The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"The Curtain Pole" (Biograph, 1908) Dir: D.W. Griffith; one reel
With Mack Sennett, Kate Bruce, Arthur Johnson, Alfred Paget.
While it is always dangerous to hail anything as a "first" in the early years, this is certainly the first sustained one-reel American slapstick film that we've come across. Clearly patterned on the French chase films in its content and construction, it is somewhat less polished than they were; many of the falls are a bit amateurish, and some of the gags seem under-rehearsed and not fully thought out. Nevertheless, it has a lot of imagination and vigor, some interesting if simple camera tricks, a good closeup of Sennett at the end, and lots of interesting and nostalgic views of old Fort Lee streets. The rather misty quality of the print is due to its having been processed from one of the Library of Congress paper prints.

"Monty of the Mounted" (Educational, 1927) Dir: Charles Lamont; 2 reels
With Lupino Lane, Wallace Lupino.
We've had many requests to repeat this lively Lupino Lane comedy ever since our first showing many years ago, but due to the extremely brittle quality of the print, we've held off until now. As a spoof on westerns, it is less subtle than Mack Swain's "His Easier Fill" or "Coward Ambrose", but as a peg on which to hang Lane's weird acrobatic comic routines - and a good running gag with a prop horse - it works well. Superficially, Lane's screen character was not unlike Keaton's, except that his bland acceptance of misfortune was done with an optimistic rather than pessimistic outlook. Not that Lane, his London music-hall background ever showing through, was anywhere near Keaton in terms of creative visual comedy or dry wit, but he was a fine little clown, and it's a pity that his film work - these 2-reelers, "Isn't Life Wonderful?", "The Love Parade", "The Lambeth Walk" - never quite captured the breezy elegance and spirited charm that he projected on stage.

TRAILERS FROM THE 20's AND 30's - a 2-reel compilation.

Coming attractions are always loads of fun, and we like to run these compilations every so often. It's odd though, that silent trailers were so lacking in showmanship and zip. Even allowing for the fact that elaborate optical work couldn't be done in the labs then, many of them seem to be stopped together with scissors and paste and with little attempt to attract patronage by showing the most enticing scenes. "A Ship Comes In, King of Traffic" (Tom Mix), "Monte of Empire" (another interesting-looking one), and "Jazzland". Careful scrutiny of this last one shows George Raff as one of the hoods! The sound trailers, all WB, are more like it. Intricate optical effects, lengthy highlights, and no false modesty. Everything is the greatest - and they consist of "I Loved a Woman" (Robinson, Francis), "The Singing Kid" (Jolson), "It's Tough to Be Famous" (Douglas Fairbanks Jr), "Old English" (Arliss) and "Female" (Ruth Chatterton).

--- Intermission ---

"LONG PANTS" (Harry Langdon-First National, 1927) Dir: Frank Capra
Story by Arthur Ripley; adaptation by Robert Eddy; 6 reels.
The Cast: Harry Shelby (Harry Langdon) His mother (Glady's Brockwell)
His father (Alan Roscoe); His bride (Priscilla Bonner); His Downfall (Alma Bennett); His Finish (Betty Francoo)

"Long Pants" is the third of the trio of really great Langdon silent comedies. The first, "Trump Trump Trump" was possibly the funniest, and the one most concerned with elaborate gags; the second, "The Strong Man", was quite certainly his best, and a perfectly constructed film; while the third, "Long Pants" was the most unusual. Langdon's comedy was always close to the borderline of "sick" humor, and Arthur Ripley's influence on him was not always for the best. Here the Ripley story-line, which involves Langdon with an attempt to murder his entirely innocent bride, and winds up with floosies and killings, is a bizarre one indeed, bringing a kind of Dumas-like classic and dream-like near-surrealism to Harry's usual comic id. Much of it works splendidly -- and some of it didn't work. It was one of one of the gag routines in their talkie "Counsel on de Fence", shown here last month -- but it does leave an occasional bad taste in the mouth, and is a bit of a letdown after Harry's previous two films.

--- Wk ---