Monday next, March 8th: COME AND GET IT (1936, dir. William Wyler, Howard Hawks) with Edward Arnold, Joel McCrea, Frances Farmer; preceded by SPAWN OF THE NORTH (1938, dir. Henry Hathaway) with Henry Fonda, George Raft, John Carradine, P.B. 

March 1 1971 The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"THE RIVER" (Fox, 1928) Directed by Frank Borzage. Scenario by Philip Klein and Dwight Cummins from a novel by Triestram Trupper; one of three films which were part of a projected five-reel original? ...With: Charles Farrell, Mary Dunson, Ivan Linow, Alfredo Sabato, Margaret Mann, Bert Woodruff. (Silent film, synchronised musical score)

It is academic to bemoan that two reels are missing from this seven-reel film; this is literally all that is left, and we can be thankful that (a) the final reel is still there, and (b) it is one of those typical late silents that were all wood and no plot, so that whole chunks can be missing with no one really being grieved. Perhaps the five reels that were destroyed also contain a few flashbacks from the missing reels (#1 and #5). The film is based on a novel by Triestram Trupper who seemed to specialise in wilderness romances that were strong on melodrama — and which were transformed into quite stylish "wood" properties for movies. William K. Howard's interesting Klonkye Fury for Monogram was also from a Trupper original. I haven't read Trupper's original for "The River", but I did read the original Fox scenario — which is still strong on melodrama, with a big climactic fight scene, and very little relation to the film that finally emerged. Somewhere along the line a decision was made to turn it into a "prestige" production, and considering its commercial stars and director, it's a surprisingly non-commercial kind of picture. Since little really happens in terms of incident, its most interesting aspects lie of course in its direction, its art direction, and the superb camerawork of Ernest Palmer ("City Girl" "Sunny Side Up"). The film also has qualities of erotic symbolism quite rare in Hollywood films of the time. Storchheim always expected. Like "Docks of New York" "Aoulin Rouge", "Beloved Rogue" and so many other late silents, it is all technique and a rather self-indulgent essay in style; grand fodder for film historians and students today, but one suspects rather trying for the sheer entertainment-seekers of 1927/28, who must have wondered where all the pace and movement of the silents had suddenly disappeared to!

"HANGMAN'S HOUSE" (Fox, 1928) Produced and Directed by John Ford; 8 reels. Scenario by Philip Klein and Marion Orth from the novel by Don Byars; Camera, George Schneiderman; edited by Margaret Clincoy; titles by Kenneth S. Boylan. With Victor McLaglen, June Collyer, Larry Kent, Robert Boisworth, Earle Fox, Jack Pennick, Mary Gordon, Mike Densil, John Wayne. This strange composite of "The Informer", "Warning Shadows" and "The Quiet Man" quite took my breath away when I first saw the Fox studio preservation print a year or so ago, with every puff of smoke and wisps of mist in crystal sharply focus, and the whole beautifully toned throughout. Considering that our print is a first-generation copy from that original it should be far better than it is. I'm afraid I have the same of rediscovery remains. It's an outstanding Ford, if for no other reason than that it lays to rest his own cynical and oft-quoted remarks that film-making to him was just a job of work that he did as quickly and efficiently as possible. Fortunately nobody takes Ford seriously (in terms of his alleged opinions of his own work) - but if they did, one has only to look at the lovely gauze and cut-out shots spaced throughout the film, and most especially at the lyrical scenes of the hero and his girl as they make their way via rowboat to McLaglen's hideout. It's a totally unnecessary scene dramatically; it could have been covered with a page or two of story. The expense of creating and lighting that set, and shooting the whole scene as a travel shot, indicative for a more a craftsman trying to add that little bit extra to his film, genuinely in love with his medium, than a workman merely doing his job. Pictorially the film is one of Ford's loveliest, ranging from lyrical pastoral scenes to a lively horse-race episode that pre-dates "The Quiet Man", to the Gernreichly gauzy sort of fantasy scenes in the hanging judge's mansion. There's a lot of the pictorially striking Inishman in the film - not least in the blarney-sea scene. The plot is watered down on this occasion, although again considerably reshaped from the original scenario in which the McLaglen character was a fairly minor one, coming to the fore only in the climax with a particularly poignant farewell scene which was almost totally played down in the final version. June Collyer, despite her incredible resemblance to Mary Astor, is a charming heroine, and after her more familiar chores as a comedienne in Fox comedies, it's rather startling to find what a good villain Earl Fox is here (and in "Four Sons") though they perhaps missed a beat in his death scene. Ford Browning, not a tenth the director that Ford is, would have not have had the luxury of completing the circle by having the villain accidentally stumble into an expressionistic noise! Incidentally, a couple of the horse-racing scenes are neatly lifted from Ford's earlier "The Shamrock Handicap" -- and John Wayne is a most enthusiastic and easily recognisable extra in approximately eight scenes. When the film opened at the Roxy, the stage presentation included a spooky "Hangman's House" prologue. That we cannot duplicate, but otherwise the film is fully complete, and unquestionably a major Ford rediscovery. --- Wm. K. Everson ---