



Theda Bara

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

Introduction

Theda Bara (1885-1955) was born Theodosia Burr Goodman in Cincinnati, Ohio. Bara became one of the most popular stars of silent film, most often playing a femme fatale or “vamp.” Between 1914 and 1926, she made more than 40 films, although all but one were destroyed in a warehouse fire. Her early films were made in New Jersey, but with 1917’s *Cleopatra*, Bara moved to Los Angeles. By 1919, she was tired of being typecast as a vamp, and left Fox Studio; without their support, however, her career faltered. Because she never starred in a sound feature, the only recordings of her voice are from 1930s radio programs. She died in Los Angeles in 1955. In 1960, she was honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Later honors also include a postage stamp and a road name.

Important Dates

- July 29, 1885: Theodosia Burr Goodman is born in Cincinnati, Ohio.
- 1903-1905: Goodman attends the University of Cincinnati.
- 1908: Goodman moves to New York City with her family, making her Broadway debut in *The Devil*.
- 1914: Goodman stars in her first film, *The Stain*, playing a gang moll.
- 1915: Frank Powell of Fox Studios changes Goodman’s name to Theda Bara for her Fox debut, *A Fool There Was*. She is also given an exotic backstory to go with her new image.
- 1917: The Goodman family legally changes its last name to Bara.
- 1919: Tired of playing a vamp, Bara leaves Fox Studios and returns briefly to Broadway.
- 1921: Bara marries director Charles Brabin.
- 1925: Bara briefly returns to film with Chadwick Pictures Corporation in *The Unchastened Woman*, followed by the short, *Madame Mystery*, again as a vamp, before retiring.
- April 7, 1955: Bara dies of stomach cancer in Los Angeles, California.

Suggested Search Strategies

- Try the following terms in combination (as an “all” word search), proximity or as phrases: Theda Bara, *A Fool There Was*, *Cleopatra*, vamp woman.
- Limit your search by date to find information about Bara’s career.
- Search newspapers in all states, not just Ohio.

Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- [“Incarnates Kipling’s ‘Vampire’ Poem”](#) *Washington Times* (Washington, DC), January 29, 1915, Image 10, col. 3.
- [“Beschlagnahmt”](#) *Tägliches Cincinnati Volksblatt* (Cincinnati, OH), May 11, 1916, Image 2, col. 2.
- [“Cleopatra – With Thirty Thousand People”](#) *Washington Times* (Washington, DC), November 17, 1917, Image 6.
- [“Theda Bara Plays In Feature At Hip”](#) *Arizona Republican* (Phoenix, AZ), August 11, 1918, Image 17, col. 1.
- [“Technik des Kuessens hat sich beim Film in 20 Jahren sehr geaendert”](#) *Siebenbürgisch-Amerikanisches Volksblatt* (Cleveland, OH), April 13, 1950, Image 6, col. 6-7.