

THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY

Written by

Scott Marble

Story by

Scott Marble

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Edison Production Company

Shooting Script, 1903

# The Great Train Robbery (film)

*The Great Train Robbery* is a [1903 western film](#) by [Edwin S. Porter](#). Twelve minutes long, it is considered a milestone in film making, expanding on Porter's previous work [Life of an American Fireman](#). The film used a number of innovative [techniques](#) including [cross cutting](#), [double exposure](#) composite editing, camera movement and [on location](#) shooting. Cross-cuts were a new, sophisticated editing technique. Some prints were also hand colored in certain scenes. None of the techniques were original to *The Great Train Robbery*, and it is now considered that it was heavily influenced by [Frank Mottershaw's](#) earlier British film *A Daring Daylight Burglary*.<sup>[1]</sup> The film uses simple editing techniques (each scene is a single shot) and the story is mostly linear (with only a few "meanwhile" moments), but it represents a significant step in movie making, being one of the first "narrative" movies of significant length. It was quite successful in theaters and was imitated many times.

The movie was directed and photographed by [Edwin S. Porter](#), a former [Edison Studios](#) cameraman. Actors in the movie included A. C. Abadie, [Broncho Billy Anderson](#) and Justus D. Barnes, although there were no credits. The film has been selected for preservation in the United States [National Film Registry](#).



## ***Library of Congress information***

The Library of Congress includes this information with the copyright:

The Great Train Robbery Copyright: Thomas A. Edison; 1Dec1903; H38748. Duration: 3:30 (part 1), 3:54 (part 2), and 4:18 (part 3) at 18 fps. Director and camera: Edwin S. Porter. Cast: George M. Anderson, Justus D. Barnes (head bandit), Walter Cameron (sheriff). Filmed in November 1903 at Edison's New York studio, at Essex County Park in New Jersey, and along the Lackawanna railroad.



One of the robbers, shooting at the audience.

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## Trivia

- Though a western, the movie was filmed in [New Jersey](#).
- The film was originally distributed with a note saying that the famous shot of the bandit firing his gun at the camera could be placed either at the beginning or at the end of the film, or both. Most modern prints put it at the end. Audiences at the time, for whom moving pictures were still very new and unfathomable, would usually scream in fear, then laugh in relief.
- Edison also made a parody of *The Great Train Robbery* (*The Little Train Robbery* (1905)) with an all-child cast in which a larger gang of bandits holds up a mini train and steal their dolls and candy.<sup>[2]</sup>
- The final shot is homaged in [Martin Scorsese's](#) *Goodfellas* when [Joe Pesci's](#) character fires a gun into the camera (and at the audience) at the end of the movie.
- A quest in Runescape is named after this movie.

## External links

- [Download from the Library of Congress](#) (in [MPEG-1](#), [RealVideo](#) or [QuickTime](#) format)
- [The Great Train Robbery](#) at the [TCM Movie Database](#)
- [Great Films: The Great Train Robbery](#)

## Quoted from Wikipedia entry

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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Great\\_Train\\_Robbery\\_%281903\\_film%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Train_Robbery_%281903_film%29)



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**CHARACTERS**

Justus D. Barnes ... head bandit  
G. M. Anderson ... slain passenger, tenderfoot, and robber  
Walter Cameron ...sheriff

A.C. Abadie ... Sheriff

John Manus Dougherty Sr. ... 4th Bandit

Donald Gallaher ... Little boy

Frank Hanaway ... Bandit

Tom London

Morgan Jones

Marie Murray ... Dance-hall dancer

Mary Snow ... Little Girl

Conductor

Engineer

Messenger

Telegraph operator

Bandit #1

Bandit #2

Bandit #3

## 1 INTERIOR OF RAILROAD TELEGRAPH OFFICE.

Two masked robbers enter and compel the operator to get the "signal block" to stop the approaching train, and make him write a fictitious order to the engineer to take water at this station, instead of "Red Lodge," the regular watering stop. The train comes to a standstill (seen through window of office); the conductor comes to the window, and the frightened operator delivers the order while the bandits crouch out of sight, at the same time keeping him covered with their revolvers. As soon as the conductor leaves, they fall upon the operator, bind and gag him, and hastily depart to catch the moving train.

## 2 RAILROAD WATER TOWER.

The bandits are hiding behind the tank as the train, under the false order, stops to take water. Just before she pulls out they stealthily board the train between the express car and the tender.

## 3 INTERIOR OF EXPRESS CAR.

Messenger is busily engaged. An unusual sound alarms him. He goes to the door, peeps through the keyhole and discovers two men trying to break in. He starts back bewildered, but, quickly recovering, he hastily locks the strong box containing the valuables and throws the key through the open side door. Drawing his revolver, he crouches behind a desk. In the meantime, the two robbers have succeeded in breaking in the door and enter cautiously. The messenger opens fire, and a desperate pistol duel takes place in which the messenger is killed. One of the robbers stands watch while the other tries to open the treasure box. Finding it locked, he vainly searches the messenger for the key, and blows the safe open with dynamite. Securing the valuables and mail bags they leave the car.

## 4 THE TENDER AND INTERIOR OF THE LOCOMOTIVE CAB

This thrilling scene shows THE TENDER AND INTERIOR OF THE LOCOMOTIVE CAB, while the the train is running forty miles an hour. While two of the bandits have been robbing the mail car, two others climb over the tender. One of them holds up the engineer while the other covers the fireman, who seizes a coal shovel and climbs up on the tender, where a desperate fight takes place. They struggle fiercely all over the tank and narrowly escape being hurled over the side of the tender. Finally they fall, with the robber on top. He seizes a lump of coal, and strikes the fireman on the head until he becomes senseless. He then hurls the body from the swiftly moving train. The bandits then compel the engineer to bring the train to a stop.

## 5 SHOWS THE TRAIN COMING TO A STOP

Shows THE TRAIN coming to a stop. The engineer leaves the locomotive, uncouples it from the train, and pulls ahead about 100 feet while the robbers hold their pistols to his face.

## 6 EXTERIOR SCENE SHOWING TRAIN.

The bandits compel the passengers to leave the coaches, "hands up," and line up along the tracks. One of the robbers covers them with a revolver in each hand, while the others relieve the passengers of their valuables. A passenger attempts to escape, and is instantly shot down. Securing everything of value, the band terrorize the passengers by firing their revolvers in the air, while they make their escape to the locomotive.

## 7 LOCOMOTIVE

The desperadoes board the locomotive with this booty, compel the engineer to start, and disappear in the distance.

## 8 THE ROBBERS

Bring the engine to a stop several miles from the scene of the "hold up," and take to the mountains.

## 9 VALLEY

A beautiful scene in A VALLEY. The bandits come down the side of a hill, across a narrow stream, mounting their horses, and make for the wilderness.

## 10 INTERIOR OF TELEGRAPH OFFICE.

The operator lies bound and gagged on the floor. After struggling to his feet, he leans on the table, and telegraphs for assistance by manipulating the key with his chin, and then faints from exhaustion. His little daughter enters with his dinner pail. She cuts the rope, throws a glass of water in his face, restores him to consciousness, and, recalling his thrilling experience, he rushes out to give the alarm.

## 11 INTERIOR OF A TYPICAL WESTERN DANCE HALL.

Shows a number of men and women in a lively quadrille. A "tenderfoot" is quickly spotted and pushed to the center of the hall, and compelled to do a jig, while bystanders amuse themselves by shooting dangerously close to his feet. Suddenly the door opens and the half-dead telegraph operator staggers in. The dance breaks up in confusion. The men secure their rifles and hastily leave the room.

## 12 RUGGED HILL

Shows the mounted robbers dashing down A RUGGED HILL at a terrific pace, followed closely by a large posse, both parties firing as they ride. One of the desperadoes is shot and plunges headlong from his horse. Staggering to his feet, he fires at the nearest pursuer, only to be shot dead a moment later.

## 13 THE THREE REMAINING BANDITS

thinking they have eluded the pursuers, have dismounted from their horses, and after carefully surveying their surroundings, they start to examine the contents of the mail pouches. They are so grossly engaged in their work that they do not realize the approaching danger until too late. The pursuers, having left their horses, steal noiselessly down upon them until they are completely surrounded. A desperate battle then takes place, and after a brave stand all the robbers and some of the posse bite the dust.

## 14 14 BARNES

A life-size [CLOSE-UP] picture of Barnes, leader of the outlaw band, taking aim and firing point-blank at the audience. The resulting excitement is great. This scene can be used to begin or end the picture.