

= Robert Kurrle =

Robert Kurrle , also known as Robert B. Kurrle was an American cinematographer during the silent and early talking film eras . Prior to entering the film industry , he was already experimenting with aerial photography . Considered a very prominent cinematographer , even his early work received notice and praise from both critics and other industry professionals . The advent of sound film did not abate his continued rise , and he became the top director of photography at Warner Brothers by 1932 .

He shot 70 films over the sixteen years of his career , working with such prominent directors as William Wellman , Raoul Walsh , Michael Curtiz , Archie Mayo , and William Dieterle . He was a member of the American Society of Cinematographers by 1921 , and he was also one of the inaugural members of the International Photographers branch of I.A.T.S.E. (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees) . In October 1932 , at the height of his career , he suddenly fell ill after wrapping a film . Hospitalized , his condition quickly worsened and within a week he was dead of an infection to the brain .

= = Early life = =

Born Robert Bard Kurrle in Port Hueneme , California on February 2 , 1890 , Kurrle had at least one sibling , Ernest W. Kurrle . Prior to his entry into the film industry , Kurrle was already an innovative filmmaker . In 1909 , flying in a Curtiss open cockpit bi @-@ plane , he photographed the Panama Canal from the air . In 1913 , Kurrle would become the first photographer to take an aerial photograph of the city of Oakland , California . Describing the experience , Kurrle said " ... we went along just as smoothly as if we were riding on velvet " .

= = Film career = =

= = = Metro years and freelancing = = =

Kurrle 's first foray into the film industry was on the 1916 film , Her Great Price , directed by Edwin Carewe . He later collaborated with Carewe on a number of pictures during the 1920s . He began his career working for Metro Pictures , where he stayed at until 1921 . Metro was one of the film companies which merged in 1924 to form Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer . The quality of Kurrle 's work was noticed even early in his career . His filming of 1919 's Lion 's Den was called " spectacular " . Kurrle 's work the following year on The Right of Way was described by some as " ... remarkable even in this day of almost perfect cinematography . " By 1921 , Kurrle was already a member of the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) . Early that year , he followed Carewe and left Metro to become a freelance cinematographer . Fifteen of the twenty @-@ four films Kurrle worked on during 1921 @-@ 27 were directed by Carewe . In 1922 , while filming a Carewe picture , I Am the Law , Kurrle successfully tested a new high @-@ speed film from Eastman . The new film allowed interior filming with less lighting , reducing both equipment and staffing costs .

Over the course of his career , Kurrle received numerous positive criticism and attention from other industry members and publications . He was highlighted in American Cinematographer on many occasions , the first time being in the 1922 edition , where he was called a " valued member " of the ASC . When he was selected to man the camera for fellow ASC member Phil Rosen 's film , Abraham Lincoln , a prominent industry magazine stated that Kurrle 's career had been " brilliant " up to that point . In July 1924 , after Kurrle 's return from north Africa where he shot A Son of the Sahara , American Cinematographer called him " ... a master of his profession . "

For 1926 's Wings of the Storm , Kurrle 's exterior shots in Mt . Rainier National Park received positive comments from industry trade papers . In 1927 Kurrle was lauded for his camerawork on the film adaptation of Tolstoy 's Resurrection , which was directed by his long @-@ term

collaborator Carrewe . The following year , in the first ever American Cinematographer poll of the top Hollywood directors , Kurrle was selected as one of the top 10 cinematographers in the industry . That same year , 1928 , his camera work on Sadie Thompson , was lauded as " ... beautifully done , and the settings are completely in the mood of the story " .

= = = Universal and Warner Brothers = = =

By 1928 Kurrle was being called a " camera ace " , a reference not only to his skill behind the camera , but also to the fact that he was one of the few people in Hollywood to own their own plane . In 1928 he worked exclusively with Universal Pictures , before returning to freelance the following year . In mid -@-@ 1930 , Kurrle signed a contract with Warner Brothers . Over the next two years he rose to become their top cinematographer . During his sixteen @-@ year career , he worked with such notable directors as John Ince , William Wellman , Raoul Walsh , Michael Curtiz , Archie Mayo , and William Dieterle (who directed the final film Kurrle photographed) . In 1928 Kurrle was one of the inaugural members of the International Photographers branch of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (I.A.T.S.E.) .

Even when the film was given less than stellar press , Kurrle 's work was often praised , as in the case of the 1929 film Her Majesty , Love , where it was noted , " The story is negligible , the cast , though capable , has nothing to do , and the direction is heavy handed and slow . But Robert Kurrle 's cinematography is outstanding . " That same year , his camerawork on another Carewe film , an adaptation of Longfellow 's Evangeline , was deemed as " beautiful " by the Film Daily . The magazine also rated his photography as " excellent " for Merian Cooper 's version of the classic tale , The Four Feathers . There were times when his work only garnered average reviews in some papers , such as 1930 's Hit the Deck , while still gaining praise in others .

Kurrle was behind the camera for Lloyd Bacon 's 1930 version of Moby Dick , for which his work received high praise , being called " ... one of the three outstanding elements of the entire work . " In 1931 , his work on Resurrection was described as " ... brilliant and sweeping " . During 1932 , Kurrle was the director of photography on ten feature films which were released that year . In September and October 1932 , he worked on back to back films . The first was The Match King , featuring Warren William and Lily Damita , followed by Lawyer Man , starring William Powell and Joan Blondell . Lawyer Man was his final film .

= = Death = =

Following the completion of his work on Lawyer Man , he went to the hospital for treatment of a persistent cold . This developed into a sinus infection , which further worsened into an infection in his brain . He remained in the hospital for over a week , fighting the infection , but eventually died from it . His death at the age of 42 on October 27 , 1932 , shocked the film industry . Later it was reported that the infection was meningitis . The last two films he worked on were released posthumously . Upon his death , American Cinematographer said , " The Motion Picture Industry lost one of its greatest cinematographers and finest gentlemen ... "

His memorial service was held at The Little Church of the Flowers in Glendale , California , after which he was interred in Forest Lawn Memorial Park , also in Glendale .

= = Filmography = =

(Per AFI database)