

CHAPTER 9

INDIVIDUAL STUDIOS

Before we start with the individual studios, let's cover one additional situation. It didn't really belong in the last chapter because it is more of a research problem. But it is one that should be addressed.

Many of the major studios submitted their primary production code numbers to the Library of Congress. These records are a tremendous help with one caveat. Almost all of the production codes submitted **DID NOT INCLUDE THE LETTER PREFIX THAT WAS ASSIGNED BY SOME OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDIOS.**

So, while the production code number would be the same, only some have letter prefixes. In several instances, there are different letter prefixes.

The bottom line is that numbers recorded at the Library of Congress may require additional research.

Columbia Pictures

Columbia's production codes are by far the most confusing and most difficult to use for identification. This may be an indication that Columbia was not quite certain how to effectively number and utilize production codes.

PRODUCTION

Columbia started production codes for their 1926-1927 season. The first film to have codes was *False Alarm*, which was issued a “C-1” production code.

They produced 24 films that season, marking them “C-1” through “C-24.” The Library of Congress records show only the numbers 1-24, but the stills reflect the letter “C,” a dash (-) and the number.

The next season (1927-1928), they produced 30 films, with the first one being *The Blood Ship*. Instead of issuing new production codes, they simply started over with their numbering, marking them “C-1” through “C-30.”

The next season (1928-1929), they produced 31 films, starting with *Court Martial*. Again, they simply started their numbering system over, marking them “C-1” through “C-31.”

Columbia repeated this production code numbering pattern for the first eleven years of film production. In other words, Columbia has 11 different C-1’s, 11 different C-2’s, 11 different C-3’s, etc.

In addition, Columbia numbered their codes based on filming seasons and not by calendar years, compounding the problems with identification.

For example, “C-7” in the 1929-1930 season was *The Melody Man*, while “C-7” in the 1930-1931 season was *Madonna of the Streets*. Both of these films were released in 1930, even though they were from two different filming seasons.

PRODUCTION CODE BASICS

Well, it seems that after eleven years, Columbia was getting confused, so they changed their numbering system.

For the twelfth year, Columbia didn't start back over with the number "1." They primarily used "A-COL," dash (-) and then the number. But some of the stills continue to show a "C-number" also.

For the thirteenth year (1935-1936 season), Columbia used "B-COL" as the primary prefix, but some of the stills continue to show a "C-number" also.

For the fourteenth year (1936-1937 season), Columbia used "C-COL" as their primary prefix.

From 1937 to 1943, Columbia used a "D-COL" prefix.

From 1943 to 1956 they changed to just a "D-(number)", and starting in 1957 they changed to using "CPC" as the prefix.

BUT, during that entire time, some stills continued to show just a "C-number" also.

In addition, Columbia would sometimes mark individual stills within one title's set two or three different ways.

For portrait codes, Columbia usually wrote the celebrity name's out in full.

In the example on the next page, the portrait still of Leslie Brooks has her name written in the bottom left corner.

PRODUCTION



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Educational Pictures

Educational Pictures was started in 1919 by Earle (E. W.) Hammons. While Hammons did distribute some educational and travelogue films, they primarily distributed comedy shorts.

Educational started using production codes in 1920. Their codes consisted of four numbers. This marking procedure stayed consistent through the years except for 1932.

In 1932, Education changed their production code numbering by adding "32" (representing the year). This addition resulted in a six-digit production code number. The following year, Education went back to using just four digits for their production code.

In 1938, Hammons tried to move into feature film production by starting Grand National Pictures. Unfortunately, this venture was a financial disaster which ultimately bankrupted both companies. The Educational-produced shorts were sold off to Astor in 1940.

We have no portrait codes recorded for Educational Pictures.

Fox Film To 20th Century Fox

Fox Film started in 1915, but our first recording of Fox production codes began in 1917.

Fox utilized a "letter dash (-) number" production code. As they increased production, they quite often

had the director use his initials or an abbreviation and then numbers.

Fox maintained this letter- number tradition until their merger in 1935.

20th Century utilized a “XXC-number,” which was usually four digits. The last two digits were “00.”

When sound was introduced into the industry, only Warner Bros. and Fox Film were ready with the necessary equipment to produce films with sound. Fox had been producing sound newsreels so they were prepared for the conversion to sound. Fox immediately became one of the largest film producers in the country.

In 1929, Fox was poised to purchase MGM, but William Fox was in a very bad car accident. While he was in the hospital, the stock market crash of 1929 basically bankrupted him. He was ousted in 1930 and Fox Film was sold.

After the merger in 1935, the 20th Century Fox production code system changed to primarily a number system with an occasional letter-number code.

Fox Film portrait codes either carried an “FX-number” or more commonly the celebrity’s initials. This can be seen on the Carol Lombard portrait still on the next page. Note the “CL7” code on the bottom right of the still. “CL” represents Carol Lombard and 7 is the still number.

PRODUCTION



C.L.T.

C.L.T.



PRODUCTION

Starting right after the merger in 1935, 20th Century Fox portrait codes primarily had an “F- number.” The still below of Marilyn Monroe is marked “F-999.”



F-999

F-999



This continued until the late 1950s and then it was changed to a “G-number.”

Metro Goldwyn Mayer

Goldwyn Pictures was formed in 1916 by Samuel Goldfish (who changed his name to Goldwyn). In 1917, Goldwyn started using production codes. They used an all number system and started with the number “1,” which was for the film *Fields of Honor*. They continued consecutively until the merger.

Metro Pictures started out in 1915 distributing films produced by Solax, the first female owned movie studio. The woman was Alice Guy-Blache who created the first story films in France in 1896.

The first production codes that we have on file for Metro was in 1921. They used number codes and letter codes, sometimes different codes for the same film. Their production codes were that way until their merger in 1925.

MGM production codes started in 1925, of course. Because of their diversity, they used every different kind of code - some just letters, some just numbers, and some letter/number combinations. MGM heavily used portrait codes for about everything.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, the most common way MGM marked their portraits was with the celebrity name written out in full along with their initials. See an example of this on the Buster Keaton portrait still on the next page. The initials “BK” are for Buster Keaton.

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They were known for the MG series and MGMP series which had the celebrity name written out, and a 4, 5, or 6 digit number afterwards, as seen on the Hedda Hopper portrait still on the next page.

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HEDDA HOPPER - Metro Goldwyn-Mayer

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Sometime it would be the MG or MGMP series with the number but without the celebrity name.

Sometimes the prefix letters were an LM or an E.

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Many celebrities had numerous portrait codes, and some even blocks of codes.

For example, we have recorded 33 different MGM portrait codes just for Anne Francis.

Paramount Pictures

Paramount was BY FAR the most aggressive studio. Paramount was probably the studio that initially created the production code system.

The first production codes we have on file start in 1912, the earliest production codes that we have found. This was actually two years prior to officially becoming Paramount.

Paramount continuously pushed the envelope with new innovations, such as their routing cards, their streamlining of the production process and even their control boards for directors. They were also the most aggressive with copyrights and distribution.

In the early years, they utilized a simple number system. By the early 1920s, Paramount had both an east coast and west coast production office. They had a very confusing dual system with each office creating their own production codes.

Their California offices used an “L” Series code while their New York office used the code “NYKN” (New York Key Numbers). Quite often a title would be presented in BOTH series types with different numbers assigned.

PRODUCTION

Here's a clip from the original Paramount list:

PROD.#	DESC	TITLE	DIRECTOR	STAR	YR
460	L SERIES	DRUMS OF FATE	MAIGNE	M. MINTER	1923
460	NYKN	BACK HOME AND BROKE (SEE F.245)	GREEN	T. MEIGHAN	1922
461	L SERIES	ADAM'S RIB	DEMILLE	M. SILLS	1923
462	L SERIES	WHITE FLOWER	IVERS	B. COMPSON	1923
463	L SERIES	COVERED WAGON	CRUZE	J. KERRIGAN	1923
464	L SERIES	BELLA DONNA	FITZMAURICE	P. NEGRI	1923
464	NYKN	NICE PEOPLE	DEMILLE	W. REID	1922
465	L SERIES	NOBODY'S MONEY	WORLSEY	J. HOLT	1923
466	L SERIES	RACING HEARTS	POWELL	A. AYRES	1923
466	NYKN	SIREN CALL	WILLAT	D. DALTON	1922
467	L SERIES, NYKN	BORDERLAND		A. AYRES	1922
468	L SERIES	TIGER'S CLAW (SEE # 314)	HENABERY	J. HOLT	1923
468	NYKN	MAN UNCONQUERABLE	HENABERY	J. HOLT	1922
469	L SERIES	PRODIGAL DAUGHTERS	WOOD	G. SWANSON	1923
469	NYKN	TO HAVE AND TO HOLD	FITZMAURICE	B. COMPSON	1922
470	L SERIES	TRAIL OF THE LONESOME PINE	MAIGNE	M. MINTER	1923
470	NYKN	OLD HOMESTEAD	CRUZE	BARNES	1922

The list of letter prefixes, which was a lot smaller, had an additional code that identified smaller groups, such as Artcraft, Hal Wallis, and Pine Thomas.

Paramount portrait codes almost always have a "P" in front of a three or four digit number, as seen on the Martha Raye still on the next page.

Paramount normally did not issue all the multiple codes except for when someone left the company and then came back later. Usually a new code would be assigned.

Be careful not to confuse Paramount portrait codes with Republic movie codes which sometimes also used a "P-number."

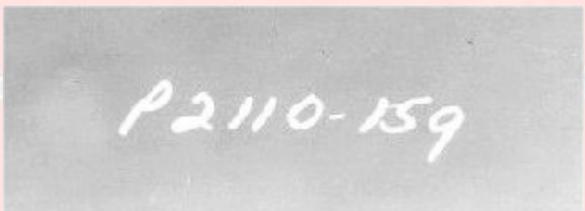
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MARTHA RAYE in PARAMOUNT PICTURES

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PRODUCTION CODE BASICS COLLECTORS

Pathe Exchange

Pathe Exchange was formed in 1914 as the U. S. distribution arm of France's Pathe-Freres. The first production codes we have on record for Pathe were Hal Roach codes used on the Lonesome Luke series in 1915. They continued as the primary distributor for Hal Roach shorts.

Pathe separated from Pathe-Freres in 1921 and was purchased by Merrill Lynch. It was later acquired by Joseph Kennedy. Outside of Hal Roach codes, they primarily used all number codes. Pathe portrait codes were the celebrity initials.

Republic Pictures

Republic Pictures started using production codes in 1935, when they first went into production. Republic, like Paramount, normally had two different numbers for the same film. This might be due to the fact that Republic distributed films for smaller production companies and then re-marked the stills with their own distribution numbers. But it continued throughout their productions.

Republic does have the distinction of being the **ONLY** studio that normally placed a **separate number for their REISSUES**. Republic portrait codes were the celebrity's initials.

Learn How To Identify RKO Unknown Movie Stills

RKO was formed in 1928 and immediately started using production codes. Generally they utilized two

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PRODUCTION

different codes for the same title. One was a letter code which was quite often the initials for the film. The other was a number code. By the late 1930s, their system changed to be all letters or letter-number combinations. This continued for the remainder of their existence.



RKO portrait codes were the celebrity's initials as seen on the Shelley Winters still above. Note the letters "SW" for Shelly Winters.



PRODUCTION CODE BASICS

United Artists

United Artists was formed in 1919 and immediately utilized production codes. UA production codes were normally letter codes or letter-number codes. Rarely is there just a number code.



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United Artists portrait codes primarily used the celebrity initials as seen in the Jane Russell portrait on the preceding page. They also had an additional letter-number system that was used for some portraits.

Universal Studios

Universal Studios was founded in 1912. By 1914, Universal was using production codes on its stills.

Universal primarily used numbers with an occasional letter code or letter-number code.

When we initially started researching production codes, we acquired an official list of Universal Studios production codes. The list was great and even included production code numbers that were NOT used and left dormant.

One problem that we had with the official Universal list was that when the film title was changed after leaving production, the official list did not correct the title. That resulted in a larger than normal number of working titles.

We have marked all the working titles in our *Movie Still Identification Book* and online in our member section of www.MovieStillID.com.

Universal portrait codes were the celebrity initials as seen in the Kay Francis portrait still seen on the next page. Note the “KF” in the lower left corner.

PRODUCTION



KF-26

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KF-26

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Warner Bros.

Warner Bros. started producing features in 1918, and by 1919 were using production codes.

The early WB production codes were all over the place. They utilized number codes, letter codes, letter-number codes, etc. This continued to the conversion to sound. At that time they started moving to all letter codes.

This trend continued to the late 1940s when they moved again to using all number codes with an occasional letter or letter-number code.

First National and Warner Bros. portrait codes became the celebrity initials as seen on this Patricia Ellis portrait still on the next page. Note the code "PE" on the bottom right.

Additional Portrait Information

Here are some additional portrait markings that might help.

A lot of smaller distributors used initials for their portrait shots. This included: British Gaumont; Goldwyn; Grand National; Metro; Monogram; Realart (1910s-1920s); Robertson Cole; Selznick; and Tiffany.

Vitagraph used VX-number. Metro sometimes used MPX-number. Realart (1910s-1920s) sometimes used RPC-number.

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PATRICIA ELLIS ~ Warner Bros. & Vitaphone Pictures

Pe 573

Pe 573



Here are some oddities to look out for when dealing with portrait codes:

Some studios would combine the portrait code with another code such as “F” for Fashion or “P” for Publicity. The additional code could precede or follow the portrait code.

An example would be “ILF” might be a fashion shot of Ida Lupino, or “PRR” might be a publicity shot of Robert Ryan.

Other common codes are:

- “FGP” - Fox General Publicity
- “F” - Fashion
- “F” - Feature
- “OSP” - Off Set Publicity

Finally, there are some definite exceptions. Here are a few:

- A. The portrait code letters sometimes refer to a celebrity’s real name, before the studio changed it. Examples include: “AC” - Anthony (Tony) Curtis; “BA” - Burnu Acquanetta; and “MMac” - Martha MacVicar, better known as Martha Vickers.
- B. Warner Bros in particular played with the standard initial pattern. Joan Blondell is not “JB” but “BL”; Dolores Del Rio is not “DDR” but “RIO; instead of RR, Rosalind Russell is “ROS”; Basil Rathbone is not “BR” but “RATH”; and Alexis Smith is not “AS” but “LEX.”

- C. Some codes refer to duos or groups: “AC” - Abbott & Costello; “AS” - the Andrews Sisters; “CSB” - Crime School Boys; and “FMM” - Fibber McGee & Molly.
- D. And then there’s MGM. While Warner Bros was satisfied to let “JC” stand for Jack Carson, James Cagney, James Craig, Jeanne Cagney and Joseph Cotton, simultaneously, MGM used an “X” or “2” to distinguish Jean Harlow (“JHX”) from Jean Hersholt (“JH”); Judy Garland (“JGXX”) from John Gilbert (“JG”); and Greer Garson (“GXGX”) from Gladys George (“GXG”) from Greta Garbo (“GGX”).



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