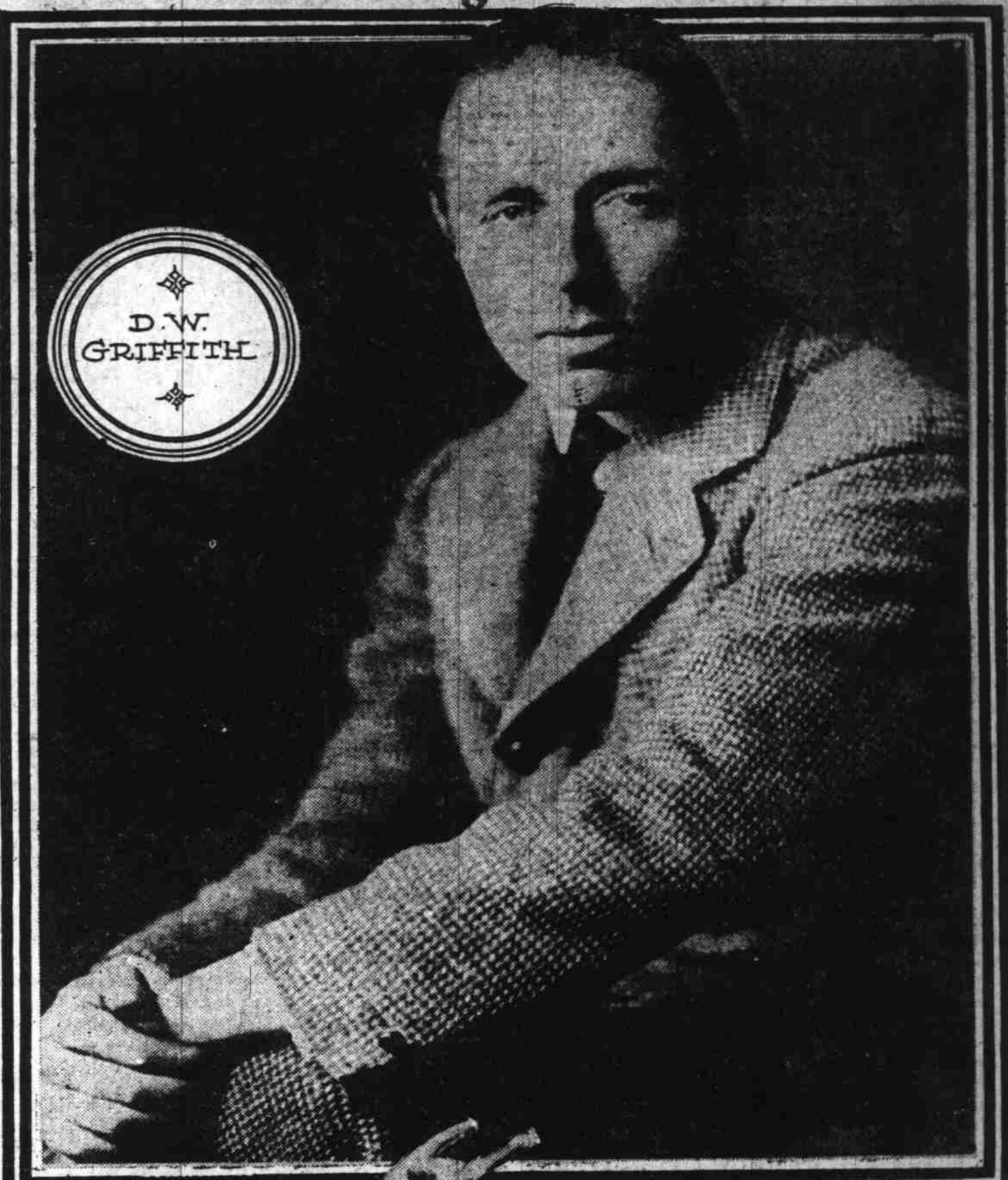


D.W. Griffith — A Portland Stage Hand

Great Producer, Earning \$1 Daily,
Here Dreamed of the Successes
He Has Achieved



LILLIAN GISH
A
GRIFFITH
STAR, AS
SHE APPEARED
IN HIS
MASTERPIECE
"THE
BIRTH OF A
NATION"



D.W.
GRIFFITH

By Earl C. Brownlee

WAY back in the barnstorming days of the drama—long before the motion picture's advent—there was in Portland a dreamer.

Perched upon the city's verdant hills, his frugal fare provided by the dollar he earned on the previous night, he looked over the broad valley to the great hilly horizon.

Here he saw the ambling river, bustling with the craft that, through trade, were building a city. There he caught a glimpse of industry's smoke screen. Again he saw, amid the scene of progress, the human element.

He saw people — their hopes, their hates and their homes. And he dreamed as he gazed.

Upon the foundation of those dreams has been built the greatest business of its kind on earth. Upon the pathway he paved with the gold of his imagination, the Portland dreamer traveled—to the pinnacle of success in his line of endeavor.

Then he was a dreamer—at a dollar a night — practically unknown hereabouts. Today he is David Wark Griffith, master motion picture producer and worth a million if he's worth a dollar.

None here will admit that he has not seen, or at least heard of, "The Birth of a Nation," "Intolerance," and like productions of the silver screen. They bear the D. W. Griffith stamp.

That's a fact. They do bear the Griffith stamp, but that is secondary, for they also bear the imprint of the dreams that were dreamed on Portland's hills.

Griffith, son of the late Brigadier General Jacob Wark Griffith of the Confederate States army—a gallant commander of stalwart troops in the Southern rebellion—wandered into Portland nearly a quarter century ago.

Avoiding the dignified footsteps of his forebear, the youth had selected for himself a pleasant pathway that fulfilled the heart's desire in everything but dollars and cents. He had been playing minor roles in Pacific coast melodramatic stock companies and had, in point of fact, done most anything that would honestly bring him the price of bed and board.

Portland was then the home of some of the coast's most known players and producers — not to mention theatres whose fame spread across the continent. But there wasn't a niche in the whole big scheme of theatricals that would, apparently, admit the silen-

der youth who sought surcease on the stage from the aggravations of hunger.

It is faithfully reported by one who clearly recalls Griffith's Portland days, though he was then only one of the multitude in stagecraft, that he "landed" in the great old Marquam Grand theatre as a stage "grip."

"Grip," it may be explained, professionally identifies a stage hand who works extra shifts. When the show called for plenty of muscle back-stage the "grips" were called into service.

Through many weary nights of thrilling melodrama at the Marquam Grand, Griffith tugged and tussled with scenes between acts and scoured the "props" during spare moments.

It was in the shadows of those same scenes that the back-stage crowd used to gather after the show on super-chilled winter nights to hold profound sessions of the T. M. A. In the rafters of the gilded old palace must echo still the stentorian tone of George L. Baker's rhymed masterpiece, "Asleep at the Switch."

The same stage era brought to light the present mayor of Portland, who happily confesses to the delight he found as a stage hand, house carpenter, and so on to the managerial office and ownership of Portland theatres.

Griffith probably experienced the wonder of his daily acquisition of one dollar for his labors shortly before Mayor Baker wielded his hammer on the Marquam Grand stage, but, withal, the same crowd of hearties attended the rise to fame of both men.

Baker, in his mechanical prime, was president of the T. M. A. John Logan, at a T. M. A. meeting, addressed his first "jury," and Mayor Baker expounded his first political wisdom.

Upon a property "throne" Baker presided over T. M. A. sessions nightly until such an hour as business was disposed of. Then someone would call lustily for "Asleep at the Switch," and the present mayor of Portland would rise from his throne and declaim.

That poem is still the mayor's favorite, it is said, for he repeated it so often and so feelingly that he could never forget a line of it.

When the poem was off the boards a jury would be assembled and the evening trial—or, rather, the early morning trial—would be under way. In the foreground was "Billy" Pangle, now manager of the Hellig theatre and then trap drummer in the orchestra pit. Up



front, too, would be John Logan, whose only claim for recognition was the fact that he was a good fellow and wrote a piece occasionally for a dramatic paper. He mercilessly practiced upon his fellows the legal maneuvers in which he was training himself.

"Those were the great old days," the back-stage coterie avows.

But about Griffith! Griffith wanted, above all else, to be an actor. He had been playing woefully small parts before he came to Portland and here his hopes were almost blighted when he was employed as a "grip." But he stuck to the job valiantly, accepting \$1 for every night he was fortunate enough to work and dreaming his free hours away beneath a sheltering fir on the heights west of the city.

His ham actor's days were not done, however, for it is recorded in "Who's Who in America," to which exclusive volume Griffith has gained admittance in a prominent way, that he was an actor for two years before he was graduated into the motion pictures in 1908.

The business of making a million through the production of great pictures for circulation throughout the world, while, almost as an incidental, he did more than any other one person to elevate the

plane of the pictured drama to its present place, has kept Griffith on the upward jump through the intervening years since "those happy days."

Friendships have fallen by the wayside sometimes, and the days of struggle are things of the dark past for Griffith. Nevertheless, memory serves him to a certain extent when he is questioned about his Portland days and his Portland dreams.

To a battery of questions that would elicit the intimacies of those days and dreams Griffith has replied, in his own happy fashion. He doesn't review the dollar-a-performance job he held here; rather he slips past that stage in his career by a casual reference to the fact that he was "working on plays" in the Rose City.

"Working is right!" exclaimed one to whom that statement was referred. "If you could have seen him push and puff at a heavy 'set' you'd agree he had been 'working' on plays."

Griffith says: "I do remember Portland vividly. I was working on plays there. Years have obliterated many memories of the time I spent there, but I believe I shall never forget the impression the beauty of Portland made upon me.

"I know of nothing quite so inspiring as a sunset view of the Willamette from the hills about Portland. Nature has played lavishly with Portland."

"On those hills I have set for hours dreaming of the things I wanted to create. Those visions of valley, upland, and river dwell vividly in memory."

"Out of my Portland dreams and Portland facts have come scenes and characters for my motion pictures—several characters I conceived in Portland have appeared on the screen."

"Even in my day Portland was not a distinctive town, from a dramatic standpoint, but it was a splendid place to live. I enjoyed it all."

From which some of those who knew Griffith find cause to criticize his reticence. Therefore it devolves upon Gerett Lloyd, that member of Griffith's big official family, styled "personal representative," to supply some of the "color" that Griffith's answer lacks. Lloyd says:

"Griffith is sensitive to beauty in all things. That accounts, I believe, for his vivid recollection of Portland's scenic charms. He is a great worker—puts in from 14 to 18 hours a day, including Sunday—and might forget fame and faces



MAY MARSH
WHO CAME TO PORTLAND
UNDER THE GRIFFITH
BANNER

where other things would impress him.

"His belief in humanity, I think, is one of the keystones of his success. He believes no one can become stale who is interested in humanity and observes it. His greatest delight at luncheon is provided by the essentially human action of some other diner. He is constantly and enthusiastically studying human nature."

"One day we went to see motor races and during a thrilling moment in the frenzied contest I found Griffith watching a small boy, visibly hungry, tearing himself between his attention to the races and a hot dog sandwich—with the sandwich winning."

"He avoids the gilded, brilliant dining rooms and seeks the 'dum,' for there he finds folks who don't care a darn about anything but the business of getting food and enjoying the proceeding."

"Maybe years later I find popping out in his pictures the things we have seen or discussed at such times and places. Perseverance, of course, is a fundamental and dominant trait with him."

"The first thing Griffith believes all success must rest in is a liking for one's work—and interest in it that is an urge. When one finds oneself in the big task, then take care of body and mind and keep ultimately fit, he says. He does nothing but make pictures, but he relaxes numberless times daily by taking up some different angle of the work. For instance, while directing a highly emotional scene

that drags the utmost from a director as he gives inspiration to the players, Griffith will stop suddenly and take up with the composer who is always at hand some original music they are working out together."

"Griffith hasn't always been so thoroughly wrapped up in pictures, however, and it is a little known fact that he has received royalties through five mediums of creative expression—mechanical invention (two while he was an expert puddler in a steel mill), poetry, stage plays, music and motion pictures."

"Which fits in nicely with what Portland folks say about Griffith's dreaming days, his studious capacities and his reticence."

Griffith, to give a bit of intimate history in closing, was born, at La Grange, Ky., in 1880, and is, therefore, 40 years old. His father, as has been said, was a Confederate army officer.

As a motion picture producer Griffith is said to have reached the greatest fame. He is producing nowadays on his own hook, but since he started he turned out pictures for such people as Biograph, Triangle, etc.

His best known pictures are "Birth of a Nation," "Intolerance," "Hearts of the World" and "Broken Blossoms," and to these, Griffith promises, will soon be added "Way Down East," a distinct departure in Griffith pictures in that it is essentially a story of humanity rather than war—a drama and not a spectacle.