THE THEODORE HUFF MEMORIAL FILM SOCIETY

Program for Tuesday June 19th, at the Capitol Hotel, Eighth Avenue and 51st Street, New York City: Marine Room, 6th floor, 7.30.

OFFICER 444 (Goodwill Pictures, 1926) Directed by Ben Wilson and Francis Ford; photographed by Joseph Walker; starring Ben Wilson and Neva Gerber, with Jack Mower, Lafe Macks, Francis Ford, Philip Ford, Al Ferguson, and ????? as "The Frog".

Two reels

Episode One. With this program, we are starting something fresh by adding a serial to the schedule. "Officer 444" is in ten episodes, which will be run at the rate of one per month. (For the benefit of non-serial addicts, the following nine episodes will be regarded as "bonus" additions to the regular show, and will always be run at the end of each program!) "Officer 444" is the last serial co-starring the popular team of Ben Wilson and Neva Gerber, is far from being the best of the serial cliff-hangers. It is a little too obvious, and more concerned with mystery and plot than with inventive action. But it is lots of fun, and, "The Green Archer" not being available, should make an enjoyable addition to our programs. The production values are of a high order, the photography often very fine, and most of the mystery elements of the twenties are well represented - a supremely well organized crime ring, hidden rooms, trapdoors, and a mystery man known as "The Frog" whose identity is not revealed until episode 10. (Members who have not guessed who it is by episode two will be dishonorably discharged!) The direction is by the late Francis Ford, who also plays a bit, and one of the chief suspects is Philip Ford - son of Francis, and now a director himself at Republic.

COWBOY AMBROSE (app.1922; exact date uncertain) Starring Mack Swain and Ethel Teare.

Two reels

Through Sunshine Comedies, rotund Mack Swain remade many of his earlier Sennett hits and "Cowboy Ambrose" is a meticulous, but MUCH funnier, reworking of "His Bitter Pill". The satire of both western tradition and western action is truly classic; nobody needs merely mounts a horse when a spectacular leap will do instead, and although done for comedy purposes, the riding stunts are frenzied and exciting. Not the least of the film's delights are the brilliant subtitles, some of the funniest ever written for a silent comedy. Older members may recall that we ran this some three years ago; new members have a real treat in store.

A CORNER IN WHEAT (Biograph, 1908) Directed by D.W. Griffith, photographed by Billy Bitzer, based on Frank Norris' story "The Pit". Starring Frank Powell, with Harry B. Walthall, Arthur Johnson, Mack Sennett, Owen Moore, Robert Harron, Claire McDowell, Billy Quirk.

So much has been written about this early Griffith classic that further comment here seems superfluous; probably no film in history has been quite as mature (for its period) and as ahead of its time (compared with the contemporary output) as this masterly and still extremely powerful social drama. Since the film's narration covers its significance, as well as production details, we will say no more about it here. Our print is brand new, and absolutely complete.

- Intermission -

THAT CERTAIN THING (Columbia, 1926) Directed by Frank Capra; produced by Harry Cohn; story by Kimer Harris; titles by Al Boasberg; edited by Arthur Roberts; art direction by Robert E. Lee; photographed by Joseph Walker, A.S.C.; starring VIOLA DANA and RALPH GRAVES, with Burr McIntosh. 7 reels

Frank Capra, formerly a gag man for Hal Roach, and later a director of some fine Harry Langdon vehicles at First National, joined Columbia in 1929 and
stayed with the company for more than a decade. (Recently, incidentally, he signed a contract with Columbia for two more pictures, ending a "retirement" from the screen of several years duration). His initial salvos for Columbia were simple comedies, these leading into melodrama ("Dirigible"); "Bitter Tea of General Yen") and ultimately the elaborate comedies and emotional dramas of the "It Happened One Night" and "Lost Horizon" calibers.

His earlier films, of which "That Certain Something" is a particularly enjoyable and typical example, were recognizable blueprints for the "It Happened One Night" formula - comedy, romance, and a hint of social commentary (a hint that unfortunately went completely overboard in the boring and pretentious "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town").

The plot of "That Certain Thing" is simple, and revolves around one of Capra's favorite themes - a marriage between rich and poor, with true love finally overcoming social barriers. Not that this film deserves to be categorized that way - it's too much fun for such a heavy generalization - but it does fit into that oft-repeated pattern of Capra's.

In this case, treatment is of more import than content. The plot is perhaps unremarkable, but watch how deftly it avoids the clichés - even when they seem right on top of the principals. Note how Capra keeps the film moving at a rapid clip even when the plot slows down; he includes little bits of visual "business" to round scenes off nicely (the wheelbarrow scene for example) and breaks up routine scenes, unobtrusively, by shrewd changes in camera placement. (The simple scene of Ralph Graves carrying his bride through their apartment is broken up into long, trucking, and close shots - not for technical effect, but to maintain a lively tempo). Despite a fairly cheap budget, Capra makes his film look like an expensively lavishly mounted affair. The big hotel lobby and night-club scenes are largely stock, but so deftly are they intercut by Capra, that only a very slight difference in the quality of the film stock gives the game away. Much of the film is shot out of doors, on busy streets, and behind the studio, and Capra makes good use two of one of Columbia's standing street sets. Apart from its other facets, "That Certain Thing" is thus an object lesson in filmic economy - without letting that economy show. One of the most striking aspects of the whole film is its utter lack of dating; with the addition of a simple sound track this could easily pass for a much later production. In fact, it is far less dated than Capra's later talkie "Platinum Blonde".

Former Sennett and Griffith player Ralph Graves was here approaching the peak of his popularity. Later Capra was to co-star him with Jack Holt, but as soon as the star-director team split, Graves sank into quickies and serials. Viola Dana, sister of Shirley Mason, is an interesting player very much in the tradition of Eleanor Boardman. At first glance she appears quite plain and colorless, but as the film progresses her warmth and basic loveliness come through. Boardman's performance in "The Crowd" is of course the classic example of this, but Dana's performance here, if on a less accomplished level, is very much in the same vein. And good old Burr McIntosh the tyrant of "Way Down East" is as gruff and tyrannical as ever - until the final reel of course. The supporting cast (including some strangely unpleasant, hostile and vindictive neighbors, rare in Capra's nevernever-land where only the financiers are anti-social) includes one young lady who is trying, without too much success, to emulate the beauty (and hairdo) of the one and only Louise Brooks.

The titles, by veteran title-writer Al Boasberg, are good, and the camerawork by Bill Hart's old photograp her, Joseph Walker, is slick and accomplished. By no stretch of the imagination could "That Certain Thing" be called an important work; but it is a very enjoyable one, and a particularly interesting one for students of Frank Capra's work.

Program Notes & Enquiries: Bill Everson, Manhattan Towers, 2166 Broadway, NYC. Secretary: Dorothy Lovell, 10 W. 84th Street, NYC.

OUR NEXT PROGRAM: July 17th.

A rare and fascinating re-discovery - "THE BEULS" (1926) Directed by James Young, with LIONEL BARRYMORE, VIOLA TAWOD, DORIS KARLOFF, GUSTAV VON SCHerruptitz. Plus: D.W. Griffith's "The Mothering Heart" with Lillian Gish and Walter Miller, a two-reel condensation of "The Marriage Clause" with William Dovi, Francis X. Bushman and Werner Cland; and episode two of "Office 446". 
Announcing A Special Screening Marathon on Saturday June 23rd, Room 10-B, Adelphi Hall, 74 Fifth Avenue (now Fifth Avenue Cinema) at 3:30 p.m.

The screening has been arranged to dispose of part of the backlog of product that has just been no room for on our regular programmes; 3:30 was selected as the starting time so that members who attend the William S. Hart screening at the MMA in the morning, will have time for lunch in between. Our room is a very large one, and will give everyone plenty of room to stretch during the rather long session.

ADMISSION PRICE will depend upon the number of attendees. A large room booked for a Saturday is quite expensive, and we would like to cover costs so that future screenings of this type can be arranged. If 50 or more attend, the fee will be a dollar as usual; if only 25 or less, it will be two dollars. Between these two figures, $1.50. Although we feel sure that the attendance will keep us in the dollar category, we also consider that the fare on view is certainly worth $2.00, in the event that the turnout is small.

More detailed notes will be issued at the screening, but for your reference, we are appending below brief details and screening times:

3:30 "Wife and Auto Trouble" - William Collier & Wau Busch in a vintage Sennett
4:00 "At Dawn" - Wallace Reid and Josephine Crowell in a strong early drama
4:15 "DOMBEY AND SON" - a rare print of a 1917 British version of the Dickens novel; starring Lillian Braithwaite; dir: Maurice Elvey
5:26 "The Doll House Mystery" - 1914 - a real gem directed by Chester and Sidney Franklin; a minor classic
5:55 "MISS BLUEBEARD" - Bebe Daniels, Robert Fraser and Raymond Griffith in a sparkling Paramount comedy of the mid-twenties

6:55 - break for food and fresh air

7:45 "The Deadly Turning" - Pearl White and Crane Wilbur vs Paul Panzer in another episode of "The Perils of Pauline"
8:00 "PATHWAYS OF LIFE" - Lillian Gish, Spottiswoode Aitken, Alfred H. Det and 90% of the Griffith stock company in a charming and rarely shown morality play
8:50 "MADAME BEHAR" - a sparkling, brand new print of one of Julian Eltinge's best comedies. An item exclusive to this film society. Leading lady is Ann Pennington - performing a lively Charleston of course!

10:00 "VANITY" - the highlight of the session, another exclusive for the society, and a real find. LEAFICE JOY, CHARLES RAY and ALAN HALIF in a lush Cecil B. Demille production. Lavish sets, incredible decor, and two of the most powerful closing reels you'll ever see on the screen. A really fine subject.

11:20 - Finish

(Note: it is difficult to estimate times exactly on such a lengthy program; in theory the times quoted are accurate, but in all probability the show will finish a little later than 11:20. In the unlikely event that we run ahead of these times, additional material will be on hand to add to the end of the program)

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COMING PROGRAMMES

THE CIVIL WAR AND THE OLD WEST - a carefully compiled selection of the best of D.W. Griffith's and Thomas H. Ince's one and two-reelers on these themes, including Griffith's outstanding "The Battle"

THE CHAPLINS - Syd in "The Man on the Box" (5 reels); Charlie and Syd in "A Dog's Life" (5 reels); Charlie in "Shoulder Arms" (5 reels)

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