LIFE WITH HENRY (Paramount, 1941)Produced and Directed by Theodore Reed; Original story and screenplay by Don Hartman and Clifford Goldsmith; Camera, Leo Tover; 51 mins.; NY premiere, Criterion Theatre, Feb. '41.
With Jackie Cooper (Henry Aldrich); Leila Ernst (Kathleen Anderson); Eddie Bracken (Dizzy); Fred Niblo (Mr. Aldrich); Hedda Hopper (Mrs. Aldrich); Kay Stewart (Mary Aldrich); Moroni Olsen (Sylvanus Satherwaite); Rand Brooks (Daniel Gordon); Pierre Watkin (Mr. Anderson); Etta McDaniel (Cleo); George Meader (Mr. Allen); Edith Evanson (Anna); Rod Cameron (Bill van Dusen)Frank New York (Joe Oye); Lucien Littlefield (Stevens); Doris Lloyd (Mrs. Anderson); Thurston Hall (Mr. Woodring); Minifred Harris (Mrs. Woodring); Theodore von Eltz (Mr. Rapaport); Mary Quirrier (Mrs. Rapaport); Hanley Stafford (Theatre Manager); Wanda McKay (Girl on stage).

Whether there is still an audience for the "family" films of the thirties and forties we will find out this evening, perhaps disastrously, but regardless our two films this evening are among the best of their type, and far superior to the general run of Jones, Higgins and other proliferating families that were eventually joined by Britain's Ruggetts. The first of the Henry Aldrich films was "Life With Henry", made in 1939, also with Cooper and the same director and based on a successful Broadway play. The play initially spawned a radio series. The first film was distinguished by the presence of Betty Field and a Wilder/Brackett script, but wasn't quite as good as the second film in the series - if indeed a series was planned at that time. After this second film, the Aldrich films did become a regular series, with Jimmy Lydon starring, and entertaining though many of them were, they were definitely "B"s. "Life With Henry" is good enough to have stood on its own as an "A" feature, and one of its major assets is the excellent comedic work of Eddie Bracken, who in at least one sequence provides a sort of comic pathos that he was to do so well for Preston Sturges in a year or so. And family behaviour may - unfortunately - have changed a lot since 1941, but the film, apart from being quite sensitive, is well served by an excellent cast of veterans. However one wonders about the logic of casting Rod Cameron, whom Paramount had introduced in 1940 and seemed to be grooming for romantic leads, as a near-Gabby Hayes old-timer! He's surprisingly good in the role, especially for such a newcomer, but inevitably his youthfulness shows through the makeup.

--- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

THE HARDYS RIDE HIGH (MG M, 1939)Directed by George B. Seitz; produced by Lou Ostror; Screenplay by Agnes Christine Johnson, Kay Van Ripper and William Ludwig, based on characters created by Anawanda Rouvel; Camera, Lester White; 80 mins.; NY premiere, Capitol Theatre, April 1939.
With: Will Stone (Judge Hardy); Mickey Rooney (Andy Hardy); Cecilia Parker (Vian Hardy); Fay Holden (Mrs. Hardy); Ann Rutherford (Polly Benedict); Sarah Haden (Aunt Miltie); Virginia Grey (Consuela McNeal); Minor Watson (Mr. Archer); John King (Philip Westcott); John T.Murray (Don Davis); Hallwell Robbes (Dobbs); George Irving (Mr. Bonell); Alleen Pringle (Miss Booth); Marsh Hent (Susan Bowen); Don Briggs (Caleb Bowen); William Orr (Dick Bannerm); Truman Bradley (sales clerk); Erville Alderson (Infield); Hale Hamilton (Archer); Don Castle (Dennis Hunt); Frances McNamara (Emma girl); Mary Tanner (Desk clerk); Ann Morris (Rosemund); Phil Reed (Driver); Alex Pollard (Bad Wailer).

The Hardy Family films are often referred to as MGM "B"s, but they were hardly that - except perhaps in comparison with the deluxe "A"s. They were enormously popular, and tonight's entry was the sixth in the series of six, starting in 1937 (with the only one to run less than 7 reels, and thus perhaps technically qualifying as a "B") and really finishing in 1946, though there was one final wrap-up entry, minus Lewis Stone, in 1958. They owed a lot to their casts, most especially Lewis Stone (and the frequent newcomers who were introduced and tried out as stepping stones to stardom). Considering that their time span covered the depression and the war years, they were remarkably trivial in their plotting and basically divorced from their period. Andy's recurring problems may have been amusing then, but many of them today are dated and irritating. Fortunately, despite its stereotypical nature, Lewis Stone's Judge Hardy kept everything pleasant and wisely on track, and the Hardy family never came up against the psychoses and neuroses that plagued Dr. Kildare and Dr. Gillespie. (Happily too, Beryl Mercer was never introduced as Grandma; with her whining she could have destroyed the series with problems. Oh no! The little town of Carvel (introduced in Janet Gaynor's "Small Town Girls"), its inhabitants' everyday problems, the unrelated depression, were a pleasing escape from it, and probably Louis B. Mayer was the series' greatest fan. Arguably, the first one, and two from 1939, tonight's film and "Andy Hardy Gets Spring Fever", were the best in the series. The moralising in "The Hardys Ride High" comes a little more naturally from the plot than usual, Sarah Haden gets probably her best opportunity in the whole series, and the blending of fun, sentimental asides and drama is neatly done. It may also be a mild concession to an element of realism that the Hardy's wild spree in the big city takes place not in New York, Los Angeles or San Francisco, but in - of all places - Detroit! Not only were the Hardys prolific - they brought two series in 1939 - but they wasted no time getting into theatres. This one was begun in mid-January, completed within a month, had rewrites in February, and was playing in theatres by April 14.

--- William K. Everson

Program ends 10:30 a.m. Brief discussion period follows.
A reminder: as with all our triple bills, next week's program will start promptly at 7:30 without an introduction. Five minutes between films; finish at approx. 10:50.