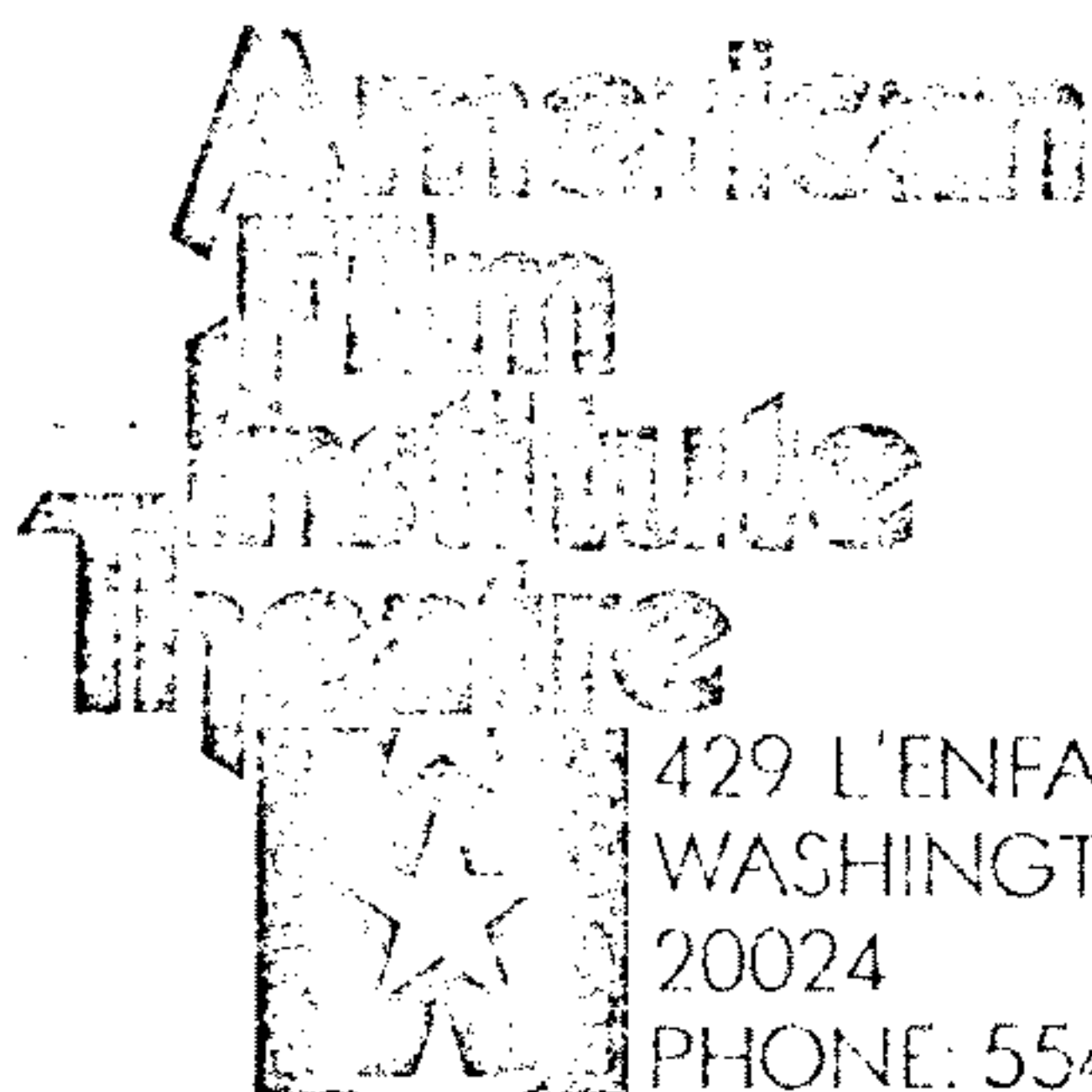


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THE IRON HORSE (1924)

Davy Brandon	GEORGE O'BRIEN	Wild Bill Hickok	JOHN PADJAN
Miriam Marsh	MADGE BELLAMY	Major North	CHARLES O'MALLEY
Abraham Lincoln	JUDGE CHARLES	Cottis P. Harrington	CHARLES NEWTON
Thomas Marsh	EDWARD BULL	Charles Crocker	DELBERT MANN
Deroux	WILLIAM WALLING	Cheyenne Chief	CHIEF BIG TREE
Peter Jesson	FRED KOHLER	Sioux Chief	CHIEF WHITE SPEAR
Ruby	CYRIL CHADWICK	Old Chinaman	EDWARD PIEL
Judge Haller	JAMES MARCUS	David Brandon, Sr.	JAMES GORDON
Sergeant Slattery	FRANCIS POWERS	Davy as a child	WINSTON MILLER
Corporal Casey	J. FARRELL McDONALD	Miriam as a child	PEGGY CARTWRIGHT
Private Schultz	JAMES WELCH	Jack Ganzhorn	THOMAS DURANT
Tony	COLIN CHASE	John Hay	STANHOPE WHEATCROFT
General Dodge	WALTER ROGERS	Polka Dot	FRANCES TEAGUE
Dinny	JACK O'BRIEN	and DAN BORZAGE	
"Buffalo Bill"	GEORGE WAGGNER		

Scenario: CHARLES KENYON, from a story by Kenyon and JOHN RUSSELL. Photography: GEORGE SCHNEIDERMAN, BURNETT GUFFEY. Titles: CHARLES DARNTON. Music score: ERNO RAPEE. A FOX PICTURE, released August 28, 1924. 120 minutes.

Directed by JOHN FORD

THE IRON HORSE (was) directed for Fox in 1924 by John Ford, when he was twenty-nine and had already made nearly fifty films, thirty-nine of them Westerns which gave him a reputation as a shrewd director.... For the statistically minded, THE IRON HORSE contained 1280 separate scenes and 275 subtitles! Ford was well schooled in the Western field and, loving Westerns, he obviously saw in THE IRON HORSE an opportunity to make a Western on a grand scale, and that is precisely what he did....

For his star he selected George O'Brien, formerly an assistant cameraman with Tom Mix, a stunt man who was actually better known as the son of San Francisco's police chief. He soon became one of the top Western stars in both the silent and sound eras, directing ten films, in addition, and starring in eight of them. Such Ford reliables as J. Farrell MacDonald and Chief Big Tree were also featured, and George Wagner, who later became a leading writer-director, played Buffalo Bill. Charles Bull, cast as Lincoln, was actually no actor at all, but a Reno judge discovered by Ford. The film's subtitles were written by Charles Danton, then dramatic editor of the New York World.

Ford emulated (THE COVERED WAGON by James Cruze) by shooting his film almost entirely on location in the Nevada desert. There was little or no studio work in the film; all of the cabin's interiors, for example, are authentic, with constant activity taking place outside the windows. Apart from an obviously painted backdrop of a canyon, there were no artificial sets at all. It was a monumental undertaking, since there were more than five thousand extras and it required almost one hundred cooks to feed them all. The unit built two complete towns, used a train of fifty-six coaches for transportation, issued a daily newspaper, and in general lived under the same conditions as had the original worked on the railroad. The huge cast lists a complete regiment of U.S. Cavalry, three thousand railroad workers, one thousand Chinese laborers, eight hundred Pawnee, Sioux, and Cheyenne Indians, two thousand horses, thirteen hundred buffaloes, and ten thousand head of cattle, thus providing enough "accessories" for an authentic segment of life in the old West.... Ford went out of his way to obtain authentic props, or at least so Fox's publicity agents claimed. The original trains "Jupitor" and "116" are shown in the final sequence, for example; Wild Bill Hickok's vest pocket Derringer gun was used, and so was--although this sounds rather too much like a publicity story--the original stagecoach used by Horace Greeley....

THE IRON HORSE still contains some of Ford's best and most typical work, despite the number and quality of some of his later works. Its weakest sections are its broad slapstick interludes, which represent the least successful ingredients in Ford's Westerns. But photographically THE IRON HORSE is superb, with many shots now almost his trademark, the grouping of Indians on the crest of a hill, for example, or the small band of riders fading into the dusty sunset. Though THE IRON HORSE did not duplicate the critical acclaim of THE COVERED WAGON, it enjoyed huge popular success in the United States, and it did earn the praise of governmental and educational bodies. One critic termed it "An American Odyssey," a description that someone has applied to almost every Ford film since then, and in Ford's oeuvre, it certainly represents an extremely important film to which he gave both his enthusiasm and dedication.

--William K. Everson and George Fenin

We would like to express our grateful appreciation to Arthur Kleiner, who has come to the AFT Theatre direct from the New York Film Festival in order to provide musical accompaniment for tonight's program.