

Tuesday's Tip: Elsie Janis - Not Always Where Expected



Elsie Janis from cover of "My Yankee Doodle Girl," sheet music for a song from "The Slim Princess," 1910.

[Beerbower Family, Helbling Family](#) *(Click to go to tree)*

You never know where one's genealogical ramblings might lead, or where you might find your ancestors, so it is smart to keep an open mind.

While working on cleaning up e-files on my desktop after some marathon research sessions, I decided to listen to D. Joshua Taylor's presentation at RootsTech/FGS 2015. He has a circus

performer in his family so was talking about Cyndi's List, the genealogical wonder that was created and is maintained by just one woman. Cyndi has a listing for 'Entertainment' so I jumped on the webpage and started searching for relatives who had been in the entertainment industry: Max Broida/Max Brodie (his stage name) and Elsie Janis (Beerbower). No hits for Max but Elsie came up under "[Vaudeville Homepage](#)," which has a transcription of acts from the "Manitoba Free Press" in, surprisingly, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, for 1913. I never expected to find Elsie there! According to the description of the website on Cyndi's List, Winnipeg was part of the main vaudeville circuit for North America, so it does make sense when we understand the context. I had never thought to look at Canadian newspapers!

At the Winnipeg "Orpheum," acts during the week of June 2-7, 1913 included:

"Miss Orford and Her Wonderful Elephants is the headline act. The finale consists in the sensational rescue of Miss Orford from a burning building."

[Wonder if they used real fire? How exotic to have tropical elephants in the far north!]

"Lamberti gives impersonations of famous composers, living and dead. Not only does he assume the guise of each, but he plays compositions from their pens."

[Edutainment...]

"Ida O'Day in her original songalogue."

[A 'songalogue,' as you may surmise from the compound word, takes lyrics- sometimes from multiple songs- and instead of singing them, they are spoken and/or acted out. You can find YouTube videos of people doing that today. Ida was actually Ann (O'Day) Maples, who billed herself as "Ida O'Day, the Merry Musical Maid,.'" She performed at the height of vaudeville, and spent 20 years on the stage; she gave it up when she married. Ann died at age 106 in 1987.]

“Foreign music halls have long been glad to welcome Carl and Lotty, a pair of most original eccentric dancers. Their work is not so grotesque as it is graceful, however, in spite of its general designation.”

[Interesting description of their dance style. They might have done very well on today's programs such as "America's Got Talent."]

“There will be a new set of Edison Talking pictures, orchestra and photo plane.”

['Edison talking pictures' are of course movies, but I have been unable to determine what 'photo plane' is in this context. It is a technical term in photography- "The plane in which a film or plate lies at the moment of exposure." but it is still unclear as to what that meant inside the theater.]

And finally, here is what our Elsie, at age 24, was presenting:

“Elsie Janis presents three protegés of hers, in a sketch written, staged and rehearsed by herself. The trio consists of Val Harris, Rita Roland and Lou Holtz in a sketch called “Three in One.”

Elsie was a writer for stage and later screen, as well as a song-writer, comedienne, and actor.

See also [“Wishful Wednesday: Elsie Janis.”](#)

Notes, Sources, and References:

1) Cyndi's List- Thank you, Cyndi, for all your hard work for so many years! <http://www.cyndislist.com>

2) Vaudeville
Homepage: <http://members.shaw.ca/winnipegvaudeville/>.

3) “Stage star ANN O'DAY MAPLES, 106, who toured the United...”,
Orlando Sentinel, September 5,

1987 -

http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/1987-09-05/news/014032009_9_1_vaudeville-oday-john-d

4) "My Yankee Doodle Girl" copyright 1910 by Chappell & Co. Ltd. Sheet music in collection of the author.

5) ["Wishful Wednesday: Elsie Janis."](http://heritageramblings.net/2014/08/27/wishful-wednesday-elsie-janis/) <http://heritageramblings.net/2014/08/27/wishful-wednesday-elsie-janis/>

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Tuesday's Tip: Max Broida's Head



Max Broida, circa 1894, so about age 8-9; cropped from a family picture.

[Broida Family](#) *(Click for Family Tree)*

Tuesday's Tip:

Look at data- and images- in context.

Look at data- and images- in sequence.

And look again.

We have had the pictures in this post for many years, and the new image we found on eBay of Max Broida makes a total of five (if you don't count his film images). It wasn't until after writing the Sunday post, however, and looking at the other four images we have of Max, that a new thought presented itself. So make sure you revisit old data and pictures periodically, since you have new information (hopefully) that

will help you understand more about an ancestor.

We know that the [picture posted Sunday of Max](#) was most likely taken around 1924, because that is when he lived at 1020 W. Pico St. in Los Angeles per the City Directory, and that is the same as what he wrote on the back of the picture. Max/Buster signed himself as, "The Hairless Man"- had he performed in the circus under that guise? In vaudeville? He certainly had many Hollywood roles where his bald pate featured prominently.

Well, then what do you think of the two images in this post? Although they have been posted before, it didn't click until now that Max had hair in these images. Max apparently was not *born* without hair, unless they had purchased a wig for him as a boy in the above picture.



Max Broida at the wedding of his brother Theodore "Dave" Broida and Lucy Shatzke, 20 Aug 1916. Family photo.

Max was born in 1885 or 1886, so was about 30-31 when his brother Dave got married. Again, unless that was a wig in the above picture, he had hair- receding quickly for a young man, but nevertheless, he had hair.

What was Max doing and where was he living in 1916, when the wedding picture was taken? We have found a 'Max. M. Brodie' in Los Angeles, age 30, noted as a salesman and Republican on the Voter's Rolls. He was living at 651 W. 42nd Place. Is this 'our' Max? We [posted previously](#) about this mystery and still cannot determine if these are two different men or just one with an alter ego, or in the process of becoming an actor.

Having the same address on his publicity photo as what we expect might be a different man is now quite puzzling.



Will Max's slightly-more-than-Mona-Lisa-smile in 1924 give us more of a clue?

Here's Max on 25 July 1930:



John Jacob/Zelig Broida and his seven sons. From left- front sitting- Max Broida, standing- Phillip Broida, Joseph J. Broida, Morris Broida, Louis Broida, Theodore Broida, Harold Broida. Sitting on right- John J. "Zelig" Broida. Taken 24 July 1930 when John "Zelig" Broida returned from Israel for a visit. Family photo.

Sure hope there are some California family members out there who can give us a bit more insight into the life of Max Broida and/or Buster Brodie.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. Use our search box to find other posts about Max Broida/ Buster Brodie.
2. Photos from the Family Treasure Chest.

Please contact us if you would like higher resolution images. Click to enlarge images.

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**Sentimental Sunday: Max
Broida**



Max Broida as Buster Brodie- "The Hairless Man," c1924. In possession of author.

[Broida Family](#) *(Click for Family Tree)*

Sometimes, one falls in love with an ancestor.

Probably, only die-hard family historians truly understand this statement.

But it happens.

For me, Max Broida is one of those ancestors.

It started out as one of those quiet relationships. A casual acquaintance, when as a newly married-in, I asked about the family history.

The picture of "The Seven Brothers" was brought out, and there sat John Broida, the patriarch, surrounded by his dashing

seven adult sons. They all looked so handsome in their suits, all of them tailored to a "T" since so many of them were in the men's fine clothing business. They were serious looking-Max too. But his professional demeanor totally belied what I would learn many years later.

Gertrude (Broida) Cooper, the daughter of one of those dashing sons (Philip Edwin Broida), could name all her uncles, and tell about their family life: wives, children, grandchildren, where they lived, and even businesses. She had an astonishing memory, and attention to detail. She too always looked 'dashing'- if that word can be used for a woman- as she also was in the clothing business, but fine women's clothes. She always dressed up and put on her makeup and her heels; she colored her hair a bright red until her very later years, when she softened the color but she would always be a beloved carrothead to me.

Gertrude did not know much about her Uncle Max. She told us that he had worked in movies in Hollywood using the name Buster Brodie, and that he was completely hairless- did not even have eyebrows. She didn't know the names of any films he was in. He was very short, but so were the majority of the family, being Eastern European. He did not marry. That was about all to the story.

Other family members did not know much about Max either- some even thought that their 'movie star' relative was a figment of their father's imagination! (You doubting children know who you are.)

As a good family historian, of course it is important to document collateral relatives, plus sometimes you can find more information about your direct line. So I delved into the history of each of the seven brothers and their families. And when I got to Max, it happened.

Not much came up in the Google search years ago, but that made

him more intriguing, a bit mysterious. Of course, that also made him a challenge- you know, hard to get. Others might have backed down, but not me- Max became more attractive, and it became hard to stop running after him. (Yes, my husband does know...)

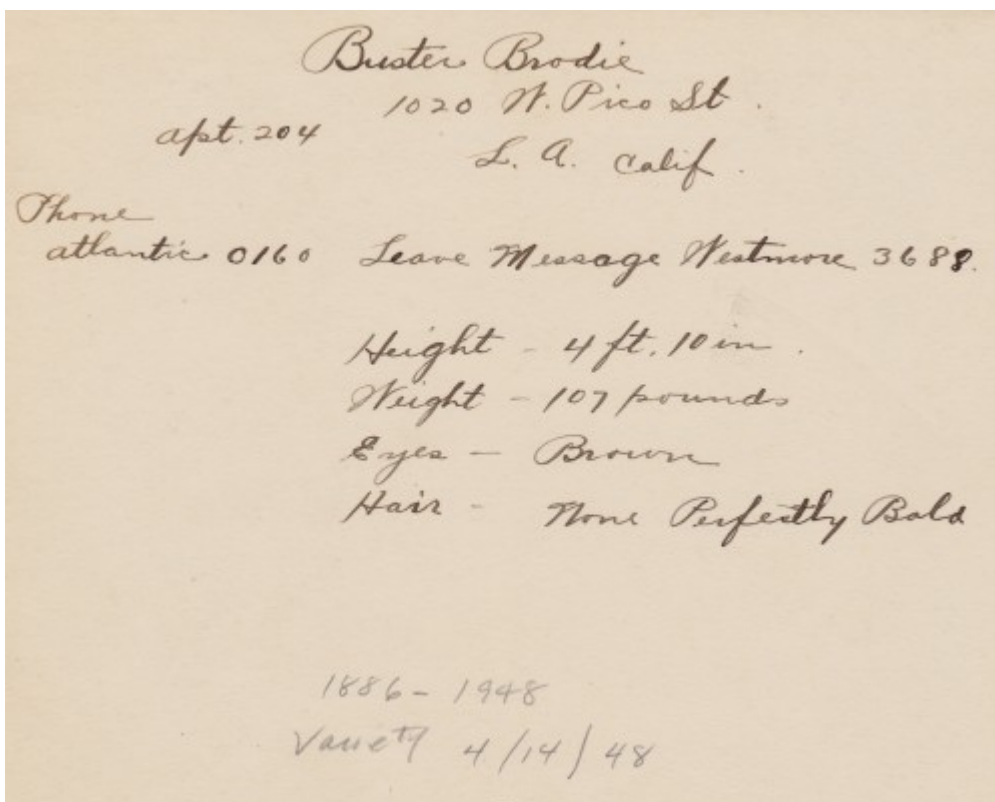
It was probably about 2 or 3am one research session when I realized what had happened. I was putting together a filmography for Max, and began watching clips or even whole movies where he might have had just a bit part. He was little and cute. He was enthusiastic. He played silly roles with a completely straight face. He had a funny little voice. Sometimes he seemed an underdog. But he was mesmerizing to me. I couldn't stop watching. It seemed like he wanted his audience to laugh and be happy, and that was happening to me.

I was addicted. I had to know more about him. The passion ramped up.

So I wrote posts, and the blog became cousin bait. Well, actually we didn't find cousins, but people who had pictures of Max, knowledge of Max, and interest in Max found us. (Putting a portrait on Max's Find A Grave memorial helped too.) These folks so kindly shared! I felt like we were breathing life back into Max.

I did more research, and wrote more, and was so pleased to hear back from cousins that they were excited to learn that Max was *REAL*! They were amazed to learn that he had run away to be in the circus as a young boy or man, and did vaudeville after he tried working in business with family. Apparently a settled family business life just didn't work for him, so he headed west, to Hollywood. The movie studios were becoming a big business in the 1920s, and talkies appeared; Max wanted to be a part of it all. With a bald head, he probably was happy to get to sunny SoCal and leave the miserable Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania winters behind.

Max never had big parts, usually not even big movies. The two most memorable are in the Wizard of Oz, where he was a Flying Monkey, so we can't even tell which one he was. He also was in what is *still* a cult movie, Paramount's 1932 film, "Island of the Lost Souls." He had an amazing makeup job in that film: as "The Pig Man," Max as Broida would be unrecognizable. Part of the reason the film is still popular is because it was the first to use sophisticated 'monster' makeup. It is also macabre, and even friends who like scary movies say it was creepy and scary. I could never get through it. In fact, the above portrait found on eBay had another offered by the same seller showing "The Pig Man" in makeup but in a regular shirt. That picture sold as well (but not to me), as did a number of other stills from the movie.



Buster Brodie
1020 N. Pico St.
apt. 204 L. A. Calif.
Phone
atlantic 0160 Leave Message Westmore 3688.
Height - 4 ft. 10 in.
Weight - 107 pounds
Eyes - Brown
Hair - None Perfectly Bald
1886 - 1948
Variety 4/14/48

Reverse of Max Broida, as Buster Brodie. Probably a publicity photo, c. 1924. Owned by author.

I was really excited to see this delightful portrait show up in my automatic eBay searches, since we really don't have any decent images of Max as an adult other than the "Seven Brothers" picture. The seller had a ridiculous price on it,

but all week Max let me know I needed to procure this for the family. I was just compelled... and I won it.

I was so thrilled to get the picture, and turn it over. The eBay listing had not included an image of the back, nor even mentioned that there was anything on the reverse. (I hadn't wanted to ask questions and risk others deciding to bid.) I felt like I had won the lottery! I had Max in my house, and with all the info on the back, I knew a whole lot more about him.

This was likely a publicity photo that Max shopped around, trying to get even bit parts. The handsome man in the picture with the slight smile completely hides the zaniness he could exhibit in some of his acting roles, such as in, "Groovy Movie." To think of him as Buster Brown (advertising shoes), or a circus clown... well, I just can't call him 'Buster' even though that is how he reported himself to census takers. And I don't want to think of him as "Pigman" at all.

So thanks, Max, for being a crazy family historian's passion for a while now, and for surprising me with a treasure every now and then. Happy Valentine's Day to you, wherever you are.
xoxoxo

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. Thanks to Steve Cox, who wrote, *The Munchkins Remember*, EP Dutton, 1988, and documented that Max was a Flying Monkey in "The Wizard of Oz." Steve also shared what he knew about Max and 'the little people.'
2. Thanks also to Frank Reighter and his compadres at the Three Stooges Fan Club, who provided some obits and Max's death certificate.

Please contact us if you would like higher resolution images. Click to enlarge images.

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Sunday's Obituary: Sophie Broida of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

[Broida Family](#) (Click for Family Tree)

We are not sure just who this Sophie (maiden name unknown) Broida is, nor her husband Max Broida. They are not known to any of the long-time Broida researchers, so if you have any clues, please let us know!

'Broida' is a fairly unique name in the United States- if you have it, you are most likely related. The Karklinsky family

changed their name when they immigrated to the US, and the lines were very prolific so there are a lot of Broida descendants.

There are some folks who had the name Brode, Brodie, Broido, Broidy, etc., that have sometimes been confused with our Broida name. Not in this case, however, as we have found Sophie's death certificate, which states her name exactly as in the obituary. It also indicates she was 65 years, 10 months, and 2 days old at her death on 17 February 1940, and she was born in Russia. The names of her parents were unknown but they too were born in Russia.

Sophie's son Harry Broida of 2164 Dellwood, Jacksonville, FL was the informant on the death certificate. The death certificate also states that she was married to Max Broida- it does not list her as widowed. All this information correlates with the obituary.

Where to look next? A search on Find A Grave brought up a memorial for Sophie, and in the image a headstone for Max was slightly visible to the side. Checking for other Broidas in the cemetery, yes, there was a Max Broida, with his own memorial and stone next to Sophie's. Sophie's stone states "Beloved Wife and Mother" so we know she predeceased her husband and had children; the headstone for Max says "Beloved Father." They were both buried in the Gates of Wisdom section of Shaare Torah Cemetery in Pittsburgh. (Click on the cemetery name in Find A Grave to learn about any old names for the cemetery, exactly where it is located, and contact information. That helped us to know that this was the correct Sophie and Max, even though initially the cemetery name seemed wrong.)

Next step? We now have the date of death- 24 Jan 1948- for this Max Broida, so back to looking for a Pennsylvania Death Certificate. Ancestry.com now has the PA Death Certificates, and here is the pertinent information for Max:

1. PLACE OF DEATH:		2. USUA	
(a) County	<i>alleggheny</i>	(a) State	
(b) Township		(c) City	
(c) Borough	<i>Pittsburgh</i>	(d) Street	
(d) City		(e) If cit	
(e) Name of hospital or institution	<i>36 Vine st.</i>		
(f) Length of stay: In hospital or inst.	(g) In this community		
3. (a) FULL NAME <i>Max Broida</i>			
3. (b) If U. S. Veteran, complete reverse side of certificate		3. (c) Social Security No.	
4. Sex <i>M</i>	5. Color or race <i>W</i>	6. (a) Single, widowed, married, divorced <i>Widower</i>	20. Date year
6. (b) Name of husband or wife <i>Sophie</i>	6. (c) Age of husband or wife if alive _____ years		21. I her
7. Birth date of deceased	<i>Unknown</i>		that I la
8. AGE: Years Months Days	If less than one day		and tha
<i>about 78</i>			stated al
9. Birthplace <i>Lithuania</i>	(City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)		Immedia
10. Usual occupation <i>Retired</i>			<i>Rec</i>
11. Industry or business			Due to
12. Name <i>Abraham Broida</i>			Due to
13. Birthplace <i>Lithuania</i>	(City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)		Other c
14. Maiden name <i>Unknown</i>			(I
15. Birthplace <i>Lithuania</i>	(City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)		Major fi
16. (a) Informant's own signature <i>Max Broida</i>			Of op
(b) Address <i>Fairmont, W. Va.</i>			Of aut
17. (a) <i>Burial</i>	(b) Date thereof <i>1 26 48</i>		22. If de
(c) Place of <i>Place of W...</i>	(Month) (Day) (Year)		(a) (Pro
18. (a) Signature of funeral director <i>Blank</i>	(b) Address <i>3222 Forbes</i>		(b) Date
(c) Address <i>3222 Forbes</i>			(c) Whe
19. (a) <i>JAN 20 1948</i>	(b) <i>Superior</i>		(d) Did
(Date received local registrar)			place
			Whi
			23. Signa
			Address

Section of death certificate of Max Broida, who died 24 Jan 1948 in Pittsburgh, PA. From Ancestry.com, PA Death Certificates 1906-1963. (Click to enlarge.)

Let's see what we can learn from the death certificate:

Wife Sophie, and predeceased him? ✓

Residence 36 Vine in Pittsburgh? ✓

Birthplace Russia? ✓

(*Lithuania belonged to Russia at various times.*)

Informant known to us to have knowledge of the family? ✓

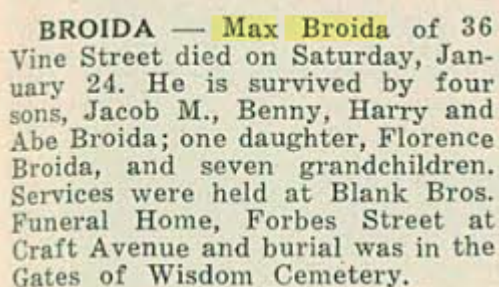
(*Yes, it was their son Jacob Broida, who lived in West Virginia, who we know from Sophie's obituary.*)

And the best thing about this death certificate? It names Max

Broida's father as Abraham. That is a big clue.

Another big clue? The birthplace of Lithuania for both mother and father of Max, and the fact that Max was born there as well- our Broidas came from Lithuania which was also called Russia on many of their documents. There was a famous Rabbi in Lithuania which may be why our ancestors took the Broida name, and this could have been the case with this family as well. Or they could be descendants of the Rabbi, or even related to our Broida lines.

So back to the Pittsburgh Jewish Newspaper Project to find an obituary for this Max Broida:



BROIDA — Max Broida of 36 Vine Street died on Saturday, January 24. He is survived by four sons, Jacob M., Benny, Harry and Abe Broida; one daughter, Florence Broida, and seven grandchildren. Services were held at Blank Bros. Funeral Home, Forbes Street at Craft Avenue and burial was in the Gates of Wisdom Cemetery.

Max Broida's obituary in the American Jewish Outlook on 30 Jan 1948, page 13, column 1. With kind permission of the Pittsburgh Jewish Newspaper Project.

Again, the obituary corroborates other information we have found, but disappointingly nothing new.

So where do we go from here?

A quick addition of these two persons to Ancestry.com generates some of the famous shaking leaves. In addition to the information already found, there is a 1932 Pittsburgh City Directory entry for them. Maddeningly, it does not list the occupation of Max, but he may have been retired by then. It does list Sophie as his wife, and notes they live at 36 Vine.

The leaves aren't leading to censuses, so an Ancestry search can help us there. A 1930 census for the family in Pittsburgh

shows daughter Florence living with Max and Sophie, but also a 19 year-old son named Albert, who is a salesclerk in a grocery store; Florence is a salesclerk in a department store. Albert is not listed as surviving in either obituary, so he may have died in his 20s. Sophie and Max own their home at 36 Vine which was worth \$3,000, and they even had a radio. BUT- they are listed with the last name of "Brodie"- very clearly written, and indexed that way too. Both Sophie and Max spoke Yiddish according to the census, so maybe the two names sounded the same to the census taker, or a neighbor gave the information incorrectly?

So let's keep on searching- the 1920 census is next as we move back in time. Max and Sophie **BRODY** are listed in Pittsburgh Ward 3, living at 32 Townsend. Max is listed as a tinner for the electric company, and there are 5 children living with them: Gilbert, Minnie, Harry, Florence, and Abe. (Two- Gilbert and Minnie- that we did not know about. Again, maybe they died as young adults since they are not noted in the obituaries.) The three oldest were born in Russia, with Florence and Abe born in Pennsylvania. Apparently Max immigrated in 1904, and the family followed in 1907; they all became naturalized in 1915.

We can't find the family in 1910, although they all would have been in the US by then if the 1920 and 1930 censuses are correct.

So where are we with this family? Are they some of the folks who shifted their name from census to census, sometimes using our family name of "Broida," or sometimes a similar version? Using more census records, city directories, and newspapers would be another way to learn more about this family, and we could possibly even find immigration records.

Focusing on the father of Max would be important- was Abraham related to our Broidas? Did he ever come to the US himself? Maybe following up on the children of Sophie and Max Broida

might give us more clues, and maybe cousins. And that is part of the reason this blog was begun: cousin-bait. Hopefully some of these Broida (we-don't-think-are-) cousins might find this and help us learn they really *are* related to us.

Or *not*– sometimes knowing who is NOT related is important in genealogy too.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. Obituary of Sophie Broida who died 23 February 1940 in Pittsburgh, PA used with the kind permission of the American Jewish Outlook, page 13, column 1. Pittsburgh Jewish Newspaper Project, <http://digitalcollections.library.cmu.edu/portals/collections/pjn/index.jsp>
2. Thanks to Mitch and Ann, as usual, for their thoughts on this family.
3. Intriguingly, there is a partial view of a stone next to that of Max on FAG that has the name of “Max B” showing, and the date of death starts with an “F” (for February?) Only Sophie and Max are noted as Broidas in the cemetery, but it would be interesting to see what the full name is on the adjacent headstone. (Research is like potato chips...)
4. Find A Grave Memorials:
Max
Broida- <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=153070616>
Sophie (__)
Broida- <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=153070616>

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Workday Wednesday: They just don't make 'em like this anymore...

[Broida Family](#) *(Click for Family Tree)*

Rereading the obituary of Buster Broida/ Max Broida, it is sad to think that he ended up mostly alone, selling paramutual tickets at the racetrack in between acting jobs, just to pay the bills. There was a brighter side of Hollywood, however, and Max likely saw some of that in the movies as he worked to make them. (Can you imagine being on the set of , "The Wizard of Oz"?) Most of our other ancestors of the 20th century- those who went to the movies- saw this bright side too, and it definitely helped them get through the challenging

years of the Depression and World War II. Mary Helbling McMurray talked of going to the movies with her girlfriends after work, and they loved these types of films.

What would these folks think of today's music? There are now so many musical genres that they couldn't have even imagined, with our electronic instruments and looser moral code. (Christian gangsta rap???) Much of their music was considered risqué or not appropriate for refined young ladies and gentlemen in their time, too.

We also need to consider the context of their times- it was 'shocking' back then to see Shirley Temple dancing with a black servant, though made more okay since she was a little girl and the darling of America. Glad that most of us are past that today. (Can't believe it had to be 'most of us' instead of just the all-inclusive, "we.")

Here is an earlier version featuring Fred Astaire, not a mix of many films:

I'll bet Buster Brodie could 'cut a rug.' Take a look at how much rhythm he has in "Groovy Movie" as they dance the jitterbug. (Buster is the piano player.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbaNYWkQYYA>

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. Slate
article- http://www.slate.com/articles/video/video/2015/11/mashup_of_uptown_funk_and_hollywood_golden_era_movie_dancing_video.html
2. 66 Old Movie Dance
Scenes- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1F0lBnsnKE>
3. Fred Astaire with "Uptown Funk." -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wb3VTnuuuRI>

4. "Groovy

Movie": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbaNYWkQYYA>

Please contact us if you would like higher resolution images. Click to enlarge images.

We would love to read your thoughts and comments about this post (see form below), and thank you for your time! All comments are moderated, however, due to the high intelligence and persistence of spammers/hackers who really should be putting their smarts to use for the public good instead of spamming our little blog.

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