



# HippFest

18 — 22 March 2026



## Captain January

**Dir. Edward F. Cline | USA | 1924 N/C U | b&w | English intertitles | 1h 5m**

**With:** Baby Peggy (Diana Sera Carey), Hobart Bosworth, Irene Rich

**Performing live: Stephen Horne (piano, accordion)**

**Programme notes: Fritzi Kramer**

**Sat 21 March 14:00 - 15:15**

*Screening material courtesy of Milestone/Kino Lorber.*

Team a grizzled onscreen tough guy with a cute kid for a bit of family fun! This timelessly appealing family film concept is the center of *Captain January*, pairing precocious child star Baby Peggy Montgomery with experienced stage and screen actor Hobart Bosworth. A matinee idol of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bosworth was one of the first film actors to move permanently to California, where he carved out a reputation for playing antiheroes and occasional villains in gritty and sometimes graphically violent nautical fare. He received Jack London's personal blessing to play the malevolent title character of *The Sea Wolf* and infamously taxidermied Wallace Beery alive in *Behind the Door*.

Baby Peggy, billed as “the biggest little star,” had won the hearts of audiences while still a toddler with her skillful pantomime and penchant for celebrity impressions. At just five years old, she had a filmography of over a hundred shorts under her belt and had worked grownup hours under harsh conditions, a genuine pop culture sensation with her own merchandise lines.

Bosworth plays Jeremiah Judkins, an elderly Maine lighthouse keeper. (Laguna Beach, California stands in for the East Coast of the United States.) Montgomery plays Captain January, the adopted daughter he rescued from the sea as a baby. They are an inseparable pair but local busybodies and troublemakers conspire to break them up. A little girl being raised in a lighthouse and learning the ways of the sea, the very idea! On a more serious note, Judkins can feel his health declining and it is increasingly difficult for him to fulfill his duties at the lighthouse, something that must be kept a strict secret because it will mean losing his job, home, and child if the busy body brigade finds out.

Edward F. Cline, previously Buster Keaton's collaborator and future director of W.C. Fields talkies, stays true to his instincts and allows *Captain January* to be a two-character film that relies on the eccentric antics of Bosworth and Baby Peggy as they go through their happy routine at the lighthouse: gather lobsters to fund their dream of buying their own boat, supper with their dog and pet pelican, bedtime with readings from Shakespeare or the Bible. The duo enjoy visits from friendly neighbor Bob Peet (Lincoln Steadman) and his swearing parrot, which inadvertently expands the child's vocabulary.

It's an intimate, tissue-thin story that lives or dies on the strength of its stars and they are more than up to the task. Bosworth is at his most paternal here, though his status as the once and future king of sadistic seafaring revenge would have been on the minds of period audiences during scenes in which he confronts his local nemesis. With little Peggy, he is all tenderness and the film is at its strongest when the pair of them are simply let loose to play their characters. Of course, such an idyllic life can't last in a movie and conflict arrives in the form of wealthy Bostonian Irene Rich, who suspects that the little girl at the lighthouse is her long-lost niece.

While the original 1891 novel by Laura E. Richards aimed for a bittersweet tone and wove in themes of mortality and sacrifice, the film adaptation opts to keep things light and bubbly with some scenes of pathos to showcase the skills of Bosworth and Baby Peggy but nothing too heavy to interfere with the peppy and sentimental mood of the picture.

There was good reason for this as *Captain January* was aggressively marketed to children. Trade magazines aimed at theater management recommending "tie-ups" (tie-ins) that included everything from a Baby Peggy lookalike contest, to kids-only Baby Peggy quizzes, to Baby Peggy balloons (available at \$15 per thousand from the film's distributor, about £200 today), to displays of Baby Peggy-branded children's clothing, to collaborating with local schools for classroom Baby Peggy essays with the winners from each class being awarded free tickets to see the picture. For the movie theater itself, recommended decor and "ballyhoo" included setting up a replica lighthouse and lifeboats in the lobby, dressing the ushers in nautical garb, playing seafaring music, and adding a faux yacht exterior to a motor car in order to drive around a Baby Peggy impersonator.

These tactics seemed to have worked, and enthusiasm was high among both parents and children. A Minnesota theater manager sums the film up perfectly in a box office report she sent to a trade magazine during *Captain January's* original theatrical run: "A very good picture. No big story, but one with good comedy. Plenty of heart appeal. Good photography, good cast, beautiful scenery. Many favorable comments, and you won't be afraid to meet your patrons. Any exhibitor should be proud to show this picture. One that any mother can send her children to see and be glad she sent them."

## **FRITZI KRAMER**

*Fritzi Kramer is the founder of Movies Silently online and has contributed essays to the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, as well as the Keaton Chronicle, and Smithsonian websites.*