Tuesday next, October 5th: A Richard Barthelmess program: "HE LASF" (1930, dir: Frank Lloyd, with Mary Astor, Fred Kohler) and "CARIN IN THE COTTON" (1932, dir: Michael Curtiz, with Bette Davis, Dorothy Jordan, Henry B. Walthall).

September 28, 1945
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

An apology.....

No, no change in program. However, about two hours after the end of "The Bat Whisperer" last week I was floored by insidious microbes and have been flat on my back ever since. Since I look and feel a little like Miss Davis in the closing reel of "Of Human Bondage" (not, I hasten to add, for the same medical and personal reasons!) my participation tonight isn't possible. That in itself doesn't rate an apology, but checking out the prints and doing the notes presented a few problems, and there was just no way of getting musical scores done. Even if there had been, one couldn't have loaded that extra chore on the helpful shoulders of Charlie Shituk, who is handling the show tonight. I regret doing this film, but if I don't it could mean running them silent, and these charming trifles that would benefit a great deal from the right music. Tonight's audience is likely to be small, and limited mainly to our old reliables—the very people who deserve to see such films under the best conditions. However, it can't be helped, and the main thing is that film is up there on that screen.

Next week's show is sound, and after that I should be back in circulation again.


One of Gregory LaCava's earliest films as a director (he had been in the business for only two years, starting as a writer on Johnny Hines films in 1922), "The New Schoolteacher" is a charming little slice of Americana, although heavier on comedy than nostalgia, thanks no doubt to the combination of Irvin S. Cobb and LaCava. They add up to a sum total that may not give Mark Twain undue cause for alarm, but LaCava gave it a considerable twist and still has flavor and bite on its own. LaCava was a former cartoonist, and this film is constructed much like a cartoon strip. Indeed, each little individual sequence usually has a kind of framing opening and closing shot in the comic strip manner, and the seedy villain, if villain isn't too strong a word for him, is right out of the Sunday supplements. There are some pleasing if rarely uproarious sight gags, many of the titles have an amusing wisecracking wit which may not be apropos to the scholastic or old swimmin' hole, but which help to keep the laughs on track, and LaCava catches throughout, I especially liked the gibeering lunatic of an aristocrat, who runs through the town (already alerted to his escape) asking the rather dense citizens for matches! Needless to say, only the villain recognizes him -- and gives him a match just for the hell of it. Chic Sale, better known later on for his grizzled old veteran characterisation (although he was still a young man when he switched to character makeup), is surprisingly winning despite his unprepossessing appearance. Charlie Ruggles or Edward Everett Horton could probably have done more with the role (and did, in talkies like "For Trouble" & "Your Uncle Dudley") but the emphasis then would have been more on comedy than Americana. The balance here is nicely held, The East-coast locations are charming and well photographed, and considering how little really happens, the film has much of the pace of such later and more frenetic LaCava films as "My Man Godfrey" and "The Half-Naked Truth". All of us at one time or another probably had a semi-boob of a teacher like Sale here -- just as we all had semi-tyrants like Professor Bath. (My old French master could have given Jannings a real run for his money!) Such personal recollections always intrude in a film like "The New Schoolteacher", and usually help to make it work even better. Certainly this is a very pleasing little film, and a lovely toned original print helps to make it even more enjoyable.


George Peck's popular stories provided screen fodder for years, other "bad boys" being Jackie Cooper and Tommy Kelly, while Mabel Normand did a "Peck's Bad Girl" for Goldwyn. This early directorial effort by Sam Wood (one of the more ponderous "prestige" directors of the 30's and 40's) exploits little Jackie Coogan's talents for pathos but little, and puts him through a series of "brat" escapades which would make the character obnoxious in the hands of a less capable little performer. The film keeps nicely on the move however, with lots of action and sprightly mischief, culminating in a traditional last-minute rescue. Only in the appealingly edited dog-catcher sequence -- presumably put together on a moviola and never looked at on screen -- does it really falter; otherwise it is an unambitious but quite satisfactory little programer, and a good solid showcase for the fast rising young star.