

Women Film Pioneers Sourcebook Vol. I (U.S. and Latin America)**Model Entry #3**

Ida May Park

December 28, 1879 - June 13, 1954

The fall 1916 *Motion Picture News Studio Directory* credits Los Angeles native Ida May Park with twelve years of stage experience as a “leading woman in support of well-known stars” and with screen experience at Pathé and Universal, where she was then employed as a scenario writer (134). Park flourished at Universal, where she penned forty-four films, half of them feature length, between 1914 and 1919. Before 1917, Park’s husband, Joseph De Grasse, directed almost all of the films she wrote. In 1917, Park began directing her own scenarios and, according to a 1918 story in Universal’s weekly newspaper for exhibitors, editing them as well (“Holds Three Jobs”). She crafted a total of eleven features by this method in a scant two years. She and De Grasse left Universal in the spring or summer of 1919 for reasons as yet unknown. On September 12, *The Los Angeles Times* reported that Lew Cody and manager-producer Louis J. Gasnier has signed her to direct pictures in which Cody would star. She made one such title, and, with De Grasse, directed two features for Andrew J. Callaghan Productions in 1920.

Park’s directing career effectively ended in 1920. Ironically, this was also the year she published an article in *Careers for Women* that confidently described directing as an “open field” for those women who were “hardy and determined” (337). No matter how commanding a director, Park could not foresee the profession’s future. De Grasse’s career sputtered on, and he directed her scenario for *The Hidden Way* (Associate Exhibitors) in 1926. But by 1930, his days in the director’s chair had also come to an end.

The 1930 U.S. Census lists him as a motion picture actor, Park as a writer, and their son Joseph as a motion picture “draftman.” In 1931, Willis Kent Productions made Park’s last credited screenplay, *The Playthings of Hollywood* (also known as *The Chiselers of Hollywood, Sisters of Hollywood, Gold Diggers of Hollywood*). Fittingly enough, the film depicts Hollywood as offering women limited options. It concerns the attempts of three sisters to find love and success as: a secretary to an oil magnate, a department store saleswoman, and a motion picture extra.

In addition to praising her talent and work ethic, reports in the trade press offer at least two explanations for why Universal gave Park the opportunity to direct in 1917. Several articles represent her as a replacement for De Grasse, who was “about to go on vacation” and/or was unable to meet the demand for pictures starring Dorothy Phillips (for example, “Bluebird's New Director”). One such story describes Park as a substantial collaborator on the titles Universal credits De Grasse as directing. It notes: “She prepared scenarios for his productions and assisted him materially in the manifold details of directing features” (“Ida May Park, Director”). Park and De Grasse took turns directing a series of Phillips’ titles released in 1917 under the Bluebird brand, which Universal created in 1916 to market quality five-reel features. Park continued to direct Phillips when De Grasse moved to other projects in 1918, and a print of her *Broadway Love*, released in January, survives. *Universal Weekly* advertised the film as revealing “the Heart of the Great White Way in all its nakedness,” but the story is not an especially salacious one. In the film, chorus girl Midge O'Hara (Dorothy Phillips) preserves her virtue in the big city while evading the boorish advances of a country rube (Lon Chaney) who tracks her from their hometown. Meanwhile, she reforms by her example the

members of fast theater crowd she encounters. A meticulously composed and edited scene in the second reel deftly stages Midge's relationship to New York's hazards. While her fashionable theater friends dance and flirt energetically in a hotel suite's inner room, she hovers self-consciously on the threshold in foreground. Turning in retreat, she discovers the jilted lover of her friend, the hostess, as he raises a gun to his head in despair. She thwarts this histrionic suicide attempt with a pep talk and sends him back to the party. Soon she too is sucked into the melee, where her friend Cherry Blow (Juanita Hansen) tries to set her up with a millionaire. A review in *Wid's* found the film as a whole "inconsistent" but particularly praised this "flat party" scene and noted that "the direction is greatly responsible for the interest the story arouses."

Other than emphasizing Park's relationship with De Grasse, stories in the trade press indicate that Universal gave her the nod in an effort capitalize on the reputation of its famous director Lois Weber. A 1917 *Moving Picture World* article suggests that Park was promoted in order to keep "a woman's hand in the Bluebird game" after Weber left to establish the semi-independent Lois Weber Productions. Marketing cemented the connection between the two women when Park began to direct Mary MacLaren, who starred in Weber films including *Shoes* (1916) and *The Mysterious Mrs. M* (1917). MacLaren played the lead in Park's *The Model's Confession*, *Bread*, *The Vanity Pool*, and *The Amazing Wife*. Of these, only a fragment of *Bread* is known to survive. In a review published August 24th, *Moving Picture World* recommended that exhibitors promote *Bread* with the line: "The Heroine of 'Shoes' Now Comes To View In Another Sociological Photodrama." The films are similar in several respects. MacLaren portrays both heroines as stoic in their suffering from poverty and upright in their refusals of

improper suggestions from wealthier men. In the fragment of *Bread* that survives, scenes in which the starving heroine looks longingly at food through shop windows clearly echo scenes from *Shoes* in which she stares through the glass at desperately needed footwear.

In plot outline, however, the films differ significantly. In Weber's film, MacLaren portrays a salesclerk whose paycheck supports her entire family, including a father who squanders the money on the paperbacks he reads when he should be looking for work. Her eventual acceptance of the local rake seems to be a continuation of this self-sacrificing program, and it puts an end to her marriage dreams, which we see in fantasy sequences juxtaposed with her return to her parents' tenement at the film's conclusion. Weber's depiction of poverty as a family problem is absent from *Bread*, in which the heroine strives to succeed on her own as a stage actress. Although the ending is missing from the extant copy, published synopses state that MacLaren's character finds love and marriage with a playwright whom she earlier perceived as trying to buy her. One might say, then, that Park's film provides *Shoes* with a traditional happy ending. Such an alteration merits consideration, not only for what it illuminates about the two directors but also in its implications for studio policy. For marketing purposes at least, Universal sought to associate Park with Weber as a "woman director." It also associated them both with a particular star and type of film—the "sociological photodrama"—the parameters and evolution of which want further study.

Mark Garrett Cooper

Bibliography:

---. "Bluebird's New Director." *Universal Weekly* 4.13 (12 May 1917): 27.

Denton, Frances. "Lights! Camera! Quiet! Ready! Shoot!" *Photoplay* Feb. 1918: 50.

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- . "Ida May Park. Director." *Moving Picture World* 14 Jul. 1917: 222.
- . "Involved Melo of Theatrical Life That Is Inconsistent." Rev. of *Broadway Love Wid's*. 17 Jan. 1918: 879.
- . *Motion Picture News Studio Directory* 21 Oct. 1916: 1-275.
- Park, Ida May. "The Motion-Picture Director." *Careers for Women*. Ed. Catherine Filene. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920. 335-37.

Archival: A. Film Print Sources:

- Alas and Alack*. Dir.: Joseph De Grasse, sc.: Ida May Park (Rex/Universal Mfg. Co. US 1915) Cast: Lon Chaney, Cleo Madison, si., b&w, reel 1 of 1. Archive: BFI.
- A Mother's Atonement*. Dir.: Joseph De Grasse, sc.: Ida May Park (Rex/Universal Film Mfg. Co. US 1915) Cast: Cleo Madison, si., b&w, reels 1-2 of 3. Archive: LOC.
- Dolly's Scoop*. Dir.: Joseph De Grasse, sc.: Ida May Park (Rex/Universal Film Mfg. Co. US 1916) Cast: Lon Chaney, si., b&w, 2 reels of 2. Archive: BFI.
- The Grasp of Greed*. Dir.: Joseph De Grasse, sc.: Ida May Park (Bluebird/Universal Film Mfg. Co. US 1916) Cast: Lon Chaney, si., b&w, 5 reels of 5. Archive: GEH.
- If My Country Should Call*. Dir.: Joseph De Grasse, sc.: Ida May Park (Red Feather/Universal Film Mfg. Co. US 1916) Cast: Lon Chaney, Dorothy Phillips, si., b&w, reels 2-3 of 5. Archive: LOC.
- The Place Beyond the Winds*. Dir.: Joseph De Grasse, sc.: Ida May Park (Red Feather/Universal Film Mfg. Co. US 1916) Cast: Lon Chaney, Joseph De Grasse, Dorothy Phillips, si., b&w, reels 2-5 of 5. Archive: LOC.

Bread. Dir.: Ida May Park, sc.: Ida May Park (Universal Special/Universal Film Mfg. Co. US 1918) Cast: Mary MacLaren, Kenneth Harlan, si., b&w, partial print of reels 3-4 of 6. Archive: LOC, Archives of Canada. [Note: Parts of picture lacking; nitrate deterioration printed through.]

Broadway Love. Dir.: Ida May Park, sc.: Ida May Park (Bluebird/Universal Film Mfg. Co. US 1918) Cast: Dorothy Phillips, Lon Chaney, Juanita Hansen, si., b&w, 5 reels of 5. Archive: GEH.

Archival: B. Paper sources: AMPAS

Filmography: Titles Not Extant:

A. Ida May Park as Director-Screenwriter:

Bondage, 1917; *Flashlight*, 1917; *The Fires of Rebellion*, 1917; *The Rescue*, 1917; *The Grand Passion*, 1918; *The Model's Confession*, 1918; *The Risky Road*, 1918; *The Vanity Pool*, 1918; *The Amazing Wife*, 1919; *The Butterfly Man*, 1920

B. Ida May Park as Co-Director (with Joseph De Grasse):

Bonnie May, 1920; *The Midlanders*, 1920

C. Ida May Park as Screenwriter:

A Gypsy Romance, 1914; *Her Bounty*, 1914; *The Man Within*, 1914; *All for Peggy*, 1915; *Betty's Bondage*, 1915; *Bound on the Wheel*, 1915; *The Dancer*, 1915; *The Father and the Boys*, 1915; *The Girl of the Night*, 1915; *The Grind*, 1915; *Lon of Lone Mountain*, 1915; *The Millionaire Paupers*, 1915; *Mountain Justice*, 1915; *One Man's Evil*, 1915; *Quits*, 1915; *Simple Polly*, 1915; *Steady Company*, 1915; *Unlike Other Girls*, 1915; *Vanity [The Sinner Must Pay]*, 1915; *When Love Is Love*, 1915; *Bobbie of the Ballet*,

1916; *The Gilded Spider*, 1916; *The Grip of Jealousy*, 1916; *The Price of Silence*, 1916;
Tangled Hearts, 1916; *Hell Morgan's Girl*, 1917; *The Piper's Price*, 1917