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Hollywood Sign History #5

POSTED BY **BRUCE TORRENCE** ON FRIDAY, MARCH 17, 2017 3:24:00 PM | [0 COMMENTS](#)



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HOLLYWOODLAND SIGN'S DETERIORATION

As mentioned above, the sign was a problem for the M.H. Sherman Co.. The cost to maintain it was expensive and it didn't seem to help in stimulating potential buyers to purchase lots in the [Hollywoodland subdivision](#). On September 19, 1936, the second letter "O", from the left, collapsed, due to wind. The two telephone type poles remained standing because they had been repaired with iron "spuds" and cement in January 1935. Two days after the letter "O" collapsed, a detailed inspection and report was written about the condition of the sign. This report accompanied a letter, dated September 22, 1936, from [Hollywoodland](#) manager, Gilbert A. Miller to J.H. Risheberger, with the M.H. Sherman Co. The report indicated the sign's wood frame was "—was too badly dried, split and warped —." According to the report, previous repairs had been made, as early as 1927-28. Gilbert Miller's recommendation was " -- that we spend no money "fiddling around" with the sign." During the next two and one half years, two other sign letters were blown down.

In early 1939, the company bowed to public pressure and entered into a contract with the Harman & Company to repair the sign at a cost of \$2,177.43. According to a letter written by Gilbert Miller, dated February 8, 1939, "--- another letter fell down during the course of construction and a little landside knocked the bases of two letters out of line at the same time. This was caused by the wind and rain of the two storms that occurred while the work was in progress."



TELEVISION AND MT. LEE

In late 1939, the Don Lee Broadcasting System purchased twenty+ acres on the summit of the un-named mountain on which the Hollywoodland sign was located. This was the same property that Mack Sennett was going to build his palatial residence. The Don Lee Company was founded by broadcasting pioneer, Don Lee, who, in 1931, began experimenting with television

using call letter W6XAO. Upon Don's death in 1934, his son, Tommy took the reins of the company and expanded on what his father started. (24) He, also, pioneered and built television station KTSL. He formed [Thomas S. Lee Enterprises, Inc.](#), which acquired all the assets of the Don Lee Holding Co. (24-1)

Because television transmissions were limited to line-of-site, large population areas were unable to receive broadcasts. The purpose of purchasing the hilltop property was to build a studio that would allow better transmission. When completed, the facility included a state-of-the-art broadcasting studio, 300-foot transmission tower, indoor and outdoor filming facilities, swimming pool, and suspended control room. (25) Tommy Lee named the un-named mountain, Mt. Lee, in honor of his father, Don. After WWII ended, it was recognized that Mount Wilson was identified as a better location for broadcasting transmission. As a result, the three large television networks moved their transmission towers to Mt. Wilson. The last television transmission from Mt. Lee took place in October 1951. (26)

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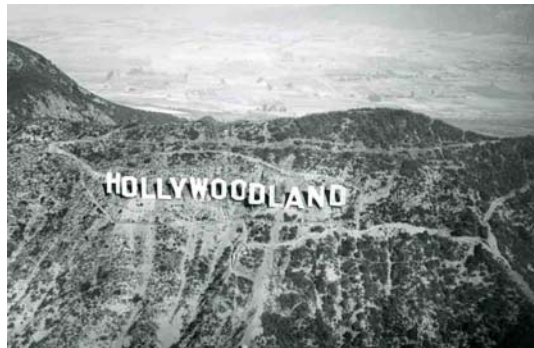
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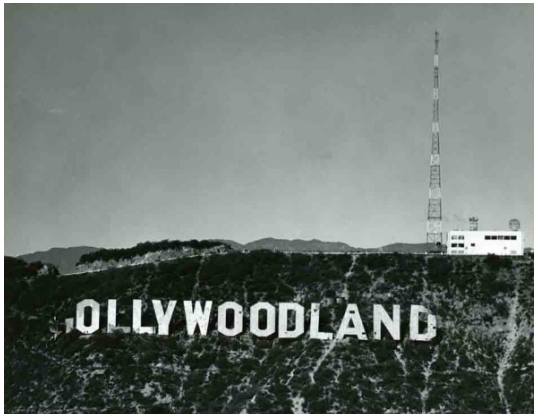
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On January 19, 1959, Tommy Lee committed suicide by jumping from the 12th floor of the Pellissier building in Los Angeles. Lee had been declared mentally incompetent on August 27, 1948, following a hearing at General Hospital. Physicians said his condition resulted from a vertebra injury received in an automobile accident. (26-1)



Ten months after Tommy Lee's death, a retirement plan of employees of the General Tire Co. was the successful bidder to acquire all 5750 shares of the Thomas S. Lee Enterprise Inc., which owned, among other assets, the summit above the Hollywood sign. The bid of \$12,320,000, also, resulted in the acquisition of KTSB by CBS. (26-2) A year and a half later, the summit of Mt Lee was leased to the State Office of Civil Defense as its regional control center for Los Angeles and Orange Counties. However, the State relinquished its lease on October 1, 1955. (26-3)

On September 13, 1955, the Los Angeles Times announced that the L.A. City Council authorized the \$200,000 purchase of the 22 acres on top of Mt. Lee., from the Employee Retirement Association of the General Tire Co. Ever since then, the summit has been owned by City of Los Angeles. (26-4)



HOLLYWOODLAND AND GRIFFITH PARK

On December 18, 1944, the Hollywoodland tract developers, then known as the M. H. Sherman Company (General Moses H. Sherman) decided to donate the remaining undeveloped land, consisting of 425 acres, to the City of Los Angeles for a token price of \$1. On January 30, 1945, the City of Los Angeles formally accepted the offer and added it to the 3,801 Griffith Park

Acreage, of which the Park Commission will maintain control. Griffith Park is the largest park in the country. (27)

The most accurate history of the Hollywood Sign is on the [hollywoodsignhistory.com website](http://hollywoodsignhistory.com).

The largest collection of Hollywood photos is on the [hollywoodphotographs.com website](http://hollywoodphotographs.com).

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