Those of us who work with old movies and love them are sadly inured to the passing of the familiar names. In recent months we have lost Gareth Hughes, Tom Kennedy and director John Waters, among others. Each name that is struck from the record, whether it be a well-remembered star or a half-forgotten pioneer, is like an old friend, and we are saddened by their passing. But it is usually a sadness without shock, for most of them are truly veterans, well into their eighties, and we cannot term such inevitability as tragedy. Tragedy however, is the only word one can use for the sudden and premature passing of both Constance Bennett (on July 24) and Nancy Carroll some two weeks later on August 6th. Both were veterans in terms of service perhaps, but hardly in age. Both were still vivacious and lovely, their appearances quite contradicting their close-to-60 ages. Both two were still very active, Miss Bennett having recently completed a new movie, and Miss Carroll appearing in a play at the time of her death. Those of you who were present a few years ago when we screened "Honey", with Miss Carroll as our guest, will well recall what a lively and charming person she was. Our program tonight is more in the nature of a passing tribute than a farewell -- they'll always be with us in their movies, and we'll be seeing them again. The current (October) issue of "Films in Review" has a particularly fine career-article on Miss Bennett by Gene Ringgold, while equally good articles on Miss Carroll, written by her close friend John Springer, have appeared in past issues of both "Films in Review" and "Screen Facts".

"Married?" (Jans Productions, 1925) Director: George Terwilliger. EXCERPT
A combination of Elinor Glyn and James Oliver Curwood, this silent New York-filmed independent offers us a glimpse of a cool, slim and very lovely Miss Bennett at the beginning of her career. Its pseudo-sophistication about divorce, marriage and bored society is a curiously prophetic forerunner of the kind of fare that was to become so much Constance Bennett's forte.

"TWO AGAINST THE WORLD" (Warner Brothers, 1932) Directed by Archie Mayo
Scenario by Sheridan Gibney from the play "A Dangerous Set" by Marion Dix and Jerry Horwin; camera: Charles Rosher; Art Director, Anton Grot; Gowns by Orry-Kelly; editor, Bert Levy. 8 reels.

While hardly one of Miss Bennett's best films, "Two Against the World" is certainly both typical and appropriate in that it represents - quite literally - the zenith of her career. In a now-famous deal engineered by Myron Selznick, she was paid $150,000 for starring in this film -- at that time the highest salary ever paid to any star. Constance Bennett's best films (e.g. "What Price Hollywood?") were not necessarily Bennett vehicles, and in later years she slipped easily into sophisticated comedy roles that
might easily have made her a bigger star than ever, had she been lucky enough to work with Lubitsch and Sturges rather than competent second-raters. But be that as it may, her peak was in the early 30's in the confession-illicit-sin dramas, spiked with sex, murder and unmed motherhood. Whether the approach was hard-boiled and cynical, or magaziney and sentimental, depended largely on whether the film was being made for Warners or Rko. "Two Against the World" is surprisingly leisurely in getting under way, but builds up a full head of steam by the end, and is an enjoyably typical example of the Bennett vehicle.

:: Intermission ::

"SWEETIE" (Paramount, 1929) Directed by Frank Tuttle; scenario by George Marion Jr. and Lloyd Corrigan; camera: Alfred Gilks; music by Richard Whiting; dances by Earl Lindsay; 9 reels.

With Nancy Carroll, Helen Kane, Stanley Smith, Jack Oakie, Stuart Erwin, William Austin, Joe Depew, Wallace MacDonald.

"Sweetie" is hardly the film we would have chosen for a "tribute" program, but not wanting to repeat films we'd run earlier, and "Devil's Holiday" still not being available to us (hopefully, later it will be), it was the only one we could acquire in the short time available to us. It disappoints mainly because it rather short-changes us with Miss Carroll; a not wholly sympathetic role minimises her charm, and songs and dances are shifted to Helen Kane. In the manner of so many 1929 talkies, it talks endlessly at times in a very stagey fashion, and one would dearly love to take a pair of scissors to one or two comedy routines that consume a reel or so at a time, and would frankly never be missed. It's a pity to show a film that is not top-rank Nancy Carroll, but we hope we've evened the score a little by concluding the evening with two excerpts of Nancy singing and dancing from other films. Not that we are consigning her to just a "song-and-dance" category, for she was certainly a winning actress and, given the opportunity, a very fine one. But above all, she had personality, and it is too often kept in check in "Sweetie". In the closing excerpts however, her vivacity and pep is given far more scope.

Although no credit is given, "Sweetie" is actually based rather loosely on an Alice Duer Miller Saturday Evening Post story that Paramount (as was their habit with most properties) filmed on several other occasions. It first saw the light in 1920 as "The Charm School", became "Someone to Love" eight years later, and was dusted off in the mid-30's as "Collegee". "Sweetie" has most of the trimmings of the collegiate film, complete with that all-important climactic football game, but it suffers from over-length and a lack of pep. You really have to be interested in the history of the movies rather than the art of the movies to find "Sweetie" in any way rewarding, apart from Miss Carroll of course. But approached without too high an expectation, it's a nostalgic and generally enjoyable romp.

"HONEY" (1929, Paramount; EXCERPT) Dir: Wesley Ruggles
A charming little sequence climaxed by a song that was missing from the previous tv-trimmed print that we ran a few years ago. Here Miss Carroll shows quite clearly how she became the early sound cinema's leading contender for the "America's Sweetheart" throne vacated by Mary Pickford, and only half-heartedly claimed by Janet Gaynor.

"PARAMOUNT ON PARADE" (Paramount, 1929; EXCERPT) Directors: Several
Introduced by Skeets Gallagher, and backed by Abe Lyman's orchestra, Nancy's "Dancing to Save My Soul" number was one of the two or three highspots of a revue-film which was generally much slicker and more sophisticated than those put out by Warners and MGM. Nancy's singing and dancing is peppy and delightful, and an appropriate closing image for our program.

William K. Everson