

Small Town

S T A R

Director's award-winning films subject of 13th annual festival

By Josh Nichols
Staff writer

Many are not aware, but the man once called the "King of Hollywood" was born in Wahoo, Nebraska.

The Museum of Nebraska History will attempt to change that with a series of films from the man who started 20th Century Films, Darryl F. Zanuck.

The museum will show a movie every Sunday at 2 p.m., starting Jan. 23. The series, titled "The Wahoo Kid in Hollywood," will run through March 12.

Andrea I. Faling, Associate Director of the Nebraska State Historical Society, said this is the 13th year the museum has had a film series.

Series in the past have featured Henry Fonda and Marlon Brando films, Faling said. Other genres, such as war movies, have also been explored.

This year, the Zanuck series is something Faling said the State Historical Society felt had to be done.

"His output was so stupendous that it cannot be ignored," Faling said.

Zanuck's "stupendous" work began at a young age.

At the age of 25, before he left to start 20th Century Films, Zanuck was head of production at Warner Brothers.

"I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang," the first movie in the series, playing this Sunday, will be the only film shown from the early years when Zanuck was still at Warner Brothers.

The movie is about a man who returned from World War I and was falsely accused of committing a \$10 robbery.

The man is sentenced to 10 years of hard labor in a chain gang where he is forced to endure the brutal, primitive and torturous conditions prison facilities provided in the first part of the century.

The next movie, which will run Jan. 30, is the light-hearted Shirley Temple flick, "Poor Little Rich Girl."

Raymond Screws, Curator of the Raymond Saunders County Museum, said Shirley Temple's success saved Zanuck early in his career.

But at the same time, Zanuck was responsible for making the young actress the huge star she became.

Zanuck's 20th Century Films had just merged with Fox when the unknown actress came along.

Aside from his early success with Temple, Zanuck may most be remembered for his productions dealing with social issues of the time that other producers would not touch, Screws said.

He dealt with discrimination during a time when sensitive issues were not often seen in the entertainment world. But these issues were common in Zanuck films.

Ignoring the possible criticisms,

PREVIEW The Wahoo Kid in Hollywood

WHERE: Museum of Nebraska History, 15th and P streets
WHEN: Jan. 23 - March 12
COST: free
THE SKINNY: Native Nebraskan's award-winning movies featured in film festival.

Zanuck kept producing cutting-edge scripts.

"He was bold enough not to let (controversy) stop him," Screws said.

The next five films in the Zanuck film series focus on a variety of people and situations that have "lasting significance," Screws said.

The film "How Green Was My Valley," which won the Academy Award for best picture in 1941, is about a coal-mining family, and "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" is the story of a family living in Brooklyn, N.Y.

"Gentlemen's Agreement" and "Pinky" are the films Zanuck produced dealing with racial prejudice.

"Gentlemen's Agreement," a 1947 Academy Award winner, is about an investigative reporter who pretends to be Jewish.

Once he begins this charade, he is shocked at the amount of anti-Semitism he encounters. He sees his everyday life change significantly as a result of simply pretending to be Jewish.

The 1949 film "Pinky," which will run Feb. 27, is about a young black woman who tries and is able to "pass" as a white woman.

The movie is about the problems she encounters dealing with the racial prejudice of the time.

"All About Eve," which won seven Academy Awards in 1950, focuses on the life of a young actress who maneuvers her way into the life of a Broadway star.

The final movie shown in the series is the 1951 science-fiction flick "The Day the Earth Stood Still."

The movie is about an alien warning regarding nuclear explosions.

One well-known film produced by Zanuck that will not be shown is "The Grapes of Wrath," only because it has been shown in past film festivals, Faling said.

Both Screws and Faling said there were too many other good reels to choose from.

"We wanted to get some of the other Oscar winners and films that Zanuck himself thought were important (in the series)," she said. "He always tried to produce films that would make people think."

Faling will be on hand before the production to give an introduction and at the conclusion to answer questions.

"You will get an opportunity to see movies that have had a lasting impact socially," Screws said.



Melanie Falk/DN

Zanuck's schedule

- Jan. 23- "I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang" (1932)
- Jan. 30- "Poor Little Rich Girl" (1936)
- Feb. 6- "How Green Was My Valley" (1941)
- Feb. 13- "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" (1945)
- Feb. 20- "Gentleman's Agreement" (1947)
- Feb. 27- "Pinky" (1949)
- March 5- "All About Eve" (1950)
- March 12- "The Day, the Earth Stood Still" (1951)

All films begin at 2:00 p.m.