This wasn't actually written in 1929 but it is about a trip Gary took with a stopover in Chattanooga, TN in 1929.

[www.chattanoogan.com/2013/7/12/255037/John-Shearer-The-Visit-Of-Gary-Cooper.aspx](http://www.chattanoogan.com/2013/7/12/255037/John-Shearer-The-Visit-Of-Gary-Cooper.aspx)

**John Shearer: The Visit Of Gary Cooper

Friday, July 12, 2013 - by John Shearer**

Well-known movie stars have periodically stopped in Chattanooga over the years for one reason or another.

Of course, the most recent example was Harrison Ford, who was playing the role of Brooklyn Dodgers’ president Branch Rickey in the Jackie Robinson movie, “42.”

One visit that has likely been long forgotten because it took place many years ago and because the actor was still in the early stages of a very successful career was when Gary Cooper came to the Scenic City in 1929.

He had stopped in Chattanooga not for any public visit, but simply to spend the night while flying from Chicago to Tampa.

I came across a brief article in the Chattanooga Times on his visit while looking at some 1929 articles on microfilm at the library on the stock market crash that ushered in the Great Depression.

So while the stocks were hitting a new low, the 28-year-old Mr. Cooper was enjoying a high time above Chattanooga. He was also reaching new heights in his movie career, as the native Montanan was just starting to become famous due to such films as the 1927 silent hit, “Wings,” which won the first Academy Award for Best Picture.

The wings of his plane – a six-passenger, 300-horsepower Travelair, which had an office – had landed at Chattanooga’s Marr Field at 5:15 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 23, 1929.

Marr Field – named for automobile pioneer and aviation enthusiast Walter Marr of Signal Mountain and formerly of Michigan -- was Chattanooga’s first airport of consequence. It was located in the area of Riverside Drive – north of Wilcox Boulevard and east of Amnicola Highway.

Mr. Cooper was not the first famous person to land at Marr Field, as aviator Charles Lindbergh had landed there two years before in front of thousands while on a promotional trip following his famous trans-Atlantic flight on the “Spirit of St. Louis.”

The somewhat brief article mentioned that Mr. Cooper came to Chattanooga with three other people, and was to meet two actors and an actress in Tampa.

Flying with him from Chicago and stopping in Chattanooga were Iowa pilot and aviation pioneer W.B. “Wilford” Gerbacht, Chicago newspaper writer and former Grinnell (Iowa) College classmate Basil Talbott, and photographer A.L. Child Jr. of Grinnell.

Mr. Cooper had been attending a homecoming event at Grinnell College shortly before the flight, and was to go to Tampa to meet up with three fellow entertainment stars – Al St. John, Jean Hersholt, and Lupe Velez for about four days of apparent rest and relaxation.

While those three would not have quite the lasting name recognition that the iconic Mr. Cooper would, they all had distinguished careers. Mr. St. John, for example, was known as the comic sidekick to a number of cowboy stars and was the nephew of the noted comedian “Fatty” Arbuckle.

Mr. Hersholt, meanwhile, was a Danish-born actor who performed on the popular “Dr. Christian” radio show directed by Ronald Reagan’s brother, Neil, and Ms. Velez was an accomplished Mexican-born actress.

The three were shooting a movie in Tampa. The article does not say, but it was apparently the early talkie, “Hell Harbor.”

Ms. Velez had just performed with Mr. Cooper in the Victor Fleming-directed movie, “The Wolf Song.” Some contemporary fans of movies might be surprised to learn that the 1929 movie actually showed Mr. Cooper shaving and bathing in a river without any clothes in the pre-code/pre-rated film days.

He apparently did not take a swim in the nearby Tennessee River after arriving in Chattanooga, but he did spend the night at the Read House, with the current version of the hotel having just opened in 1926.

The four had stopped in Louisville after having to endure a snowstorm and being forced to fly close to the treetops for visibility.

Mr. Cooper was evidently gracious to an unknown Chattanooga Times reporter while in Chattanooga. He spoke of the scenic beauty of the city, which was no doubt likely enjoying some spectacular fall color in late October.

In fact, he thought the city might be a great place to film a movie and would suggest the idea to Hollywood executives.

“Mr. Cooper said that he would recommend the location and considered it superior to California because of its trees and water,” the article said. “Chattanooga would be especially suited to film purposes, he said, in the fall. He added that continuous sunshine and good roads – the latter to accommodate the nine-ton truck used to haul the sound-recording apparatus – were necessary for taking a picture and that these factors would enter into the possible selection of Chattanooga as the scene for a movie.”

Mr. Cooper also said he was impressed with the beauty of Chattanooga women and with the accents of the local people.

His stop in Chattanooga was actually Mr. Cooper’s first visit to the South, he said.

It was not a very long one, at least in Tennessee, however, as he and his group headed for Tampa the next morning at 8.

He likely found out about the Wall Street nosedive the next morning at the Read House or during his visit to Tampa.

He was to return to California via Texas.

While Mr. Cooper made his first visit to Tennessee via the air, he would soon bring Tennessee to the world by land in his portrayal of native son and World War I Army foot soldier Alvin C. York.

The 1941 movie about the courageous war hero from Pall Mall, Tenn., would earn Mr. Cooper his first Oscar. The second would come in the 1952 Western movie, “High Noon.

Mr. Cooper became known for his sometimes understated roles of heroic and praised male characters, including New York Yankees star Lou Gehrig in “The Pride of the Yankees.”

While generally likeable in life as well, he was also known for a few affairs or scandalous relationships, including with silent screen star Clara Bow and Knoxville actress Patricia Neal.

He died of prostate cancer at the age of 60 in 1961 and was feted as one of the real giants of Hollywood.

He inspired the Scenic City many times in films, and at least once in person.

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