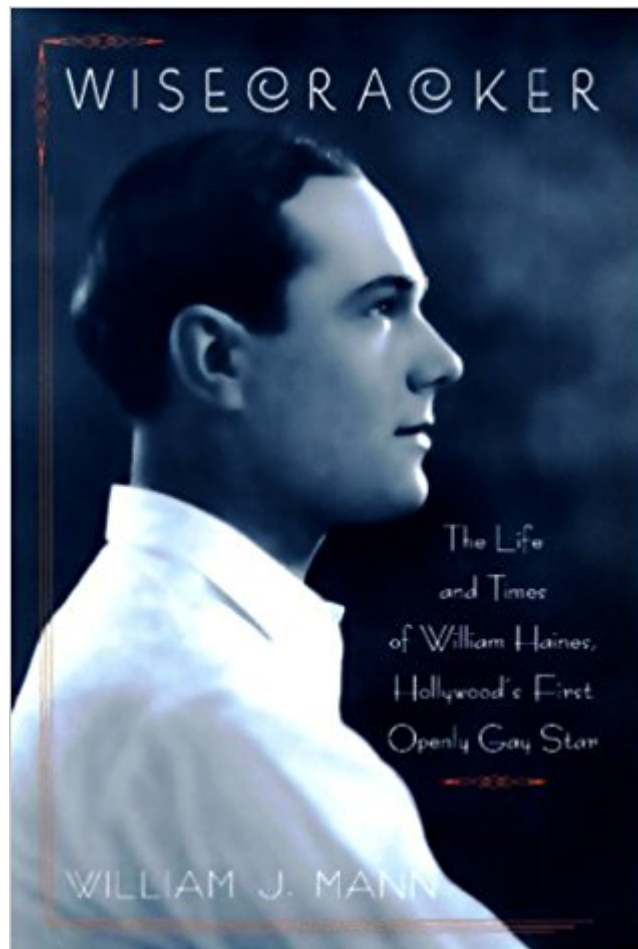




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# **Wisecracker: The Life And Times Of William Haines, Hollywood's First Openly Gay Star**



## Synopsis

In 1930 William Haines was Hollywood's #1 box-office draw - a talented, handsome, wisecracking romantic lead. Offscreen, protected by a careful collaboration between studio and press, he was openly gay with reporters and studio chiefs alike. Here is Haines's virtually unknown story - rich with detail, revelations, and scandal - about silent movies and talkies; his lover Jimmie Shields, and the fifty-year relationship (Joan Crawford, their best friend, called them "The happiest married couple in Hollywood") and the enforcement of the Production Code and the establishment of the Hollywood closet, which led to the blacklisting that ultimately doomed Haines's film career. Wisecracker sweeps from gay pool parties to the excitement of early talkies to Haines's infamous encounter with gay-bashing white supremacists in 1936. He survived the scandal to emerge as a top interior decorator to the stars and to such clients as Nancy Reagan and Walter Annenberg, who employed him for the American Embassy in London. With a cast of characters running from Tallulah Bankhead to Betsy Bloomingdale, from Clark Gable to William Randolph Hearst, Wisecracker is an astounding piece of newly discovered gay history, a chronicle of high Hollywood, and - at its heart - a great and enduring love story.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 480 pages

Publisher: Viking Adult; First Edition edition (February 1, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0670871559

ISBN-13: 978-0670871551

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1.5 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 48 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #338,918 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #15 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > LGBT > Gay #814 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Television Performers #2612 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Actors & Entertainers

## Customer Reviews

William Haines was one of MGM's biggest stars in the late 1920s, playing cocky but sympathetic wise guys in movies such as *Brown of Harvard*. He was as self-assured in real life: dropped by the studio in 1933 because he refused to hide his homosexuality, Haines became a successful interior

decorator. Journalist William J. Mann perceptively links Haines's story to shifting attitudes in the movie industry, the gay community, and America as a whole. He also paints a tender portrait of the actor's love for Jimmie Shields, his companion from 1926 until Haines's death in 1973.

The now-forgotten Haines made the leap from contract player to featured actor in 1926 and was Hollywood's top male moneymaker in 1930. But a combination of changing times and battles with Louis B. Mayer over his love life ended his career by 1936. Thereafter, Haines made a fortune as one of America's top interior designers without giving up his principles. Journalist Mann's detailed biography, based partly on interviews with gay Hollywood figures who knew Haines well, reveals a film community whose public and private faces rarely coincided. Haines and his partner's 50-year life together and that of other long-term gay Hollywood couples demonstrates a commitment rarely seen among any couples. Highly recommended for its vivid portrait of these overlapping communities. Anthony J. Adam, Prairie View A&M Univ. Lib., Houston Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Excellent sociological study of Hollywood in the 20s and 30s, and the transition from silents to talkies, from freedom to censorship. William Haines was a most likeable man who was devoted to family and friends. This is the first time I ever read anything about Joan Crawford that made me admire her. She was a loyalist. A surprising biography

I always wanted to know more about this iconic interior designer whose modernist and eclectic work I had greatly admired in photographs, but knowing nothing about his previous career as a film actor, I had erroneously assumed he had been an unsuccessful and fairly unknown actor of the silent era. In fact thanks to this biography I discovered that he was hugely successful as an MGM star and even proceeded with his career in films following the advent of sound when a number of his famous colleagues of the time just did not have the same luck and ability. As the title suggests the author concentrates on Haines' years as a Hollywood studio employee and how his career was affected by his homosexuality, his determination to not hide his long term relationship with his partner, and a strong change in social attitudes between the twenties and thirties, without doubt triggered by the great depression. By his mid thirties after the freshness of his screen idol looks and the interest of the public had faded, and probably seeking shelter from the limelight following a big scandal that saw his partner charged for an act of pedophilia, Haines turned to his passion for antiques and interiors and proceeded to make a successful business of it becoming 'the' interior designer of his

many friends in the Hollywood industry. Overall very informative and well researched with lots of references to his many performances in films, the author at times takes the route of the educated guess due to material lack of available information - possibly for the inaccessibility of MGM Studios files, and the often secretive nature of the subject matter -

Has to be the most well-researched Hollywood book I've ever encountered. Incredible detail and timelines.....I do wish there were photos of his furniture designs and interiors, which are more of a legend now than ever.

Very entertaining and informative. As someone who is fascinated by old Hollywood, I thought Mr Mann's account of Mr Haines career and life in the context of an industry pressured to conform was excellent.

Loved the book Would like to have known William Haines

made me buy William Haines's movies

got it but, not had read it yet! It's there when I will make that move with all the other readable books I have.

Great book!

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