December 6, 1971

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Note: Extreme pressure of work over the current period has made it impossible to find even a few hours to devote to the scoring of tonight's program. The music therefore will have to be on an ad-lib basis, and we hope you'll bear with us in any inadequacies.

"A.W.O.L." (Bowser Cartoon, 1919) - reel

Simply but well drawn, this is an interesting example of the animated propagandist cartoon, drawing its style primarily from that of the newspapers' topical and political cartoons.

"The Housekeeping of Jim" (Community Productions-American Films, 1920)
Directed by Ashley Keller, from a story in "The Youth's Companion"; 2 reels
With Phil Sanford, Ray Allen, Alice Walsh and Andy Clark.

Here it not so relentlessly and even repulsively upbeat and optimistic, this interesting little morality play would recall some of the reformation dramas that Griffith did so frequently at Biograph. It's well photographed, and another illustration of the astonishing variety of short dramatic subjects turned out in the 20's; its main historic interest however is as an example of the quite considerable film work done in Rhode Island during the silent period, films that are now - like today's film - being systematically hunted down and preserved by the newly-formed Rhode Island Historical Society film division.

"THE SILENT EMANCY" (Burden-Chanler Productions for Paramount release, 1930)
Produced by Douglas Burden and William Chanler; Directed by H.P. Carver; Chief Cameraman, Marcel LeFicard; 3 reels of excerpts from an original 9-reel production.

"The Silent Emancy," a documentary on Indian life (the title refers to hunger) was directly inspired by the producer's enthusiasm for the Schoedack-Cooper "Grass". A full Hollywood crew - not just a small documentary unit - was sent to the wilds of Northern Ontario and spent nearly two years shooting the picture. Although like "Gang," it had a mildly melodramatic and semi-fictional story-line, its documentary realism was all the real thing - though enhanced by Hollywood gloss, superb camerawork, carefully dug camera pits to make the most of the caribou stampede scenes, and by many scenes that seem to have been directly copied from "Grass". The expedition was partially sponsored by the Museum of Natural History in NY, who unfortunately allowed their one complete print to be run until it was in ribbons. While a complete print isn't currently unavailable, it seems most unlikely that it has been lost for good. In the meantime, our excerpts give a good idea of its remarkable quality. They consist of two reels from the theatrical release (with synchronized score) and a third, silent, and overly-simple in its titling, reel designed purely for school use. Together these three reels do convey its style, its beauty, and certainly some of its highlights.

"WILD ORANGES" (Goldwyn-Cosmopolitan for Metro release, 1923; released 1924)
Written and Directed by King Vidor from the novel by Joseph Hergesheimer; Camera, John W. Boyle; 7 reels
With Virginia Valli, Frank Mayo, Ford Sterling, Nigel de Bruijer, Charles A. Post

Like "Tol'able David", "Wild Oranges" was a Hergesheimer property owned in 1920 by Griffith. One can see instantly why it appealed to him, and also perhaps why he decided not to film it at that time due to its similarity to his other "South Seas" films. Its resemblances to "The Love Flower" are especially marked, though this may be at least partially due to Vidor possibly having seen that film and borrowing certain things from it. It's a curious film - perhaps not quite as good as one would like, bearing in mind Vidor's own great personal enthusiasm for it, but nevertheless an extremely impressive atmospheric melodrama with a wealth of per usual, cool story-telling photos that one was to find in later Vidor films -- the empty rocking chair on the deserted porch, for example, to be echoed in "Duel in the Sun". What in Griffith's hands would probably have been played for straight melodrama is here played for grim horror - complete with bats, rats, and a vivid psychopathic villain. The climax is really exciting stuff, although the big fight scene is an odd mixture of really impressive long-shot rough-an-tumble and unconvincingly faked close-up work. In an already small cast, Ford Sterling seems miscast and in the way, but Virginia Valli is appealing and Charles Post makes a marvellous heavy. In his book "A Tree is a Tree", Vidor points out that James Kirkwood was the original star, and did all the location work for four weeks in Jacksonville, Florida, only to be injured when they returned to the studio. Frank Mayo took over for all the closeup work, and the catching up is unusually expert, but Kirkwood can be spotted in some of the long shots.

--- Wm. K. Everson ---