Monday next, January 11th: A Tom Mix program: "IN THE DAYS OF THE THUNDERING HERD" (1924, Selig) followed by "THE LAST TRAIL" (Fox, 1925); and an extra - "OVERLAND STAGE RAIDERS", a 1926 John Wayne "B" that was also Louise Brooks' last film.

January 4 1971

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"JUNE ON AT TWELVE" (Hal Roach-MGM, 1933) Directed by Charles Parrott (Chace) Camera, Francis Corby; 2 reels With Charley Chase, Betty Mack, Gale Henry, Billy Gilbert, Jack Bart, Charlie Hall. This interesting and lesser-known Chase comedy is quite unusual, and is one of the relatively few that he directed himself. It's split into two halves, the first being a prolonged and amusing encounter with a garbage-man, the second being a rather gentle parallel to the mutually destructive Laurel & Hardy encounters. Not by any means a top Chase, it is still decidedly worth seeing.

"MINNIE THE MOONSHINE" (Max Fleischer-Paramount, 1932) Directed by Dave Fleischer. Animation: Willard Bowsky, Ralph Somerville; one reel With Betty Boop and Gab Calloway's orchestra. Like the other Boop-Calloway "collaboration", "Snow White", this is a bizarre and near-surrealistic cartoon, in which the imagination more than makes up for the general ugliness of the animation style - the gartered Miss Boop always excepted from that criticism!

(Intermission)

"FILIGRAME" (Fox, 1933) Directed by John Ford. Scenario by Philip Klein and Barry Conners, with additional dialogue by Dudley Nichols, from the story "Cold Star Mother" by I.A.B. Wylie; Camera, George Schaeferman; Assistant Director, Edward O'Keefe (Ford's brother); 9 reels With Henrietta Crosman, Heath Angel, Marion Nixon, Norman Foster, Maurice Murphy, Lucille LaVerne, Charlie Grapewin, Robert Warwick, Francis Ford, Betty Blythe, Hedda Hopper, Louise Carter, Jay Ward, Frances Rich, Adele Watson, William Lawrence, Frank Moran, Jack Perrick, St. Jenks, Mary Gordon, Sarah Padden, Claude King. I deliberately don't want to say too much about "Filigrame" since it is obviously impossible to discuss it in depth without commenting on the story. Like "Four Sons" it is based on an I.A.B. Wylie story, and would seem to be so full of trite coincidences and sentimental traps that even to outline the story would be to do it an injustice. When I first saw the film about a year ago, I was quite bowled over by it; not only is it one of Ford's finest films from any period, but it's certainly one of the screen's most skillful tear-jerkers - and I use that phrase not in a derogatory sense, but in a coldly descriptive sense. One of the joys of rediscovering a film like this is not knowing too much about it, and, given a story like this, seeing how Ford side-steps all of the obvious traps. Only once does Ford seem to stumble a trifle, this in giving in rather too enthusiastically to light comedy relief at one stage. This comes fairly late in the day, at a point in the heavily emotional story when a hint of comedy is welcome. But with American tourists on a spree in Paris, Ford has too logical an excuse to let himself go, and as in "Four Sons", doesn't exercise quite enough discipline. (There is of course a similar point in "Sunrise" - but there it's important to the whole of the film, and the human devote a large lump of film to the young married couple finding themselves again, and having fun in the city). But having let off steam, Ford recovers himself quickly, and the film soon regains its not lost but rather sidetracked momentum. Not only is the film an outstanding tour-de-force showcase for Henrietta Crosman in the starring role (the finest character actress performance in any Ford film, not even excepting Jane Darwell in "The Grapes of Wrath"), but it is visually one of the most beautiful and evocative of all Ford films. Almost all of it - a simple farmer's shack in the middle of a wheat-field, a brook in the forest, a railroad station, battlefield trenches and highly stylised scenery - is entirely stage constructed, yet the kind of stylised realism that again recalls "Sunrise". Again - as in "Judge Priest" - there are many visual echoes of Griffith. The realization, during a storm, of the son's death, brings to mind the identical sequence in "The Greatest Question", while the lovely little vignette with the flowers at the railroad station is an equally direct parallel with the homecoming scene of "The Birth of a Nation". One of the biggest surprises of all though (less of a surprise after "Four Sons", admittedly) is that Ford, still in his 30's and having built his reputation primarily on vigorous action material, has such an affinity with and non-contendorous compassion for, problems of the aged. The score, incorporating such standard themes as "Boy O'Mine", is the least subtle aspect of the film, but it still works.

The original 35mm print from which the negative was made was badly shrunked, and the initial prints made therefrom reproduced surface noise on a most distracting level. Some of it was re-recorded, and this is a second and much improved print. However, there is a limit to what can be done in such cases, and where the sound is still a little inadequate - especially in the opening reels - we have to live with it, as it's now all there is. By using two projectors tonight, I don't anticipate any major problem.

--- William K. Everson ---