"OFF HIS TROLLEY" (Pathe-Jack Sennett, 1924) One reel; with Ralph Graves, Alice Day, Natalie Kingston, Marvin Lobach, Billy Devan

Between his periods with D.W. Griffith and, at Columbia, Frank Capra, Ralph Graves put in a lengthy session as a Mack Sennett star — both in shorts like this one, and in such features as Fabel Normand’s "The Extra Girl". While not very adept at slapstick, he had a likeable personality and was certainly about the best "straight" comedy hero that Sennett ever had. "Off His Trolley" is more polished and elaborate than many of the Sennett shorts of the period, but also a little less inventive. Far more could have been made of some of the gags. However, it zips along at a fast clip (faster here than originally, it must be admitted, since our print is a condensation of the initial 3-reeler) and certainly covers a great deal of territory in its short running time.

"THIS MECHANICAL AGE" (Warner Bros., 1954) One reel; written and produced by Robert G. Youngson.

This charming little short — an Academy Award winner for 1954 — is quite one of the best of the interesting series that producer Youngson built around the newreel library of Warner-Pathe. Lightheartedly, but not disrespectfully, it surveys some of the quaint and fantastic experiments in flight that followed in the wake of the Wright Brothers' triumphant flight. Possibly not intended, but nevertheless very much present, is an element of pathos too. How insane some of these experiments seem, how hair-brained some of the ideas of their inventors. Yet they represented courage, work, and an imagination that could be proven invalid only by the final experimentation. And too, as the planes are proudly trundled out for takeoff, it's a little saddening to know that within a few seconds they'll be merely a mass of rubble. Some of them, for all their impracticality, are lovely and graceful things; how wonderful it would have been if some of them had worked.

"THERE GOES THE BRIDE" (Pathe-Hal Roach, 1926); two reels; with Lucien Littlefield, Walter Long, Martha Sleeper, Husky Hanes, Noah Young, B. Wayne Lamont.

Far from being the greatest Hal Roach comedy we've ever shown, this is quite certainly the strangest. It actually isn't terribly funny in itself, but it seems funny by its very vigor, the gusto with which everything is slammed over, and its determination never to be still for a moment. There's a forest fire, a train wreck, riding stunts, thrills on a high bridge, a bear, shooting the rapids, a fall over a cliff, another one over a waterfall — and so on — plus some lovely location shooting at Yosemite. There are some enjoyably sadistic gags too, including a little boy gleefully pounding at the cheeks of a toothache-ridden victim, and Walter Long swallowing a key ring and then telling us, via title and a painted expression, that "one of 'em was a cork screw"! Strangely, there's no star in charge of all this — and even Martha Sleeper, who has most of the action, gets lower billing than Lucien Littlefield and Walter Long. Roach had strange ideas about star comics at this time anyway, and often felt that "character" names (ones that had slipped far enough for him to be able to afford them, like Lionel Barrymore, Herbert Rawlinson and Priscilla Dean) would raise the value of his shorts. However, it's interesting that no really great comedy films seemed to emerge from that brand of Roach thinking (or if they did, they don't appear to have survived) — and certainly none to compare with the best work of Laurel & Hardy or Charlie Chase.
"THRILLS FROM THE PAST" (Warner Bros., 1954) One reel; written and produced by Robert G. Youngson; adapted from "Old San Francisco", 1927, directed by Alan Crosland, and starring Dolores Costello, Charles Frument Mack, Warner Oland, Anna May Wong, Sojin, Andras Randolf.

We've espoused the work of Alan Crosland before, and this rousing melodrama is a good example of the rich and vigorous work that he turned out. It's climaxed by a splendid reconstruction of the 1906 earthquake, with some outstanding special effects work. (Incidentally, in the original feature the earthquake seemed to be a direct outcome of Dolores Costello's prayers, uttered when she was about to be shipped off into white slavery!) The narration is inexcusably over-written - even for an admittedly complicated plot like this one - but that one element apart, it's an extremely enjoyable reel which certainly does manage to present not only the highlights of the film, but also some of the best individual shots.

"ALEXANDER HAMILTON" (Warner Brothers, 1931) 8 reels; directed by John G. Adolfi; written by George Arliss and Mrs Hamilton; photographed by James Van Trees; Art Director, Esdras Hartley. Starring GEORGE ARLISS, with Doris Kenyon, Montague Love, Dudley Digges, Lionel Belmore, June Collyer, Ralf Harolde, Charles Middleton, George Larkin, Alan Newbray, Morgan Wallace, Gwendolin Logan, John T. Murray, Charles Evans, John Larkin, Evalyn Hall, Russell Simpson, James Durkin.

We've never yet played a vintage George Arliss vehicle, and this one is as typical as they come. Most of you, we assume, know just what to expect from an early Arliss talkie, and this one supplies it with a vengeance. Apart from an encouragingly visual and cinematic opening - Washington's farewell to his army on November 2 1793 - "Alexander Hamilton" is not notably cinematic (especially in comparison with other 1931 movies from Warners like "Five Star Final", "Vieques Nights", "Swengali" and others). It offers sustained theatrics from good old George, and of course a rousing speech towards the end. In retrospect especially, it's easy to see why Arliss was so lidded by the critics; and indeed it is amusing to see the same Arliss mannerisms cropping up in so many identical interpretations of statesmen of completely differing creeds and even nationalities! Arliss, along with Paul Muni, is perhaps one of the most over-rated of actors, and yet one can't help admiring the old fellow for getting away with it for so long, and for injecting such obvious self-esteem into every performance that he almost seems to be waiting for applause at the end of every line. Yet, it's nice to see theatrical, bravura acting of the old school again - nice, and refreshing. Even though it's no rediscovered masterpiece, "Alexander Hamilton" is a well-mounted picture, and an interesting interpretation of a period of American history rarely dealt with on the screen. Also, it is of reasonable brevity so that the preponderance of talk doesn't become oppressive. The cast is full of old friends from the silent days, all of them struggling valiantly to sneak in a word or a look when Arliss' eagle-eyes are directed elsewhere. (What a pity that nobody ever thought of co-starring George and Bill Hart!)

IM K. Everson