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# The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

## The Great Locomotive Chase *When Walt Disney Came to Rabun County*

An 1862 Civil War story from Northwest Georgia was transplanted to Rabun County and the Tallulah Falls Railroad by Walt Disney Productions in 1955. The movie told the story of Andrews' Raiders, a Union force whose goal was to prevent southern reinforcements from reaching Chattanooga, thereby making it easier for the approaching Union Army to take the city. The plot failed after Confederate forces gave chase, captured the soldiers and hung them as spies.

The world premiere of "The Great Locomotive Chase" was in Atlanta on June 8, 1956. Beginning on June 10, the film opened in Clayton to run a record-setting one full week.

Movies have been an economic boon to Rabun, not to mention the national exposure for our natural beauty. After the filming was complete, "The Great Locomotive Chase" writer Larry Watkin wrote a letter to *The Clayton Tribune*. He said the crew was still talking about "the wonderful hospitality, the beauty of the countryside, but most of all the friendliness of you Georgians."



"The Great Locomotive Chase" brought Hollywood stars like Fess Parker and Jeff Hunter to Clayton as well as Walt Disney himself. In the movie shots above are Fess Parker on the left. He was known for his portrayal of Davy Crockett on television. On the right is Jeff Hunter.





Many Rabun citizens were hired as extras for the movie, including W.S. Bearden who was mayor of Clayton at the time, shown here with Fess Parker.



Local extras pose in costume in front of the Clayton Depot, standing in for a Civil War depot in the movie.



The real local star was Doug Bleckley, a 13-year-old who was discovered working in a local restaurant by Disney producers and given the juvenile lead. He would later travel to Los Angeles for post-production filming.



Slim Pickens, famous for dozens of character parts in Westerns, was a recognizable star. When Doug Bleckley went to Hollywood in 1955 to film additional scenes, he recalled that he and Slim Pickens ate Thanksgiving dinner together.





These extras were pictured in the local newspaper. Front row from left: Buff Green, Martha Sue Long and Mrs. Weatherly Vaughan. Back row: Mrs. Florence Powell, Mrs. Mae Duncan and Mrs. W.L. Gillespie



Walt Disney photographed at the Clayton Café. During filming, Disney, actors and crew members stated they enjoyed being on location in Clayton.

Most of the depots used in the filming were constructed sets.



Filming at the Tallulah Falls Railroad depot in Clayton... Some observers at the time said that up to 12,000 onlookers would come from surrounding areas on weekends to watch the action.



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- Please visit our museum and research library on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from 11:00 until 3:00.
- Group tours by appointment



Rabun County native Frank Rickman served as location scout, set builder, casting director for local extras, and general problem-solver for many films in Rabun County beginning in 1955 with "The Great Locomotive Chase." He was one of the fifteen original members of the Georgia Film Commission.