertainment , and theatrical distribution rights , however , are in other hands : The U.S. and Canadian theatrical , television ? and subsequently , video ? rights to the bulk of the RKO film library were sold at auction in 1971 after the holders , TransBeacon (a corporate descendant of C & C Television) , went bankrupt . The auctioned rights were split between United Artists and Marian B. Inc . (MBI) . In 1984 , MBI created a subsidiary , Marian Pictures Inc . (MBP) , to which it transferred its share of the RKO rights . Two years later GenCorp 's subsidiaries , RKO General and RKO Pictures , repurchased the rights then controlled by MBP . In the meantime , United Artists had been acquired by MGM . In 1986 , MGM / UA 's considerable library , including its RKO rights , was bought by Turner Broadcasting System for its new Turner Entertainment division . Ted Turner planned on colorizing the films , but RKO initially filed a lawsuit claiming copyright infringement , which was eventually resolved . In December 1987 , Wesray licensed the worldwide rights to the RKO library to Turner ; they included the films previously distributed by MBP and C & C. In October 1996 , Turner Broadcasting was merged into Time Warner , the parent company of Warner Bros .. Today both Warner Bros. and Turner Entertainment control and distribute the majority of the RKO library in the Americas and Australia , although RKO Pictures still retains the copyright .

International ownership of theatrical , television and home video distribution rights to RKO 's library is divided on a virtual country @-@ by @-@ country basis : In the UK , many of the RKO rights are currently held by Universal Studios . In 1981 , RAI , the public broadcasting service , acquired the Italian rights to the RKO library , which it now shares with Silvio Berlusconi 's Fininvest . In France , the rights are held by Ariès , in Spain are held by a company called Manga Films . The German rights were acquired in 1969 by KirchGruppe on behalf of its KirchMedia division , which went bankrupt in 2002 . EOS Entertainment 's Beta Film purchased many of KirchMedia 's rights in 2004 , and the library is now distributed by Kineos , created in 2005 as a Beta Film ? KirchMedia joint venture . In Japan as of 2009 all the RKO films are in the public domain under Japanese copyright law and have been distributed through various distributors .

Howard Hughes retained ownership of The Conqueror and Jet Pilot ; those films are now owned by Universal .

= = RKO Encino Ranch = =

RKO Radio Pictures ' Encino , California movie ranch consisted of 89 acres (360 @,@ 000 m2) located on the outskirts of the Los Angeles district of Encino , in the San Fernando Valley , near the Los Angeles River and west of Sepulveda Basin Recreation Area on Burbank Boulevard . RKO Radio Pictures purchased this property as a location to film its epic motion picture Cimarron (1931) , (winner of three Academy Awards for Best Picture , Best Writing , and Best Art Direction) . Art Director Max Ree won an Oscar for his creative design of the very first theme sets constructed on the movie ranch , which consisted of a complete Western town and a three @-@ block modern main street built as the fictional Oklahoma town of Osage .

In addition to Cimarron scenery , RKO continued to create a vast array of diverse sets for its ever @-@ expanding movie ranch that included a New York avenue , brownstone street , English row

houses , slum district , small town square , residential neighborhood , three working train depots , mansion estate , New England farm , Western ranch , a mammoth medieval City of Paris , European marketplace , Russian village , Yukon mining camp , ocean tank with sky backdrop , Moorish casbah , Mexican outpost , Sahara Desert fort , plaster mountain range diorama , and a football field @-@ sized United States map , which Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers danced across in The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle (1939) . Also available were scene docks , carpentry shop , prop storage , greenhouse , and three fully equipped soundstages with an average of more than 11 @,@ 000 square feet each .

A short list of classic movies that contain scenes shot on the RKO Pictures Ranch includes What Price Hollywood ? (1932) , King Kong (1933) , Of Human Bondage (1934) , Becky Sharp (1935) , Walking on Air (1936) , Stage Door (1937) , Kitty Foyle (1940) , Citizen Kane (1941) , Cat People (1942) , Murder , My Sweet (1944) , Dick Tracy film noir series (1945 @-@ 1947) , and They Live by Night (1948) , among others .

In 1953 Dragnet was the last project to film on RKO 's movie ranch for a 1954 NBC broadcast of an episode titled " The Big Producer " in which the crumbling lot played the part of a fictitious " Westside Studio . " Standing sets exhibited on this particular Dragnet program were a cocktail lounge on modern street , a ranch entry gate with a church and house facades (' George Bailey ' wrecked his car there during a snow storm in It 's a Wonderful Life in 1946) , plaster desert mountain range , ocean tank & sky backdrop used for Sinbad the Sailor (1947) , Notre Dame de Paris Carre built for The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1939) , and (the very first sets ever built on the ranch) the award @-@ winning Western town from Cimarron (1931) .

After all those unique themed sets were bulldozed under in 1954 , the ' Encino Village ' subdivision was built on the property with modern home designs by architect Martin Stern , Jr .

= = Logos and historical documentary TV series = =

Most Radio Pictures Inc. and RKO Radio Pictures Inc. films produced between 1929 and 1957 have an opening logo displaying the studio 's famous trademark , the spinning globe and radio tower , nicknamed the " Transmitter . " It was inspired by a two @-@ hundred @-@ foot tower built in Colorado for a giant electrical amplifier , or Tesla coil , created by inventor Nikola Tesla . Orson Welles referred to the design as his " favorite among the old logos , not just because it was so often a reliable portent It reminds us to listen . " The studio 's closing logo , a triangle enclosing a thunderbolt , was also a well @-@ known trademark . Instead of the Transmitter , however , many Disney and Goldwyn films released by the studio originally appeared with colorful versions of the RKO closing logo as part of the main title sequence . For decades , re @-@ releases of these films had Disney / Buena Vista (Disney RKO films) , Pixar and MGM / Goldwyn (Goldwyn films) logos replacing the RKO insignia , but the originals have been restored in many recent Blu @-@ ray and DVD editions . The Hartley ? Merrill RKO Pictures has created new versions of the Transmitter and the closing thunderbolt logo .

In 1986 , the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) commissioned the production of a six @-@ hour documentary series on the history of the RKO studios and their films . Edward Asner started as the series host and narrator . Many surviving RKO stars and technical people were interviewed and numerous extended clips from many RKO movies were included . The six @-@ episode series was aired on the PBS network in the late 1980s . No official VHS tapes or DVDs of this series have been released in the American @-@ Canadian NTSC video format , but reasonably decent copies are available on NTSC DVD by various indie distributors made from VHS tapes that were recorded off @-@ the air during their PBS broadcasts .