

## ON LOCATION IN LONE PINE

News from Behind the Scenes of Western Films and Filming.

**Silent Film Megastar Arbuckle Scandal Backdrops ‘Round-Up’ Restoration Debut**  
Dorothy Kosich 10.20.2015



LONE PINE, California--The fully restored, high-resolution, digitized version of the silent film western, [The Round-Up](#), which had its television premiere Sunday, October 18<sup>th</sup> on [TCM](#), actually debuted at its first official world premier nine days earlier on October 9<sup>th</sup> before an audience of western film buffs at the [26<sup>th</sup> Lone Pine Film Festival](#) in Lone Pine, California.

The Lone Pine Film Festival showing and a celebrity panel discussion fêted the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the original 35mm film, officially released by Paramount on October 10, 1920. [The Round-Up](#) restoration’s Lone Pine Film Festival unveiling was particularly appropriate since the western is believed to be the first feature film shot in the Alabama Hills of Lone Pine, California.

*The Round-Up* was also silent film megastar [Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle’s](#) first feature film. However, the comedian was not actually the star of the film, based on a hit play by Edmund Day that featured Arbuckle’s older cousin.

*The Round-Up* was restored by the Library of Congress with funding provided by the Lone Pine Film Festival and festival founder, [Jim Rogers](#), a Nevada media mogul, who died in June 2014. Lone Pine film historian Chris Langley, Inyo County’s film commissioner, provided the research.

The Lone Pine showing of the film featured a celebrity panel of silent film experts including moderator [Ed Hulse](#), the author of numerous articles and several books pertaining to Lone Pine’s film legacy; author Richard W. Bann, an authority on westerns; and film editor and producer Robert S. Birchard, editor for the [American Film Institute Catalog of Feature Films](#), and the current president of [Cinecon](#), a Hollywood film festival specializing in the screening of rare and unusual films of the silent film era.

During the panel discussion at Lone Pine, the men noted that *The Round Up* was Arbuckle’s first feature film for Paramount, which signed him to a three-year contract at a record \$1 million annual salary. The \$5,000 per week contract was unheard of at a time when most people lived comfortably at \$5,000 a year, observed TCM Premiere Host and Anchor Robert Osborne during Sunday’s showing on TCM.

The film was also unusual because it was not confined to the “slapstick” shorts, typical of comedians in the silent film era.

Arbuckle was 33 years old at the time *The Round Up* was shot in the Alabama Hills of Lone Pine in January and February 1920, Bann told the Lone Pine Film Festival audience. The rotund comedian was hoping to make a move into light comedy and other motion pictures, said Bann.

However, critics at the time attacked *The Round Up* because it was “not at all the type of movies that fans of Fatty Arbuckle expected to see him in at that point in his career,” observed TCM’s Osborne during Sunday’s TV debut.

Arbuckle himself had only a supporting role in *The Round Up* as Sheriff “Slim” Hoover, a friend of the film’s romantic lead Jack Payson, played by actor/writer/producer [Tom Forman](#), who co-authored the film script with Edmund Day. Forman would go on to direct the second screen version of the Owen Wister western classic, “[The Virginian](#)” in 1923.

Among the cast members were the movie’s villain, an almost unrecognizable future Academy Award winner Wallace Beery. Comedian Buster Keaton—a good friend of Arbuckle’s—had a cameo as a Native American, for which Keaton was paid \$7.50.

*The Round-Up* was shot entirely on location at Lone Pine because Arbuckle “wanted the best locations for the film that would be based on a successful stage melodrama by the same name,” wrote film historian Langley in a 2007 article. In its January 3, 1920, edition, the local paper, *The Inyo Independent* declared that the relationship between Lone Pine and the movies was close from this point on.

On Dec. 24, 1921, Langley said, *The Round-Up* was shown at the Independence Theater in nearby Independence, California. The local newspaper stated, “*The Round-Up* is best described as six reels of undiluted laughs and hair-raising thrills, for its shows the corpulent comedian in comedy situations that characterized his former short funfests as well as a dramatic portrayer extraordinary.”

Unfortunately, that glowing review was published three months after Arbuckle’s career came to a screeching halt.

### **Rappe Scandal Destroys Arbuckle Acting Career**

The events surrounding the biggest scandal of 1922 began when Arbuckle and his friends drove from Los Angeles to San Francisco, on the Labor Day weekend and checked into the St. Francis Hotel. A raucous three-day party would follow. Twenty-six year old [Virginia Rappe](#) ended up in Arbuckle’s bedroom where one witness claimed she was either raped and/or was seriously injured from Arbuckle’s weight reportedly while having sex with the comedian.

However, Arbuckle insisted he found Rappe vomiting in his bathroom where he helped clean her up and led her to a bed to rest. He subsequently found her on the floor and went to get help. To make matters worse Rappe was not taken to the hospital until three days later because her friends mistakenly believed she typically was on a drunken bender. On the fourth day, after her hospitalization, Rappe died from peritonitis, caused by a ruptured bladder. Arbuckle was arrested and charged with her murder.

The press considered Arbuckle guilty and portrayed Rappe as an innocent young girl, not reporting that she had a history of abortions included one which reportedly would have taken place just before Arbuckle’s party. Arbuckle became a symbol of immorality and movie houses stopped showing his movies.

In his third jury trial, Arbuckle was finally found innocent by a jury which issued a [statement](#) that “a great injustice has been done him. There was not the slightest proof adducted to connect him in any way with the commission of the crime.”

“The happening at the hotel was an unfortunate affair for which Arbuckle, so the evidence shows, was in no way responsible,” they concluded.

On April 18, 1922, Will Hays, president and chief investigator of the organization, banned Arbuckle from film making. Arbuckle’s acting career was destroyed although Hays lifted the ban in December 1922.

“I think he (Arbuckle) was railroaded,” film editor and author Birchard told the audience of western film aficionados at the Lone Pine Film Festival.

In response to the scandal and the murder of actor/director [William Desmond Taylor](#) on February 1, 1922, Hollywood studios established a self-policing organization known as the Hays Office, film historian Hulse told the Lone Pine audience. The office produced the [Motion Picture Production Code of 1930](#), informally known as the “Hays Code”.

As the years went on, Arbuckle eventually began directing under the name William B. Goodrich. He also appear in Vaudeville off the screen.

On June 29, 1933, Arbuckle signed a contract with Warner Brothers to act in several comedy shorts. Tragically, on that same day, after attending a one-year anniversary party with his third wife on June 29, 1933, the 46-year-old Arbuckle [suffered a fatal heart attack in his sleep](#).

The film *The Round Up* is currently available for on-line viewing at [Watch TCM](#) through October 26<sup>th</sup>. Viewing is free to cable and satellite TV subscribers who gets TCM.

*The Round Up* will also be available in the DVD box set, The Arbuckle Anthology at the end of this year or early in 1916 from CineMuseum, LLC.

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