

Historic Bakersfield & Kern County, California

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An Olympiad and Movie for Bakersfield, 1926

By Gilbert P. Gia

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About the Olympiad

***"1,115 Pupils Compete In Great Meet At Speedway
67 Districts Are Matched In Greatest of All Field Days
MANY RECORDS ARE EXPECTED TO FALL
Marchers Form Parade of Quarter-Mile in Opening"***

"Five thousand wildly cheering spectators in the grandstands at Bakersfield Speedway today witnessed the biggest Kern County Grammar School Olympiad ever held. Representing 67 grammar schools, 1,115 students, boys and girls, took part in the meet, which started at 9:00 AM and lasted until late this afternoon. It is possible, the judge stated, that every record made by the grammar school athletes in former Olympiads will fall under the onslaught of the army of students, whose physical ratings are higher by a marked percentage than last year."¹

¹ Scholer Bangs, reporter, Bakersfield Californian, May 7, 1926

*"A chill wind playing across the speedway threatened for a time to dampen the enthusiasm of the occasion, but promptly at 10 o'clock when the figures of three girls rose to the crack of a starter's gun in a 25 yard dash, the grandstands became a waving mass of shouting mothers, fathers, and students who had gathered to cheer their schools to victory."*²

*"The Olympiad started with a never-to-be-forgotten spectacle at 9 o'clock when the youthful contestants marching in school units and carrying group banners passed before the judges' stand in a rhythmical posture parade. Forming a solid line one-quarter mile long, the contestants joined in a salute to the flag, passed again in review before the judges, and then segregated to go through the morning's athletics schedule, which included races, high jumping, broad jumping, baseball and basketball throws, and pole vaulting."*³

"A band concert by Kern County Union High School band opened the afternoon program at 1 o'clock, following a lunch period, and one-quarter hour later a mammoth circus parade, in which the students clowned and passed the grandstands dressed in the garb of a menagerie of animals. Schools taking part in the meet are as follows: Emerson, Franklin, Hawthorne, Jefferson, Lincoln, Lowell, McKinley, Roosevelt, Washington, William Penn, Williams, Bryant, Arvin, Beardsley, Blake, Bowerbank, Brundage, Buena Vista, Caliente, Cleveland, Delano, Edison, Fairfax, Fairview, Fruitvale, Granite, Greeley, Greenfield, Hamlin, Indian, Jasmine, Keene, Lebec, Lerdo, Lynn's Valley, McFarland, Maple, Mountain View, Munzer, Norris, Old River, Ordena, Palm, Panama, Pershing, Petroleum, Pond, Poplar, Poso Flat, Richland, Rio Bravo, Rockpile, Rosedale, Semi-Tropic, Shafter,

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

*Standard, Stine, Tejon, Toltec, Union Avenue, Vineland, Wasco, Wildwood, and Woody.”*⁴

*“The afternoon order of events for the boys (in three classes for age) was 50, 75, and 100 yard dashes, baseball throw for accuracy, potato race and running broad jump. The order of events for girls (in three classes for age) was 40 and 50 yard dashes, baseball throw for accuracy; potato race and basketball throw for distance.”*⁵

*“Reviewing the events of the morning, Superintendent Chenoweth expressed himself as being more than satisfied with this Olympiad.”*⁶

*“In spite of adverse weather conditions, and other handicaps, the students came to Bakersfield from all portions of Kern County, sometimes traveling a distances of 70 miles and part of the way in rainstorms,” Mr. Chenoweth said.”*⁷

*“We owe the success of the Olympiad not only to the enthusiasm of the students but to the parents, to the service clubs of the county, and to the 200 officers who supervised the running of the events. We appreciate the assistance of all concerned and are particularly grateful to the traffic officers under the command of Captain Snell and the Boy Scouts of America. It is true that there has never been such a large gathering of schoolchildren at one point in the history of Kern County. Aside from the 1,115 participants in the contests, I would say that there were at least 8,000 students of grammar schools on the grounds and in the grandstands.”*⁸

“Superintending the handling of the crowds, Traffic Captain Snell praised the manner in which the children behaved, obeying traffic

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

*officers and keeping the pedestrian lanes clear at all times. ' They are a lot easier to handle than grownups,' said he."*⁹

*"The spirit of prankish play, contrasted against the morning's sportsmanlike fight for athletic honors, was ejected into the afternoon program, with the staging of the Jingling Bros. Circus. Comic 'floats' featuring the appearance of Miss Bakersfield and the 'mayor' of the city headed the circus parade, in which a prominent display of the ring-necked huperunkus and the goggleosaur, acrobats and other bats, and biological wonders never before seen in Kern County drew a roar of mirth from the spectators. Clownomaniacs from the one- and two-teacher schools of the central section of Kern County drew the attention of spectators to Ring 1 of the three-ring circus. Ring 2 was given over to acrobatics and elementary tumbling supervised by the teachers from the three- and five-teacher schools. Group stunts, pyramid work, mass tumbling, and other spectacular features were to be seen in the third ring."*¹⁰

*"One of the most beautiful spectacles of the day was the Maypole dance of the students. About 12 polls were festooned with garlands of flowers. Rhythmical exercises under the direction of Mrs. Mary Strickland Bayne featured the unified movements of 200 tiny tots from the primary grades. A like number of intermediate pupils under the supervision of Mrs. Claude Blodgett participated in mass formal work."*¹¹

"Special appreciation is extended by those in charge of the meet to Don C. Preston and the Kern County Union High School for the use of voice amplifiers used in announcing the events. All final scoring is

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

*being done through the courtesy of Burroughs Adding Machine Company, of which Loche Mardis is local manager."*¹²

"Motion pictures were taken of the Olympiad during the afternoon by the Imperial Film Company and will be shown early in June at the Nile Theater in a reel entitled 'Things About Bakersfield You Should Know.'" ¹³

*"Lawrence E. Chenoweth, country superintendent of schools, headed the list of officials for the meet as business manager, and was assisted by the following: J.W. Byfield, director of activities; Claude M. Johnson, assistant director of activities; James Parker, assistant superintendent of Bakersfield schools, field manager; Eldora DeMots, referee, girls' events; Chester H. Fee, referee, boys' events."*¹⁴

*"Field judges for the girls' events were Harriet Howells, and girls of Kern County Union High School. Frank Corwin, assisted by boys from the high school, judged the boys' field events. Starters were Ernest Dalborn, Bakersfield; John Compton, Maricopa; F.M. Foster, Beardsley; R.L. Curran, Bakersfield; and Carl Shoemith, Standard."*¹⁵

*"Timers for the girls were Louis Roux, chief; J.M. Rider, C.J. Bower, C.F. Harper and A.J. Ferguson. For the boys the following held the stop watches: Harry T.S. Shirley, chief; Kenneth Lilly, Leon D. Fletcher, Lloyd Stroud and Roy Bledsoe. Timers for the potato races were C.E. Teach, chief; Robert Coats, Leonard Hoar, R.E. Bacon, Clyde Stickler, K.F. Clemens, J.J. Wilt, Phil Duncan, C.K. Badger, T.E. Mathis, L.M. Brown and Albert J. Marvin."*¹⁶

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

*"Herbert L. Henley, assistant county superintendent, as clerk of the course, was largely responsible for the evens events being run off on record time, the students finishing the contest against time within two hours after the first race was run. He was assisted by a staff of 100 clerks, who arranged the events, and the following assistant-chief clerks: Mrs. Caroline Vigario, Mrs. Jean Durnal, J.W.S. Painter, Mrs. Carrie Mull, Katherine Gannon, Miss Jane Grace, N.H. Farnham and Mrs. Effie Thomas Tolle. Dr. G. C. Sabichi, field physician, was assisted in the first aid hospital tent by Ruth Williams, rural nurse for the Bakersfield school district."*¹⁷

*"The Olympiad was marked by no serious injuries to any of the participants, though a small group of junior athletes were treated for minor scratches and bruises and returned to the contests. A blanket of black clouds that threatened rain made the large supply of pleniac [sic] acid in the hospital tent for the treatment of sun burn of little value."*¹⁸

*"Handling the crowds with the precision of trained police, the uniformed Boy Scouts of America patrolled the field and grandstands, directing spectators to their seats, and keeping the athletic courses clear for contestants at all times. Automobile traffic was in charge of County Traffic Captain W.E. Snell, who was assisted by Chief of Police J.H. Dupes and staff, and Sheriff Cas Walser and his staff of deputies."*¹⁹

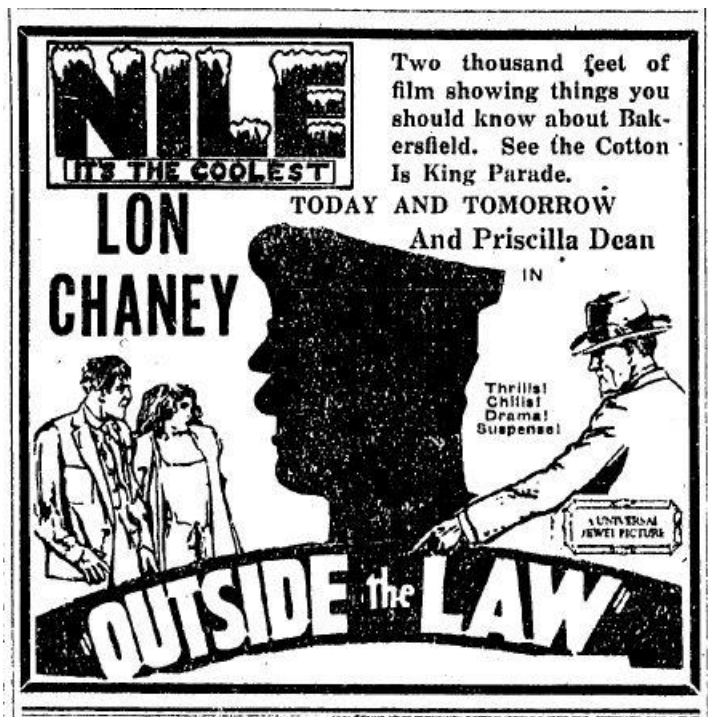
¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. Sapienic acid or sapienate is a fatty acid which is a major component of human sebum. It kills or slows the growth of bacteria.

¹⁹ Scholer Bangs, reporter, Bakersfield Californian, May 7, 1926

About the Reporter

Author of this admirable writing was Scholar Bangs, 21 years of age, who from 1920 to 1928 was an on-again, off-again writer and editor for the *Bakersfield Californian*. In the 1930s he was an editor in the Los Angeles Examiner's Science and Aviation Department, and from then on his career remained in aviation writing. Bangs was also a playwright, and poet.



Things You Should Know About Bakersfield is mentioned in this ad from the *Bakersfield Californian* of June 10, 1926

About the Film

The Imperial Film Corporation that made the Bakersfield movie was probably a subdivision of Imperial Film Company Ltd., an English production and distribution company founded in 1913 by Paul

Kimberley.²⁰ In the 1920s in towns across the United States, Imperial's regional film crews produced a series called *Things You Ought to Know About* (fill in a city name). The chief in charge of Arizona and California productions was Furniss M. Tisdale Peterson²¹ who had been writing music and screenplays in the Los Angeles area since around 1916.

In 1927, however, it was Imperial's director E.J. Sperry who filmed *Things You Ought to Know About Pomona* [California].²² The *Bakersfield Californian* wrote, "*Pomona community life being filmed. Pomona, August 22--With a promise of bringing much favorable publicity to the city, the Imperial Film Company, under the direction of E.J. Sperry, today started the filming of a community motion picture which will depict in interesting fashion the city's beautiful spots as well as commercial enterprises and other activities. The Kiwanis Club will be filmed in action at its meeting here Wednesday, when a greater movie season program will be given. Other organizations will be included in the picture, which when finished, will be shown for one week at a local theater and then turned over to the Pomona Chamber of Commerce for any future use that they desire to use it for.*"²³

In May 1929 "California filmmaker"²⁴ Furniss M. Tisdale was at Prescott, Arizona making a promotional film for the Elks Theatre and the Yavapai County Chamber of Commerce entitled *Things You Ought To Know About Prescott*, which was a short, silent movie, as were all in that series. However as the U.S. economy slumped into Depression, the *Things You Ought to Know* series ceased operation.

²⁰ In 1913-1914 he was managing director of Thanhouser Films Ltd., London.

²¹ b 1890 Alabama-d 1929 Arizona. Aka: Furniss M. Tisdale

²² Los Angeles Times, Aug 23, 1927

²³ Bakersfield Californian, Aug 23, 1927

²⁴ <https://sharlot.org/2003/february/1472-1929-prescott-film-is-rescued-and-tells-unique-arizona-story>

The Prescott film had its run and after that lay dormant and nearly forgotten until the mid-1990s when a two-year restoration process returned it to public view. This movie is the only extant film documentary from that period of Arizona history and is said to be a remarkable look at Prescott in the Jazz Age.²⁵

Another surviving black-and-white, silent film from Imperial is a 7-min, 592-ft (partial) copy of *Things You Ought to Know About San Jose* shot in 1927-28.²⁶ It includes scenes of the business district, theatres, a Chamber of Commerce luncheon, Police Chief J.N. Black and Sheriff Geo. W. Lyle, the Exchange Club, Santa Clara Valley, San Jose Evening News, parks and swimming pools, a Kiwanis Club luncheon, schools and colleges, a Rotary Club luncheon, San Jose Country Club, and the San Jose Mission.²⁷

A regrettable loss to history is that all *Things You Ought to Know* films were made with cellulose nitrate film, a material that decomposes, becomes brittle, and turns into a sticky mass. Although inevitable deterioration is usually gradual, it accelerates in higher temperatures and humidity.²⁸

All of which is to say that the odds of finding a copy of *Things You Ought to Know About Bakersfield* might be better than hitting the lottery, but not by much.

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²⁵ <https://sharlot.org/2003/february/1472-1929-prescott-film-is-rescued-and-tells-unique-arizona-story>

²⁶ Caroline Frick, "Itinerant Filmography, North America," *The Moving Image*, Vol 10, No 1, Spring 2010, pp. 170-181 University of Minnesota Press. The San Jose film is an archival holding of the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television.

²⁷ <http://cinema.library.ucla.edu/vwebv/search?searchArg=things+you+ought+to+know&searchCode=FTIT&limitTo=none&recCount=50&searchType=1&page=search.search.button=Search>

²⁸ http://motion.kodak.com/motion/Support/Technical_Information/Storage/storage_nitrate.htm#ixzz3UkipadEG