

## FIRST DRAFT

# Record is largely silent on Al Look's silent film adventure as a lead actor

During the 35 years that Alfred Alvine "Al" Look served as advertising manager and sometime columnist for The Daily Sentinel, he established a well-deserved reputation as a sort of Renaissance Man.

However, few people know that Look also had a brief career as a silent film star. He appeared in one motion picture, called "The Love of a Navajo," which was filmed in New Mexico in 1922.

In addition to his work at the Sentinel, Al Look was an author of multiple books, an amateur paleontologist who had a fossil mammal named after him, an amateur archaeologist who helped define a key ancient Indian site in Utah that still bears his name, and was a self-taught geologist.

He also served two terms as president of what he called the Colorado Ad Men's Association, led numerous promotions for the Sentinel, and became an expert on certain types of Western art.

Born in Nebraska in 1893, Look moved to Dove Creek, Colorado, in 1920, where he homesteaded and worked for a newspaper. By 1922, he was working for the Durango Herald, where he apparently met two local businessmen who were forming their own film company.

One of them, the owner of a local auto dealership, had written the script for what would become "The Love of a Navajo," sometimes called "Navajo Love."

"So, they're going to make this motion picture ... and who did they select for one of the leading characters? Me," Look recalled in an oral history he recorded with the Museum of Western Colorado in 1981.

"And it had a double lead in it, which was one thing wrong with it."

Look also said the script for "The Love of a Navajo" was "full of corn," meaning it was extremely corny.

In the movie, Look played an Easterner suffering from tuberculosis, whose sister brings him to the dry climate of the West in hopes of curing him. The second male lead was a cowboy who falls for Look's character's sister.

Soon after Look and his sister arrive in the West, the stage they are riding in is attacked and robbed. Later, Look's character somehow stumbles into the desert, where he almost dies of thirst.

However, a Navajo woman finds him and nurses him back to life, and they fall in love.

The script also required the film crew — including actors — to construct some makeshift wooden structures.

Then, Look said, "We had the Indians attack them and burn them down ... There wasn't anything you've read about (the Old West) that wasn't in this darn picture."

No copies of the film itself have survived. Like so many other pictures from the silent-film era, made with highly flammable cellulose nitrate, it



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Al Look's character being rescued by a young Navajo woman in "The Love of a Navajo."

has long since disappeared.

All that's left today are some still photographs and a few newspaper articles about the movie, as well as Al Look's recollections about the film as recorded in the 1981 oral history.

And, as he put it then, "All I remember is little episodes of it."

"The Love of a Navajo" employed some Navajo tribal members in critical roles, including the chieftain who marries Look's character and his Navajo lover. Look claimed it was the first film ever made to employ actual Native Americans.

That's not true, however. A few Native American actors began appearing in films years earlier, such as the Winnebago actress Red Wing, who starred in 1914's "Squaw Man."

Additionally, the actress who played the Navajo woman who rescued Al Look's character was actually a Latina-French woman from Albuquerque named Aline Caire.

It's interesting to note that Caire's character in the film was named Lo-Lita, three decades before Vladimir Nabokov published his famous novel, "Invitation to a Beheading."

According to several newspaper articles of the time, filming of "The Love of a Navajo" took place near Farmington, Aztec and Shiprock, New Mexico. It took 10 weeks to shoot all of the scenes and filming wrapped up in March of 1922. The film was produced by the Navajo Film Co., headed by Thomas H. Marshall of Durango.

Look recalled that a rotating stage was built on a ranch near Farmington for much of the filming.

Because the film company didn't have any electric lights to use on set, the stage rotated to capture the natural light as the day progressed, he said.

After each day's work, cans of film that had been shot that day were sent to a production company in Hollywood to be developed. The production company would then send back



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Al Look encounters outlaws in "The Love of a Navajo."

still photographs from the film, "so that we could look at them and decide whether we needed to reshoot a scene," Look recalled.

The film was released in 1923, and showed in a handful of locations around the West, including Albuquerque and Denver. It almost certainly played in Durango, but no newspaper articles from the time are now online that confirmed the film's appearance there.

Look said he also arranged for a showing of it in Grand Junction, after he had moved here around 1925. It had its longest run — two weeks — at the Palace Theater in Denver.

If there were reviews of the film, they are not easily discovered today. However, newspaper descriptions of the movie do mention its stunning scenery — "mesas, deserts, strange rock formations and the famed valley of the San Juan River."

Considerable newspaper ink was also devoted to Ailine Caire and the other female lead, Helen Head, who was of Navajo and Irish ancestry. She was a New Mexico woman and described as an accomplished horsewoman. No mention was made of Look or other males in

the film.

Near the end of the movie, when Al Look's character married the Navajo woman who rescued him in the desert, his sister in the film gets married to the cowboy with whom she had fallen in love.

But that apparently wasn't the end of the movie. Trouble is, even Look, in his oral interview 60 years after the film was shot, couldn't recall the ending.

"I've forgotten how that dog gone picture wound up," he said.

Al Look died in Grand Junction in 1992.

Sources: Al Look oral interview, April 1981, Mesa County Oral History Project, online at the Mesa County Libraries; "Alfred Alvine 'Al' Look," by Mesa County Libraries, <https://mesa.marmot.org/Archive/person:3637/Person>; "Alfred A. 'Al' Look" in "125 People, 125 Years: Grand Junction's Story," by Laurena Mayne Davis; New Mexico historic newspapers at [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com); author interview with Noel Kalenian, librarian, Mesa County Libraries.

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Al Look as he appeared later in his life, while living in Grand Junction.

**IDEAL**  
LAST TIME TODAY  
AILINE CAIRE  
AN ALBUQUERQUE YOUNG LADY, STARRING IN  
**"THE LOVE OF A NAVAJO"**  
A thrilling five-act feature, filmed in the Aztec-Farmington section of the Navajo reservation.

This advertisement for "The Love of a Navajo" appeared in an Albuquerque, New Mexico, newspaper in September, 1923.

## 2021 THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

DENVER — This week, the House and Senate will take up some of the election-related bills that have been introduced into this year's session, few if any of which are expected to pass. Four of them include measures to require proof of citizenship to vote, audit of the voter registration system, election recount requests and ballot signature verifications.

■ **Monday:** The Senate Health and Human Services Committee is to hear SB123 partly sponsored by Sen. Don Coram, R-Montrose, to expand the state's Canadian Drugs Import Program.

■ **Tuesday:** The Senate Transportation and Energy Committee is to debate SB72, designed to require the Colorado Public Utilities Commission to focus on ways to modernize the state's electric transmission infrastructure.

■ **Wednesday:** The House Health and Insurance Committee will discuss HB1020, a measure partly sponsored by Rep. Matt Soper, R-Delta, that would prohibit health benefit plans that provide coverage for cancer treatments

to apply a higher standard of clinical evidence for proton beam therapy than other radiation therapy treatments.

■ **Thursday:** The House Finance Committee is to look at HB1071, a measure that would allow local governments to use ranked choice voting in municipal elections. The bill cleared the House State, Civic, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee late last month on a 7-4 party-line vote, with all four Republicans dissenting.

■ **Next week:** A House committee will take a look at some gun-related bills that routinely get introduced, and routinely get killed. They include measures to repeal ammunition magazine limits, exceptions to background checks in gun transfers, and concealed handguns on school grounds.

All floor action and committees can be watched or heard on the Colorado Legislature's website at [lege.colorado.gov](http://lege.colorado.gov). Check that website to see which measures are available for remote testimony, and how to register to speak.

— Charles Ashby

## Law officer shoots male suspect inside local home

By SENTINEL STAFF

One man was taken to the hospital after being shot by law enforcement on Sunday.

The incident started shortly before 11 a.m. when the Grand Junction Regional Communications Center received a call about a suspicious vehicle. The reporting party said the vehicle was observed speeding and swerving on the Interstate 70 Business Loop and that it appeared there were people arguing in the vehicle.

The suspicious vehicle was located in the 400 block of Coronado Court. A witness reported seeing a man pulling a woman into a residence and that she appeared to be in distress.

Law enforcement arrived on the scene, but after unsuccessful attempts to contact the occupants of the residence, Mesa County Sheriff's Office deputies forced entry into the house. A juvenile male was removed from the home by deputies.

Ultimately, an officer-

involved shooting occurred in the residence, with an adult male suspect shot and taken to the hospital, where it was reported that he was treated for serious injuries.

A woman was also located in the home and was treated for injuries that are believed to have occurred prior to deputies contacting her.

The juvenile male suffered a minor cut on his hand. One deputy suffered minor injuries during the incident.

All officer-involved shootings in Mesa County are investigated by the 21st Judicial District Critical Incident Response Team, which is made up of representatives of the Grand Junction Police Department, Mesa County Sheriff's Office, Fruita Police Department, Palisade Police Department, Colorado State Patrol, Colorado Department of Corrections, 21st Judicial District Attorney's Office and Colorado Bureau of Investigation.

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