April 6th 1965

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"SHIFTS' SANDS" (Triangle, 1918) Director: Albert Parker 5 reels
With Gloria Swanson, Joseph King, Lillian Langdon, Harvey Clark, Arthur Millet, Leon Carhart, Myrtle Stoffel

When Triangle went out of business, all of their properties were split up. Ince retained some of his films, but a goodly smattering of the Barts, the Sennett's and miscellaneous features turned up in reissues in the early 20's under the Tri-Stone banner. Frequently they were fitted out with fresh titles, and the one produced but not copyrighted before they were now, hence laying the groundwork for many an entertaining film history book. Our point is one of these 1920's reissue versions, and goes under the title "Harriet's Destiny". Not only was the title changed, but some of the plot details too. Many a Sennett comedy of 1917 vintage (e.g., "Her Torpedoed Love") capitalised on the U-Boat scare, and in order to hide the film's age when reissued, the German Navy suddenly found itself referred to as "submarine pirates". The original plot-line of "Shifting Sands" was told in a flashback framework, and its climactic situation had a German villain, Harvey Clark, embroiling Miss Swanson in a spy plot. In this reissue version, he's just a plain ordinary heel, and a toned-down one at that. (Originally he had Miss Swanson arrested on a prostitution charge; here it's amended to theft!) Thus all the do-do about the "papers" doesn't make too much sense, since one assumes they are off an invention, or relate to a business deal, but neither one seems to justify all the nocturnal prowlings and secret organisations that surround them. However, the flashback frame is all that has actually been cut, and the changed titles excepted, the film is otherwise substantially as it was. Which is not saying a great deal, except that it's typical standard Triangle fare of the '20's and good fun if not taken too seriously. The highly clichéed titles are a delight, and the prevailing moral code, while criticised at times, is very apparent throughout. For a man to offer to "lead money" to a girl becomes tantamount to seduction, long before there has been time to ascertain whether his motives are pure or sinful, and Gloria is properly insulted. The reformers are right out of "Intolerance", the Salvation Army wholly sympathetic and not yet a target for jest, and the only cliché that is avoided is that struggling artist Gloria turns out to be a lousy painter after all, and goes on to do something else. The first third of the film is full of sub-plots for a dozen movies; the last two-thirds stretches one theme rather thin. The supposedly heart-warming kids are so dirty and ill-behaved that one isn't really won over by them, and tends to side with cold-hearted Lillian Langdon in keeping them at arm's length. But some of the Ince and Barta apart, one has never had reason to expect too much from the non-Griffith Triangles, so to be overly critical of this one is unfair. It served its purpose then as program fodder, and we have no right to expect more of it now. Gloria certainly gives it her all, and in an extremely pretty costume. Some of the close-ups demand a rather humane print quality. Joe Joseph King never really amounted to very much, and is probably better known as a heavy and character player in Warner films of the 30's.

Intermission

"THE PRIMITIVE LOVER" (First National, 1922) Director: Sidney A. Franklin
Scenario by Frances Marion from a story by Edgar Selwyn; camera: David Abel; Art Director: Stephen Goosson; presented by Joe K. Schenck, 21s.
With Constance Talmadge, Harold Lloyd, Kenneth Harlan, Joe Roberts, Charlie Stevens, Chief Big Tree, Kathilda Brandage, Frederick Vroom.

Constance Talmadge was such a delightful and animated performer, almost a feminine Fairbanks, that her personality alone was often all that was needed to hold so-so material together. In a way it's a pity that she was at her peak, in terms of youth and popularity, before the era of sophisticated comedy really arrived. Lubitsch, St. Clair, Fox, and many others could have joined forces with her and really made the most of her unique charm. But we would hardly apologize for such films as this one, done with flair and zip by Sidney Franklin. Its plot is a nothing (indeed, it was remade as a dull sound quickie in 31 or 32) but is so full of enjoyable people, good titles, surprise comedy moments and solid production qualities, that one hardly cares what it's all about. Not that its plot... "The Taming of the Shrew" mixed with "My Favorite Wife"... is dull, but it is familiar. It certainly isn't one of the best Talmadge vehicles either, but it is far from being the worst, and since her films are so hard to come by, it's good to have such a typical and spirited reminder of what a charming and bubbling comedienne she was.

William E. Everson