February 18, 1969

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"DON QUICKSHOT OF THE RIO GRANDE" (Universal, 1923) Dir: George Marshall Scenario by George Hively from a story by Stephen Chalmers; Camera: Charles Kaufman; 5 reels

As we pointed out in our quarterly Bulletin, there are a few annoying cuts in this print. Were it anything but a western, we'd be reluctant to play it—but after all, it's not too difficult to fill in mentally the missing leap or two! Obviously through the years, one or more Jack Hoxie devotees—may their souls remain in eternal torment—clipped out odd little scenes for their own little collections. There are four such moments, resulting in sudden jump cuts—an escape from saloon and jail, and a couple of leaps—but they cause no great dramatic confusion. Since good Hoxies are very scarce, and in addition this was his first, and one by a good director to boot, as well as being a rich toned print, we felt justified in overlooking the matter of completeness this time. In terms of actual footage, very little is really missing since the original length was a very short 4894 feet in 35mm. Hoxie was no actor, but it hardly matters since here he's kept on the go all the time, primarily on horseback. Clearly influenced by the stunt-extravaganza pattern of the Tom Mix films, it's a fast, elaborate, often beautifully photographed Western, replete with dream sequence and wild comedy. It's certainly easy to understand from this film why Hoxie was so tremendously popular, especially with the youngsters. Unable to deliver convincingly even the few simple lines his grade-D independent quickies gave him. (Curiously, this film offers a rather cruel "in" joke when he tosses away a book in frustrated disgust in a prison cell sequence!)

Despite being clearly tongue-in-check, the film was reviewed as a straight western at the time, and was criticized for its "nonsensical story" and for being "unintentionally amusing." Since it was the first Hoxie for Universal, trade paper critics also feared that Hoxie wasn't a big enough name yet to carry it, and suggested that the ads remind audiences that they'd seen Hoxie in films. In any event, print shortcoming or not, it's a lively and most enjoyable western frolic—and regardless of his histrionic limitations, Hoxie certainly handles the action very capably. Incidentally, the film seems to have made quite an impression on Ken Maynard, who copied its opening dream sequence and its whole general structure in his 1925 western "The Grey Vulture."

"THE SOCIAL SECRETARY" (Triangle-Pine Arts, rel: Sept. 10 1926)
Directed by Sidney Franklin; scenario by Anita Loos; 5 reels
With Norma Talmadge, Gladden James, Kate Lester, Erich von Stroheim, Helen Weir, Herbert French, Vivia Oden.

"The Social Secretary" was Norma Talmadge's sixth starring vehicle for Pine-Arts, following close on the heels of "The Devil's Needle" and it was the first to be filmed on the East Coast. Some of the NY exteriors, especially upper Riverside Drive, are quite fascinating, and apparently quite a number of non-studio interiors were used, causing the film to have "the most magnificent settings ever seen on the screen." According to Triangle's 1926 publicity material, although in the face of earlier Griffith, Bronson and DeMille sets, this claim is a little hard to swallow! Sidney Franklin's name is curiously and conspicuously absent not only from the print itself, but from all the Triangle publicity of the period too. Certainly, directorially, it's inferior to 2-reelers he'd done earlier for Reliance, but even so it's an odd and unexplained omission. It's frankly a rather stodgy little film, like so many of the lesser Inces and Pine Arts, but it's still an interesting period piece, quite engagingly eventful and notable for some of the more outrageous scenery—chewing that ever Erich von Stroheim ever perpetrated! The original Triangle publicity has this to say: "While all Triangle pictures are clean pictures, the Talmadge pictures are as a rule exceptionally adapted for promotion as plays which women and children may be especially invited to see. They have what may be called a family appeal, because they deal with conditions in the home. The Social Secretary" is a healthy, wholesome play."

"The Social Secretary" is a healthy, wholesome play. I'm only sorry that we can't reconstruct the detailed musical score outlined in the publicity, since (apart from indicating that标题是 "bells" ring at 55 minutes, and chimes at 24) it recommends the use of such intriguing-sounding pieces as "Creepy Creeps" and "Dainty Daffodils.""

--- William K. Everson

** His first starring western for Universal. He had appeared in earlier Universal films under the name of Hart Hoxie, and had also starred in some independent westerns.