

This Day in History... April 20, 1893

Birth of Harold Lloyd

Film star Harold Clayton Lloyd Sr. was born on April 20, 1893, in Burchard, Nebraska.

Lloyd acted in local theaters as a child. In 1910, his parents divorced and he moved with his father to San Diego, California. By 1912, he was acting in one-reel comedy films.

Early on, Lloyd worked with Thomas Edison's motion picture company, making his first appearance in *The Old Monk's Tale*. He moved to Los Angeles when he was 20 and started appearing in several Keystone Film comedies. He also worked as an extra in several Universal Studios movies. Around this time Lloyd befriended filmmaker Hal Roach. Together they created Lloyd's character "Lonesome Luke."

Lloyd also developed his "Glass" character, often named

Harold in his silent films, who was more mature with greater emotional depth than similar characters of the day. Lloyd later recalled, "When I adopted the glasses, it more or less put me in a different category because I became a human being. He was a kid that you would meet next door, across the street, but at the same time I could still do all the crazy things that we did before, but you believed them. They were natural and the romance could be believable." The character was also never restricted to a single social class, though he was always in search of success and recognition. By 1918, the white-faced man in horn-rimmed glasses and straw hat had become Lloyd's trademark.

In 1919, while posing for promotional photographs, Lloyd lit what he thought was a prop bomb with his cigarette. It turned out to be a real bomb and it exploded in his hand, causing him to lose a thumb and forefinger. He worried he'd never be able to act again, but it didn't hinder his career and it gave him an even greater appreciation for life.

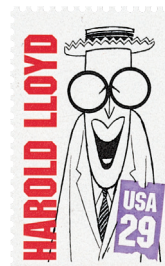
In 1921, Lloyd made the transition from shorts to feature-length comedies. He was the first comedian to use physical danger as a source of laughter. He was the screen's most daring star, often performing his own stunts. In his 1923 film *Safety Last*, he dangled from the hands of a clock several stories above a busy city street. In *Girl Shy* (1924) he took a thrilling ride atop a runaway streetcar. And in *The Freshman* (1925) – one of the most successful of all silent films – he stood in for the football team's tackling dummy.

Lloyd parted ways with Roach in 1924 and started his own film production company, the Harold Lloyd Film Corporation. His film, *Welcome Danger*, was released just before the Depression started, but managed to be a massive success as audiences wanted to hear his voice on film.

Although his peak of popularity was during the silent film era, Lloyd made numerous sound motion pictures as well. However, as the Depression went on, his character decreased in popularity and he wasn't able to make movies as quickly as before. He closed his studio in 1937 and only worked on a few films in the early 1940s. After that, Lloyd moved to radio, hosting *The Old Gold Comedy Theater*. He was also involved in civic and charity work as a Freemason and a Shriner.

Lloyd had copyright control for most of his films and didn't allow them to be re-released in theaters or shown on television for several years. Then in the 1960s, he produced two compilation films that were widely regarded and stirred new interest in his work. Lloyd died on March 8, 1971.

Over the course of his career, he made nearly 200 films, including 12 feature films. Lloyd had several honors during his career. He was the fourth person to have a ceremony at the Grauman's Chinese Theatre, which took place in front of the Masonic Temple of which he was a member. He also got a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1960 and received an Academy Honorary Award.



From the Silent Screen Stars issue



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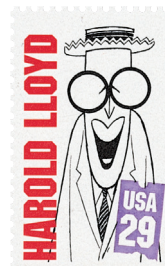
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