



While researching THE PLAINSMAN, and subsequently cutting it to shreds for its inaccuracies and inadequacies, we found this article from the Herington Times, April 30, 1936. Take a peak...

FEATURE KANSAS CHARACTERS

Cecil B. DeMille, one of Hollywood's ace picture producers, is turning to Kansas for the chief character of the next big picture he plans to turn out. Tentatively titled "This Breed of Men," the picture will deal with the doings of "Wild Bill" Hickok, famous old-time character who once was marshal of Abilene. For historical matter the picture organization called on the Kansas Historical Society, which has what is probably the world's best collection of literature and source material concerning early days on the plains.

What can we say?????? Mr. De Mille and his staff didn't listen to us, or something.....

# THE PLAINSMAN



Presented by the Kansas State  
Historical Society

through a grant from

CAPITAL  
CITY  
BANK



# Horse-Opera

The Kansas presented in THE PLAINSMAN comes straight out of the myth-machines of Hollywood and the pulp westerns. It is a land where mountains and pine trees are as likely to appear on the horizon as grassy prairies; where Indian attacks are imminent; where strong, violent men are revered and women are the "chains" of civilization.

We want to share some of the "expert" opinions of movie critics...from 1936 to more recent reviews. As you watch the film, we'd like to encourage you to become a reviewer, too. Try to determine where fact and fantasy begin and end. (Remember those history classes...names and dates, geography and politics are presented in this film in a crazy-quilted version of history as full of fantasy as is Dorothy's land of Oz.)

Indian stereotypes, historical inaccuracies and images of the state that may not match what we know today...all make this film important as a representative of how Hollywood images wield great power in our culture, shaping popular opinions and creating movie mythology...complete with heroes and heroines in a Never-Never Land that has come to be called "The Wild West."

## THE PLAINSMAN

Wild Bill Hickok.....Gary Cooper  
Calamity Jane.....Jean Arthur  
Buffalo Bill.....James Ellison  
John Lattimer.....Charles Bickford  
Louise.....Helen Burgess

Directed by Cecil B. De Mille for Paramount  
Screenplay: Waldemar Young, Harold Lamb, and  
Lynn Riggs; based on stories  
by Courtney Ryley Cooper and the  
novel WILD BILL HICKOK by Frank  
J. Wilstach\*

\*\*Our serial, THE LAST FRONTIER, is also based on stories by Courtney Ryley Cooper.

# Reviews

Leslie Donaldson says: "Cecil B. De Mille's name is associated in the public mind with epic films that use large casts and vast settings...(in his) 1936 Western THE PLAINSMAN... (he) found room for 1200 Montana Cheyenne Indians, as well as a large Hollywood cast...this retelling of Wild Bill Hickok's adventures was stretched to include touchstones of Western mythology such as Abraham Lincoln and General Custer...The film opens with wagon trains...its rapid historical cues verge on the ridiculous..."

P.I.W. in the K.C. Star, Dec. 27, 1936: "There can be no criticism because the picture does not meticulously follow the actual chronology of events in Wild Bill's life..." (We disagree!)

Frank S. Nugent in the Jan. 14, 1937 Times: "...THE PLAINSMAN...is another of those action-crammed, spectacular and inaccurate canvases that Mr. De Mille delights to paint...It is a picture in which small details are faithfully reproduced and established historical facts scrupulously rewritten...It is one of his foibles to pretend that he makes only sagas or epics, never anything so elementary as a splashing adventure film... Taking history by the tail and throwing it out the window, Mr. De Mille and his millions have tossed (the characters) into a series of Indian fights, gun duels with renegade whites selling repeating rifles... (to the Indians) and some small amatory skirmishes as a sop to the romanticists in the audience..."

And the Saturday Time, 1936 promotes a popular image of the prairie landscape with this: "...Bad characters are smeared in charcoal black, heroes and heroines arrayed in magic garments of daring and beauty, playing a game of desperate designs upon a landscape lonely, hostile and magnificent...Topflight cinematographers clinch the pictorial language of the plains in brief, consummate idioms: a stagecoach ribboning down the long slant of a prairie shoulder; the Cheyennes charging up a shallow river riding so evenly their ranks look like...mist; braves in war paint...a herd of buffalo...grazing in the burnt grass."