SITTING PRETTY (Paramount, 1935) Directed by Harry Joe Brown; produced by Charles R. Rogers; Screenplay by Jack McGowan, S.J. Perelman and Lou Breslow, from a story by Nina Wilcox Putnam; Camera, Milton Kramer; Songs by Mack Gordon and Harry Warren, by Edward Heyman; With: Jack Oakie (Chick Parker); Jack Haley (Peter Pendleton); Ginger Rogers (Dorothy); Thelma Todd (Gloria); Gregory Ratoff (Tannenbaum); Lew Cody (Jules Clark); Harry Revel (Harry, the pianist); Mack Gordon (Meyers); Hale Hamilton (Vinton); Walter Walker (George Wilson); Kenneth Thomson (Norman Lubin); William B. Davidson (director); Lee Moran (Assistant director); Irving Bacon and Stuart Holmes (Dice players); Guest stars: The Pickens Sisters, Arthur Jarrett, Virginia Sale; and Fuzzy Knight, Harvey Clark, Wade Boteler, Russ Fowall, Frank Lawton, Anne Nagel, Sidney Bracey, Rolio Lloyd, Lee Phelps, Paul Change, Beno Bremer, O'Brien; Anthony Holley, Benny Hall, Larry Steers, Charles Coleman, Frank Hagney, James Burtis, Joyce Matthews.

In the early to mid 30's Hollywood was virtually inundated with musicals and comedies about itself. "Sitting Pretty" is both more elaborate and more amiable than most, and the song titles alone (with the exception of "Did You Hear About a Man Named Al "Dream Walking?" of course) stress that the film is dealing in relatively honest terms with the mass manufacture of material rather than the creation of art. Both Oakie and Haley were more familiar as the second-string buddy of a bigger star, and it's off-beat to say the least to see them teamed in the leads. Haley was always a very useful if relatively talentless type, and as usual he lacks sparkle, but the slack is more than taken up by Oakie, Rogers and of course Thelma Todd. It's a slick, breezy, pre-Code production, and excitement, no demand for. The climactic production number bears a more than coincidental relationship to Busby Berkeley's "Spin a Little Web of Dreams" number in "Fashions of 1934", which was released about a month later. It's difficult, with both films clearly in production at the same time, to know who stole what from whom. Berkeley's number has his usual "plot" and structure, and the Paramount number is a little rambling and untidy. Too, Berkeley's girls were more uniform in basic height and size, whereas Paramount's are more inconsistent, and probably include a few producers' girl friends who got into the chorus line despite being too tall or too wide. But there's room for both approaches, and we're certainly not complaining. The one consistency in both numbers is to discard as many feathers as possible.

---Ten Minute Intermission---

IN OLD KENTUCKY (Fox, 1935) Directed by George Marshall; Screenplay by Sam Hellman and Gladys Lehman, with additional dialogue by Henry Johnson, from the play by Charles T. Dazezy; Camera, L.W. O'Connell; Musical director, Arthur Lange; 84 mins.

With Will Rogers (Steve Tapley); Dorothy Wilson (Nancy Martinage); Russell Hardie (Dr. Andrews); Bill Robinson (Wash); Louise Henry (Arlene Shattuck); Alan Dinehart (Chick Doherty); Charles Sellen (Ezra); Charles Richman (Pole Shattuck); Esther Dale (Dolly Breckenridge); Etienne Girardot (Pluvius J. Aspiration; the rain maker); John Ince (Sheriff); Raymond Nye (deputy); Edward LeBaron (Professor George I. Case); Stanley Blystone, Fritz Johnson, Everett Sullivan, William Worthington, Bobby Rose, Dora Clement, Ned Norton, Eddie Tamblyn, Brooks Benedict, Larry Steers, William Norton Bailey, Jack Byron, James Ford, Frances Morris, Charles Mcclurphy.

By the mid-30's, the Will Rogers formular was beginning to wear a little thin, and Fox had taken to starring him in comedies like "Handy Andy" and "Dubbing Thomas" which took him out of his rural surroundings and seemed a little labored. There's no doubt that Henry King's "State Fair", his two for James Curoe and the trio for John Ford, were his best - but "In Old Kentucky", though slight, is thoroughly typical Rogers fare, and released after his tragic death, provided a more than fitting swan-song to his career.

Fox, and later 20th Century Fox, were forever buying up old properties that, by virtue of their reputations, seemed ideal for their top stars - and then using little more than the title. The Shirley Temple films "Poor Little Rich Girl" and "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm", both based on novels that had served as Mary Pickford vehicles, were typical. They pulled something of the same stunt here with a turn-of-the-century play that had already been filmed twice in the silent era, one of them already updated to bring in a post-World War I angle. But enough of the spirit of the play remains to make a very satisfying Rogers vehicle, though the suspense/comedy angles of the climactic race could have been exploited a little more than they were, and the occasionally tiresome one-note comedy of Charles Sellen could have been edited down a bit. But it's still a most pleasing film, not least because of the charming and graceful presence of the much under-rated (and under-used) Dorothy Wilson. The dancing of Bill Robinson is a major asset, though the number of times he is called "boy" is a little embarrassing today! The big comedy set-piece in the pool, with Will Rogers in black-face, was frequently edited out in its entirety when the film first hit television.

(Cont. overleaf)
The print is particularly good and fully complete. Incidentally, one horse-fall is particularly spectacular and has the look of a stunt that went partially away.

---- William K. Everson

Note: because of the changed venue for this showing only, as announced last week, we are starting the show ten minutes later than usual and also adding a cartoon to the beginning of the program to accommodate late-comers who might be unaware of the change. This means that the program will end at approx. 10:50, too late for a discussion session, but some of the points I meant to cover are discussed below.

Because the New School Summer Bulletins have been out for three weeks now, there is no need to reprint in abbreviated form, as we usually do, our Summer series. If you don't have a copy of the Bulletin yet, you can pick one up in the lobby today. As usual, The Summer Series is a mixture of repeats (though all of them shown about 15 years ago, so they'll be new to many of you) and films that are new for us. It's a relatively unspectacular series since many of you are away over the Summer and I'd hate to have you wait another 15 years before we repeated something really unusual. One other restriction applies too: to prevent complications or let-downs, I only use films that I can have on hand at the beginning of the series, with all notes written ahead of time. As usual I will be away most of the Summer (possibly back for the last two programs) but as in the recent past, Rick Kramer, a veteran of film series at the Academy of Arts in Honolulu, will be coming in to project and supervise. I can't foresee any problems, but if we should have any equipment breakdown over the Summer, as happened to sabotage our screening of "Behold My Wife" some months back, be assured that any such film(s) will be re-scheduled, at a free show, and that such announcements will be made at the beginning of the Fall season.

Secondly, some comments about economics. (Don't worry, this is not a preamble to announcing an admissions increase!) This is our 22nd year of operations with these film series. During that time, there has been only one budget increase for the series, and that well over fifteen years ago. In the interim rental prices have soared, and more importantly, less and less material has been available. This has meant paying special clearances to get some films, bringing others in from Europe, buying prints outright on occasion. So that on top of other expenses (including shipping charges, and fees to the generous and underpaid Stuart Oderman for his pianist chores) it's increasingly tough to balance the budget, and indeed it wouldn't be possible without kind friends who sometimes loan films. I'm sure if I were to push for a budget increase I'd get it, but it would immediately be passed on in the form of an upper admission fee, which I am extremely reluctant to contemplate.

There is, however, a solution which I hope you'll agree is the best all round, namely to cut our regular series from 11 shows to 10, and our Summer shows (though not this Summer) from seven shows to six. Actually it's not so much of a retreat as a retrenchment as it takes us back to where we were before. Recall that when I instituted the "Archive Night" programs they were added without upping the overall series subscription because I felt that they were of primarily academic interest and should be regarded as something of a bonus. But they have proven to be quite popular as well as, I hope, valuable, and have found their own little niche in our showings. So cutting back to where we were before will give us a little more budget money to play with, and will only delay rather than eliminate a couple of films per series. I hope this meets with everyone's approval.

Series #60 in the Fall is a really good one and should keep everyone happy. The details will be printed on the reverse of the last set of notes for the Summer series, but in all probability the Fall Bulletin will be out and available before that.

Have a good Summer. I'll be doing film series in Switzerland and Luxembourg in June, and San Francisco in August, so may well run into some of you there!