Please note: both of tonight’s prints are made from new "preservation" negatives which do not reflect at all well on current lab standards. Both prints are a little on the soft side, and those who appreciate sharp focus will find that the further back you sit, the better the prints will look.

JUST FAIS (Fox, 1920) Directed by John Ford Scenario by Paul Swofford from an original story by John McDermott; Camera, George Schneiderman; 60 mins.
With: Buck Jones (Jim); Helen Ferguson (Mary Bruce); George E. Stone (Bill); Duke Lee (Sheriff); William Buckley (Harvey Cahill); Edwin Booth Tilton (Dr. Stone); Alice Murdock Moore (Mrs Stone); Durt Apling (brakeman); Slim Padgett, Pedro Leal ( OUTLAWS: Joseph Combrink, John J. Cook, Fred, Helen Field.

Of all the pre-1923 Fords, only this one and the 1917 "Straight Shooting" are presently lost (to survive, it was his first film in a long association with Fox, "Just Fais" is possibly a little disappointing in that it largely avoids the rugged action material for which he was already comparatively famous, and combines it and its semi-western theme — with a Charles Ray-like story. The weak and self-pitying Ray character was never a very fortuitous one for Ford to tackle; "Lightning", a film very much in that vein, is one of the weakest of all the Ford silents. Fortunately Ford and his star Buck Jones seem to realize the irritating quality of the character, and the absurdity of the extremes of his self-sacrifice, and try to overcome it with as much action and gentle humor as the plot will allow. Obviously, Ford wasn't going to rock the boat too much with his first film under a new contract. Too, the film suffers (and unfairly) by a comparison with the later, similar and more ambitious Frank Borzage-Buck Jones film "Lazy Bones". So the film's shortcomings, if indeed they are that, are largely those of hindsight. It's certainly a very pleasing and eventually a robust little film, and confirms again what a good and often moving actor Buck Jones could be. Jones obviously liked the story of this one, and reshaped it very slightly to become "The Cowboy and the Kid" made by his own production unit at Universal in 1926.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

THREE BAD MEN (Fox, 1926) Directed by John Ford; Scenario by John Stone from "Over the Border" by Herman Whitaker; Camera, George Schneiderman; Asst. Director, Edward O’Fearn; 90 mins.
With: George O’Brien (Dan O’Malley); Olive Borden (Lee Carlton); Lou Tellegen (Rayne Hunter); J. Farrell MacDonald (Mike Costigan); Frank Campeau (Spade Allen); Ralph Little (Chesney); George Harris (Joe Misk); Jay Hunt (old prospector); Priscilla Bonner (Millie Stoney); Also B. Francis (Rev. Benson); Otis Harlan (Sack Leslie); Walter Perry (Pat Monahan); George Irving (Gen. Nevile); Phyllis Haver (Prairie Beauty); and Vester Pegg, Bud Osborne.

"Three Bad Men" was Ford's last silent western, and indeed his last western until he returned to the genre in 1939 with "Stagecoach". And in many ways, it is one of the best serials, generally superior to "The Iron Horse" (an epic in which the common-place story kept getting in the way) in that it places its strong, "Three Musketeers"-derived story in the foreground, and uses the epic-empire-building ingredients as massive background. (This may or may not have been entirely Ford’s choice; genuinely epic westerns were out of favor and had been replaced by the big "show" westerns in which history was subordinate to excitement). It’s a curious film, combining the gutsiness and raw poetry (and several sub-themes) of the earlier William S. Hart westerns, with the romantic, sentimental, comedic and curiously Irish-dominated West of Ford’s own vision. Tom Santschi, out to revenge a betrayed sister, is a genuine Hart character, and the strongest character in the film. (Originally the film had been intended to co-star Ford's Big Three westerners, O'Brien, Tom Mix and Buck Jones. That would have made it quite a collector's item, but it probably works much better with its present casting, even though Ford is prone to give his character-bad men a shade too much comedy at times). Although much of the beauty of the original 35mm nitrate print (from which this was copied) has been lost and we'll say more about that in the introduction, it's still a most impressive production, a little slow (and title—laden) by today's standards, but more than made up for it in the second half. Filmed in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and in the Mojave desert, it has some stunning locations, and the land rush sequence is beautifully done, save for an unnecessarily hokey (and unconvincing) bit with an abandoned child. Incidentally, despite the similarity of title and theme, Ford's film has nothing to do with the several versions of "Three Godfathers". (Ford himself filmed two of the TV versions). "Three Bad Men" was remade once, in the early thirties as "Three Rogues", much simplified, with Victor McLaglen taking over the Santschi role, built up to be the lead, and a of footage lifted from this original version.

Program ends at approx. 10:20, followed by discussion William K. Everson period. Time approximate since projection speeds will be varied throughout the films.

A reminder: no screening next week. Final shows for this series on April 13 and April 27. Summer schedules will be available on both of those dates.