

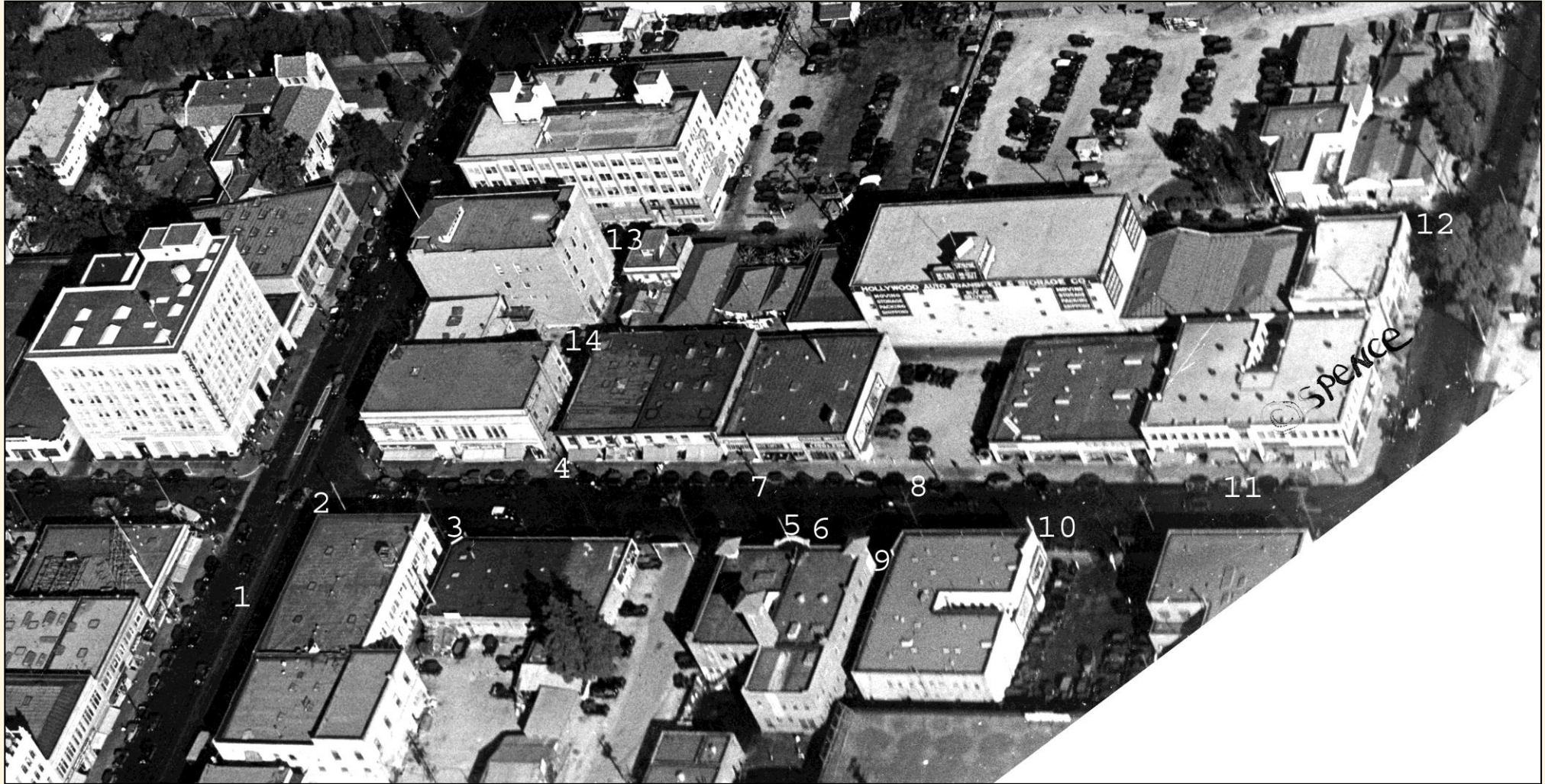
Hollywood's Silent Echoes Tour

Late in 1921 a mob of angry police chased Buster Keaton down a narrow Hollywood alley towards Cahuenga Boulevard. Entering the street Buster saw to his right a corner where “America’s Sweetheart” Mary Pickford filmed a scene in 1918 beside what is now an adult book store. To his left Buster saw the former Hollywood fire/police station where he would shoot *five* different films. All seems lost when Buster boldly stops and turns to face his pursuers – then suddenly, grabbing a passing car one-handed, he flies out of frame to safety. This breathtaking stunt, appearing in Keaton’s most famous short film *Cops* (1922), was filmed on Cahuenga just south of Hollywood Boulevard.

Unburdened by permit regulations and truckloads of sound equipment, the silent movie filmmakers roamed freely seeking the best locations to shoot. In the process they created a vast photographic record of early Hollywood and Los Angeles, capturing historic streets and settings that often no longer exist. But as fleeting images projected on a screen, this record remained hidden in plain sight for decades until digital technology allowed us the time to freeze these moments and take a closer look.

Remarkably, the great silent film comedians Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd filmed more frequently on the block of Cahuenga south of Hollywood Boulevard than at any other spot in town. It’s easy to speculate why. All three stars had studios close by (the Keaton Studio was just six blocks to the south), and with its numerous alleys and generic commercial buildings, filming on this “urban” street saved them from making trips to downtown Los Angeles to shoot. More remarkably, each star filmed an iconic masterpiece, *The Kid*, *Cops*, and *Safety Last!*, respectively, at the same Cahuenga alley we’ll be visiting on our tour.

Cahuenga Boulevard - 1929



Looking east at Cahuenga running from Hollywood Boulevard at left to Selma Avenue at right, with tour highlights numbered. A decade earlier the right half of this image comprised vacant lots.

Bison Archives – Marc Wanamaker

Cahuenga Boulevard - 1921



Looking NW at Cahuenga running from lower left towards Hollywood Boulevard, with some tour highlights numbered. Notice the vacant lots at lower left.

After ten decades Cahuenga Boulevard still echoes with silent movie history. This brief tour covers some highlights.

1. Charlie Chaplin and Marie Dressler dodge a street car in *Tillie's Punctured Romance* (1914), Hollywood's first feature length comedy, as Toberman Hall, built in 1907 at 6410-6414 Hollywood Boulevard, and still standing near the corner of Cahuenga, appears behind Marie. Then a Broadway star, Dressler reprised her stage role as Tillie, a naïve farm girl who succumbs to an urban con man played by Chaplin, his first year in pictures. This same view appears in such other silent films as Harold Lloyd's feature comedy *Why Worry?* (1923) and the Harry Langdon comedy short *His Marriage Wow* (1925).



2. Pioneering film comedienne Mabel Normand waits to confront Charlie and Marie during *Tillie's Punctured Romance* at the corner of Cahuenga looking west down Hollywood Boulevard. Once a bank, the corner building was remodeled in 1931 with a new tile exterior and two additional floors.



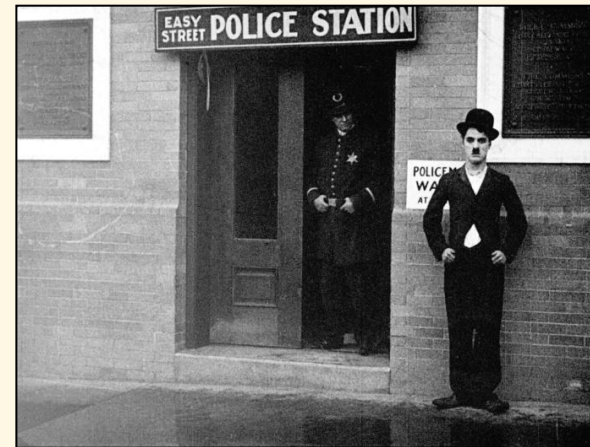
3. Mary Pickford co-founded United Artists in 1919 with Charlie Chaplin, future husband Douglas Fairbanks, and famed director D.W. Griffith, at a time when women were still not allowed to vote. Here Mary peeks from an alley corner looking north up Cahuenga during *100% American*, a 1918 Liberty War Bond promotional film. The vulcanizing shop behind her is now a porn shop. Roy Brooks and Harold Lloyd's future wife Mildred Davis stood at this alley too for a scene in Lloyd's *Never Weaken* (1921).



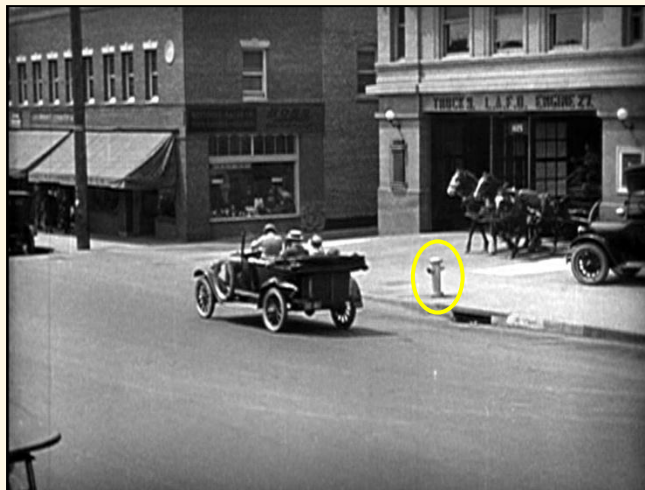
4. Across the street on the east side of Cahuenga is the alley from *Cops* where Buster grabs a passing car one-handed. This alley appeared in many early films, including Harry Houdini's 1919 feature *The Grim Game*. At the back of the alley stands the extant Palmer Building, under construction at the time, that would become the home of the now defunct *Hollywood Citizen* newspaper. The art deco building standing north of the alley today, designed by noted LA architects Morgan, Walls & Clements, was completed in 1935, making the alley more narrow.



5. The Edmonds Tower at 1635 Cahuenga is the site of the former Hollywood joint fire/police station. Built in 1913, the station appeared in dozens of films, including Chaplin's *Easy Street* (1917), shown here as Charlie debates whether to join the force. The station also appears with Douglas Fairbanks (*Flirting With Fate* (1917)), Buster Keaton (*Three Ages* (1923) and *The Cameraman* (1928)), Stan Laurel (*Mixed Nuts* (1924)), Our Gang (*High Society* (1924)), and Harry Langdon (*Plain Clothes* (1925)), among others.



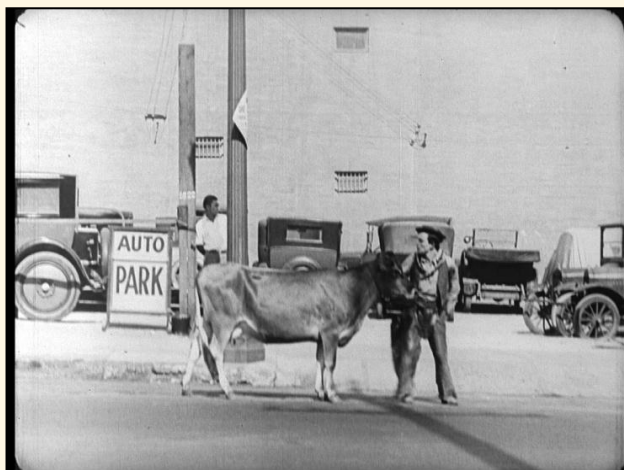
6. The Hotel Cafe building, built in 1922 next to the fire house, appears during Lloyd's 1924 feature comedy *Hot Water*, as Harold's family drive is threatened by a racing fire engine. The station fire plug (oval below) appears in scene 7 on the next page.



7. While Lloyd's stunt climbing scenes from *Safety Last!* (1923) were filmed on Broadway in downtown Los Angeles, many early scenes were filmed on Cahuenga. Here, a man helping Harold receives a ticket for parking in front of the same station fire plug shown above at scene 6. The Linoleum Shop and Kwik Lunch counter across the street are now a tattoo parlor and nightclub.



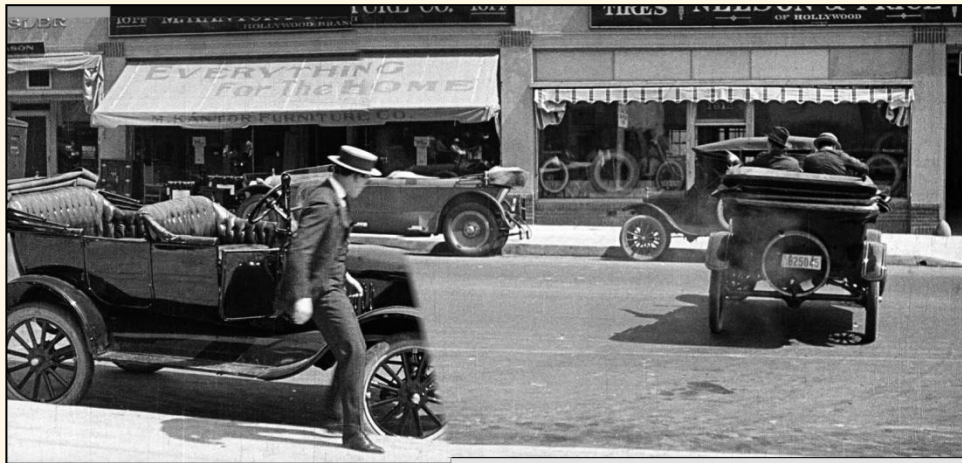
8. The lot across the street at 1622 Cahuenga is where Buster leaves his co-star Brown Eyes the Cow with a parking attendant during *Go West* (1925). The restaurant standing in the lot was originally a shoe repair shop built in 1941. A few ventilation windows on the back wall of the lot, a warehouse now converted to residential lofts, remain unchanged.



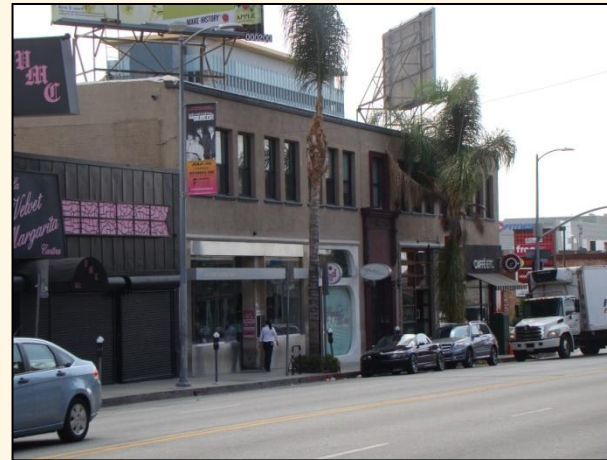
9. The alley along the south side of the fire station, now an office tower, is where Buster staged scenes for three short films; *Neighbors* (1920), *Hard Luck* (1921) (pictured here) and *The Goat* (1921). You can see the *Go West* parking lot across the street.



10. As Harold attempts to hitch a ride to work during *Safety Last!*, the buildings across the street at 1614 and 1612 Cahuenga, once a furniture store and a tire store, now host a tattoo parlor and bar.



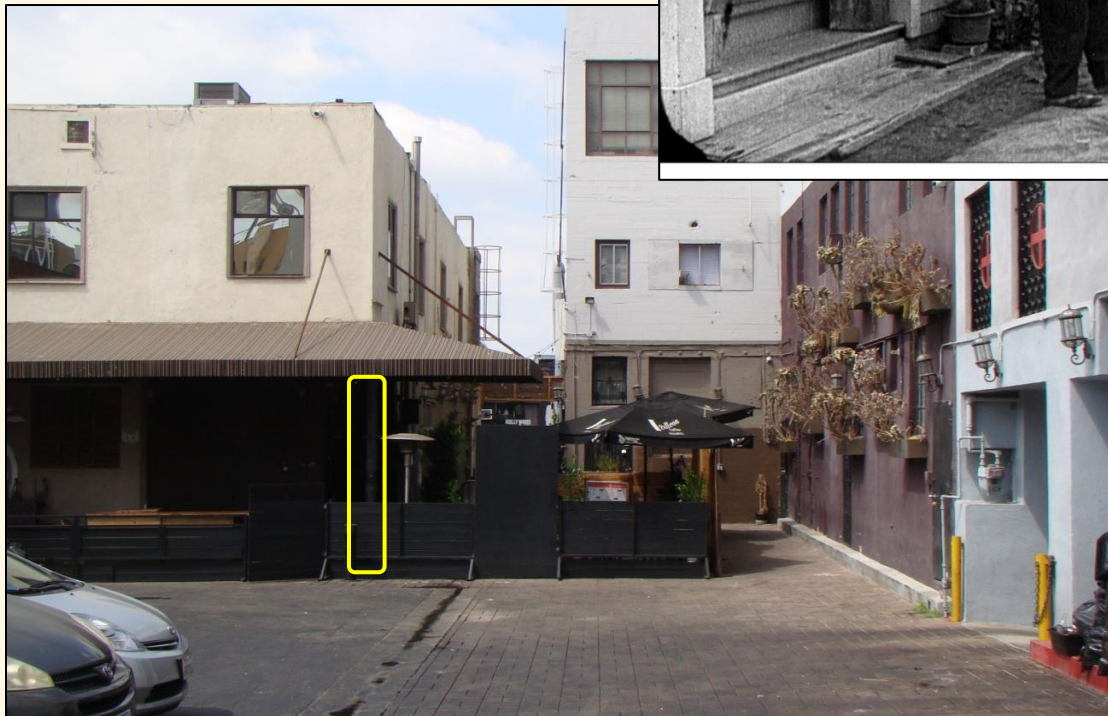
11. During *The Cameraman* Buster leaps aboard a racing fire engine hoping to capture newsreel footage of a conflagration. Instead the engine travels north up Cahuenga from Selma, shown here, and promptly turns left into the fire station, thwarting Buster's plans.



12. A dog bites Buster's hand during *Cops* as he signals a left turn from Cosmo onto Selma. This motivates Buster to attach an extension towel rack/boxing glove turn indicator to his wagon, also filmed on Cosmo. The former warehouse at back (seen below in 1997) is now fitted with large windows to accommodate residential lofts.



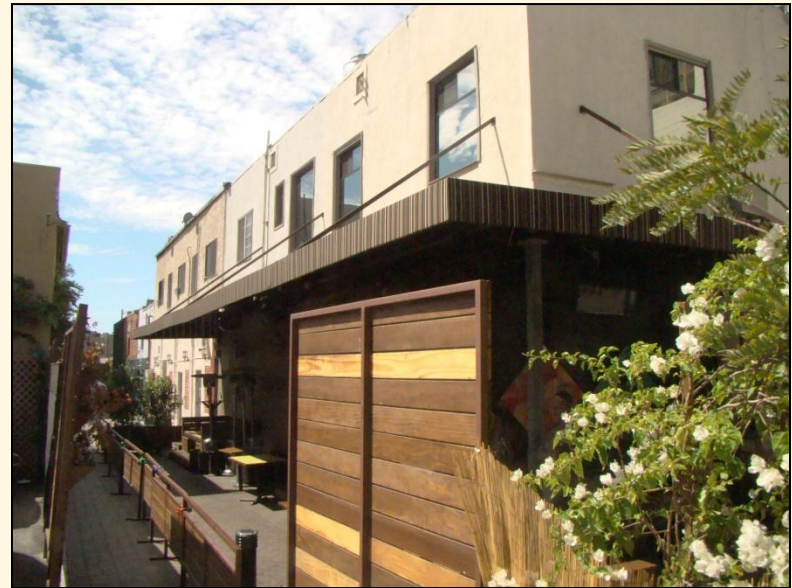
13. Before 1920 the unnamed alley running east-west from Cahuenga to Cosmo was one of the few available for filming in Hollywood. Keaton filmed scenes here from *Neighbors* (below) looking west. Two years later he would flee down this alley filming *Cops*. The corner cast iron post (yellow box) still stands today. Harold Lloyd filmed *Safety Last!* here as well (matching red details).



13 cont. When the Palmer Building on Cosmo was completed in 1922, it formed a backdrop to the east end of this sheltered sunlit alley, making it a perfect place to shoot. The building to the left, now completely rebuilt, portrayed the back of the department store where Harold works during *Safety Last!*, and appears frequently in the film. Compare the matching view as Buster is hauled away by the police in this newly discovered closing shot from *My Wife's Relations* (1922). Keaton filmed other scenes from *Neighbors* at this alley, as did Lloyd for scenes from *Never Weaken*. The alley appeared in pioneering female director Lois Weber's drama *Where Are My Children?* (1916), in the Christie comedies *Hubby's Night Out* (1917) and *All Jazzed Up* (1920), in Gale Henry's Gaumont Co. short *The Detectress* (1919), Ben Turpin's 1924 short *Ten Dollars or Ten Days*, and extensively in the 1925 newspaper drama *The Last Edition*.



14. The north end of East Cahuenga (EaCa) Alley running parallel between Cahuenga and Cosmo is where Charlie discovers an abandoned newborn that he informally adopts (portrayed as a child by Jackie Coogan) during *The Kid* (1921). The view looks south, where a patio dining area blocks some of the view today. Other scenes in the film show Charlie running north up EaCa Alley. Olvera Street, still standing downtown, portrayed the alley where Charlie and Jackie Coogan are reunited later in the film.



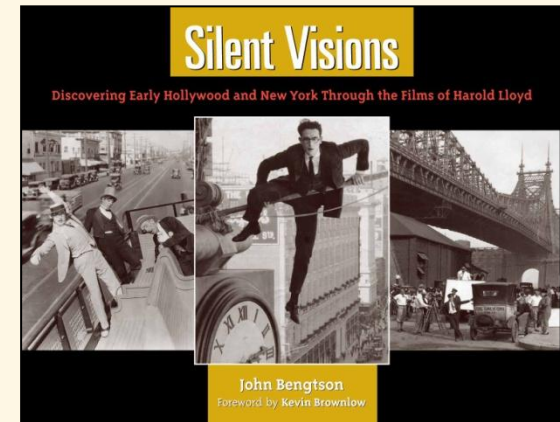
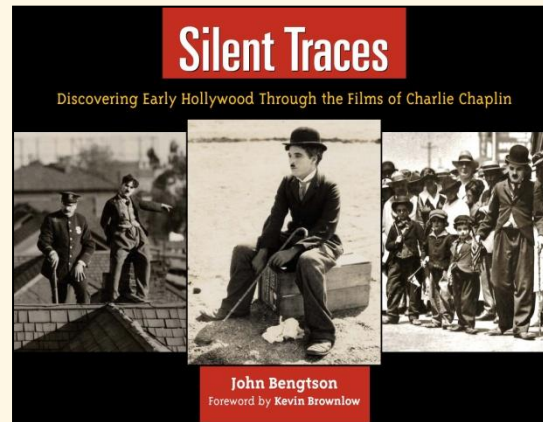
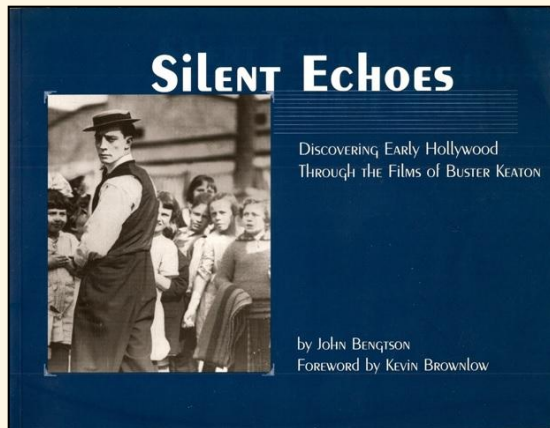
Movies inspire, inform, and entertain. More vividly than any other art form, they're also time machines, a window into the past. The great comedians once roamed Cahuenga Boulevard looking for places to shoot, and today, amid the din and rush, we can still sense their silent echoes.

John Bengtson

Credits

Hollywood map detail © 1938 Thomas Bros. *Tillie's Punctured Romance* © 2010 by Lobster Films for the *Chaplin at Keystone Project*, from Flicker Alley. *Easy Street* © 2014 Film Preservation Associates, Inc. for Charlie Chaplin – The Mutual Comedies, from Flicker Alley. *The Kid*, CHARLES CHAPLIN, CHAPLIN, and the LITTLE TRAMP, photographs from and the names of Mr. Chaplin's films are trademarks and/or service marks of Bubbles Incorporated SA and/or Roy Export Company Establishment. Used with permission. *Cops*, *Hard Luck*, *My Wife's Relations* licensed by Lobster Films, *Buster Keaton: The Shorts Collection (1917-1923)* from Kino Lorber. *Safety Last!* and *Hot Water* © 1923 and 1924, Pathé Exchange, Inc. Renewed The Harold Lloyd Trust. HAROLD LLOYD images and the names of Mr. Lloyd's films are all trademarks and/or service marks of Harold Lloyd Entertainment Inc. Images and movie frame images reproduced courtesy of The Harold Lloyd Trust and Harold Lloyd Entertainment Inc. *Go West* © 1925 Buster Keaton Productions, Inc. © renewed 1953 Loew's, Inc., from Kino Lorber. *The Cameraman* images © 1928 Turner Entertainment Co. Photos courtesy Marc Wanamaker – Bison Archives, Hollywood Photographs.com, USC Digital Archives, Tommy Dancil, Association Chaplin, and John Bengtson.

John Bengtson's books *Silent Echoes*, *Silent Traces*, and *Silent Visions* explore the early Hollywood and New York history hidden in the background of the films of Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, and Harold Lloyd. A business lawyer practicing in the Bay Area, John serves on the Board of the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, has presented his work at events hosted by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the TCM Classic Film Festival, and the Museum of the Moving Image, among others, and has prepared bonus feature programs for numerous DVD and Blu-ray releases.



For silent-era tours, maps, PowerPoint presentations, information about John's books, and new location discoveries, visit <http://SilentLocations.Wordpress.com/>