Next Tuesday: Edna Clifton's "LET IT BLOW AWAY" (1927) with Harrison Ford, Elinor Nut and a 90 minute compilation on the career of CHARLIE CHASE (1914-19)

January 26 1925

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

It now seems unlikely that the print of "LAST OF THE PAGANS" will arrive in time for the screening, and these rather sketchy notes, prepared without a recent review of the subject, are prepared only for the record in case it should arrive at the last minute. In that case, more detailed notes will be issued, just for the record, and will be available next week.

**THE VIKING" (1911) Directed by George Melford; scenario by Garnett Weston, from an original story by Varick F. Frissell; cameramen: Maurice Kellerman, Alfred Condolfi, E.A. Penrod. Original length: 7 reels; this print: 5 reels. With Captain Bob Bartlett, Charles Starrett, Louise Huntington, Arthur Vinton.\n
Canada's first sound feature, "The Viking" is far less notable for that, or for back director George Melford's nebulous direction, than for its stunning documentary footage. One notes with interest that E.A. Penrod, one of the cameramen on Clifton's "Down to the Sea in Ships," was also one of the cameramen on this expedition. Originally, the film seemed to take forever before it put to sea, and the plodding dramatic stuff in the first two reels was amusingly acted and poorly recorded. This shortened version gets to the sea stuff right away, eliminating the fictional elements almost entirely. Occasionally this results in Charles Starrett getting dirty looks that are not explained, but otherwise one hardly notices and certainly doesn't miss the lack of a linking plotline. The seal-hunting scenes, if a trifle plain, are powerfully done, and the climactic episode of two men alone on a drifting sea of ice is a real thriller. Some shots are quite incredibly beautiful, and I can't recall ever seeing before scenes like those of the hunters advancing across the frozen sea, with the breakers rolling and undulating beneath the thin covering of ice.

--- Introduction ---

"LAST OF THE PAGANS" (MGM, 1935) Directed by Richard Thorpe
Producer: Philip Goldstone; scenario by John Villiers Farrow; Musical Score: Mal Fein; Camera: Clyde de Vinna; 7 reels
With Mala and Loca.

The success of "Trader Horn" and "Eskimo" inspired quite a long-lasting cycle of location-filmed outdoor adventures and semi-documentaries in the early and mid-30's. Some, like "Igloo" and "SOS Iceberg" were fine, almost reaching the standards of their inspiration. Others like "The Mighty Tundra" seemed fine at the time, but today can be seen to be totally phoney, relying on stock shots and slick editing to get their admittedly entertaining effects. Still others, like "Red Morning" and "Adventure Girl" were merely lurid actioners that debased the traditions they pretended to follow.

Without the benefit of a recent reappraisal, I can only remember "Last of the Pagans" as being expert hokum, visually more dynamic than it was dramatically, which is only to be expected, since De Vinna, who photographed "White Shadows in the South Seas" also photographed this film, while director Thorpe, newly promoted from Claytonfield cheapies and serials, was certainly no W.S. Van Dyke, although at that his pacing moved faster than they did in his later, dumber MGM days. Reviewers were generally kind, and in line with my own recollections of the film. Obviously it will still be enjoyable hokum on its own level, whether time will have been kind enough to have turned it into a much rediscovered classic is anybody's guess until (possibly) this evening, or (more probably) early in March.

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