(As last week's attendees know, I am absent this week due to a once-every-Fall commitment out of town. Tonight's program, which needs a minimum of supervision and discussion, was deliberately chosen to fill this slot. So you'll have an early night, and any questions can be added to next week's session... Wke)

THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN (Columbia, 1946) Directed by Lothar Mendes; Produced by Albert J. Cohen; Screenplay by Wilfrid H. Petter from the novel of the same title by Jo Elisinger; Camera, Charles Lawton Jr.; Music, Marlin Skiles. 82 mins.
With: Lee Bowman (Gilbert Arter); Marguerite Chapman (Patricia Foster); Edgar Buchanan (Mr. Johnson); George Macready (Matthew Stoker); Lee Patrick (Sister Josephine Hale (Captain Griffin); J. Edward Bromberg (Ernest Heims); Elisabeth Risdon (Catherine Walsh); Miles Mander (Dr. Marko); Moroni Olsen (Bishop Martin); Katherine Koreansky (Mrs. Stoker); Noel Cravat (Rausch); Bob Ryan (Detective Regan); Charles LaTorre (Bianca); Arthur Loft (oil man); Mary Wickes (Secretary); Al Ferguson (workman).

Both of tonight's well-above-average mysteries work very well on their own, but have been buttressed together as an example of the continuing influence of two earlier and classic mystery novels and films. In some ways, "The Walls Came Tumbling Down" is an outrageous plagiarisation of "The Maltese Falcon" yet odd enough, with the Huston/Bogart film only five years behind it, and with ingenious reshuffling, it managed to fool the critics who spotted no resemblance at all. It is based on the same novel as the 1941 movie of a very advent, short story, also by Jo Elisinger, whose "The Sleeping City" will be shown in this series on October 30. Lee Bowman plays a columnist rather than a private eye, and curiously is named Archer, the name of Sam Spade's murdered partner. Lee Patrick, who plays his secretary, played exactly the same role in the Bogart film. J. Edward Bromberg and George Macready double nicely for Lorre and Greenstreet, with virtually identical characters and dialogue; whether or not Marguerite Chapman follows in the deceitful path of Mary Astor is an element of surprise we won't comment on. The Black Bird is expanded into two bibles which contain a clue to a local painting but otherwise there are few basic changes; even the climax is concerned more with the solving of the mystery than an actionless disposal of the villains. With sharp dialogue and neat playing, this is a crisp and entertaining programmer which doesn't deserve its long obscurity. It was the last film of the curious and erratic emigre director Lothar Mendes (best films, probably "Payment Deferred" and "The Man Who Could Work Miracles") whose twenty year career produced about twenty movies.

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

THE EX-MRS BRADFORD (Rko Radio, 1936) Directed by Stephen Roberts; Screenplay by Anthony Veiller; Camera, J. Roy Hunt. 80 mins.
With: William Powell (Dr. Bradford); Jean Arthur (Mrs Bradford); James Gleason (Inspector Corrigan); Eric Blore (Stokes); Robert Armstrong (Nick Martel); Lila Lee (Miss Prentiss); Erin O'Brien (Mrs. Bradford); Lucille Gleason (Mrs Hutchins); Frank M. Thomas (Mike North); Frankie Darro (Salsbury); Frank Reicher (Harry Strand); Charles Richman (Turf Club president); John Sheehan (Murphy); Paul Fix (Lou Fender).

What an endorsement for the star system 1936 was! Apart from this one, William Powell turned up in "The Great Ziegfeld", "After the Thin Man", "My Man Godfrey" and "Libelled Lady" in that one year, and Jean Arthur likewise had five biggies to her credit, including "Mr Deeds Goes to Town" and "The Plainsman"!

If "It Happened One Night" and "My Man Godfrey" could be considered the two films of major influence on the screwball comedy genre, then certainly "The Thin Man" was the comparable influential ancestor in the realm of urbane comedy mysteries. But while too many of the comedies were merely lazy ripoffs, the best of the many movie descendants merely used "The Thin Man" as a creative launching pad and then took off on their own. Among the best were a brace that director Roberts and star Powell made for Rko, tonight's film and a predecessor "Star of Midnight" (with Ginger Rogers). Here, Powell's smooth polish makes a particularly felicitous combination with Arthur's scatterbrained vivacity; even their voices, his dulcet, hers aggressive and husky, work well together, suggesting both the differences that broke up their marriage (before the credits) and the mutual attraction that will bring them together again. It was the kind of opposites-attract chemistry that worked so well for Claudette Colbert and Fred MacMurray, and it's a pity that the Powell/ Arthur collaboration was never repeated. Rko added a note of genuine novelty by placing in the cast a suave, co-operative, friendly non-suspect, who, in every other mystery he ever made, possessed those same characteristics and (of course) turned out to be the murderer! His usage here leads us nicely up the garden path. In one sense, the two Powells at Rko (and especially tonight's film) quite outdid the original "Thin Man" - surely no other films ever, have contained quite so much non-stop cocktail tipping. Starting as soon as the credits are over, they are drowned out by potato chips, making it a source of
wonderment that Powell and Arthur can draw enough sober breaths to stand upright, let alone solve a complicated series of murders. Despite the several killings, and an ingenious method of murder (which doesn't seem to be too feasible), the tone is essentially light, and the NY Times considered it one of the year's best comedies rather than one of the best thrillers.

Stephen Roberts, a graduate of 2-reel comedies, was one of the major new directorial talents of the 30's, demonstrating not only directorial flair and a nice sense of pacing, but also taste and sophistication in the dozen features that he directed over only a four-year period. Sadly, death brought his promising career to an abrupt end; "The Ex-Mrs Bradford" was his last film. It's purely coincidental that the other film tonight was also its director's last, but it provides a little additional cohesion between the two, and it's nice that both directors had such satisfying finales to their careers.

"The Ex-Mrs Bradford", since we planned it for this series, has emerged on video-cassette, so the chances of its theatrical and TV exposure in the future grow dimmer. It's the kind of elegant film that belongs on a big screen. Our print is a good one, though there are some mild sound track scratches at times that create different results on different projectors. If there is an occasional surface noise, bear in mind that it's in the print, not in its handling by our projectionist.

William K. Everson

Program ends 9:52.