

Mono County Historical Society Bridgeport, California 2025 Newsletter Action!



The *Roughshod* cast and crew near Sonora Pass in 1947.



The Kinetoscope

During the 1890s, the precursor to motion pictures was a device called the Kinetoscope. It moved photo images mounted on film stock in front of a light source with a high-speed shutter, providing the illusion of movement. It was a novelty that faded out once motion pictures took hold in the early 1900s.

The movie industry took off after *The Great Train Robbery* was released in 1903. Until the late 1920s films were not equipped with sound. Instead, narratives were displayed between scenes that provided lines of dialogue. Mood music was usually performed by a pianist or organist and in large theaters, played by a small orchestra.

In the early days, most movies were shot on the east coast, but by the 1910s production companies gradually moved west to California to take advantage of the milder weather and more location choices. The Eastern Sierra, and in particular Lone Pine, became a popular locale to shoot westerns and other action films. In 1920 comedian Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle made the first movie in Lone Pine. Since then countless movies have been filmed there.



Strongheart with his co-stars.

The first Mono County movie was filmed in May of 1922 at Twin Lakes in Bridgeport. Trimble-Murfin Productions arrived in town with four large trucks to shoot *Brawn of the North*. The cast and crew stayed at the Hotel DeChambeau (now the Bodie Hotel). Locals cleared snow from the primitive road to the lakes so that the company could drive back and forth.

A German Shepherd named Strongheart shared the spotlight with silent film actors Irene Rich and Lee Shumway. Rich had charge of the canine during most of the filming. Strongheart had been trained as a German police dog during World War I and it took his handlers months to reverse the harsh training. Strongheart was so popular with the public that the studio insured him for \$50,000, a large sum of money in the 1920s.

In 1927 Paramount shot *Jesse James* in Bridgeport. Main Street was still unpaved and locals served as extras. The lead actor was Fred Thomson, an ordained minister who served as an Army Chaplain during World War I. In 1924 he filmed *Thundering Hoofs* near Mammoth Creek.



The Paramount crew in front of the Bridgeport General Store.



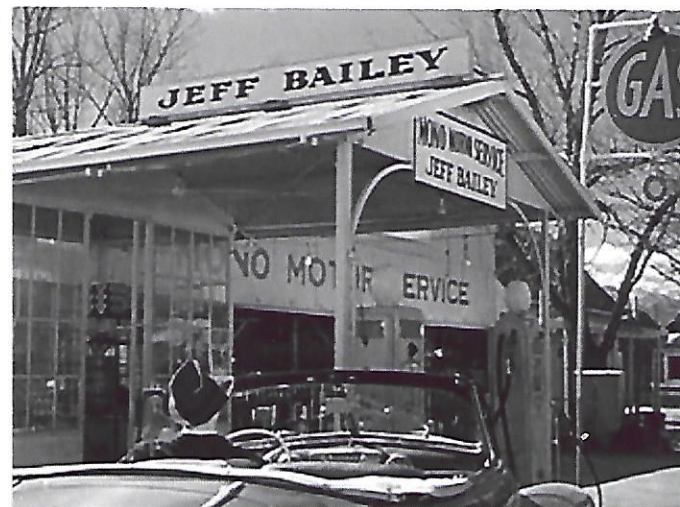
Charles Bickford on the right, riding into Bodie.

In 1929 Universal Pictures filmed *Hell's Heroes* in Bodie, three years before the destructive 1932 fire. Released in 1930, it was a sound version of *The Three Godfathers*. Bodie became the fictitious town of New Jerusalem and Charles Bickford was the star. Filming took place in the old Bodie Bank, inside a saloon on Main Street and in the Methodist Church. The streets were unpaved and many buildings were still intact, allowing a peak into the past.

In June 1932 Tom Mix shot *Flaming Guns* near Bridgeport and in Lone Pine. John Wayne filmed *The Trail Beyond* at the Devil's Postpile in Mammoth in 1934.

Fox Film was at Bridgeport's Twin Lakes in 1934 to shoot the upscale production of *She Was a Lady*, starring Helen Twelvetrees and Donald Woods with a crew of about 75. Twin Lakes subbed for Montana.

The Eastern Sierra remained a destination for westerns, but in October of 1946 RKO came to Bridgeport to film the modern drama *Out of the Past* with Robert Mitchum. Mitchum played private investigator Jeff Bailey, who left his shady past behind to run a gas station in Bridgeport. The old Mono Motors, now the site of the Volunteer Fire Department, was Bailey's gas station. The story begins when a mobster comes to town looking for Bailey. What was interesting is that the man was filmed approaching town from the west, but then is shown entering from the east, providing two good views of 1940s Bridgeport.



An opening scene in *Out of the Past*.

Other buildings used in the filming were the Bridgeport Schoolhouse (Mono County Museum), the Mono County Courthouse, the Towle House, and Ann's Grill (now Ken's Sporting Goods), which was renamed Marny's Café for the movie. Mitchum's fishing scenes were shot at Lower Twin Lake and on the West Walker River near the Sonora Pass Summit.

Mitchum had a close call the day he flew into Bridgeport. After his small plane landed it failed to slow down and the pilot announced he had no brakes. The plane smashed through a fence, hopped a ditch and knocked over an outhouse before it came to a stop. Mitchum crawled out of the crumpled plane, dusted himself off and went into town to have lunch.

Locals were used as extras. Teenager Lawrence Bettencourt can be seen leaning against the courthouse fence in one scene. The actors and crew rented all of the available rooms in town, including the cabins at Slick's Court (Silver Maple Inn), where Mitchum stayed.

One night, after spending an evening in town, Mitchum returned to a cabin at Slick's where some of the cast was hanging out. He was in a foul mood and proceeded to punch holes in the front door and a wall of the cabin. RKO Studios later paid Slick Bryant damages that amounted to \$135.00.

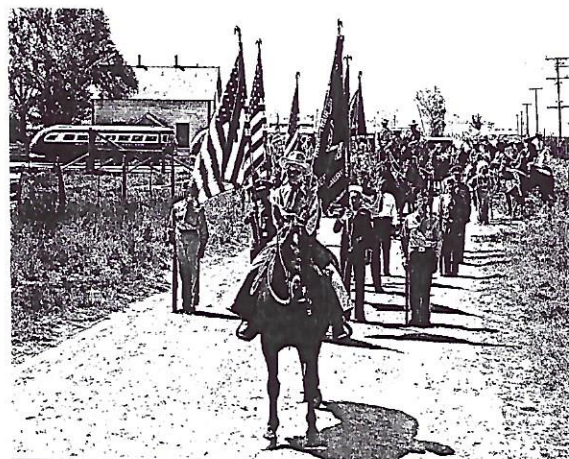
Mitchum was otherwise calm and professional during his stay in Bridgeport and was made an honorary member of the local Paiute tribe by Chief Jack Lundy. Mitchum's actor status rose rapidly after *Out of the Past* was released in 1947. The movie survived the test of time and is now considered a classic film noir, a prime example of cynical crime dramas of the period.



Robert Mitchum & Paiute Chief Jack Lundy.

In 1947 RKO shot the western *Roughshod* mainly in the Sonora Pass area. The stars were Robert Sterling, John Ireland, Claude Jarman, Jr. and Gloria Grahame. The cast and crew were housed in tents at the Leavitt Meadows location camp. During a break in filming, teen-aged actor Jarman lead the Bridgeport 4th of July parade on horseback. Additional scenes for the movie were shot in Lost Canyon, Devils Gate and in the hills across from the old Bridgeport Ranger Station north of town. Five weeks of filming concluded with a private viewing of *Out of the Past* plus a dance and buffet supper held at the location camp attended by the cast, crew and local residents.

Monogram Pictures shot *Rocky* in 1947 at Twin Lakes. Actors Roddy McDowell and Nita Hunter starred. Local girl Joan Green stood in for Hunter. Young Patsy Crocker performed diving and swimming stunts, while Russell Cain doubled for McDowall and earned his money by ending up in the water.



Claude Jarman Jr, head of the parade.



20th Century Fox was at the Hunewill Ranch in 1948 to film *Belle Starr's Daughter* with George Montgomery and Rod Cameron. Universal was in Bridgeport filming *Whispering Smith* starring Alan Ladd and Robert Preston. Montgomery and Cameron returned in 1950 for *Dakota Lil*.

RKO also filmed *Storm Over Wyoming* in 1948 at the Hunewill Ranch and in Robinson Canyon. Star Tim Holt was a frequent visitor to the area and was a kind and thoughtful man. He took time out from shooting to entertain Bridgeport Elementary School children at the ranch, an experience they would never forget.

Fair Wind to Java, a 1953 movie based on the 1883 eruptions at Krakatoa, was mostly filmed in Malibu with actor Fred MacMurray. Miniature ship and volcano sequences were shot on Paoha Island at Mono Lake. A building on the island used in the filming was left behind and was used later as a weather station.



Tim Holt at the Hunewill Ranch in 1948.

Mammoth's Hot Creek was a busy film location beginning in 1958 with *From Hell to Texas* starring Don Murray. In 1960 John Wayne and Stewart Granger shot *North to Alaska* there. *Ride the High Country* with Randolph Scott and Joel McCrea was filmed in 1962 at Horseshoe Lake and Twin Lakes in Mammoth. *Nevada Smith* with Steve McQueen was shot at Hot Creek in 1966 and at locations near Lee Vining. *Will Penny* starring Charlton Heston was filmed at the Casa Diablo Volcanic Tablelands east of Crowley Lake in 1967. John Wayne returned to Hot Creek in 1968 for *True Grit* and Gregory Peck filmed *Shoot Out* at the location in 1971.



John Wayne with his crew in Bodie, 1970.

In 1970 John Wayne was in Bodie hosting a segment for *Swing Out, Sweet Land*, a TV special celebrating the history of American settlement. Clint Eastwood filmed part of *Joe Kidd* in 1972 near Tom's Place above Sherwin Summit.

The most lavish production to be filmed in the Eastern Sierra was Eastwood's *High Plains Drifter* in 1973. He scouted locations and felt that Mono Lake was perfect for his Malpaso Company script. Universal wanted the exteriors filmed on their studio back lot, but Eastwood instead had the entire fictional town of Lago built on Mono Lake's south shore in 28 days by 50 technicians and construction workers. Some of the buildings were

complete structures for interior filming. The town was later painted red for the movie's ending and then burned to the ground. A number of locals were used as extras. Additional scenes were shot near Reno, Winnemucca Lake and in the Inyo National Forest. Eastwood was known for finishing on time and staying under budget. He completed filming within six weeks.



A scene from *High Plains Drifter* in 1973. Clint Eastwood is standing at far right.

Listed below are other movies that were partially filmed in Mono County.

- 1940 – *Return of Frank James*, Henry Fonda: Convict Lake.
- 1945 – *Road to Utopia*, Bob Hope & Bing Crosby: June Lake.
- 1949 – *Kazan*, Stephen Dunne: Crestview, Deadman, June Lake.
- 1954 – *Rose Marie*, Ann Blyth: Mammoth Lakes.
- 1975 – *The Other Side of the Mountain*, Marilyn Hassett: Mammoth Mountain.
- 1981 – *First Monday in October*, Walter Matthau: Silver Lake.
- 1982 – *Jinxed*, Bette Midler: Bodie and Bridgeport.
- 1984 – *Indiana Jones Temple of Doom*, Harrison Ford: Mammoth Mountain.
- 1985 – *Perfect*, John Travolta: Mammoth Mountain and Mammoth Lodge.
- 1986 – *The Golden Child*, Eddie Murphy: Mammoth Mountain.
- 1989 – *Born on the Fourth of July*, Tom Cruise: Mammoth Mountain.
- 1991 – *For the Boys*, Bette Midler/James Caan: Crowley.
- 1991 – *Big Girls Don't Cry*, Hillary Wolfe: Lake Mary, Mammoth.
- 1998 – *Star Trek IX: Insurrection*, Patrick Stewart: Convict Lake.
- 2000 – *Highway 395*, Fred Dryer: Bridgeport.
- 2004 – *Surviving Christmas*, Ben Affleck: McCoy Station.
- 2013 – *Oblivion*, Tom Cruise: Silver Lake.

In addition, a music video was filmed in 1988 at Mono Lake and in Bodie by Cinderella, who performed the song, *Don't Know What You Got Till It's Gone*. Mono County is also a favorite location for commercials.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND PHOTOS

Mono County Museum - Bridgeport Chronicle-Union Newspaper - Internet Movie Data Base
 Wikipedia - Eunice Langreder, Billings, Montana - Robert Stewart, Carson City, Nevada
 Megan Hunewill, Hunewill Circle H Ranch, Bridgeport
Robert Mitchum, "Baby, I Don't Care", by Lee Server, St. Martin's Griffin, New York, 2002
Clint Eastwood, by Richard Schickel, First Vintage Books/Random House, New York, 1997

PASSINGS

RAYMOND ROBLES

1953 - 2024

Ray was a 6th generation Californian, descended from early Spanish settlers. Ray was born in Ventura and was a reserve deputy sheriff there in the early 1970s. He and his mother Michaela Robles moved to Bridgeport in 1999 and opened Michaela's Mexican Restaurant. Ray was a founding member of the Bridgeport Fish Enhancement Foundation. He is survived by his six children.

RAULLIE HOLT

1933 - 2024

Raullie was a popular Bridgeport contractor who worked at the old cement plant with Hank Eitel in the 1960s and later worked with Mono County Public Works. He and his wife Virginia built a beautiful house near the Bridgeport Reservoir where they raised their three children.

GARY CUMMINGS

1933 - 2024

Gary served with the Perris, California Police Department until he was hired by Mono County Sheriff Cecil Thorington in 1957 as the Mammoth Lakes Resident Deputy. In 1960 he was promoted to Undersheriff and moved to Bridgeport. In 1972 Gary became the first District Attorney's investigator for Eddie Denton. Due to illness he retired in 1980. His wife Dorothy and he were married for 72 years and had five children.

LIZ CARNER

1924 - 2024

Mary Elizabeth Burke was born in Smith Valley, Nevada and raised on her grandparent's farm. She graduated from Smith Valley High School and the Reno Business College. Liz moved to Bridgeport, married Jimmy Cain and had children Gail and Mark. In 1956 she worked for the Mono County Road Department. Liz divorced Cain in 1958, married Fred Carner in 1959 and had son Fred, Jr. Liz later served as the Mono County Election's Clerk and the Assistant Superior Court Clerk.

ALFRED ANNETT

1942-2024

Al was the great-grandson of Bridgeport pioneer George "By Day". He was born in Reno to Norman and Alpha Day Annett. He grew up in Smith Valley and worked with his parents on their ranch and at their Mono Village resort. Al graduated from Smith Valley High School and married Josie Birch of Ely. Their children are Norman, Arleen and Allen. In 1979 Al and Josie opened the Annett & Sons Auto Parts store in Bridgeport. In 2000 Al was President of the Mono County Historical Society and Curator of the Mono County Museum. He was an accomplished pilot, had many friends and was known for his outrageous sense of humor and endless jokes.

WALLIS MAC PHERSON

1945-2024

Wally Mac Pherson was born in Arizona, but was raised in Bridgeport. His parents, grandparents and great-grandparents were long time Mono Basin residents and once lived on Paola Island on Mono Lake. He is survived by his sister Venita and brother Barry.

MONO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Mono County Historical Society and the Mono County Museum are funded by admissions, donations, memberships and sales. The Mono County Tourism & Film Commission has supported MCHS for ten years by reimbursing calendar production. The Museum Curator and the Board of Trustees are volunteers. The Museum Docent is the only paid employee.

In 2025 the museum will be open May 29 through September 30, Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-4pm. Admissions: Adults/\$3.00, Seniors 55+/\$2.00, Children 6-17;\$1.00. Children under six are free. The Museum Docent is Pam Haas-Duhart. Museum phone: 760-932-5281, Museum website: www.monocomuseum.org.

The MCHS Board of Trustees consists of President/Curator Kent Stoddard, Vice President Pam Haas-Duhart, Treasurer Janelle Mills, Secretary Sharon Stoddard and Nonofficer Voting Trustees Lynda Bryant Pemberton, Mary Lent and Jeff Simensen.

Patron and Life Memberships are valid for life. All other memberships are renewable each year effective January 1. MCHS is a registered nonprofit organization per Section 501c3 of the Internal Revenue Code and a public charity under Section 509a2, Federal Tax ID 77-0191728.

MEMBERSHIPS AND DONATIONS

___\$10.00 Individual ___\$15.00 Family ___\$25.00 Sustaining ___\$50.00 Organization/Business

___\$100.00 Life ___\$500.00 Patron ___Donation_____

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

EMAIL_____

Make checks payable to MCHS. Mail coupon and remittance to PO Box 417, Bridgeport, CA 93517