Tuesday next, February 8th: Ernst Lubitsch's *MONTE CARLO* (1930) with Jeanette MacDonald and Jack Buchanan; and Robert Florey's *THE HOUSE ON 56TH STREET* (1933) with Kay Francis, Ricardo Cortez, Gene Raymond, Margaret Lindsay.

**Tuesday February 1 1966**

Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"CHURCHILL'S ISLAND" (National Film Board of Canada, 1940) Produced by Stuart Legg for the "Canada Carries On" series; narrated by Lorne Greene; distributed in Canada by Columbia, and in the U.S. by United Artists. 2 rls.

Let me first correct an error from our last News Bulletin, in which this film was announced as being given its "first New York showing". For some reason I was confusing it with the National Film Board's "The People Between" (about China) which is prohibited from US distribution, and which we showed at the Film Group about a year ago. Far from being unknown in the U.S., "Churchill's Island" won the Academy Award in 1941 as the best short documentary that year, although it's doubtful that there have been many showings since the time of its release. A lot of the footage in it is now familiar, and of course the early days of the war have been re-fought by a dozen TV documentaries, yet it's such an excellently put together film that it still holds up extremely well. Amazingly so in fact that it is built around the assumption, then taken for granted everywhere, that England would be invaded momentarily — and to still be able to create suspense out of a situation that we now know never came to pass is quite a tribute to the film's power and persuasiveness.

DANCE NUMBERS OF THE THIRTIES BY LARRY CEBALLOS — EXCERPTS FROM FEATURES.

"MAD ABOUT MONEY" (British Lion, 1936) Directed by Melville Brown; production numbers staged by Larry Ceballos; camera: John Stumar; Special Effects, Len Lye; Produced by Henry Barns; music by James Dyrenforth and Kenneth Leslie-Smith.

With: Ben Lyon, Lupe Velez, Harry Langdon, Wallace Ford.

A dominant if usually disastrous line of thought in British film-making of the thirties was that the most sure-fire road to success was to copy Hollywood. And what better way to do that than to import Hollywood talent? Of course with rare exceptions, the big names were out of the question, so over came all the stars who were slipping just a little, or were frankly has-beens. The theory was that British audiences (largely unaware of the status slips) would be dazzled by Hollywood talent, while the resulting film would also stand a fair chance in the U.S., where secondary American names were still to be preferred to British ones. The system rarely worked of course, and "Mad About Money" in its entirety is a perfect example of the folly of it all. It has American stars, an American dance director (Ceballos had preceded Berkeley at Warners, and continued to work in Hollywood musicals through the 30s and 40s), an American cameraman and an American director — albeit a very lesser one, normally consigned to B melodramas. Enjoying his moment in the limelight, Melville Brown saw to it that the film studio that plays a prominent part in "Mad About Money" was identified by big signs as "The Melbrow Studios". All "Mad About Money" really lacked was a script, and good songs. Dubin and Warren weren't brought over, and as you can see from the credits, two very English gentlemen turned out the ditties! Every attempt is made to duplicate the Hollywood style in the production numbers, and they're certainly big enough — especially one involving a rocket ship, where the chorus girls dance on the stars — but they never quite make it. However, Ceballos never quite made it in Hollywood, either, and certainly these British numbers try hard enough, and have an academic and historical interest coming on top of our exposure to all of the Busby Berkeley material.

"SITTING PRETTY" (Paramount, 1933) Director: Harry Joe Brown; camera: Milton Krasner; songs — Gordon and Revel; dances staged by Larry Ceballos; With Ginger Rogers, Jack Oakie, Jack Haley, Gregory Ratoff.
Although we ran "Sitting Pretty" (a very disappointing film) last year, it was at an extra and unbillable showing, and few of you were able to make it, so I think its big production number - "Did You Ever See a Dream Walking?" - bears repetition. Its main distinction is that it comes a year before Berkeley's very similar number in "Fashions of 1934"; clearly he saw this, was appalled at its wasted opportunities, and was determined to do it right! The number here is elaborate enough - Ginger Rogers' singing is pleasing - and the girls are gorgeous, though the bosom sizes vary remarkably, costume sizes are arranged accordingly, and thus one doesn't have that regimentation of size and shape (though not face) that Berkeley always insisted on. Also, unlike the Berkeley numbers, it has no "story" at all, and literally no connection between the lyrics, the writhing cuties and the overhead patterns. But perhaps these days it is churlish to quibble -- as long as we have writing cuties and overhead patterns, why complain?

- Intermission -

"ANIMAL CRACKERS" (Paramount, 1930). Directed by Victor Heerman.
From the play by George S. Kaufman, Morris Ryskind, Harry Ruby and Bert Kalmar; scenario and dialogue, Morris Ryskind and Pierre Collings; camera: George Folsey. 10 reels.
With The Four Marx Brothers, Lillian Roth, Margaret Dumont, Lewis Sorin, Gerry Goff, Margaret Irving, Robert Grieg, Edward Metcalf, Hal Thompson, Katheryn Hieece.

For years, "Cocaine" used to be the most elusive "lost" Marx Brothers film; now the distinction has passed to "Animal Crackers", which had its last US showing almost 20 years ago, and which is held off TV and theatrical revival for a number of alleged or actual reasons, including sub-standard sound quality and legal complications on rights.

With less sight gags than usual, it has also has less of a "story" than usual - if that is possible. It's little more than a single situation, something of a nightmarish dress rehearsal, sans character or plot development, for Kaufman's later "The Man Who Came to Dinner". It soon develops into a series of insane and unmotivated verbal exchanges. Groucho's onslaughts against Margaret Dumont are among the longest, best and most merciless he's ever given us. And those long surrealistic "discussions" that begin nowhere and retrogress from befuddlement to idiocy are also some of the most enjoyable that the comics have ever done, with less outrageous punning than usual. And when there are puns, they're usually quite brilliant ones - as with Groucho's assertion that he prefers shooting elephants in Alabama because the Tuscaloosa there! Groucho's leering sexual innuendoes are wildly uninhibited too, and the double-entendres, to quote Oscar Wilde, are so doubtful that there is no doubt at all!

Basically "Animal Crackers" is a matter of sustained patter, with occasional moments out for song - from Robert Grieg in the Lubitsch manner, and from Lillian Roth in her own manner. The film does rather run out of steam at the midway point -- the insanity remains, but it becomes repetitions rather than innovational insanity. And it's more of a show and less of a film than any of their other vehicles. But Marx Brothers fanciers will surely offer no complaints. Non-Marx Brothers fanciers shouldn't be here tonight, and will deserve all they get! The sound quality is below-standard, especially when characters move out of microphone range, but luckily all of the Marxian exchanges are done in close takes, and even at its weakest the sound is acceptable. You can help it along by keeping coughings, floor-scrappings, mutterings and analyses of "Red Desert" down to a minimum.

----- Wm. K. Everson -----

Friday February 18th has been set as the date for the next Film Group meeting out at Bob Lee's theatre in Nutley, N.J. The program will include some 35mm silent Polish film, 8mm silent German, and 16mm of indeterminate origin. More details later -- or from Bob Lee.