

'Flesh and blood movie star' and company transfixed, transformed a community

By Jon Stinnett
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

For a while there, it must have seemed like anything was possible.

In the late spring of 1926, Cottage Grove residents had more to look forward to than the long, sunny days and cool, pleasant nights of another summer to come. News had traveled their way that one of the biggest stars of the era would film his most ambitious work yet in their little town.

"To have a sure-enough flesh and blood movie star like Buster Keaton as a resident for several months, together with a company of 65, is a novelty that residents are enjoying immensely and is also a novelty that is

attracting many from outside points to 'The Hollywood of Oregon,'" the Sentinel exclaimed that June.

Can it be any wonder, then, that Cottage Grove and its visitors got so swept up in it all? And how exciting must it have been to have that flesh-and-blood star downtown many days, walking from their humble hotel to work just a few blocks away or to a pickup baseball game at nearby Kelly Field, working his magic for all to see, requesting only that onlookers not "cast a shadow on the picture"?

The filming of "The General" in Cottage Grove that summer fostered stories of close encounters with movie stars, of dreams realized and a town uplifted far beyond its borders,

stories that lingered for generations to come. This summer, it is the pleasure of the Cottage Grove Sentinel — which dutifully recorded many of those stories in its extensive coverage of the making of the film these many decades ago — to join in the celebration of one of the community's proudest achievements, the making of "Cottage Grove's own movie," as the newspaper later called it. We sincerely hope that our special 90th anniversary publication can help to foster a love of the film and its history in a new generation and call to mind the curiosity and enthusiasm of that bygone era. For if Hollywood can come to your small town, even if for just one summer, then truly anything is possible.

Cover photo: Buster Keaton poses with "The General" for a photo that also serves as the background element that the star gives to Annabelle in the film. Photo reprinted courtesy John Bengtson. Several photos are also reprinted here by permission of the Cottage Grove Museum.

Thanks and acknowledgements

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Presented by the CG Historical Society, CG Chamber of Commerce and the City of Cottage Grove