

Movie “The Kentuckian” Remembered

By Jerry Long
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Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 17 March 1977, p.3C:

‘The Kentuckian’

Local extras remember bit parts
in Lancaster movie 23 years ago

By Ann Whittinghill, People Editor, Messenger-Inquirer



The state premier of the United Artist film “The Kentuckian” on Aug. 5, 1955, drew crowds of area residents to see themselves and their friends who were among the 1,200 Kentucky and Indiana “extras” in the movie.

It's been more than two decades since the state premiere of "The Kentuckian" drew crowds of Owensboroans to the Malco Theatre. Many had been "extras" in the Hecht-Lancaster movie that was partially filmed in the area.

The movie, which was Burt Lancaster's first independent film, will be the feature film tonight at 7:30 at the Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library. The film tells the story of a father, his son and his dog who headed west from Kentucky to Texas in 1820.

"I had fun," said Don Likens. He was a chubby 11-year-old among the school children in the movie. The Owensboro native and practicing periodontist, had a four-word part during filming of a school scene at Lincoln Village in Rockport, Ind. "That's my claim to fame," Likens muses.

"In that scene (he appears in seven scenes) I was late for school and ran between Diana Lynn (the schoolmarm) and Burt Lancaster who were in conversation. On the run I tipped my hat and said, 'Good morning, Miss Susie,' and continued on into the schoolhouse," Likens remembers. "One time (during shooting of that scene) I stumbled on the school steps and so they had to do it again."

Another highlight of the dentist's experience was "getting to ride over with some of the (professional) actors in a 1953 Chevy station wagon."

Throughout the 1954 summer and fall filming, the extras were provided bus transportation, were paid \$10 each day and were served lunch., According to newspaper accounts at the time, United Artists used about 1,200 Kentucky and Indiana residents as extras in the movie that included scenes filmed in the eastern Kentucky mountains.

"The great number of extras used in the movie was one of its attributes according to the critics," said John Friedmann Jr. said. Friedmann, after a Hollywood career in set and costume design, had returned to his hometown of Owensboro when the movie adaptation of Felix Holt's book, "The Gabriel Horn," started filming in western Kentucky.

"It really interested me," Friedmann said, "because I had the idea I might do something on the sets." But, Friedmann confessed he "didn't get around to seeing about it." The day before shooting started "the employment office manager called about 9:30 p.m. and asked me if I wanted to be an extra, Friedman remembers. "I'd had experience being an extra while I was working in Hollywood," he continued. The designer had his resume available and soon he was "among a couple of people" selected to play in key scenes.

"They used me for close-ups," Friedmann said, "and a lot of times with Lancaster, so I knew I wouldn't be cut out."

In addition to acting in the movie, Friedmann got the job of an "assistant's assistant's assistant." He described the duties of getting all the extras ready for a shooting session. "You know, making sure nobody was chewing gum or looking through binoculars . . . just seeing they were right for the scene," Friedmann explained.

The Hollywood veteran had tales of numerous incidents surrounding the filming and repeatedly mentioned Lancaster's concern for realism.

Friedmann said there were stunt men on the crew who doubled for the actors, but Lancaster often subjected himself to abuse that many actors avoid.

"Walter Matthau was supposed to be throwing dirt in Lancaster's face," Friedmann said, and the camera angle was such that dirt was tossed aside but gave a realistic appearance.

"Lancaster stopped short and had Matthau do it again and really grind those handful of dirt right in his face ... it didn't bother Lancaster one bit . . . he was strong, tough, and rougher than some of the stunt men."

Some of the extras also got some roughing up in a barroom brawl scene. This was shot on the "Sternwheeler" riverboat, that was based at Owensboro, but was moored at Spottsville for filming on the Green River.

"The Kentuckian" world premiere was in Chicago just prior to the Kentucky premiere at Owensboro on Aug. 5, 1955. Time magazine wrote in its Sept. 26 issue, " 'The Kentuckian' strikes a note, . . . that might suitably be called 'Hollywood pastoral.' "

The magazine's review, which had an accompanying photograph, closed with the comment that the dog, Faro, "is one of the rarest sights on any screen; just plain dog."

The movie was a major production for Owensboroans and other area residents who had bit parts. But, on the Hollywood scale, "The Kentuckian" was not destined to be a cinema classic.

Nobody told Burt Lancaster. According to Friedmann, Lancaster managed to get the movie entered in the Cannes Film Festival, and "The Kentuckian" subsequently was the target of movie critics. "

One New York critic called it 'one of the most uncharacteristic' of the American cinema," Friedmann quoted.

Dianne Foster co-starred with Lancaster in the movie that became Walter Matthau's screen introduction. Others in the cast included Diana Lynn, John Carradine, John McIntire, Una Merkel, Stan Bodine and Lee Erickson. Donald McDonald had the role of Little Eli, Lancaster's son. All left memorable impressions.

Erickson attended Don Likens' birthday party; McDonald couldn't go but sent an autographed Daniel Boone book as a gift.

Friedmann has kept in touch with dialogue director Tom Conrey and visited him on the West Coast.

In the midst of all the work and excitement, Dianne Foster and a radio and television script writer, Joel Murcott, chose to marry in Owensboro.



John Friedmann Jr. of Owensboro was one of several chosen for key scenes with Burt Lancaster. Friedmann had returned to his hometown after a career in Hollywood set and costume design, when filming of the movie begin in 1954.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 15 July 1954, p.11B:

Filming Of 'Gabriel
Horn' Is Scheduled
To Begin On Aug. 15

Filming of "The Gabriel Horn," Technicolor drama about the adventures of a Kentucky pioneer and his son, will start Aug. 15, it was learned here yesterday.

Three major location sites in Kentucky and one in Indiana have been selected for the film, which will be produced by Hecht-Lancaster Productions, according to an announcement from the studio.

The motion picture producing company, headed by screen star Burt Lancaster and his partner Harold Hecht, will move their 150-man cast and crew into the Cumberland Falls area for the start of the movie. The entire production will be photographed in Kentucky and neighboring Rockport, Ind.

A. B. Guthrie Jr., Pulitzer Prize winner and former city editor of the Lexington Leader, has adapted the screen story from the novel, "The Gabriel Horn," by Felix Holt, a native Kentuckian. The story deals with the activities of a father and his nine-year-old son as they wander through the Kentucky backwoods of 1820, seeking a home "away from civilization."

In the film, Lancaster will make his debut as a director and also play the leading role of the pioneer, Big Eli Wakefield. Dianne Foster, young Canadian-born actress, has been signed for the role of Hannah, an indentured servant. The rest of the cast is still to be announced.

After finishing its work in the Cumberland Falls district, the movie company will move to the Levi Jackson Wilderness State Park, near London, then to the Green River and Ohio River at Owensboro and finally to the Lincoln Memorial Village at Rockport, Ind.

The locations were selected by Lancaster during a recent tour of Kentucky with production manager James Vaughan and cameraman Ernest Laszlo.

"The Sternwheeler," a retired river packet scheduled for use here as a restaurant, was contracted for recently and will have a part in the film.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 29 August 1954, p.2A:

Wetherby Says Film's
New Name Is "Great
Honor" To Kentucky

FRANKFORT, Ky., Aug. 28 – Governor Lawrence Wetherby has expressed pleasure with the changing of the name of the movie, "The Gabriel Horn," to "The Kentuckian."

"The producers have done us great honor and every Kentuckian will take pride in this opportunity to advance our name and to show movie-goers the beauties of our state," the governor said.

The Hecht-Lancaster Organization, producers of the film, sought the governor's endorsement in a telegram which stated, "We hope this motion picture will prove worthy of the natural beauty of your state and the hospitality of its people." The film company has its Kentucky headquarters in Owensboro.

Starring in the film will be Burt Lancaster, who will also be its director.

"The name is especially fitting because the film is based on a book by a Kentuckian and adapted for the screen by another Kentuckian," Governor Wetherby stated.

The picture is based on the book, "The Gabriel Horn," by the late Felix Holt, a native of Calloway County. A. B. (Bud) Guthrie, formerly of Lexington, wrote the screen play.

Filming of the movie is now in progress in Levi Jackson Wilderness Road and Cumberland Falls State Parks and other sites in Southeastern Kentucky. Subsequent work is to be done around Owensboro, Rockport, Ind., and along the Green River.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 14 September 1954, p.5:

Filming Of Scenes For "The Kentuckian"
Gets Under Way Here And In Rockport, Ind.

**Burt Lancaster Is Star, Director
And Co-Producer Of Picture;
Movie To Be Finished In October**

By Lewis Donohew



GETTING READY TO ROLL – The shot above gives an overall picture of "The Kentuckian" set yesterday during the filming of a scene at Rockport, Ind. The picture shows the large array of set workers and equipment used in filming just one scene

of a movie. The sequence shot here, although lasting only about four minutes, required the full complement of equipment and required about three hours to set up.

It was lights, cameras, and plenty of action yesterday as movie-making came to Western Kentucky and Southern Indiana in the form of the Hecht-Lancaster Organization, which is filming the movie, "The Kentuckian."

Huge trucks loaded with photo graphic equipment, props, costumes, and other movie paraphernalia rolled up to the locations – one just across the river from Owensboro and the other at Lincoln Village in Rockport, Ind. – and dozens of actors, extras, and crewmen jumped to work to grind out two scenes for the picture.

One of the scenes, a ferryboat crossing, was shot on the Ohio River here yesterday morning and the other, a tavern sequence in the movie village of "Humility," was filmed at Rockport in the afternoon.

Burt Lancaster, star, director, and co-producer of the picture, was everywhere yesterday, setting things up before the cameras rolled.

He recited the lines of each player, complete with grimaces and gestures. Walking about among them, he told each actor how to walk or sit, where to look, and what expression to wear. Then, moving back to the cameras, he surveyed the scenes, talked them over with the cameraman, made a few change, and nodded his head in satisfaction.

A large crowd gathered to watch the proceedings in Rockport but because of needs for plenty of room move around in and for quiet while the scenes were being shot, the spectators were only allowed as far as the gate of the fenced-in village.

It wasn't all work, however.

Little bits of frivolity livened the picture as the actors and set men relaxed between jobs.

"Whip" Wilson, Hollywood bullwhip artist who will double in a whipfight scene, displayed his talents by knocking the ashes off a cigarette held by a member of the cast, and later by Lancaster. He also sneaked up on another member who sat in a chair reading a paper, snapped the whip with a loud pop, and ripped the paper to shreds. The man, shaken but untouched moved quickly to another location.

Miss Dianne Foster, after taking part in the whip tomfoolery, sat back in a chair and read a pocket edition of a book entitled "The Corpse That Refused to Stay Dead."

Lancaster, among the first to arrive at the Rockport location after the river scene was shot, said a few words to the other members of the organization and then stretched out on a stone bench for a short break, appearing to relax. as much as if he were on a feather-bed.

The Rockport portion of the movie yesterday afternoon involved the picture's villian, Stan Bodine, played by Walter Matthau; a village comic played by Norman Leavitt; Hannah, the bondservant and female lead, played by Dianne Foster, and several extras.

In the scene, Bodine gave a couple of ugly leers, kicked a stool out from under the comic, and growled at Hannah to bring him some wine. That was all there was to it. About three to five minutes of film time, but it took about two and a half hours of brisk activity to set up equipment, another thirty minutes of rehearsals – stool-kicking, leering, and the like – and another several minutes of shooting before the sequence was recorded to the satisfaction of all concerned, especially Lancaster, who showed himself to be a perfectionist. A minor setback occurred when Bodine kicked the stool too hard and split it in two, but a far-sighted pop man quickly produced another.

The Picture is being filmed in Cinemascope and Eastman color. The group will return to the same location today for other scenes, "many of which will be filmed in the village and others

– interior shots – in a tent-covered site in the same park. The tent covers interior cabin scenes constructed of plaster of paris and painted to resemble logs. Officials said the interiors would be filmed on rainy days when other work was interrupted.

Two other scenes remain to be shot on the Ohio River near Owensboro and on the Indiana bank. One of them involves a mussel-fishing scene in which Lancaster, who plays the part of Big Eli, and Donald MacDonald, who acts as his son, are the principals. The other includes MacDonald in a woodland scene.

The mussel-fishing part was scheduled to be shot yesterday but was postponed because of the illness of MacDonald, who was reporting to be suffering from an upset stomach.

Among the participants in the day's activities was an Owensboro girl, Mrs. Marie Agnew, of 1011 W. 2nd Street, who is a standin for Miss Foster. Mrs. Agnew, who has the same general build and facial characteristics as the star, poses under the cameras while they are being focused for the scenes in which Miss Foster will play.

Mrs. Agnew was chosen from among several persons for the part. When interviewed yesterday, she reported she has no ambitions to become an actress, however, in fact she is a happily married housewife and the mother of two children, Pamela, 7, and Donna, 5.

Most of the members of the cast have been in Kentucky for about three weeks, taking part in shooting in the Levi Jackson State Park - Cumberland Falls area. For the remainder of the movie, they are staying in Owensboro.

One other star, John Carradine, will arrive here today and another, Diana Lynn, will get here Wednesday, along with Harold Hecht, co-producer. Both will come by plane, according to production manager James Vaughn. The movie is expected to be completed in late October.



Left: A CHAT WITH BURT – Mrs. Marie Agnew, Owensboro, a standin for Dianne Foster in the production of "The Kentuckian," chats with Burt Lancaster, star, director, and co-producer, during a break in the routine yesterday at Rockport, Ind., where one of the scenes was filmed. Right: THE STARS – Burt Lancaster and Dianne Foster, co-starred in the Hecht-Lancaster production, "The Kentuckian," pose for a portrait between scenes of shooting at Rockport, Ind. The movie, to be filmed entirely in Kentucky and Southern Indiana, will be completed around the latter part of October.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 14 September 1954, p.6:



FALL FASHION NOTE – Beards are back in style again in Western Kentucky and Southern Indiana as evidenced by this gathering here Sunday afternoon. The line of bewhiskered men are shown as they waited to apply for jobs as extras with the Hecht-Lancaster Organization in the picture "The Kentuckian." Filming of the movie started in this area yesterday.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 19 September 1954, p.2D:

Runaway Mule, Babies And Forgotten Lines Are Plagues To Director Of "The Kentuckian"

By Lewis Donohew

There comes a time in everyone's life when all seems to go wrong and nothing goes right. Burt Lancaster, star and director of "The Kentuckian," on location here, will attest to that.

Lancaster has just completed a hectic week in which he was plagued by everything from sick stars to rearing mules, with such pesky little things as missaid and forgotten lines thrown in for good measure.

It all began Monday when Donald MacDonald, who is playing the role of Lancaster's son in the movie, came down with an upset stomach, forcing cancellation of his part of the shooting schedule for the while and causing a hasty revision of plans.

Treatment by the company's first-aid man, John Leber, and a couple of days rest put MacDonald back on his feet. Then came the rearing mule.

The company was shooting a scene in which John Carradine, playing the part of a medicine man, was extolling the wonders of his wares to a crowd of pioneers while an extra drove by in the background with a sleepy mule, just to add a touch of realism.

Waving a bottle containing an embalmed gopher snake in the air, Carradine waxed more and more eloquent. Then the mule, startled by the light from a reflector, decided to take a more prominent role in the proceedings.

Leaping into action, he dashed around and around the town square, scattering extras, tossing his driver and ruining the scene. Carradine remained at his post throughout the proceedings. When everything had quieted down, he spoke.

"I've evoked reactions to my art in my time, but never one like this before."

But to the producers, H wasn't quite so funny. The unfortunate extra had to be treated for bruises and everything had to be set up all over again at a loss of valuable time so the scene could be retaken. Retakes cost a lot of money, anyone connected with a film company will tell you.

With that scene out of the way and MacDonald back in action again, the organization moved into a schoolhouse sequence, which involved several youngsters, many of them children of Owensboro residents.

The crew shot a scene in which some of the youngsters went into a schoolhouse, and moved on into another in which the remainder of the children filed into the building. Everything was rosy until someone recalled that one of the little girls who had gone in with the first group came out and went in again with the second batch also. Re take!

The young ones began filing in once more, greeted near the door by Diana Lynn, acting in the role of Miss Susie, the schoolteacher.

Playing their parts perfectly, they walked past Miss Lynn and into the schoolhouse. "Good morning, Miss Susie," the girls said as they passed, dropping cute little curtsies.

"Good morning, Miss Susie," the boys said, taking off their caps.

Everything moving along fine. Everyone smiling. Here comes another one.

"Good morning, Miss Sally." Cut!

After the children went into the schoolhouse, Lancaster and MacDonald were scheduled to arrive, talk to the schoolteacher for a couple of minutes, and then MacDonald was to go into the schoolhouse and join the other children. Lancaster was to ask the schoolteacher about a fight his son had with one of the pupils and say: "It was about me."

It moved along good up to the point where Lancaster was supposed to say "It was about me." Then, just to prove that actors are human, he forgot the line.

Came the retake. Kiddies skipped in wonderfully. MacDonald said his piece well and was gone. There was the discussion about the fight and they moved up to the same point once more. Then there was silence. Lancaster forgot the line again.

There were other costly breaks also, such as stars failing to make an entrance, and the noise of pounding hammers and crying babies, the latter two ruining the soundtrack. One crying baby incident, which also involved some Hollywood slang, was quite funny to some but terrifying to the mother. Several takes had been ruined by the crying child and the mother, a spectator, was asked to take it off the set.

Just as she was leaving, one of the men relayed an order to an electrician.

"Kill that baby," he yelled, pointing in the general direction of the departing mother and baby.

The mother didn't turn around to watch the electrician turn off a baby junior spotlight. She just whirled and fled.

But through it all, Lancaster and the members of the cast and crew retained their calm, kept on digging, and ground out the scenes that one day will flicker on the screens.

Spoiled scenes and sick stars are disturbing, yes, Lancaster and the others say. But, they add, it's all in the day's work.

Speaking of a day's work In the life of a member of a Hollywood company, it's quite a bit longer than some people think.

The idea has been circulated about that anyone connected with the movies sleeps till noon, goes out for a couple of hours after lunch, then returns fresh for an evening of fun. That's a wonderful dream, the people who do the work will tell you, but it just ain't so.

A movie company is divided into the following general classifications: Actors, grips, makeup men, camera crew, sound men and staff, the latter covering a multitude of groups, including the front-office personnel.

The grips get up around 5 a.m. and arrive at the location around 6:15 to set things up for the day's shooting. The actors, extras and makeup men arrive around 15 minutes later and the grease paint is applied.

Other members arrive within the next hour and set up cameras, mikes, and other equipment in readiness for the day's shooting.

The toils continue until the sun light fades around 6 p.m., then equipment is removed and they return to their hotels. But the day isn't over for the actors and members of the production staff. Persons in the cast get together for rehearsals for a length of time, then go to their rooms to do some final boning up on their lines for the next day's shooting.

After that, Lancaster, the producers, cameraman Ernest Laszlo, and cutter Otto Ludwig map out the next day's work to round out the "soft" day.

Among the children seen playing the roles of schoolchildren in the movie at Rockport were Paul King, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Robert King; Betsy Brooks Vincent, daughter of Judge and Mrs. Norris B. Vincent; Don Likens, son of Mr. 3rd Mrs. Arnold Likens, and Nicky Burlew, son of Mr. and Mrs. Nick Burlew.

Owensboro may be on its way to becoming a location headquarters for possibly several film producing companies.

The city is already playing host to the Hecht-Lancaster organization, which is now filming "The Kentuckian" in this area, and it has been learned that another major movie producer has evinced an interest in making a picture here.

According to an informed source. Warner Brothers has contacted the production department of Hecht-Lancaster, stating it is planning to make a picture about Daniel Boone and inquiring about the possibilities of this area.

The company has not yet made its reply.

Owensboro is getting quite a bit of publicity out of the movie-making here. Stories with an Owensboro dateline are being sent out daily by Art Wilde, publicity agent for Hecht-Lancaster. And the city will receive a large additional boost on Oct. 5, when 20 New York and Chicago newspaper and magazine editors will be on hand to cover the production of "The Kentuckian."

In Federal Court the other day, John Carradine and Norman Leavitt, there as spectators, were mistaken for defense witnesses in a bootlegging case. Both are lean, tall and have long hair for their roles.

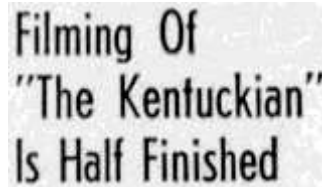
The "Sternwheeler," retired river packet here which has been rented and redecorated for a role in the movie, will be moved to a location on the Green River sometime before Oct. 5, when it will be used in some of the scenes.

Among the shots to be taken will be one of Burt Lancaster making a 58-foot jump off the top deck into the river. Lancaster was interviewed earlier about his reactions to the idea.

"One thing is for sure," said the star-director. "I'm not likely to call for a retake."



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 30 September 1954, p.2A:



Filming of "The Kentuckian" Is half finished, a spokesman for the Hecht-Lancaster Organization said yesterday.

Art Wilde, publicity director for the movie company, said scene shooting at Lincoln Pioneer Village at Rockport would continue through October, with the exception of a week on location at Spottsville.

Outdoor and "cover" scenes (interiors covered by huge circus tents) of the village known as Humility" in the story are being made at Rockport. Two sequences centered around the river boat episode will be filmed at Green River. There the Sternwheeler is anchored, after a tugboat ride last week.

Aboard the former river packet which has been bedecked with paint and ironwork for its part in the movie, a gambling, fight and plunge into the water sequence is scheduled, Another scene will be filmed on the bank, where a crowd of 100 persons welcome the boat to the village.

Sometime between now and the end of next month the mussel scene will be shot across river from Owensboro, Wilde said. This will take only a half day's work and will be sandwiched in on a tight production schedule.

At Rockport the filming is now at the whip scene stage, where villain Stan Bodine (actor Walter Matthau) attacks Big Eli (Burt Lancaster). The sequence, which is requiring about a week to complete, will run an estimated 4 minutes in the movie. The trouble lies in the difficult business involved and some 300 untrained extras and stunt people, Wilde said.

Wednesday's rain meant that cover scenes were filmed. Yesterday's concerned one inside the home of Miss Susie (Diana Lynn), schoolteacher with designs on the pioneer principal. Few extras were required. Those reporting at call time (7 a. m.) were sent home with quarter pay (one-fourth their daily salary).

Altogether 2,500 extras are being used in "units," the publicity director said. He explained that the script calls for this number of spectators, and fill-ins. Some people are reappearing in different scenes on callbacks. Wilde estimated that some 1,200 extras will have taken part in the movie by the time filming is completed.

Standard pay for extras is \$10 for an 8-hour day, plus overtime. Like the regular cast and crew, they are fed on location by a Louisville catering service.

Artist Thomas Hart Benton, who has spent the past week here making sketches in connection with publicity layouts, left Wednesday for London to do background work at Cumberland Falls and Levi Jackson State Park. Later the works will be completed in oils in his Kansas City studios.

Though filming will end in another month, it will be next spring or early summer before the movie is ready for sneak preview. The work of cutting, adding background music and noises and color processing remains to be done in Hollywood, Wilde said.

"The Kentuckian" is being released through United Artists Corporation, which has promised a premier here in the Blugrass state. The city has not been selected, the film company's spokesman added.



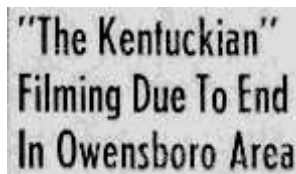
Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 4 October 1954, p.1:



FOR WESLEYAN'S LIBRARY — Burt Lancaster, center, actor, director of "The Kentuckian" presents two copies of the bound A. B. Guthrie adaptation of the late Felix Horn's "The Gabriel Horn," to Prof. John W. Parker, head of the department of English of Kentucky Wesleyan College. Student Beverly Bell, a Wesleyan junior looks on at right. The copies arc for the library and archives of the college.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 25 October 1954, pp. 1& 14:



Owensboro's movie days are numbered. Filming of "The Kentuckian" is scheduled for completion at the end of this week, the Hecht - Lancaster Company announced Monday.

Location was Kingfisher Lake, yesterday, where a sequence with young Donald McDonald was being filmed. In the scene, frightened while wandering through the woods alone.

Another day's work remains at Rockport on the cover set for a tavern sequence. Then the cameras will move to the Armory, where the boat gambling salon set has been erected. This scene should be filmed within three days, according to Grady Johnson, publicity director for the movie company.

The layout, which will serve as background for the film's most colorful scene, depicts the boat's interior. Doors, a huge brass chandelier and some of the stained glass window panels in the set were taken from the Sternwheeler itself. The antique furnishings, including an elaborately carved oak bar, were secured in the London and Owensboro area.

The only scene that may be left for filming in Hollywood is one where McDonald and Burt Lancaster emerge from the water, following their jump from the river packet, Johnson added. This may be shot here if permits.

Several of the stars have returned to the West Coast. Actress Diana Lynn left Sunday. She is scheduled to begin work soon on a Martin and Lewis picture. Diana Foster will leave within a few days with her husband, Joel Murcott, for New York. They will see some plays before driving back to Hollywood on their delayed honeymoon.

Character actor Ian Keith, who arrived last week to play a role in the gambling scene, was stricken ill and was flown back to the film capital Saturday. Edward Norris, his replacement, reported here yesterday for the part. When the filming is finished, Lancaster will return to the coast by way of Kansas City, Mo., where he will sit for portraits by artist Thomas Hart Benton. The works will be used in connection with "Kentuckian" advertisement posters, Johnson said. He is scheduled to begin work on a new picture, "The Rose Tattoo," in Key West, Fla., around Nov. 4. In the film adaptation of the Tennessee Williams' play, Lancaster will star opposite Italian actress Anna Magnani. The picture is a Paramount production.

"The Kentuckian," the third of seven Hecht-Lancaster Productions under contract for United Artist Studio release, should be ready for a Kentucky premiere next spring. The site has not been selected.

Although the cast and crew will leave immediately when the shooting is completed here, some department heads will remain behind until Nov. 4 to close shop officially, Johnson said. The auditor's office will stay open at 704 Frederica Street until that date to pay final bills incurred during the company's stay here.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 30 October 1954, p.12:



The director yelled "cut" and the final sequence of the Hecht-Lan-caster "Kentuckian" was completed at 4 p. m. Friday in the Armory. Burt Lancaster, sporting his first modern haircut in two months, announced shooting was all over as crew members dimmed arc lights and began striking the elaborate River Queen gambling room set.

Most of the members of the cast and crew are to leave today by plane for the West coast. The production company office at 704 Frederica Street will remain open until Nov. 4 for payment of bills.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 3 December 1954, pp.1A & 14A:

Chicagoan Describes 'Bigtime Hollywood In Smalltown USA'

(Editor's Note: The following article was brought to our attention yesterday, and we deem it worthy of a reprint. It was published Nov. 27 in the Chicago Daily News, an independent newspaper of five sections now in its 79th year. The title – "Small Town Jumps: Hollywood Goes To Main Street."

We were a little late in seeing it. The paper has a circulation of three copies here. We don't recall seeing Mr. Davis here anytime during the filming, which ended, incidentally, Oct. 29).

By Miller Davis

OWENSBORO, Ky. – What happens when bigtime Hollywood hits Small Town U. S. A.? Small Town jumps – like a lizard on a hot rock.

This small town will be jumping for a long time. Burt Lancaster has just completed the film "The Kentuckian" eight miles from here.

It was the biggest thing that happened in Owensboro since the Green River distillery burned down 35 years.

And everybody got into the act.

Aunt Lil signed on as an extra. Her nieces and nephews played school in the film. And Grandpa Joad got \$10 a day on the strength of his flowing beard.

Even the pigs and the chickens in the movie were home-grown talent.

Six months ago this was a sleepy tobacco town of 33,000, perched on the muddy banks of the Ohio River. The kind of town where folks go cat-fishing after lunch. Hollywood hit it with an awful wallop.

The Kentucky Unemployment Insurance office here was swamped with applications for movie jobs.

There haven't been so many strangers in town since the last flood brought volunteers from three states.

Nor so many crisp dollar bills in circulation.

"It was the biggest business boom in years," said a local hard ware dealer. He should know.

The Hecht-Lancaster movie company purchased all materials for set construction from local dealers. The figure for hardware, lumber, paint and fixtures ran into the thousands.

All livestock, harnesses, wagons and other conveyances for the picture were rented locally.

Hotels and restaurants did a land-office business. The movie company brought a 150-man crew and cast from Hollywood. These folks eat well and often.

"The Kentuckian" may not be the biggest spectacle Hollywood has ever filmed – but it could be the toughest. At one time or another everything went wrong.

Moviemen erected circus tents to house interior scenes. The Kentucky breezes blew them down.

They borrowed a mule for a scene with actor John Carradine. The mule took one look at Carradine and ran away.

An extra blew his lines four times in one crucial scene. He called another actor by three different names – all incorrect.

A local baby started bawling while the cameras were grinding. An electrician shouted the Hollywood term for "turn off the lights."

He cried, "Kill that baby!"

The baby's mother grabbed her wailing infant. She hasn't been seen since.

"It was quite an experience," says actor-producer Burt Lancaster. He said it kindly. But there was a dazed look in his eyes.

How do the local folks feel about it?

"Sorta hated to see them movie fellers go," sighed an oldtimer sitting in the Court House square.

Then he lighted a 50-cent cigar – taking care not to muss his new \$75 suit.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 31 July 1955, p.9D:

OWENSBORO'S MOVIE
Local Stars Will See Selves On Screen
When 'The Kentuckian' Comes to Town

By MARGARET MORGAN

Many Owensboroans will have a chance to "see ourselves as others see us!" when "The Kentuckian" opens at the Malco Theatre on Friday for its Kentucky premiere.

The weeks of growing beards, the hours of standing around between takes, the long wait to see the final product are at an end for the approximately 1,200 extras who played in the picture, as well as for some 120 members of the movie company who came to Kentucky for the filming of the picture originally called "The Gabriel Horn."

Natives of Rockport, Ind., and Owensboro were cast in parts ranging from school children to elderly citizenry in the story of the activities of a father and his nine-year-old son as they wandered through the Kentucky backwoods in the 1820s.

The story is based on the book "The Gabriel Horn" by the late Felix Holt, who also wrote "Daniel Boone Kissed Me."

Early filming of the story took place at Levi Jackson Wilderness State Park and at Cumberland Falls State Park early last summer. Burt Lancaster, who played the leading male role, directed the picture, and as half of Hecht-Lancaster Productions, also helped to produce the picture, came to Owensboro and Rockport to look over prospects for the filming to be done here.

Late in July a contest was announced in which the man with the best growth of beard would receive a \$25 savings bond, and all entrants would stand a good chance of being employed as extras in the movie, at \$10 a day, plus overtime and lunch. Early morning shaves came to a screeching halt for many in this area on July 23, 1954.

J. A. Bullington, Stanley, won the savings bond. He had begun his chin growth for the Rockport Centennial and just held on when he heard of the casting of "The Kentuckian."

Word went out that men, women, and children with long hair would be needed as extras.

A special plea was made for an expert on mussel fishing.

And not only were extras and stand-ins and advisors in demand, but many props were sought in this area. Publicity personnel requested among other things, a moonshine still, a yoke of oxen, a spinning wheel, and a red fox.

Also requested were old wooden-works clocks, stone crocks, candle sconces, and lanterns. Farmers were asked to look in the smokehouse or up in the barn loft and see if any old tobacco scales were stashed away there, and if the old buggy-house might be concealing wooden tobacco wagons, buggies, or a stage coach. Housewives were asked to look around for pianofortes, a concertina, antique furniture and other relics of a century and a half ago. Most of the items sought were found near here, and a promise of adequate insurance coverage helped to persuade owners of the valuables to allow them to be used in the picture.

Stars of the cast, including Lancaster, Diana Lynn, Dianne Foster, John McIntyre, Una Merkel, John Carradine, and the child star, Donald McDonald, appeared at civic meetings and lent a cosmopolitan air to more than one social occasion in the vicinity between mid-August and late October, when the "location" part of the production was finished.

Scenes which supposedly took place in the mythical town of "Humility, Ky.," were shot at Lincoln Pioneer Village at Rockport. A mussel fishing scene took place on the Ohio near Owensboro. Part of the setting for the play was Hart's fish Camp at the concourse of the Green and Ohio Rivers. The retired old river packet, the "Sarah Lee," refurbished by her new owners and renamed "The Sternwheeler" floating restaurant, was towed to the Spottsville site for the filming.

Later the interior of the Sternwheeler was duplicated on an indoor setting at the National Guard Armory for a river boat gambling scene.

Then the cast folded their costumes, packed up their make-up, paid the extras, and quietly moved back to California, to leave Kentuckians in a state of anticipation for more than nine months. Now, at last, we can see ourselves.



Cool MALCO NOW SHOWING
FEATURE: 1:00—3:10—5:10—7:10—9:10

AN AVALANCHE OF FURY!



BURT LANCASTER
as **The KENTUCKIAN**

CINEMASCOPE
print by
Technicolor

Rise Starring **DIANNE FOSTER · DIANA LYNN**
with **JOHN McINTIRE · URSULA MERKEL · JOHN CARRADINE · JOHN LITEL** and **WALTER MATTHAU** and **DONALD MacDONALD**



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 29 June 1984, p.5D:

Area extras recall filming
'Kentuckian' in 1954

Associated Press: ROCKPORT, Ind. – Burt Lancaster was already a matinee idol when "The Kentuckian" was filmed in 1954. but it was the bit players who made the movie a classic here.

"There's a brother on the left. And that's Bob on the right, and that's Herb over there." said Allen Grose, pointing out his brothers who worked as extras in a scene replayed in his living room recently.

More than 1,200 people from the area were hired as extras for filming here and in Owensboro and Spottsville. Ky.

For 30 years, they faithfully tuned in to the occasional late-night television showings of "The Kentuckian." But from now on, they can watch it every year at the town's Fourth of July celebration.

The Old Rockport Little Theatre will have several showings of the film and apply the \$3 admission fee toward restoration of the Lincoln Pioneer Village, a recreated frontier homestead near President Lincoln's boyhood home where several scenes were filmed.

The town's people still have vivid memories of working with Lancaster.

"He had the most brilliant blue eyes and flashing teeth," recalled Dottie Phillips, who played a river-boat passenger in Owensboro.

"He was a very warm man, and he also got close to his people," said Anna Boultinghouse. "For 15 years, we received a Christmas card from him."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 22 October 1994, p.2A:

Filming of Lancaster movie was big event here

The cast and crew of "The Kentuckian" created quite a hubbub during its filming between mid-August and October 1954, said Casper "Cap" Gardner, who was Owensboro's mayor at the time.

There were make-up people, costumers and carpenters. The Hotel Owensboro served as a base for crew members as they traveled to nearby sites like Kingfisher Lake or Lincoln Village near Rockport, Ind.

"Leonard Maltin's Movie and Film Guide 1993" calls the movie "a minor but spirited frontier adventure set in 1820s with Lancaster (doing double duty as star and director) traveling to Texas with his son, hoping to start a new life in Texas."

Owensboro apparently was picked as a site because it had a riverboat called "The Sternwheeler," a floating restaurant docked on the Ohio River at the end of Frederica Street, Gardner said.

Gardner said the actors and actresses weren't aloof and seemed to like mixing with the locals at cocktail parties. Actor John Carradine served as a judge at a beauty contest for a Hawesville sorghum festival and was the guest of honor for the victory celebration of Owensboro's Community Chest drive.

The movie officially premiered in Chicago, but had its Owensboro debut on Aug. 5, 1955, at the Malco Theatre downtown.



In Owensboro for the filming of "The Kentuckian" in 1954, Burt Lancaster, right, looks over newspapers and telegrams with two unidentified members of the movie crew at an Owensboro coffee shop. Lancaster both starred in and directed the movie. [note: Harold Hecht (on left), producer and James Hill (center), production executive.]



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 21 September 2004, Connections section, p.8:

'The Kentuckian' brought celebrities to town

By Karen Owen, Messenger-Inquirer

Owensboro went Hollywood in 1954 when part of a major motion picture was filmed in the area.

Burt Lancaster starred in, directed and co-produced "The Kentuckian," but for many local residents the real stars were their friends and neighbors who appeared as extras in the film.

The plot centered on the adventures of a frontier widower headed for Texas with his son and their dog.

Owensboro apparently was picked as a location because it had a riverboat, "The Sternwheeler," which was a floating restaurant docked on the Ohio River at the end of Frederica Street.

For the movie, "The Sternwheeler" was taken by tugboat to Spottsville on the Green River for a scene where the boat is welcomed at a dock.

Carpenters spent days building a dock in preparation for that scene, former extra Calvin Ray Robinson of Owensboro once recalled. The riverboat had no power of its own, so it was rigged with a cable to an electric motor that pulled the craft through the water.

"Well, here the cameras were rolling, and the boat came into that dock and just crushed it," Robinson said, laughing. "They had to start all over."

The Kentucky National Guard Armory on West Parrish Avenue was transformed into a riverboat gambling casino for a scene.

A steam engine was used to warm the water in the old Sportscenter swimming pool for a scene where Lancaster and another actor fell into a river.

Other scenes, including a whip fight between Lancaster and newcomer Walter Matthau, were filmed at Lincoln Pioneer Village, a Rockport, Ind., tourist attraction built by the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression.

Portions of the movie were also filmed at Cumberland Falls State Park and Levi Jackson Wilderness State Park in eastern Kentucky.

Matthau actually broke a finger during filming, according to members of the Grose family. Five brothers and the father of the southern Indiana clan worked as extras on the movie.

Their paychecks were sufficient to provide electricity, a water pump, a bathroom and an ice box for their home. "We were raised poor, but that movie put us on our feet," said Kenny Grose of Patronville, Ind.

Former Mayor Casper "Cap" Gardner's 6-year-old son, Chris, had a minor role in "The Kentuckian," but he made enough to buy a bicycle.

Restaurants and hotels also benefited from the film crew's presence mid-August to October 1954.

Lancaster's leading lady, Dianne Foster, and radio-TV script writer Joel Murcott were married in a private ceremony at Gardner's Robin Road home. County Judge Norris Vincent performed the wedding.

Cast members mingled freely with local residents. Actor John Carradine served as a judge at a beauty contest for a Hawesville sorghum festival and was the guest of honor for the victory celebration of Owensboro's Community Chest drive.

The only negative publicity came when an 18-year-old Indiana man handcuffed himself to actress Diana Lynn at the hotel. He was arrested on a misdemeanor charge but the event was later denounced as a publicity stunt.

The movie officially premiered in Chicago, but had its Owensboro debut on Aug. 5, 1955, at the Malco Theatre downtown.

Area people who served as extras on the production held annual reunions for three years or more.

The log cabins at Lincoln Pioneer Village eventually fell to disrepair but were restored in recent years. They are now on the National Register of Historic Places.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 1 July 2007, p.1G:



This log cabin, a center-piece of Lincoln Pioneer Village in Rockport, Ind. served as a saloon during the 1954 filming of "The Kentuckian," starring Burt Lancaster.



There are 12 buildings in the Civil War-era park, Lincoln Pioneer Village, in Rockport, Indiana. One served as a saloon in the 1954 film "The Kentuckian," starring Burt Lancaster. Another was built as the tobacco house for the movie; it is now used as a museum of early transportation.

On 18 September 1956, a reunion of the cast of extras and their friends who took part in the picture "The Kentuckian" was held at Lincoln Village in Rockport. Following a covered dish luncheon, suggestions were made to organize an association and establish a regular annual meeting date. Entertainment was provided by local talent, and pictures were shown of the activities on the set during the filming of "The Kentuckian." There was also a large cake enjoyed by all.



Picture on left: Burt Lancaster (center) with two local residents – Mrs. Marie Agnew, of Owensboro, KY, and a man from Evansville, IN, who worked as one of the extras. Mrs. Agnew was a standin for actress, Dianne Foster. Picture was taken during a break in filming of a scene at Lincoln Pioneer Village in Rockport, IN in September 1954. Picture on right: Actor - director, Burt Lancaster.

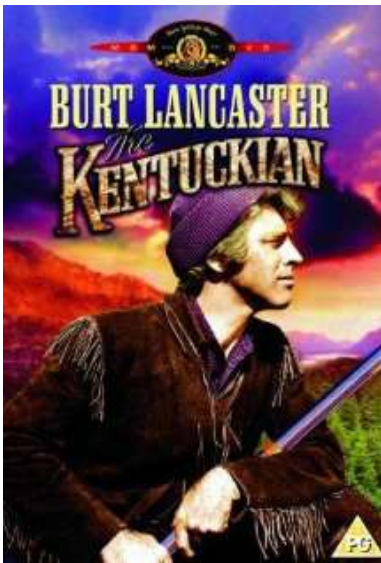


Actor Walter Matthau plays Stan Bodine in a scene where he kicks the chair from under a village comic, played by Norman Leavitt, during the filming of a scene for “The Kentuckian” at Lincoln Pioneer Village in Rockport, IN on 13 September 1954.



A major portion of the movie “The Kentuckian” was filmed in Owensboro in 1954. Burt Lancaster, who starred in and directed the movie, insisted that the film be shot on site in Kentucky and Indiana. The old Owensboro Hotel, which used to be on the corner of 4th and Frederica, is where the cast stayed while filming in Owensboro. Hundreds of Owensboroans were used as extras, and several residents got larger roles.

Set in 1820, the plot of the movie was that “Big Eli” (Lancaster) decides to leave Kentucky for Texas with his son. Several scenes were shot at the Lincoln Pioneer Village in Rockport, some riverboat scenes were shot on the Ohio River near Spotsville, and the SportsCenter was also used. The movie made its Kentucky Premiere in Owensboro at the Malco Theater, which is now the Theatre Workshop’s Empress Theater, on 5 August 1955.



Some of the cast of “The Kentuckian”



Burt Lancaster
(as Elias Wakefield)



Walter Matthau
(as Sam Bodine)



John McIntire
(as Zack Wakefield)



Dianne Foster
(as Hannah Bolen)



John Carradine
(as Fletcher)



Diana Lynn
(as Susie Spann)



Una Merkel
(as Sophie Wakefield)



Donald MacDonald
(as Eli Wakefield)

