



A Toolkit for Change: The Los Angeles Women’s Landmarks Project

Sample Evaluation: Mack Sennett

Overview

The following document evaluates the Historic-Cultural Monument nomination for Mack Sennett Studios (Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #256). The Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources provided the Los Angeles Women’s Landmarks Project team with the nomination file, and the historical narrative was evaluated for its inclusion of women’s history.

Women’s History at the Site

The Mack Sennett Studios soundstage in Echo Park, Los Angeles is associated with the career of Mabel Normand, a popular actor, director, and producer during the Silent Film era.

| BASIC INFORMATION | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| LA Community Plan Area: Silver Lake - Echo Park - Elysian Valley | Architect: Unknown |
| Council District: 13 | Architectural Style: Vernacular |
| Ownership: Private | Original Use: Film Studio |
| LA Historic Preservation Overlay Zone: n/a | Current Use: Storage Units |
| NRHP: n/a | Integrity: Unknown |
| Date Built: 1915 (estimated) | Period of Significance: 1915 -? |
| Original Form Prepared By: A.C. DiMarco | |

Name: Mack Sennett Studios

Address: 1712 N. Glendale Blvd.

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OVERVIEW OF CURRENT SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

The significance statement makes an argument for the building's contribution to the broad cultural history of the film industry. According to the statement, this is the last remaining building from the period in Hollywood history when Mack Sennett was considered the major producer of comedy films. The preparer notes that "countless" silent films were filmed in the building, but there is no mention of any specific films or actors associated with the building.

The significance statement is incredibly brief by today's standards – only one page.

Numbered criteria were not in use at the time of the nomination, but the significance statements indicate that the preparer nominated the building for broad cultural history (present-day Criterion 1). The preparer also notes that the building is possibly the first all-concrete motion picture sound stage but does not make an argument for architectural significance.

The historical narrative consists only of general statements, with limited research included to strengthen claims of the building's significance to Hollywood history. Between the broad statements and limited bibliography, the narrative claims need further research to confirm their accuracy.

The last four pages of the nomination file contain the evaluation of the Cultural Heritage Board on the building's significance. Two of the five board members voted that building was not significant enough for designation.

POTENTIAL FOR WOMEN'S HERITAGE AMENDMENT

The nomination makes no mention of women's history in the significance statement. A quick search of the Mack Sennett Studios website (now relocated) includes Mabel Normand as a central figure in the studio's legacy. The website's narrative credits Normand with running the studio, working as one of Hollywood's first women directors, and as a pioneer in the comedy genre. Normand even invented the famous pie-in-the-face comedy gag. Additionally, she is credited with discovering Charlie Chaplin.

Normand later started her own company. Her collaboration with Sennett and her time at the studio still represents a formative period in her career and the influence she had in comedy. An amendment should focus on Normand's time at the studio.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

<https://macksennettstudios.net/history/>

<https://wfpp.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-mabel-normand/>

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<https://collections.new.oscars.org/Details/Collection/528>

<https://www.academymuseum.org/en/hollywood-past-and-present/mabel-normand-feature-film-co?filter=>

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Only two references were listed under “sources of information” section on the nomination cover sheet – “King of Comedy” by Mack Sennett and the March ‘76 issue of American Cinema Magazine.

There are some inconsistencies with the dates in the nomination. The Mack Sennett Studios website lists their founding date as 1916, but the preparer states that the studio was built and in operation by 1912. Sennett started his career with Keystone Studios in 1912, later leaving to start his own independent production company. There might be some conflation with these studio histories – confirm dates and locations during the amendment process.

SIGNIFICANCE FINDINGS (X – in nomination/designation; X – identified through evaluation)

| Women | Black/African American | Latinx | AAPI | LGBTQ | First Peoples | Broad cultural, economic, or social history | Historic Personage | Architecture |
|-------|------------------------|--------|------|-------|---------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| X | | | | | | X | X | |

Light gray represents groups that have been the subject of a [City of Los Angeles Historic Context Statement](#). Dark gray represents the three criteria used to determine the historic significance of the nominated Historic-Cultural Monuments.

AMENDMENT SCENARIO

- No Amendment Needed** – This site was nominated for its association with women’s history and contains a significance statement focused on the contributions of women; narrative contains sufficient research to convey women’s significance.
- Name Change Only** – This site’s significance statement focuses on the contributions of women to its history, but the site name does not reflect its importance to women’s history.
- Minimal Changes to Narrative and/or Documentation, NO change to criteria** – This site’s significance statement identifies women’s heritage through its criteria and historical narrative but could use more detail or information to emphasize women’s contributions. Minimal or no additional research is needed.
- Significant Changes to Narrative and/or Documentation, NO change to criteria** – This site’s significance statement identifies women’s heritage in its criteria and historical narrative, but the overall nomination form is very basic and does not fully explain women’s contributions. This scenario requires additional research and significant editing to the existing narrative.
- Significant Changes to Narrative and/or Documentation, addition of criteria** – This site does not identify women’s heritage in its designation criteria and may or may not point to women’s contributions in

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the historical narrative. If women's history is mentioned, the current narrative does not adequately convey the significance of women's contributions. This scenario requires significant additional research, editing, and new writing to the existing narrative. Even without these changes, the narrative does articulate that the site is significant in some way.

6. **Full Review** – This site has minimal information and is largely incomplete. It not only lacks women's history, but it fails to adequately convey the significance of the site through its criteria, narrative, and documentation. This scenario requires significant additional research, editing, and new writing to convey the site's overall significance.

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