HAT CHECK GIRL (Fox, 1932) Directed by Sidney Lanfield; screenplay by Philip Klein and Barry Conners from an original story by Alan James; Camera, George Schneiderman; Original length, 7 reels; remade by Fox in 1929 under the same title as a partial musical.


The most important John Ford film prior to "The Iron Horse" - or at least, the biggest and commercially most important - is "Cameo Kirby" obviously not well served with this print of only 482 feet, the leather. However, as a complete film with a complete title, it is all that is left, and we must be grateful that the Europeans saw fit to preserve it when its own production company did not. Ford in this period was always a little over-fond of titles, and the many titles here, probably derived from the original play, are amplified by additional titles inserted later to cover missing footage. Its general similarity to the other Booth Tarkington property "Magnolia" (likewise done as a silent, and remake as a partial musical twice) makes it a little easier to follow, as do the generally stereotyped characters. Alan Hale's villain is an exact duplicate of his villain in the same year's "The Covered Wagon", and John Gilbert's hero is one of many blueprints for Bett Butler. The great structural influence from Griffith - the cutbacks, (as in the earlier brawl, cut into a card game, to explain how Kirby got his nickname), the intertwining of parallel story-lines - also helps to make it a little more apparent what is going on. The exterior scenes flow beautifully - a horseback chase out for rhythms rather than excitement, a duel amid trees and variegated grasses, even extreme closeups taken from the deck of the river-boat with the scenery passing idly by in the background - whereas the interiors seem rather stilted, full of theatrical flourishes and gestures. The last "act", being virtually all dialogue, is - with that dialogue denied to us - frankly rather dull. Another Griffith derivation (rare with Ford) is the occasional repeat action by showing the same shot from two consecutive angles. Some of the steamboat race shots were re-used by Ford in "Steamboat Round the Bend", 12 years later - very smooth, very unoriginal work that we might add - and part of the plot was also incorporated into the George O'Brien Talkie "Smoke Lightning". Officially but very loosely based on a Zane Grey story. A brief synopsis is printed separately to help in following the story.
The extreme length of some of the titles - probably wholesale chunks of dialogue from the play - may suggest that a great deal of importance is being missed through non-translation, but this is not necessarily the case. For example, early in the film the heroine turns down the marriage proposal of a suitor. Right in the midst of an inordinately long title appears a variation of the word "koniec" (which from sundry Czech prints, we know to be used as "The End"). The girl's expression, and the use of this one word, tell us right away that she is telling him that their romance is finished. The rest of the words obviously mean something too -- but their sense is conveyed by that one word.

Synopsis in brief

River-boat gambler Camo Kirby accidentally meets and falls in love with Adele Randall (a scene that rather surprisingly foreshadows the meeting of Snow White and the Prince by the wishing well) without knowing her name. Later, Kirby and crooked gambler Moreau engage Adele's father Col. Randall in a card game. Kirby is unaware that he is her father, but when he wins his entire estate in the game, he has no intention of keeping it. However, before he can get to the Colonel after the game to return the deed, the Colonel, is despair, shoots himself. Moreau contrives to have Kirby blamed, and later on tries to shoot Kirby in the back. Kirby turns in time however, and though wounded, has time to fire back. He then falls overboard and is rescued by his partner. Moreau further discredits Kirby by claiming that it was Kirby who tried to kill him.

Kirby recuperates, getting in condition for the duel with Moreau that he knows must come. With the duel set up, Moreau again tries to shoot Kirby in the back, but Kirby shoots first and Moreau is killed. However, one of the Randall brothers, still convinced that Kirby did in fact directly cause his father's death, sees a way to revenge. He removes the gun from the dead Moreau's hand, giving the impression that he was shot down while unarmed. Kirby is pursued by a posse of Randall kinmen, but eludes them and takes refuge at the Randall home. There he discovers that the girl he met and fell in love with earlier is the heir to the Randall estate. The Randall kinmen still seek revenge, but he is able to persuade them of his innocence, returns the deed to the property to the family, and marries Adele.