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FABLES AND DISTANCES  
Filmmaking  
in the Southwest



DRESSING THE WEST  
with costume designer  
CATHY SMITH

MOVING PICTURES  
The Films of Faron Konopak  
with DOTTIE DIAMANT



A  
JOHN MURRAY  
Production

WHERE GOD PUT  
THE WEST  
a documentary

28



Technicolor ROCKS  
starring Sedona's own  
JOE O'NEILL

featuring  
BETTE STANTON  
as recorded by  
CINDY HARDGRAVE

JUST LIKE IN  
THE MOVIES  
script by  
RENNARD STRICKLAND



Moab's Movie  
Museum  
by SAM WAINER



meep meep!  
and that's all, folks!

**JOHN A. MURRAY**

# FABLES AND DISTANCES

**JUST AS EACH PERSON CREATES A PERSONAL HISTORY THAT IS PARTLY TRUE AND PARTLY MYTHIC, WEAVING FACT AND FICTION—WHAT HAPPENED, WHAT SORT OF HAPPENED, AND WHAT NEVER HAPPENED—SO DO A NATION'S FILMS.**

**IN THE FILMS OF THE SOUTHWEST—PARTICULARLY THOSE ANCHORED IN ACTUAL EVENTS—WE AS A NATION HAVE FABRICATED AN ALTERNATIVE AND OFTEN ILLUSORY VISION OF OURSELVES AND THE PAST.**

I am sitting on a rock overlooking Monument Valley. It is the hour before sunrise. The sky to the west, over Oljeto Mesa, is still sprinkled with a few stars. The sky to the east, over the distant Chuska Mountains, is as pink as the palm of my hand. Even as I watch, a lens of red light is forming on the horizon. Before me are three great buttes—Left Mitten, Merrick, and Right Mitten. The names may not be familiar, but almost everyone has seen the formations, for they have been featured in dozens of films. For vast distances the landscape is perfectly flat, and then suddenly there are these three heavy solid rocks, each rising to the height of a one-hundred-story building. As the light comes up on the earth, the country begins to reveal its secrets. It is a desert land, spare and disciplined, and there is no fat on it. The colors are dry and sun-washed, like the colors of Anasazi pottery sherds. The floor of the desert is covered with reddish-brown sand, dotted here and there with rabbitbrush and sage, prickly pear cactus, and barbed yucca. Along the winding stream courses, junipers and pinyons grow, branched in delicate ways like bonsai. The early-morning air is cool and fresh, and scented with the smell of sage.



# where god put the west

BETTE STANTON *with* CINDY HARDGRAVE

WHEN A TOURIST ASKED WHY THEY WERE FILMING IN MOAB,  
ACTOR JOHN WAYNE RESPONDED, "TO FILM A REALLY BIG WESTERN,  
YOU HAVE TO GO WHERE GOD PUT THE WEST. . . "



ollywood producers began leaving their studio sets to film amidst actual landscapes in the 1920s and '30s. They soon discovered the magnificent scenery of the Colorado Plateau—and the rest is movie history. Soon audiences around the world had come to recognize its rugged landscapes as being synonymous with “The West.”

Monument Valley, located on the Arizona/Utah border, was the first to receive Hollywood. Harry Goulding, who lived on the Navajo Reservation during the Great Depression, traveled to Hollywood with a portfolio of landscape photographs to recruit filmmakers who could bring much needed jobs and money to the struggling population. Director John Ford liked what he saw and took his company there to film *Stagecoach* with John Wayne in 1939, where most of the stars and crew stayed at Goulding's Lodge. Ford returned many times.

By the 1940s Kanab, Utah, a little farther west, had become known as Little Hollywood. The varied scenery made Kanab a prime base for movie making. Located within an hour or so of Zion, Bryce Canyon, and Grand Canyon National Parks, it also had sand dunes nearby that were perfect for filming *Arabian Nights* (1942).

Ford eventually discovered Moab, Utah, located near today's Arches and Canyonlands National Parks, Castle and Professor Valleys, and Dead Horse Point State Park. His first film shot in Moab was *Wagon Master* (1949), the story of Mormon settlers moving west. By this time the importance of the movie industry in this area prompted the founding of the Moab to Monument Valley Film Commission, which is recognized as the longest running film commission in North America. At least fifty movies have been made in the Moab to Monument Valley area since then.



**HARDGRAVE:** How did you get involved in the movie industry, Bette?

**STANTON:** All the makings for western movies can be found in my family history. My paternal great-grandfather was one of the first settlers in the Moab area. He was a Mormon polygamist who emigrated from Denmark to the “Promised Land.” He had encounters with Indians, as well as Butch Cassidy and the Wild Bunch. Range wars were part of life then, too. He had confrontations with bears, rattlers, and cougars; the family lived on sego lily bulbs and pigweed for an entire winter. Of course, I came along much later. In 1938, my parents moved our family to Kanab, and by that time Kanab was already becoming well known as one of the few locations where movies were filmed away from the big studios in Hollywood. Kanab was a small town with a population of about 800. Most people's livelihoods revolved around livestock. This was still the Wild West. There were no tourists and that's why they were romancing the film industry so much, because it was bringing work and spreading money throughout the town. By the 1940s, *Life* magazine had done a special article on Kanab, dubbed it “Little Hollywood,” and that's what put Kanab on the map for tourists. That gave us an additional income.

**H:** What movies were you in and what jobs did you perform?

**S:** I was about twelve when I started getting involved with movies. I think the first one was *Green Grass of Wyoming* (1948). Part of it was filmed at Three Lakes, which is a popular location about eight miles up the canyon from Kanab. They have a big dance hall that goes out over the lake; they used that a lot in some of the movies. After that I worked on *Red Canyon* (1949). That one was shot during school, and the kids and our teachers were all in it. Then came *The Outriders* (1950), with Joel McCrea and Arlene Dahl. They needed somebody with long, blonde hair to stand in for Arlene Dahl. I was only fourteen and you couldn't get hired to double or stand in unless you were eighteen. But Arlene Dahl had major surgery, so I wound up having to take everything but lines and close-ups.

**H:** That must have been quite an experience for a teenager.

Bette Stanton (she was Bette Larsen then) when she was a stand-in for Arlene Dahl in *The Outriders*. Courtesy of Bette Stanton; Facing: Hasenonkel/Dreamstime



# dressing the west

with costume designer **CATHY SMITH**

"TO TRANSFORM ONE HUNDRED MOVIE EXTRAS INTO WARRIORS WEARING BUCKSKIN AND MOCCASINS, WAR PAINT AND FEATHERS, AND THEN TO SEE THEM ON HORSEBACK SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE HORIZON OF AN EPIC LANDSCAPE—THAT IS THE MAGIC THAT KEEPS ME IN THE BUSINESS OF MOTION PICTURE COSTUME DESIGN."



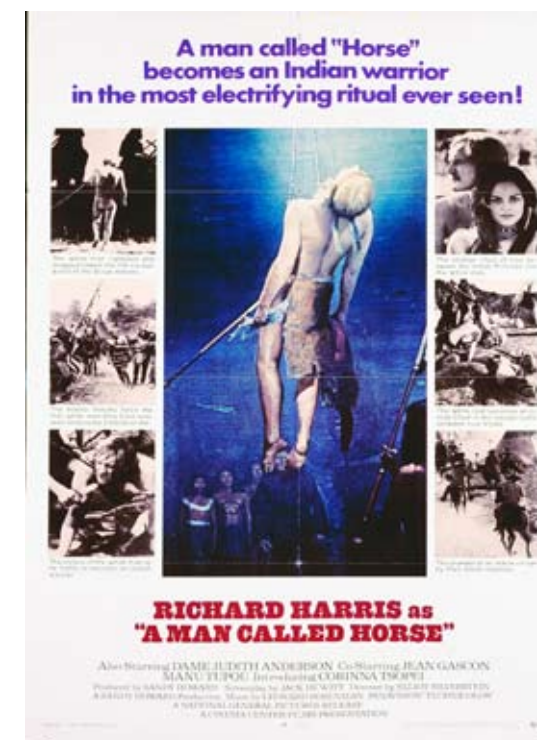
**Costume in the movies is about storytelling**, about bringing a director's vision to life. Great costumes are so much more than mere fashion; they reflect and augment the development of a character: her emotional journey, status, personality, and the cultural and temporal landscape that surrounds and affects her. Many cultural touchstones have been created by costume designers, from the starched uniforms in Edwardian “upstairs/downstairs” dramas to the

turned-up collars of disaffected teens in 1950s hot rod movies to the ball gowns worn by Jane Austen heroines. But designers are by definition invisible. A great costume should never look like a “costume.” It should be so authentic to time, place, character, and story that it feels natural and “undesigned.”

My specialty is western and Native American costume. This interest did not originate in Hollywood, but on a ranch on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation where I was raised surrounded by cowboys and Indians—the real thing! The Saturday matinee Westerns at our local theater were the exciting event of the week. We each took our twenty-five cent piece and bag of penny licorice into the darkened theater with great anticipation. But for me these movies were often an embarrassment: John Wayne fought white men dressed as Indians; Tonto, and even *A Man Called Horse*, looked ridiculous in faux leather. This was the Myth of the West in Technicolor, a popular image of a frontier that never was. A majority of these films were shot in the valleys and canyons of the Colorado Plateau, locations of epic grandeur, but not actually the habitat of the Plains Indians they featured. Nor were the costumes in most of these movies historically accurate.

*The Searchers*, filmed in Monument Valley in 1956, is considered by many to be a true American masterpiece of filmmaking and perhaps the most admired film of director John Ford. But the story takes place in Texas, which doesn't look at all like Monument Valley, and John Wayne's character, an affirmed Rebel, wears Union cavalry trousers with his Confederate cape. Scar, the Comanche chief, is played by Henry Brandon, a blue-eyed Anglo in a braided wig and faux leather. Natalie Wood's character, Debbie, becomes the wife of Scar, but is dressed in Navajo velveteen, not Comanche buckskin.

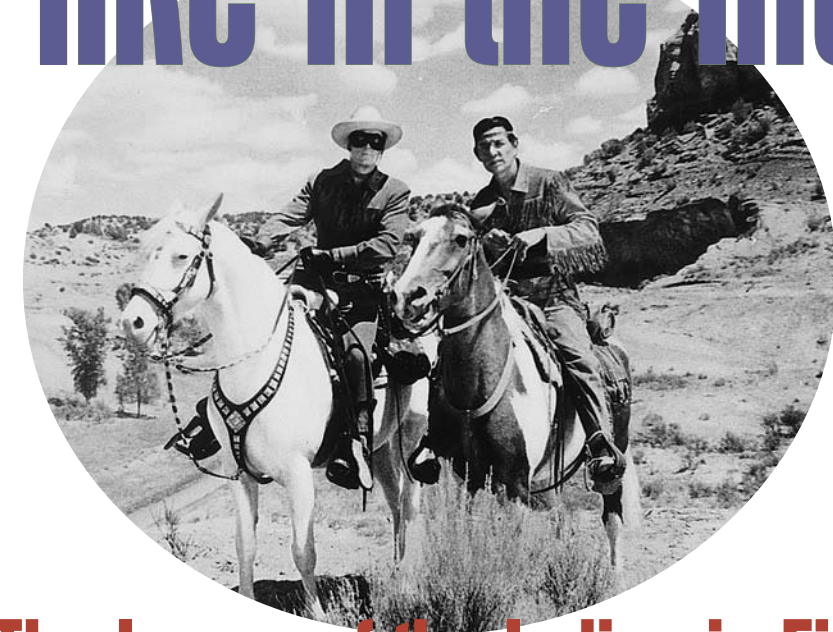
Geronimo has been the subject of at least three major motion pictures filmed on or near the Colorado Plateau. The first, shot in 1939, starred Victor Daniels or Chief Thunder Cloud, a mixed-blood Cherokee actor. The tagline read: *The Red Raider roars into battle...with 10,000 yelling Indians at his back! Thrill to the heart-thudding courage of a boy and a girl who risked their very lives for their love...who dared the ruthless wrath of the war-mad demon, Geronimo!* Costumed much like Tonto in the famous Lone Ranger series, Geronimo wears what looks like a faux leather leisure suit and a thin buckskin headband, which serves to keep the wig in place.



Top: Natalie Wood in *The Searchers*. Hollywood stock photo.  
Facing: Gary Sundown as Hiawatha in a documentary on the Iroquois. Photo by Jennifer Jesse Smith.



just like in the movies



## The Image of the Indian in Film

RENNARD STRICKLAND

DURING THE SHOOTING OF ONE OF JOHN FORD'S EPIC WESTERNS IN MONUMENT VALLEY, THE CAMERAS STOP AND THE NAVAJOS DISMOUNT AND TAKE OFF THEIR SIOUX WAR BONNETS.

ONE OF THE CREW SAYS, "THAT WAS WONDERFUL, YOU DID IT JUST RIGHT."

AN INDIAN REPLIES, "YEAH, WE DID IT JUST LIKE WE SAW IN THE MOVIES."



Surely no racial, ethnic, or political group has been subjected to as much or as frequent on-screen stereotyping as have Native Americans. Film gave light and motion to long-standing images of deeply entrenched stereotypes. The Indian in film is rooted in more than 500 years of portrayals of Indians, in art and literature and commerce. Movies took the advertising posters off the barroom wall and flickered them through the nickelodeon.

Budweiser's famous 19th-century advertising poster, "Custer's Last Fight" (1886), has been seen again and again as the climax to yet another screen version of the Battle of Little Bighorn. The screen Indian is, with few exceptions, directly out of the Indian captivity, travel, and exploration narratives, and such stalwart literary traditions as James Fenimore Cooper and the dime novel.

The transformation from Indian medicine show to Wild West Show, to nickelodeon, to two-reeler, to wide-screen epic was neither as long or as great as some fans of the cinema might suspect. Buffalo Bill, the Miller Brothers, and the

Farona Konopak was born in Philadelphia in 1895, but her enduring love was the Southwest. From her first visit in 1918, she embraced the landscape, the history, the culture, and the people. She would in time record them on film, first for Fred Harvey and later in her own home movies.

## Scenes on the Indian detour

# The Moving Pictures of Farona Konopak

**DOTTIE DIAMANT**

W

hen Farona Konopak arrived in New Mexico in 1918 she encountered an environment ripe for exploration. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway was swiftly becoming the new gateway for tourists

traveling to the Southwest and one of Farona's acquaintances, William Haskell Simpson, was busy orchestrating a vision of the area through promotional campaigns that would endure for decades. He was largely responsible for building the railway's outstanding art collection, as it was his idea to exchange railroad transportation for paintings from prominent Taos and Santa Fe artists. The rapidly increasing popularity of Native American art and western paintings during the 1920s was largely due to promotion by the ATSE, and the railway enjoyed an influx of passengers along its nearly 11,000 miles of track. Simultaneously, the Fred Harvey Company was vigorously promoting the American Southwest by opening numerous "eating houses" and Harvey Hotels along the Santa Fe's rail route from Chicago to Los Angeles. Simpson became the company's natural partner and ally. In 1926, the Harvey Company launched its ambitious Indian Detours program, created by Major Robert Hunter Clarkson, a Scottish immigrant. Clarkson's idea was to provide Harvey Hotel guests with opportunities to explore remote reaches of the Southwest via comfortable automobile transportation in the company of highly-trained, knowledgeable tour guides,



Farona Geiser O'Brien Konopak, Harvey Courier, Santa Fe, 1928–29. Courtesy of the New Mexico State Records Center & Archives, Photo #79409; Facing: Taos adobe. Seragen/Dreamstime



Millions of years of patient erosion have nibbled at the southwestern edges of the Colorado Plateau, exposing its colorful core around Sedona, Arizona. Photo by Ted Grussing

# technicolor rocks

JOE MCNEILL

**M**onument Valley has the cachet of its association with John Ford. Lone Pine in California has the numbers—over 400 films have been made there. But Sedona, Arizona, is American film in microcosm, from silent movies to early talkies to B Westerns to World War II propaganda to film noir to 3-D movies to rock ’n’ roll to 1970s road pictures—a visual record of 20th-century popular culture. Although Sedona played host to more than sixty film productions between 1923 and 1973, it was never really known to the world at large as a filming location, even in its prime. Studio public relations departments during the Golden Age of Hollywood rarely mentioned it by name, and on the rare occasion when they did, it was usually incorrectly.

The movie filmed in Sedona that gets my vote for the one everyone should see is *Broken Arrow* (1950). Most people today probably aren’t aware of how important the film was to its time, and how unique it was that the good guys happened to be Indians. *Broken Arrow* is historically significant for another reason, too. It was one of the first films written in secret by a member of the “Hollywood Ten,” the group that was blacklisted in the late 1940s and sent to jail because of their refusal to admit to membership in the Communist Party.

Much is surprising in Sedona’s film history, but perhaps most shocking to many would be the existence of a film called *Der Kaiser von Kalifornien* (1936). Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s minister of propaganda, used modern technologies of the 1930s, including motion pictures, to promote the Nazi agenda. One of the cornerstones of Nazi doctrine was the need for *Lebensraum*—“living space” for the German people—which was the major motivation behind Hitler’s territorial aggression. *Lebensraum* is at the root of *Der Kaiser’s* plot, and Sedona is specifically shown in the film as the Promised Land. Exterior scenes were also shot at the Grand Canyon and Death Valley.

I was also surprised by what we learned about filming locations for *Stagecoach*. The old *Coconino Sun*, a weekly paper published in Flagstaff, is a good resource for researching movie history of the area. It took years, but we searched through every single issue from 1923 into the early 1950s. Along the way we stumbled upon reports that some filming for *Stagecoach* took place in Sedona. In three separate reports published in the *Coconino Sun*, before, during, and after shooting, *Stagecoach* locations in Arizona were specified as Monument Valley, Cameron, Oak Creek Canyon, Schnebly Hill [on the Mogollon Rim], and areas near Phoenix. The accepted backstory about the making of *Stagecoach* is that Harry Goulding of Goulding’s Lodge drove to Hollywood with snapshots of Monument Valley and talked John Ford into going there to shoot. According to the first *Sun* report, however, about a month before shooting began, the film company contacted Lee Doyle, Sedona’s local movie coordinator, who drove the director around northern Arizona for a few days to scout locations—standard operating procedure for a film company planning to shoot in the area. I was able to later confirm this by locating a copy of the telegram sent to Doyle to alert him of Ford’s imminent arrival in Flagstaff. Film history continues in the making, and its backstories can be as rich as onscreen drama.

Excerpted from *Arizona’s Little Hollywood: Sedona and Northern Arizona’s Forgotten Film History 1923–1973*, by Joe McNeill (Northedge, 2010). Contact [info@arizonaslittlehollywood.com](mailto:info@arizonaslittlehollywood.com).