Tuesday next, February 22nd: (Academy Hall closed on Monday due to holidays) Haou Walsh's "THE BIG TRAIL" (1930) with John Wayne, Marguerite Churchill.

Extra: a transient print, only just come to hand, of John Ford's NORTH OF HUDSON BAY (1923) with Tom Mix and Fred Kohler, will be shown after "The Big Trail" met week. It will have Czech titles, but is easy enough to follow.

February 16 1972
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"SPANGLES" (Universal, 1926) Directed by Frank O'Connor
Scenario: Leah Baird and Hugh Hoffman, from a story by Nellie Bevill; Camera: Andre Barlatier; titles by Walter Anthony; 6 reels
With Marion Dixon, Pat O'Malley, Hobart Bosworth, Gladys Brockwell, Jay Emmett, James Conly, Grace Gordon, Paul Howard, Tiny Yard, Charles Becker, Nellie Lane, Clarence Wertz, Harry Schultz, Herbert Shelly.

Frank O'Connor was one of the least inspired of Universal's programer directors, and "Spangles" certainly never rises above that unsatisfactory category. Nevertheless, it's a pleasing example of the run-of-the-mill Saturday matinee fodder that Universal did so frequently and so slickly, and it is certainly helped by the print -- a fine toned original in literally mint condition, and fully complete except for the missing credits. Its plot has mild parallels with the later "Freaks," although its circus folk display a singular lack of traditional camaraderie, and a lynching mob at the end is as easily swayed as any mob in a Republic "western". Sometimes the cheapness shows through -- as in the painfully obvious painted backdrops for the chariot race scene -- while at other times, the circus footage is clearly authentic. With a little more showmanship for the climax -- a nice little fire, perhaps, with all the animals running amok -- it could have been quite a strong little picture. But even as it is, it is an enjoyable little time-killer -- which, after all, is all that it ever set out to be.

"GOOD AS GOLD" (Fox, 1927) Directed by Scott Dunlap; camera, Virgil Hart; One reel excerpt from a five-reel film
With Buck Jones, Frances Lee, Carl Miller, Charles French, Adele Watson.

It is a little difficult (and unwise) to form set opinions on the silent Buck Jones westerns for Fox. Fox saved none of them at all, and the only known surviving copies come from the Czechs -- untitled, and often sadly incomplete. While Jones shows to good advantage in them, and they often have quite strong stories, they do seem to be surprisingly lacking in both production values and solid action content, as though deliberately seeking to avoid serious competition with the Mix films. However, it's always good to see Buck Jones, and this excerpt comes from one of the better films in his series is lively and actionful stuff. The director, Scott Dunlap, later produced Jones' "Rough Riders" series for Monogram, and was with Jones in the tragic fire that took Jones' life, Dunlap luckily surviving. The mine used as the location in this excerpt appears to be the same one used by Raywood Griffith in "The Night Club".

"THE RAINBOW TRAIL" (Fox, 1925) Directed by Lyn Renolds; adapted by Reynolds from the novel by Zane Grey, a sequel to "Riders of the Purple Sage"; Camera, Dan Clark; 6 reels
With Tom Mix, Anne Cornwall, George Bancroft, Lucien Littlefield, Mark Hamilton, Vivian Oakland, Thomas Delmar, Fred de Silva, Steve Clements, Doc Roberts, Carol Halloway, Diana Miller.

"The Rainbow Trail" is a sequel with a vengeance, assuming that all its viewers have seen Mix's preceding "Riders of the Purple Sage" (a logical assumption in 1925, since "Riders" was released only a couple of months earlier), and waiting no time. There is a flashback to the climax of "Riders", but otherwise there is little attempt to explain who is who -- although curiously the first third of the film is rather protracted byplay, and the basic story doesn't get under way until the mid-way point. The story, perhaps due to its Grey heritage, is much stronger than usual with Mix. There's less of the circus approach to the action, and for once the bad guys get killed off -- frequently, summarily, and with no tears shed. While "Riders" was something of a misfire Mix, and too close to the spirit of Billhart in Mix to seem thoroughly at home, "Rainbow Trail" works much better, perhaps because the story is stronger on its own and doesn't even rely on traditional western trappings. I never could quite buy the "geography" of "Riders", in which a single avalanche trapped hero and heroine in a huge valley with no other exit -- but the locations chosen here, and the excellent photography of them, make that earlier premise seem a little more plausible. Mix appears as Lewis, the equally flashbacks, and in earlier scenes (bearded) -- but in the later scenes, where the two Mixes would appear side by side, LaSalle's role is taken over by another actor (Doc Roberts), the beard making the transfer easy and not-too-obvious. With its good story, rugged action and beautiful locations, "The Rainbow Trail" is quite one of the better Mixes, if one of the least typical.

Wm. K. Everson