



**5 September 2006 XIII:2**

**KING KONG (1933) 104 min.**

**Selected for the National Film Registry 1991**

Fay Wray...Ann Darrow  
 Robert Armstrong...Carl Denham  
 Bruce Cabot...John 'Jack' Driscoll  
 Frank Reicher...Capt. Englehorn  
 Sam Hardy...Charles Weston  
 Noble Johnson...Skull Island nation leader  
 Steve Clemente...Witch King  
 James Flavin...Second Mate Briggs  
 Merian C. Cooper...Pilot of plane that kills Kong  
 (uncredited)  
 Arnold Gray...Reporter (uncredited)  
 Ernest B. Schoedsack...Machine-gunner on plane that kills  
 Kong (uncredited)  
 Jim Thorpe...Native Dancer (uncredited)  
 Ivory Williams...Warrior (uncredited)

Directed by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack  
 Story by Merian C. Cooper and Edgar Wallace  
 Screenplay by James Ashmore Creelman and Ruth Rose  
 Produced by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack  
 Executive produce David O. Selznick

Original Music by Max Steiner  
 Cinematography by Edward Linden, J.O. Taylor, Vernon  
 L. Walker and Kenneth Peach  
 Edited by Ted Cheesman  
 Production Design by Carroll Clark  
 Art Direction by Carroll Clark, Alfred Herman, Van Nest  
 Polgase  
 Sculptor...John Cerisoli  
 Sidney Saunders...rear projection process (uncredited)  
 Ernest B. Schoedsack...camera operator (uncredited)  
 Max Steiner...conductor

**MERIAN C. COOPER** (24 October 1893, Jacksonville, Florida—21 April 1973, San Diego, California, cancer) was an aviation pioneer, film pioneer, war hero, film studio chief, and as infinitely more interesting than any of the fabulous characters who appeared in the 6 films he directed and 65 he produced. If his life were the subject matter of a novel publishers would reject it on the grounds of improbability: no one person could have done all that in one lifetime. Merian Cooper did. He was a real Indiana Jones. He was producer or executive producer for *The Searchers* (1956), *This Is Cinerama* (1952), *The Quiet Man* (1952), *Rio Grande* (1950), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), *Fort Apache* (1948), *King Kong* (1933), *Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness* (1927), and *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life* (1925). He directed *This Is Cinerama* (1952), *King Kong* (1933), *The Four Feathers* (1929), *Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness* (1927), and *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life* (1925). He plays the pilot of the plane that kills Kong.



**ERNEST B. SCHOEDSACK** (8 June 1893, Council Bluffs, Iowa—23 December 1979, Los Angeles County) directed 16 films, several of them in collaboration with Cooper: *Mighty Joe Young* (1949), *King Kong* (1933), *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932), *The Four Feathers* (1929), *Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness* (1927), *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life* (1925). He was camera operator for *King Kong*, and cinematographer for *Chang*, *Grass*, *The Four Feathers* and several other films. He plays the machine-gunner on the plane that kills Kong.

**WILLIS H. O'BRIEN** (2 March 1886, Oakland, CA—8 November 1962, LA, heart attack). *From netdoor.com*: “*King Kong* could not have been possible if not for the contribution of the special effects genius Willis O'Brien who turned an eighteen inch high model into the eighth wonder of the world. O'Brien utilized a cinematic process known as stop-motion animation where miniature models were photographed one frame at a time and repositioned between exposures. When the processed film was projected in sequence the inanimate models moved with the illusion of life. O'Brien is known as the father of this process which he debuted in his 1917 short film *The Dinosaur and the Missing Link*. He would further develop the process and create whole herds of dinosaurs in the 1925 classic *The Lost World*, based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel. *King Kong* was the greatest challenge yet for O'Brien. He brought the giant gorilla to life on film using eighteen inch high models constructed on metal skeletons with ball-and-socket joints, padded with foam rubber and cotton, and covered with rabbit skins to simulate the beast's fur. His team constructed lavish and intricate miniature sets to provide the appropriate backdrop for the animated models. O'Brien used these models to film all but a few short scenes which utilized a life-sized bust of Kong as well as a life-sized hand to hold Fay Wray and a life-sized foot to trample Skull Island natives. O'Brien studied the movements of gorillas in zoos and other large animals to develop his characterization of Kong and the dinosaurs of Skull Island as well as attending professional wrestling matches searching for ideas of how to make his creation battle the other prehistoric denizens of Skull Island. It is this attention to the performance of his models that sets O'Brien's work apart as a pinnacle of the art.”



**FAY WRAY** (15 September 1907, Cardston, Alberta, Canada—8 August 2004, NYC) acted in 116 films and tv episodes. In the 1950s and 1960s she appeared in almost all the major network drama series and several made-for-tv films, the last of which was “Gideon's Trumpet” (1980). Her last theatrical film was *Small Town Girl* (1953); the first was *Gasoline Love* (1923). **ROBERT ARMSTRONG** (20 November 1900, Saginaw, Michigan—20 April 1973, Santa Monica, California, cancer) did a lot of TV series and showcase work in the 1950s and 1960s (“Perry Mason,” “Cheyenne,” “77 Sunset Strip,” “Alfred Hitchcock Presents”, but mostly westerns: “Laramie,” “Bronco,” “Lawman,” “The Alaskans,” “Rawhide,” “Have Gun—Will Travel”). Between 1927 and 1950 he appeared in about 130 (mostly “B”) films, among which were *Destination Big House* (1950), *Mighty Joe Young* (1949), *Streets of San Francisco* (1949), *The Paleface* (1948), *Return of the Bad Men* (1948), *The Fugitive* (1947), *G.I. War Brides* (1946), *Gangs of the Waterfront* (1945), *The Kansan* (1943), *Let's Get Tough!* (1942), *Dive Bomber* (1941), *Enemy Agent* (1940), *All American Chump* (1936), *Palooka* (1934), *The Son of Kong* (1933), *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932), *The Lost Squadron* (1932), *The Leatherneck* (1929), and *The Main Event* (1927). **BRUCE CABOT** (20 April 1904, Carlsbad, New Mexico—3 May 1972, Woodland Hills, Los Angeles, lung and throat cancer) acted in 107 films, among them *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971), *WUSA* (1970), *Chisum* (1970), *The Green Berets* (1968), *The*

*War Wagon* (1967), *Cat Ballou* (1965), *McLintock!* (1963), *Hatari!* (1962), *The Comancheros* (1961), *The Quiet American* (1958), *Angel and the Badman* (1947), *Dodge City* (1939), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1936), *Flying Devils* (1933), and *The Roadhouse Murder* (1932).

**Cooper, Merian C(oldwell). From World Film Directors, Vol I. Ed. John Wakeman. H.W. Wilson Co, NY 1987**

American producer and director, born in Jacksonville, Florida, the youngest of three children of John C. Cooper and the former Mary Coldwell. His father, a lawyer who became chairman of the Federal Reserve Board in Florida, was descended from Scotch-Irish planters, and Merian Cooper was raised in the traditions of Southern chivalry, patriotism and religious certainty.

At the age of six, according to Ron Haver, Cooper was given Paul Du Chaillu's *Explorations and Adventures in Equatorial Africa*, finding the seeds of *King Kong* in the book's highly imaginative account of giant apes that were supposed to terrorize the jungle villages—including one that carried off a screaming woman. He decided that he, like Du Chaillu, would find fame as an explorer, and later, when he was sent north to Lawrenceville School near Princeton, he trained himself for the rigors of this career as

a boxer, wrestler, and swimmer.

In 1911, still dreaming of travel and adventure, Cooper entered Annapolis Naval Academy. A high-spirited young man, he “took chances and got caught too many times”; in 1914 5, his graduating year—he resigned from Annapolis (presumably upon request) and joined the merchant marine. When the Germans sank the *Lusitania*, Cooper recognized that war was coming and decided that he wanted a part in it. Ron Haver says that he “literally jumped ship in London,” injuring himself in the process.

Shipped back to the United States, Cooper worked as a journalist in Minneapolis, Des Moines, and St. Louis. In 1916, desperate for his piece of the Great War, he joined the Georgia National Guard, believing that it would be sent to Europe. In stead he found himself skirmishing against Pancho Villa on the Mexican border. He volunteered for flight training with the Signal Corps and at last, in September 1918. Was sent to France. The war was almost over, but Cooper was in time to be shot down and severely burned. He greeted the Armistice in a German prison hospital.

Released, Cooper was assigned to an American relief office in Poland. His interviews there with refugees from the Russian Civil War confirmed his belief that communism posed an international threat. He left the American army to fight with the Poles against the Bolsheviks, flying with the Kosciuszco Squadron—some sources, indeed, claimed that he both founded and commanded the squadron, though this does not seem likely. In July 1920 he was shot down once more and sent to a prison camp near Moscow. After ten months he escaped with two others and made his way to Latvia. There he was imprisoned again as a suspected Communist until an American relief mission bailed him out.

Cooper returned to New York in 1921, laden with medals. He worked for the New York *Daily News* and the New York *Times* as a reporter and feature writer, also contributing to the *Times* articles about his own adventures that he signed “A Fortunate Soldier.” Still intent on becoming an explorer, he spent hours every day the American Geographical Society, studying mapmaking and survival techniques. His chance came when he learned that Captain Edward A. Salisbury was planning an exploratory world cruise, hoping to gather materials for articles, films, and a book. Salisbury needed someone with writing and navigational experience, and Cooper was accepted. When the expedition’s cameraman absconded after a particularly ferocious typhoon, Cooper suggested as his replacement a young combat photographer he had met on the way to Poland—Ernest B. Schoedsack, who had trained at Mack Sennett’s Keystone studios.

Cooper and Schoedsack first worked together on a film when the expedition reached North Africa. They planned a documentary about Ethiopia and Hailie Selassie and shot a great deal of film. This burned a few weeks later in a fire that also destroyed the expedition’s ship. Cooper

and Schoedsack decided to continue their globetrotting collaboration by other means. Inspired no doubt by the worldwide success of Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*, they conceived the idea of a documentary about the Bakhtiari, a fiercely independent nomad people who every year drove their flocks over the mountains of central Persia to the grazing lands beyond. Back in the United States, Cooper borrowed \$5,000 from his family and \$5,000 more from a new partner, Marguerite Harrison, an adventurous journalist who had supplied him with food, blankets, and books when he was a prisoner in Russia.

The three Americans went via Turkey to Persia and then on horseback and on foot to Shustar, capital of Arabistan. There they met the Bakhtiari khans and secured permission to join the migration of 50,000 tribesmen and half a million animals. For twenty-six days they shared all the hardships of the journey over the Zagros mountains—fording rivers on goatskin rafts, scaling trackless and snow-covered peaks—until they reached the grassy valleys on the other side. Cooper and Schoedsack photographed it all with Schoedsack’s heavy Debie camera, and Marguerite Harrison noted that Cooper “had a flair for the bizarre”—“was for ever striving for startling climaxes and sharp contrasts.” He was also “disdainful of all the refinements of life...Stubborn as a mule, moody, quick-tempered but generous, loyal to the point of fanaticism.”

The journey over, Cooper and Schoedsack took their film to Paris. Arriving there practically penniless, they developed and edited it themselves into a feature-length documentary they called *Grass*. Schoedsack went off to the Galapagos Islands on an expedition led by William Beebe and Cooper took *Grass* on the lecture circuit. Its success was so great that Jesse Lasky offered to release it through Paramount. It created a sensation, grossing many times its minuscule cost (and incidentally promoting the sales of Cooper’s diary of the journey, published under the same title as the film).

Though Cooper and Schoedsack are credited as codirectors, Cooper in his diary gives most of the credit for the film to his friend. A modern critic, Elliott Stein, writes that “Schoedsack’s camera captured some of the most remarkable and strikingly framed outdoor footage of the 20s....Unhappily, Terry Ramsaye, Paramount’s title writer, churned out an endless string of inanities (‘Gosh, it’s another day!’). And since *Grass* is a collective odyssey, it never deals with families or individuals—the Bakhtiaris are seen from a distance like some race of rugged compulsive insects—the concentration on panoramic visions eventually fatigues.”

Cooper and Schoedsack were well aware of this weakness and, before their money ran out, had hoped to repeat the journey, viewing it from the point of view of a single family. This was the approach they adopted in their second documentary, *Chang* (1927). Amply financed by Jess Lasky (to the tune of about \$60,000), it was the product of almost two years’ filming in the jungles of

northern Siam (Thailand). This heavily fictionalized documentary centers on a Lao tribesman, Kru. With his family he leaves the village, clears a patch of land in the jungle, battles against tigers, leopards, and the encroaching vegetation, and tames a wild *chang* (elephant) as a work animal—a triumph of private enterprise over an inimical environment.

In assembling their material, the filmmakers faced nearly as many dangers as their hero. Schoedsack, perched in a tree, almost paid with his life for his shot of a tiger leaping up at the lens. Cooper, a man of uncontrollable rages publicly slapped a Lao chieftain during an argument and that evening was served a chicken stew laced with bamboo barbs; only the accidental presence of a missionary doctor saved him from an agonizingly slow death. But there was also a good deal of comic relief—in the filming as in the film—much of it provided by Bimbo, an eccentric gibbon.

*Chang* opened in April 1927 at the Criterion Theatre in New York, with a score composed and conducted by Hugo Riesenfeld. The orchestra included a percussion section of twenty men pounding six-foot jungle drums during the climactic elephant stampede. This spectacular sequence (footage from which was later used in at least a dozen other films) was projected at the Criterion through a magnifying lens onto a screen about three times the normal size, in a process, known as Magnascope, that had a brief vogue during the mid-1920s. *Chang* (which was also one of the first films shot on panchromatic stock) was a critical success and the top-grossing movie of the year. It launched a whole cycle of jungle thrillers like *Trader Horn* and *King of the Jungle*. All the same—enjoyed as it was for its showmanlike mingling of comedy and drama—there are many who prefer the “stark, heart-breaking” simplicity of *Grass*.

In a natural progression, Cooper and Schoedsack went from *Chang* to their first wholly fictional feature—the second silent version of A.E.W. Mason’s *The Four Feathers* (1929). Richard Arlen plays Harry Faversham, the gentle, introspective young officer who resigns his commission just as his regiment is leaving for the Sudan to avenge the death of General Gordon. He received white feathers—symbols of cowardice—from four of his nearest and dearest. One of these is his fiancée (Fay Wray) and another is a brother officer (Clive Brook). After being blinded in the desert, the Brook character [is] led to safety by a mute heroic tribesman; much later he learns that this was the despised Harry Faversham. David O. Selznick was assigned by Paramount as production supervisor.

*The Four Feathers* matched exterior footage (shot mostly in the Sudan and Tanganyika, sometimes with doubles) and scenes filmed in the studio, with a care and precision that had not previously been attained. Like *Chang* (but with less justification), it included many fine documentary studies of wildlife. One of the last major silent films, it was released with synchronized music and

sound effects but, though it as well received by the critics, seems to have been rather overlooked by audiences clamoring for talkies.

Perhaps for this reason Cooper left the film industry for two years and turned to his other passion, the airplane. Investing the profits from *Grass* and *Chang*, he became one of the founding stockholders and first directors of both Western Airlines and Pan American Airways. In his spare time he wrote a book (never published) about baboons, a species whose behavior had caught his interest when he was filming *The Four Feathers*. His researches reminded him of the stories about giant apes that he had read as a boy, and the idea for a film began to take shape. Further inspiration came from his friend Douglas Burden, an explorer who told him fascinating stories about the “prehistoric” island of Komodo in the Dutch East Indies, inhabited by lizards twelve feet long.

Cooper settled down to write the first of several treatments for what was to become *King Kong*, working out in detail what could be achieved with the special effects then possible. He was forced to discard the idea of using a real (but magnified) gorilla in his film, and to investigate instead ways in which models of monsters, filmed on miniature sets, could be combined with live action scenes projected on the same miniature scale. It was at this point that David O. Selznick, by then head of production at RKO, invited Cooper to become his executive assistant, evaluating the commercial prospects of current and proposed RKO productions. In this way he met Willis O’Brien.

O’Brien was a cartoonist and animator of genius who, in *The Lost World* (1925) and other films, had perfected the technique of “stop-motion animation.” In this process, small models are given the appearance of life by photographing them, one frame at a time, in successive stages of a movement. In O’Brien and his team of model-makers and matte artists, Cooper saw the solution to his remaining technical problems in *King Kong*. Selznick was excited by Cooper’s proposals and so was Schoedsack when he returned to Hollywood from another project. Cooper prepared an elaborate case for his film, including detailed sketches of some of its most spectacular scenes, and eventually RKO—cautious in that Depression year—authorized an expenditure of \$5,000 on a test reel.

Cooper added another \$5,000 of his own money and work began. After one false start, O’Brien and his crew constructed three eighteen-inch model gorillas, each weighing ten pounds. For each, a skeleton of articulated steel was equipped with a latex rubber muscular system and padded out to shape with cotton. The whole was painted with a liquid latex and, after this had dried into a “skin,” a final covering of animal fur was applied. For close-ups. O’Brien’s team also built a gigantic bust and head of Kong, with movable eyes and mouth, as well as a giant-sized leg and arm. Models of the principal locations—“Skull Island” and Manhattan—were built on

tables on a closed stage. The jungle sets were copied from Doré's engravings for *Paradise Lost*—a favorite of Cooper's and a work highly relevant to his theme. These sets were painted on sheets of glass, each nine feet by twelve, placed one behind the other to give an extraordinary impression of mysterious depths. Live action scenes were shot on the swampy jungle set constructed for another Cooper-Schoedsack project, *The Most Dangerous Game*.

Meanwhile, Cooper was developing a full shooting script. He worked with several collaborators, including Edgar Wallace, but it was reportedly Schoedsack's wife Ruth Rose who contributed most to Cooper's script, giving the dialogue the "fairy-tale simplicity" he wanted in this, his first talkie. Fay Wray was cast as the heroine, the movie star Ann Darrow; Robert Armstrong was to play Carl Denham, an intrepid filmmaker obviously modeled on Cooper himself; and the part of Jack Driscoll, the sailor who becomes Ann Darrow's lover, went to a young Canadian, Bruce Cabot. Impressed by the test reel, RKO came up with a budget of \$500,000 (which Selznick boosted to \$650,000 by squeezing other projects).

Shooting began in the spring of 1932. It is believed that Schoedsack directed the quiet but tense scenes at the beginning of *Kong Kong*, Cooper the violent action that follows. The latter was a tyrant on the set: for the scene in which Kong fights the allosaurus—the first back-projection ever filmed at RKO—he worked Fay Wray for a full twenty-four hours. There are also many anecdotes about the conflicts between Cooper and his collaborators, with Schoedsack and Willis O'Brien constantly but unsuccessfully opposing Cooper's insistence on the monstrous violence he attributes to the film's real hero, Kong. And it was Cooper who ordained that Kong's apparent height should change, in the course of the picture, from eighteen feet to about sixty feet—he "felt confident that if the scenes moved with excitement and beauty, the audience would accept any height that fit into the scene." By and large, he was right.

The score for *King Kong* was the work of Max Steiner, head of RKO's music department. It was as extraordinary as everything else about the film, often dissonant and using leitmotifs for characters in the manner of Wagner. As Ron Haver says, Steiner "wrote a score for an eighty-five piece orchestra that heaves, rumbles and shrieks its way through the film, underlining emotions, adding suspense, terror, and a kind of epic aural accompaniment. A grunt from an animal was picked up with a corresponding growl from the orchestra, while Wray's screams were echoed and intensified constantly by the strings. Nobody had ever heard music like this before in a film, or so much of it. Steiner's music for *King Kong* was, and is, a landmark in film scoring."

*King Kong* opens in New York with preparations for a film to be made on location on Skull Island, reputed to be inhabited by prehistoric beasts. Led by Carl Denham,

the filmmakers sail for the remote island. The long voyage is uneventful, but full of "carefully orchestrated hints of what lies ahead." On the island, the filmmakers find that the inhabitants live within a huge palisade as protection from the island's monsters. But Kong, most fearsome of them all, is only placated by sacrificial offerings of young girls. Ann Darrow is kidnapped and offered to Kong. Instead of killing her, he is infatuated, fighting in her defense against the other monsters. Jack Driscoll and the others rescue Ann and capture Kong, who is taken to New York for exhibition. He breaks loose and searches for Ann, terrorizing the city. In the end, he climbs with his beloved to the top of the Empire State Building, where he is machine-gunned to death by two flyers (Cooper and Schoedsack).

The film was previewed in San Bernardino in January 1933. A scene in which Kong shakes some sailors from a log and they fall into a ravine full of huge, slimy (and carnivorous) insects caused so much screaming in the theatre that it was removed. Otherwise, the film opened intact on March 2, 1933 at two new theatres, the RKO Roxy and Radio City Music Hall, which had a combined capacity of 10,000. Heralded by a massive publicity campaign, including the first use of radio plugs, it played to over 50,000 people on its first day and went on to become one of the greatest box-office successes there has ever been. Three sequences were cut when the film was reissued in 1938 and not restored until 1969—one of Kong curiously picking off Fay Wray's clothes, and two of exceptional violence.

As Ron Haver says, *King Kong* is a "twentieth century version of the myth of Beauty and the Beast and the destructive powers of both love and civilization." Elliott Stein, who has seen the picture more than two hundred times, calls it "the greatest adventure film ever made," and Carlos Clarens write that "one questions or marvels at, or wonders at the first sight of the monster, but thereafter one is caught in nothing but the sheer flow of events, each thrill surpassing the previous one in splendid outrageousness, The film's art is to make the technical tour de force seem effortless."

Since then, as Stein says, Kong "has emerged...as one of our great culture heroes, an absorbed and central personage of the American mythos." He is a major leitmotiv in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and an incarnation of the hero's fantasies in Karel Reisz's film *Morgan*, as well as a familiar reference point in ads, cartoons, and comedy shows. During the button craze of the 1960s, one of the most popular read "King Kong Died for Our Sins." And for one British critic, "it is the principal triumph of the film that our sympathy is always with Kong....man is directly culpable, man with his movie cameras, gas bombs, and aeroplanes. Man as Faust, unable to let things be. It is because, for all its limited technical means and strict conventions, this film succeeds in finding the perfect form and content to transmit this truth that *King*

*Kong* will remain a triumph of the cinema.” The \$24 million remake by Dino De Laurentiis in 1976 seemed by comparison “knowing, full of nudging Freudian jokes.”

During the filming of *King Kong*, Selznick resigned from RKO in a dispute, and Cooper succeeded him as vice-president in charge of production. Among the films he produced or supervised were George Cukor’s *Little Women* (1933) and several directed by Schoedsack, including *The Most Dangerous Game* (1933, called *The Hounds of Zaroff* in Britain), *Son of Kong* (1933), and *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1935). In *Flying Down to Rio* (1933) he teamed Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers for the first time. Cooper was one of the first to see the possibilities of the new Technicolor three-color process, and with John Hay Whitney formed Pioneer Pictures to exploit the process in films like Rouben Mamoulian’s *Becky Sharp* (1935). He also persuaded Whitney to invest in Selznick International Pictures, founded in 1935, of which Cooper served as vice-president.

During World War II Cooper returned to active service with the air force, becoming chief of staff to General Chennault in China. He participated in the 1942 air attacks on Japan and the New Guinea invasion and afterwards served as deputy chief of staff to General MacArthur, finally achieving the rank of brigadier general in the air force reserve.

In 1946 Cooper formed an independent production company with John Ford, Argosy Pictures. He had already produced one Ford film, *The Lost Patrol* (1934), and now he supervised some of the finest of the director’s postwar pictures, among them *The Fugitive* (1947), *Fort Apache* (1948), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), *Wagonmaster* (1950), *Rio Grande* (1950), and *The Searchers* (1956). He also produced one more film of Schoedsack’s, *Mighty Joe Young* (1949), an extremely interesting variation on the *Kong* theme. In 1952, as always in the forefront of technical advances, he coproduced *This is Cinerama*, the first movie made in the new three-strip process. It grossed over \$30 million in the United States alone. The same year Cooper was honored by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for “his many innovations and contributions to the art of the motion picture.”

“Cooper was no faceless studio executive or colorless technical innovator,” wrote Ron Haver. “His personality was distinct, a blend of the culture and traditions of the South, where he was born and raised; the more aggressive and pragmatic North, where he was educated; his reading of romantic writers such as Kipling, Harte, London, and Haggard; and the works of Shakespeare and the Bible, a book he read every day. Muscular, short, with sparse, sandy hair, and an outthrust jaw, he had a blunt forthright manner. He would size up a person through crackling brown eyes which could freeze to ice when he was displeased or angry.” Cooper was quite often very angry indeed: in 1932, when his first car stalled and he could not restart it, he pushed it off a cliff.

He died in 1973, survived by his wife, the actress Dorothy Jordan; two daughters; and a son, a major in the air force.

from **KING KONG (1933 film) Wikipedia**  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King\\_Kong\\_\(1933\\_film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Kong_(1933_film))

*King Kong* was influenced by the “Lost World” literary genre, in particular Edgar Rice Burrough’s *The Land That*



*Time Forgot* (1918) and Arthur Conan Doyle’s, *The Lost World* (1912), which depicted remote and isolated jungles teeming with dinosaur life.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century few zoos had monkey exhibits so there was popular demand to see them on film. William S. Campbell specialized in monkey-themed films with *Monkey Stuff* and *Jazz Monkey* in 1919, and *Prohibition Monkey* in 1920. Kong producer Schoedsack had earlier monkey experience directing *Chang* in 1927 (with Cooper) and *Rango* in 1931, both of which prominently featured monkeys in real jungle settings.

Capitalizing on this trend “Congo Pictures” released the hoax documentary *Ingagi* in 1930, advertising the film as “an authentic incontestable celluloid document showing the sacrifice of a living woman to mammoth gorillas!”. *Ingagi* was an unabashed black exploitation film, immediately running afoul of the Hollywood code of ethics, as it implicitly depicted black women having sex with gorillas, and baby offspring that looked more ape than human. The film was an immediate hit, and by some estimates it was one of the highest grossing movies of the 1930s at over \$4 million. Although producer Cooper never listed *Ingagi* among his influences for *King Kong*, it’s long been held that RKO green-lighted *Kong* because of the bottom-line example of *Ingagi* and the formula that “gorillas plus sexy women in peril equals enormous profits.”

*King Kong* was released four times between 1933 and 1952. All of the releases saw the film cut for censorship purposes. Scenes of Kong eating people or stepping on them were cut, as was his peeling off of Ann’s

dress. Many of these cuts were restored for the 1976 theatrical release after an uncensored print was discovered in the United Kingdom (which was not covered by the American Production Code).

#### TRIVIA

- \* In the original script, the gorilla is named “Kong”. “King” was added to the title by studio publicists. Apart from the opening titles, the only time the name “King Kong” appears in the picture is on the marquee above the theater where Kong is being exhibited—and the marquee was in fact added to the scene as an optical composite after the live footage of the theater entrance had been shot. However, Denham does refer to Kong in his speech to the theater audience as having been “a king in his native land”.
- \* The giant gate used in the 1933 movie was burned along with other old studio sets for the burning of Atlanta scene in *Gone with the Wind*. The gate was originally constructed for the Babylonian segment in D.W. Griffith’s 1816 film *Intolerance*.
- \* The gate can also be spotted in the Bela Lugosi serial *The Return of Chandu* (1934).
- \* *King Kong* is often credited as being Adolph Hitler’s favorite film (unconfirmed but often

mentioned).

- \* Jungle scenes were filmed on the same set as the jungle scenes in *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932).
- \* The original metal armature used to bring Kong to life, as well as other original props from the 1933 film, can be seen in the book *It Came From Bob’s Basement*. It was on display in London until a few years ago in the now-closed Museum of the Moving Image.
- \* King Kong’s height is different in different parts of the movie. He appears to be 18 feet tall on the island, 24 feet on stage in New York and 50 feet on the Empire State Building.
- \* In the original script Kong was going to climb the Chrysler Building. The Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building were both being built at the very same time and the Chrysler Building was supposed to be the taller of the two. There was a competition who could build the tallest building in the world, so the Empire State Building creators added an observation deck and mooring mast at the last minute, making it the world’s tallest building. The script was changed and Kong climbed the Empire State Building, looking down on the spire of the Chrysler building.

#### Coming up in Buffalo Film Seminars XIII, Fall 2006:

Sept 12 Michael Curtiz **Mildred Pierce** 1945  
Sept 26 Howard Hawks **The Big Sleep** 1946  
Oct 3 Satyajit Ray, **Aparajito/The Unvanquished** 1956  
Oct 10 Jean-Pierre Melville **Le Samourai** 1967  
Oct 17 Roman Polanski **Chinatown** 1974  
Oct 24 Robert Altman **M\*A\*S\*H** 1970  
Oct 31 Fred Zinnemann, **The Day of the Jackal** 1973  
Nov 7 Emile de Antonio **In the Year of the Pig** 1969  
Nov 14 Bob Rafelson, **Five Easy Pieces** 1970  
Nov 21 Nicolas Roeg **The Man Who Fell to Earth** 1976  
Nov 28 Spike Lee **Do the Right Thing** 1989  
Dec 5 Peter Greenaway **Prospero’s Books** 1991



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...for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>

...for the weekly email informational notes, send an email to either of us.

...for cast and crew info on any film: <http://imdb.com/search.html>

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