

# Movie filmed in Grant County holds fond memories

‘Napoleon and Samantha’ filmed in Grant County marks its 50th anniversary

By BENNETT HALL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — In the summer of 1972, U.S. newspaper headlines were dominated by the Watergate burglary and the growing political scandal that would ultimately end the presidency of Richard M. Nixon.

But the Grant County was abuzz over a new movie — “Napoleon and Samantha,” a Disney production — that was filmed the summer before in Grant County.

The movie — a wildly improbable tale of two young runaways who survive a perilous trek through the Oregon wilds protected by a pet lion and an idealistic college student — was released 50 years ago on July 5, 1972.

Half a century later, “Napoleon and Samantha” still conjures fond memories for some local residents.

## The making of ...

Filming began on June 21, 1971, and continued for about four weeks, with a production company of 65 people — 15 cast and 50 crew members — in town for the duration.

“Interest in the film has been keen locally,” the Blue Mountain Eagle reported, noting that Walt Disney Productions planned to hire roughly 50 locals to serve as extras and stand-ins.

Some two dozen locations around Grant County were used in the filming, including the county courthouse, the state welfare office and the fraternal



The old schoolhouse in Canyon City was one of the filming locations in “Napoleon and Samantha.” It has since been restored by Steve and Shelley Fischer.

hall in Canyon City (which was renamed “Grantville” in the movie). The old Damon’s Mercantile in Mount Vernon was prominently featured, and other scenes showed Campbell’s Texaco and other downtown businesses along Main Street in John Day. Several scenes were shot at the Gerald and Jessie Lewis home in Canyon City and the Tom and Jerry Mosgrove home in John Day. Other shooting locations included the Oxbow Ranch near Prairie City and the Williams Ranch on the East Fork of Canyon Creek. And the Grant Union High School gymnasium was transformed into a soundstage, where interior scenes

were filmed.

At the time, Oregon was enjoying a bit of a Hollywood moment. Several major motion pictures had been shot in the state in the previous few years, including “Paint Your Wagon” with Clint Eastwood and Lee Marvin, filmed near Baker City; Paul Newman’s “Sometimes a Great Notion,” shot in the Newport area; and “The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid,” filmed around Jacksonville with Cliff Robertson and Robert Duvall.

Those films had pumped an estimated \$5 million into the state’s economy and “Napoleon and Samantha,” with a budget of around \$1 million or so, was having

a positive effect on Grant County businesses.

The biggest name on the cast list may have been Johnny Whitaker, the 11-year-old child actor who played Napoleon and was then riding the crest of his fame as Brian Keith’s son in the hit TV sitcom “Family Affair.”

Samantha was played by Jodie Foster, who would go on to win a pair of Best Actress Oscars for “The Accused” and “The Silence of the Lambs” but was then a relative unknown. Just 8 years old at the time, she was performing in her first movie role.

Likewise, Michael Douglas would have a long career as a leading man (including a Best Actor Oscar for “Wall Street”) but at the time was just beginning to step out from under the long shadow cast by his screen idol father, Kirk.

The cast also featured a number of veteran character actors, including Will Geer and Ellen Corby, who would later team up again as Grandpa and Grandma on the long-running television series “The Waltons.”

## Extras and stand-ins

Marvin Gibbs was 14 years old that summer and working as a paperboy, delivering The Oregonian and the Oregon Journal in John Day. One of his delivery stops was a bakery on Main Street, where members of the production crew would gather to start their day.

“One day a guy asked me if I wanted to be in one of the scenes and I said, ‘Sure, why not?’” recalled Gibbs, now 65 and living in Wallowa.

The filmmakers wanted to use him as an extra in a scene where Whitaker, as Napoleon, and Geer, who played his grandfather, are

walking out of a movie theater (the Canyon City Fraternal Hall, made over as the Grantville Theatre in the film).

“They come out the door and as they’re coming out, I get on my bike and ride off,” Gibbs said. “It’s a pretty short clip, just two or three seconds.”

Gibbs was paid \$100 for his efforts.

“I made more in one day than I did in two months delivering papers,” he said.

## Movie mania

Even people who weren’t involved in the movie’s production got caught up in the excitement.

Grant County Emergency Management Coordinator Eric Bush was just 6 years old when “Napoleon and Samantha” came out. He remembers seeing it with his mother, brother and sister at the Grant County Drive-In in John Day. He also remembers how excited his mother got when she saw familiar locations up on the big screen.

“My mom grew up in Canyon City, and (part of) the movie was filmed up behind her house,” said Bush, now 56. “I remember my mom pointing out places and saying, ‘Hey, that was filmed right by our house!’”

“I remember as a kid everybody talking about that,” he added. “That was the buzz — everybody was excited about it being filmed around here.”

Michael Johnson, home from his freshman year at Oregon State University, got a job working for the production company in the summer of 1971. Then 19, he was assigned to assembling props and helping to interior shots.

He got to know sev-

eral of the movie people, including Will Geer and his adult son Raleigh, who was traveling with him. One night, Johnson recalled, he borrowed his dad’s car and went to the Grant County Drive-In with the Geers and a friend of his.

“The drive-in was actually the only theater in town and was showing a movie Will Geer had starred in called ‘The Reivers,’” said Johnson, now 70 and living in Tualatin.

Some people got front-row seats to the production, such as the residents of two houses used in several key scenes in the movie.

The Tom and Jerry Mosgrove house on Hillcrest Road in John Day filled the role of Samantha’s house in the movie and was the site of intensive filming for two days. The Mosgroves’ son, David Liberty, recalls watching with his sisters Mary and Michelle as the production crew pulled up with two huge trailers and started unloading their gear.

“We watched in amazement as they got out all their equipment,” said Liberty, who was 14 in the summer of ’71.

The house was used for exterior shots only, so the family could observe the proceedings from inside as long as they didn’t get into the shot. One of the more exciting scenes in the movie happens when Danny (Michael Douglas), who is trying to help Napoleon and Samantha, knocks on the door and Samantha’s suspicious grandmother, played by Ellen Corby, calls the police.

“Michael Douglas got arrested on my front porch while I watched from my upstairs bedroom,” said Liberty, now 65 and living in Hood River.

# Man with felony warrants arrested after police vehicle chase

Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — A Lakeview man who had multiple felony warrants and led police on a chase on the Fourth of July was arrested after officers found him in the Powder River.

Michael Ray Schulte, 36, was arrested at about 7:49 p.m. near Church Street, according to a press release from the Baker County Sheriff’s Office.

Schulte was taken to the Baker County Jail, charged with being a felon in possession of a firearm, reckless driving, attempting to elude police and unlawful possession of methamphetamine.

He also had an arrest warrant from Lake County.

The incident started when the Baker County Sheriff’s Office dispatch center received a call about a suspicious vehicle in the ditch along Old Highway 30 near Ebell Creek, several miles southeast of Baker City.

As deputies were en route, a caller reported that another vehicle had arrived and pulled the first vehicle out of the ditch.

The first vehicle, a 2006 Ford Taurus, was heading toward Baker City on the highway at a high rate of speed, according to the press release.

Deputies learned that the driver was Schulte, and that he had multiple felony arrest warrants. Deputies turned on their overhead lights and started following Schulte.

He failed to stop at a stop sign and entered Baker City on Elm Street. Baker City Police Department officers joined the deputies in pursuing Schulte.

Police found the Taurus, empty, along Church Street near the river. After searching for about 30 minutes, police found Schulte “partially submerged” in the river, according to the press release.

# Wildhorse Pow Wow recognizes thousands of indigenous women through first-time event

By ANTONIO ARREDONDO  
East Oregonian

MISSION — After two days full of dancing and drumming at the 26th annual Wildhorse Pow Wow, the many indigenous tribes gathered in the area took a moment to recognize those who are missing.

The pow wow is a Native American tradition where many tribes gather together to celebrate their culture as well as compete in different events. One of the events at this year’s Wildhorse Pow Wow was the Red Dress Competition.

“It’s a newer movement to raise awareness for the missing women from Canada and the United States,” Pow Wow Master of Ceremonies Thomas Morning Owl said. “It started in Canada but has moved down here.”

The REDress Project displays red dresses in public spaces to show the number of missing Indigenous women. Since 1980, thousands of indigenous women have gone missing, with most cases left unsolved.



Sonney Walsey of Toppnish, Washington, stands surrounded by others dancing in a circle during the opening ceremony Sunday, July 3, 2022, at the Wildhorse Pow Wow in Mission.

Morning Owl highlighted several cases in the Yakama tribes as well as some farther north in the Seattle area as regional examples.

“For some reason when indigenous women go missing in this nation they slip through the cracks,” Morning Owl said.

Morning Owl said this is the first time the Pow Wow held an event of this nature, and the staff showed their support for the new activity. Most staff members wore

red Wildhorse staff shirts on July 3 to honor those missing. Many of the women participating in other events also wore red.

The Red Dress remembrance initially was schedule for the early evening on July 3, but a thunderstorm with heavy wind and rain July 2 sent spectators and participants alike to seek cover, ending the festivities a few hours early. The rescheduled slate pushed the final day’s com-

petitions back to the evening of July 3.

After finishing up the previous day’s events, the Red Dress competition took place, where women were judged by other members for their dancing and dress.

The event was a part of three days’ worth of competitions with more than \$90,000 in prizes. The event typically brings in 5,000-7,000 guests per year, and the crowds packed in to watch the celebrations July 3.

Along with the guests, nearly 100 participants from several tribes came to participate at Wildhorse, the first Pow Wow on the site in two years due to the pandemic.

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