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DATA SHEET No. 173

CHARLIE CHAPLIN in "THE GOLD RUSH" (9 Reels)

Written and Directed: Charles Chaplin
Associate directors: Charles Reisner and H. d'Abbadie d'Arrast
Technical director: Charles D. Hall
Photographed: Rollie Totheroh and Jack Wilson
Releasing company: United Artists: (August 16, 1925)
Running time: 2 hours

Cast: Mack Swain (Big Jim McKay); Tom Murray (Black Larson); Georgia Hale (The girl); Betty Morrissey (Her friend); Malcolm Waite (Jack Cameron); Henry Bergman (Hank Curtis).

THE STORY:

THE GOLD RUSH opens on an unending procession through the snowy Chil-koot Pass in the Klondike gold rush of 1898. "A Lone Prospector", jauntily flourishing a cane appears on a narrow ledge, nonchalant despite spills and unaware of the huge bear following behind. As he climbs downward, a slip sends him tobogganing down the slope. To set his course, he takes out a map and follows the arrow "pointing" north.

Meanwhile, Big Jim McKay stakes a claim, upon which he discovers he's sitting on a mountain of gold, and basks in bliss.

A big storm comes up, and Charlie and Big Jim separately find shelter in a crude shack occupied by the desperado, Black Larsen, who takes his rifle and tries to drive out his uninvited guests. As Larsen and Big Jim grapple for possession of the gun, they keep it covering Charlie, no matter where he runs in the cabin. It finally goes off, and Charlie feels himself for blood, sure that he is shot. Big Jim takes over the cabin, telling Larsen that he and Charlie were going to stay put.

The three famished men and a dog are snowbound. When Jim returns from the back room, picking his teeth, Charlie whistles for the dog and is relieved to find it alive. They all cut cards to decide who will go out for help. Larsen draws the low card, and Larsen loses. He comes across two mounties who have been trailing him and shoots them, and steals their sled.

Thanksgiving day finds the two men so hungry that they cook up one of Charlie's shoes. In a delightful, if horrifying, sequence, Charlie eats his portion with all the gusto of a gourmet, to the bewilderment of Big Jim.

Their hunger unabated, Big Jim's fevered imagination transforms Charlie into a giant chicken, whom Jim tries to dispatch. The upshot leaves the frightened Charlie laid out at the door and the delirious giant collapsed in bed. The next morning, the attack resumes, and as they both grapple for the rifle, a bear wanders in, and is soon dispatched.

Later, with recovered strength, they shake hands and wander off in opposite directions. Jim finds Larsen working his claim. In the ensuing struggle, Jim is struck over the head with a shovel, and Larsen rides off. He gets his desserts, when an avalanche finishes him off.

We next meet the beautiful dancehall girl, Georgia, in one of the boom towns created by the gold rush. She disdains Jack Cameron's offer to join some of the other girls he is taking for a sleigh ride. Then Charlie wanders into town. That night he saunters into the dancehall, and is immediately in love with Georgia. She uses him as a foil against Cameron, and dances and flirts with him. The enraged Cameron pummels Charlie, and the latter accidentally knocks out Cameron by causing a balcony clock to fall on him.

The following morning, a good-natured prospector, Hank, takes Charlie into his cabin after Charlie pretends to be frozen stiff. The invalid's appetite astounds Hank. Hank's partner arrives, and Charlie agrees to look

after the cabin in Hank's absence. Meanwhile, Big Jim has wandered into town, recovered but with his memory gone, searching for Charlie, the one man who can help him relocate the cabin and his claim.

Georgia and three other girls, frolics near the cabin, are invited in to warm up. Georgia discovers a torn picture of herself under Charlie's pillow, and the girls giggle about it. Before they leave they accept his invitation to New Year's Eve Dinner. To earn money for the dinner he shovels snow, and makes work for himself by successively shoveling the snow on neighboring sidewalks.

On New Year's Eve, the girls revel in the dancehall. They have forgotten their promise to come, and dreaming, Charlie performs the now-famous "Oceana Roll" with some biscuits and forks. He bows to the applause of his dream guests, and the scene dissolves back to Charlie asleep at the table alone. In the meantime, at midnight, Georgia suddenly remembers her promise, and goes to the cabin with Cameron and the girls, to find the dressed up table. Remorseful, Georgia repulses and slaps the persistent Cameron.

The next night, Big Jim finds Charlie in the dancehall, and promises him a half share in the gold mine if he helps him find it.

"After a long, tedious journey," they find the cabin. As our heroes sleep, a storm blows the cabin to the edge of an abyss, where it perches precariously. After they waken, the cabin tilts with their steps, and finally tilts over the chasm. Each cough causes the cabin, held by a frayed rope, to slip. Finally Jim clammers over Charlie to safety, and simultaneously finds his claim. He pulls Charlie up by the rope, just as the cabin plunges into the chasm. As the men embrace, Charlie faints.

Charlie and Jim are next seen on a steamer bound for the States. They are now millionaires, and they pose for interviews with reporters. For a human interest story for one of the reporters, he dons his tramp outfit. Posing for a picture, he backs over a rail, and falls into a coil of rope on the deck below, where Georgia, unknown to him is a steerage passenger.

Believing him to be a stowaway, she hides him from a pursuing officer. The captain identifies him as one of the millionaires, and orders a deluxe suite for Georgia. Charlie identifies her to an inquiring reporter as his bride to be, and they walk together to the upper deck, where they pose in a tintype embrace.

THE GOLD RUSH is probably Chaplin's most celebrated picture. It was the longest and costliest comedy made up to that time, the Keaton and Lloyd features running to about five reels. The film was in production for some fourteen months, a good deal of that time being spent in Nevada for the outdoor snow scenes representing the Chilkoot Pass and vicinity.

The inspiration for at least one of the scenes in the picture was the Donner Party disaster with its grisly background of cannibalism. This scene, of course, was the one where Big Jim visualized Charlie as a chicken.

The film, overall, contains several themes: it is an ironic commentary on man's greed; the spiritual regeneration of a "wild" girl; the embodiment of and refinement of Chaplin's "little man" to the n'th degree.

Once again, Chaplin put more than comedy in the film. While there are moments of hilarious comedy, there are also scenes with profound depths of pathos. It's principal character symbolizes the good, kind and pitiful core of humanity.

Georgia Hale, whom Chaplin selected for the feminine lead, had previously appeared in von Sternberg's "THE SALVATION HUNTERS". She was an entirely different type from Edna Purviance, his leading lady for nine years, giving a lively performance as the fiery-tempered dancehall girl. She faded from the cinema scene after appearing in several more films.

Mack Swain, whose career had been in eclipse for some time, gave his top performance, showing a great change from his overdone slapstick character of the early Mack Sennett days. As a result of "THE GOLD RUSH" he prospered until his death in 1935. Old friend Henry Bergman appeared as "Hank".