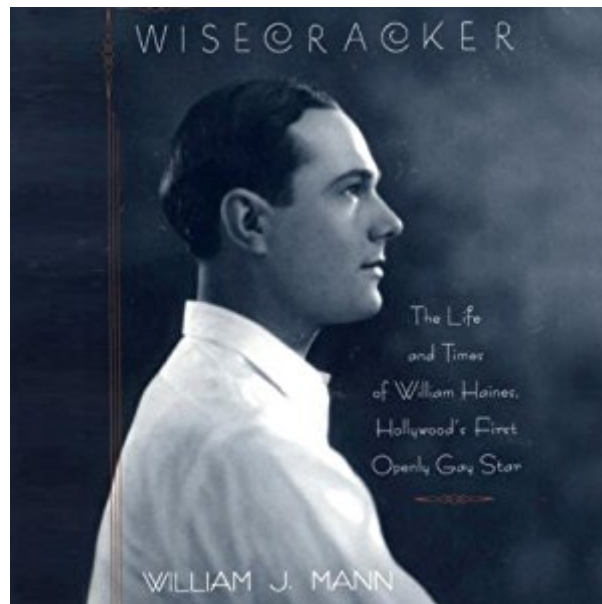


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Wisecracker: The Life And Times Of William Haines, Hollywood's First Openly Gay Star



Synopsis

In 1930 William Haines was Hollywood's #1 box-office draw - a talented, handsome, and wisecracking romantic lead. Off screen, however, protected by a careful collaboration between studio and press, he was openly gay with reporters and studio chiefs alike. Here is Haines's virtually unknown story - rich with detail, revelations, and scandal - about silent movies and talkies; his lover Jimmie Shields, and their fifty-year relationship (Joan Crawford, their best friend, called them "The happiest married couple in Hollywood") and the enforcement of the Production Code and establishment of the Hollywood closet, which led to the blacklisting that ultimately doomed Haines's film career. Wisecracker sweeps from gay pool parties to the excitement of early talkies to Haines's infamous encounter with gay-bashing white supremacists in 1936. He survived the scandal to emerge as a top interior decorator to the stars and to such clients as Nancy Reagan and Walter Annenberg, who employed him for the American Embassy in London. With a cast of characters running from Tallulah Bankhead to Betsy Bloomingdale, from Clark Gable to William Randolph Hearst, Wisecracker is an astounding piece of newly discovered gay history, a chronicle of high Hollywood, and - at its heart - a great and enduring love story.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For those looking for an introduction to the career of William Haines and for some insights into gay life in the 1920s and 1930s, this book will suffice. But it has as its grounding assumptions several false facts. 1) William Haines was not the biggest moneymaker or the biggest star at MGM in 1930.

He was not the Gay Gable. That "fact" is gleaned from one minor poll of distributors and is not reflective of the reality that by 1930 -- even 1929 -- Haines was fading. 2) Haines was fading partly because he was losing his looks -- an odd thing to say about a thirty year old man -- but true. He was getting heavy; he was losing his hair, and he was losing the boyish look that had been the source of his appeal. 3) Anyone who has ever seen a Haines talkie will understand why his career faded. His wiseguy persona did not translate well to the talking screen. He was, in a word, obnoxious. He looked like a big obnoxious stiff. 4) Mann says that changing mores in Hollywood, mores that would soon result in the Hays Code, partly brought about Haines's downfall. Wrong. Haines was already finished by 1932, long before the Code was instituted. And in any case the Code wasn't a product of some kind of consensus within Hollywood. And there could have been no moral re-trenchment in Hollywood, in anticipation of the Code, because in 1932, no one saw it coming. And to know that, all one has to do is watch some 1932 movies. 5) Half the people Mann says were gay weren't. 6) Some of the sex stories are specious, undocumented, seventy-year-old gossip. 7) Haines gayness was a nuisance, so far as MGM was concerned, but if his movies were making money the studio would have kept him indefinitely. He was dropped because his movies were tanking.

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