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## *Fred Thomson earned millions as movie star; died at age 38*

(Ninth in series)

By Charles Cooper

Fred C. Thomson managed to squeeze at least three careers into his 38 years of living, starting out as a world renowned athlete and dying at the height of his fame as a western movie star in Hollywood.

A native of Pasadena, Thomson grew up in Highland Park, and went on to college at his hometown school, Occidental, where he graduated in 1910.

It was at Occidental that he demonstrated the athletic prowess which made him one of the track stars of the country, and which eventually carried him on to the title of America's top amateur athlete.

Thomson showed the versatility to compete in the decathlon, then as now ten events which call upon speed, strength and endurance. After his college days, he competed internationally, winning world championship titles and setting records which stood for years.

### MINISTER

After Occidental, Thomson continued his studies at the Princeton Theological Seminary, being ordained for the ministry in the Presbyterian church.

He served parishes in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C. and Reno, Nevada

before enlisting in World War I as chaplain for the 143rd Field Artillery.

Then, his life took another turn when he met, fell in love with and married Frances Marion, one of Hollywood's top screenwriters and a divorced woman.

In her autobiography, "Off With Their Heads!", Marion indicated that her divorced status forced Thomson to leave the church, and he cast around for something to do.

### ACTOR

That something turned out to be acting in silent Hollywood films; first as a leading man for the Queen of Hollywood, Mary Pickford, in a film directed by Marion, and then in a serial at Universal Studios, "The Eagle's Talons."

He then launched a series of western films released through FBO Studios (the FBO stood for Film Booking Office), which was then controlled by an Irish financier from Boston, Joseph P. Kennedy.

Riding his horse, Silver King, and applying cinematically the principles he's pursued as a minister and Boy Scout leader, Thomson quickly became a star ranked among silent movie cowboys only behind William S. Hart and Tom Mix.

As an example of his

popularity, one source book on the western film states that Thomson earned \$2.5 million in six years on the screen, as compared to \$3 million for Ken Maynard

during a career which spanned some 20 years.

Thomson's films are little known today, but according to contemporary (Continued on Page A2)



WESTERN MOVIE STAR of the 20's Fred C. Thomson grew up in Highland Park near Occidental College, and went on to track fame at the local school before winning American and world amateur athletic titles, and then becoming a film star.

—Photo courtesy Occidental College