THEODORE HURT MEMORIAL FILM SOCIETY

Program for Tuesday December 22nd, at 8.00 p.m., Room 318 (Radio Writers' Guild) 2 E. 23rd St., N.Y.

A MESSAGE TO OUR MEMBERS

Our plans to screen "FROM MAKER TO CROSS" and "EXTASIS", announced at the last meeting, have by no means been abandoned. However, last-minute complications made it impossible to guarantee arrival of these two prints and thus, rather than run the risk of disappointing our members, it was considered wiser to postpone that program temporarily. We are endeavouring to obtain these two films for one of our January shows, and an announcement about this will be made at the forthcoming meeting.

Our current show contains several extremely rare items, and in keeping with the festive season, the emphasis is on light-hearted material. With the exception of the Chaplin film, these are subjects that are very difficult to see, and our prints are in first-class condition, so we know we can look forward to a good turnout for this program.

As announced last time, we are making an attempt to cut down quite heavy expenses in every way possible - the less spent on unnecessary overheads, the more available for renting better films. One of our biggest expenditures is on a very large mailing list, and while naturally members are entitled to receive (and we are pleased to supply) advance program notes, we do feel that many of the names on our list are of people who have but scant interest in our activities, and seldom if ever appear at our meetings. Thus, we have attached a simple form to the end of these notes. Those members who wish to continue receiving notes are asked to sign them and either hand them in at the next meeting, or mail them to U.K. Emerson at the New York Times Building, New York, N.Y. Members who do not wish to continue receiving notes need not, of course, take any action, and accordingly will be dropped from our circulation lists.

In conclusion, the Committee of the film society wishes all members the very best for Christmas and the New Year ... here's hoping for bigger, better, older and rarer films in 1954!

PROGRAMME: (In order of screening)

MICKEY'S CHRISTMAS
GRASS
THE GANGSTER AND THE GIRL
HIS TREATING PLACE
Intermission
SKIRKER'S DRESS SUIT

(MICKEY'S CHRISTMAS)

Walt Disney's early talking black-and-white cartoons are always a delight today, this one the best of his Mickey Mouse shorts - made before Disney got too cute, and before inventive gags in cartoons were supplanted by satiristic violence.

GRASS - Paramount, 1925. Produced by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack. Photography by Ernest B. Schoedsack.

The mid-twenties provided the richest material that American cinema has contributed to the documentary field. "Michalet's films "Hancock of the North" and "Koma", "Grass", "Chang", and later, "Gabu" and "White Shadows", "GRASS" - which deals with the Baktiari tribe of North West Persia, and their twice yearly migration in search of grass - is one of the most famous. Curiously, it is a rather detached sort of documentary, and has little of the humanity, and the love of people, of Michalet's films; in its own unemotional way, though, it is superlatively done and contains some of the most spectacular and genuinely exciting sequences of any documentary film. Our version is a condensation of the original feature - a condensation that incorporates the two primary highlights, namely the crossing of the glacier-melted river, and the great climax of the trek over the mountain range. These two sequences are wonderfully photographed and edited, reaching considerable heights of tension and excitement.

Following "Grass", Schoedsack and Cooper followed up with another great documentary, "Chang", and the spectacular "The Four Feathers", which is regarded as their most impressive (and successful) work. They have each, in turn, continued to make documentaries following the career of sound, and have both continued to make important films. Cooper became associated with John Ford at the time of "The Last Patrol", and is now a partner with Ford in Argus Films, and is of course one of the big names of Cinema. Schoedsack on the other hand, launched himself into a series of hair-raising stunt "shockers" - "King Kong", "The Most Dangerous Game", "Son of Kong", "Dr. Cyclops" and "Highly Educated Young". With the exception of "The Last Days of Pompeii" his other titles were mainly in the detective and mystery fields.
In his year at Keystone, Chaplin made 35 films, of which the solo feature — "The Pilgrim's Progress" — is probably the most famous. Although this series is marked for its rather crude slapstick and violence, many of the films contain interesting improvisation and spontaneous charm, along with the first appearance of many of the familiar Chaplin traits. During 1914, too, Chaplin's costume became fixed — but not his character. His Keystone characterizations were basically unsympathetic, though often engaging — the obvious drunk, the sharpie, the blunderer, the thief and the philanthropist — all of them often cruel almost to a point of madness. Not until the following year at Essanay did the "Real Charlie" begin to appear. "His Trysting Place" is one of the best of the Keystone series, and certainly one of the most polished: there are some very funny moments in a restaurant and later in a park. One of its most amusing images is of Charlie carrying a small baby by the scruff of its romper!

(Teas notes, very much condensed, are taken from the Keystone chapter of Ted Huff's biography of Chaplin).

THE GANGSTER AND THE GIRL. 

Starring CHARLES RAY, ELIZABETH BURRIDGE, MARGARET THOMPSON, ARTHUR JARRETT.

Whether or not "The Gangster and the Girl" was actually directed by Ince, as the credits claim is a matter that is hard to prove or disprove. Ince certainly, has acquired a reputation that he certainly does not deserve — French and Italian magazines, devoted seriously to the film, still ran frequent tributes to Ince, regarding him as a pioneer and a creative artist on a plane with Griffith. While he undoubtedly could and did direct, he seemed mainly to hover around in a supervisory capacity, pointing out on the finished product with a director credit if it turned out well, leaving well enough alone if it didn't! Certainly many of the early William S. Hart and Francis Ford westerns credited to him were actually directed by the stars themselves, while his epic "Civilization" was likewise directed by another.

All of that is perhaps neither here nor there, except to emphasize that one cannot, without knowing the facts, regard this film as having been made, personally, by Ince. Regardless of who directed it, it is a tremendously interesting film from a period which is very badly represented in film archives. A full-blooded melodrama, it was made well before Charles Ray established his familiar "small-town-hero" character. It is interesting to note too, that the leading lady — Elizabeth Burridge — switched to writing scenarios in 1919, and became probably the most prolific of all screenplay writers for "B" westerns, turning out script after script for Autry, Bob Steele and other sagebrush heroes at Republic, Monogram and other companies, and so far as we are aware, still going strong at it.

Mr. John E. Allen, the well-known New Jersey film collector and one-man archive, now controls the rights to this film and has been kind enough to loan the society a copy of the original shooting script, complete with Ince's handwritten notations. This script offers such interesting data as the facts that shooting started on May 27, 1914 and was finished on June 6, 1914. The first print was shipped from California on June 19th, and the film was in release on August 7th! Certainly this script offers proof-positive that no matter how much off-the-cuff shooting was being done, rigid discipline was practised by some production companies. There are but few deviations between the original and the finished film, and those deviations were caused by unimpeachable circumstances and are duly recorded on the script. (I.e., a sequence showing a girl arrested for shoplifting had to be scratched because it was subsequently impossible to shoot in a department store as planned. So instead, the versatile young lady was arrested on the street for another offense!) The script makes interesting suggestions for obtaining the right slain note, insists that "a crook atmosphere" be stressed throughout, and indicates that if the planned individual make-up doesn't succeed in establishing the different "types", the director should get around this by inserting additional close-ups.

Altogether this is a fascinating document, and we are grateful to Mr. Allen for loaning it to us. Interested members may examine it prior to, or after, the screening.
SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT

A Universal Jewel, presented by Carl Laemle. (1925, released 1926)


With: RENAID DENNY (Skinner); LAURA LAEMMLE (his wife);

This equivalent pre-Christmas week of 28 years ago saw Broadway ablaze with interesting titles and names - the holiday moviegoer could choose from STELLA DALLAS, THE BIR PARADE, THE MERRY WIDOW, PHANTOM OF THE OCEAN, EAST LINDE, PARISIAN LOVE, NOAH OF THE WORLD, TUSKINABEE, SIEGFRIED, A KISS FOR CINDERELLA, LAKE WINDERMERE'S FAN and BEN HUR. (Alas, the 1925 holiday moviegoer will have no such good fortune!) And that same week, the film trade was looking at advance screenings (for early 1926 release) of the two latest Regional Deny comedies from Universal.

The first of them, "What Happened to Jones" (also directed by Seiter) raked rave reviews, and was considered Deny's best to date. Then, a few days later came "SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT", and this time the trade critics consisted themselves. "Harrison's Reports", for example, stated: "Mr. Deny has appeared in many good comedies, but none of them equals this in entertaining values ... it can be shown anywhere and under any conditions. It is sure to give satisfaction". The verdict of "Film Daily" was: "Deny's best yet ... after a succession of real comedy hits, Deny scores another knockout and you have another bonafide hit. Surefire entertainment - you cannot afford to lose out on this one!" It is interesting to note that each and every review commented on the film's "clean and wholesome" appeal, and its complete absence of the vulgarity which was characteristic of so many other contemporary comedies.

"SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT", which had been made previously by Esanay in 1917 with Bryant Washburn, Virginia Valli and Hazel Daily, is the type of slight but slick "Saturday Evening Post" comedy which has almost completely disappeared from current cinema. (The only recent example was the very pleasing and overlooked Republik film, "The Lady Wants Him", a film very much in the tradition of "Skinner". Perhaps it is no mere coincidence that it was also produced and directed by Seiter).

In plot it is alike, but full of gentle charm and fast-paced humor; it builds itself around the old clichés that "clothes make the man", and comments on the "problems" of acceptable social life in the twenties, the ways to "advancement" through keeping up with the boss socially - and complications of trying to do all this on an inadequate budget. The party sequences feature a spirited rendition of the Charleston, considered one of the film's highlights.

Incidentally, "SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT" provides an interesting example too, of the star-vehicle series of the twenties - a type of movie-making that has now almost disappeared. Today, the only remaining vehicles in the starkest sense are the grade "B" catastrophes with Jungle Jim and the Bowery Boys - and at the opposite end of the scale, the Alab Ladd, John Wayne or Doris Day vehicles. However, no Warner salesman who valued his job would dare talk about "six John Waynes" when signing an exhibition contract - the big vehicles today are handled strictly as individual subjects. (The disappearance of the series films and the vehicles has come about primarily because they had degenerated into "B" product, as with the Richard Alem and Richard Dix films of the Forties, and the various "Family" series, and were no longer considered good financial risks). SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT shows that the vehicles of the twenties were considered of real importance - they were given the top talent available, and packed with production values. Laura Laemmle's film prior to this, for example, was "The Midnight Sun" - one of Universal's biggest offers, which in itself testifies to the importance of the Deny films commercially.

COMMITTEE OF THE FILM SOCIETY: Charles Tannen (Chairman); Robert G. Youngson (Program Secretary); Harvey G. Hilsberg; Delil Keary (Visual Source); Warren Rotherberger; William K. Everson (Program Notes).

PLEASE ENSURE THAT I AM HIGHLIGHTED ON YOUR MAILING LIST TO RECEIVE REGULAR PROGRAM NOTES AND OTHER NOTIFICATIONS:

(Signed)

Address