Text program: April 5th: MADONNAS AND MEN (1920) with Edmund Lowe, Gustav von Seyffertitz; LEATHERNECK (1922) with William Boyd, Alan Hale, Fred Kohler.

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

March 8 1976

Note: The one-reeler "Mammy Lou's Mistake" was not, unfortunately, returned in time from another screening. Thus we have substituted a Felix the Cat cartoon this evening, and will play "Mammy Lou's Mistake", along with other stock-piled shorts, in our May program.

FELIX PUZZLED (Educational, 1924) Dir: Pat Sullivan; one reel

A good and typical Felix with, as usual, most of the interest resulting not from the limited comic content, but from the near-surrealist solutions to Felix's problems.

SYD'S BACKWARD WAYS (Mack Sennett-Keystone, 1915) Dir: Mack Sennett
With Syd Chaplin, Phyllis Allen. One reel

This is actually a retitled reissue print of a film originally titled "Gusale's Backward Ways". Syd Chaplin made half-a-dozen films in this series for Sennett in 1914/15, most apparently directed by Sennett himself. They're a little more polished than the average Sennettes of the period, and obviously their key interest is in Syd Chaplin, Charlie's half-brother, who presumably was being considered as a replacement when Charlie moved to Essanay. Although Syd (later especially) was a talented pantomimic comedian who suffered from using too much in Charlie's shadow, here he does seem to be trying quite seriously to imitate Chaplin in bits of business, if not in basic character. The byplay with the cane, and the many kicks - actual and threatened, are quite obviously "borrowed" from Charlie.

DAD'S CHOICE (Harold Lloyd Corp.-Paramount, 1927; released 1928) Directed by J.A. Howe; Camera, Walter Lundin; Story, T.J. Crizer and N.T. Barrows; 2 rls.
With Edward Everett Horton, Sharon Lynn, Otis Harlan, James Gordon, Josephine Crowell.

Presumably there was a tax reason for the Harold Lloyd Corp. making the odd short; certainly Lloyd didn't need the money, nor, even more certainly, did he need 2-reel comedies to support his own features. This one is an oddity indeed, typical Lloyd material done by the usual Lloyd crew; carefully done, so as to maintain certain production standards, equally carefully controlled so as not to make a really funny comedy that could compete with Lloyd himself. The best stuff is in the very funny running gag involving Horton and Josephine Crowell; once it begins to build up to a typical Lloyd chase finish, it is markedly soft-pedalled. There appears to be part of a gag missing in the material introducing Horton, but the missing footage is brief and easily imagined.

--- Intermission ---

LORNA DOONE (Thomas H. Ince Corp.--Associated First National, 1922) Produced and directed by Maurice Tourneur; Scenario by Katherine Reed, Cecil G. Mumford and Wyndham Gittens from the (1869) novel by R.D. Blackmore; Camera, Henry Sharp; Set Design, Milton Menasco. 7 reels
With: Madge Bellamy (Lorna Doone); John Bowars (John Ridd); Frank Keenan (Sir Ensor Doone); Jack MacDonald (The Counsellor); Donald MacDonald (Carver Doone); Norris Johnson (Ruth); May Giraci (Lorna as a child); Charles Hatton (John, as a child).

When we last ran this film some fifteen years ago, our notes were somewhat more elaborate, citing the generally very favorable reviews, and giving much more information on Maurice Tourneur, whose work was then little known and very sparsely represented. Fortunately since then many of his best films have become more accessible, and hopefully you all had a chance to see "The Last of the Mohicans", "The Blue Bird" and "Victory" at the Museum of Modern Art recently.
"Lorna Doone", a classic British romantic adventure novel, based at least partially on fact, has never been given the sweeping, large-scale treatment it deserves. A couple of English versions, and likewise a couple of American, have both taken the rather easy way out of changing it (like "Gypsy Wildcat" at Universal in the 40's) into a kind of costume Western. The ending here is pure Incville, with a ride to the rescue in response to signal fires, the hero galloping after the villain, and even a stock-shot horse fall taken from a Western. One magnificent episode in the novel - an escape across a frozen lake - has never figured in any movie version.

Clearly Inc's production economy prevented Tourneur turning this, as he might well have done, into an adventure film rivaling "The Last of the Mohicans". But he does what he can, and manages to make it look far more imposing and expensive than might have been expected from its budget. The Tourneur pictorialism is there to be sure: lovely, mystical compositions and superb lighting (Henry Sharp was an excellent cameraman) both of interiors and exteriors, though little of the latter part of the film matches the prologue, with the superb shots of mysterious figures silhouetted in the mist on the hilltops, or the wrecked stagecoach abandoned to the tide at sunset, with seagulls skimming by. Still, it always remains pictorially impressive and dramatically lively, and the courtroom scenes contain some excellently convincing and adroit examples of the glass-shot. The California hills and seashores double surprisingly well for the very different terrain of Devonshire; as in "The Wishing Ring", where Tourneur made 1914 Fort Lee look like 18th century England, the authentic look of the sets seems to carry the landscape along with it.

The film was perhaps the last really interesting one to come from the diminishing and ever-more-economical activities of Thomas Inc. (The courtroom set was left standing, and was used the following year in "Scars of Jealousy"). Inc's creative career was certainly over by this time, and of course he died - under mysterious circumstances - on Hearst's yacht just a couple of years later.

John Bowers (the original and actual "Norman Maine") was physically the best of all the movie John Ridds, and certainly far better than the last two - John Loder and Richard Greene. And there's an interesting performance from Frank Keenan - father of Ed Wynn and grandfather of Keenan Wynn. Many familiar Inc faces scowl at us too from among the Doones. (The Doones were the closest the British ever came to their own Jesse James and Dalton clans!)

The print we have tonight is a little ragged, but is a fine amber toned original and looks quite stunning on screen. However, it may need frequent ministrations so if we occasionally have to abandon music to coax a rough spot through, we hope you'll bear with us. Despite its occasionally rough quality, it is a longer and more complete print than the one we showed before. There is one key missing scene: in the climactic fight, the villainous Doone is sucked down into a bog. The shot was very brief and, done by stop-motion, not very convincing. Presumably it was taken out of this print as being a little too grim for the school and home-usage which at one time was probably its key market.

William K. Everson

IMPORTANT Somehow, our Spring Bulletin, mailed last December, got scrambled on one date. There is no Monday April 22 (THE UNDYING MONSTER, THE MAN WITH MINE LIVES). This should be March 22nd. A fresh mailing will take place at the end of this week, announcing this correction and filling in odd details (additions, no changes) in our shows through May 10.