Tuesday next, June 10th: Two thrillers: "SOMEBWHERE IN THE NIGHT" (1946, dir: Joseph L. Mankiewicz) with John Hodiak, Nancy Guild, Fritz Kortner; and "KING OF ALCATRAZ" (1938, dir: Robert Florey) with Lloyd Nolan, Anthony Quinn, Gail Patrick.

The new Huff schedules covering June-August will be available at the next show, and will be in the mail immediately thereafter.

June 3, 1969
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"VENDETTA" (Jacoby Films, 1928)
Directed by and starring Henry Edwards; 5 reels

I must admit to being a bit baffled by this film, since it has been carefully ignored by all the reference sources, British included, and it has been impossible thus far to trace the full credits on it. Admittedly, with a film of this type one shouldn't wait until a day or two before the screening to try to track it down! However, I have written to colleagues at the B.F.I. for fuller details, and belatedly we will publish such credits as are unearthed. Secondly, my only foreknowledge of the film was by looking at it very quickly, last December, on a very small 16mm viewer, and "seeing" all of a film like this in some ten minutes, one doesn't get a very accurate impression of its pace! Screening it properly only now, it must be admitted that it doesn't emerge as a very exciting discovery: a "Shooting Stars" or an "Underground" it most certainly isn't! However, I do think we can expect a lot for it; doubtless, as with "The Rolling Road" and "Not Quite a Lady", we'll attract only those members who want to fill in a few more gaps in their film histories, and do not expect to be swept off their feet. It is quite a handsome production, with good sets and locations, but it is also rather plodding and old-fashioned. Still, it's interesting as an example of the star/director work of Henry Edwards, one of the most popular stars of the British silent cinema. A casual but more dignified parallel to Richard Barthelmess, Edwards specialized in the ultra-reliable gentlemanly he-man; many of his films were based on currently popular novels or plays, and not a few were perennial thrillers that turned up again as talkies - for example, "The Flag Lieutenant" and "The Amazing Quest of Ernest Bliss". His true-blue gentleman of the old school rather waned in popularity when talkies came in, but nevertheless Edwards kept very busy, both as an actor and director. He retained his good looks, and right through the 40's and 50's - in films like "Green for Danger" - was invaluable as a character actor. His stage career began in 1900, and he entered films in 1915, being extraordinarily prolific in the silent period. Although his career is none-too-well represented even at the B.F.I., fortunately some of his bigger and better successes do survive, so that posterity will not have to remember him by this independent production from the late 20's, when he was past his peak.

"THE CALL OF THE SEA" (Twickenham Films, 1929/30) Directed by Henry Edwards; with Henry Edwards, Chrissie White, Bernard Nedell, Chilli Bouchier;
EXCERPTS from a 6-reel feature.

"The Call of the Sea" was Edwards' first talkie, and unique in that it teamed him once again with his wife, Chrissie White, who had been a big British star in the 20's. She had teamed with him often, but had retired before the end of the silent era. The idea of teaming them here is rather charming - rather like having Lillian Gish and Henry B. Walthall suddenly appear as the stars of a 1930 talkie - but Miss White was by now rather matronly. The film itself is incredibly primitive: it was, for some reason, shot constantly in Britain through the 30's and 40's, and those who caught it unsuspectingly (as I did, in 1960) often couldn't make up their minds whether it was impossibly bad, or a satire of the old serial thrillers that just didn't come off. It's certainly typical of the very early British sound period: despite its title and a story of adventure in a tropic locale, it is all dialogue. There's only one quick shot of a battleship in the entire film; everything else is studio-bound and unutterably stagey. However, it was intended as a serious "last stand" of the old-school-type of adventure that Edwards had made so much his forte in so many silents, and was not played for laughs, as were the later Tod Slaughter melodramas. Admittedly, it is a little difficult to take it seriously today, with Edwards playing "Dickie Good, R.N.", and Bernard Nedell out-hamming a 1915 Robert MacKinnon as the villain. But even so, Edwards' appeal still comes through - and some of the jingoistic dialogue is a delight - especially when he accuses the seductive siren of not playing the game, and betting with a sticky wicket!

- intermission -
"THE LAST OUTLAW" (Rko Radio, 1936) Director: Christy Cabanne
Original story: E. Murray Campbell and John Ford; scenario, John Twist and Jack Towne; camera; Jack Mackenzie; produced by Robert Sisk; 8 reels

Like "The Plough and the Stars", shown a few weeks ago, "The Last Outlaw" is one of several "lost" Rko Radio films of the 30's that have never shown up on television, and whose ownership has reverted to, or been sold to, other parties. Ostensibly a remake of a 1919 Universal 2-reeler written and directed by Ford - a fast flitately repeated in all the Ford indexes - it actually has no basic connection with it at all. Ford wanted to use some of the characters, and most of the title, in a much altered new version. Presumably after the unexpected success of "The Informer", it was considered too unimportant a property for him then, and it was turned over to Cabanne to direct. Ford however kept it at the back of his mind, bought the property back for a post-war remake which again never materialised, but because of its withdrawal from Rko, the original film vanished.

It's hardly a major rediscovery, and one wishes fervently that Ford had made it. The story is a good one, and full of possibilities; the cast is marvellous, and full of nostalgia. But Cabanne takes all of this rich potential and embles through it as though it were an assignment no different from a dozen others. The film lacks pace, and while it does have some exciting action sequences, they are never really exploited. But what it lacks most of all is the kind of inspirational, off-the-cuff stuff that Ford would certainly have brought to it. An example: Harry Carey, as the ex-outlaw out of prison, goes back to the former western town (now a thriving metropolis) and looks up his old saloon hangout. It's now a bright, modern night-club. If not Ford, then a Leslie Sandler or a David Howard would have done something with that scene - at the corniest perhaps, a sound-track throw back to the piano and noise of the old saloon, merging into the brittle chatter and brassy jazz of the new nightclub. But Cabanne just sticks rigidly to the bare bones of his script and does nothing. The one sequence that does pay off rather nicely is where the old sheriff (Walthall) and the old outlaw (Carey) go to a movie and are flabbergasted by the artificiality of the new musical westerns. (Fred Scott plays the singing cowboy, but the dig is obviously at Gene Autry). It's a little unlikely perhaps that Carey would be so totally unaware of talking pictures (even the chain-gang in "Sullivan's Travels" got to see a movie show once in a while, so presumably a big penitentiary would be even better equipped!) but it's a nice sequence - though with that premise, and Carey and Walthall delivering some good dialogue, it works automatically and can't be hurt by Cabanne's lack of inspiration.

Despite the awkward pacing, much of "The Last Outlaw" is charming, while the climactic reels do deliver the expected action, Margaret Callahan is an appealing (and unfamiliar) heroine, and Tom Tyler, as always, makes a much better villain than he ever did a hero. Ford's first star, Harry Carey and Hoot Gibson, work well together, though considering that they are of the same vintage, it's a little disconcerting to hear Carey referred to so often as an "old man" and Gibson as a "young fellow". At one point, somebody also remarks that 25 years in prison haven't changed Carey at all - which is true enough. He seemed to age not one iota between his Griffith Biographies and Vidor's "Duel in the Sun".

Erroneously referred to in most reference books (and all the Ford indexes) as a 62-minute picture, "The Last Outlaw" is actually almost two reels longer, and by no means a "B". Our point is also in Clendenin condition, and we think you'll find it a pleasant, nostalgic and thoroughly enjoyable little surprise.

Ms. K. Everson