



American Legends: The Life of Mary Pickford

Charles River Editors

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"Make them laugh, make them cry, and hack to laughter. What do people go to the theatre for? An emotional exercise. I am a servant of the people. I have never forgotten that." – Mary Pickford

A lot of ink has been spilled covering the lives of history's most influential figures, but how much of the forest is lost for the trees? In Charles River Editors' American Legends series, readers can get caught up to speed on the lives of America's most important men and women in the time it takes to finish a commute, while learning interesting facts long forgotten or never known.

At the end of the 20th century, the American Film Institute compiled a list of the 25 greatest actors and actresses in Hollywood over the past 100 years, but only a select few worked all the way back in the silent era of films, before "talkies" revolutionized the industry at the end of the 1920s. Among them was Mary Pickford, who was ranked 24th but was arguably the most influential actress when it came to creating the career template for all actresses who followed, from name changes to salary.

Like many actresses of the early 20th century, "Little Mary" got her start by acting on the stage, and she eventually made it to Broadway. By the time she had finished her run there, she had caught the eye of film director D.W. Griffith, who would go on to make *Birth of a Nation* and was working for the Biograph at the time. Pickford figured she would best make a mark by playing as many roles as possible, to the extent that she was appearing in an average of one film per week: "I played scrubwomen and secretaries and women of all nationalities... I decided that if I could get into as many pictures as possible, I'd become known, and there would be a demand for my work." And back before it was the norm, Pickford would avoid harsh winters in New York by heading to California to make movies there until it got warmer again, a move that foreshadowed the film industry's wholesale move to Hollywood the following decade.

Over the next several years, Pickford became the most famous actress in the industry, with only Charlie Chaplin rivaling her in popularity, to the extent that one film reviewer wrote she was "the best known woman who has ever lived, the woman who was known to more people and loved by more people than any other woman that has been in all history." By the time she had reached her peak, Pickford was making the unheard sum of \$500 per week, and she was using her status to promote humanitarian causes and fundraising drives during World War I, a model that would be followed by so many Hollywood stars during World War II. Pickford was even one of the founding members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

In a sense, it was fitting that "America's Sweetheart" all but finished her career just as sound was being incorporated into movies, but ironically, the actress once called "loved by more people than any other woman" became something of a recluse in later years, until she started communicating with the outside world only by telephone. In fact, when she won a lifetime achievement Academy award, a TV crew was sent to her house to record her statement instead of having her appear to accept the award in person at the ceremony.

American Legends: The Life of Mary Pickford examines the life and career of one of Hollywood's most

famous silent actresses. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Mary Pickford like never before, in no time at all.

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