So much has been written about the work - and relative importance - of D.W. Griffith and Thomas H. Ince, that a detailed re-evaluation here would be rather pointless. The film histories are full of such discussions; so are our own previous program notes.

That D.W. Griffith was, and is, the greatest director that the cinema produced, must be beyond question. Ince's stature has always been infinitely less, but his importance - as a showman and an efficient organizer rather than a creative craftsman - is sometimes minimized in favor of exaggerated praise heaped on his films themselves.

Tonight's program provides an interesting comparison of the two pioneer film-makers, working on similar themes (The Civil War and the Old West) over the same period (1910-1913). However, it should be remembered that while this period was the peak of Ince's creativity, it was merely a formulative and experimental period for Griffith. Ince went on to bigger, longer and lesser pictures; Griffith matured to bigger, longer, and greater pictures.

While we have not selected tonight's films to prove any particular point - other than being the best of their kind available - the films do in themselves point out the basic differences in approach. Griffith was all for technique and the maximum of excitement that could be derived from the exploitation of that technique. As you will see, his films are built more on simple situations rather than plots; situations that are developed steadily to a climax of tremendous power. With Ince, however, the story is the thing. The excitement is there, and the spectacle too - exceedingly well done spectacle into the bargain - but there is a minimum of absolute creativity. At first one is impressed by the apparent 'maturity' of Ince's stories over Griffith's. They seem to have more depth, and their often starkly tragic denouements indicate a commendable attempt to break away from routine. But only at first .... when one after another of Ince's films comes to an (often unnecessarily) unhappy ending, one realizes that Ince is playing for shock effect in his plots just as Griffith is playing for suspense in his editing.

In all film controversy, one has to take sides - and we of course are essentially for Griffith. Perhaps therefore it is unfair to make any further comment at all, and leave it to the films themselves to help you make up your mind!
with "Faithful servants" were made by most studios of the period. Altman, for example, released a touching little film called "Selling Old Masters" only a few months after "The Trust" - and quite interestingly it in sentimentality. Griffith's kindly disposition to the negro in "The Trust" does rather offset none of the racial prejudice accusations flung at him following "The Birth of a Nation" - and it's interesting too to see how in this early film he depicts Union troops as savage footloose! The simple story is quite moving, and the battle scenes excellently done - with Griffith's usual passion for minute detail (note the background shots of the men moving among the wounded). A fire scene too is interestingly done, cunningly suggesting a whole mansion in flames even though only a burning porch is shown. (Fire scenes were a big exploitation asset in those days, and were often used in the advertising the way a star's name was later. Often three scenes of the fire, labelled "Before," "During," and "After," were provided, although seldom existing before and when the lower studios burned down in 1911, the production supervisor made sure it was all captured on film) "The Trust" finishes on a note surprisingly like that of part one of "Once with the Wind" - the war still in progress, the heroine finds temporary refuge and promises to regain strength for the battle still ahead. A sequel was made, a rather meagre affair of George's continued sacrifice through the years to educate the beloved old master.

"EVEN HOURS." (Ince, 1913, with Tom Chatterton, Gable Allen)

Lincoln's situation was what the South be treated as though "it had never been away" Griffith and Ince went him on one better by treating it as though it had never even lost. Here once again, the Yankees take quite a beating at the hands of the Confederates - via some stunningly photographed battle scenes. A linking plot concern's a Southern youth's attempt to prove that he is not a coward. For the hero to prove his bravery became somewhat of a standard plot in film until war drama of the day, although somehow existing before are important issues only when Southern hero was at stake. It took "The Red Badge of Courage" to concern itself seriously with Northern comrades. Tom Chatterton, a likeable hero here, was still going strong in movies until the late '20s, probably also directed this film.

"IN THE TENNESSEE HILLS." (Ince, 1913, with Charles Ray and Jobn Marlowe; two reels)

Although a trifles slow-moving, this little western is a dramatic and exciting affair, with some distinctly unusual situations. Although not strictly a western due to its Southern locale, it certainly comes under that collective heading, and seeks to recreate with remarkable accuracy the rough and hard spirit of the times. In their unglorious backgrounds - and in the realistic flavor of old Incerville - these westerns do have a certain documentary aspect in their depiction of an old West that, after all, was not so many years away at the time. Perhaps one of the greatest (and least noted) contributing factors to this definite realism was the predominance of dust. Dust in the town, on the trails, behind men as they walk, and behind horses as they gallop. This was not a remembered effect, film-makers had not yet gotten on to the trick of getting down the ground before shooting to eliminate most of this dust.

"HUNTING HONDA." (Griffith, 1911, with Robert Harron, Florence La Badie, Kate Bruce).

Little-known, this is one of the early Griffith masterpieces - a brilliant depiction of an Indian raid on a settler's cabin, the unequal struggle, and the gradual triumph of the whites as the cavalry race to the rescue. This is a perfect example of Griffith's "situational" thrillers. It is also an interesting blueprint of so many things to come - from Henry Harron's unfinished straw hat (later a major trademark of Griffith) to the shrewd interpolation of "human interest" via amusing - and sympathetic - children. Griffith had an effective habit of heightening tension by showing children in danger - both from the enemy, and from their own parents, to prevent their falling into enemy hands. The whole climax to this film, complete with magnificent panoramic shots of action by Sittery, is very much of an exercise in preparation for the similar climax in "The Birth of a Nation" when the Klan advances from Piedmont to rescue the beleaguered Cameron family.

"THE HOUSE WITH CLOSED SHUTTERS." (Griffith, 1910, with Henry B. Walthall, Dorothy West, Grace Henderson, Charles West).

One of the rare examples of Griffith concerning himself more with plot than style - and the results, significantly, are not outstanding. There is some good battle footage, and some good acting, although few complete features but somehow it doesn't quite come off. Since there are no titles in this print, a brief explanation is perhaps advisable. Walthall plays a Southern officer who is both a drunkard and a coward. When he falls in a mission, his sister takes over for him - and is killed. To hide the disgrace, Walthall's mother shoots him away from the world, telling everyone that he was killed in battle, and that the shock has driven his sister out of her mind. The sister's suicide continues to wall through the years, bringing flowers, not knowing of the deception. Finally, an old man, and insane, Walthall breaks open the shutters, reveals the secret, and dies.
"THE DRUMMER OF THE ALAMO" (1913, Ince, with Mildred Harris)

Another fine film very much in the mold of "Silent Heroes" - great battle scenes, and stark story elements. Individually these films are quite remarkable; collectively they have a "sameness" that did not mar the work of Griffith. However, since Ince's "sameness" is still pretty high order, one hardly has cause for complaint. Ince here takes rather definite sides against the Confederates! The heroine, played by Mildred Harris, seems to be somewhat prematurely initiating Mary Pickford's "and the Confederate commander, of course, looks like Robert E. Lee!"

"THE WOMAN" (Ince, 1913; directed by Charles Gilby); with Leona Hutton, Richard Stanton.

Using an involved serial drama as the peg on which to hang his action, Ince presents in "The Woman" one of the first recreations of the famed Cherokee Strip landrush. (Unless we are very much in error, the very first had been done only a year earlier by Vitagraph.) The rush, itself, and the events leading up to it - and following it - are staged with quite amazing background detail and authenticity; one might almost be watching uncorrected footage of the event. As a historical comment, it's worth noting that although Arizona (the setting of the story) had been organized as a territory in 1863, it had been admitted to the union only one year before this film was made! As evidence of how carefully these land rushes were made; it's also worthy of comment that the Woman was in production for a period of nine days, even assuming that the unit ceased work over a weekend (and it probably didn't) this still leaves seven shooting days - longer in fact than was spent over the average B-reel talkie shoot on western, some of which were turned out in 3 days! As an extra in the saloon scenes, you'll notice Bob Kortman, one of Hart's favorite villains, and still active until a few years ago. Currently he is employed as a janitor at the Screen Director's Guild.

"THE LAST DROP OF WATER" (Griffith, 1911, with Blanche Sweet, Charles West, Joseph Mayboll)

Very much a precursor to "The Covered Wagon" - this Griffith saga of Indians and pioneers has a good deal more excitement than Cruse's epic; it less poetry. Cruse cared little for action as much, disposed of it as quickly as possible, and made no attempt to build excitement via cross-cutting and camera placement. The way Griffith does her. No classic, "The Last Drop of Water" (its title, inspired, incidentally, by the poem dealing with the battlefield death of Sir Philip Sydney) is a solidly made and quite spectacular western. Joseph Mayboll, as the drunken husband, was rather too literarily typecast, unfortunately - only a year or two later he died of acute alcoholism.

"WHITE REPUDIATION" (Ince, 1913; dir: Burton King; written by Ince and William Clifford); with Ann Little, Richard Stanton.

While Griffith always made it quite plain how much he opposed puritanism and bigotry, one was never quite sure where Ince stood. In "The Quakeress" he came out against puritanical conventions; in "Hell's Hinges" he seemed to be very much for it; here he plays it safe by bowing to both sides. "Fast Redheads," adds Indians, cavalry, gamblers, and enough other plot ingredients to make several shorts - and throws in a climax from "Grease" for good measure! Ann Little makes a charming and believable heroine, always going through her riding paces energetically, and showing that she was all right for the serial queen careers that wasn't too far behind.

"THE BATTLE" (Griffith, 1912) with Blanche Sweet, Robert Harron, Charles West, Spottiswood Aitken, Donald Crimp

Quite literally a 1920 forerunner of "The Red Badge of Courage" (the plot is identical, with Charles West as the Northern youth who loses, and regains, his courage) "The Battle" is probably the greatest of the pre-"Birth of a Nation" civil war dramas. Like "Raging Blood," it devotes its whole length to a single action situation. In detail and scale, it dwarfs anything Griffith had done earlier, and compares very favorably with the mighty battles in "Birth" itself. It is often difficult to realize that this is a staged, movie battle; here it is superbly organized chaos in the best Griffith manner. Troops advance and retreat, reinforcements arrive, almost casually and in the background, something is happening everywhere - and in every part of the screen. Here too is Griffith paying one of his rare tributes to the North - no names are mentioned, but the cigar-smoking general in charge of operations is quite obviously Ulysses S. Grant. But of course, the Yankees almost lose the battle, and the Confederates all but wipe them out before the day is saved! Watch for Spottiswood Aitken as General Granta's aide - and for Donald Crimp, who carries a flag in the opening parade (and what a parade!) and stands rigidly at attention at the back right of the screen as an orderly during the interior scenes.
THE BATTLE OF (AT) ELDERBUSH BACHU (Griffith, 1913) with Lillian Gish, Mae Marsh, Bobby Harron, Alfred Paget, Henry B. Walthall. 2 reels.

One of Griffith's last films for Biograph - and one of his relatively few two-acters for that company - "The Battle of Elderbush Bachu" is somewhat of an expansion of "Fighting Blood," and another step in the direction of the really big-scale epic. Despite the added length, situation and style are again the things, and except for rather more "bits of business" with Mae Marsh, this has no more plot than the one-acters. But Griffith has twice as much time to milk that single situation of its suspense, and how well he does it.

The intense fighting scenes are magnificently realistic (how D.W. did love to show smooth-skinned frontier women, or holding up infants by their feet prior to scalping!), and the vast panorama of action better than ever. The film is certainly one of Griffith's finest earlier productions, and we don't feel that we could find a more rewarding - or more fitting - climax to this program than Henry B. Walthall and Bobby Harron leading the troops hell for leather into battle, and arriving just in time to save Mae Marsh and Lillian from death - or worse.

There will be an intermission following "THE DRUMMER OF THE SOUTH."

Several comments on the historical accuracy of these subjects, we are perhaps not qualified to comment on, ... after the general tendency to keep the South on the winning side, and since having given his Southern pariahs some cannon (in "Silent Heroes") which were, in fact, in the war, there seems little to argue with.

As to the completeness of the prints: to the best of our knowledge, our prints are absolutely complete with the following four exceptions:

THE LAST DROP OF WATER: due to negative deterioration, one short scene in the middle has been permanently lost. This shows Charles Kent leaving the wagon train to search for water. The almost full-length length of the print indicates that this must have been a very short scene, with little else involved.

THE DRUMMER OF THE SOUTH and PAST REDEMPTION: a number of scenes are missing from these two prints - usually extensions of existing scenes, so actually nothing basically is missing, except for an episode in "Past Redemption" which showed the heroine overseeing the village women gossiping about her, and engaging in a brief fight with the ring-leader.

THE BATTLE: no footage at all is missing, but there are a number of awkward cuts in scenes between Charles Kent and Blanche Sweet in her cabin. These jump-cuts are due to deteriorated titles that are missing.

It is also worth noting that in the case of FIGHTING BLOOD and THE LAST DROP OF WATER, the titles are not the original Griffith titles, but new ones that were inserted by Nathan Hirschl, who licensed the films, such to Griffith's dismay, after Griffith was established as a top-flight spectacular director in 1915-16. First printed the films with over-lengthy titles which took so long to read that the one-acters were now literally two-acters. Most of these phoncary new titles have been eliminated from our prints, and only those which appeared to be repeats of the old titles have been retained.

And looking back for a moment to the first film on our program, "His Trust", here's an extract from the review in Moving Picture World:

"This is a story of the self-sacrificing love of the man for his master... the Biograph players have told a story graphically and with dramatic force. They have reproduced accurately conditions which actually existed in thousands of instances all over the South while the war raged, and at its close. And they have done it so well that it holds the attention of the audience from beginning to end."

This is also interesting to record an unwinding bit of realism which appears in the original synopsis... the anti-Griffith brigade can of course make whole city capitals of this, but since they have been doing so anyway for the past 60 years, this adjective should not add much fire to their flak. The synopsis refers to the closing scene in which the narrator is overcome by emotion, and "tears run down his black but honest cheeks!"

Program Notes and enquiries: William K. Everson, Manhattan Towers Hotel, 2366 Broadway, N.Y.C.