

# Our Hospitality

Buster Keaton Productions 1923

Directed by Buster Keaton  
and John Blystone



## Cast

Willie McKay: Buster Keaton  
Virginia Canfield: Natalie Talmadge  
The Baby: Buster Keaton Jr  
The Engineer: Joe Keaton  
Aunt Mary: Kitty Bradbury  
Joseph Canfield: Joe Roberts  
James Canfield: Leonard Clapham  
Lee Canfield: Craig Ward  
Clayton Canfield: Ralph Bushman  
John McKay: Edward Coxen  
Mrs McKay: Jean Dumas  
Rev Benjamin Dorsey: Monte Collins  
Sam Gardner: James Duffy

Story by Jean Havez, Clyde Bruckman,  
Joseph Mitchell

Photography: Elgin Lessley and Gordon  
Jennings

Art Director: Fred Gabouri

Score by Carl Davis—18 players

A tinted print  
Duration: 75 minutes  
Projection speed: variable  
Aperture: full



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This was Buster Keaton's second feature length film and the first in which he created a real character and a story. He wanted to make comic use of early trains, so set the film in 1831, the year railways first appeared in America. The first part of the film takes place on a replica of Stephenson's Rocket. Apart from trains, the comedy hinges on the contrasting characteristics of life in the South: hospitality and feuding

One dark and stormy night in Rockville, James Canfield opens fire on John McKay. They both end up dead. Thus began the Canfield/McKay feud. To protect her baby son from certain murder by a Canfield, McKay's widow sends him to the North. Under the tutelage of his aunt, Willie grows up to be a little gent in the growing New York city. At twenty-one he receives a letter instructing him to travel to Rockville to take up his inheritance. Willie bids his Aunt farewell but not before she reveals to him the history of the feud. His long and tortuous train journey South is greatly enhanced by the presence of a pretty young lady – unbeknownst to Willie, a Canfield. They arrive in Rockville, dishevelled but, in Willie's case, smitten. Pretty soon one of the Canfield boys discovers that a McKay is back in town. Disappointed to learn that his inheritance is far from the gracious Southern plantation he had imagined, Willie cheers up when he is invited to the Canfields for dinner. So keen is he to spend an evening with his charming travelling companion that it overrides all fears for his own safety. The Canfield men are primed for the kill but their father warns that they must adhere to the code of honour and not kill Willie whilst he is a guest in their house. Dinner is tortuous but Willie knows the ropes and manages to stay within their walls – and near the Girl – for longer than the Canfields had bargained. Eventually outside, he is fair game and the game is not fair, the Canfield boys being twice Willie's size. However love – and a lot of cunning – will out and Willie saves his girl, marries her and ends the feud all in one hair-raising chase.

Keaton made the film a family affair. His father, Joe, played the engine driver and his one-year old son, Jimmy, played the baby Willie. Buster's pregnant wife, Natalie, played The Girl. To find an unspoilt landscape they filmed the journey around Lake Tahoe and the Truckee River. The tiny train's journey south through magisterial forests is unbelievable to us today. To ensure authenticity the production was so carefully researched that the duplication of the Gentleman's Hobby Horse used in the New York scenes was given to the Smithsonian, Washington, at the museum's request.

The production was fraught with emergencies which make for exciting viewing. Buster came close to drowning twice. In the Truckee River, filming what was meant to be a rescue, his safety wire snapped and he was swept downstream. Filming the waterfall sequence, Keaton continually dropped head first into the pool below over which he had to swing on a rope. The finished scene is a spectacular display of Keaton's agility as well as a tribute to Keaton's ingenuity as a film maker. The waterfall, which seems to be situated in rugged territory with a view of wooded hillsides, was in fact filmed over a Hollywood swimming pool. Carl Davis' score reflects the gentle era depicted in the film with contemporary songs and Southern melodies.