

Clark Gable's Connection to Oregon and the Rogue By Dennis Powers

Remembered for his handsome looks, pencil mustache, and commanding screen presence, William Clark Gable was regarded as the "The King of Hollywood" in his prime. He was the leading man opposite screen stars as Norma Shearer, Jean Harlow, Lana Turner, Joan Crawford, and Myrna Loy. Although best remembered for his role as Rhett Butler in "Gone with the Wind," Gable won the 1934 Best Actor Academy Award for his role as a roguish reporter in "It Happened One Night," along with two other nominations. Over three decades, he was featured in 70 films.

As a teenager, he decided to become an actor after seeing the play "The Bird of Paradise." Leaving his Ohio home, Gable eventually joined a traveling theater company, which disbanded in Montana. He rode the rails on a freight train to Bend, Oregon, in 1922 and worked at a sawmill, as well as in the hop fields as a picker. The 21-year-old Gable next moved to Portland where he sold neckties for the Meier and Frank department store and in the classified advertising department for the *Oregonian*.

While there, he joined a Portland-based company, the Astoria Players Stock Company; this troupe traveled the lower Columbia River aboard a paddle steamer and stopped to play in towns such as Astoria and Ilwaco. It also ran into financial problems and disbanded, the players needing to perform their way back to Portland as they were broke. Gable studied under Josephine Dillon at the Little Theater in Portland from 1923-1924, and when she moved to Hollywood, he followed soon thereafter.

Despite his being seventeen-years younger, they married in late 1924, but then divorced six years later. During this time, he was discovered in Hollywood. Gable's first appearances were in silent films, followed by acting in New York and Los Angeles plays. Liking his acting abilities, MGM offered him a contract and his first sound role in the 1931 film, "The Painted Desert." His career took off from there, but a second marriage also ended in divorce.

Although Gable was an American film icon from the 1930s through the 1950s, he repeatedly returned here. He particularly liked staying at the Weasku Inn along the Rogue River in Grants Pass and the Wolf Creek Inn, fishing and relaxing. Gable married his third wife, actress Carole Lombard in 1939 and would stay at the Wolf Creek Inn with her. She was killed in 1942 after her plane crashed outside of Las Vegas following a war-bond selling tour. After her death, Gable enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps, worked special assignments as an aerial gunner in the Atlantic theater, and was promoted to major in 1944.

He returned to film after the war, including "The Misfits" which was both Gable's and co-star Marilyn Monroe's final movie appearance. Still he returned to his favorite places in the state, although less frequently. When Gold Hill held its Ben Hur Lampman Day on June 21, 1947, Gable interrupted his Rogue River fishing to be at the celebration in recognition of the famous journalist. (His signature on a motel wall on the Rogue River Highway near Gold Hill is believed to be from that time.)

Gable died November 16, 1960, in Los Angeles, California, from a severe heart attack, but is still remembered--both here and in Hollywood.

Sources: William Cornett, "The Oregon Encyclopedia: Clark Gable in Oregon" at [Clark Gable](#); "Astoria, Oregon: Clark Gable," at [Oregon and Southern Oregon Connections](#); "Clark Gable: The King of Hollywood," at [Official Site](#).