Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

February 25 1974

MOONSHINE (Paramount, 1918) Directed by Fatty Arbuckle; 2 reels
With Fatty Arbuckle, Buster Keaton, Al St. John, Alice Lake.

While we must apologize for the inferior French print, at the same time it's good to have any print of this rare early comedy. The harshness of the print does work against being able to relax with it, and undoubtedly it would seem much funnier in a pristine print, but there are still some extremely funny gags. Arbuckle's style dominates so much in these early ones (the cozy method of taking one's time, for example) that it's valuable to compare them with such early solo Keatons as "One Week" and note how much of Arbuckle overlapped in to Keaton. The print has French titles, but the gags are mainly visual, and all that is really lost are Arbuckle's quite funny comments on the film itself as it unfolds, commenting at one point for example on the necessity of establishing the romantic interest right away since the film is only a two-reeler!

HAUNTED SPOOKS (Hal Roach-Pathe, 1920) Directed by Hal Roach and Alfi Goulding; Camera: Walter Lundin; titles, R.M. Walker; 2 reels
With Harold Lloyd, Mildred Davis, Wallace Howe.

Although the rather protracted closing sequences don't live up to the pace and originality of the opening, this is still one of the best and slickest of the earlier Lloyds. There's a lot of racial humor (one Jewish gag is particularly endearing!) but it's warm and affectionate.

- Intermission -

THE OLD SWIMMIN' HOLE (Charles Ray Productions-Associated First National, 1921) Directed by Joseph De Grasse; Scenario by Bernard McConville from the (1903) stories by James Whitcomb Riley; Camera, George Rizard, Ellsworth H. Rumer; Assistant Directors, Robert Bennett, Clarence Dewitt; 6 reels
With Charles Ray, James Gordon, Laura La Plante, Blanche Rose, Marjorie Prevost, Lincoln Stedman, Lon Poff.

Famous (among the well-informed) as a film totally devoid of subtitles (the less well-informed still persist in bestowing on "The Last Laugh" the distinction of being the only title-less movie), "The Old Swimm' Hole" is either an idyllic classic, or a ponderous bore, depending entirely on one's point of view. There is no doubt that it is a marvellous (and valuable) evocation of an earlier era. The non-events of the day are faithfully recorded, the costumes, props and backgrounds seem exactly right, and though it is never stressed, one notes that no reference is ever made to money, and that all goods are simply made or acquired by barter. But every so often the sense of sun and waving grasses on a Summer afternoon is so strong that one tends to nod happily off to sleep. One sequence in a schoolroom is so long (and uneventful) that one realizes after a time that it is virtually like spending an afternoon in a schoolroom, and the end result is not unlike that of an Andy Warhol film! The look of titles is not necessarily a good idea, and as in the dialogue-deprived "The Thief" (in which the script constantly refused to allow Ray Milland to answer a ringing telephone) it comes over as merely a gimmick. There is no lack of clarity, and indeed there is some subtlety in conveying ideas and emotions visually. On the other hand, there is constant (but unreported) dialogue between all the characters, and in such an accurate piece of Americana as this, it would have been pleasant, as well as historically useful, to have had a record too of the speech mannerisms and expressions of the day. Nothing really happens in the film, and there's no beginning or end -- just a solid chunk of peaceful intermission living. The print, from a worn and fading 35mm copy, seems to be substantially complete but from the framing compositions and uses of gauze, it's obvious that it can only hint at the pictorial beauty of the original.

- Ms. K. Everson -

Since tonight's program is short, we are taking the opportunity to add -- on a kind of non-sequence basis -- some more material. We'll do this from time to time. In many cases, it'll be our own first chance to look at the material, so there'll be no notes, music, or other niceties for these added items, and no guarantee as to quality -- tho' in tonight's case, I don't think that will be a problem. We're starting out with two circa 1913 shorts, "The Dalton Boys", a 2-reel semi-documentary with a climactic appearance by Emmett Dalton, and "Harmeny's Speed Limit", an astonishing one-reel forerunner of Keaton's "Seven Chances", and presumably pilfered from the same Belasco play. Then, at the end of the evening, "The Cowboy and the Countess" (Fox, 1926, dir: Roy William Neill) with Buck Jones, Helen D'algy, Diana Miller, Harvey Clark; Czech titles only, but a romp in the Fairbanks-Kir manner - Bozitenian derring-do -- that isn't unduly difficult to follow. 5-6-15.