

**JUNE 11, 2019**

**THE SAWMILL** - Also known as *The Lumberjack*. Filmed August to October 1921. Released January 1, 1922.

Filmed at Lake Hume in the Sequoia National Forest in Fresno, about 500 miles north of Hollywood. Log cabins to house the cast and crew of more than 75 people were built at this location. At the film's completion, they were torn down.

As a result of the high cost to make this film, Larry Semon was put under a new contract by producer Albert E. Smith where Larry would be responsible for the finances of the cast, crew and production expenses.

Just before filming began on this comedy, a fire had started nearby and threatened to burn out of control. All 75 members of the cast and crew joined in to help the 500 fire fighters battle this disaster. Female cast members plus many others worked in the kitchen to feed the fire fighters. Over 2000 acres and a half a billion feet of lumber burned before the fire was finally put out three days later.

**Larry Semon** - In his day, Larry Semon was considered a major movie comedian as popular as Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd. Today, he is remembered mainly for working with both Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy in their solo film days. He is also sometimes noted for directing (as well as appearing in) the 1925 silent film *The Wizard of Oz*. He usually played a goof in derby hat and overalls who would enter any given setting and cause chaos, with people being covered with debris and property being destroyed. His short slapstick comedies were made and released quickly, making Semon very familiar to moviegoers.

No gag was too big for him. He loved chase sequences involving airplanes, exploding barns, falling water towers, auto wrecks and/or

explosions. A typical Semon comedy might involve barrels of flour, sacks of soot, gallons of ink, gobs of jam, or pits filled with mud. Oliver Hardy recalled in an interview that Larry Semon, when staging his comedy short *The Sawmill* in a lumber camp, would not use traditional, painted stage sets. Instead, he insisted on building permanent log cabins complete with modern conveniences. The production budget soared, and his bosses at Vitagraph finally demanded that he become his own producer and underwrite his productions personally.

Semon tried to reverse his money problems by entering the field of feature films. He produced and starred in a few features in the mid-1920s, including the financial disaster *The Wizard of Oz* in 1925. By 1927, he was back in short subjects released through Educational Pictures. After filing for bankruptcy in March 1928, Larry Semon returned to vaudeville. While traveling on the vaudeville circuit, he suffered a nervous breakdown and went back to Los Angeles. He died of pneumonia and tuberculosis on October 8, 1928 at the age of 39. In its obituary for Larry Semon, the trade paper *Variety* speculated that ongoing stress related to his dire financial circumstances was a contributing factor in his demise, alluding to the 1925 production of *The Wizard of Oz* as the major cause of his money woes.

**Babe Hardy** - began working in films with the Lubin Company in Florida 1914. By 1915, he was working in New York for a short period of time. When the Vim Film Company was forming an association in New Jersey and soon relocating to Florida, Babe went along with them. By 1917, he was in Hollywood working with King Bee Films, L-KO, Vitagraph, Arrow Pictures and Fox. In 1925, Babe was at the Hal Roach Studios that would eventually lead him to a memorable partnership with Stan Laurel. Before his teaming with Stan, Babe Hardy appeared in 273 films.

**Frank Alexander** - was best known for playing villains in the films of Larry Semon, usually as the father of Semon's love interest. He is best

known to contemporary audiences for portraying a villainous interpretation of Uncle Henry, eventually proclaimed "Prince of Whales" upon reaching the Emerald City in Semon's *The Wizard of Oz*. He was also part of the comedy team called "A Ton Of Fun" with two other large actors, Kewpie Ross and Hilliard Karr. In 1928 his career dwindled, reducing him to playing supporting roles for director Hal Roach. When sound came into the motion picture industry, he was virtually finished, and his last parts were a number of bit roles for Universal RKO Pictures, with his last role being unaccredited in the film "The Barber Shop" starring W.C. Fields.

**Kathleen O'Connor** - Actress and leading lady of silent films who appeared in more than 30 films from 1918 to 1924, many of them of the Western genre. She was leading lady to Tom Mix in "Ace High" (1918) and "Hell-Roarin' Reform" (1919). She also starred in the 1919 Universal 18-part serial "The Lion Man." She married writer/director Lynn F. Reynolds in June of 1921. Their marriage ended in tragedy when her husband fatally shot himself in their home on February 24, 1927, after a quarrel about infidelity. Kathleen never resumed her film career and ironically, was remarried several years later to another man named Reynolds, Clark Reynolds, a realtor.

**Ann Hastings** - is listed as the owner's daughter in this film's numerous filmographies, however according to author Claudia Sassen who wrote the book titled *Larry Semon - Daredevil Comedian Of The Silent Screen*, Ann Hastings never appeared in this comedy. After filming of *The Sawmill* had been completed, she had signed a contract with Larry Semon on November 16, 1921 but three days later she announced that the contract had ended within 24 hours by her choice due to personal concerns.

**Al Thompson** - He appeared in 176 films between 1916 and 1958. Well known in the industry for performing the more difficult stunts, he kept busy as a stunt double for Andy Clyde and also appeared in many

Three Stooges shorts. The wiry, athletic Thompson performed in a variety of bit parts and was equally comfortable in roles as varied as laundry worker, professor, desk clerk, or sign painter.

**Pal the dog** - During the 1920s pit bulls were one of the most popular family dogs in the United States. They were so well-liked that a pit bull, Pal, was a much beloved character in the popular films about Our Gang, later called The Little Rascals. Pal was very much a family pet and was owned by the Harry Lucenay family. When Pal was still a pup, he made a cameo appearance in Harold Lloyd's *The Freshman* (1925). Shortly after that, Pal was cast as "Tige" in a series of two-reeler silent films made for Universal about Buster Brown, a comic strip character who first appeared in 1902. Pal had a partial circle around one eye. In 1921 producer Hal Roach's attention was captured by some children playing on the railroad tracks outside. Roach was so fascinated by the dynamics of the group that he decided a series of short films about regular kids and their pets might work. In looking around for typical pets, Roach came upon Pal and cast him as Pete the Pup. In 1927 Pal was signed to a three-year contract with six month options. His starting salary was \$125 per week, and he was guaranteed certain incremental increases so that he would maintain exclusivity with Hal Roach Studios. Pete, a pup sired by Pal, came into the Our Gang role of Pete the Pup by 1930.

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**SMITHY** - Filmed October 11 through 23, 1923. Released January 20, 1924.

The gag with Stan sawing the wooden plank with Fin on the other end was reworked in Laurel & Hardy's *The Finishing Touch*.

Some of the trade papers of the day listed Stan's common law wife, Mae Laurel as a cast member of this film. This was not true as Ena Gregory is the only female performer in this comedy.

Footage from this film was used in a television commercial during the early 1990's to promote the Wood Products Credit Union located in the Northwest United States.

**Stan Laurel** - appeared in 82 films before his teaming with Oliver Hardy. He made his stage British debut in 1906 at the age of 16. By 1910, he was traveling with the Fred Karno Troupe and stayed with him until 1917. Stan made four films for the Nestor Company at Universal Studios. Next, five films for the Rolin Company in 1918, then off to Vitagraph to make three films with Larry Semon. Over the next few years, Stan was in vaudeville until G. M. Anderson hired him to star in a film titled *The Lucky Dog*. Another comedian by the name of Babe Hardy was also in this film. In 1923, Stan was at the Hal Roach Studios making one and two reelers but left in 1924. He went to work for Joe Rock making Stan Laurel Comedies. Since Joe Rock was unable to pay Stan's salary in a timely manner, Stan went back to Roach as a writer and director. By mid-1926, he was back in front of the camera for good and on the path to film history with Oliver Hardy.

**James Finlayson** - Arriving in Los Angeles from Scotland in 1916, he found work at L-KO and Thomas H. Ince's studio. In October 1919, he signed a contract with the Mack Sennett Comedies Corporation and appeared in numerous Sennett-produced comedies, including the Keystone Kops. After his days with the Hal Roach Studios, he was a freelance actor late in his career. He made some of his final films in the United Kingdom and also played bit parts in films such as *Foreign Correspondent*, *To Be or Not to Be* and *Royal Wedding*.

**Ena Gregory** - was born in Australia in 1907 and grew up there where she sang, danced and performed in juvenile roles for the J. C. Williamson organization in 1918. She arrived in California in about

1920 and was first signed in Hollywood for ingenue roles by Universal Pictures in 1921. Ena also worked for Hal Roach Studios and First National Pictures. In all she spent five years in comic roles before going into dramatic work. By 1924 she was the leading lady of the Independent Pictures Corporation and was a WAMPAS Baby Star of 1925. WAMPAS stands for Western Association of Motion Picture Advertisers and honored 13 young actresses each year (increased to 15 in 1932) whom they believed to be on the threshold of movie stardom. Madeline Hurlock, June Marlowe and Anne Cornwall were in her 1925 group that would go on to appear in films with Laurel & Hardy in the coming years. Ena consulted a Hollywood seer named Dareos who suggested a new stage name would help her career. She chose a name that combined the syllables of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. Now, she was Marian Douglas. Her first film using the new name was *The Shepherd Of The Hills* (1928) and continued to make movies as Marion Douglas until 1931. Retiring from the film industry in 1931, she became a successful real estate agent in Laguna Beach, California.

**George Rowe** - broke into the film industry in the 1919 film short, *Tough Luck*, starring Snub Pollard. Known for his cross-eyed look, he appeared in over 125 shorts over a ten year period, many of which for Hal Roach, including several with Stan Laurel and the Our Gang series. His Roach Studio contract was terminated in 1925, after which he toured the west coast in Vaudeville. Rowe's film career ended with the advent of talking pictures.

**William Gillespie** - played in about 180 films between 1915 and 1939, although many of his appearances were often uncredited. Gillespie frequently appeared in Hal Roach comedies from 1917, usually as stuffy official or manager. He supported such "slapstick comedians" as Charlie Chaplin, Charley Chase, Our Gang and Laurel and Hardy, but was most prolific supporting Harold Lloyd in 60 films. With over 170 films for Hal Roach, he is one of the most-seen actors in a Roach-produced film.

**Jack Gavin** - Jack Gavin was born in 1875 in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia as John Francis Henry Gavin. He was an actor and director, known for Assigned to His Wife (1911), Ben Hall and His Gang (1911) and His Convict Bride (1918). Solidly-built supporting actor in Hal Roach comedies of the 1920's.

**Glenn Tryon** - appeared in 67 films between 1923 and 1951. A former vaudevillian and stage actor, he was signed by Hal Roach in 1924 as a replacement star for Harold Lloyd, in a series of two-reel comedies. After failing to make the grade, being more the stalwart leading man type, he reinvented himself in the 1930's as a screenwriter. From 1941, worked as associate producer for Universal and Roach.

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**SUGAR DADDIES** - Filmed May 26 and 27 1927. Resumed on May 31 through June 3, 1927. Release September 10, 1927.

This was the 10th film in which Laurel & Hardy appeared together, but they were still not the characters we recognize today. James Finlayson was the star of this comedy.

In the original script, Stan Laurel was cast as Fin's butler and Ollie as his secretary.

Location filming took place at Pike's Amusement Park in Long Beach, California. The park opened in 1902 and closed in 1979.

The \$50,000 thousand dollars the brother-in-law demanded from Oil Tycoon Cyrus Brittle adjusted for inflation to 2017 is the equivalent of \$700,009 thousand dollars.

**Noah Young** - A former champion weightlifter, joined the Hal Roach studios as an actor, mainly playing comic villains. He appeared in several Laurel and Hardy comedies, but was more notable as a foil in

over 50 films for Harold Lloyd, who discovered Noah at the Athletics Club. He failed enlistment in the United States Navy, because he was missing too many teeth. He was a member of the Hal Roach Studio's renowned brass band. Roach himself played the saxophone, "Snub" Pollard played the trombone and Noah played the bass horn. He once set a record by running a mile in 8.5 minutes while carrying a 150-pound man on his back.

**Charlotte Mineau** - appeared in 65 films between 1913 and 1931. She supported Charlie Chaplin on numerous occasions and also appeared in several very early Laurel and Hardy comedies. In her very first screen appearance in *The Usual Way* (1913) she co-starred with Wallace Beery. She later appeared in several of Chaplin's films, including an uncredited bit in his debut *His New Job* (1915). Charlotte subsequently joined Chaplin's move to Mutual, then had work with Mack Sennett and Hal Roach where she supported Laurel & Hardy on several occasions, most notably in *Sugar Daddies* (1927).

**Edna Marian** - began her career in the 1920s, starring in Edward Ludwig's *Broadway Beauties*, followed by several appearances in Francis Corby's productions and spending a year (1927-1928) at the Hal Roach studios, alongside comedians Charley Chase, Laurel and Hardy, and others. In 1926, Edna Marion was named one of the WAMPAS Baby Stars, along with Mary Astor, Mary Brian, Dolores Costello, Joan Crawford, Dolores del Río. Her career at the Hal Roach Studios ended abruptly on April 7, 1928 after being employed since April 25, 1927., Janet Gaynor, and Fay Wray.

**Budd Fine** - was born Budd Nathan Fine on September 10, 1894, in Hartford Connecticut and served in the US Army during World War I, during which he was awarded a Purple Heart. He broke into the film industry in a short titled, *Aggravatin' Papa* in 1924. Budd also played the policeman in Laurel & Hardy's *The Second Hundred Years* and *The Battle Of The Century*. With the advent of the talking picture, Fine



began to work steadily in feature films. He appeared in over 100 films, including credits in more than 80 features.

**Villie Latimer** - Extremely tall and thin, hatchet-faced actress who specialized in busybodies and spinsters in shorts such as *Chasing The Chaser* (1925) and the gossip in Laurel & Hardy's *Love Em And Weep* (1927). Her largest roles seem to have been for the Hal Roach Studios, but she also appeared in shorts like *Twins* (1925) and Mack Sennett's *Smith's Modiste Shop* and *The Girl From Nowhere* both 1927, plus features on the order of *The Girls I Loved* (1923) and *The Spieler* (1928).

**Eugene Pallette** - After an early career as a slender leading man, Pallette became a stout character actor. He had a deep voice, which some critics have likened to the sound of a croaking frog and is probably best-remembered for comic character roles such as Alexander Bullock, Carole Lombard's character's father, in *My Man Godfrey* (1936). He also starred in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) and *Heaven Can Wait* (1943). Pallette began his silent film career as an extra and stunt man in 1910 or 1911. Quickly advancing to featured status, Pallette appeared in many westerns. He left Hollywood for the oil fields of Texas, where he both made and lost a sizable fortune of \$140,000 (almost \$2 million in today's value) in the same year. Eventually, he returned to film work becoming one of the screen's most recognizable character actors.

## REFERENCES

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