

Somewhere in El Dorado Hills, Gaelyn Whitley Keith, the mother of two grown daughters welcomed her first grandson into the world in October of 2005.

Her grandchild born almost two years ago, has a unique heritage. In fact, for more than five years, Keith has worked to chronicle and document the amazing life of her great-grandfather, Hobart Johnstone Whitley, who is five generations and more than 100 years removed from her new grandson. The result is Keith's first published book called *The Father of Hollywood*. "It's about my great-grandfather," Keith says. "He founded Hollywood, California and named it."

This makes Keith's new grand-son someone with some very interesting reading to do when he gets older and also a member of a family that is more-or-less responsible for providing the tone and color, as well as the 'meta-nym' (or well-known catch-all 'brand-name') for what the world knows as the multi-zillion dollar 20th Century film and TV industry. If you reference Hollywood to anyone in New York, London, South Africa or the deep interior of China, almost anyone knows what you mean, but not of course, this baby boy despite his rich heritage.

As Keith's grandson grows, a new chapter in the history of this Californian family will also unfold. Keith was born in Long Beach and lived for 20 years in Manhattan Beach, California. She graduated from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo with a degree in Business Marketing. She worked a bit in the magazine industry as a business accountant and also provided a program magazine for the Dixon Scottish Cultural Association out of Dixon, which earned a national award for excellence. Keith is of Scottish descent and there's no doubt that Hobart Johnstone Whitley, the subject of her book, is the same. "I'm a free spirit," she says. Other words she uses to describe herself are 'young' and 'vibrant'.

But writing any book, much less a fact-based book as difficult and challenging as this 304-page family history, with all it's names, dates and places, was not something Keith had planned for herself. Indeed, given that the topic is so well known and the famous old Hollywood personalities also closely observed by Hollywood fans for many decades, 'The Father of Hollywood' is a book that required very precise research and composition.

The many hours of research were imperative if only to avoid the criticism, controversy and debate that will doubtlessly follow. The reason is obvious: everyone would like to own a piece of Hollywood history and many people claim to take credit for getting it all started, if not actually choosing the city's name. "I was almost going to write a book about him for a long time," Keith says. "I felt he was worthy of a book."

Finally, last November the almost became reality. The book is more than 100,000-words long and the cover features a gorgeous black-and-white photo of well-known actress and film star, Jean Harlow.

So, who was the Father of Hollywood? In a 'note from the author' that opens the book, Keith writes: "Why did the Los Angeles Times and others in the community give him this title? Whitley Heights was the Beverly Hills of yesteryear and some of the most impressive homes in Hollywood are located there. Stars like Jean Harlow, Ethel Barrymore, Charlie Chaplin, Marion Davies, W.C. Fields, Harold Lloyd, Carole Lombard, Rudolph Valentino and many others lived and held legendary parties in the Heights. How did he get them to settle there? What was the magical draw this amazing man possessed? Learn the true story of how Hollywood got its name."

Keith had the help of her great-grandmother, Margaret Virginia Whitley (known as Gigi in the book), in the writing of "The Father of Hollywood" (if not in the living of it). Margaret kept diaries and journals of her life and 47-year marriage with Hobart, which given this man's whirlwind of entrepreneurial energy as he passed through this world, may have been about all she was able to do just to keep up with him. Margaret's writings were kept in an attic for many years, hand-written or typed, as notes or letters---as many as ten boxes. "My mother always said they were a hidden treasure," says Keith. "They were all mumble-jumbled. It was hard to say what's-what. That's why it took so long to write it." Margaret was not without her own colorful writing style: "My lingering thoughts are of the bird's greetings with their sweet carols, flowers with their wonderful colors, fragrances that waft here and there and the mountains and valleys with their divine power to impart peace and give inspiration to my faith..." as she is quoted in the preface of her great-granddaughter's book.

It's hard to capture Hobart's life briefly in an article like this. He seems



to have been a passionate and driven businessman from the late 1800's. His genius represented in the myriad of new opportunities in the newly settled American West and Mid-West. Keith relates that Hobart was on the Board of Directors of the famous Rock Island Railroad and he set forth to promote and build new communities along the rail-line that was pushing westward.

He would also have huge parties with 8,000 guests or more, to promote a new town and came up with ideas like the 'Red Car' auto-club's race between a car and an airplane, as an Old World advertising gimmick. Hobart helped develop new laws in the Oklahoma territory that prevented claim jumping and was friends with U.S. President Teddy Roosevelt (both men had previously lost their first wives). Hobart and Roosevelt were friends for many years and for many cattle round-ups. "He liked Teddy," says Keith. "He thought he was a great man."

Hobart met and then married Margaret (Gigi) around 1885 and by the time he moved his family to what is now present-day Hollywood in 1897, he had a lot of experience with new townships. At this point the tale reads like a portrait of old California pioneering and the quaint glamour of early Hollywood society-life. Starting with 500 acres that Hobart purchased for about \$22,000 in gold, he laid out the streets, the residential areas, the large businesses and banks and what is called the 'infrastructure' of a place that is named Hollywood - not the movie industry per se, but the actual city - at a time when even home-electricity was still new. Now familiar to millions, streets in Los Angeles, such as Wilcox, LaBrea, Hollywood Boulevard, Sunset and Vine, were laid out and presumably named by Hobart. He established the Bank of Hollywood and the famous Hollywood Hotel. Whitley Heights, on those original 500 acres, was developed as an up-scale neighborhood of craftsman homes and small mansions; where so many newly famous film-celebrities then lived.

At the same time, of course, following Thomas Edison's involvement with motion pictures (along with many others), a brand-new industry was forming, which would become today's powerhouse feature film business. The camera in the orchards and groves in this Hollywood region routinely captured early silent films. There were 17 ranches in the area, where the old cowboy films were made, with all the bank-robberies and stagecoach chases anyone could want. Hobart and Gigi now found themselves to be celebrities among the newly crowned early Hollywood royalty, keeping pace with new friends William Randolph Hearst, Douglas Fairbanks, Lillian Gish, Charlie Chaplin and many others. "The people he affected, because

he could see who would be successful, made Hollywood what it is," says Keith. "He attracted successful people. He was a great speaker."

So, there in Whitley Heights and at places like the Hollywood hotel, the legend grew. When Hobart and Gigi were at home they would see Rudolph Valentino walking his dogs, also other friends like Judy Garland, Boris Karloff, Cecil B. Demille, Gloria Swanson and William Faulkner along with many others who lived in Whitley Heights during that time. According to Keith, today the Whitley Heights area is being restored and preserved for posterity.

If you're wondering about the famous Hollywood sign (seen on hundreds of postcards and images), this was originally a typical Hobart Johnstone Whitley gimmick to bring new homebuyers in to come and purchase a home. During that time there wasn't any electricity and a similar sign that read, 'Whitley Heights' was erected on one of those hills to promote sales. It was later changed to read, 'Hollywood Land'. So, in other words, the world-famous Hollywood sign we see today was originally a promotional real-estate advertisement.

What about the name itself, 'Hollywood'? Where did that come from? This is a tightly-protected secret and you will have to read the book to find out. A small hint though, let's just say Hobart was inspired one day while surveying his land.

Hobart Johnstone Whitley attended the first Academy Awards festivities and watched as the first star was laid on the Hollywood Star-Walk, which visitors from around the world now enjoy. He died in 1931 and is buried in the Hollywood Forever Cemetery. The headstone declares him none other than the true 'Father of Hollywood'.

Keith would like to send copies of her book to film producers and others who may remember her great-grandfather. She says, "If this book does well, there's more to the story." As a portrait of the "person behind the scenes" of the town that came to represent so much, Gaelyn Whitley Keith's *The Father of Hollywood*, is something that will enlighten and thrill film fans everywhere—including a certain grandson, still too young to read, or to know much about the entertainment business, but never too young to wish upon a star.