Dunne, Irene (1898-1990) Encyclopedia Article

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Contents

Dunne, Irene (1898-1990) Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Dunne, Irene (1898-1990).....3

Dunne, Irene (1898-1990)

Dubbed "The First Lady of Hollywood" in her day, her persona always charming, sweet, resourceful, and dignified, Irene Dunne evokes nostalgia for an era of romantic escape from harsh reality. Kentucky-born Dunne carved a successful career in musical comedy before entering films in 1930 (she starred as Magnolia in *Show Boat,* 1936), and was in the first rank of sympathetic screen heroines throughout the 1930s. She suffered gracefully through several sentimental, sometimes tragic, love stories, famously including *Back Street* (1932), *Magnificent Obsession* (1935), and *Love Affair* (1939), but also revealed an exceptional aptitude for comedy in such films as *Theodora Goes Wild* (1936) and *The Awful Truth* (1937). She received her fifth Oscar nomination for *I Remember Mama* (1947) which, together with *Life with Father* (1948), marked her last big successes. Dunne retired from the screen to devote herself to civic, philanthropic, and Republican political causes. Also a prolific radio and television performer, in 1985 she was honored at the Kennedy Center for her achievement in the performing arts.

Further Reading:

Schultz, Margie. *Irene Dunne: A Bio-Bibliography.* Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1991.

Thomson, David. *A Biographical Dictionary of Film.* New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.