Tuesday next, May 27th: Fritz Lang and John Ford at Republic: "THE HOUSE BY THE RIVER" (1950, with Louis Hayward, Jane Wyatt) followed by a fully complete print of "THE SUN SHINES BRIGHT" (1953) with Charles Wintinger.

May 20 1969
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

As veteran filmgoers know, the society exists as much for the films as for its members. Like the dead grandparents in last week's "The Blue Bird", who come to life briefly only when their descendants think of them, film can only come to life when it is projected and seen. Tonight's films are neither good nor bad; they are just films. But they are unknown films, films that have probably never been shown in America before, and probably won't be again, once these prints are returned to Louis and sent to cine fans in just that much more on the little represented British silent period. We have deliberately not made these sound too enticing in our advance notes, and I assume we'll just have our small hard-core of old reliables this evening, which is as it should be. Old films, I'm sure, have some kind of a soul beneath the nitrate, and would rather be appreciated by a few, than tolerated or laughed at by many.

"VERY NEARLY A LADY" (British International Pictures, 1928) Directed by Thomas Bentley; from the story by St. John Hankin; Art Director, J. Elder Wills; Cameraman James Rogers; 5 reels
With Mabel Fournon, Janet Alexander, Barbara Gott, Maurice Bradell, Dorothy Bartlam, George Bellamy, Gibb McLaughlin.

Somewhat akin in mood to Brenon's "Dancing Mothers", "Very Nearly a Lady" starts off appetizingly with some lively jazz-age night-club stuff, strikingly photographed in Ceramic images, and winds up quite touchingly, if too abruptly, with a somewhat unexpected denouement. In between unfortunately, it tends to stagnate somewhat, with all-talking introductions at points too numerous and constant head-shaking - though no doubt somebody will some day discover in all this a pre-Antonioni comment on the boring emptiness of society. Built around rather outdated social conventions and class distinctions, it becomes a kind of "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" of Britain's class system, with the scales so overloaded in favor of the aristocracy by the heroine's vulgar lower-middle-class mother, that all the snobbism seems perfectly justified. It's a curious little work, interesting pictorially for its unusual transitions, and held together by the appealing work of heroine Mabel Fournon. The use of the Manchester chanteuse and other titles is hard to explain, as it would be impossible for an American distributor to Americanize it, even by implication, and anyway, even if it had been released in this country, it would never have used the title it currently bears ("Almost a Lady") since that has been used for a popular PDC release of 1926. In all probability, some of these titles were later redone for a British 16mm release, and they have the look of having come from the art department of Wallace Neaton, Britain's equivalent of Perriam/Willoughby. In case anyone is puzzled by the titular reference to the mother as being "the remnants of a principal boy", it should be remembered that in British pantomime, Aladdin, Peter Pan etc. - where the male hero is always played by a girl - and always a gleeful and graceful one.

"THE ROLLING ROAD" (Gainborough, prod: late 1926, rel: 1927) Directed by Graham Cutts; Story by Boyd Cable; Cameraman: Hal Young; Art Director, Basil Evans 3 reels; With Carole Blackwell, Flora Le Breton, Clifford Heatherley, A.V. Bramble, James Stephenson, Marie Ault.

Although made relatively late in the 20's, and by a director, who, on such films as "The Rat" has on occasion displayed real style, "The Rolling Road" is such a primitive film in so many ways that if one were to hazard a guess as to its vintage, one would automatically think in terms of 1919/20. Its script is the main culprit; it is old fashioned in the extreme, and somewhat stilted in its period. Its plot mechanism belong back in Victorian melodrama, yet the heroine's clothing is quite contemporary. To further compound its dated quality, its heroine is named Nell - and A.V. Bramble plays the villain like a stiff, straight version of the comic villains that James Finlayson played for Sennett and Roach, with nothing to suggest the subtlety and sensitivity that he presumably must have had to have later directed that classic British silent "Shooting Stars". However, pictorially it is quite pleasing, despite an obviously budget-conscious tropical island set and I suspect that, even edited from the dith and graft that characterises this duple, and especially so, the fine, clear, toned original 35mm print, it would seem spectacularly better. Despite its plotting (and an incredibly naive hero) it does keep on the move however, and again, the work of the heroine (Florence Le Breton, who also did some Hollywood films) is quite pleasing. Both of these films are extremely obscure, even by Britain's own standards, and apart from occasional listings under specific biographies, are not noted in any of the British reference books. The upcoming "Vendetta" however, is a rather more imposing production.

Wn. K. Eversen