Tuesday next, April 5th: Robert Florey's musical comedy of World War One, "THE BATTLE OF PARIS" (1929) with Gertrude Lawrence, Charlie Ruggles & songs by Cole Porter; and BOAT OF THE DRAGON (Wesley Ruggles, 1932) with Richard Dix, Gloria Swanson, Edward Everett Horton; a shameless plagiarism from von Sternberg's "Shanghai Express", but really enjoyable adventure hokum.

Tuesday March 29 1966

Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"THE EXPLOITS OF ELAINE" (Star Company-Pathe, 1915); a 14 chapter serial produced by The Whartons, and directed by Louis Gasnier and George B. Seitz; written by Charles W. Godard and George B. Seitz from the stories by Arthur B. Reeve. With Pearl White, Arnold Daly, Creighton Hale and Sheldon Lewis.


Since presumably most of you were here last week, I won't waste time by recapitulating general comments; for those who weren't here last week, spare copies of those program notes are available this evening. One important point that Dick Kraft, George Geltzer and other alert members were quick to point out: last week's notes completely failed to mention the producers of the serial, The Whartons. This was an inexcusable oversight, brought about by comparing credits from differing sources. There seems reasonable doubt as to just how much Gasnier and Seitz did make of the serial, but there is no doubt at all about the Whartons' contribution, which, despite the "producer" tag, probably involved some direction as well.

None of tonight's episodes quite reach the heights of eps. 6 and 7 last week, and there is some evidence of a slight lessening of enthusiasm as it goes along, but nevertheless there's enough invention and bizarre action to keep it all very lively. I particularly like Craig Kennedy's reaction to the Clutching Hand's demand that he give up the case and leave the country, or else at a given hour innocent bystanders will be mown down by a death ray outside Kennedy's apartment. With the detached interest of the true criminologist, and watch in hand, Kennedy keeps vigil -- and only takes action after an unfortunate pedestrian is pulverised by the death ray! Other highlights include an episode in the sewer, the Clutching Hand's marvellous escape through a roll-top desk (rather like Keaton in "Sherlock Jr."!), an imaginative bit in which Pearl is given a wrist-watch for her birthday, said watch having been doctored so that at three o'clock it will inject poison into her veins, another great bit in which Pearl is led to believe that she has killed a man, and envisions her own escape in the electric chair. The Hand's decision to escape by having himself turned into a suspended-animation dummy, and Pearl's encounter with Chinese Devil Worshippers, under the leadership of Wong Long Sin, who points out that their God demands a bride who "is blonde, beautiful, and not of our race!"

The titles in French are rather more prolific this time, but again, of a fairly elementary nature. Nobody will have any trouble figuring out what "une odieux machination" is (even though the French grammar is a bit awry there!) or understanding the character of Johnny, "le plus grand simulateur d'accidents de la ville"! In any case, as before, the action itself is usually quite specific, and this time Pearl herself seems far more involved and less of an observer than in the earlier portions of the serial. Kennedy's inventions seem even more up-to-date in these chapters, and even include a kind of wire-tapping tape-recording device that must predate Mr. Hoover by quite a few years. It's quite surprising how little repetition there has been throughout the whole 14 episodes; certain standard interior sets are re-used naturally, but there is continuous variety of plot content, no repetition of actual footage, and unlike later serials, no "cheats" in getting the hero or heroine out of predicaments. Logic is strained a little in having Kennedy capture the Hand at one point and neglect to remove his mask -- but after all, with the big denouement at hand, why quibble? Why do the French call Kennedy Justin Carol? No idea, unless the books in France used that name.