It has been some years since we ran a program devoted exclusively to independent films made here on the East Coast. Most of them are quite simple and unpretentious - wherein of course lies much of their charm - but they gain in being run side by side, so that one has more examples of how they made a great deal out of very little. The title does not refer to a pioneer of this institution, then just five years old, but it provides a pleasant vehicle for Charles "Chic" Sale, the writer and vaudevillian who actually does not make a particularly likable hero, but was much more effective when he donned whiskers (as in "The Star Witness", "When a Feller Needs a Friend" and "Treasure Island") to become a grizzled old-timer and philosopher - something of a combination of Will Rogers and Gabby Hayes. But at least this is a rare opportunity to see him without makeup. The film is also the earliest extant example of the work of its director, Gregory La Cava, and while there is nothing in it to suggest the screwball comedy genius of the 30's (or the maker of such serious works as "Private Worlds" and "Stage Door"), it is an ably directed film, making the most of its Long Island country lanes, swimming holes and pastoral backgrounds. In such a film, economy usually shows only in the casting and in scenes of potential spectacle. The cast is certainly adequate, but apart from Sale, only Leslie King (a primarily East Coast actor whom we'll see again shortly in Griffith's "America") is fairly familiar. As for spectacle, there's a good deal more smoke than fire in the climactic blazing school sequence, but it works well enough. The greatest appeal of the film is of course its Long Island location and studio work - authority and writer Kenneth Scott has more to say about that in a note he has written that appears overleaf - and the sheer visual beauty of the print itself, a fine toned original. The smaller the image, the better these old toned prints look - their crystal clarity, reflections on the water, sunlight streaming through the trees, give it the look of life itself, seen through a window. Some of this beauty recedes as the image gets larger, but it should still look most impressive on our big screen. What a pity that it is only the lesser films that seem to survive in such pristine condition, mainly because they were screened so relatively infrequently. Imagine having a "Beggars of Life", a "Metropolis" or a "Three Bad Men" looking like this!

"Ten Minute Intermission"

_Madonnas and Men_ (Jans Pictures Inc., 1920) Produced and Directed by B.A. Rolfe; Scenario by Violet Clark from a story by Carey Wilson and Edmund Goulding; Camera, A.A. Ceddi; 60 mins approx.

With: Edmund Love (Gordon/Gordon Turner); Anders Randolf (Turner/Marshall Turner); Gustav von Seyffertitz (Grimaldo/John Grimm); Raye Dean (Laura/Laura Grimm); Evan-Burrows Fontaine (Nerissa/Ninon); Blanche Davenport (Mrs Grimm); Paire Binney (Patsy)

Shot at the Peerless Studios in Fort Lee, New Jersey, "Madonnas and Men" is a fascinating oddity that both predates and reverses the double procedure. Here a debunked Rome is given a prophetic vision of New York in the 20's and is so appalled at what it sees that it decides to mend its ways. The subtiles that introduce the film also indicate that its makers knew their Griffith, and we are informed that no civilisation based on the debasement of womanhood can survive! It's a cunning and ingenious film for an independent, managing to create the impression of a bigger budget than it could possibly have, and it was the recipient of one of the strangest reviews "Variety" ever gave any film in its long history. The review starts out as an absolute rave, saying that Jans is to be congratulated on having made such a film, that it is an exhibitors' dream and that it undoubtedly make a fortune. Then it proceeds to dissect it bit by bit, calling attention to all of its flaws, and even commenting on the hypocrisy of its "debasement of womanhood" subtiles saying, in effect, that that is precisely what Hollywood does! It also says that its live prologue (involving on-stage horses and chariots on a treadmill) is good but far too short, while the rest of the film is far too long and needs cutting before release. Presumably the latter was taken to heart, as its original 7 reels is now 5, and even allowing for the fact that the episodic story makes cutting easy, does make sense and seems complete - except for the strange red- edit that took shots of a lady disrobing behind a screen in her bedroom and re-arranged them so that they appeared to be part of the floor show. Rolfe, who also directed, had only a handful of features and a Houdini serial to his credit, but the parent company, Jans, who handled the film on a states rights basis, had a happy knack of making independent films like this with just enough star value and apparent production values to really clean up with smaller exhibitory. Jans! "Harried"! (with Constance Bennett and Owen Moore, a film we showed some years back) was probably his best. Evan-Burrows Fontaine, a noted dancer of the day, garnered lots of attention - and there else can you get Anders Randolf dying of
apoplexy bursas in one movie! None of it makes very much sense, but it creates its illusion of size without recourse to stock shots, and deserves admiration for that. New York locations, apart from some Riverside Drive shots, aren't as abundant as the Long Island countryside was in the co-features. Only Edmund Lowe really lets the side down. Still relatively fresh to movies (this was only his fifth film, though his biggest part, since 1915) Lowe plays it stiffly, possibly against his own idol style, although his ill writen part doesn't help him. But he made four films in 1920, and by 1925 was up to eleven, clearly signalling a preference to movies over the stage. His relaxed performance in last week's "Guilty As Hell" (1922) makes an interesting comparison with the artificial one here.

THE YOUNG PAINTER (Triart Productions for Kodakin release, 1922) Directed by Herbert Blaché; Story: Arthur Maude; Camera: Ned Van Buren; Art Direction: Lejarre A. Miller. 20 mins; With Mary Astor, Pierre Gendron.

We don't usually conclude our programs with a short, but this one seemed a particularly pleasing way of winding up this program. It's part of a minor but very enjoyable series of 2-reelers that purported to tell the stories behind great paintings, or their influence in later years. Most of them starred Mary Astor, and one or two featured up-and-coming newcomers like Reginald Denny. It's fairly safe to say that the visual quality dominates - pictorial compositions frequently try to emulate the style of the painter involved, and exterior rural scenes are likewise pleasingly designed. Thus the influence of art director Miller and cameraman Van Buren, who worked on the whole series, was perhaps more important than that of the directors. Incidentally, when Mary Astor did a scene in "Sunset Boulevard" in the 50's, footage from one of this series - "Hope" - was used to illustrate the young Norma Desmond. Except that they botched it, and when the "They had faces then!" line came up, it was not Astor's face that appeared on the screen!

Program ends approx. 10.15. Discussion follows.

Please note: Because of prior booking of the auditorium for another function, our Oct. 25th Halloween program will be transferred to the 5th Avenue Cinema venue, just a few minutes walk away. We'll start about 6 minutes later for the benefit of those who don't find in out in advance. We'll also list (on our next notes) those nights when a Jazz Concert precedes our screening ... and we hope to have good news about the price-increase problem next week too.

Professor Kenneth Scott, formerly of Long Island University, and an authority on (in particular) East Coast studies and films based on the novels of Zane Grey and James Fenimore Cooper, has kindly provided this note on the studio and locations involved in "The New Schoolteacher". (Some material from George P. Miller's "Greater Ridgewood Locality and Place Names", Glendale, NY, 1987)

Produced at Burr's Glendale Studio, 3021 Myrtle Avenue (later 88-43 Myrtle Avenue), Glendale, Queens, NYC, in late July and early August 1923, and at various locations in Queens and Nassau Counties. The Bellrose, Long Island, station on the Long Island Railroad appears in one scene.

The Glendale Studio, originally known as the Mirror Studio, was built in 1916 on a site once occupied by William Riebling's Greater New York Park and Casino. Some of the Casino buildings were converted to stages, dressing rooms, a laboratory, and offices. During World War I the Mirror Film Company, which owned and operated the studio, went bankrupt and it was taken over by the Emancipation Film Corporation. For a time, Emancipation leased the studio to Wistaria Films (the serial The Lurking Peril, with George Larkin and Ann Luther, was made there in 1919) and later sold the property to Charles C. Burr, the producer, in June 1922. Burr bought a dozen films at the studio, including Luck, with Burr's favorite comic star, Johnny Barnes. In the autumn of 1922, sometime in 1924 the property reverted back to Emancipation Films which again sold it, this time to the producer Whitman Bennett in July 1925, for the alleged sum of $110,000. Several films were made there during the next six months but the studio constantly operated at a loss, and Bennett shut down the Glendale Studio in April 1926. Several months later he declared bankruptcy. In the late 1920s, the larger of the two stages at the studio became the Sportland Dance Hall, but nothing of the original casino, the studio, or the dance pavilion remains. Everything was destroyed in the early 1930s to make way for the Interboro Trolley; and streets were quickly laid out on several acres of open land which had surrounded the studio. Now modest one- and two-family houses, most of them semi-attached, occupy the site where the bustling "Chic" Sale attempted to woo attractive Folly Archer.