



the
daily
break

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Far from gone

As film critic Mal Vincent will tell you, the legendary film "Gone With the Wind" isn't going away soon, but an immense exhibit in Elizabeth City will stay only through December.

By Mal Vincent
The Virginian-Pilot

It was 74 years ago this week that the entire world wondered and gawked at the world premiere of "Gone With the Wind" in Atlanta.

Could the film match the promise of the phenomenal book, which had broken all publication records? Records showed that more than 55 percent of America's population had read the book and, consequently, had preconceived ideas of what Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara should look like.

Could any movie live up to the expectations?

It did.

Today, far from gone, the film remains the most seen and most profitable movie in history – at least when box office tallies are adjusted for inflation.

Its Hollywood origins are legend, and, right now, are much closer than you think.

It may be something of a secret, but the best of Hollywood's golden era continues to glisten in Elizabeth City, N.C. Through Dec. 31 you can see the Oscar trophy Vivien Leigh won for playing Scarlett O'Hara. You can see one of the dresses she wore in the film, the typewriter on which Sidney Howard wrote the screenplay and much more.

"Real to Reel: The Making of 'Gone With the Wind'" is the title of the exhibit at the Museum of the Albemarle, displaying James Tumblin's precious collection of "Gone With the Wind"

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if you go

What "Real to Reel: The Making of 'Gone With the Wind'"

Where The Museum of the Albemarle, 501 S. Water St., Elizabeth City, N.C.

When The exhibit is up through Dec. 31; the museum is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, closed Sundays and Mondays and Christmas Day

Cost Admission to the museum is free, but the "Gone With the Wind" exhibit costs \$5, \$2.50 for senior citizens. It's free to military and children.

More info 252-335-1453 or www.ncdcr.gov/ncmoa

TAG ON OLD DRESS READ “SCARLETT”

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memorabilia. It is the largest private collection in the world, showcasing awards, costumes and other artifacts.

The age of the film makes the curiosities at Elizabeth City even more unusual. Katie Edwards, who helped curate the exhibit when it debuted a year ago at the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh, said that “through costume sketches, scene storyboard and letters, the exhibit highlights the many challenges, and the controversy that is a part of this film.”

Tumblin was a makeup and wig expert for Universal film for decades, beginning his work with Hitchcock’s “Psycho” in 1960.

But his “Gone With the Wind” collection began when he spotted a dress discarded on the floor at Western Costumes, the warehouse-like center handling many of the rented costumes for movies. In the lining was a label that read, simply, “Scarlett.”

“The costume,” he said, “had been worn by at least two other actresses since ‘Gone With the Wind,’ including a John Wayne Western, but the origin was traceable. That is the tricky part of collecting. You can find things in the most unlikely places. In this case, on the floor. I bought it for \$20.”

The dress was worn

during the scene of the attack on Shanty Town.

It was the start of Tumblin’s collection, which was valued 10 years ago at \$66 million and is worth much more now.

One of his most expensive items is the Vivien Leigh Oscar, which he bought for \$500,000 several decades ago.

“My mother was always hounding me to find out how much I paid for it,” he said. “I wouldn’t tell her. I kept telling her I bought it with money I saved from shaving.”

For four decades he has sported a well-trimmed beard.

His mother, who lives near him in Seattle these days, can be somewhat placated by the likelihood that the Oscar could be auctioned today for more than \$2 million. It was originally put on the market by Leigh’s daughter.

Tumblin pointed out that “Michael Jackson got the best-picture Oscar from ‘Gone With the Wind’ for one and one-half million dollars. We had an urge to get the two Oscars together, so I went up to his Neverland Ranch and had them photographed together.”

Other costumes on view at the Museum of the Albe marle are Bonnie Blue’s velvet dress from her final scene and the uniform Ashley Wilkes (Leslie Howard) wore when he returned home after the Civil War.

Of the 1,500 outfits



MGM STUDIOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Among items in the collection are Vivien Leigh’s Oscar and a letter written by Hattie McDaniel, who played Mammy.

Walter Plunkett designed for the film, his favorite appears in the exhibit: Belle Watling’s burgundy velvet jacket.

It’s in the show along with Max Steiner’s score for “Tara’s Theme.” There’s the typewriter Sidney Howard used when he wrote the script. (He died in a tractor accident on his Connecticut farm before the film was released. The script was eventually handled by dozens of writers, including F. Scott Fitzgerald.)

Production paintings for the burning of Atlanta and other scenes are part of the exhibit, as are Butterfly McQueen’s audition tapes for the role of Prissy.

There’s a letter of appreciation to a fan from Hattie McDaniel, who, for her role as Mammy, became the first African American actress to win an Oscar.

On Dec. 15, 1939, Clark Gable stood in front of the Loew’s Grand Theater in Atlanta and said, “I am told the population of Atlanta is some 300,000. I have seen

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three million people on the way from the airport.”

It was something of an exaggeration, but, then, “Gone With the Wind” is a movie that has always thrived on its excesses.

Every aspect of its casting (a worldwide search to find Scarlett), production (at least three directors fired or hospitalized along the way) and overruns (it was the most expensive movie up until its time) was covered in the press.

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It never faced the fate, for example, of Walt Disney’s “Song of the South,” which has not been shown in the United States for some three decades because it was ruled socially unacceptable, even

though it is based on the literary classic by Joel Chandler Harris.

“Gone With the Wind” largely avoided controversy on the strength of its quality. Author Margaret Mitchell supported African American causes, and some observers have pointed out that a young Martin Luther King Jr. was in a choir that sang during film’s premiere events.

The movie survives as the prime example of the scope of movies during Hollywood’s golden era.

“Gone With the Wind” was popular throughout the world, but particularly in countries beset by war. The film’s greatest popularity, perhaps, is in Japan where it has played in theaters regularly and been adapted into stage versions.

Mitchell has said that the story’s theme is not for one time, but applies to “survival” in general.

The novel, she said, asks, “What makes some people come through catastrophes and others, apparently just as able, strong and brave, go under? It happens in every upheaval. Some people survive; others don’t. What qualities are in those who fight their way through triumphantly that are lacking in those that go under? I only know that survivors used to call that quality ‘gumption.’ So I wrote about people who had gumption and people who didn’t.”