These brief home movies are rather sad, in many ways. Clearly no great attention is being paid to Griffith's passing; all too few of the attendees seem really moved by the occasion, and close in on the cameras. The crowds are sparse, and are probably mainly tourists, hoping to glimpse a few big names. Madame Sul T'ou T'ao, a devoted friend of Griffith's since her appearance in "The Birth of a Nation", seems more genuinely affected than anyone. Among those in attendance (and recognisable in this reel) are DeMille, Chaplin, Sennett, Leisky, Mayer, Hedd Hopper, Richard Neill, Jack Mulhall, Monte Blue, Delli Henderson, Charles Rosher, Tax Cooper and Charles Brackett, while the broad back glimpsed in the very last shot is that of Theodore Huff.

"The Blacksmith" (First National, 1922) Directed by Buster Keaton & Mal St. Clair With Buster Keaton, Joe Roberts, Joe Keaton; 2 reels
To label "The Blacksmith" merely an "average" Keaton comedy is accurate perhaps, but unfair, since it is "average" only in the relative sense that some of Buster's finest and subtlest work - e.g., "Moonshine" and "One Week" - had already preceded it. It has a wry opening and a typically bizarre gag finish; in between it is all elaborate and fast slapstick. It fits into the Keaton chronology rather like the bulk of Chaplin's First Nationals ("Payday", "A Day's Pleasure") which were slick and very funny, but just not as inspired as the Mutual group that they were following. But it would be churlish indeed for us to be ungrateful for a film as funny as "The Blacksmith"; fortunately more and more of his "lost" shorts are being found again, and hopefully we'll have "Moonshine" on hand for you early next year.

"Four Sons" (Fox, 1928) Directed by John Ford Scenario by Philip Klein, from "Grandma Bernile Learns Her Letters" by I.A.R. Wylie Camera: George Schneiderman, Charles G. Clarke; Music arranged by S.I. Rothafel; theme "Little Mother" by Evelyn Raeppe and Lee Pollack; titles by Katherine Halliker and H.N. Caldwell; 10 reels

"Four Sons" is that rarity, a John Ford film that is designed as an "art" and "prestige" picture. It's this kind of a film that a director with Ford's flair for warmth and spontaneity rarely pulls off well; he certainly failed badly on "The Fugitive", though admittedly he succeeded equally spectacularly with "The Long Voyage Home". "Four Sons" can't really be called a failure - financially it was an enormous success, and created a permanent attendance-record at the Roxy, but somehow one feels it could have been a better picture with a different director (Forzage, obviously) or if Ford himself were better tempted to take it less seriously. The echoes of Murnau and "Sunrise" are everywhere - even literally, since the same village set is re-used. But even though it was the fashion at the time, accepted by critics and public alike, the deliberate sloveness of pace doesn't seem a happy method for Ford. One has the constant feeling that he wants to throw in some lively bits of business, or some spectacular showmanship, and is prevented from doing so out of respect for his material. The camerawork is stunning, the gauze shots lovely, and yet it's neither a first-rate film nor first-rate Ford. He was often careless with detail, as if it never seemed to matter, yet we know his costumes and cars for pre-World War One New York are so blatantly late 20's that they really stick out like a sore thumb. And his German "types" are either stereotypes, or his more familiar black-shawled Irishwomen trying to look a bit Teutonic. It just isn't as moving as it should be, and one longs to give Mame Bernile as vigorous a shaking as should have been inflicted on Emil Jannings in "The Last Laugh"! Incidentally, although it isn't credited, at least one screen treatment for this film was written by Herman Bing - done in a very stylised, poetic, semi-stream-of-consciousness manner, much like the original screen treatment for the original German of this scenario (although, since it was so thoroughly literate it may have been a translation of an original German treatment of his) and the pacing and mood of the film suggest that it was based on that rather more than Klein's official and credited scenario. Quite incidentally, John Wayne was a prop man on the film - and assistant director Edward O'Fearns is, of course, Ford's brother. All in all, a fascinating and off-beat Ford - but for a really magnificent and 100% successful venture into the same genre, watch out for Ford's early talkie "Pilgrimage" (also from a Wylie story) which we'll be running in January.

Wm. K. Everson