

# YESTERDAY

## B-movie capitalized on Boulder Dam's drama

By David Barnett

"Boulder Dam" is 50 years old this year. No, not the big barrier that holds back the Colorado River, but rather the movie. The film was originally released by Warner Brothers during the spring of 1936. It was directed by Frank McDonald and starred Ross Alexander, Patricia Ellis, Lyle Talbot and Henry O'Neill. Admittedly, the movie, the director and the stars are not very well known to contemporary filmgoers; and, honestly, they were not very recognizable to those in the 1930s either.

Although no one would ever have mistaken Frank McDonald for such excellent Warner Brothers directors of the era as Mervyn LeRoy, William Dieterle or Michael Curtiz, he was nonetheless prolific. The same year that he directed "Boulder Dam" for Warner Brothers, he also made five other movies for the studio.

Prior to starring in "Boulder Dam," Ross Alexander had appeared in a number of motion pictures for Warner Brothers, including "Midsummer Night's Dream" with James Cagney and "The Sea Hawk" with Errol Flynn. "Boulder Dam" gave him his first starring role, and he was seen as a rising star by the studio. Sadly, however, he died about a year after he made the movie. He was



*Patricia Ellis' doll-perfect features, and competent acting, made her a prolific star in budget pictures of '30s and '40s, becoming known as Warner Brothers' "Queen of the B's." Yet she never became a "star" in the gigantic sense that the term was understood in her time.*



*Ross Alexander was being groomed for major stardom by Warner Brothers in 1936, the time he appeared in "Boulder Dam." But the handsome young actor was destined to die the next year, at the age of 30. Like his co-star, he did well considering the script he was given.*

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its movies primarily to men who had become casualties of the Depression

about the building of the dam. It was popularly known that the dam would

the construction company and the

in "Warner Brothers Presents," gives the movie only a few lines. Clive Hirschhorn, in "The Warner Brothers' Story," also gives "Boulder Dam" a few lines, but the best thing he says about the movie is that it had a predictable storyline.

Despite being relegated to historical obscurity, "Boulder Dam" remains a good example of the B-picture during Hollywood's Golden Era. The film includes actual footage of the construction of the dam as part