

Ellie Adder, Private Investigator

The Case of The Silver Screen Horses



Ellie finds herself in San Antonio, Texas in 1932 where she is hired to catch real horse rustlers on a make-believe motion picture.

Link to the story: [The Case of the Silver Screen Horses](#)

After listening to the story, what are your reactions to it? Did you see any interesting historical, social or political themes in the story. Write your replies below.

Here are several questions for you to answer. Please use any library or digital resource available to you to research your answers.

1. The story takes place near San Antonio, Texas. Did you know that San Antonio has a long history as a location for motion pictures? Identify some movies made in or near San Antonio. See if you can find a very early film, say before 1930.
2. Cowboy films always have horses in them. How do you think the filmmakers got horses to do the stunts that you see in the films? Is there any evidence that horses (and maybe other animals) were hurt or abused when making films?
3. Motion pictures were originally silent... no spoken words. Movies always had background music and sometimes sound effects provided by an organ or orchestra. The films however had no permanent sound track. Silent movies were very popular and developed a unique artistic style. About 1927 or so, the technology to add synchronized sound (the spoken word and effects) to movies. This changed the medium. Find some resources that discuss how the addition of sound changed the movies. Were there some silent screen movie stars who did not continue into talking films? Why was this?

Discuss your answers. Further, the Ellie Adder stories are set in time periods in America that are quite different from today's world. Are there any ethical or stereotypical issues that the story raised for you?

Resources

San Antonio has long been a location for western films. One of the first film companies was established in 1911.

- Star Film Ranch photo on right, located in San Antonio near Mission San Jose (1911). Texas Hollywood, Frank Thompson, Maverick Publishing Co., 2002.



Western films call for the use of horses. Generally, horses were not abused by film companies but there were cases when horses were hurt and abused.

- Hollywood Horses, Les Sellnow, The Horse, March 1, 2006.
<https://thehorse.com/129314/hollywood-horses>
- Horses in Film: Abused for Entertainment?, Kelly Chase, Reading Area Community College (RACC), Reading, PA.
https://www.racc.edu/sites/default/files/imported/StudentLife/Clubs/Legacy/vol_1/Horses_in_Film.html

Sound recording for film changed the professional lives of many actors who had been popular during the period of silent films. Actors who did not speak English, had an accent that did not match their silent film image or who just did not want to change their acting style left the industry. Two motion pictures that help to illustrate this period of transition are:

- Singing in the Rain (1952)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singin%27_in_the_Rain
- The Artist (2011)
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Artist_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Artist_(film))

Early sound recording for film required a lot of equipment. One example is the Bell and Howell 35mm camera (Model 2709) and RCA Photophone recording system from 1932 shown below.

- Bell & Howell Standard Cinemachinery Type 2709, Chicagology.
<https://chicagology.com/silentmovies/bellhowell2709>
- A Rare Set of Specs for the RCA Photophone (Sound on Film), JF Ptak Science Books.
<https://longstreet.typepad.com/thesciencebookstore/2017/04/a-rare-set-of-specs-for-the-rca-photophone-full-text-posted.html>

