

HERMAN AND JOSEPH MANKIEWICZ HOLLYWOOD SCREENWRITERS

WHEN?

Herman: 1897-1953
Joseph: 1920-1993

WHERE? Wilkes-Barre
and Hollywood



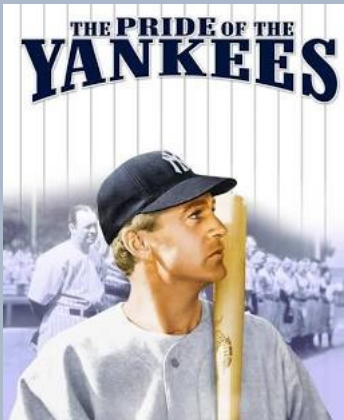
Herman

Joseph

VOCABULARY

collaborator
director
intertitle
screenwriter

Quite a number of movies made during the 1920s through the 1980s had the stamp of two of our native sons—Herman and Joseph Mankiewicz. Herman graduated from the Harry Hillman Academy on Academy Street in Wilkes-Barre. After spending his early years in the valley, the family moved to New York. Following graduation from Columbia University as a teenager, Herman went to Europe writing for the Chicago Tribune as a foreign correspondent. Upon returning to the U.S., he soon landed a job in Hollywood with Paramount in 1925. He was well-known for his quick wit and clever lines that provided raucous laughter around the lunch table—his favorite time of the day.



His first movie was *The Road to Mandalay* written for the legendary Lon Chaney. He did some of the early work on *The Wizard of Oz* particularly the Kansas scenes (Times Leader 2024). He was also involved in the “writing of seventy movies and worked behind-the-scenes rewrites on about a hundred more” (Lottick 210). He also wrote the Oscar-nominated movie *The Pride of the Yankees* and collaborated alongside other notables such as the Marx Brothers and W.C. Fields. He was considered to be Hollywood best writer in the 1930s. His best-known movie was *Citizen Kane* for which he (along with Orson Welles) won the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay. It is considered to be one of the best movies ever made. Critic Richard Meryman writes: “*Filmed in 1940, it was a synthesis and extension of everything innovative in film to that date. As a totality, Kane was so revolutionary in its techniques, so devoid of sentimentality, so advanced in its use of psychology, that the movie became a springboard for future motion pictures—and eventually a landmark in cinema history. Perhaps no other script has provided a movie with a structure at once so complex and so perfectly machined*” (Lottick 208).



A movie about his life titled *Mank* was made in 2020 starring Gary Oldman which show his struggle with gambling and alcohol addictions.

Herman’s younger brother Joseph was also very gifted as a writer—some say even more brilliant than Herman. He was born in Wilkes-Barre in 1909 and lived on Sullivan Street with his family. He moved to New York when he was still young. After graduating from Columbia University in 1928, he left for Europe to do work for the Chicago Tribune and translating

intertitles from German to English. (An intertitle is a frame of printed text used for description to convey information between scenes; used mostly in silent films.) His brother Herman convinced him to come back to take a job with Paramount pictures. He wrote four films for Paramount his last being *Alice in Wonderland* in 1933. He left Paramount for MGM studios where he wrote or directed numerous films working with stars such as Joan Crawford, James



Stewart, Clark Gable, John Wayne, and Katherine Hepburn along with many others. He produced *A Christmas Carol* in 1938 which is still a beloved movie today. He later moved to 20th Century Fox for a number of years before moving back to work with MGM where he completed the film *Cleopatra* starring Elizabeth Taylor in 1963. He won four Academy Awards and was nominated for several others. His movies *A Letter to Three Wives* and *All About Eve* also won Academy

Awards. *All About Eve* was nominated for 14 Academy Awards and won six. He was involved in the writing, producing or directing of more than 100 movies. He was still keeping notes about upcoming ideas when he passed away at age 84.

Check the online resources for more information about the numerous movies each wrote, directed, or produced. For more in-depth information look for the print resource.

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Herman Mankiewicz \(Times Leader 2024\)](#)

[Joseph Mankiewicz](#)

[Mank](#)

PRINT RESOURCES

Lottick, Sally Teller. *Bridging Change: A Wyoming Valley Sketchbook*. Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Wyoming Historical and Geological Society. 1992.

Stern, Sidney Ladensohn. *The Brothers Mankiewicz: Hope, Heartbreak, and Hollywood Classics (Hollywood Legend Series)*. University of Mississippi Press. 2019