



Colorado Biographies



Leonidas "Lon" Chaney 1883-1930

- Both of his parents were deaf, and his grandfather on his mother's side of the family opened the School for the Deaf and the Blind in Colorado Springs.
- When Lon Chaney was in 4th grade, his mother became sick; he left school to take care of her. He spent his days pantomiming things that happened during the day to entertain her.
- Lon Chaney took on his first summer job in 1897 at the age of 14 as a Pikes Peak Tour guide.
- That year he became a prop boy at Opera House where his older brother was a stage manager.
- He helped to rebuild the Antlers Hotel in 1900 after it was destroyed in a fire.
- In 1902, Chaney joined the cast of the opera "The Little Tycoon," which he and his brother wrote. After that, he joined the opera company and his career as a comic actor began.
- He married Cleva Creighton in 1906 and had one son, Creighton Chaney who later changed his name to Lon Chaney, Jr.
- Lon and Cleva moved to San Francisco and then to Los Angeles where Lon started his silent film career. (A silent film is a movie with no sound, including no spoken words. Actors used gestures and title cards to portray the plot. Occasionally a soundtrack was provided by a piano or organ player.) During his career, he was in 157 films, earning him the title "The Man of a Thousand Faces." Two of his most famous roles were The Phantom in "The Phantom of the Opera" (1925) and Quasimodo in "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" (1923.)
- In 1914, Lon divorced Cleva, and in 1915, he married Hazel Bennett Hastings.
- He became a skilled makeup artist, usually doing his own makeup for his movies; he wrote the entry on makeup in the 1929 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.
- Lon Chaney died at the age of 47 of bronchial cancer on August 26, 1930.
- In 1986 the Little Theatre at the City Auditorium was renamed the Lon Chaney Theatre in his honor. This theater is located at 221 E Kiowa St. in Colorado Springs.

Great Resources on Lon Chaney

- Aldridge, Dorothy. "Little Theatre Re-Named in Honor of Lon Chaney." *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph* 30 May 1986: E1. Print.
- Blake, Michael F. *Lon Chaney: the Man Behind the Thousand Faces*. Vestal Press: Vestal, NY 1990. Print.
- Epstein, Warren. "Hollywood's Frightening Face." *Colorado Springs Gazette* 24 Oct. 1999: Life:1. Print.
- "Lon Chaney." *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. Vol. 19. Detroit: Gale, 1999 *Biography in Context*. Web. 14 Aug. 2013.

Public domain photo courtesy of https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Lon_Chaney,_Sr._The_Miracle_Man.jpg