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((Sound))



SHAWN DEAPALDN

of Zanuck

Nebraska
filmmaker
unknown
to state

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Darryl F. Zanuck's childhood sounds like the subject of a Jerry Springer episode, but his legacy is far from it.

He was the son of an alcoholic hotel clerk and the hotel owner's allegedly promiscuous daughter. His parents divorced, and they both abandoned him when he was 13.

At age 15, he lied about his age to get into the military and fight in Belgium in World War I. After returning, he worked a series of odd jobs, including stints as a steelworker and a boxer.

Despite a hard childhood, Zanuck worked his way up the film studio ladder, first as a writer, then as a producer. He eventually became one of the most powerful producers in the histo-

ry of Hollywood.

Zanuck, a Wahoo native, got his start in film after a short story he wrote for a pulp magazine, *Physical Culture*, was turned into a film script. That film was never made, but he was able to sell other scripts later. Warner Bros. hired him as a scriptwriter, and he wrote most of the Rin Tin Tin movies.

By age 23, Zanuck was promoted to head of production. His business savvy and feel for many different genres of film helped make Warner Bros. a major studio, said Dan Ladely, director of the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater.

"He was really famous for gangster films, social dramas and musicals," he said. "He was very expansive at what he could encompass."

Some of Zanuck's biggest productions at Warner Bros. include "The Jazz Singer" (1927) and "The Public Enemy" (1931).

Ladely said Zanuck was very innovative and knew when something was going to be popular. He was a proponent of sound in film, although he didn't originate the idea.

Ladely said filmmakers and studios were interested only in using sound for a film's musical score. They didn't think audiences would be interested in talking.

When "The Jazz Singer" was being filmed, Al Jolson made a few comments after singing a song. The studio wanted to cut the chat off the

film's soundtrack, but Zanuck said to leave it in. Audiences responded. "People went crazy," Ladely said. "Almost overnight, it changed the film world."

Zanuck was a powerful producer, and he was getting more powerful every year. Warner Bros. was uncomfortable with Zanuck's "hands-on" production style, and he had a bitter falling out with the company.

In 1933, he quit Warner Bros. and formed his own company, Twentieth Century Pictures. In 1935, his company bought out the bankrupt Fox studios. The company was then named Twentieth Century Fox.

Zanuck became even more controlling as head of his own studio.

"Unlike other producers, he kept his finger in the pie of all his films," Ladely said.

He would often tell directors what to shoot and editors what to cut, which made him many enemies. He even took over for the directors on "Cleopatra" (1963) and "The Longest Day" (1962), though he wasn't credited. Ladely said Zanuck clashed with directors "all the time."

He invited this difficult reputation, especially in his office. Zanuck's office was huge, but had very little furniture in it. When visitors or studio employees needed to talk to him, Zanuck sat at a long table across the room from them.

"He was very intimidating," Ladely said. Although Zanuck was controlling, difficult

and loved making money, he believed his films could better society, Ladely said.

"He was concerned with making films with a social impact," he said. "One of the greatest examples is 'The Grapes of Wrath' (1940)."

Zanuck returned to social themes again and again in his work, including his second-to-last production, "The Longest Day."

"He tried to do something more important than the typical frothy stuff," Ladely said.

Zanuck worked with "Grapes of Wrath" director John Ford on several projects, though both men were adamant about having control over the film and argued bitterly.

Zanuck had better relationships with actors and worked to make them stars, such as Henry Fonda.

After leaving his wife in the late 1950s, Zanuck gave his girlfriends starring roles in his studio's films, but they didn't catch on with the movie-going public.

Also in the late '50s, Zanuck slowly removed himself from power at Twentieth Century Fox for a few years. He returned as president in 1962 and made his son, Richard, head of production. After a power dispute, Zanuck fired his son but was deposed himself in 1971.

His son was then appointed president. Richard Zanuck is still a major Hollywood producer.

Zanuck stayed out of the spotlight until his death in 1979, but his influence on the film industry is still felt.

"He was a genius," Ladely said. "He's had such a huge impact on the film world, but a lot of Nebraskans don't know him."