

GO WEST (1925)

The Western had been a staple of the screen since its very beginning as a commercial art form, popular with audiences and cheap to produce. But the genre had gained a new measure of respectability with Paramount's *The Covered Wagon* (1923) and Fox's *The Iron Horse* (1924), big budget productions that were among the most popular attractions of their respective years. Roscoe Arbuckle and Buster Keaton had previously burlesqued the conventions of the genre in *Out West* (1917), but now Keaton was aiming for something more, inserting his familiar character into a modern and nuanced version of the Western, a satire in the form of a genuine character study. With a rough outline in hand, he hired a scenarist named Raymond Cannon, who was coming off a year's contract with comedian Douglas MacLean, to flesh out the story and help gag it up.

In May 1925, Keaton located five-thousand cows in a herd near Fort Worth and applied to the Chamber of Commerce for permission to drive them through the city's business district for the film's finale. The scene, according to his wire, was to show "about 400 head of cattle stampeding down Main Street and milling about the Texas Hotel, together with other appropriate atmospheric scenes." The city fathers assumed he was remembering the place the way it was back when he was a child in vaudeville, when dirt roads and frame businesses were still common. Keaton's telegram went on to suggest that the shots could be made "on a Sunday when everything is quiet and dull."

Now taking offense, the authorities wired back and suggested that he pick some other town for his horse opera, such as Cromwell, Oklahoma. “Besides,” they said, “the cows wouldn’t like it.”

Production got under way in Los Angeles on May 23, while studio carpenter H.B. “Harry” Barnes and electrician Denver Harmon were dispatched to Arizona to oversee the construction of a bunkhouse, blacksmith shop, and various other structures needed for the film’s exteriors. Two weeks later, Keaton, accompanied by cast, crew, and three carloads of equipment, arrived in Kingman, establishing an office at the Hotel Beale across from the Santa Fe terminal. A convoy of cars and trucks then wended its way north about sixty miles to George “Tap” Duncan’s massive Diamond Bar Ranch, specifically a portion of the Diamond Bar known locally as Valley Ranch.

By Hollywood standards, filming at the Duncan ranch was roughing it. “We were really out in open country,” said Keaton. “Four cameramen (that’s [including] the assistants), electrician generally takes about three men with him (because we took a generator, which takes a couple of men), technical man takes a couple of dozen carpenters, a prop man must take about four extra helpers with him... Then we house ‘em up there, see—we take tents and everything else and a portable kitchen.” The bunkhouse had been built out so that male members of the cast could live in it, while actress Kathleen Myers, even more incidental than usual as the obligatory girl, occupied a suite in the main ranch house. Based at the Beale, Harry Barnes made the daily trip from Kingman

to the ranch and back, as did a truck loaded with supplies. Barnes also arranged for the shipment of exposed film to the coast for processing. The days were so hot they had to pack ice around the cameras to keep the emulsion from melting, while winds and flash rainstorms played hell with the schedule. Still, at well over a million acres, there was something inspiring about the Diamond Bar. "I always preferred working on location," Keaton said, "because more good gags suggested themselves in new and unfamiliar surroundings."

ONE WEEK (1920)

By the time director Eddie Cline signed on with Comique, the production company funding the Buster Keaton comedies, he was a firm believer in Keaton's mantra of logic and consistency, a thoroughly modern approach to the job of making people laugh. And at the core of the new picture would be a pair of well-rounded characters, a believable young couple who clearly love each other and are cheerfully assuming the arduous task of building a house for themselves. Sybil Seely wasn't necessarily hired for her acting chops, but she turned out to be an ideal match for Buster, energetic and expressive and willing to do her fair share of the hard and sometimes dangerous work. Their chemistry was unmistakable, warm and natural. Then someone came up with a framing device in which the action progresses over seven days, with the passage of each day delineated by a leaf from the calendar. Yet, the resulting title, *One Week*, suggested a lampoon of the old Elinor Glyn potboiler *Three Weeks*.

Utilizing the new Keaton studio in Hollywood and its surrounding neighborhood, the marriage of Buster and Sybil is staged, establishing the animosity of Handy Hank, “the fellow she turned down.” Hank, it turns out, is sourly driving their honeymoon car, an uncomfortable circumstance that leads to their abandoning it for another while still in motion, Sybil managing the jump effortlessly while Buster is caught between the two cars until a motorcycle catches him, roughly carrying him off in the opposite direction. In the distance, he sees Hank abandon the first car for the second and gives chase, halting them with the unwitting help of a traffic officer. Regaining control of the driverless first car, they arrive at the lot Buster’s Uncle Mike has given them to greet the arrival of their new house. Buster opens the directions:

1. To give this house a snappy appearance put it up according to the numbers on the boxes.

The next day, Tuesday, they are already well along, Buster sawing away as Sybil prepares breakfast on a camping stove. Hank comes upon the scene, notices the numbers marking the boxes, and, unseen, gleefully alters them with black paint. The funhouse effects begin almost immediately.

— James Curtis, *Buster Keaton: [A Filmmaker’s Life](#)* (Knopf)