

# PERCY'S FIRST HOLIDAY

Year of release: 1914 • Scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan

After leaving Australia for America in late-1913, W.S. Percy met up with Millard Johnson in New York. The American representative for Greater J.D. Williams Amusement Company invited him to visit the Thanhouser Film Company and while at the studios a short film scenario was written for the comedian. Although initially intended for Australian exhibition only (as a compliment to Percy), Thanhouser management were delighted with the end result and subsequently gave it wide US release. It was also screened in a number of other countries, including Great Britain.

The storyline sees Percy arrive in New York from Australia on a holiday. In quick succession he is thrown out of a cinema, has a fight with a 16 stone actor for the privilege of playing the role the younger brother of an attractive young lady, treats a young girl to a plate of spaghetti in a tango restaurant, argues with her infuriated husband, is fleeced of every penny by race course crooks and having lost all his money id forced to secure passage as a steward on a ship returning home. At the end he leans over the side of the vessel and says "I'm just crazy about America, but oh! I love Australia!"



**W.S. Percy**  
Source: Peter Downes. *The Pollards*.

- 1914:** New York (USA); 8 Feb. [world premiere]
- 771 ft ; black and white; sound
  - **Dir/Dir of Ph.** Carl Louis Gregory; **Prod.** Thanhouser Film Company; **Ast Dir.** M. Perry Horton
  - **Cast** incl. W.S. Percy (Theatrical star from Australia), Fannie Bourke (Jane), Muriel Ostriche (May, an actress), Baby Wallace, Charles Van Houten, Boyd Marshall, Eddir Ford, Arthur Bauer, Grace Eline and Lydia Mead.
  - The Australian premiere was held at the Crystal Theatre, Sydney, on Monday 30 March 1914. The film was distributed by the Greater J.D. Williams Amusement Company.
  - *Percy's First Holiday* was released in Britain on 10 August 1914.



## Thanhouser Films



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# Percy's First Holiday

Code Word: "Holiday."



Released - - - August 10th.  
Approx. Length - - - 771 ft.  
Price - - - £12 17s. Od.

Presenting Mr. W. S. PERCY, the  
famous Australian Comedian -  
with MURIEL OSTRICHE.



**H**E was an Australian, and hadn't had a holiday for a long time, so naturally was out to enjoy himself. At the picture studio the fair heroine was remonstrating with the director. How could a man 6 feet something, weighing upwards of sixteen stone act as her little brother—and she was only just over 5 feet, weighing between 7 and 8 stone. It couldn't be done. A stage hand had seen Percy poking his nose in places where he was not wanted, and suggested a way out of the difficulty to the harassed

director. The result was Percy was pressed into service, being complimented eventually by the director. Visiting a picture theatre later on, the film in which he had acted was put on the screen. Percy was so excited and anxious to make known his identity to the audience that the ushers threw him out bodily. After other exciting experiences he lost all his money to confidence men and had to work his way back to Australia as a steward.

**Advertising for the British premiere.**

Source: Chapman University

## SEE ALSO

W.S. Percy • *Percy Gets a Job* (1912)

## QUOTATIONS

- *Percy's First Holiday* is based on the recent American adventures of W.S. Percy, Australia's greatest comedian, who came over to this country on his first vacation. The Yankeeland experiences of the famous Antipodean funster would make a mummy laugh. Thanouser favorites are with him every minute, to make you remember always that Thanouser grabbed the privilege of filming the comedian-visitor (*Reel Life*, 7 Feb. 1914, n.pag.) [advertisement]
- "Percy was the idol of the theatregoing public in Australia. On his first holiday he came to America. To him New York was a city to wonder at. The traffic all went the wrong way, he said - and it seemed mighty strange to be freezing to death in December, for that month is midsummer in Australia. His adventures in outlandish U.S.A. made a thrilling story for him to take back with him to the other side of the world (*Reel Life*, 7 Feb. 1914, n. pag.) [synopsis]
- The first appearance of the Australian comedian, W.S. Percy, is the feature of this film. The story is a rather novel one in that it consists largely of the adventures which the actor is supposed to experience in coming to this country. Incidentally he returns to Australia, which it is to be hoped has not actually happened, as photo playgoers would like to see more of him (*Morning Telegraph*, 15 Feb. 1914). [review]
- Featuring the clever comedy work of W.S. Percy, the Australian actor, this picture has broad humor of a kind that is apt to become rough; but there is a pertinency in the incidents at times that keeps it alive and interesting. It makes a very fair offering (*Moving Picture World*, 21 Feb. 1914, n. pag.) [review]
- This is a one-reel comedy extravaganza, with lots of hilarity, albeit much horseplay - which is probably what it was intended to be. 'Percy' is introduced as the 'leading Australian comedian,' who takes his first holiday, coming to New York. All sorts of experiences, good, bad, and indifferent befall him. The bad ones are those that are so absolutely extravagant that they weaken the general effect. In New York Percy wanders into a movie studio, where he persuades the ingenue that he is the actor to play opposite her in their plays. Then he escorts her to a tango emporium, where his capers as a dancer and a diner are many and varied. Then he is inveigled into a bucket shop, where he is adroitly trimmed by the wire-tappers. He sails back to Australia glad to leave New York to the New Yorkers (*New York Dramatic Mirror* 18 Feb. 1914, n. pag.) [review]<sup>1</sup>
- Australians have reason to be proud of W.S. Percy. There was no blare of trumpets or clash of timbals on his arrival in New York, but within a month, and in the face of keen competition, he was numbered among the first flight of screen comedy actors. In this film Percy does some of the funniest stunts of his life ("Pav's Great Catch, 10).



**The crowd outside the Crystal Theatre, Sydney, for the first matinee showing.**  
Source: National Film and Sound Archive.

<sup>1</sup> The above quotations have been sourced from Q. David Bowers.

## HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. The National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) is incorrect in describing *Percy's First Holiday* as the comedian's first film. Percy had previously been the lead actor in the 1912 short, *Percy Gets a Job*. The NFSA entry also incorrectly records Millard Johnson's given name as Willard, and provides a wrong Australian premiere date (31 March). The entry appears to be based in part on an incorrect report in the *Sun* (29 Mar. 1914) stating that this was Percy's debut appearance in a film. In the same newspaper article the writer records that a special matinee would be held on Tuesday the 31<sup>st</sup> for Percy's friends and acquaintances from the theatre industry. The author(s) of the NFSA entry may have mistaken this for the premiere (which was actually held the day before). [See "*Percy's First Holiday*" - NFSA below]
2. The first draft of the scenario was apparently written in 20 minutes while Percy, unaware of the situation, toured the Thanhouser studio.
3. While in New York Percy also appeared in the Broadway show *Maid of Athens*.

## FURTHER REFERENCE

- Bowers, Q. David. "*Percy's First Holiday*." *Thanhouser Films: An Encyclopedia and History*. [sighted 18/04/2018]  
"Moving Pictures: W.S. Percy, Cinema Actor - His American Adventures." *Sunday Times* (Sydney) 29 Mar. 1914, 5.  
"Pav's Great Catch: W.S. Percy as Cinema Actor, The." *Mail* (Adelaide) 9 May 1914, 10.  
"*Percy's First Holiday*." *Internet Movie Database*. [sighted 18/04/2018]  
"*Percy's First Holiday*." *National Film and Sound Archive* [incl. a clip of crowds outside the Crystal Theatre premiere] [sighted 18/04/2018]  
"W.S. Percy's First Holiday." *Sun* (Sydney) 29 March 1914, 9

**Monday's Specials at the Picture Block Theatres,  
Sydney's Picture Centre.**

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**CRYSTAL PALACE.**

**Three Specials on One Program.**

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A brand new series which shows the blowing up of Gamboa Dike with 18,000lbs of dynamite; the waters of two oceans rushing together; the passage of the first ship through; the operation of the great lock gates; and scenes along the completed canal.

Excellent Photography.

**W. S. PERCY'S FIRST HOLIDAY**

Australia's favorite comedian in a delightful film burlesque of his trip from Sydney and adventures in New York. He has a lively time with Tango girls and bunco men, who finally get his wad. He ends by working his way home as a steward.

When it comes to film acting the "Yanks ain't got nothin' on our Percy."

*Evening News* (Sydney) 28 Mar. 1914, 3.

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