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What drove filmmakers from Fort Lee, NJ?



There was a time when Fort Lee, New Jersey was considered to be the film capitol of the country. In the Garden State, it was a golden opportunity for a bustling town, which was poised for growth. Of course this was before the film industry gradually decided to move on to Hollywood, California.



Russell Roberts, author of *Discover The Hidden New Jersey*, said: *"It's fitting that Fort Lee and the movies were attracted to each other."* The town and the film industry were taking its first steps at the beginning of the 20th Century. Fort Lee was incorporated March 29, 1904 and the demand for movies was building during this period of growth. Filmmakers found Fort Lee an ideal location. The town was near New York City, had restaurants and hotels that the movie companies needed.

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Yet it was sufficiently rural, which made it an ideal place to film a wide variety of motion pictures. The Coytesville section of Fort Lee bore a striking resemblance to a prairie town in the Old West. Fort Lee and filmmakers basked in this brief, but lovely light. Fort Lee may have been Hollywood!



What exactly drove moviemakers from Fort Lee, New Jersey? Some say unpredictable weather.

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Others believe it was Thomas Edison's Motion Picture Patents Company and his business allies. The company they formed was a trust that sought out to control the entire motion picture industry. Some filmmakers went along with it. Other filmmakers, calling themselves independents, resisted. They continued making movies in defiance of the MPPC. The trust dispatched detectives for the purpose of enforcing their edicts; who weren't polite about it; they employed strong-arm methods.



A deal breaking moment in Fort Lee's movie business was World War I, as government rationing deprived the studios of coal required to heat drafty buildings. A combination of inclement weather, the MPPC's trust patent enforcement methods and coal rationing proved an arduous undertaking.

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So began the exodus to Hollywood, California. Roberts added: *"Of course no one in New Jersey could know that trickling away to California was an industry whose glamour and economic power would one day captivate the world."* Even if they were aware of the future of the film industry, would it have mattered without government commissions or lucrative tax breaks as an incentive? In fact, the moviemakers were not highly regarded at the time; the film industry vanished by 1925.



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