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Hopalong Cassidy: On the Page, On the Screen

Francis M Nevins

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Clarence E. Mulford spent his creative years, writing a vast saga of interlocking novels and stories, most of them dealing with the Bar-20 ranch and the men who called it home, chief among them a certain Hopalong Cassidy. Eventually Mulford's works became the nominal source of 66 Hollywood films, made between 1935 and 1948, and a 52-episode TV series (1952-54), all starring William Boyd as a character with the same name but very different from Mulford's. Hopalong Cassidy: On the Page, On the Screen covers each of Mulford's books and each of the Cassidy theatrical films in full detail. A comprehensive index enables readers interested in almost anyone or anything linked to the books or films-including eventual stars like Robert Mitchum, George Reeves, Jan Clayton and Barbara Britton—to find the relevant material instantly. It began in the waking dreams of a young civil servant in Brooklyn who spent evenings, weekends and vacations putting into words an old West he had imagined but never seen. Story by story, novel by novel he created a vast canvas centering around a Texas ranch he called the Bar-20 and the men who made it the focus of their loyalty, chief among them a red-headed liquor-swilling young puncher with a noticeable limp, Hopalong Cassidy. Clarence E. Mulford (1883-1956) was one of the most remarkable Western writers America has produced. His fictional universe is an immense saga, written over a third of a century, in which Cassidy and the other main characters go adventuring, fall in love, marry and have children, grow old and eventually take part in the adventures of the next generation. Mulford's life and world are explored in detail in the first several chapters of this book. In 1935, the now prosperous author signed the contracts that brought his world and characters to America's movie theaters-or at least so he hoped. But, except for a handful of character and place names, the 66 Hopalong Cassidy movies, made between 1935 and 1948, starring William Boyd as Cassidy, turned out to have almost nothing in common with Mulford's fiction. Those films captivated audiences on their first release. The finest of them were hailed by Western lovers as classics of the genre and, restored for satellite and DVD, continue to excite viewers today. This book covers all 66 Cassidy movies in depth. The final chapter recounts what happened in the late 1940s and early 1950s when Hoppymania swept the country as the films migrated to the infant medium of television, generating new celebrity and a huge fortune for William Boyd and quite a bit of money for Mulford too. With a comprehensive checklist of Mulford's writings and a complete filmography providing cast and credits for every Cassidy movie and every episode of the later TV series, Hopalong Cassidy: On the Page, On the Screen is the definitive book on a fascinating subject.

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