FOUR SONS (Fox, 1926) Directed by John Ford; Scenario by Philip Klein and ** (uncredited) Herman Bing; Camera, George Schneiderman; Charles Clarke; Theme song "Little Mother" by Bruno Hapee and Lew Pollack; Musical arrangement by S.L. Rothafel; Asst. Director, Edward (Ford) O'Farrill. Silent film with musical score. 90 mins approx. NY premiere: Roxy Th. With: James Hall (Joseph Bernle); Margaret Mann (Grandma Bernle); Earle Foxe (von Stomm); Charles Morton (Johann Bernle); Francis X. Bushman jr (Franz Bernle); George Meeker (Andreas Bernle); Albert Gran (mailman); Frank Reicher (Schoolmaster); Hughie Mack (Inkeeper); Michael Mark (von Stomm's orderly); August Tollaire (burgomaster); June Collyer (Ann); Wendell Phillips Franklin (Johann Bernle's house maid); Jack Pennick (Joseph's america friend); Leopold, Archduke of Austria (German captain); Robert Farrish (child); L.J. O'Connor (Aubergiste); Captain John Porters, Ferdinand Schumann-Reink, Carl Boheme, Constant Franke, Hans Furberg, Tibor von Jenny, Stanley Blystone, Lieut. George Blagoi (officers) ** eliminated from the credits was the source material, "Grandmother Bernle Learns Her Letters" by I.A.R. Wyle, published in the Saturday Evening Post in 1926."

"Four Sons" was quite certainly the biggest commercial success that John Ford had had to that date, capitalising on both the renewed interest in war films and a brief boom in "mother love" stories. The roots of so many later Ford family sagas ("How Green Was My Valley" especially) can be found in this film, while it represents an interesting transition for him. Like all Fox directors, he was an adherent of the German director's concept. As Fox's film "Sunrise", and for one of the few times in his career, consciously tried to emulate another director. "Four Sons" is far more studied and formal than most Ford films, uses mobile camerawork far more than was his norm, and even re-uses the sets from "Sunrise", thus stressing the affinity between the two films. Its sentiment, though perhaps alien to younger audiences today, works well because it is clearly sincere, and one can fault Ford only for his lack of attention to period detail. Clothes, cars, hairstyles etc. remain resolutely the Ford "look" of 1927, the year in which the film was made (it was released early in '26) rather than the '30's, when most of the plot is set. It was remade by Fox at the outset of World War Two, with propagandist values displacing much of the stress on mother love and family separation.

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

PILGRIMAGE (Fox, 1933) Directed by John Ford. Screenplay by Philip Klein and Barry Connors, with additional dialogue by Dudley Nichols, from the story "Gold Star Mother" by I.A.R. Wyle; Camera, George Schneiderman; Asst. Director Edward O'Farrill. 90 mins With: Henrietta Crosman (Hannah Jessop); Norman Foster (Jim Jessop); Heather Angel (Suzanne); Marion Nixon (Mary Saunders); Maurice Murphy (Gary Worth); Lucille LaVerne (Mrs Hatfield); Charles Grapewin (Dad Saunders); Hedda Hopper (Mrs Worth); Robert Warwick (Major Albertson); Louise Carter (Mrs Rogers); Betty Blythe (Janet Prescott); Francis Ford (Elmer); Jay Ward (Jimmy Saunders); Frances Rich (Nurse); Jack Pennick (sharpshooter)

Of all the John Ford films rediscovered at Fox in the late 60's, "Pilgrimage" is one of the best - and the least known and shown. I don't think it has had a NY exposure since our own showing of it here at the New School in 1971. Like its co-feature tonight, it's a sentimental tale based on a Wyle story. It also represents the end of Ford's German-influenced period (echoes remain, as in the stock German-dressed girl) and a pronounced return to themes of Americans and a Griffith influence. The farewell scene at the station, with the flowers thrust into the window, is virtually a copy in reverse of the famous homecoming scene in "The Birth of a Nation", while the realisation of the son's death is likewise inspired by a similar scene in Griffith's "The Greatest Question". The sentiment is a little more specialised and less naturalistic than in "Four Sons", and has some of the ritualistic quality of an Irish-American wake. Its sincerity is obvious, but how well it works depends on the individual, though anybody who isn't reduced to a quivering mass by the knock-out climactic scene clearly has something wrong with them! Much of the film has real poetry, and only occasionally (as in prolonging of comedy scenes) does Ford stumble a trifle. I deliberately don't want to say too much about the film as it is still relatively unknown, more's the pity, and there's a real sense of joy in rediscovery of a film like this. Incidentally, when Fox's one 35mm preservation copy was dupe-negated, the lab forgot to clean off a piece of blooper tape in which Lucille LaVerne (a grand performance) made a down-to-earth hilbilly comment on a ship's toilet. Unless we have ultra-expert lip-readers in the audience, the secret is now lost to the ages.

Program ends approx. 10:40.

-- William K. Everson

My language seems a little confusing there. The tape was added to the print later to obliterate the said remark. It could have been removed and the dialogue preserved for posterity -- but it wasn't.