Monday, February 8th: Two British thrillers: Le Fanu’s "UNCLE SILAS" ("The Inheritance", 1946) with Jean Simmons, Katina Paxinou; preceded by Edgar Wallace's "THE MAN WHO CHANGED HIS NAME" (1934) with Lyn Harding.

February 1 1971
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"THE PICTURES THAT MOVED" (Australian Commonwealth Film Unit, 1958)
Directed by Alan Anderson; Script & research: Joan Long; 5 reels

Through our nearly twenty years of operations we’ve shown but few Australian films at this society; "The Sentimental Bloke" of course, and one or two others like "The Squatter’s Daughter". Thus both our first and second hand knowledge of the history of the Australian film is negligible at best, and perhaps because of this, we tend to be overly-impressed by this exceedingly well-done coverage of that national cinema from 1936 through 1950. Certainly because one has to accept its information at face value, one can’t discriminate opinions or quibble over facts. But it gives the impression of being not only a loving but also a thoroughly reliable tribute to those early film-makers; it is sober, restrained in its claims, constantly backed by the cross-reference of names and dates, respectful and non-condescending in its treatment of the early primitives, all told, it’s an ideal (and too rarely encountered) approach to such material, while the latter in itself is quite fascinating - not only for its national material, but also for the many locations of an Australia that was undergoing fewest and slower "progressive" or mechanical changes than America. An interesting highlight shows Fred Nicholas as an actor and comedian, and the stills illustrating the 1906 "The Story of the Kelly Gang" make interesting comparison with the recent "Ned Kelly". The only disappointment is the lack of showmanship in its climax, where veteran director Raymond Longford - astonishingly vigorous and well-spoken at 85 - merely recites a brief and fairly standard optimistic wrap-up speech. One would have liked to see and hear a great deal more of him.

"THE PENALTY" (Sam Goldwyn Productions, 1920) Directors: Wallace Worsley
A Sam Goldwyn-Rex Beach presentation; scenario by Charles Kenyon from the story by Gouverneur Morris; Camera, Donovan D. Short; Art Director, Gilbert White; 7 reels

With Lon Chaney, Kenneth Harlan, Ethel Grey Terry, Charles Clary, Claire Adams, Doris Preece, James Mason, Milton Ross, Cesare Gravina.

After so many disappointing Chaney MGMs, it’s good to find that this much earlier Chaney - not seen since the Museum of Modern Art’s big Goldwyn cycle a dozen years ago - is as lively and as good as it seemed at the time. In fact, it is such a good melodrama that one wonders how audiences stood still for all the programmers (like "The Shock") and repetitious collaborations with Tod Browning which characterised Chaney’s peak years. Admittedly, it is hardly a work of literary greatness or, filmically, of breath-taking thrills. But it sets its bizarre note of shock in the very first scene and then (something Browning was never able to do) builds steadily in interest and excitement. This kind of plot have come to be the Browning format, but it certainly never received this kind of execution at his hands. Chaney’s leg make-up, and his incredible agility on his apparent stumps, are quite remarkable - and if there’s a rather unsubtle stress on his making menacing faces in closeups, at least those faces are so well photographed, and so interesting, that one can forgive the indulgence. The plot is full of off-beat little tangents, ranging from a dope fiend to a rather caustic commentary on modern art, and the San Francisco location work is likewise full of interest. The bizarre sub-plots take in Chaney’s fascination with the organ and - his being legless - the necessity for having his men squating on the floor beneath him to pump the pedals of the organ while he plays, providing food for thought for both the Freudians and the Women’s-Lib agitators. Also rather diverting is the doctor of Kenneth Harlan - presumably of negligible anatomical education, since he visibly blanches when confronted by a nude model in an artist’s studio. The film’s ending, though partially predictable, is still far more satisfying than the rather forced irony that was hammered home so heavily in the Browning films.

Wm. K. Everson

IMPORTANT NOTICE: We apologize to those who were unable to get into our "Bulldog Drummond" show last week. When we were filled to the brim, we had to start a few minutes early, and most of our regulars had received our warning, seemed to have arrived in plenty of time, will those who missed out, and who wanted to see the film, please drop me a line at 118 W. 79th St., NYC 10024 (I’ll repeat this notice over the next few shows). Depending on response, we’ll either re-schedule the whole program, or, preferably, bring the films along and show them separately ahead of a regular program (starting early) or after a show. Please be sure to include your address in any such communication, so that you can be notified by mail as to the solution we’re selecting.