HOWARD HUGHES: AN ORPHAN



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These pre-1924 photos depict moments in the life of Howard Hughes, Sr. Clockwise, from the top left, we see: "Howard Hughes Sr. as an adult. Howard behind the wheel of an early automobile. The famous Hughes double-cone drill bit. The Sharp-Hughes Tool Co. in Houston, Texas. The building after it became simply the Hughes Tool Co. Howard Sr. checking out equipment." Image collage and descriptions online via the Bolivar Herald-Free Press

When he was fourteen, Howard's parents sent him to the all-boys <u>Fessenden School</u> in West Newton, a suburb of Boston, Massachusetts. It was the fall of 1920, two years after the end of World War I.

Although the school no longer has Howard's records, fellow students recalled that he studied hard and passionately loved golf. Whenever he could, he spent time on Fessenden's course.

On a life-changing day during that school year, Howard's father stopped by to see "Sonny" (the nickname Hughes' family had given him). The two were close and decided to watch the <u>popular</u> Harvard-Yale <u>boat races</u> in <u>New London</u>, Connecticut.

Cheering for Harvard, Hughes Sr. promised his son that if Harvard won, Howard could have anything he wanted.

Making good on his promise, after the Crimson's victory, the elder Hughes paid \$5 each for himself and Sonny to fly in a <u>Curtiss Seaplane</u>. Hughes Jr. had spied the plane tied up on the <u>Thames River</u> in New London, and his first ride led to the one enduring passion in his life: aviation.

The following year, after he completed his studies at Fessenden, Howard was enrolled at the Thacher School in Ojai, California (near Santa Barbara). Since Hughes Sr. had opened a branch of his tool company in Los Angeles, he and Allene thought they would be able to spend more time with their son if he attended school on the west coast.

Still shy, Hughes did not make friends easily. He preferred to ride his horse, in solitude, for hours in the hills near the school.

His mother, ever concerned about her child, wrote to the headmaster in the fall of 1922:

I think it is awfully hard for an only child to adjust himself well in school and make friends as he should, and I am very interested to hear from you about him. (Quoted by Donald Bartlett and James Steele in *Empire*, page 49.)

Allene Gano Hughes would never hear much more about her son from anyone. On the 29th of March, 1922, she checked into Baptist Hospital in Houston for minor surgery. Expecting to be released a few hours later, she never woke up from the anesthetic. She was dead, at thirty-nine.

Howard Sr. was totally devastated. Although he sent a telegram for Howard to return home from school, he did not provide the real reason for his summons. That difficult job fell to his brother Rupert, a famous author and writer of Hollywood screen plays. Rupert recalled the sad situation:

I received one night a heartbroken telegram from my brother, stating that Allene, his wife, had died suddenly. He had telegraphed young Howard at Ojai, telling him merely that his mother was ill and he had better come home. My brother asked me to meet the boy when he came down from Ojai and put him on the first train for Texas. (Rupert Hughes: A Hollywood Legend by James O. Kemm, page 121)

Howard, of course, was extremely concerned about his mother's health. Rupert continues:

Young Howard, then just sixteen, arrived in great anxiety and suspense. I hesitated a long while over telling him the bitter truth. My poor brother, I knew, had suffered so much in the death of his beloved and beautiful wife that telling his son the news would be too much to put upon him. So I steeled myself, told young Howard the truth, and tried to uphold him in his first great tragedy. (Quoted in Empire, page 49.)

Grief-stricken over the loss of his wife, Hughes Sr. wanted Sonny near him. Allene's younger sister, Annette, agreed to look after her nephew for one year. They moved into one of the <u>cottages</u> at the <u>Vista del Arroyo</u>, a Pasadena hotel, while Howard's father stayed at the then-new, now-closed <u>Ambassador Hotel</u> (later the scene of <u>Bobby</u> Kennedy's <u>assassination</u>) in Los Angeles.

It was just the first of many hotels in which Howard Hughes would spend his life.

Fascinated by his brother's career as a writer of Hollywood silent movies, Howard Sr. wanted to produce films himself. His tool company, after all, was run by competent executives. He never got that chance, however.

On the 14th of January, 1924, while talking with the tool company's sales manager, Hughes "suddenly rose to his feet, grasped at the desk before him convulsively, and fell to the floor." (*Empire*, page 52.) The man who had changed the oil-drilling industry forever was dead at fifty-four.

Seemingly ... one minute both his parents were in good health; the next minute they were gone. At age eighteen, Howard Hughes—high-school dropout—was an orphan.

One can understand why, for the rest of his life, he wanted to shield himself from disease and illness.

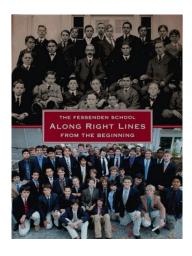
See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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Media Stream



Fessenden School

Image online, courtesy fessenden.org website.

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Harvard-Yale Crew Race

Image online, courtesy <u>amazon.com</u> website.

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Crew Racing in New London, Connecticut

Image Online, courtesy Yale University Library.

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<u>Curtiss Seaplane - 1918</u>

 $Image\ online,\ courtesy\ U.S.\ Library\ of\ Congress.$

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Thames River in New London, Connecticut - Aerial View

Image online, courtesy NOAA (nautical charts).

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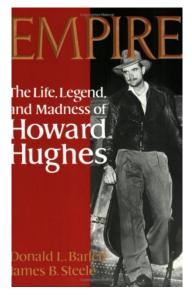


Ojai, Californina - Map Locator

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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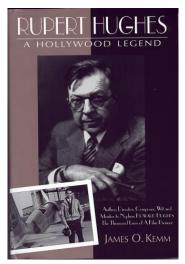
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Empire - by Donald L. Barlett

Image online, courtesy W.W. Norton and Google Books.

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Rupert Hughes - by James O. Kemm

 $Image\ online,\ courtesy\ \underline{lib.uiowa.edu}\ website.$

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Empire The Life, Legend, and Madness of Howard Hughes

Tomas harrest ann sames steer of the Phitadelphia fuquiery, the finest team of reporters west of The Times of London, herewith present the perfect biography of the weirdest, most faacinating, most god-awful corporate creature you will ever encounter in broad daylight."

—Robert Sherrill, Nation

been published, told not as cheap gossip but as a dazzling reported, hard-nosed account...[A] fat, beautifully researche book."—John Justin Smith, Chicago Sun-Time

"[The authors] have made an impressive use of documents to fashion this longest, most responsible and authoritative biography of Hughes to date."

—Peter S. Prescott, Neuroped

"A remarkable job of investigative reporting. — a milhessly probing, 671-page blockbuster biography that crocks Hughes's public persona as it disentangles the psychodrama of his private doings his ties to Watergate and Nixon, his mysterious death, the way the CIA apparently used him to serve its own ends."

bizarre billionaire who commanded the fortunes of Croesus y could not command himself. It is the story of a man who hi everything—and nothing."

— John Barkham Review

the best... the first fully documented, cradle-to-grave account of a unique American life."

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Donald Barlett and James B. Steele, an investigative team for the Philadelphia Inquirer, have won seventeen major journalism

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<u>Image of cottage</u> at the Vista del Arroyo, online courtesy Library of Congress.

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Ambassador Hotel

Image online, courtesy Wikipedia.

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Vista del Arroyo Hotel - Howard's Pasadena Home

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Howard Hughes Sr.'s Sudden Death

Back-cover image of *Empire*, online courtesy W.W. Norton & Company and Google Books. View this asset at:

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Robert Kennedy - Fatally Shot at the Ambassador Hotel

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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