

# GATE CRASHER'S STORIES QUASHED BY FRONT OFFICE DIPLOMACY

By LEE CANNON

"I want to see Greta Garbo. I'm a relative."

"Clark Gable invited me to have lunch with him."

"Jean Harlow told me to drop in any time."

"Tell Joan Crawford that Alec, her second cousin from Kansas is here and wants to see her."

AND from that point the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer "front office" boys take up the "game" that is their daily job. They check with personal secretaries of the celebrities to find out if the "relative" or "friend" is just another courageous sightseer trying to crash the studio gates or, as is sometimes, though infrequently, the case, the real thing. They systematically and quickly separate the 'phoney' from the bona fide—and in

the vast majority of cases it is only the latter who gain admittance.

In all instances, however, the person outside is given courteous consideration, not only because it is good policy but because Robert Hilton, head of M-G-M's front office, demands it of those working under him. This excellent psychology coupled with good management make Hilton's department one of the smoothest running of the studio's many units.

The tremendous importance and responsibility of the "Front Office" is not at once apparent to the casual visitor. A glance into the reception room during the lunch hour is convincing proof that the boys are adequately busy—but that isn't all. Their working day doesn't begin and end with the noon hour.

Here is an average example of what takes place during the crowded hours between eight in the morning to eight at



ROBERT HILTON

night—their working "day": All employees on the Number Two payroll must be checked individually as they arrive for work, as they come out to lunch and back, and as they leave at night. Classified on this payroll are all stars,

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M-G-M FRONT OFFICE CREW. Seated, Bert Wrench, assistant to Hilton and Robert Hilton, head of front office force. FRONT ROW, standing, left to right, William Saracino, Fred Leet, Jean Valentino, Herbert Hall, Bernon Tabor, Herbert Josephs, Frank Shugrue, Calvin Clark, Frank Capacchione. BACK ROW, left to right, Joe DeMichell, Floyd Wittenberg, Herbert Riehl, Paul Sivadge, Gordon Otto, Gerald Starkey.

—Photos by Ted Allen.

# GATE CRASHER'S STORIES

## QUASHED AT FRONT OFFICE

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featured players, directors, writers, supervisors, production heads and assistants, all department heads and their assistants, all the high salaried technicians, such as cameramen, sound men, art directors, and others. The business of writing studio passes is constantly going on during the twelve hours the office is open. Approximately 250 passes are written each day. Then there are visi-

tors who must be escorted through the studio, and often to and from the commissary. Another item is the delivering of all inter-studio mail and messages. In addition, there is the usual one hundred and one miscellaneous tasks that invariably appear and must be taken care of by Bob Hilton's department.

As for the important matter of issuing passes, and to whom, Hilton has this to say:

"All persons admitted into the studio are okayed by someone inside with the proper authority. Those who appear with a fake story are easily detected because in this job you must know nearly 3000 people—by name—and are constantly meeting more, you cannot help but become good at analyzing human nature at a moment's notice.

"It's a strange thing but nevertheless true that nearly all visitors who have legitimate reasons for coming to the studio are backward and hesitant about asking for their passes. Exactly the opposite is true of the "chiseler" who makes his presence and wants known by blustering talk and a presumptuous manner."

Hilton has a personell of twenty-five boys. At the Front Desk, aiding Hilton, are Bert Wrench, William Saracino, Louis Littlefield, Frank Cappochone. Charles Eddy and Floyd Whittenberg handle the studio mail, the volume of which necessitates a complete circuit of the "lot" every half hour, or an average of forty miles of walking between the two boys, per day.

Nineteen boys have been appointed to escort studio parties, deliver special messages, and to do general errand duty and personal call work. Fred Leet, George

O'Connor, Frank Shugrue, Paul Sivage, William McCrystal, Albert Ashworth, Calvin Clark, Jack Young, William Lyons, Herbert Josephs, Ernest Grooney, Gerald Starckey, Herbert Riehl, Robert Jans, Gordon Otto, Vernon Tabor, Herbert Hall, Joe DeMichell, and Gene Valentino are on this general office staff.

It is imperative that the front office men learn how all the other departments on the lot function and this knowledge has proven a stepping stone to better paying position in many cases. Joe Newman started "up front" and is now an assistant director, having handled "David Copperfield" and other big pictures. Thomas Wright and Dean Dorn have gone to publicity positions while Ira Mesley, Norman Steiner, Freeman Davies, Lane Britton and Sid Mayner are now with the Sound department. Lee Stanfield is in the Make-Up department; Norman Gieger in Advertising; Phil Kellogg in Location; and a long list of others who have found Front Desk training invaluable in learning the picture business.

Before becoming affiliated with M-G-M, Hilton managed a men's clothing establishment in Culver City. He has been in his present position for two years, being appointed head by 'Whitey' Hendry after serving only three weeks as assistant desk man.

### THE HEALER

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volving brain concussion forces the Healer to perform a skillful operation to save the girl's life. As a result the grateful father offers to set the Healer up in a magnificent sanitarium to reward him for saving his daughter, and, incidentally, curing his dyspepsia. At first reluctant, the Healer is won over, and deserts the children for the sanitarium, catering to the rich and half-sick. A forest fire threatens to wipe out the sanitarium, and the Healer calls out the dilletante patients of the fashionable sanitarium to fight the fire. When a choice comes as to which he shall save from the flames, the children come first, and Karen Morley gets what she deserves—namely, the Healer.

### RATING:

A good program picture with an exciting climax that had the preview audience tense and interested. Should have good build-up at the box-office because of an excellent name-cast and some thrilling sequences. Ranks highly with the recent output of any studio.

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