

Chronological Biography of

Gertrude Homan Thanhouser

April 23, 1882 to May 29, 1951

by Q. David Bowers

Edited by Edwin W. Thanhouser
April 2005

GERTRUDE (HOMAN) THANHOUSER BIOGRAPHY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	III
GERTRUDE HOMAN THANHOUSER (MRS. EDWIN).....	1
THANHOUSER CAREER SYNOPSIS	1
BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY	1
FILMOGRAPHY WITH THANHOUSER	2
GERTRUDE’S EARLY LIFE.....	3
1882: BORN IN NEW ORLEANS	3
1888: ON THE STAGE AT AGE SIX IN NEW YORK	3
1888: ON THE WEST COAST	3
1888: WITH SALVINI.....	4
1888: SINGING TO THOMAS A. EDISON.....	4
1890: <i>BOOTLES' BABY, LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY & THE BURGLAR</i>	4
1892: <i>PYGMALION, ROMEO AND JULIET, THE CHILDHOOD OF JACK HARCKAWAY</i>	5
HER SCRAPBOOK	6
EDWIN AND GERTRUDE’S ROMANCE	7
1898: EDWIN THANHOUSER AND THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC IN MILWAUKEE	7
1898: GERTRUDE JOINS THANHOUSER-HATCH STOCK COMPANY	7
1899: EDWIN’S COURTSHIP OF GERTRUDE	8
1900: GERTRUDE MARRIES EDWIN	11
1902: EDWIN AND GERTRUDE’S FIRST CHILD: LLOYD FRANK	12
1906: EDWIN AND GERTRUDE’S SECOND CHILD: MARIE LOUISE	12
THEATRE MANAGEMENT IN MILWAUKEE AND CHICAGO.....	12
1905: SHUBERT TAKES OVER THE ACADEMY	12
1906: SHUBERT THEATRE OPENS FOR BUSINESS	12
1907: EDWIN THANHOUSER TAKES OVER THE STAR THEATRE.....	13
1907: EXIT MILWAUKEE FOR CHICAGO BUSH TEMPLE THEATRE	14
THANHOUSERS MOVE TO NEW YORK, ENTER FILM BUSINESS	15
1909: ENTERING THE FILM BUSINESS	15
1909: MOVING TO NEW ROCHELLE.....	15
1909: THANHOUSER COMPANY INCORPORATED.....	17
1909 TO 1912: GERTRUDE AND EARLY THANHOUSER FILMS	18
1910: <i>Featured in St. Elmo</i>	19
1910: <i>Scenario Writer for The Winter’s Tale</i>	19
1911: RAISING LLOYD AND MARIE	20
1911: THANHOUSER INCREASES OUTPUT AND QUALITY	20
THANHOUSER SELLS TO THE MUTUAL FILM CORPORATION.....	22
MARCH 30, 1912: A MEETING OF INDEPENDENT MANUFACTURES.....	22
APRIL 6, 1912: HARRY E. AITKEN INTERVIEW	22
APRIL 11, 1912: THANHOUSER SELLS TO CHARLES F. HITE OF MUTUAL	23
APRIL 15, 1912: THANHOUSER PURCHASE BY HITE EFFECTIVE	24
APRIL 15, 1912: THANHOUSER GALA BALL	25
APRIL 20, 1912: FROM MAIN STREET TO WALL STREET	27
UNDER THE MUTUAL BANNER	28

SEPTEMBER 10, 1912: QUALITY SUFFERS.....	28
NOVEMBER 30, 1912: GERTRUDE AND EDWIN SET SAIL FOR EUROPE.....	29
JANUARY 13, 1913: WHEN THE STUDIO BURNED	29
1914: EDWIN AND GERTRUDE WRITE FROM EUROPE.....	30
JULY 29, 1914: THE TRUST FLEXES ITS MUSCLES	31
AUGUST 21, 1914: CHARLES J. HITE DIES FROM AUTO ACCIDENT.....	31
EDWIN AND GERTRUDE RETURN TO AMERICA	32
AUGUST 1914: THE WORLD WAR AND ESCAPE FROM EUROPE	32
SEPTEMBER 1914: RETURN TO NEW ROCHELLE.....	34
FEBRUARY 21, 1915: EDWIN AND GERTRUDE RETURN TO THANHOUSER.....	34
1915: GERTRUDE AS SCENARIO WRITER.....	35
<i>May 2, 1915: Their One Love</i>	35
<i>May 25, 1915: Fairy Fern Seed</i>	36
<i>June 7, 1915: The Patriot and the Spy</i>	36
<i>September 5, 1915: From the River's Depths</i>	37
<i>September 30, 1915: The Price of Her Silence</i>	37
1916: EDWIN AND GERTRUDE MEET THE PRESIDENT	37
1916: A YEAR OF TRANSITION	38
1917: THANHOUSER OPERATIONS WIND DOWN	39
1917: THANHOUSER EXITS THE INDUSTRY	40
EDWIN AND GERTRUDE'S RETIREMENT	41
1916: BAYVILLE, LONG ISLAND	41
1924: AROUND THE WORLD	42
1925: SANDS POINT, LONG ISLAND	43
1925: THANHOUSER NEGATIVES DESTROYED.....	43
1927/1928: AROUND THE WORLD, AGAIN	43
1930: AN INTERVIEW WITH EDWIN THANHOUSER.....	43
1938: NEW ROCHELLE 250 TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION	44
1941: EDWIN THANHOUSER-ART COLLECTOR	44
1945: ONE FIFTH AVENUE.....	45
1947: EDWIN THANHOUSER INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT HAMILTON BALL.....	45
1949: IN BUENOS AIRES.....	45
1951: GERTRUDE'S DEATH.....	46
GERTRUDE'S FAMILY	46
APPENDIX - FILMOGRAPHY OF GERTRUDE THANHOUSER.....	1
ST. ELMO (CAST MEMBER)	1
THE WINTER'S TALE (SCENARIO WRITER).....	3
THEIR ONE LOVE (SCENARIO WRITER)	8
FAIRY FERN SEED (SCENARIO WRITER)	11
THE PATRIOT AND THE SPY (SCENARIO WRITER)	12
FROM THE RIVER'S DEPTHS (SCENARIO WRITER).....	17
THE PRICE OF HER SILENCE (SCENARIO WRITER).....	18

Foreword

The Thanouser Company, including its successor, Mutual's Thanouser Film Corporation, was an extraordinarily active and energetic film company that thrived from 1909 through 1917 in New Rochelle, New York. Founders Edwin and Gertrude Thanouser were the first heads of an American motion picture studio that had a substantial background in the theater. They were an important leader in the rebellion of the "Independents" against the Motion Picture Patents group associated with Thomas Edison. Thanouser produced and released to world-wide distribution over 1,000 silent films. Of those productions, the extant collection of 185 Thanouser prints is located in archives and private collections around the globe.

Edwin Thanouser was the business manager and the public ambassador for the company during his tenure as its president from 1909 to 1913 and again from 1915 to 1918. But it was his wife, Gertrude Homan Thanouser, who was the unsung "behind the scenes" hero. She was an actress, scenario writer, film editor, and studio executive, as well as mother to their two children. While a lot is known about Edwin Thanouser because of his public image representing the company, little is known about Gertrude's life story and her contributions to the Thanouser film enterprise and the early motion picture industry.

This biography was gleaned from hundreds of articles found on the CD-ROM: *Thanouser Films: An Encyclopedia and History* by Q. David Bowers. I remain eternally grateful to Dave Bowers for his exhaustive research on Thanouser that resulted in the most complete research effort on an early American motion picture company. It is to his credit that this comprehensive perspective on Gertrude Thanouser's contribution to early film is possible.

Minor editing and organization changes were done to make the multitude of articles flow together to tell her story. Footnotes and bibliographic entries reflect the primary sources for material as documented by Bowers. My intent is to provide the most complete picture of Gertrude's life circumstances as documented by work she is publicly credited for and by filling in the gaps with the relevant historical facts where she was in all likelihood an integral participant. Most of Bower's work is written from the perspective of Edwin Thanouser since he was the more prominent public representative. But, to be sure, Gertrude was at his side as a loyal companion, confidant and creative contributor to the success of the enterprise.

It is my hope that this work will help reveal the absolutely critical role she played in the success of Thanouser and as a woman film pioneer as the movies transitioned from 1910's "one-reelers" at nickelodeons to multi-reel feature films showcased in movie palaces just a few short years later.

Edwin Way Thanouser
Portland, Oregon
April 2005

Gertrude Homan Thanhouser (Mrs. Edwin)

Actress, scenario writer, film editor, executive

April 23, 1882 to May 29, 1951

Thanhouser Career Synopsis

Mrs. Edwin Thanhouser, wife of the Thanhouser Company's founder Edwin Thanhouser, was active in the firm's business from 1909 to 1912 and again from 1915 to 1918.

Biographical Summary

Mrs. Edwin Thanhouser, the former Gertrude Homan, had extensive stage experience and was a child star. She was born in Beauvoir, Mississippi on April 23, 1882. She soon moved north to Brooklyn, New York with her parents. At the age of six she played her first part on the stage. From then until she married Edwin Thanhouser 12 years later, she appeared in many productions, including the title roles in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *Editha's Burglar*.

In the late 1890s she joined the stock company at the Academy of Music in Milwaukee, which was managed by Edwin Thanhouser. Gertrude Homan married Edwin Thanhouser in Brooklyn on February 8, 1900. In the years at New Rochelle during the film business, she reviewed scripts, wrote scenarios, edited films, and helped Edwin Thanhouser in many ways. She acted in just one Thanhouser film, the 1910 release of *St. Elmo*.

In 1912, Edwin Thanhouser sold out to a combine headed by Charles J. Hite and retired from the motion picture business, taking his family on a grand tour of Europe, where he remained until World War I broke out in August 1914. He returned to America about the same time that Charles J. Hite was killed in an automobile accident. The stockholders of the Thanhouser Film Corporation asked Edwin Thanhouser to resume his old position as managing head of the company.

He did this early in 1915 with help from Gertrude who wrote several scenarios. But the film industry, its practices, and the tastes of the public had changed since Edwin and Gertrude had last been in films in 1912; Thanhouser's re-entry did not duplicate the success scored in earlier years. By autumn of 1917 Edwin Thanhouser and his secretary, Miss Jessie Bishop, were the only remaining employees at the studio, while he waited for his contract to expire. He remained until early 1918, when the Thanhouser Film Corporation was liquidated, with several hundred thousand dollars remaining on deposit in various accounts.

The New Rochelle city directories indicate that Edwin's widowed mother, Julia Thanhouser, lived in the Locust Apartments, 11 Locust Avenue, in 1916 and 1917. Edwin and Gertrude Thanhouser retired to Bayville, Long Island, New York in 1918, subsequently relocating in 1925 to Sands Point, New York. In 1945 he and his wife sold their Sands Point home. Within a year the couple moved to New York City and soon became residents of the One Fifth Avenue Hotel, where they lived for the remainder of their days. Edwin Thanhouser kept active in securities investments and enjoyed collecting

art. Gertrude Thanouser died on May 29, 1951, and Edwin passed away on March 21, 1956.

Filmography with Thanouser

1910: [St. Elmo](#) (3-22-1910), [The Winter's Tale](#) (5-27-1910)

1915: [Their One Love](#) (5-2-1915), [Fairy Fern Seed](#) (5-25-1915), [The Patriot and the Spy](#) (6-7-1915), [From the River's Depths](#) (9-5-1915), [The Price of Her Silence](#) (9-30-1915)

Gertrude's Early Life

1882: Born in New Orleans

Gertrude F. Homan was born in New Orleans, Louisiana on April 23, 1882, the daughter of George and Louise Homan. When she was four years old her parents moved north, where they settled in Brooklyn, New York.

1888: On the Stage at Age Six in New York

By the age of six she was on the stage in *Partners*, at the Madison Square Theatre in New York City. On April 25, 1888 the players in that production presented **Gertrude F. Homan** with a leather-bound scrapbook, which she used for the next decade to collect autographs and display letters she received. Many friends and fellow players wrote sentiments to her. May Robson expressed the hope "May your understudy never get a chance to play." On the same date this note was penned in florid script: "Dis ist mein little daughter! 'Partners.' A. Salvini."

1888: On the West Coast

The *Partners* Company went to the West Coast in the summer of the same year. An article in *The Daily Alta California*, August 10, 1888, relates: "The overland train that arrived shortly before 6 o'clock last evening brought to San Francisco the Palmer Dramatic Company, which is to open a season of five weeks at the Baldwin Theatre on Monday in their latest great success, *Partners*. With a few exceptions, the company is composed of the same talented artists who played such a successful engagement here two years ago...."

The Palmer Company, as now organized, is composed of the following ladies and gentlemen: J.H. Stoddard, Fred Robinson, Louis Massen, E.M. Holland, Walden Ramsey, C.P. Flockton, Herbert Millward, Harry Holliday, George S. Stevens, Mrs. E.J. Phillips, Marie Burroughs, Annie Russell, May Brooklyn, Virginia Buchanan, Clara Lipman, Kate Molony, Annie Homan, **Little Gertie Homan**, J.B. Hollis, and G.W. Presby.

The party left New York a week ago last Monday, and made the run with a stoppage of two days only in Chicago. From there they came through without a change of cars to Oakland.... Mr. Palmer said, "Our people have had a rest of over two months, and many of them have taken a run across the Atlantic during the vacation, and now return to work invigorated by the rest and change and with renewed ambition."

"I am told," said the reporter, "that you have a remarkable little lady in **Gertie Homan**; is that so?" "Indeed we have," said Mr. Palmer, enthusiastically. "She is a wonderful little woman - yes, little woman - for six years of age. We found her very entertaining on our trip, and she was the life of the party. You will see her in *Partners*."

1888: With Salvini

After the stint with his father, Alexander Salvini¹ established his own company. In 1886 he was engaged for a lengthy run at the Union Square Theatre, where he played the young priest in William Dean Howells' *A Foregone Conclusion*, Launcelot in George Parsons Winthrop's *Elaine*, the baron in *Jim, the Penman*, and Henri Borgfeldt in *Partners*, an 1888 play which also featured a young girl, **Gertrude F. Homan**.

1888: Singing to Thomas A. Edison

In an interview in 1930², **Gertrude Homan Thanouser** recalled an incident from her childhood: "Rather a curious coincidence that I should have been the first child to sing for Mr. Edison when he was making his experiments with the phonograph. I sang into a wax cylinder, in his Twenty Third Street studio, the lullaby that Editha lisps to the cracksman in the second act of *The Burglar*. That was in 1888. I was seven, and the inventor was 41.' Edison was presented to the former Editha and recalled the incident perfectly."

1890: *Bootles' Baby, Little Lord Fauntleroy & The Burglar*

An unattributed news clipping from late in the month of December 1890, saved by Gertrude's parents, told of her activities at the time:

One of the happiest young ladies in this town yesterday was **Miss Gertie Homan**, the charming little Brooklyn actress who plays the part of Mignon in *Bootles' Baby*. Her Christmas was one of the merriest. The members of the company, which is this week at the Amphion, and her many friends and admirers had fairly showered presents upon her, and from early morning until her eyes closed in slumber last night, she was the gayest of gay.

Gertie Homan is only eight years old, but she has been on the stage nearly two years. In that time she has developed a dramatic power which amazes all who see her. The best judges of acting in the country have spoken in the highest terms of her and predict for her a brilliant future. She is a beautiful little rose of the South transplanted to a Brooklyn home, with dark liquid eyes, capable of expressing any emotion, and a wealth of black hair that falls over her shoulder in wavy ringlets. Her elocution is excellent, and her power of facial expression something worth traveling miles to see.

She has played several parts in her brief career and all of them well. Her Little Lord Fauntleroy is believed to be as fine an impersonation of the character as has yet been seen, and as Editha, in *The Burglar*, she has won golden opinions. **Gertie** is a member of the Madison Square Company and has traveled all over the country with her parents. Her parents are Creoles and formerly lived on the Gulf Coast. They were near neighbors of Jefferson Davis, their home, Sea View, being

¹ By 1893, Alessandro Salvini, referred to in the American press as Alexander Salvini, was one of the better-known stage performers in America. Born in Rome on December 21, 1861, he was the son of Tomasso Salvini, the celebrated tragedian.

² *The New York Sun*, May 30, 1930 by Bob Davis

separated from Beauvoir [Davis' estate near Biloxi, Mississippi] by only one other residence. **Gertie** is the youngest of ten children. Her father disposed of his property in the South a few years ago, and, bringing his family north, settled in Brooklyn. Here he found a large Southern colony and many friends. The family resides at 452 Wythe Avenue, and it was there that **Gertie** enjoyed her Christmas....

Another undated, unattributed clipping from the era gives a review of **Gertrude F. Homan** as Little Lord Fauntleroy in the play of the same title: "*Little Lord Fauntleroy* was presented to an appreciative audience at Ming's last night. The story is an interesting one and is nicely dramatized. The fact that the leading role is assumed by so young a character makes the play the more interesting. Miss **Gertie Homan** played the part of Cedric Errol, Lord Fauntleroy, in a most pleasing manner. She won the admiration of the audience from the start. Her acting is so graceful and her style so charming. Much could be said of this little actress that could hardly be said of many older ones now playing as stars. Frank E. Aiken, as the Earl of Dorrincourt, presents a splendid portraiture of the gouty and irascible English nobleman...."

A further unattributed clipping notes: "*The Burglar* at the Madison Square Theatre has made so popular a success that the chances are that it will run through the summer's heated term with good financial results. Gus Thomas, author of the play, has every reason to feel proud of the success his work has made.... On Fourth of July night the receipts were the greatest in the history of the house as compared to those of other 'Fourths.' Mr. Barrymore, as the burglar, gives us another of the strongly drawn characters of which his Capt. Swift is a good illustration.... One of the chief attractions of the piece, however, is the wonderful performance of little **Gertie Homan** as Editha, and so great is her success that she has been re-engaged for the coming season. Sydney Drew, who made a hit as the young lawyer, has also been re-engaged. There is no doubt of *The Burglar's* future."

1892: *Pygmalion, Romeo and Juliet, The Childhood of Jack Harckaway*

In April 1892 she was on the stage in New York City, where at Palmer's Theatre *Pygmalion* and *Galatea* was presented for the benefit of the Actors' Fund. **Gertie Homan** took the part of Myrine, *Pygmalion's* sister. An unattributed New York City newspaper clipping, dated April 27th, preserved by Miss Homan's parents, told of **Gertie's** performance:

The most artistic piece of acting in the play was done by little **Gertie Homan**, an actress to the tips of her fingers. Hers was the soubrette part (Myrine), and she played it as Bernhardt would have - unwillingly, but divinely. The dark olive face and sparkling eyes of this beautiful little Creole alone would attract universal attention, but the graceful poses into which she seemed to dissolve, and the earnestness with which she spoke her tender, loving lines charmed the coldest heart, and made the most ardent supporters of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children feel happy that its power has been circumscribed....

The strongest scene in the play was the climax of the last act, when Myrine brings blind Pygmalion to Galatea. The three children made a beautiful tableau which was encored again and again by a large audience, composed mostly of children. The applause was continuous and deserved throughout the play, and it was evident that the public welcomed the return of juvenile performances. The curtain went down, the audience lingeringly departed and the lights were turned low. But the children on the stage? Tired? Not a bit. As the orchestra struck up a lively waltz, they joined hands and danced about. Myrine, still robed in her pure Greek robes, stood in the center - an ancient goddess in miniature, smiling and happy, for it was her tenth birthday, and still within the portals of Pygmalion's studio, Gertie's youthful contemporaries decided to celebrate the occasion fittingly. Tommy Russell [who played the part of Pygmalion] presented an exquisite basket of Jacque roses, and the others followed suit with various floral tributes until the little goddess was almost hidden behind a perfumed wall.

Gertie Homan was born in New Orleans ten years ago, but moved to Brooklyn at the age of four. A.M. Palmer³ saw her at Sunday school and offered her the child's part in *Partners*, which she played so well that he commissioned Gus Thomas to write *The Burglar* for his little protégée, and at the age of six **Gertie** became a full-fledged star.

During the 1890s she played roles in *The Burglar* (which was retitled *Editha's Burglar*), *Bootles' Baby*, *Romeo and Juliet* (as Juliet, in 1892), *The Childhood of Jack Harkaway*⁴, and many other productions. Her greatest renown was achieved with her renditions of Editha and Little Lord Fauntleroy.

Her Scrapbook

Little Gertie Homan's scrapbook continued to acquire entries. While in San Francisco on September 15, 1888, she acquired this sentiment from Julia Robison: "Go on as you have begun - Sweet Little Star Light." A few weeks later on the return trip from the West Coast, in Denver on October 3, 1888, Henry M. Woodruff wrote: "There is a pretty little flower; Of sky-blue tint and white; That glitters in the sunshine; And goes to sleep at night; 'Tis a token of remembrance; And a pretty name it's got; Would you know it if I told you?; 'Tis the sweet forget-me-not."

On June 11, 1889 William Robert Pike⁵ inscribed a scrapbook page: "There came to us a little blossom - sparkling with dew from God's own kingdom - Gertrude!" Around the same time, Etienne Girardotm wrote: "She's as sweet as a ripe strawberry - picked early in the morning with the dew on!" On September 14, 1889 Augustus Cook whimsically wrote: "The more I see of men, the more I love dogs. But you are sweet-sweet always."

³ A.M. Palmer was in 1888 the manager of the Madison Square Theatre where *Partners* was staged.

⁴ *The Childhood of Jack Harkaway* was made into a Thanhouser film in 1910.

⁵ Years later he would appear in Thanhouser films

Edwin and Gertrude's Romance

1898: Edwin Thanouser and the Academy of Music in Milwaukee

In the meantime, Edwin Thanouser had made arrangements to manage the Academy of Music in Milwaukee and to locate his own stock company there. Some of the cast had been members of the Grand Stock Company⁶ in Atlanta several months earlier. The theatre had a seating capacity of 1,800⁷ and was one of the largest houses in the Midwest, but in recent years it had fallen on hard times. The Davidson, Pabst, and other theatres and attractions had eclipsed it, and no longer was it a focal point for Milwaukee society.

On October 23, 1898, *The Sentinel* advised readers: "Edwin Thanouser, manager of the new stock company soon to open the season at the Academy, is not a stranger to the Milwaukee theatre-going public. His Sir Richard Cursitor in *Sowing the Wind*, Bertie Nizril in *Thoroughbred*, and Captain Larolle in *Under the Red Robe* - all Frohman productions - are bits of character work pleasantly remembered."

Frank B. Hatch, an actor who had been with him in Atlanta, joined Thanouser in the Milwaukee venture, which was designated as the Thanouser-Hatch Stock Company. Earlier, Hatch had been on the stage with George B. Broadhurst's players. Tickets went on sale on November 7, 1898 for the opening performance on Monday, November 14th, which featured *The District Attorney*.⁸

1898: Gertrude Joins Thanouser-Hatch Stock Company

The reputation of the Milwaukee stock company managed by Edwin Thanouser spread as far east as New York, so that headliners became willing to apply for positions out "in the sticks" during the summer months when many Broadway houses were closed.

One such applicant hired by the astute Edwin Thanouser was a 16 year old girl named Gertrude ("Gertie") Homan, who, as noted above, had scored a triumph during the 1898 – 1899 New York season in the title role of *Editha's Burglar*. She arrived in Milwaukee in early summer of 1898 and turned out to be barely five feet tall, crowned with a mass of dark, curly hair surrounding her pansy-like face. **Gertrude Homan** was chaperoned on this trip by one of her older sisters, Carey Tidball, who had recently been widowed and had lost her only child.

Members of the Thanouser-Hatch Stock Company at the beginning of the season included the two principals, Thanouser and Hatch, who not only directed the performances but were on stage in many roles, and Donald Bowles, Meta Brittain, Irving Brooks, Mary Davenport, Millie Flagg, Alberta Gallatin, Willis Granger, Lucius Henderson, **Gertrude F. Homan**, Samuel Lewis, Nan Mifflin, and William Yerance. In

⁶ The summer of 1898 saw Edwin Thanouser in Atlanta, where he leased the Grand Theatre for a series of performances by his own troupe, the Grand Stock Company.

⁷ Donaldson's Theatre Directory of 1894; *Milwaukee's Movie Palaces* by Larry Widen and Judi Anderson places the number at 1,680 by the time when movies were shown there as added attractions on a bill, a figure taken from the 1910 *Annual Report of the Inspector of Buildings*. Presumably the earlier figure of 1,800 represents an estimate, or the seating was reconfigured by 1910.

⁸ As advertised in *The Sentinel*, November 13, 1898. This play was staged the preceding year by Edwin Thanouser in Atlanta.

charge of the scenic backdrops was Thomas Neville. The opening night was reviewed by *The Milwaukee Journal*:⁹

THE REOPENING OF THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC: Prof. Mayr, the excellent leader of the orchestra at the Academy, began the evening's entertainment last night with an overture especially composed by himself for the occasion (and a very good overture it was, by the way) entitled *The Phoenix*, and the name was characteristic of the situation. The house has indeed re-arisen - not from the flames to be sure, but from that innocuous desuetude in which it has lain dormant for the past ten years.

The article went on to say:

Mr. Bowles, a trifle over-exuberant in a few spots, played the juvenile role delightfully, and Mr. Berthelet, a young Milwaukeean, was excellent in the role of a Yale football-playing student. Mr. Lewis overplayed the role of Williams but was good as old Corrigan, and the smaller parts were well rendered throughout. **Miss Gertrude F. Homan**, formerly the favorite child actress in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, appeared as the "ingenue" and made a delightful impression; she is pretty and has a charming smile and played very prettily.

1899: Edwin's courtship of Gertrude

The Academy of Music in Milwaukee turned out a regular schedule of performances all year around. Players came to realize that a stint at the Academy of Music combined the appeals of steady compensation and an appreciative audience. **Gertrude F. Homan**, whom Edwin had met earlier in his career, was now a regular member of the company.

She was "barely five feet tall, crowned with a mass of dark, curly hair surrounding her pansy-like face. She was cute as the dickens," her son Lloyd related in his recording of the Thanouser family history.¹⁰

"Edwin Thanouser fell desperately in love with her....He courted her at every opportunity and even cast himself to play opposite her on the stage - much to **Gertie's** displeasure, because she did not think much of his acting. Nevertheless, Edwin managed to propose to **Gertrude** at least five times. She flatly turned down the first four offers, but said 'maybe' to the last one shortly before she returned to New York."¹¹

The uncertain outlook for the romantic future of the young Romeo is evidenced by two letters, both written to **Gertrude** on February 7, 1899. It is not known if either was sent, but both were preserved as mementos by the Thanouser family. Probably each was a draft and was kept because he liked certain of the phrases. The first letter was written in advance to respond to a possible "no" answer from **Gertrude**:

⁹ Tuesday, November 15, 1898.

¹⁰ Taped recollections of Lloyd F. Thanouser, August 17, 1981.

¹¹ Unpublished manuscript by Lloyd F. Thanouser, *The Thanouser Family*, January 1970.

My Dear Miss Homan:

Your answer, had I needed any assurance, would have told me that my devotion was not misplaced - however hopeless. It must have been, in part, your noble womanhood that appealed to me. I saw and recognized it long ago. I would have been content to wait if I could have seen you often enough - you might have loved me in kind - as I have you. A short half hour to decide the fate of two lives! It was hard for you to know in that time! But your note was womanly and honest - sterling qualities that make me honor you. I thank you for your tender consideration - no action could more fittingly tell your goodness. I am strong enough that you will never see or feel that I ever hoped to be more than

*Your devoted friend,
Edwin Thanouser.
Milwaukee, Feby. 7/99*

The second letter was written in an optimistic vein:

Dear Sweet Gertrude:

Since Friday, when we were not to let the white blossoms fade, hope and despair have alternately held me. I have said 'Each new bud that bursts into bloom will bring some thought of love' - and that was hope - and then came the thought - 'The white flowers are drooping - and love is dying' - and that was despair. I had to put your pictures away - in my room and on my desk - I could not see them each moment - with all this uncertainty. I had your little pink handkerchief out - and I put that away too. Even now I don't know if we are pledged to one another - all is so uncertain - yet I am content to wait - no time will be too long. You, Gertrude, are my life, my hope - everything. I have no future that is not yours, no joy that you do not share. Even though my manhood were strong enough to live without your sunshine - life would hold no promise to me then - none.

I know now I must have waited for your coming, for no one else, in all the world, could have awakened in me such high resolve and tender sympathy. I never felt so much the purpose of noble effort - as when I think of your dear love and the best in my nature crowds out all else - as I try and try to be more worthy of you. You must know me - and so must your sister and your dear mother - just as I am, with my life's purpose to make you happy, to live for you, to guard and cherish you. It does me good to write to you - to have you the first to look into my real heart - the first to look deep into my real soul - and see there the pure undying love that will always be yours.

*Accept this little present - my first to you - God bless you.
Devotedly,
Edwin.
Milwaukee,
Feby. 7/99*

A letter sent by special delivery mail on March 3, 1899 from the Academy Theatre to **Gertrude F. Homan**, who was staying with Mrs. Schmitz at 164 Wisconsin Street in the same city, indicates that the romance was blooming:

Little Flower -

Good night sweet love - my heart is full of love and it beats for you - for you alone. Good night - darling Gertrude - good night. I am happier tonight than I have been for many weeks. Gertrude - Gertrude - how I love you!

Edwin.

A telegram sent from New York City on March 28, 1899 was received by Gertrude at her Wisconsin Street address and indicates that all was continuing to go well for the lovers: "ARRIVED SAFE AND SOUND AWFULLY LONESOME FOR YOU DARLING I SEND ALL MY LOVE AND KISSES, GOD BLESS YOU. EDWIN. 9:10 P.M. "

Frequently, Mr. Thanouser was taxed with an evident penchant for the charming little actress, which he always vigorously denied, although the denials were made in that rather plaintive tone described by the French as *avec des larmes dans la voix*,¹² which seemed to indicate that the manager sincerely regretted the necessity of making the denial and heartily wished that he might be in a position to announce that the rumor was true.

In autumn 1899, when Edwin Thanouser was courting **Gertrude F. Homan**, the Academy of Music, which increasingly was being referred to simply as the Academy or the Academy Theatre, went from one success to another. Audiences continued their enthusiasm, and receipts were all that could be hoped for. Players came and went, and over a period of time the stock company membership changed, but little Gertrude remained a part of the company.

Thanouser family tradition has it that **Gertrude F. Homan** had many admirers, and by the time she met Edwin she had received many proposals of marriage. Of a practical nature, and successful on the stage in her own right, **Gertie**, as her friends called her, was too smart to sign up with an actor of uncertain stage and financial fortunes. While she was quite impressed with Edwin's sincerity, she told him that before she would consent to marriage, he had to have \$10,000 in the bank. By autumn 1899, again according to family tradition, the required amount was on deposit, and **Gertie** said "yes," although one can easily assume from press clippings mentioning his success that Edwin had passed this financial milestone well before that date.

An unattributed newspaper article from October 1899 tells of the engagement:

The patrons of the Academy of Music, which has now been successfully occupied for a year by the admirable Thanouser stock company, have long suspected that Edwin Thanouser, the genial manager and proprietor of this organization, was not so entirely free and independent as to his heart as he was when he first came to Milwaukee. His evident devotion to charming Gertrude Homan, the 'ingenue' of

¹² Literally translated as "with tears in the voice."

the company, had not escaped the watchful eyes of those who took an interest in all things connected with the organization.

However, this time of probation and anxious delay is happily ended, and today Mr. Thanouser announces to his friends that he and **Miss Homan** have agreed to trot the remainder of the course in double harness, and the month of January will start off the New Year and their domestic "ménage" at the same time....

Mr. Thanouser is a young man still, a very young man, in fact, but he has scored a triple hit as an actor, a manager, and as an actor-manager....

He has steadily and surely fought his way to the front until the Academy of Music and the Thanouser stock company can be safely regarded as a permanent and successful business venture, deserving a prominent place in the front ranks of the city's enterprises.

From the very start, **Miss Homan** has been a member of the company. She is a graduate from the ranks of the child actresses, her name having been associated with the best performance of the role of Cedric, Lord Fauntleroy, that any child offered to the public.... Since coming here she has been seen in a great variety of roles, and she is unquestionably one of the most popular members of this popular company. Mr. Thanouser is so happy today that a sensible, level-minded reporter, undisturbed by dreams of hymeneal bliss, can not get a coherent interview from him, and **Miss Homan** is very voluble in assuring all comers that she has nothing to say, but as far as one can judge the match promises in every respect to be a brilliant success....

1900: Gertrude Marries Edwin

Edwin went to New York, visited with her family, and married **Gertrude** in Brooklyn on February 8, 1900. A front-page article in the *New York World* described the event: "**Miss Gertie Homan**, of 291 Prospect Place, Brooklyn, who has endeared herself to so many theatre-goers as Little Lord Fauntleroy, was married last night at her home to Edwin Thanouser, manager of the Academy of Music, Milwaukee. The wedding was a quiet one, only intimate friends of the family being present. The marriage ceremony was performed by the Rev. Brady E. Backus, of the Church of the Holy Apostles, Manhattan. Mrs. Thanouser is the youngest of four sisters, and Mr. Backus has performed the ceremony for each one of them...."

After telling their friends that they would be back in Milwaukee after March 10th, the honeymooning couple took the train to Miami, Florida. A real estate agent viewed the blissful pair as interesting prospects and tried to sell them a large section of land, a sandbar on the east side of Miami Bay, for \$2,600. The offer of what in later years became one of the busiest sections of Miami Beach was declined.

During their Florida trip, Edwin and **Gertrude** attended an exhibition golf match which featured visiting English pros. They enjoyed what they saw, and soon the Thanousers

added golf to their list of recreational activities, remaining active in the sport for the next 30 years. Edwin's only other outdoor sport was fishing, which he pursued for the remainder of his long life.

During the winter of 1900-1901 Edwin contracted a severe case of pneumonia and nearly died. After weeks of illness, when his recovery seemed apparent, he went to Florida for a month to recuperate. The next summer, in good health, Edwin went with Gertrude to Spokane, Washington, where the couple stayed for several weeks. Later in 1901 they went to the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. By that time **Gertrude** was pregnant.

1902: Edwin and Gertrude's First Child: Lloyd Frank

On January 31, 1902, the Thanousers became parents of a boy, whom they named Lloyd Frank, after Lloyd F. Lonergan, who had married Gertrude's youngest sister, Molly, and after Edwin's elder brother Frank.¹³

1906: Edwin and Gertrude's Second Child: Marie Louise

The second of the two Thanouser children was a girl born on March 23, 1906, who was given the name Marie Louise after **Gertrude's** mother.¹⁴

Theatre Management in Milwaukee and Chicago

1905: Shubert Takes Over the Academy

The presentation of *The Phoenix* at the Academy from November 27th through December 3rd marked the seventh anniversary of Edwin Thanouser's management of the theatre.

In late 1905, the direction of the Academy was taken over by Lee Shubert's *Shubert Theatrical Corporation*, a New York conglomerate which controlled a large number of houses. It was announced that the Academy would be closed briefly for repairs, the Thanouser Stock Company would be disbanded, and that the house would be reopened in 1906 as the Shubert Theatre. Edwin Thanouser was hired as manager, but this time his function was to supervise business arrangements concerning the booking of various road shows, itinerant vaudeville acts, and traveling stock companies which played on the stage of the theatre.

1906: Shubert Theatre Opens for Business

The Shubert Theatre opened for business on Sunday, February 11, 1906, with Henry E. Dixey starring in *The Man on the Box*, a stage adaptation of a popular novel of the time. From February 22nd to the 24th, Arnold Daly presented *You Never Can Tell*. From that point onward the Shubert Theatre was open on an intermittent basis. In summer of 1906 the building was dark until the autumn season opened on August 26th with Henry Woodruff in *Brown of Harvard*, followed by Eddie Foy in *The Girl and the Earl* from

¹³ Edwin's older brother Frank died suddenly and unexpectedly in 1907.

¹⁴ Marie Louise Homan (c. 1845 to c. 1916) was born in Dresden, Germany, raised in Paris and moved to New Orleans was the granddaughter of renowned German dramatist, poet and literary theorist Friederich Schiller (1759 – 1806).

September 9th to the 15th, after which, from October 9th to the 13th, Mrs. Fiske appeared on stage in *The New York Idea*.

Edwin Thanouser became restless in his new position, for the opportunity for creativity was largely lost. Now he was a business manager, whose main responsibility was taking care of details. The thrill of directing his own players was gone. He looked around for another opportunity, and found it in the Star Theatre¹⁵ which had fallen on hard times.

1907: Edwin Thanouser Takes Over the Star Theatre

It was announced in February 1907 that Thanouser would take over the Star around May 1st, remodel the building and reopen it as the Garrick with a company of stock players. In the meantime, he continued to manage the Shubert, which continued to be open on an intermittent basis for traveling productions. A number of players from the Thanouser Stock Company, now out of work, joined Albert Brown's Company of stock players, which opened at the competing Davidson Theatre in Milwaukee on April 14th with a dramatization of George Barr McCutcheon's novel, *Graustark*. The Brown stock company did well, but one can surmise that Edwin Thanouser, who had no connection with it, missed being with his old friends.

Trouble developed with Thanouser's arrangements for the Star, and the project was taken over by Richard Kann, who followed the earlier plan, and with backing from several out-of-state associates, opened the Star, renamed the Garrick, with a new in-house stock company on May 20th.

Meanwhile in late April, under the management of Edwin Thanouser, the Shubert played host to Etienne Girardot's performance in *Charley's Aunt*, followed by a return engagement of Mrs. Fiske in *The New York Idea*. Later, the Lew Fields company was seen in *About Town*. The policy of featuring occasional productions staged by road companies did not work, and in late May 1907 it was announced that the Shubert would close its doors, possibly to reopen in the autumn as a vaudeville house.

Affairs weren't going well at Richard Kann's new Garrick Theatre enterprise either, and Milwaukee theatre goers were informed that the doors would close permanently on June 20th because of an inarguable reason: "lack of receipts." Edwin Thanouser sensed an opportunity and told the press that he would consider taking over the theatre once it had closed and reopening it with his own stock company.

The next month or two saw a state of flux in Edwin Thanouser's affairs. The Shubert remained closed, but in August it was announced that in the following month it would be reopened, with the name changed to the Empire Theatre, apparently without the involvement of Thanouser. Nor would Thanouser be involved in the Garrick, for it was scheduled to be reopened by others, under the name of the Gaiety (or Gayety) Theatre, a burlesque house.

¹⁵*Milwaukee's Movie Palaces* by Larry Widen and Judi Anderson states the Star Theatre was located at 612 North Plankinton Avenue from 1899 to 1909 and seated 2,000.

The various complications were sorted out; Edwin Thanouser negotiated a new arrangement with the Shubert interests, and on September 1, 1907, with the Shubert Theatre name still on the marquee, Edwin Thanouser's old house reopened with Klaw & Erlanger's advanced vaudeville program on the bill. All was in good order the press proclaimed, and from then through the remainder of the year trade papers stated that the theatre did well with a succession of jugglers, comedians, animal acts, magicians, and other vaudeville attractions. It is apparent that there was trouble at the box office, enthusiastic press notices notwithstanding. The Shubert Theatre faded from prominence in the trade papers early in 1908, and for weeks at a time there was little on it. Occasional attractions were mentioned, such as a lecture by Frank R. Roberson, on *The East Coast of South Africa*, presented on February 23, and a lecture, *Norway, Land of the Midnight Snow*, on March 1, but the show-after-show, week-after-week momentum was gone.

In the meantime, **Gertrude Homan Thanouser** was busy with her two children. The summers of 1906 and 1907 were spent at Green Lake, Wisconsin. During the 1906-1907 school year, young Lloyd attended kindergarten at the German-English Academy.

1907: Exit Milwaukee for Chicago Bush Temple Theatre

One can imagine that Edwin Thanouser longed for a greater challenge. Enlisting some of his old Thanouser Stock Company members, he departed for seemingly greener pastures in Chicago, a theatre center second only to New York City. His seven-year management of the Academy Theatre had been very rewarding financially. Banking his profits Edwin Thanouser became a man of wealth, and had assets estimated to be worth six figures. From time to time he invested in the stock market. During the financial panic of 1907, he sold United States Steel Corporation stock short at the right time and made what he called "a modest killing."

With a comfortable balance in the bank, he confidently signed a lease on the Bush Temple Theatre,¹⁶ a Chicago house which had fallen on hard times but seemed to have a potential for aggressive management and a good program. Under the management of Edwin Thanouser and his newly-organized stock company, the Bush Temple Theatre opened on August 29, 1908 with the four-part play *Leah Kleschna*.

In Chicago, Edwin Thanouser and his family stayed in a large apartment building overlooking Lincoln Park. Young Lloyd went to the Francis Parker Academy for additional kindergarten education and part of first grade. Around this time little Marie came down with a serious case of diphtheria and was near death at one point before she recovered.

During the autumn of 1908, reviews concerning the various Bush Temple Theatre productions were generally favorable, and in many notices a full house was mentioned. However, it was the practice in the trade at the time, and of a later era as well, to say nothing unfavorable about the business aspects of a theatre or its productions. The plays

¹⁶ According to a letter to Q. David Bowers from Joseph R. DuciBella on December 28, 1987, the Bush Temple Theatre of Music opened in 1902 with a seating capacity of 989.

and stage events were fair game for reviewers, but poor business was usually left unmentioned. Located outside of the central Loop area, the district with most theatres, the Bush Temple Theatre often had many empty seats during performances. By the end of 1908 Edwin Thanouser realized that he was in the wrong place.

The nature of the entertainment business in America was changing. Stage plays were drawing smaller audiences, and motion pictures, once considered suitable primarily as fillers on a vaudeville program, were becoming important in their own right. It was a time of growth for what would later become known as the movie industry. In Chicago and in a thousand other places storefronts were being converted to motion picture theatres which by means of a brilliantly-lighted facade and music blaring into the street enticed passers by to part with a nickel to see the wonders of Niagara Falls, the ferocity of an African lion, the latest naval battleship, or even the president of the United States. Seemingly, such companies as Biograph, Vitagraph, Lubin, and Edison were turning nice profits producing films, and it was certain that the picture houses around the Chicago Loop were earning money for each month saw new ones sprouting up.

Edwin Thanouser studied two possibilities, and when he came to the East he sought to investigate two growth industries: aviation and motion pictures. After giving due consideration to the matter he realized that while he knew relatively little about either, his work in the theatre would serve him well in the latter field, so that is the one he chose. In the spring of 1909, Edwin Thanouser terminated his lease on the Bush Temple Theatre and made arrangements to enter the motion picture producing business.

Thanousers Move to New York, Enter Film Business

1909: Entering the Film Business

Seeking to enter the growing field of motion pictures, Edwin and **Gertrude** moved to the New York City area in 1909, which was then the center of American film production.

At the time, Edwin Thanouser, his wife, and two children were staying temporarily in Lloyd Lonergan's apartment at 205 West 94th Street on New York City's West Side. The Thanousers' young son, also named Lloyd, attended first grade at Public School No. 96. Originally it was planned to lease studio facilities in Manhattan, where several other motion picture companies had their headquarters, notable among them being Biograph and Vitagraph, two of the pioneers in the film industry.

1909: Moving to New Rochelle

After their brief stay with Lloyd Lonergan, Edwin Thanouser and his family moved to New Rochelle, New York, where he leased an old wooden skating rink. It was only by accident that the Thanouser Company located at New Rochelle. The original company was organized under the laws of Westchester County, and it was necessary that an office be secured there, although it was Mr. Thanouser's original intention to do all his picture work in Manhattan. He decided that New Rochelle was the place in which to open an office. As he stepped off the train in an attempt to locate a site, a young man came forward and inquired if he was looking for real estate. Under a sudden impulse, he said "Yes," and explained that he would like to secure a place where he could make motion

pictures. The young man, who was a real estate agent, said he had just the spot, and took Mr. Thanouser over to a vacant skating rink. A brief investigation satisfied the moving-picture man that it was just what he wanted, and a lease was soon signed. *The Photoplay Arts Portfolio of Thanouser Movie Stars*, published in 1914, related:

[Edwin Thanouser] closed up his stock company and spent the next six months looking over the motion picture field. His venture was unique because he was the first well-known theatrical man to embark on it. All the other moving picture companies were controlled by men with little or no theatre experience. In the fall of 1909 Mr. Thanouser formed the Thanouser Company, of which he was president and general manager. Unlike most of his competitors, Mr. Thanouser was not of the opinion that anything that moved was a motion picture. He determined to have the best, but at the start his work did not please him. The first release was made on March 15, 1910. The subject was *The Actor's Children*, and it was released through the Independent Motion Picture Alliance, which was at that time an Independent organization. The first picture made a great hit, and the company at once took its place among the leaders of the industry. The original director was Barry O'Neil.... Lloyd Lonergan wrote the first scenario. The first plant had originally been used as a skating rink....

New Rochelle was then known as an elite community where many successful theatre owners and stage players lived. However, to the average American it was better known as being Forty-Five Minutes From Broadway, from a 1906 play and song of that title by George M. Cohan.¹⁷ The lyrics satirized the community:

*The West they say, is the home of the jay,¹⁸
And Missouri's the state that can grind them.
This may all be, but just take it from me,
You don't have to go out West to find them.
If you want to see the real jay delegation,
The place where the real rubens dwell,
Just hop on a train at the Grand Central Station,
Get off when they shout "New Rochelle."*

*Only forty-five minutes from Broadway,
Think of the changes it brings;
For the short time it takes, what a difference it makes*

*In the ways of the people and things.
Oh! What a fine bunch of rubens,
Oh! what a jay atmosphere;
They have whiskers like hay,
And imagine Broadway
Only forty-five minutes from here.*

¹⁷ The play was produced on Broadway by Klaw and Erlanger and opened on January 1, 1906.

¹⁸ A jay is a rube, a greenhorn, an uncultured rural person unaccustomed to city ways.

New Rochelle was about that distance from midtown Manhattan by the trains, which ran on frequent schedules. It is probable that Edwin Thanouser went there to find a home for his family, with scarcely a thought about the location of his studio. Eventually, Edwin moved his family into a large rented home near the entrance to Rochelle Heights, across the street from the high school. Young Lloyd F. Thanouser finished the first grade at the Beckwith School in New Rochelle, where he learned the three R's and how to ice skate.¹⁹

1909: Thanouser Company Incorporated

After the studio site was secured, Edwin Thanouser's attorney, Louis S. Phillips, who maintained offices at 49 Broadway, New York City, drew up a certificate of incorporation for the Thanouser Company, dated October 28, 1909, and filed it with the State of New York on the 29th and with the clerk of Westchester County on November 1st. The stated purposes of the company were to "manufacture, buy and sell, lease or otherwise deal or to traffic in photographic apparatus, paraphernalia and material, and to acquire patent rights therefore. To take, make and exhibit, moving, animated and stationary pictures and photographs, and to lease rights to exhibit the same, and to deal in and sell same."

The amount of capital stock of the Thanouser Company was fixed at \$10,000, divided into 100 shares each having a par value of \$100, of which \$1,000 was to be paid in before the commencement of business. Named as original directors and stockholders were **Gertrude Thanouser** (98 shares), Edwin Thanouser (1 share), and Lloyd F. Lonergan (1 share).

As mentioned above, the Thanouser Company, released its first commercial film *The Actor's Children* on March 15, 1910. In 1910 and 1911 Edwin and Gertrude lived on Slocum Street in Rochelle Heights.

Shortly after operations commenced in New Rochelle in 1909, Edwin and **Gertrude Thanouser** compiled a list of 20 things that could and did go wrong to ruin thousands of feet of motion picture film in the course of perforating, exposing, developing, processing, copying, and storing it.²⁰ Film was expensive, and, as amazing as it might seem to a later generation of cinematographers, in the early years of the Thanouser enterprise nearly all of the film footage taken was actually used in the finished product. Retakes were few and far between. While no figures survive, it is estimated that a typical film with a finished length of one reel, or approximately 1,000 feet, was edited from no more than 1,200 feet of exposed stock. Apparently, elsewhere in the industry it was not uncommon to expose several thousand feet or more of film for each finished one-reel production.²¹

¹⁹ Taped recollections of Lloyd F. Thanouser, August 17, 1981.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ From a letter to Q. David Bowers on February 18, 1989 from film historian Linda Kowall.

1909 to 1912: Gertrude and Early Thanouser Films

In the motion picture industry at the time, scripts, usually referred to as scenarios, were casually prepared and consisted of simple notes outlining the intended action. One director, Etienne Arnaud, the Frenchman who was the primary director for the American Eclair Company in Fort Lee, New Jersey in 1912, proudly informed a reporter that he needed no scripts, and that a few ideas sketched on a paper or piece of cardboard were enough.²²

Edwin Thanouser, who by 1909 had appeared in or directed hundreds of plays, knew that preparation of a detailed script in a film, as in a stage production, would result in a better finished product. Among Independent producers Thanouser was a year or two ahead of his time in the dramatic content of his films and the care with which they were prepared.

Thanouser was familiar with the dramas and comedies of the stage and knew which ones were popular and how to produce them. Numerous plays which he had acted in or directed were eventually adapted for use in Thanouser Company films. Popular novels were another source of stories, as were fairy tales, poems, legends, and mysteries. Although at the Thanouser Company the duty of script writing fell upon the shoulders of Lloyd F. Lonergan in the early years, nearly every player developed ideas for plots, and Lonergan soon found that he had a dozen or more advisors.

Lloyd F. Lonergan, who was the husband of one of **Gertrude Thanouser's** sisters, Molly Homan, was educated at the United States Naval Academy and eventually became a journalist. By 1909, he had a well-paying position at the *New York Evening World*. During the early period, Lonergan maintained his residence in New York City and commuted daily to New Rochelle. At the outset of the Thanouser film enterprise he remained at his World desk, and with the assistance of **Gertrude Thanouser**, crafted one scenario a week.

By early 1913 Lonergan and his wife moved to Beacon Hall, an apartment building which was adjacent to Thanouser's second studio location. Perhaps more prolific than any other scenario writer in the profession at the time, by the end of his career Lonergan claimed to have written over 1,000 scripts!

Information concerning players in Thanouser films for the first several years is fragmentary. Lloyd F. Lonergan probably wrote nearly all the scripts for films released in 1910, but in the absence of specific verification, no such assumptions have been made. **Gertrude** became a remarkably fine film editor, and Edwin Thanouser was quick to credit her for this ability.

Among 1910 releases, most films were of standard one-reel length, or 1,000 feet, or slightly less than this. There were several split-reel releases with two subjects, typically of different lengths, with the first being the longer. A typical split reel subject pair can be

²² As reported in *The Moving Picture World*, August 17, 1912 in an interview with Arnaud.

found in *A 29-Cent Robbery*, a subject 750 feet in length, which was paired with *The Old Shoe Came Back*, a subject 250 feet in length at the end of the same reel.

Edwin Thanouser called various pictures "classics," especially if they were dramatizations of famous plays or novels. Similarly, many pictures, including one-reel subjects, were called "features;" this classification being somewhat arbitrary. Elsewhere in the industry, the term "feature" was typically applied to a longer production, of two or more reels in length, and of dramatic (as opposed to comedy, documentary, or scenic) content. Terms were not well defined in the early years, and, for example, whether to call a film dramatization a photoplay, photo-play, photo-drama, or a "movie" (usually in quotation marks back then) was endlessly debated.

1910: Featured in *St. Elmo*

Concerning the second release, [St. Elmo](#), distributed on March 22, 1910, Edwin Thanouser recalled later:²³

Our next film was a picturization of the well-known novel and play, *St. Elmo*. *St. Elmo* was having a New York run at the time, and our picture made an instantaneous hit. I only printed ten copies of *St. Elmo* to start in with, and sent them for the most part to the exchanges that had bought *The Actor's Children*. The fame of *St. Elmo* soon spread, and we had telegraphic orders for more prints, until I had disposed of 25. Then *The Actor's Children* began to find its own, and soon I had disposed of the ten copies that had been returned to me from my first attempt.... *St. Elmo* indicated that I was early in the game of making picturizations of novels and stage successes.

Frank H. Crane had the lead in this picture, while Anna Rosemond and Carey L. Hastings had other parts, as did Edwin Thanouser's wife **Gertrude**. This was the only film in which Gertrude is credited to have appeared. "She was greatly disappointed when she saw preliminary runs. Now over 30 and twice a mother, her face and figure had changed considerably in the decades since she left the stage. Besides, she no longer had time for acting; her screen play writing and film editing responsibilities occupied most of her waking hours."²⁴

1910: Scenario Writer for *The Winter's Tale*

[The Winter's Tale](#), released on May 27, 1910, was the first of several Shakespeare plays that Thanouser was to adapt for the screen over the years. **Gertrude** is credited with the scenario along with Lloyd F. Lonergan. While to a modern viewer the film appears to be a succession of costumed players in scenes tied together by subtitles, with a beforehand knowledge of the story necessary to its understanding, in 1910 it is apparent that the lines of the play were familiar to a significant percentage of viewers, sufficiently so that *The Morning Telegraph* could write: "The story of Shakespeare's play will not be repeated here, but suffice it to say that it is a good one and has good photography."

²³ *The Moving Picture World*, March 10, 1917.

²⁴ Unpublished manuscript by Lloyd F. Thanouser, *The Thanouser Family*, January 1970.

1911: Raising Lloyd and Marie

An item in *The New Rochelle Pioneer*, July 1, 1911, noted that Edwin and **Gertrude Thanhouser** had as their guests for a week in their Rochelle Heights home Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd F. Lonergan, who probably came to escape the New York City heat. Lloyd F. Lonergan's mind never rested, and even during his vacation moments he scrutinized newspapers, observed people around him, and studied the surrounding world to gain ideas for scenarios. Although **Gertrude Thanhouser** found some time for scenario editing and other studio work, she devoted most of her attention to her two young children, Lloyd and Marie.

1911: Thanhouser Increases Output and Quality

During the year 1911 both the Patents Company and Independent members increased their production by about 50% to a combined output of 72 reels per week by December, not counting occasional two-reel and three-reel films released by Kalem, Vitagraph, and other Patents companies.²⁵ While Thanhouser, as a member of the Sales Company program, had to be content earlier in the year with releasing its multiple-reel features such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *David Copperfield* one reel at a time, the competing Patents program would permit longer films to be released all at once. However, in December, Thanhouser's *She* was released in two reels on the same day. Now the Sales Company schedule was on an equal footing with the Patents Company program. By the end of the year the upstart National program was challenging the two older programs by putting an impressive 21 reels on the market each week.

During this time, the Aitken brothers were making the news with regularity.²⁶ Harry E. Aitken, a long-term exchange operator, and a partner with John R. Freuler in the highly successful Western Film Exchange and other enterprises, went to Europe in the autumn, where he opened a new agency for Reliance, through his brother, Roy E. Aitken, who controlled the Western Import Company. The Aitken brothers and Freuler were heavy investors in the American, Reliance, and Majestic film companies, and all would soon play important parts in the fortunes of Edwin Thanhouser.

That the quality of motion pictures improved in 1911 was suggested by *The New York Dramatic Mirror*:²⁷

On the whole the standard has shown improvement. Motion pictures are generally better than they were a year ago, and this in spite of the great increase in the number of productions.... When a company doubles its output, as many did, it could only be done by overworking its producing force or increasing the force in proportion, and either method could only mean a lowered standard. Happily, the representative companies accompanied their increases of production by enlarging their forces, and while this resulted for a time in the raw recruits turning out more or less inferior films, it was only for a limited period, and it was not long before the old standard had been regained, and even passed in some instances. The net

²⁵ *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, January 31, 1912 by Frank E. Woods.

²⁶ The Aitken enterprises were discussed in *The Billboard*, November 25, 1911.

²⁷ January 31, 1912.

result is that better motion picture films and many more of them are being issued today than was the case in 1910, and in their production twice as many players are given employment.

Of these players, a truly astonishing number have become popular favorites.... How many players are now employed in motion picture work in America? The answer can only be approximate, as the forces of all companies are continually changing. The Biograph Company, producing but two reels a week, took about 50 regular players to Los Angeles, where, as occasion may require, extra people may be added. Taking 25 people as an average for each reel of pictures for the American output of 31 reels of Licensed films and 33 reels of Sales Company films (about eight reels are imported), we have in these two groups 1,600 players. In addition to these, the players in free-lance companies, whose negatives are sold by the foot to the National Company, and others employed in irregular ways, would probably swell the grand total of American picture players to close to 2,000. Quite a respectable army, it would appear.

It is doubtful if the standard of acting improved very much during 1911, except among the new recruits. The great advance in that branch of art took place prior to 1911. Who can look back on the methods of picture playing three and four years ago, without a shudder? In those days the actors were told to step high in walking or running. Each player called by gesture on high heaven to witness each assertion. Talking, gesticulating, and grimacing at the camera was the constant habit. Slapstick farce was the only known form of fun; the harder a poor devil fell or the more crockery he smashed the greater comedian he was supposed to be. Actors and actresses of any self respect refused to work for the films, or if circumstances compelled them to earn the money they carefully concealed their identity. The vast change that has taken place is nowhere more apparent than in this very difference in the attitude of professional people toward motion picture employment, a state of affairs for which the *Mirror* feels justified in claiming some credit. The companies can now have their pick of all but the most exclusive stars, and distinction in the films is eagerly sought by the best of them.

The account in the *Mirror* went on to relate that scenarios were improving as well, and perhaps that among several thousand ambitious writers there were undoubtedly many promising candidates for future glory. This situation was not true, of course, for the Thanouser Company, where Lloyd F. Lonergan continued to write each scenario, with occasional help from **Gertrude Thanouser**. The *Mirror* account continued”

Directing skill has undoubtedly improved, and to the extent that these active gentlemen and the scenario editors have participated in story construction there has also been story improvement. Certain points in the management of scenes and action are now much better done than formerly. It would take more space than is now available to point out the many particulars in which all this is apparent. One or two illustrations will suffice: "Where formerly no attention was paid to the direction in which players left one scene and entered another, the best directors are now careful to aid the illusion by making the scenes harmonize. So, too, in the

matter of time lapse, directors now take care, or most of them do, that the spectator shall not be too greatly shocked...."

For Thanouser the 1911 year saw the production of several multiple-reel films, the completion of its first full year in business, and the solidification of its reputation for producing films of high quality.

Thanouser Sells to The Mutual Film Corporation

March 30, 1912: A Meeting of Independent Manufactures

On Saturday, March 30th, a meeting of Independent manufactures and exhibitors was held at the Hotel Sherman in Chicago. An attempt was made to change the method of distribution so that films would be leased to exchanges, rather than sold, permitting damaged and obsolete films to be retired by the manufacturers. Also on the agenda was the establishment of fixed geographical territories for exchanges, to increase profits and prevent conflicts. Among the manufacturers' representatives attending were Edwin Thanouser, Carl Laemmle, Jules E. Brulatour, David Horsley, Herbert Miles, Charles O. Baumann, and Samuel S. Hutchinson. Committees were established to work on the problems.²⁸

In an article published the same day, *The Moving Picture World* informed readers that the Majestic Motion Picture Company had withdrawn from the Motion Picture Distributing and Sales Company because the firm did not want to pay two cents per foot to have its product distributed. Something was in the wind, for the likes of the Aitken brothers and John R. Freuler were not known to make decisions capriciously. That something proved to be the Mutual Film Corporation, immense for its era, which set out to take distribution of motion pictures into its own hands.

April 6, 1912: Harry E. Aitken Interview

A week later readers learned more in a statement made by Harry E. Aitken, who was not ready to release details but who was willing to provide a glimpse of the future:²⁹

You may say that the Mutual is not interested in the manufacture of pictures, nor will it be; it is an exchange proposition only and to that end a number of existing exchanges have been bought and more are under our option. I'm not at liberty to tell you which exchanges these are at present, but that will be announced later. Our capital is \$2,500,000 divided into preferred and common stock, all of which is participating stock entitled to a vote. There is \$1,250,000 in common and the balance preferred.

There is no connection between the action in the Majestic Film Corporation withdrawing from the Sales Company and the Mutual project; that is entirely distinct and relates only to the Majestic Company. In that connection I might say that the Majestic withdrew from the Sales Company because its owners believed that they were the victim of extortionate practices and that discrimination and

²⁸ As reported in *The Moving Picture World*, April 13, 1912.

²⁹ As reported in *The Moving Picture World*, April 6, 1912.

restraint of trade was practiced against them. Acting upon that belief, the officers of the Majestic Company have caused suit to be commenced against the Sales Company and its directors, but that is another matter.

For the Mutual exchanges I wish to say that they will work in harmony with the Sales Company and handle the product of all manufacturers affiliated with that organization. We realize that there is too much at stake to cause a serious break in the Independent ranks at this time. Our purpose is to place the exchange business upon a more logical and businesslike basis. In some respects we will follow the plan of the General Film Company. It is our purpose to utilize the best features of that organization. "I might also say," continued Mr. Aitken, "that nearly all the men interested in our exchanges are those who have created the exchanges now composing the General Film Company. It is too soon to announce the name of the officers of the Mutual and we are not quite ready for very much publicity of any kind just yet."

Aitken's commentary would prove to be the understatement of the year. In the meantime, the Thanouser Company continued its parade of two releases per week through the Sales Company.

April 11, 1912: Thanouser Sells to Charles F. Hite of Mutual

On April 11th and 13th readers of local newspapers encountered news items about Edwin Thanouser. On April 13, 1912 readers of The New Rochelle Pioneer read the following: "Edwin Thanouser of New Rochelle is among the directors of the Films Leasing and Sales Company of New York City, capitalized at \$5,000." Those with a technical turn of mind might have surmised that Edwin Thanouser was about to embark on some sort of a new distribution arrangement for his studio's films, for it was no secret that the Motion Picture Distributing and Sales Company's program was becoming increasingly crowded, and although some Thanouser two-reel films had been allowed, what about the planned acceleration to three films a week?

However, that little announcement paled in significance compared to another notice in the same issue:

Edwin Thanouser has sold a part of his interest in the Thanouser Company...to Charles J. Hite, Chicago, and has formed a new company which is being incorporated for \$400,000 with a capitalization of \$400,000. The new company will consist of four people. Mr. Thanouser will be president, Lloyd F. Lonergan, vice president, **Mrs. Thanouser, secretary**, and Mr. Hite, treasurer. The only change from the old directorship is that Mr. Hite takes the treasurership which was held by Mr. Thanouser, who is also president. The new company will come into existence on April 15th as the Thanouser Film Corporation. It is reported that Mr. Thanouser received \$250,000 for the portion of his interest that he sold, and that he is to continue as manager of the factory at a salary of \$500 a week.

A similar article in the New Rochelle Evening Standard, April 11, 1912, included this information:

It is reported that Mr. Thanouser received \$250,000 for the portion of his interests that he sold and that he is to continue as manager of the factory at a salary of \$500 a week. Mr. Thanouser, when interviewed last night, would neither deny nor affirm the report as to the price he received for his interests, but said the report of the salary he is receive has been exaggerated.

Mr. Thanouser is also a director in the new Films Leasing and Sales Company, New York City, just incorporated with a nominal capitalization of \$5,000. Mr. Hite owns interests in several film concerns. Mr. Lonergan, who is at the head of the scenario department of the local company and writes the plays produced, is night city editor of The New York World. Mr. Thanouser said last night that Mr. Hite is likely to make New Rochelle his home. "How about yourself?" Mr. Thanouser was asked. "Why, I intend always to live in New Rochelle. I have no intention of ever living anywhere else. I have taken a two and one-half year lease on a handsome house at the entrance of Rochelle Heights and will move in with my family shortly. We like New Rochelle."

The Thanouser Company said Mr. Thanouser has always been associated with the Independent film concerns and with the Motion Picture Distributing and Sales Company, which embraces about 15 separate Independent companies. The change in the local company, it is said, means practically a combination of all of the important Independent companies. "You see," said Mr. Thanouser, "it takes several companies to supply a program. The Thanouser Company issues two films [each week], others issue the same number, while a few issue three. The Thanouser Company is the head of the Independent group and sends its films all over the world. Ever since this company has started it has advertised New Rochelle. Every film has the name of New Rochelle stamped on its head, and the name appears on the screen before the picture appears. In the two and one-half years the company has been in existence, it has paid out nearly half a million dollars in salaries. Most of the employees and actors live in New Rochelle and spend their money here. We expect to enlarge our plant but not at once. That will come in time."

April 15, 1912: Thanouser Purchase by Hite Effective

The Thanouser purchase was effective on April 15, 1912, at which time the name of the firm was changed. The certificate of incorporation of the Thanouser Film Corporation, dated April 27, 1912 and filed with the State of New York, listed the purpose of the company:

To prepare, manufacture and make pictures, photographs, plates, and films for moving pictures, to prepare, manufacture, make and take, sell, lease, and dispose of moving pictures; to arrange scenes and settings and to conduct exhibitions, plays and dramas of all kinds to be photographed or reproduced as moving

pictures or motion pictures; to purchase theatres, scenery, costumes, stage settings, and any and all theatrical accessories; to operate theatres, amusement parks or other places of public amusement; to conduct theatrical, dramatic, musical, and other public performances; to employ actors and other persons whose services are necessary or proper in any theatrical or dramatic business or in public exhibitions or shows; to lease, own, deal in and sell and dispose of real estate....

The capital of the corporation was set as \$400,000 in common stock, comprised of 4,000 shares having a par value of \$100 each. However, "the amount of capital with which the said corporation will begin business is \$5,000." Directors for the first year were to be: Edwin Thanouser, **Gertrude Thanouser**, Charles J. Hite (316 Monadnock Building, Chicago), Lloyd F. Lonergan (205 West 94th Street, New York City) , and Crawford Livingston (53 William Street, New York City). To launch the corporation's activities each director agreed to purchase one share.³⁰ Named as incorporators were Hite, Livingston, and Dr. Wilbert E. Shallenberger. Shallenberger had been one of Hite's boyhood chums and in later years had invested in some of his motion picture enterprises.

Just as Samuel S. Hutchinson was tapped by investors in 1910 to head the American Film Manufacturing Company, exchangeman Charles Jackson Hite was named by investors to be president of Thanouser in 1912. Hite more than made up for his slight physical build by a generous measure of human warmth and fine character, and those who worked with him at the studio considered him to be the finest employer one could have.³¹ He was a caring, sharing, charismatic individual whose office was open to all comers. A formal executive or man with pretensions he was not, and when he wasn't working in his office with his shirt sleeves rolled up, he was on the spot watching films being made, or tending to one of his many ventures. He was a true "idea man," and in the months to come the Thanouser Film Corporation would undergo many improvements and innovations under his management. Thanouser employees enjoyed working for Hite, and Edwin Thanouser himself had a fine relationship with him. The historic trail of corporate America is strewn with carcasses of companies sold by their owners to investors, after which the entrepreneurial spirit vanished, and the cachet which made the companies so attractive in the first place faded away. Not so with the Thanouser Company. Its immediate successor, the Thanouser Film Corporation, went on to bigger and better things, and Edwin Thanouser, apart from the greatly augmented balance in his bank account, had every reason to believe that he made the right decision in selling.

April 15, 1912: Thanouser Gala Ball

Monday evening, April 15, 1912, was a time for festivities in New Rochelle, not for the sale of the Thanouser Company, although Edwin Thanouser may have had his own private celebration in this regard, but for the previously planned First Annual Reception and Dance staged by Thanouser employees. Germania Hall was rented for the evening,

³⁰ On August 21, 1912 the directors voted to merge the shell of the old Thanouser Company into Thanouser Film Corporation.

³¹ As related to Q. David Bowers in a personal interview with Muriel Ostriche who was hired by Hite in 1913.

invitations were sent out, and no fewer than 1,200 people attended.³² Not present was Charles J. Hite, for he was not yet known to the employees, and, besides, he had his hands full making arrangements to move his business operations and his wife and young daughter from Chicago to New Rochelle.

At the gala ball the grand march was led by Edwin and **Gertrude Thanouser**, followed by actors and actresses in pairs, including George O. Nichols, Viola Alberti, Mr. and Mrs. Lucius Henderson, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Benham, Florence LaBadie, Bert Adler, Marguerite Snow, James Cruze, Mr. and Mrs. Frank L. Zimmerman, Mr. and Mrs. Charles J. Van Houten, and Mr. and Mrs. John Andren.

The Moving Picture News reported:

In the entertainment portion of the program a number of non-released Thanouser pictures were shown. One of them, which, by the way, will never be released, caused a great deal of fun, screams of laughter ringing out through the building as it unrolled itself upon the screen. The title of this picture was *The Crazy Quilt*, prepared especially to get a laugh. In the title you were told that it was "**joined by the new girl in the joining room;**" and, truly, it did its title proud, for positive and negative mingled with one another in the most astounding and ridiculous fashion - upside down, topsy-turvy, and every other way but the right way.

The vaudeville was done by Thanouser home talent. *Editha's Burglar*, with Marie Eline, Harry Benham, and David Thompson; and *The System of Dr. Tarr*, with Lew Woods, Harry Marks, Larry Merton, William Harris, Carl LeViness, Bertha Blanchard, Phil Brady and Perry Horton. Leo Edwards put over a Charles K. Harris number. Harry Spear staged the vaudeville. Frank Champury saw to the scenic effects and Gerald Badgley and Charles Gercke to the electrical. As may be imagined, the receipts were large. Finally Mr. Thanouser suggested a grand clambake as soon as the weather's right. So be on the lookout for something of that sort.

James Cruze, a corking actor, was there with Peggy Snow, a real artiste. I seem to see *She* again, the full two reels of it, and Cruze became "Leo," Miss Snow "She." Miss Snow is the most charming of conversationalists, not the least "uppish," though she was the second most popular American picture player in a recent newspaper contest. Bert Adler³³ said that he would show me to the prettiest player in the pictures, and then introduced me to Flo LaBadie. She is! And the most wonderfully gowned girl I have ever seen at a function. William Russell, whom I like best to remember as the Stranger in Ibsen's *Lady From the Sea*, was there alone. Adler whispered that William's sweetheart, who is a leading actress in "the legitimate," was playing in Chicago, while William had figured that she would

³² A detailed report of the event appeared in *The Moving Picture News*, April 15, 1912.

³³ Bert Adler was the publicity director for Thanouser from 1909 thru 1914 where he created advertising and newsletters, prepared publicity releases, conducted interviews, and otherwise contributed to the public image of the company.

come east at the time of the Thanouser ball. But the best calculators will go wrong at times. So William was quite disconsolate.

David H. Thompson, a character man in the Thanouser pictures, played the burglar in *Editha's Burglar*, the sketch in the first half of the entertainment. In this sketch, as all who are familiar with it know, a ring is used. Just before Stage Manager Spear rang up the curtain it was discovered that the prop ring was missing. Thompson volunteered the use of his own diamond ring, valued at \$150. It was used and, later, lost. Up to the time I left Germania Hall - in the wee small hours - it had not been found.

Marie Eline, the Thanouser Kid, was the sensation of *Editha's Burglar* and the show. I say this unreservedly. Harry Benham helped Marie put over her hit. I was surprised to learn that Benham, whom you will remember for his "Nicholas Nickleby" in the film of that title, was a married man. I was shown a mighty pretty Mrs. Benham, and a cute Harry Benham, Jr., in one of the front boxes. Benham is to be envied! And I understand there was a little Benham girl at home - too young to "sit in" at all-night seances at Germania Hall.

I understand that the racket was also by way of commemoration of Bert Adler's birthday, and was therefore originally slated for April 14th. But since the 14th fell on a Sunday, the affair was put over to Monday, the 15th!!! That's the way Bert's press agent spins it, anyhow! All Bert would say is he doesn't believe in commemorating birthdays, since his best girl wouldn't commemorate his even with a kiss. Now, can Bert mean his wife?

They say that Thanouser's chief chauffeur, Arthur Miller, was holding hands with a girl in a dark corner of the ballroom when electrician Bradley threw the spotlight on him. Miller is reported to have cranked up and gone home. To Frank L. Zimmerman and Theodore Heise of the Thanouser mechanical forces, who invented *The Crazy Quilt*, I hereby remove my hat and bend my knee. They are geniuses! Mr. and Mrs. **Edwin Thanouser** looked to be exactly what they were - the happiest couple in the vast assemblage.

April 20, 1912: From Main Street to Wall Street

Not quite the full story was told on April 13, as it turned out, as readers of *The Moving Picture World* would learn on April 20th:

THANHOUSER SELLS PLANT. It was intimated in a recent issue of *The Moving Picture World* that efforts were being made by Western picture men to secure one or more of the leading manufacturing plants associated with the Sales Company. The prediction came true last Friday, when it was announced that Mr. Edwin Thanouser, maker of the famous Thanouser pictures, had sold his plant to the interests mentioned. Mr. H.E. Aitken, who is interested in a number of picture concerns, and who was supposed to have conducted the details of the deal, authorized the following statement:

Mr. C.J. Hite, of Chicago, is at the head of a syndicate which has just consummated the purchase of the entire plant and assets of the Thanouser Company, makers of the famous Thanouser films. Edwin Thanouser still remains connected with the company as its general manager. Mr. Hite has been very active in the film business in the past, and is at the present largely interested in the American, Reliance, and Majestic companies, and also has large interests in the H & H and Majestic Film Exchanges in Chicago. He is now the second vice president and director of the Mutual Film Corporation and is a member of its executive committee.

The announcement created quite a stir among the Independents, and many theories as to what the probable effect of the sale would be were indulged in by picture men generally. The purchasers are saying nothing as to what their plans are, but it is hinted that they propose to have more to say in the management of the Sales Company in the future than has been accorded them in the past. In this connection it may be recorded that a general reorganization of the distributing machinery of the Independent interests is a present order of business.

So, Edwin Thanouser did a bit more, it seems, than just collect \$250,000 for moving from one company officership to another. "The entire plant and assets of the Thanouser Company" were transferred also, from Edwin Thanouser's ownership to the Aitken combine. In New Rochelle, indeed in the entire industry, film production was moving from Main Street (or at least the intersection of Grove, Crescent, and Warren streets) to Wall Street.

Backing the purchase were investors affiliated with the newly formed Mutual Film Corporation, the firm about which Harry E. Aitken was not ready to give details a few weeks earlier. Behind the Mutual facade were Harry and Roy Aitken, John R. Freuler, a handful of Chicago and New York financiers, and Charles J. Hite, who bought the Thanouser Company lock, stock, and barrel, save for a few token shares retained by **Edwin Thanouser and his wife**. The Mutual Film Corporation was an umbrella under a parent holding company, the Film Exchange Company, which owned assets for its account and also served as a command center for subsidiary companies which were owned in large part by groups of private investors. The cross-directorships and financial entanglements of the Mutual-related enterprises eventually became so extensive that even the major shareholders were not certain in some instances who reported to whom and who owned what!

Under the Mutual Banner **September 10, 1912: Quality Suffers**

A Star Reborn, the Thanouser release of September 10, 1912, featured a scenario involving life on the stage, a popular topic and one that the studio used regularly. The review in *The Moving Picture World* gave players' names:

The Thanhouser people have always been very successful in picturing theatrical people. Here is another offering of this kind, and it is even better than most of them have been. Its hero (Howard Kyle) is a Shakespearean star who finds himself unable to get work. The heroine (Miss Flo LaBadie) is an ex-actress who has married a millionaire (William Russell). The rich woman discovers her old friend in distress, and there is a revival of Twelfth Night, an outdoor presentation, in which he is given the role of Malvolio. The story is not tensely dramatic, but accents scene-making. Some of its scenes are fine. This in a way is a legitimate aim, but it is not the best use that can be made of the motion picture camera. If Thanhouser stories were, as a rule, up to Thanhouser scene-making, its products would be, we feel very sure, even more deservedly popular than now.

Bearing the brunt of the criticism was Lloyd F. Lonergan, who continued to be the major contributor to the scenario department, with some assistance furnished by his brother Philip. By this time, **Gertrude Thanhouser**, who had helped in the early days, was hardly ever seen at the studio. Edwin Thanhouser supervised the day to day activities of the directors and players, while Charles J. Hite tended to financial and administrative matters.

November 30, 1912: Gertrude and Edwin Set Sail for Europe

While Edwin Thanhouser was quoted frequently in the trade press and remained the spokesman for the firm bearing his name, by autumn 1912 he decided to leave film making behind and enjoy himself in an extended grand tour. On November 2nd The New Rochelle Pioneer announced that the Thanhouser family would leave within the next few days for a combined business and pleasure trip to the other side of the Atlantic. On November 16th the same newspaper told of revised plans: "Edwin Thanhouser, founder of the Thanhouser Film Corporation, accompanied by **Mrs. Thanhouser**, will sail on November 30 for Europe, where he expects to make a leisurely tour of various countries, mainly by auto."

By November, Charles J. Hite was comfortable in the president's chair at the Thanhouser Film Corporation, and nearly all decisions were his. The transition had been smooth, the quality of the studio's films had been maintained, and all of the players who had been hired during the period of Edwin Thanhouser's ownership enjoyed working with the new administration. Backers of the Mutual Film Corporation had the good sense to remain in the background, and although contingents of Wall Streeters paraded through the plant from time to time, the Thanhouser Film Corporation was still largely thought of as a home-grown New Rochelle enterprise by the public. In the meantime Bert Adler was taking driving lessons in a new automobile presented as a gift by Charles J. Hite, "in appreciation of his good work for the Thanhouser Company."³⁴

January 13, 1913: When the Studio Burned

Early Monday afternoon, January 13th, all was quiet at the Thanhouser studio. Many of the players, directors, cameramen, and others were 2,500 miles distant, enjoying warm and sunny Los Angeles, while a few others were with the Middle Western Company and

³⁴ Per an item in *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, November 17, 1912.

were busy in that area. Edwin and **Gertrude Thanouser** were enjoying their travels in Europe, while young Lloyd and Marie were attending private schools in Switzerland. At home in New Rochelle were James Cruze, Marguerite Snow, the Thanouser Kid and Kidlet, director Lawrence Marston, and a handful of other players and production personnel, plus the usual office and laboratory contingent. Being processed in the plant were advance negatives from Sherlock Holmes Solves The Sign of the Four, a film still being made, featuring Harry Benham and Mignon Anderson, recently returned from the Middle Western Company.

Following the normal Monday, January 13th Evening Standard there was another edition issued, titled "Extra Special Edition," with the same date. In very large type across the top of the front page a lengthy banner headline began: "THANHOUSER FACTORY BURNED TO GROUND." Then followed this article, set in larger type than usual:

The Thanouser Film Corporation's entire plant at Grove and Warren Streets was completely destroyed by fire this afternoon. It took but an hour before the building with its valuable contents were a flat heap of ashes. Two houses adjoining the factory and studio caught fire and were burned down before any impression could be made on the flames.³⁵

1914: Edwin and Gertrude Write from Europe

Among other news, Edwin and **Gertrude Thanouser** were continuing their tour of Europe, stopping here and there to visit film plants and offices. A letter dated June 6, 1914, from Thanouser secretary Jessie B. Bishop, in New Rochelle, to Paul Kimberley, head of Thanouser Films, Ltd. in London, stated:

We have your letter of May 23rd and note that Mr. and **Mrs. Thanouser** have recently visited your place. They are very delightful people. We are glad to note that you were able to show them some of our feature productions, and we suspect it seemed good to both of them to see some of our old time actors on the screen. Enclosed please find a list of negatives which we have produced and which have not been exhibited in Great Britain or on the Continent. Mr. Thanouser will undoubtedly remember well all of the ones taken before he left here, and while some of the subjects are topical and some local, there are others that we think would go very well with English audiences. We should be glad to send any of them to you upon request.

Kindly give the writer's best regards to both Mr. and Mrs. Thanouser, and with sincere wishes, we are,
Yours very truly, THANHOUSER FILM CORPORATION, J.B. Bishop,
Secretary

In the spring of 1914 Lloyd and Marie Thanouser were in boarding schools in Lausanne, Switzerland, while Edwin and **Gertrude** traveled through various European countries,

³⁵ The balance of this article is omitted for readability. Charles Hite capitalized on this spectacular fire with the film *When the Studio Burned*; production continued and new production were completed in May.

stopping to visit film factories in France, Germany, and elsewhere, and staying in various grand hotels along the way.³⁶

July 29, 1914: The Trust Flexes Its Muscles

The Motion Picture Patents Company reared its head and in July commenced an action in the United States District Court against Thanouser, seeking to enjoin the firm from manufacturing and selling its films, on the grounds that a camera employed by the company infringed on the Edison reissue patents controlled by the plaintiff.³⁷ This camera had been used for the preceding several months, the action asserted. A similar suit was filed against the Universal Film Manufacturing Company, which had been enjoined recently from using the Warwick camera, which was said to have infringed on the Edison patents. An appeal had been filed by Universal, and a stay of the injunction was granted against a bond of \$8,000. Soon thereafter, additional defendants were named in the suit, including Crystal, All Star Features, Ramo, Ryno, Victor Motion Picture Manufacturing Company, and the Life-Photo Film Corporation.

On July 29, 1914, a settlement was reached between the Patents Company and the Mutual interests, including Thanouser, Majestic, American, Reliance, Keystone, Broncho, Carlton Motion Picture Laboratories, Domino, and the New York Motion Picture Corporation. Mutual acknowledged the validity of Reissue Letters Patent Nos. 12,192 and 13,329, for motion picture film and camera respectively, and expressed the desire to settle. A payment amounting to an initial \$10,000 followed by four like amounts payable 45, 90, 135, and 180 days later, was agreed upon. The agreement also affected numerous exchanges and individuals, including among the latter, Addison E. Jones, Wilbert E. Shallenberger, Jessie B. Bishop, D.W. Griffith, the Aitken brothers, Charles J. Hite, and several dozen others.

August 21, 1914: Charles J. Hite Dies from Auto Accident

On Friday, August 21st, Charles J. Hite had a busy day in New York City. The Broadway Rose Gardens, seriously behind its scheduled opening date, occupied much of his attention in the afternoon, after which he had dinner with a broker. It was well into the evening when he climbed into his new touring car and headed northward to Westchester County, where he was to host a party involving another of his business investments, Clysmyc Waters. Thanouser actors and actresses were on hand, eagerly awaiting his arrival so that festivities could begin. As the hour grew late his employees began to worry. An article in *The New York Dramatic Mirror*³⁸ later told what happened:

CHARLES HITE DEAD: Fatally injured when his auto became unmanageable and plunged 50 feet from the Central Bridge in Harlem to the street below, Charles J. Hite died in the Harlem Hospital last Saturday. Mr. Hite, who was only 38 years old, was the first vice-president and treasurer of the Mutual Company, president of the Thanouser Corporation, and a director and stockholder of many of the largest picture concerns in the country. He was universally liked, and the

³⁶ Unpublished manuscript by Lloyd F. Thanouser, *The Thanouser Family*, January 1970.

³⁷ *The Motion Picture World*, July 25, 1914.

³⁸ August 26, 1914.

funeral services in New Rochelle yesterday were attended by the prominent factors of the motion picture world. A delegation from the Screen Club, of which Mr. Hite was a life member, was also on hand. The Reverend Charles F. Canedy, of the New Rochelle Episcopal Church, officiated.

Edwin and Gertrude Return to America

August 1914: The World War and Escape from Europe

In the summer **Gertrude** and Edwin were reunited with the children, and the family began a walking tour around Mont Blanc, where the boundaries of Switzerland, France, and Italy come together. In early August, when the World War was rampaging throughout much of Europe, the party was at Argentière, a French village in the Chamonix district. Edwin departed immediately for Zermatt, Switzerland, where the walking tour was to end, to pick up baggage that had been forwarded there, while **Gertrude** took the children back to Lausanne, where trunks and larger baggage were stored.

Edwin Thanouser recalled the time:³⁹

The tragedy of it all came upon me in one brief second. One morning early, I stood at my bedroom window in Argentière watching a troop train pull out. The recruits shouted the *Marseillaise* with tremendous enthusiasm. The ardor with which they sang thrilled me through and through. Then suddenly, while their shouting still echoed in the distance, I heard a great wail below me, and looking down I saw the mother and sister of one of those boys sobbing as if their hearts would break. Never before have I experienced such a dramatic effect, first the song and then the sob. It was tragic.

Another observer of the scene, quite possibly Mrs. Thanouser, although her identity was not stated, told of her experiences while staying at the Hotel Alexandra in Lausanne. At the time the mobilization calls in Switzerland took proprietors, concierges, and waiters from hotels and cabmen, chauffeurs, and automobiles from the streets, and foreign visitors were forced to leave. The account noted:⁴⁰

I felt such pity for the men who had to quit their wives and families and occupations because in a far-off land a maniac had killed an archduke who meant nothing to them. One could see they had no interest in the fight. A waiter in our hotel came in to serve tea one afternoon, upset with suppressed emotion. I remarked that he looked unwell. He replied with terrible bitterness, "Madame, I am aflame inside. After I have served you this evening, I must go to war, not because we have been wrong, not for our liberty, but because a madman wants to change a map. For his insane idea, we must give up our lives.

A few days later the Thanouser family went to Milan, Italy, where Edwin was able to arrange accommodations on a shabby steamer, Principe di Udine, of the Lloyd Sabauda

³⁹ *The Sailing of a Refuge Ship*, 1914, page 34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Line, which was to sail from Genoa. The vessel was chartered by a number of well-known Americans, Frederick W. Vanderbilt among them.

*The Moving Picture World*⁴¹ told of Edwin Thanouser's view of the war's effect upon the motion picture trade in Europe:

Mr. Thanouser had many interesting things to say about the general progress in the European motion picture business and art. The war has caught all this in a choking grip. Speaking of these things pleasantly in his parlor at the Great Northern Hotel in New York City, as though these advances and this progress so painfully made and so eagerly labored for were still going on, it is probable that neither Mr. Thanouser nor the interviewer vividly realized how grim and terrible a picture of war's destruction his account was driving. These valuable activities have ceased; perhaps they are being destroyed. And, of course, what is true of the motion picture business is true of all kinds of activities, and especially true of all kinds of artistic and scientific activity.

Mr. Thanouser thinks that one of the most important and hopeful advances in all the motion picture business was being made in Germany. Some of the best pictures he has ever seen were recently made in Germany. There producers and players have been growing more and more skillful in setting forth hard-stirring things by means of repose and mental suggestion and in escaping from that restlessness in continuous motion which must, of course, tend to make a picture's message less sure of itself and shallower. Some of the best German pictures, he thinks, have been made by the Mestere Company, with Hetty Porter as the leading woman.

In France, too, he found improvement, particularly in the work of the Gaumont Company. The best improvement in their work, he sees, has been in the quality of the stories, but there has also been progress all along the line - acting, stage craft and photography. He was delighted with the show offered at the Gaumont Palace in Paris, which seats as many as the Hippodrome here in New York yet exhibits to a full house every night and sells standing room - all at high prices. The well-balanced *Variety* of the show pleased him. There were black-and-white pictures, colored films and singing pictures with short scenics and educationals, but no songs or anything that wasn't photographic. He added, though, that he had just come from an afternoon from the Strand Theatre in New York City and was enthusiastic over the way pictures are handled there. It is the best conducted picture house that he has yet seen.

In England he finds that picture makers have proved their misty climate is not the impossible handicap to good photography which many have long supposed it to be. Some recent English photography is as clear and as good as that made on the Continent or elsewhere. Many fine and interesting offerings have been recently turned out in English studios.

⁴¹ *Edwin Thanouser Home From Europe*, September 12, 1914 by Hanford C. Judson

He finds that architecture and decoration of the picture houses are considered far more important abroad than these things are in this side of the sea. Art Nouveau is markedly in fashion there, especially in Berlin, where there are picture houses decorated with the grace and beauty that are never seen here. He thinks, too, that we in America have not taken the same care in choosing and balancing the program as abroad, where an evening's entertainment is apt to be more satisfactory as a whole. He is not at all sure that our feature films are, as a rule, just what the people want. Of course, he said, any reasonable length of film at all will be a delight, for the story warrants that length, but he finds that in the making of many features we, on this side, have been too tempted to pad out for mere length's sake. Yet some of our new features he finds greatly pleasing. He finds, too, that our big features have led us in America to make flattering progress in the handling of big subjects. He is optimistic as to the picture business in the future here in America, both artistically and from a business viewpoint.

September 1914: Return to New Rochelle

After returning to New Rochelle in September, 1914, Edwin Thanouser spent the remainder of the year developing plans to re-enter the motion picture business by forming a new company. The New Rochelle Pioneer reported on January 2, 1915:

At a meeting of the Development Department of the Association, Tuesday night, President Jere Milleman reported that Edwin Thanouser has arrived at no decision concerning where he will locate his proposed motion picture factory which he is soon to establish. A committee of the Association has been negotiating with the movie man, and several different propositions have been placed before him. He will decide next week.

More was told in the same paper on January 23rd:

Edwin Thanouser is still undecided about the location for his proposed motion picture plant. President Jere Milleman of the New Rochelle Association has submitted eight different factory sites to him, but the movie man will not make a decision as to whether he will locate in New Rochelle or Mount Vernon until some other plans of which he has not spoken materialize. There is absolutely no truth in the rumors that Mr. Thanouser has settled upon a site, although it has been stated that he intends locating somewhere in Westchester County.

February 21, 1915: Edwin and Gertrude Return to Thanouser

Meanwhile, at the New Rochelle Thanouser Film Corporation, morale was going from bad to worse as players became increasingly dispirited under the management of Shallenberger and Jones. After-hours activities at the Thanouser Theatre occupied the attention of many, but during regular work hours there was little enthusiasm expressed. Newspapers and trade journals told the tale of what happened next.

The Morning Telegraph, February 21, 1915:

After four years' absence from active participation in the motion picture business Edwin Thanouser, founder of the company which bears his name, will return to it in the capacity of general manager tomorrow. Rumors to the effect that he would again be identified with the concern he sponsored have been rife for some time. It is now stated that while he will not at first have the title of president he will be elected to that office in the near future. Mr. Thanouser is one of the pioneer film men of this country. The purchase of the stock of the company owned by the Hite estate by a syndicate will, it is expected, effect changes in the policy of the concern.

1915: Gertrude as Scenario Writer

May 2, 1915: *Their One Love*

The month of May 1915 saw the release of many films supervised by Edwin Thanouser, as well as a few pictures from earlier days. First was the May 2nd offering, [*Their One Love*](#), featuring the Fairbanks twins. It was during the filming of this picture that bombs exploded and several children were injured.

The New Rochelle Pioneer commented that the trade writers' enthusiasm for *Their One Love* was so intense that this "single reel story is comparable only, in their judgment, to *The Birth of a Nation*."⁴² Of course, this was nonsense, but reviews were quite favorable.

In *The Evening Mail*, April 17, 1915, Wid Gunning had this to say:

As a whole: A little gem; Story: Different; Photography: Splendid; Lighting: Remarkable; Camera work: Excellent; Acting: Very good; Exteriors: Good; Interiors: Splendid; Detail: Fine; Direction: Exceptional.

In this film we have a story of the Civil War with a different twist, a dainty bit of heart interest, a most commendable effort for perfection of detail, and some wonderful night photography, depicting battle scenes that carry you with them, due to the well-directed action, the proper assembling and the effectiveness of the lighting. Producer Jack Harvey and Cameraman Gregory deserve much credit for this one, and Mr. Thanouser can be very proud of this release. With the material in hand, after the splendid results secured with the night photography, this film could have been made much longer by padding the story, but had this been done, the strength would have been taken from the film and it would not have been nearly as effective. It is a one-reel "feature." I hope all of the producers make more of them.

The Moving Picture World, May 8, 1915, called it a pretty story with effective scenes.

The New York Dramatic Mirror, April 28, 1915, pointed out that the picture was unusual in that it had no subtitles:

Not a written explanation mars the film from beginning to end. There are, it is true, several letters to be read, but except for that and a changing calendar to denote the lapse of years nothing extraneous in the picture action halts the self-

⁴² *The New Rochelle Pioneer*, April 17, 1915.

instructing action. Of course it is rather simple. It presupposes two twin sisters - the Fairbanks twins - who are in love with the same young officer who is called away at the outbreak of the Civil War. Each intends to sacrifice herself that the other may have the man she herself covets. But the news of his death is borne to them and they are shown, white-haired, true to his memory. The war scenes are taken at night and show as pretty and strikingly illuminated scenes of their kind as have yet been done. In connection with well-placed white fire and explosives of every kind, they make some striking silhouette tableaux and views. The film ran a thousand feet.

May 25, 1915: *Fairy Fern Seed*

[*Fairy Fern Seed*](#), a two-reeler released on the 25th, was directed by Jack Harvey from a scenario written by **Gertrude Thanouser**. A review in *The Moving Picture World*, August 7, 1915, commented:

It has always seemed quite proper to accord extended space to large productions, solely for the reason that their very magnitude warranted it; but it is not often that a one- or two-reel picture gets more than its proportionate share of space. However, one of Thanouser's recent two-reel films has been so favorably received that an additional amount of comment here at this time may not be amiss. The title of this release was *The Fairy Fern Seed*, and it measures up to what has come to be called a standard for short films of the better kind, solely because it does not falter in plot or action. **Mrs. Thanouser** wrote the scenario, Carl Gregory looked after the photography, and Jack Harvey directed. Gregory's double exposure work in the second reel is quite unusual and exceedingly well done. This was Harvey's last picture before he joined Universal's staff, and he has left a splendid example of his painstaking work. A capable cast, headed by Ethel Jewett, does some sincere work that gains in effectiveness as the story progresses. Miss Jewett, by the way, is showing a steady improvement in her interpretations. She seems to enter into the spirit of her parts as a real screen star should.

June 7, 1915: *The Patriot and the Spy*

The making of [*The Patriot and the Spy*](#), a four-reel Mutual Masterpicture first exhibited on June 7th, was told in local newspaper articles. John William Kellette, writing as a columnist for *The New Rochelle Pioneer*, commented in the issue of May 15th:

Was your sleep disturbed last week? 'Twas? Too bad! But, certainly, had you known that Edwin Thanouser, John Harvey, and Carl Louis Gregory were proving that it is possible to take picture without the aid of daylight, you'd be willing to forgive everything, wouldn't you? Well, they proved that pictures could be taken at midnight, or any other hour during the dark stretch from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m., but a lot of gunfire had to result to give the world a glimpse of the new art.

Y'see, **Mrs. Thanouser** and Lloyd F. Lonergan conceived a four-reel Mutual Masterpiece [sic] with an intensely dramatic plot carrying a war setting between a home army and an army of invasion. James Cruze and Marguerite Snow had the

leads, with Alphonse Ethier as the heavy, and the story was given to Director John Harvey to produce. Carl Louis Gregory had charge of the photography, but had several assistants - Henry Cronjager, William Zollinger, Lawrence Williams and Lawrence Fowler, and remarkable still pictures were secured in addition to the moving pictures. Director Harvey, however, wore out many of his chief aides by the wonderful speed at which he worked. He gained for himself the sobriquet of The Human Dynamo, for he kept continuously on the job from Wednesday morning at 8:30, day and night, until midnight. Saturday, because he was given until 11 p.m. Saturday to complete the gunfire on Glen Island. At 10:57 that night he gave the signal to cease firing.

September 5, 1915: *From the River's Depths*

[*From the River's Depths*](#), released on September 5th, was from a scenario by **Gertrude Thanouser**, who must have been pleased with this review in *The Moving Picture World* on September 11, 1915:

An unusually good one-reel drama, picturing the way in which an escaped convict palms himself on a banker as the son of an English gentleman. The girl discovers a secret and the reel closes with some stirring scenes of a melodramatic character. Well constructed and absorbing in plot.

September 30, 1915: *The Price of Her Silence*

Readers of the October 2nd issue of *Reel Life* were greeted by an article, "Film Power - Intermittent or Consistent?" bearing the byline of Edwin Thanouser, which read in part:

[*The Price of Her Silence*](#) is another illustration of consistent motive power from a point of view of human interest. While it may not bring tears as readily as other dramas we have made, it is of that rare quality which holds attention from the first foot to the last. This is a scenario virtue which, while only one ingredient of the acceptable photoplay, is nevertheless the vehicle for talent and construction - you might term it the foundation of the house.

1916: Edwin and Gertrude Meet the President

In New York City on Thursday evening, February 12, 1916, many motion picture officials and players had the opportunity to greet President Woodrow Wilson at a banquet given in the hall on the 19th floor of the Biltmore Hotel, when the president addressed the assembled guests from the film industry on the theme that truth will win over all.

After Wilson's speech Edwin Thanouser commented to a reporter: "At last the motion picture industry is no longer in its infancy. While I have always taken great pride in my connection with the art, I feel now as if my responsibilities have increased a hundredfold. The Wilson dinner has done more to give us a position that belongs to us than any other group of events that has marked out years of endeavor." Other various motion picture people also gave their opinions. Accompanying Edwin Thanouser was a contingent

from New Rochelle consisting of Gertrude Edwin Thanouser, Mr. and Mrs. Leon J. Rubenstein, Mr and Mrs. Addison E. Jones, Miss Jones, and Florence LaBadie.⁴³

1916: A Year of Transition

For the Thanouser Film Corporation the year 1916 was one of transition. In January hopes were high as the Jacksonville facility, described as the finest studio in the South, was set to produce a long string of one-reel Falstaff comedies as well as numerous longer films from two reels upward. By the end of May the curtain descended, the Jacksonville studio was closed, and despite numerous official statements to the contrary, no other films would ever be produced by Thanouser in that Southern city.

At the same time, Thanouser was ejected from the Mutual program. After considering many possibilities, Edwin Thanouser made an agreement to release through the Pathé Exchange, Inc. Nothing was guaranteed. A review committee was to screen each film and then decide whether Pathé should release it. Gone were the days of one-reel pictures, which had become obsolete anyway, and after midsummer 1916 all Thanouser Film Corporation films were five reels or more.

Elsewhere in the industry Mary Pickford was idolized by movie fans worldwide. Adolph Zukor signed her to a two-year contract with Famous Players with a guaranteed minimum of \$1,040,000. Other stars of the Famous Players studio included Pauline Frederick, John Barrymore, Marguerite Clark, and Hazel Dawn. Fox, Metro, and Lasky all scored box office success with their feature films. Universal, known in the industry as a "film factory," continued to turn out a stream of pictures in its New Jersey and Los Angeles studios, with the latter, known as Universal City, being a prime tourist attraction. Triangle attracted audiences with such stars as Douglas Fairbanks and William S. Hart. Lewis J. Selznick formed the Clara Kimball Young Film Corporation amidst much pressagentry, confusing press statements, and a lawsuit by the star's husband who charged alienation of her affections.

Serials were all the rage in 1916. While Thanouser pulled in its horns after the dismal failure of *Zudora*, most other studios fielded entries in the weekly sweepstakes. Pearl White, the queen of serials whose fame in *The Perils of Pauline* endured, was seen in 1916 in *The Iron Claw* and *Pearl of the Army*, released through the Pathé Exchange, which also offered *The Grip of Evil*, *The Red Circle*, *The Mysteries of Myra*, *The Shielding Shadow*, and *Who's Guilty?* Metro produced *The Great Secret*, while Kalem issued *The Social Pirates*, Universal distributed *For Liberty and Peg o' the Ring*, and Kleine offered *Gloria's Romance* with Billie Burke. Serial episodes largely took the place of the one-reel dramas of yesteryear and were ideal fillers and additions to an evening's program featuring a five-reel or longer film.

In the world of comedy, Charlie Chaplin remained dominant and with a contract for \$670,000 in his pocket, began what eventually amounted to 12 two-reel films for Mutual. Theatre audiences laughed at the slapstick antics in Keystone comedies, while Harold Lloyd was catching on with his *Lonesome Luke* pictures produced by Rolin and released

⁴³ *The Moving Picture World*, February 12, 1916.

through the Pathé Exchange. In the Kalem studio, Lloyd V. Hamilton and Bud Duncan produced the highly successful Ham and Bud series of mirth provokers. Al Christie, earlier with Nestor, formed Al E. Christie Comedies and began releasing in September 1916, eventually gaining a wide audience.

The old Patents Company members were rapidly fading in the face of aggressive competition by newer studios. Four of them - Kleine, Edison, Selig, and Essanay - banded together in 1916 as K-E-S-E to release their productions, the successor, more or less, to V-L-S-E, formed in April 1915 to distribute Vitagraph, Lubin, Selig, and Essanay films. By this time the day of the Patents Co. studios vs. the Independents was a subject for the history books.

Two-dollar admission charges were being posted for the best seats in theatres during the evening showings of such films as *Civilization*, *Intolerance*, *Ramona*, *The Fall of a Nation*, and *A Daughter of the Gods*. While in rural districts a nickel would pay a child's admittance to a theatre, adult prices for regular films in many cities ranged from 25 cents upward. Interest was centered on *Intolerance* in particular, the Griffith film which was nearly two years in the making and which took three and a half hours to project. Audiences found the four parallel themes of the picture to be confusing, and the production lost money.

By December 1916 Edwin Thanouser was caught up in a high-powered industry which bore little resemblance to film production when he began his releases in 1910.

1917: Thanouser Operations Wind Down

In autumn 1916 Edwin Thanouser purchased a plot of land on Long Island and informed his associates, employees, and the trade that once his contract with the Thanouser Film Corporation expired in 1918, he would retire. The motion picture game was far different now than it was when he first entered the field, and he was no longer considered to be a prime innovator and leader in the industry. By now, innovation fell largely to committees and boards of directors who were backed by millions of dollars provided by investors who, as often as not, never visited the studios in which they purchased shares.

The trade itself was experiencing hard times due to the war in Europe. *The Moving Picture World* in its January 2nd issue told of economic conditions in a representative state: "Exhibitors throughout California are complaining of a falling-off in attendance of moving picture houses, in some places this being so marked as to compel the cancellation of service. Preparations for military service are under way in nearly every town, and increasing costs of living are tending further to interfere with amusements."

In 1916 the American film industry produced approximately 4,850 reels involving 2,200 titles. By the end of 1917 the figure was to drop to 4,056 reels for 1,525 productions. The following year, 1918, saw only 3,171 reels produced for just 1,010 titles.⁴⁴ In a declining market even the best of firms was faced with difficulties. During the 1916-1918 period many changes took place. By the end of that period Fort Lee, New Jersey was in sharp

⁴⁴ Figures from *Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 1898 – 1980*, by Richard Alan Nelson.

decline as studios were closed or abandoned. Los Angeles was the center of the industry, as it had been for several years, but now there was virtually no competition. No serious challenges were mounted by Chicago, Philadelphia, Jacksonville, or northern New Jersey, all of which were important film centers in years gone by.

It is easy to understand that by early 1917 Edwin Thanouser was tired of the business. As was the case in autumn 1916, each Thanouser film had to be made on speculation. If it pleased the screening committee of the Pathé Exchange, Inc., then Pathé would release it. If not, the picture was offered elsewhere or discarded. This was a far cry from the comfortable situation of just a year earlier when each and every Thanouser film automatically reached a wide audience through the Mutual program. New Rochelle was 2,500 miles from the center of trade activity in Los Angeles, and Edwin Thanouser had no inclination to move there. Rather, he bided his time on the East Coast awaiting the expiration of his contract, and in the meantime he endeavored to create pictures of merit.

The Moving Picture World⁴⁵ reported that Edwin Thanouser intended to show his feature films in advance to reviewers, because:

Exhibitors do go by the trade press criticism. It is true that a few years ago film reviewers were pretty largely synopsis writers. This was because the program situation at the time left the exhibitor no choice to individual pictures, and a tip one way or the other from his trade paper didn't help much. What is the value of a tip if you can't profit by it? Accordingly there was no call for keen criticism, and the trade press didn't waste space on it. With the breakup of the old programs' conditions, the exhibitor's position changed. He could show what he wanted, and when he wanted it. Trade press criticisms rose to the occasion, the present high level was obtained.

Edwin Thanouser went on to say that very few people wanted to go back to the type of booking under which exchanges automatically sent program releases to theatres, and that the present system kept Thanouser's own standard high, for if the studio made a poor picture "exhibitors shall be told of it far enough ahead to seriously affect its bookings."

Despite the fact that Edwin Thanouser had no serious intention of reopening the Jacksonville studio, advertising for the firm continued to state that facilities were maintained in New Rochelle and Jacksonville, with European offices now located at 167 Wardour Street, London.

1917: Thanouser Exits the Industry

If any single player could be said to be the most important personality at the Thanouser studio, that honor would go to Florence LaBadie. Year in and year out Florence remained loyal to the studio, in the meantime starring in *The Million Dollar Mystery* serial and dozens of regular releases, nearly always in leading roles. James Cruze, Marguerite Snow, Marie Eline, Mignon Anderson, Maude Fealy, Muriel Ostriche, and others came

⁴⁵ January 2, 1917.

and went, but only Florence remained in New Rochelle, unaffected by offers of higher pay elsewhere.

Then tragedy struck. On August 28, 1917 Florence was driving an automobile near Ossining, New York with her fiancé, Daniel Carson Goodman, a free lance scenario writer, as a passenger. Descending a steep hill, the automobile lost its brakes, careened at a breakneck speed down the slope, and turned over at the bottom. Florence was thrown from the vehicle and suffered a compound fracture of the pelvis. Goodman escaped with a broken leg and minor injuries. The Thanouser star was hospitalized in Ossining for the next six weeks. Her condition took a turn for the worse, severe infection set in, and she died on October 13th.

What little tradition was left at the Thanouser studio was gone when Florence LaBadie left the earthly scene.

By this time the Thanouser Film Corporation was largely forgotten, as were Biograph, Lubin, Kalem, Edison, and other great studios of an earlier era. Such names as Lasky, Paramount, Keystone, Chaplin, Fairbanks, Pickford, Sennett, and Fox were splashed across the trade publications. California dominated the industry, and production on the East Coast, primarily in Northern New Jersey, was only a shadow of what it had been several years before. Few in the industry remembered the struggle of the Independents against the Trust, and few recalled that in 1910 and 1911 Edwin Thanouser was acclaimed as one of the great innovators in the industry. Disillusionment with the changes wrought in the film industry since that time and symptoms of angina which manifested themselves in late 1917 made Edwin Thanouser determined not to look back. "The Wizard of New Rochelle" had his sights set on retirement and counting the days until his contract expired in 1918.

Edwin and Gertrude's Retirement

1916: Bayville, Long Island

In Bayville, Long Island, on the estate which he had purchased in 1916, Edwin Thanouser began the construction of Shorewood, the beginning of a complex of several buildings intended to be his new home. Edwin's son Lloyd later recalled Shorewood:⁴⁶

In 1916 Edwin bought a 10-acre tract of wooded shorefront property at Bayville, Long Island. Before the United States' embroilment in World War I put an end to further private construction, the tract, appropriately named Shorewood, was improved along its Bayville Avenue side by a massive stone wall, wrought iron entrance gates, and a solidly built gate lodge. The contemplated main house, to be erected on higher ground overlooking the water, was never built.

The Thanouser family moved into the gate lodge when it was completed, and this remained their permanent home for the next eight years. Each autumn Edwin and Gertrude closed the Shorewood lodge and, as a rule, "followed the sun" to Florida and other Southern climes. Each spring they would return to Shorewood.

⁴⁶ Unpublished manuscript by Lloyd F. Thanouser, *The Thanouser Family*, January 1970.

After World War I the town of Bayville evolved into a different kind of community. Soaring income tax rates and scarcity of domestic help compelled the closing down of big estates, and numerous small residences and summer cottages began springing up all over. In tune with this trend, Edwin subdivided Shorewood into small lots which were sold at auction in the spring of 1925. The sale was highly successful and Edwin netted a substantial profit on his investment.

In another recollection Edwin's son Lloyd told of life at Shorewood:⁴⁷

Those were the days that you had servants. Did I tell you about the servants out at Shorewood on Long Island near Oyster Bay? Bayville was the actual site of it. I told you about Dad's building, planning to build a house there and instead building a very grand gardener's cottage which was warped into the wall in front of the estate. My mother and father always had at least three servants, a chauffeur, a cook and a chambermaid. Well the mixed sexes always led to a triangle, and one day the chauffeur came over to the golf club, the old Engineers' Country Club [in Roslyn, N.Y.], and picked up my dad and mother to take them home. And, he said, "Mr. Thanouser, I have bad news for you. My wife has left us."

He also had a gardener, an English gardener, by the name of James Cooke. Whenever you ask Jim what a flower was he would say it was a red flower or a yellow flower, he never knew. One day he said he was leaving because he was offered more money from the widow next door who had just come into money, presumably. A few weeks later he came and asked for his job back. My father said, "Why," and he said "I can't stand this woman, she swears at me." "But what does she say?" "She told me to get the hell out of there."

Edwin's granddaughter, Joan Thanouser Sherman, recalled an interesting incident:⁴⁸

During World War I citizens were encouraged to have victory gardens, and at Shorewood Edwin and **Gertrude** wanted to do their part. Edwin bought a bushel of seed potatoes, carefully planted them, and nurtured the crop for a season. Then came the harvest, and when the ground was dug up the total amount of potatoes gathered amounted to precisely one bushel. This became a family joke and was told for many years.

1924: Around the World

From February 20 to March 20, 1924, Edwin and **Gertrude** Thanouser were aboard the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company's Orca, which departed from New York City on an itinerary which included Havana, Kingston (Jamaica), the Panama Canal, Cartagena (Colombia), Curacao, Martinique, and various West Indies stops, then to Bermuda, then back to New York. At the many ports of call, the Thanousers took numerous snapshots, which were subsequently pasted into a family album.

⁴⁷ Taped recording of Lloyd F. Thanouser, August 17, 1981.

⁴⁸ Interview with Q. David Bowers, June 26, 1989.

1925: Sands Point, Long Island

Following the subdivision of their Shorewood estate in 1925, Edwin and **Gertrude** Thanouser purchased a large, white, wooden-sided mansion, Wampage Shores, facing Manhasset Bay at Sands Point, Long Island. In 1939 and later years transatlantic Pan American World Airways Clipper "flying boats" docked not far from their shore. As they did when they lived at Shorewood, each winter the couple closed their home and traveled to warmer locales. Over a period of years they went around the world twice and took numerous trips to Europe, Hawaii, the South Pacific, and elsewhere.

1925: Thanouser Negatives Destroyed

For several years Edwin Thanouser stored a quantity of his early film negatives, apparently mainly from the 1910-1912 years, in a bank vault he secured for the purpose at the New Rochelle Trust Company.⁴⁹ By the mid 1920s he tired of paying the rent and had the reels taken to the dump. Although he saved many clippings, photographs, and memorabilia from this theatre stage days in Milwaukee and elsewhere, no items from the Thanouser Company or the Thanouser Film Corporation were retained.

1927/1928: Around the World, Again

In late 1927 and early 1928 Edwin and **Gertrude** Thanouser joined about 475 other adventurers on a world cruise aboard the S.S. Belgenland. Many stops were made along the way. For the ship's newspaper, The Ocean Ferry, Edwin contributed an article, "Catching Snakes in Upper Egypt." He related that in Luxor he saw an exhibition of snake charming that interested him deeply. Seeking the source of the reptiles, he learned that a local Arab made a specialty of snake catching. Enlisting his services, several tourists followed him into the fields, where in short order he found a large yellow snake under a flat rock, then, in a clump of grass, a "snake at least four feet long, a lively, ugly fellow, who ran out his fangs and wanted to fight," and, finally "a large cobra - the deadly hooded serpent of ancient Egypt."

The article concluded: "I could get no explanation as to how the man located the snakes, but I have an idea he saw signs of them on the ground, or smelled them. We were told he was one of the very few men in Egypt who had the art of finding and taming wild snakes. He does it regularly during the tourist season."

Later on the around-the-world trip, when the S.S. Belgenland was in the Bay of Bengal, the passengers presented a stage play, Just Off Broadway, on March 2nd and 3rd, with Edwin Thanouser taking a part in the activities. Around the same time, the tourists went by land to Agra, in India, to see the Taj Mahal.

1930: An Interview with Edwin Thanouser

Columnist Robert H. Davis interviewed Edwin Thanouser in 1930, while Mrs. and **Mrs. Thanouser** were vacationing at the Charlotte Harbor Hotel in Punta Gorda, Florida.

⁴⁹ Taped recollections of Lloyd F. Thanouser, August 2, 1980.

Coincidentally, Thomas A. Edison, who had a winter home in Fort Myers 25 miles to the south, was there on the same day.⁵⁰

Edwin Thanouser told Davis of motion picture production years earlier, how he almost hired Mary Pickford but declined her offer to work for \$65 per week, and:

In conjunction with my wife I produced a seven-reel [sic] serial, The Million Dollar Mystery, which Harold MacGrath novelized for publication during the run of the picture. It was a great success, ran all over the country, and made a fortune.⁵¹

I was one of the syndicate that underwrote a contract to pay Charlie Chaplin \$10,000 a week for 12 two-reel pictures a year, with an advance of \$160,000 on signing. We trebled our money; the pictures had come to stay.... I sold out the Thanouser Corporation, made a tour of the world, and now content myself with quail shooting and golf on the West Coast [of Florida]. However, it is something to have been in at the beginning.

1938: New Rochelle 250th Anniversary Celebration

As part of the town's 1688-1938 anniversary celebration the New Rochelle Standard-Star printed numerous historical features in various 1938 editions. In the June 13, 1938 issue an article by Dorothea L. McEvoy discussed formation of the Thanouser studio and related activities. Shown were a photograph of players from The Million Dollar Mystery, a picture of Edwin Thanouser, and two scenes of the 1913 studio fire. At the time Edwin Thanouser lived in Sands Point, Long Island and had just returned from a "thrilling trip" to South Africa. He showed a reporter, in his upstairs library, a teakwood chest with hand-made nails, stating that: "it was taken from an Arab's hut."

1941: Edwin Thanouser-Art Collector

In addition to his interest in travel, Edwin Thanouser became an avid art collector. While he was in England during the winter of 1924-1925 he purchased a pair of small landscape paintings, probably by an artist named Gill.⁵² The spark was ignited, and for the next 15 years he set about covering the walls of his Sands Point residence with paintings. On November 20, 1941, Edwin Thanouser wrote the introduction to a 24-page précis describing his art collection, noting in part:

This is a catalogue of my hobby. I had wanted to pursue it for a longer time than I care to mention, and finally caught up with it about 15 years ago. Now it is all about me - in the living room, the dining room, through the hallway, and up the stairs. It makes me wonder, sometimes, whether I am in fact the pursuer, or the pursued.

E.T., Sands Point, November 20, 1941.

⁵⁰ This interview was published in *The New York Sun*, May 22, 1930, in the "Bob Davis Recalls" column.

⁵¹ Actually, Edwin and Gertrude had nothing to do with the serial as it was the brainchild of Charles J. Hite.

⁵² Taped recollections of Lloyd F. Thanouser, August 2, 1980.

An unattributed newspaper clipping preserved by the Thanouser family is from this period:

One of the most interesting events of the season on the agenda of the Douglaston Art League took place Tuesday evening when a group of members visited "Wampage Shores," the home of Mr. and **Mrs. Edwin Thanouser**, at Sands Point, Point Washington, to attend a special private showing of famous paintings....

Besides paintings described in his catalogue distributed to the guests, Edwin Thanouser displayed works from other schools, including a Whistler canvas depicting the view from Battersea Bridge, a Blakelock with autumn foliage, an Inness, a painting titled Early Spring by H. Bolton Jones, a Constable work, two paintings by Gill, and one by Moreland. "A French village scene, lovely in color, is by Cazin, and the Market Place of Arras is by Laloue," the report also noted. A few years later, Parke-Bernet Galleries, Inc. included an important consignment of Edwin Thanouser's paintings in one of its auction sales.

1945: One Fifth Avenue

In the summer of 1945 the Thanousers sold their Sands Point residence. By that time Edwin was nearly 80 years old, and the burdens of opening and closing the place each year, staffing it with servants, and maintaining the spacious grounds were more than the couple wanted to bear. The sale was made at a loss, but Edwin had the satisfaction that the deficiency was more than compensated for by the profit on the sale of his art collection at Parke-Bernet Galleries a few months later on December 13, 1945.

After they sold their Sands Point mansion Edwin and **Gertrude** Thanouser lived in a hotel in Great Neck, Long Island, until they went on their customary winter travels. Upon their return they leased an apartment at the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City, moving a year or so later into the One Fifth Avenue Hotel, which was to remain their home for the rest of their lives. Edwin continued his interest in art, and the walls of their New York residence resembled a gallery.

1947: Edwin Thanouser Interview with Robert Hamilton Ball

During the course of research for his book, *Shakespeare on Silent Film*, published in 1968, Robert Hamilton Ball sought out Edwin Thanouser. Subsequently, he wrote: "When I met him in 1947 his chief interest was in his collection of paintings of the Barbizon School, rather than his reputation as the producer of the immensely popular *The Million Dollar Mystery*...."⁵³ Ball went on to interview Thanouser about the several Shakespeare plays he had dramatized for the screen.

1949: In Buenos Aires

Edwin and **Gertrude** Thanouser were in Argentina early in the year 1949, where the *Buenos Aires Herald*, on January 13, printed a feature article by "Leila" about them:

⁵³ As noted earlier, Edwin and Gertrude Thanouser did not produce this serial.

Interesting couple in town this week is Mr. and **Mrs. Edwin Thanouser**, who, in their own words, have been "following the sun" for over thirty years.... The Thanousers, who are on their first visit to the Argentine, might be described as the grandparents of the Hollywood film industry. Mr. Thanouser, whose company was among the first to be established in the film capital way back in 1900, was chiefly responsible for making Hollywood known to millions all over the world....⁵⁴

1951: Gertrude's Death

Gertrude Homan Thanouser died in her apartment at 1 Fifth Avenue, New York City, on May 29, 1951. (An obituary published in *The New York Times* stated erroneously that she died in Glen Cove, New York.)

Gertrude's Family

Gertrude Homan had nine siblings. Her sister Marie, known as "Molly" to her friends, was about ten years older and, by the time Gertrude was 10, Molly was Mrs. Lloyd F. Lonergan. A brother, Frank, was 20 years older, married and had several children, but his family never visited with the Thanousers in later years. Gertrude's younger brother, George Homan, Jr., remained a bachelor throughout his life and passed away in the 1920s. Ida, the oldest of Gertrude's sisters, married Kennedy Stout, who worked with the United States Department of the Interior in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. "Uncle Ken was a pedantic man," Edwin Thanouser's son, Lloyd, recalled in later years. "He was full of wise sayings, such as 'What is so rare as a day in June? As for me, I'd like 'em better done!' Aunt Ida was socially ambitious and wanted to join the Daughters of the American Revolution, and she had the Homan family's genealogy investigated. Sure enough, a Homan fought in the Revolutionary War, but the rascal turned out to be a Tory! Aunt Ida and Uncle Ken had one child, Miner."

Louise, another of Gertrude's sisters, married a man named Bayright, divorced him, and married I. Gainsburg, a New York lawyer. The firm of I. and L.H. Gainsburg furnished the inspiration for a Broadway show, *Counsellor at Law*. Carey Tidball, another of her sisters, was an actress and was on stage in Milwaukee in 1899 with Edwin Thanouser's stock company. Under the screen name of Carey L. Hastings she appeared in many Thanouser films from 1910 to 1917.

⁵⁴ While Edwin and Gertrude were certainly pioneers in the silent movie industry, they had nothing to do with the popularization of Hollywood.

Appendix

Appendix - Filmography of Gertrude Thanouser

ST. ELMO (Cast member)

March 22, 1910 (Tuesday)

Length: 860 feet

Character: Drama

Director: Barry O'Neil and/or Lloyd B. Carleton

Scenario: Lloyd F. Lonergan from the novel of the same name by Augusta Evans Wilson

Cameraman: Blair Smith

Cast: Frank H. Crane (*St. Elmo*), Anna Rosemond (Agnes), **Gertrude Thanouser**, Carey L. Hastings

Location: Filmed in a mansion built in 1759

BACKGROUND OF THE SCENARIO: *St. Elmo*, a novel from the pen of Augusta Jane Evans Wilson (1835-1909), was adapted into widely produced stage play. In producing it for the screen, Thanouser sought to capitalize on its popularity. Wilson, one of eight children of a Southwest Texas pioneer couple, moved with her family to Mobile, Alabama at the age of 14, where she remained for the rest of her life. Her first novel, *Inez*, was published by Harper when she was 15, although she was not identified as the author. A fervent advocate of the Confederate cause, Augusta spent long hours as a volunteer in Southern army hospitals during the Civil War. She died suddenly at home in 1909.

St. Elmo, published in 1866, was her most popular work. The novel quickly achieved and subsequently maintained great popularity throughout the country, and went through many printings. The story of a young girl who by wisdom and virtue claims for herself a sophisticated and cynical lover, *St. Elmo* toured as a play in 1909. The Vaughan Glaser stock company's presentation of this play at the Academy Theatre, using a scenario prepared by John E. Ritter under the direction of Mrs. Wilson, was reviewed in detail in *The New York Times*, December 14, 1909. T.N. Heffron, who was to gain employment with the Thanouser Company by 1911, played the part of Murray Hammond in the performance. *God's Witness*, a Thanouser film released on May 20, 1915, was adopted from Wilson's novel, *At the Mercy of Tiberius*.

ADVERTISEMENT and testimonials, *The Moving Picture World*, April 16, 1910:
"I exhibited *St. Elmo* last night (Monday). My receipts doubled those of any Monday in two years. Just 100% increase. How's that for a record breaker? No other comment is necessary on your excellent films. Nuf ced. - William F. Niel, proprietor, Crescent Theatre, Chattanooga.

"Just a line to tell you that we ran your *St. Elmo* film last night, and were surprised and delighted with the excellent quality. We shall insist on our exchange sending all the Thanouser films. We did a little extra advertising with *St. Elmo* and did a nice little business with the picture. - T.A. Rogers manager of the Edisonia Theatre, Jackson, Ohio.

"We can truthfully say that *St. Elmo* has met with our approval on every respect and that we were very much pleased with it, as were our customers. - R.A. Grombacher, Pacific Film Exchange, Seattle, Washington. March 25, 1910."

SYNOPSIS, *The Moving Picture World*, March 19, 1910:

"St. Elmo, a wealthy young man, is betrothed to his cousin Agnes. Dick Hammond, St. Elmo's chum, is studying for the ministry. As soon as he is ordained he is to take charge of a church built for him by St. Elmo. Hammond, however, takes St. Elmo's friendship lightly and makes love to Agnes in secret. The affair is discovered by St. Elmo, who, in a rage at Hammond's perfidy, challenges him to a duel. The false friend loses his life in the ensuing combat. Edna, the granddaughter of the village blacksmith, strays upon the scene of the duel, an uninvited witness. St. Elmo is forced to flee the country. He is pursued by Agnes and the sheriff. Edna tells her first lie when she deceives St. Elmo's pursuers as to his direction and leads them completely off the trail. St. Elmo makes good his escape. On the day that Edna witnesses the duel her grandfather dies, leaving her alone in the world. She is adopted by St. Elmo's mother.

"Five years later the fugitive returns. Edna recognizes him as the victor of the dual but he does not remember having met her. He discovers that he loves the girl. Edna rejects his suit, declaring that she never would marry a man who had taken a human life. In desperation, St. Elmo attempts suicide, choosing as a spot the grave of Dick Hammond, but is swerved from his purpose by Edna, who relents and promises him her love and sympathy. St. Elmo decides that life is worth living if but for her sake."

REVIEW, *The Morning Telegraph*, March 27, 1910. The review commenced with a synopsis, after which the following appeared:

"While the story is exactly as described by the manufacturer, yet not to discourage the good work of this new manufacturer, the story that he describes is told by the sub-titles in the film, and not so much by the acting. If there would be fewer sub-titles in this film and more acting to show the development of the story it would be a creditable production. In the duel scene Edna is seen lurking around the scene of action as if she were an insane person wandering about, with no object in view. There is only one strong scene, and that is when the duel occurs. The action of the rest of the film is weak. There is no complaint to make about the story."

REVIEW, *The Moving Picture World*, April 2, 1910:

"The second release of a new house and, unlike some producers, the second was better than the first. It is not what might be termed an engaging story which this firm undertook to present. The play is based upon Augusta Evans Wilson's novel of the same name. It is a religious novel and the dramatic company that has tried to play it has failed to satisfy in all places with one exception. Of course the film is an improvement over the spoken drama, since it is shortened and only the interesting scenes are retained. While the writer has no particular liking for either the story or the drama, he has no fault to find with the reproduction here. It is better than the drama because it eliminates much that is dreary and practically unnecessary to make the story comprehensible and leaves only the better

and stronger scenes. The acting is sympathetic and the photographer has performed his part satisfactorily."

REVIEW, *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, April 2, 1910:

"This film adaptation of the popular novel or play of that name is told with remarkable clearness, considering the difficulty that many other producers have experienced in adaptations. However, it must be added that much of this cleverness is due to the numerous sub-titles, which introduce nearly every scene. The acting is excellent, although not yet showing enough expressive feeling, which does not prevent the film from proving a notable one among the Independent releases.

"The picture takes up the story with the introduction of Hammond to St. Elmo's cousin, Agnes. Then follows the love making of Hammond, his duel with St. Elmo and his death, followed by the flight of St. Elmo and his meeting with Edna, the blacksmith's daughter. Later, when St. Elmo returns, he is recognized by Edna, who had seen the duel. She has been taken into the family of St. Elmo's relatives. Falling in love with her, she refuses his suit because he had taken human life, but when he is about to commit suicide she stops him in time and consents to become his wife. In the duel scene the presence of Edna is too conspicuous to have logical appearance, and her approach when he is about to kill himself is not quite convincingly managed."

THE WINTER'S TALE (Scenario writer)

May 27, 1910 (Friday)

Length: 1,000 feet

Character: Drama

Scenario: By Lloyd F. Lonergan and **Gertrude Thanouser**, from William Shakespeare's play of the same name

Cast: Anna Rosemond (Queen of Sicilia), Martin Faust (King of Sicilia), Frank H. Crane (King of Bohemia), Amelia Barleon (Princess of Sicilia), Alfred Hanlon (Prince of Bohemia)

Notes: 1. The title appeared as "WINTER TALE" on the film leader. In some notices it was listed as *A Winter's Tale*. 2. A lengthy testimonial for *The Winter's Tale*, sent by Miss Dolly Spurr, treasurer of the Royal Theatre, Marion, Indiana, was printed on page 918 of *The Moving Picture World*, issue of June 4, 1910. 3. Breaking with tradition, Thanouser announced the names of the players and their roles. The firm announced that "a strong series of Shakespearean releases are in order, of which *The Winter's Tale* is first." However, although works of Shakespeare were occasionally released later, there was no formal series. The next year, 1911, saw the release of *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest*.

BACKGROUND OF THE SCENARIO: Over a period of time, Thanouser adapted a number of Shakespeare's plays for the screen, including *The Winter's Tale* (released May 27, 1910), *Romeo and Juliet* (September 1 and 8, 1911), *The Tempest* (November 28, 1911), *The Merchant of Venice* (July 26, 1912), *Cymbeline* (March 28, 1913), and *King*

Lear (December 17, 1916). William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-on-Avon, and baptized on April 26, 1564, the son of John and Mary Shakespeare. Compared to what is known about modern playwrights, relatively little specific information survives today concerning Shakespeare's life. The authorship of his plays has been questioned by many, but the idea that someone else wrote his plays has no scholarly standing whatever. This popular controversy was the subject of *Master Shakespeare, Strolling Player*, a film created and produced by the Thanouser Film Corporation, released on April 20, 1916.

William Shakespeare received his public education at Stratford. At the age of 22, in 1582, he married Anne Hathaway. In 1586 he traveled to London, where he may have been a schoolmaster. Later he entered the theatre, working at The Theatre or The Curtain in London. Soon thereafter he became a member of Lord Chamberlain's Stock Company, later the King's Stock Company. He was seen on stage at The Theatre, The Curtain, the Globe (in which connection he is especially remembered today), and the Blackfriars Theatre. By 1592 he was also a playwright, and by 1603 he devoted his exclusive efforts to writing. His first work was *Henry VI*, written circa 1591, after which various comedies and histories appeared. *The Sonnets* were published in 1609 but are believed to have been written between 1593 and 1596. Around the same time, 1594-1596, he wrote *Romeo and Juliet*. Begun in 1596 and finished the following year was *The Merchant of Venice*. Some of his best comedies were written between 1598 and 1600. Later he took a darker outlook and created tragedies such as *Othello* (1604-1605), *King Lear* and *Macbeth* (both in 1605-1606), *Cymbeline* (1609-1610), and *The Winter's Tale* (1610-1611). *The Tempest*, written in 1611, was his last full-length dramatic play. His passing occurred in early 1616, by which time he had gained wide recognition.

ADVERTISEMENT, *The Moving Picture World*, May 28, 1910:

"DON'T READ unless you're an Independent Exchange man: This announcement is in the nature of another 'advance tip' - and remember we've never tipped you wrong yet. It is made to bid you prepare to handle another 'Thanouser Classic' that will make new customers for you and hold old ones to you. That release is Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, to be released by every single 'live' Independent exchange in America on Friday, May 27, and to be pushed and advertised to their customers from most of them long before that - from today on, in fact. Be in this class. It will pay you. Show the exhibitor that his interest interests you - that his success is almost as vital to you as it is to him. Telling him now about this great release, that you will have it for him, will work effectively toward this end. Remember that *The Winter's Tale* has been advertised very heavily by us already. Most exhibitors have heard about it; many are looking for it...."

SYNOPSIS, *The Moving Picture World*, May 21, 1910. The following was printed as an editorial article, but it embodies a synopsis and is, in fact, virtually identical to a separate synopsis published in the same journal on May 28, 1910:

"The kings of Bohemia and Sicilia, monarchs of adjoining kingdoms, have been close friends since boyhood. But after each has assumed his regal duties they find that they are not able to see much of each other. Therefore at the opening of the story it has been several years since they have met, each has taken unto himself a

royal spouse, and the king of Bohemia boasts a son of four years. The king of Bohemia pays a visit to his boyhood friend of Sicilia, is royally received and presented to his host queen. She, in fulfilling her duties as a hostess, unconsciously arouses the jealousy of her royal husband. Blinded by his jealousy, the king of Sicilia orders his royal guest, who he considers his rival, poisoned. The king of Bohemia escapes a horrible death through the confession of the courtier who has been employed to kill him. He returns safely to his own kingdom, carrying with him the courtier who saved his life.

"Enraged at the escape of his victim, the king of Sicilia orders his queen imprisoned. From her prison the queen sends her infant daughter to the royal father, hoping to soften his heart. But the king is not to be won over. He heartlessly orders the child taken beyond the borders of his kingdom, and there left in the wilderness to perish. The queen is tried at a public tribunal, and there, overcome with grief at the false accusation, she swoons, and is pronounced dead by Paulina, her lady in waiting. The body is left in Paulina's charge, when the queen revives she is taken to Paulina's house, where she dwells in seclusion, her existence being unknown to anyone but her faithful maid.

"The infant princess of Sicilia is found by a shepherd of Bohemia, and taken to his home and reared as his daughter. Her costly robes and jewels are kept by the old shepherd in the hope that in some future time they will assist in identifying her as the child of wealthy parents.

"After a lapse of 15 years, we see at the court of Bohemia the young prince starting from the palace in a decidedly mysterious manner. When questioned by his father, the king, as to where he is going, the prince refuses to answer. He is allowed to go, but the king, accompanied by his trusted friend, follows him. The prince disguises himself as a shepherd and in disguise woos a beautiful maiden whom he supposes is not but a simple shepherdess. She is, in reality, however, the princess of Sicilia. The king arrives at the shepherd's but just in time to hear the prince announce his intention of wedding the shepherdess. The king forbids the engagement and leaves the prince in anger. His faithful courtier, however, decides to befriend the young couple, and advises them to fly for protection to the court of the king of Sicilia.

"The lovers arrive in Sicilia, accompanied by the old shepherd. Here they are glad they are received by the repentant king, who, too late, realizes that his jealousy was groundless. He mourns his lost queen and his estranged friend. The shepherd, in endeavoring to prove that his adopted daughter is of gentle birth, thus permitting of her marriage to the prince, shows the king the clothes in which he found her as a baby. The king recognizes the clothes as those his own child wore. The king of Bohemia then arrives upon the scene and is told the glad news amid general rejoicings. As a final surprise the royal party is invited by Paulina to visit her house and there view a statue of the queen. The queen comes to life before the eyes of the royal party, or rather the queen, who had made up to resemble a statue,

extends her hand to her grieving spouse, who is glad to receive her whom he had thought lost and now found again."

REVIEW, *The Morning Telegraph*, May 29, 1910:

"The story of Shakespeare's play will not be repeated here, but suffice it to say that the film is a good one and has good photography."

REVIEW, *The Moving Picture News*, May 21, 1910:

"Mr. Edwin Thanouser evidently sprang from English stock. He holds the old conservative English characteristics of 'going slow, but sure.' He looks before he leaps, hence the quality of his productions. *The Winter's Tale* is the first Shakespearean subject attempted by an Independent American producer, and in presenting this picture the Thanouser Company has rendered excellent service to the Independent cause. It will be unfair to our readers not to notice the fact that Trust manufacturers have produced Shakespearean subjects before, but we question if any of them have made as perfect a picture as *The Winter's Tale*. We were asked to inspect and criticize this film, and there was nothing for us to do but give our full approval and applause, which we do right heartily. Undoubtedly Mr. Thanouser's long knowledge of stagecraft stood him in good stead in posing this picture. It was one long evidence of attention to detail and technique that has made the Thanouser stock productions so popular among the trade.

"The film abounds in fine situations and incidents. This is carefully worked out and the exhibitor who asks the patronage of students of Shakespeare on the strength of inviting them to see his production need not entertain the slightest doubt but what the patrons or critics will give undoubted approval. The story will be found in our synopsis columns, but we might just mention the fact that the cast of characters are taken up as follows.... Exhibitors need no instruction from us as to the methods they should use to advertise this film, but an invitation to the heads of schools to bring their pupils on one or two special occasions will prove very advantageous."

REVIEW, *The Moving Picture World*, May 28, 1910:

THE THANOUSER TRIUMPH. In *The Moving Picture World* of March 12th there appeared an article describing the Thanouser moving picture plant in New Rochelle. In the same number amongst our advertisements appeared an announcement of the company's first release called *The Actor's Children*. Between the latter date, namely March 15th, and the moment when we are writing this article, May 17th, barely two months, or 60 days have elapsed, yet in that short space of time, one-sixth of the year, Edwin Thanouser has emerged from the darkness of obscurity, from the realms of the unknown, and by sheer force and personal merit has won the respect of the moving picture field, and by absolutely high-class quality has secured for his pictures both dramatically and photographically a splendid reputation.

Only two months in business and daring to release a Shakespearean production in a film! When we heard of it we said to ourselves, in the current locution: 'This is going some even for progressive America.' It was a daring attempt. Even the attempt deserves commendation. We do not think in the whole history of moving picture making there has

been another instance of such an attempt. Even so, the world is full of surprises. When we first met Edwin Thanouser, a quiet, cultured, far-seeing impresario who made a striking success in the theatrical world, we felt that we had a man whose determination and ability were to make himself a factor in the moving picture field and in the only possible way that commends itself to a man of his stamp: by force of good quality work....

But to the picture on the screen. We have seen *The Winter's Tale* on a regular stage produced by many high-class companies.... Dealing with kings and queens, of course, gives an opportunity for magnificence of mounting, costumes and the like of which Mr. Thanouser is taking full advantage. We come now to the acting, and for this we have none but the highest praise. We have never seen better acting in any moving picture that has come before our eyes. All the parts struck us as properly cast, and throughout the entire production we thought, nay, we are sure, we saw the master hand of an accomplished producer. Every movement, every gesture, every action, was suited to the text of the story.

From the point of view of film production Thanouser's *The Winter's Tale* is a masterpiece. And, think of it now, the man who made and produced this picture was absolutely unknown in the moving picture field three months ago. The record then assuredly belongs to Edwin Thanouser, whom we cordially congratulate on his triumph and whom, to be perfectly frank, we expect to outdo even his present best as his opportunities and outlook broaden. He is a distinct acquisition to the science of moving picture making and he should have and we hope will have a career of uninterrupted success.

We have omitted until the latter part of this article reference to the photographic quality of this picture. We have seldom looked upon a moving picture film which gave us greater pleasure and respect for its photography.... He (Thanouser) has had the wisdom and ability to people his factory with photographers of remarkable ability who can accurately expose a negative, accurately develop it, and make from that negative a positive which in respect to freedom from defects, excellence of color deposit, and gradation, leaves nothing to be desired. This is very high praise, but it is thoroughly well deserved.... There is no reason why he should not go from triumph to triumph, and we cordially hope he will.

ADDITIONAL REVIEW, *The Moving Picture World*, June 11, 1910:

"The review of this picture in last week's *Moving Picture World* was the satisfactory criticism of an excellent piece of work. The present writer can add nothing to that criticism, yet he wants to express his own appreciation of such an altogether excellent work. The pictorial characteristics of the film are made a prominent feature and are never lost sight of. Every scene was set with fidelity to the original, but always with the development of the pictorial feature as an important factor. Then the acting. It would be a captious critic indeed who could not discover a flaw in it. Every actor seems to appreciate the opportunities of his part and to make the most of them. Seldom, indeed, is the final scene, where the supposed statue comes to life, so well done, and involuntarily one

rejoices with the King of Bohemia and the return of his lamented queen. Few, indeed, will be the releases of the month to surpass this, and few, indeed, are the pictures that seem so complete and in every way satisfactory. Mr. Thanouser deserves the heartiest congratulations upon his success."

REVIEW, The New York Dramatic Mirror, June 4, 1910:

"Congratulations to the Thanouser Company for the effective and quite adequate production it has given of an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*. Not the least pleasing feature of the picture is the fact that the adaptation is most intelligently and clearly constructed. The story is easily followed, which is unusual in adaptations from Shakespeare. The acting is dignified and impressive and the film adds to the Thanouser reputation."

REVIEW, The Nickelodeon, June 1, 1910:

"Miss Rosemond, leading woman, shows herself to be the Julia Marlowe of moving pictures in this production. Shakespearean pieces have never been given proper consideration in a motographic way and I'm glad to see such an able manufacturer bring them out. As there is no reason why tales from Shakespeare illumined and apostrophized as has been done in *The Winter's Tale* should not be given a better reception by the public than some of the cheap, gaudy modern productions now commanding so much attention in the moving picture field. I hope to see others of this type in the market in the near future."

THEIR ONE LOVE (Scenario writer)

Working title: THEIR SOLDIER HERO

May 2, 1915 (Sunday)

Length: 1 reel (1,020 feet)

Character: Drama

Director: John Harvey

Scenario: **Gertrude Thanouser**

Cameraman: Carl Louis Gregory

Cast: Madeline and Marion Fairbanks (the twin sisters), Robert Wilson (Jack, the soldier), Charles Emerson (Jack as a boy)

Notes: 1. With *The Actor and the Rube* and *Monsieur Nikola Dupree*, this was one of three films screened in New Rochelle for film critics brought to the studio for a day by Thanouser's new publicity director, Leon J. Rubenstein. The intent was to acquaint reviewers with the forthcoming series of pictures made under the personal supervision of Edwin Thanouser, and "guaranteed" by him to be of good quality. 2. This was the first "new" Thanouser film to be released; the first film to be produced under the personal supervision of Edwin Thanouser following his return to the studio. 3. The film was acclaimed for its unusual nighttime photography. 4. The picture was about the Civil War, but a review in *The Moving Picture World*, May 9, 1915, stated erroneously that it was about "colonial" times. 5. During the production of this film, an accident occurred, and several people were seriously injured. Joseph Horan, a property man, was hospitalized

with severe burns, and, separately, lawsuits were filed against Thanouser by the guardians for William Condon, George Sieverts, and Carl Sieverts. "The actions are based on alleged damages received at the local studio when a bomb exploded on April 1," *The New Rochelle Pioneer* reported on April 17th. 6. As evidenced by a print preserved in The National Film Archive (London), the film had a very slight plot and consisted primarily of battle scenes. The early part of the film was set in the year 1853, the main part of the film in 1861.

ADVERTISEMENT (signed by Edwin Thanouser), *The Moving Picture World*, May 1, 1915:

"THE ACID TEST. The first of the new Thanousers will be released on Sunday, May the second, and it will be entitled *Their One Love*. All I am going to say about it is this: Go and see it! Then if you don't write me that it's as good as the best single reel subject you ever saw - anywhere - at any time - then don't ever take my word for anything I ever tell you again! That's final and you are perfectly welcome to hold me to this to the very letter."

ARTICLE, *The New Rochelle Pioneer*, April 17, 1915:

"Leon J. Rubenstein, director of publicity at Thanouser, put over a good one on the 'city fellers' at the Metropolitan newspapers, who, about a dozen strong, came to New Rochelle this week to see the new Edwin Thanouser releases - *Their One Love* - a single reel story, comparable only, according to their judgment, to *The Birth of a Nation*. As the scribes viewed the wonderful action directed by Jack Harvey and the marvelous photography of Carl Louis Gregory taken at night, they wondered how such effects could have been secured, and Ruby told them that Carl Gregory and Al Moses perfected the 'Nacht o' Graph,' a camera that would record night scenes, and all fell for it except 'Wid' of the *Mail*. But the whole production - story, direction, acting, and photography is the most wonderful ever produced at any studio for the regular program. This is only the beginning of the wonderful program that Edwin Thanouser is to give to a waiting world.

"The reporters present were Milligan of *The Billboard*, Horace Fuld of *The Mirror*, Robertson of *The Telegraph*, Denning of *The Moving Picture World*, Proctor of *The Motion Picture News*, Mabel Condon of *Motography*, and Wid Gunning of *The Evening Mail*. Rubenstein sent Jim Wallace with a car to New York City to pick up the gang. After a ride, refreshments, smokes and lunch, a trip to the studios was made, and they went back to see the city filled with things Thanouser, even smoking a cigar named 'Thanouser.' Ruby was voted 'some gent.' All were photographed, and metropolitan papers have been filled with New Rochelle jottings this week as a result."

ARTICLE, *The New Rochelle Pioneer*, April 24, 1915:

"Mr. Thanouser has been obtaining some unusual effects in night photography. There are some striking night battle scenes, it is said, in a Civil War photodrama, *Their One Love*, recently made at the Thanouser plant."

ARTICLE, *The Moving Picture World*, May 15, 1915:

"Madeline and Marion Fairbanks, the Thanhouser twins, are to the fore again in *Their One Love*, a Thanhouser release on the Mutual program. In the play the two girls have cared for Jack since childhood and he appears to care equally for them, although he shows no special preference and seems to delight in the society of both. When the Civil War came, and Jack enlisted, he is shown taking an affectionate farewell of both girls. Each of them loves him, but each guards her secret jealously. They dream, each of them, that he will return and claim her for his bride. Soon they discover each other's secret. Both write letters to Jack saying to take care of himself for the sake of the other sister who loves him. Jack gets neither of these letters for he has been killed, and the sisters grow old together, never marrying, but always cherishing their ideal."

ARTICLE, *The New Rochelle Pioneer*, May 15, 1915:

"*Their One Love*, a Thanhouser, was the only picture applauded on the bill at The Stanley, New York City, although several other excellent ones were shown. It featured the Fairbanks twins and was produced by John Harvey."

SYNOPSIS, *Reel Life*, April 24, 1915:

"Jack ever since childhood has been the twins' hero. The years pass. Jack is as devoted as ever to the two beautiful young girls, but has given no sign that he cares for one more than for the other. The Civil War breaks out and Jack marches away. Each of the twins has come to love the young volunteer, but keeps her secret from her sister. One night Madeline wakes to see Marion standing by the window, looking at Jack's picture in the moonlight. She determines to give up Jack. Marion, however, has guessed Madeline's feelings for their 'hero,' and has made up her mind that she will not stand in the way of Madeline's happiness. The next day each of the twins writes to Jack. Marion's note tells him that Madeline is waiting for him. And Madeline's missive begs him to be careful of himself for Marion's sake. The letters never are posted. For word comes that day that Jack has been killed in battle."

REVIEW by Wid Gunning, *The Evening Mail*, April 17, 1915:

As a whole: A little gem; Story: Different; Photography: Splendid; Lighting: Remarkable; Camera work: Excellent; Acting: Very good; Exteriors: Good; Interiors: Splendid; Detail: Fine; Direction: Exceptional.

In this film we have a story of the Civil War with a different twist, a dainty bit of heart interest, a most commendable effort for perfection of detail, and some wonderful night photography, depicting battle scenes that carry you with them, due to the well-directed action, the proper assembling and the effectiveness of the lighting. Producer Jack Harvey and Cameraman Gregory deserve much credit for this one, and Mr. Thanhouser can be very proud of this release. With the material in hand, after the splendid results secured with the night photography, this film could have been made much longer by padding the story, but had this been done, the strength would have been taken from the film and it would not have been nearly as effective. It is a one-reel "feature." I hope all of the producers make more of them.

REVIEW, *The Moving Picture World*, May 8, 1915:

"A pretty story of colonial days that has been utilized as the basis of this production which is exceptionally good. The Thanouser twins play the feminine leads. *Their One Lover* goes to the war and is killed. This portion of the story is interspersed with effective scenes of battle alternated with domestic scenes showing the twins is illustrative of their feelings and thoughts."

REVIEW, *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, April 28, 1915:

Not a written explanation mars the film from beginning to end. There are, it is true, several letters to be read, but except for that and a changing calendar to denote the lapse of years nothing extraneous in the picture action halts the self-instructing action. Of course it is rather simple. It presupposes two twin sisters - the Fairbanks twins - who are in love with the same young officer who is called away at the outbreak of the Civil War. Each intends to sacrifice herself that the other may have the man she herself covets. But the news of his death is borne to them and they are shown, white-haired, true to his memory. The war scenes are taken at night and show as pretty and strikingly illuminated scenes of their kind as have yet been done. In connection with well-placed white fire and explosives of every kind, they make some striking silhouette tableaux and views. The film ran a thousand feet.

FAIRY FERN SEED (Scenario writer)

May 25, 1915 (Tuesday)

Length: 2 reels

Character: Comedy-drama

Director: John Harvey

Scenario: **Gertrude (Mrs. Edwin) Thanouser**

Cameraman: Carl Louis Gregory

Cast: Ethel Jewett (Susanna Cross), Peggy Burke (Rosalie Wood), Mrs. Burbank (her daughter), James Cooley (James Porter, Rosalie's husband), Madeline and Marion Fairbanks (Rosalie's daughters, Madeline and Marion), John Lehnberg

Notes: 1. In certain mentions of this film in the press it was referred to as *The Fern Seed*, with "Fairy" omitted. In other mentions, an extraneous "the" was added to the correct title. 2. This was the last Thanouser picture directed by John Harvey prior to his leaving for Universal.

ARTICLE, *The Moving Picture World*, May 29, 1915:

"One of the most charming comedies released in the Mutual program this year is offered by the Thanouser Company under the title of *The Fairy Fern Seed*. The Thanouser twins, Madeline and Marion Fairbanks, are starred in this production. Appearing with them are Ethel Jewett, Peggy Burke and James Cooley. The story pictures Susanna Cross intriguing until Rosalie Wood, whose home she shares, finally elopes with James Porter. Unable to forgive her daughter, Mrs. Wood now lavishes all her affection on Susanna. For the Porters' life grows harder, year by year. Finally Mrs. Porter dies, leaving the husband with two little daughters. When they are twelve their father also passes on, and the two girls are told they will be sent to an institution. Their hearts are full of fairy lore. They had been reading of the princess who put fern seed in her shoes that her spiritual

self might be transported to the care of the fairy prince. The two girls decide to reach the grandmother they have never seen in just this way, and the result of their action is all their trusting hearts could desire."

SYNOPSIS, *Reel Life*, May 15, 1915:

"Susanna Cross, envious of her wealthy girl chum, Rosalie Wood, whose home she shares, encourages Rosalie to elope with James Porter. Mrs. Wood, unable to forgive her daughter, now lavishes everything upon the unscrupulous Susanna. Rosalie's husband is poor, and each year life becomes a more bitter struggle. At last, Rosalie dies, leaving Porter heart-broken. When his twin daughters, Marion and Madeline, are twelve, the father also dies. They are told that they are to be sent to an institution. The two little girls have their heads full of fairy lore. Remembering the story of the princess who put fern seed in her shoes so that she could send her spirit self with a message of love to her dear prince, they decide that they will do the same, so that their spirit selves may find the grandmother whom they never have seen, and win her love and protection. Everybody - whether they believe in fairies or not - should see the happy conclusion of one of the sweetest playlets Thanouser has produced in many a day."

REVIEW, *The Moving Picture World*, August 7, 1915:

"It has always seemed quite proper to accord extended space to large productions, solely for the reason that their very magnitude warranted it; but it is not often that a one- or two-reel picture gets more than its proportionate share of space. However, one of Thanouser's recent two-reel films has been so favorably received that an additional amount of comment here at this time may not be amiss. The title of this release was *The Fairy Fern Seed*, and it measures up to what has come to be called a standard for short films of the better kind, solely because it does not falter in plot or action. Mrs. Thanouser wrote the scenario, Carl Gregory looked after the photography, and Jack Harvey directed. Gregory's double exposure work in the second reel is quite unusual and exceedingly well done. This was Harvey's last picture before he joined Universal's staff, and he has left a splendid example of his painstaking work. A capable cast, headed by Ethel Jewett, does some sincere work that gains in effectiveness as the story progresses. Miss Jewett, by the way, is showing a steady improvement in her interpretations. She seems to enter into the spirit of her parts as a real screen star should."

THE PATRIOT AND THE SPY (Scenario writer)

Working title: THE SPY AND THE PATRIOT

June 7, 1915 (Monday)

Length: 4 reels

Character: Drama; Mutual Masterpicture

Director: John Harvey

Assistant Director: Gordon Hollingshead

Scenario: Lloyd F. Lonergan, **Gertrude (Mrs. Edwin) Thanouser**

Cameramen: Carl Louis Gregory (in charge), William Zollinger, Henry Cronjager, Lawrence Williams, Lawrence Fowler, Frank A. Grimmer (still pictures)

Assistants: Dr. William I. Wallach and Dr. J.H. Fuchsius (on hand for medical emergencies), Mr. Lutz (pyrotechnicist in charge of fireworks)

Cast: James Cruze (Pietro, the patriot), Marguerite Snow (Blanchette, his wife), Alphonse Ethier (Johannes, the spy), Kenneth Clarendon, Samuel Niblack, Al Reitz, Frank L. Geregthy; and the following from the 2nd Battalion of the Bronx: Sgt. William Love (supervised the battalion in the film), Sgt. Frank Shafer, Mason "Mace" N. Litson, Private Schafer, about 150 National Guardsmen and their horses, as part of a total cast of about 200 persons.

Location: Glen Island in New Rochelle, New York.

Notes: 1. This was the third Mutual Masterpicture to be produced by Thanouser. 2. Sgt. Frank Shafer's last name also appeared as Shaefer in certain accounts. 3. For information concerning Glen Island, refer to an entry under the description of the June 17, 1910 release, *The Little Hero of Holland*. 4. The American Film Institute Catalogue, Feature Films, 1911-1920, states that Edwin Thanouser directed (presented) this film, and the assistant directors were Frank L. Geregthy and M.N. Litson.

ADVERTISEMENT, *The Moving Picture World*, June 12, 1915:

"An invading foe in his country! A conniving traitor in his home! And there you have the fabric of as compelling a narrative as ever human mind devolved. The splendid work in this picture embraces every ingredient of production - sympathetic acting, settings of unusually rare charm and photographic effects over the most daring, dashing variety; they mean more than a GOOD production. They mean more than an EXCELLENT production. The great punch of the picture is that it will be a POPULAR production. Note carefully the distinction we make here. Ask yourself how many of the good pictures you have seen, have ever become popular pictures; then make it your business to see this Mutual Masterpicture. Through *The Patriot and the Spy* you look a step ahead of motion pictures as you know them. The efforts of the Thanouser producing organization have brought the future nearer."

ARTICLE, *The New Rochelle Pioneer*, May 1, 1915:

"John Harvey is about to do a four-reeler with Jim Cruze and Peggy Snow in the leads, and will do some of the finest night photography ever seen, using thousands of rounds of ammunition, hundreds of pounds of high explosive, machine guns, gatlings, motor war trucks, and mounted artillery. It will be one of the greatest war dramas ever put on the Mutual Program and will cost a small fortune to produce. Carl Gregory will do the camera work and an entire company of New York artillerymen will work in the picture."

ARTICLE, *The New Rochelle Pioneer*, May 15, 1915. Short items under the "Thanouser Thespis Trifles" column pertained to the production of this film:

"The favorite song of the week was *I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier*.

"Walter Cameron, formerly of the studio, was a visitor at the island on Saturday evening.

"Gordon Hollingshead caught several fine 'gungamarungatungs' while at work on Glen Island. He is 'itching' to dispose of them.

"Frank A. Grimmer was a nightly visitor to the island and worked from carrying props to snapping 'still' pictures. That boy loves to work.

"Dr. William I. Wallach was engaged by Edwin Thanouser to be in attendance on the island in event of accident and had considerable to attend to.

"Bill Harvey caught five starfish that were apparently making their way inland for a raid on the camp, and took them to his New York home to preserve.

"Dave Keleher, who secured Glen Island for the Harvey production, remained 'on the job' most of the time, to repel civilian invaders attracted by the wonderful light effect and gun-fire....

"Mac' was a busy prop man. He caught six hours' sleep out of the 96 on the island, two hours of which were spent 'neath blankets. Harry Stillwell got about as much and never took off his overcoat.

"The peace of the island was disturbed only once. Sam Morgan Niblack and Kenneth Clarendon insisted upon discussing [William Jennings] Bryan during that time. 'Ken' was agin him.

"During a midnight lunch on the island, 'Knocko' Abrams was requested to sing, and sing he did, despite the fact that nearly everybody in the outfit threw something undesirable in his way. He has a fine voice - NOT!...

"Gordon Hollingshead pulled two pretty good wheezes on the island, last week, when requested to climb to the top of a tower and give the signal of an army approaching, shot back the information to John Harvey, the director (un-stan' Holly was un-afraid) that 'every time I move it it pushes,' and the other, while posing for a 'still' picture and the color bearer got in his way, he yelled: 'Look out, there! You're shutting out \$5 worth!'....

"Kell' [John William Kellette] wishes to thank all his pals for their work as his 'right hand' men. They had to butter his bread, mash potatoes, and carve his meat after his 'fin' got blown up, and all the various services were volunteered. 'Mac' got a pound of butter from somewhere and gave first aid to the injured, thus saving the tall guy considerable agony. After having the hand treated at the hospital, 'Kell' was back on the job until Mr. Thanouser chased him back to the city to have it redressed.

"John (Hank) Lehnberg proved to be a glutton for work. Not content with the mere duty of working 24 hours a day in the pictures, he swept out the big room used as resting quarters; cut the grass on an acre lawn; cleaned Director Harvey's auto; tried to feed the iron dog that guards the entrance to the island; caught flounders enough to serve a community banquet; stood guard for a battery boy who needed sleep; and kicked every stone he saw in the road so that none of the horses would stumble. 'Limburger' was a busy infant, take it from me."

ARTICLE, *Reel Life*, June 26, 1915:

"Alphonse Ethier, the new Thanouser star, who plays the heavy lead in *The Patriot and the Spy*, a Mutual Masterpicture in four parts, is one of the several talented actors recently recruited by Edwin Thanouser from the legitimate, and a strong asset to the New Rochelle studios. His personality is vigorous, and his performance especially well adapted to the screen. In this stirring war drama, in which he portrays Johannes, the rejected suitor, Ethier perfectly embodies the passions of hatred and revenge. Though the type is by no means admirable, we nevertheless are excited to admiration of Ethier's

remarkable acting. Intense, dramatic crises he handles as though in real life. Psychologically, also, his impersonation of the spy is powerful and convincing. Throwing light upon the situation in Continental Europe, showing the horrible effect of war upon communities and upon the character of the individual, Ethier, in this strong drama, has given photoplaygoers one of the most vital, gripping plays of the hour."

Note: Contrary to what the preceding article would lead one to believe, Ethier was hardly "new" to the Thanouser studio, as he had been with the organization since 1910!

SYNOPSIS, *Reel Life*, May 29, 1915:

"In a certain Continental village, far removed from busy centres, on a beautiful summer day, the wedding festival of Blanchette and Pietro was being celebrated. The peasant folk, flocking about the radiant bride and groom, wished them happiness - all except one, Johannes, a rejected suitor. None knew that he had vowed in his secret soul to have revenge for the slight he had suffered. The happy marriage was blessed with years of contentment, with children, and with an ever-deepening love between husband and wife. But sorrow was not always to pass them by. One day the elder child, Lizette, was playing in the road, when a great touring car - an intruder rare in those parts - came sweeping round the curve. Lizette's father reached the spot in time to snatch his daughter from the monster's path. But he was struck down, the machine passing over his foot. Two months later, Pietro was up and about, although he was no longer the magnificent specimen of health and physique that he had been. He moved slowly now, dragging the useless foot behind him.

"About this time, virtually without warning, war was declared. The nations of Europe divided into two hostile camps. In the little village of Blanchette and Pietro, the war sentiment was strong. The men rushed to the colors. One of the first to go, a hero in the eyes of his fellow townsmen, was Johannes. On the eve of his departure, he called at the crippled man's cottage. 'Well, and what do you intend to do?' he asked Pietro, with veiled malice. It was painfully humiliating to Pietro to have to confess that he now was useless to his country. His old rival talked grandiloquently of his own intentions, not unmindful that the eyes of the pretty wife were filled with an involuntary admiration. War seemed the vocation, indeed, for the rejected suitor. News of his exceptional fearlessness in action from time to time found its way back to the village. For bravery on the field, he was made a sergeant. After that, tidings ceased. The villagers began to mourn him as dead. Could they have known where he actually was and what he was doing, they would have grieved more that Johannes had not died before ever he was tempted to buy his freedom from the enemy with dishonor.

"Some weeks later, the spy returned to the village. But his townspeople knew him only for the brave defender of his country he previously had been. He told everybody a thrilling story of his escape. Meanwhile, he had sent word to the enemy that the defenseless village was theirs, unless certain of the peasantry who suspected trouble should destroy the bridge. Then, slashing his arm with his sword, Johannes staggered into the cripple's cottage. 'Our own countrymen are on the way,' he gasped. 'But the invaders

are approaching from the other side. Only by destroying the bridge can the town be saved. I was going to do this myself, when I was seen and shot down by a sentry.'

"Pietro, with explosives in his possession, was taken captive by the invaders, just as he was in the act of firing the bridge. By that time, the spy had stolen off to keep his rendezvous with the enemy's commander. As Pietro was marshalled before the chief, Johannes muttered, 'I will tell Blanchette.' Then the patriot realized that he had been the victim of treachery. However, he did not flinch when told of his doom. The spy did not linger for the execution but hurried back to Blanchette's cottage, where he told her how he had caused her husband's death. 'And now you belong to me!' he cried, seizing her and pressing her close. The next instant his arms fell from about her. He staggered back. In the doorway stood Pietro, his clothing dripping water, his face covered with blood. He flung himself upon Johannes. They struggled desperately. Outside, a squad of the invaders, pursuing Pietro, whose weight had broken the rotten rope on which he had been suspended, saw a man's head in the cottage window. The officer gave the order to fire. The spy fell, a bullet through his heart. Pietro and Blanchette, clinging to one another, took refuge in the inner room. They heard the soldiers at the door. Cries of 'The enemy!' suddenly cut the air, and the detachment fled to rejoin the invaders. Pietro's own countrymen, thousands strong, were coming, an army of deliverance."

REVIEW, *The Moving Picture World*, June 12, 1915:

"In this four-reel Thanouser will be found a highly spectacular offering, pleasing to almost any audience. James Cruze and Marguerite Snow have the principal roles and play in their usual pleasing style, portraying with intelligence the characters of a maimed patriot and his wife. Alphonse Ethier has the thankless role of the spy, which has also been well interpreted. The story is laid in no particular place or period, and is, as would be supposed from the title, founded on war. There seems no particular point to be made, and the spectacular part is really its drawing card."

REVIEW, *Variety*, June 18, 1915:

The Patriot and the Spy is a four part feature which Thanouser produced as a contribution to the Mutual Masterpicture list. The featured players are Alphonse Ethier, James Cruze and Marguerite Snow. The first few periods of this film go quietly along with little dramatic tension until the Thanouser directors get busy with their war scenes and the night photography at which this concern appears to be making a specialty of in recent pictures. As a feature the picture does well in spots, the closing portions doling out enough blood and thunder to make up for the first stanzas. As a big, gripping war feature, with a story that has a punch and sub-climaxes of a hair raising sort, *The Patriot and the Spy* misses the mark. The greatest fault is with the story. Quite ordinary to be true but it doesn't make the hero do enough to please the average movie fan who has long been used to seeing Jim Cruze pull down mountains and move heaven and earth for the woman he loves in the celluloid romances.

The advance notices said that the story hinged on action in a certain Continental village far removed from busy centers where peasant folk had other things to think of than war. Blanchette (Miss Snow) marries Pietro (Mr. Cruze) much to the discomfiture of Johannes

(Mr. Ethier), the rejected suitor who turns out to be a spy. Pietro is hurt when rescuing his eldest child from the path of a speeding auto. That prevents him from going to the front although Johannes departs amid great acclaim.

To make a long story short the spy frames up a deal whereby he persuades the patriot Pietro to attempt to blow up a bridge, only to be easily captured by the invaders (as the incoming army fighters are captioned throughout the film story). Pietro manages to escape. He reaches home to find Johannes forcing his attentions on his wife. He and Joey do a Hackenschmidt-Gotch bout with Joey being plunked for the count by members of his own side who fired through an open window. Here comes one of the thinnest situations of the picture, made thin through the holding of the scene and the supposition that Pietro with a small shooting iron fired time and again at six or seven soldiers who were pouring lead into the open window. The best parts of the picture are several of the battle scenes, and these keep the picture from going out with the tide. The story fails to tell much, and just what kind of a war it was was left to much imagination. - Mark

FROM THE RIVER'S DEPTHS (Scenario writer)

a.k.a. A CALL FROM THE DEAD

British release title: TO THE RIVER'S DEPTHS

September 5, 1915 (Sunday)

Length: 1 reel (1,002 feet)

Character: Drama

Director: Henry Clement Easton

Scenario: **Gertrude Thanouser**

Cast: Ethyle Cooke (Dorothy Hewins), Justus D. Barnes (William Hewins, her father), Boyd Marshall (Walter Van Vleck), Thomas Curran (Convict Syd)

Notes: 1. This film was first announced as *A Call From the Dead*, and then at the release time was advertised as *From the River's Depths*. The first may have been a working title. 2. The release date of this film was listed erroneously as Sunday, August 5, 1915 in a Thanouser advertisement in *The Moving Picture World*, September 4, 1915. 3. This was the only Thanouser film directed by Henry Clement Easton, who remained with the studio for only about a month. He directed this film during the last part of July 1915.

SYNOPSIS, *Reel Life*, September 4, 1915:

"Convict Syd, escaped from state prison, finds a hiding place near a river bank on the outskirts of a small town, where he is confronted by the problem of how to get rid of his striped uniform and obtain a new identity. A well-dressed man happens along. The convict attacks him. Later, when he has put on the victim's clothes, he discovers in the pocket a letter to William Hewins, the local banker, explaining that its bearer is the son of an English nobleman who has come to America on financial business. The convict weights the body and sinks it in the river. He disposes of his striped suit in the same way. Next day he present himself at the office of the banker. He forges his victim's signature

and has no difficulty in opening an account. Hewins invites the supposed Englishman to his home, and when his visitor shows signs of being interested in Dorothy, the banker's daughter, her father favors the match.

"One day, in Hewins' house, the impostor picks up an illustrated London paper. In it is a picture of the man in the river. The convict realizes that his secret cannot long be hidden. He fears that the banker already has seen the picture. However, he tears it to bits and throws the scraps into the wastepaper basket. Then he asks Hewins to go with him to look at some property he is thinking of buying. Dorothy has witnessed the actions of the impostor and her suspicions are aroused. She confides her fears to Walter Van Vleck, her lover. They piece together the torn picture and learn the truth. Believing that Dorothy's father may be in danger, they hurry off to overtake Hewins and the convict. On the river bank they find the two men struggling desperately. The convict wounds the banker, and flees. But newcomers on the scene give pursuit, cutting off his escape. The hopeless man plunges into the river. He has almost reached the opposite bank when he looks down, and a cry of horror breaks from his lips. 'It is he. He is calling me,' cries the murderer - and sinks beneath the slimy surface. Later, they drag the river. The body is found, the arms of a skeleton fastened around its neck. A bundle containing a suit of convict's clothes, also caught in the net, tells the story."

REVIEW, *The Moving Picture World*, September 11, 1915:

"An unusually good one-reel drama, picturing the way in which an escaped convict palms himself on a banker as the son of an English gentleman. The girl discovers a secret and the reel closes with some stirring scenes of a melodramatic character. Well constructed and absorbing in plot."

THE PRICE OF HER SILENCE (Scenario writer)

September 30, 1915 (Thursday)

Length: 4 reels

Character: Drama; Mutual Masterpicture No. 40

Director: W. Eugene Moore, Jr.

Scenario: **Gertrude Thanouser** and Lloyd F. Lonergan

Cast: Florence LaBadie (the elder sister), Mignon Anderson (the younger sister), Arthur Bauer (their father), Harris Gordon (the chauffeur), Thomas A. Curran (the artist), Helen Badgley (the golden-haired little girl), Leo Post and Otto Finn (doubles for other actors)
Cameramen: Carl Louis Gregory, William Zollinger, A.H. Moses, Jr., Lawrence Williams

Note: The surname of Harris Gordon appeared as "Goodwin" in *Reel Life*, September 18, 1915.

ARTICLE, *The New Rochelle Pioneer*, June 4, 1915:

"An automobile was sent off the city dock into the harbor, Wednesday morning at 4 o'clock, by the Thanouser Film Corporation, in order to get a hairbreadth scene for a four-reel picture. In the machine at the time it went over were Leo Post and Otto Finn, the

two daredevils of the studio. The machine landed flat in the water. Both the occupants jumped as soon as the auto left the dock and made land safely. Because of the cost of the scene, four cameramen were on the job clicking away. They were: Henry J. Zollinger [sic; this is a composite of the names of Henry Cronjager and William Zollinger; probably Zollinger was intended], Albert Moses, Carl Gregory and Lawrence Williams. The auto was a White make, and was taken from the water and put on a raft. The wind, however, swept the car from the resting place into the water. It is now lying at the bottom of the harbor near the city dock."

ARTICLES, *Mutual Masterpicture News Bulletin*, undated (1915). The following is a composite of paragraphs taken from articles in the same issue:

"A weak-willed, flighty girl, who falls in love and then elopes with the family chauffeur; and her sister, a self-willed, strong-minded young woman, who assumes the stigma in following her sister's false step, are the principal characters in *The Price of Her Silence*, a four part romantic drama, released as a Mutual Masterpicture. Those charming, talented young stars of the Thanouser studios, Florence LaBadie and Mignon Anderson, who are recognized as two of the most popular young women in motion picture work, are the co-stars of *The Price of Her Silence*. Miss LaBadie portraying the strong-willed girl and Miss Anderson, her weaker sister.

"Miss LaBadie, well remembered for her work in *God's Witness*, *The Patriot and the Spy*, and *Monsieur Lecoq*, preceding Mutual Masterpictures screened at the Thanouser studios, rises to one of her greatest triumphs as the heroine in *The Price of Her Silence*, the role furnishing her with an exceptional opportunity of bringing into play the many dramatic and emotional talents with which she has been gifted.

"Miss Anderson, too, it may be said, scores one of her greatest successes in this exceptionally powerful romantic drama, some critics even aver that her portrayal of the weak sister in *The Price of Her Silence*, overshadows that she furnished in *Milestones of Life*, a Mutual Masterpicture released some weeks ago.

"An unusually powerful cast of Thanouser players, including Arthur Bauer, as the father; Harris Gordon, as the chauffeur; and Thomas Curran, as the artist, appear in their support. *The Price of Her Silence*, as with the preceding Masterpictures screened at the Thanouser studios, has been screened on a princely scale. One scene, depicting a wreck of a ship at sea, is the most realistic of its kind presented. *The Price of Her Silence* concerns a wealthy widower with two beautiful daughters, whose ages are separated by only a few years. One of them, the younger, the pampered pet of the father, falls in love with the family chauffeur. To break the infatuation the father sends her to Europe to study. But the girl, loving the chauffeur, acquaints him of the fact, with the result that he books passage on the same ship.

"Far out at sea, the ship is wrecked during a storm. The girl, the chauffeur and the captain manage to get away on a raft, the only ones of the number on board to be saved. A few minutes before the captain is washed from the raft, he marries the young girl and the chauffeur. The following day the raft with the half-famished young couple is washed ashore on a desert island. That night the husband is attacked and killed by a wild animal

and the young widow is later taken on board a sailing vessel, and after a venturesome journey returned to her father, who believed her dead. Later she finds it necessary to confide her secret to someone. She confesses all to her elder sister, who induces her father to let them visit a country town where they remain until the baby is born. Later, after placing the baby to board with a farmer's wife, they return home. Some few years later, the young sister is about to be wedded to a prominent young man, when her daughter, a handsome, golden-haired little child, unexpectedly arrives in care of the farmer, who announces that he refuses to permit the child to remain in his wife's care until he learns the identity of the father. Allowed to speak, the elder sister took the blame, whereupon she and her little niece were turned adrift.

"Fearful at losing her husband's love, the younger sister maintained silence while the elder one eked out living for herself and child in a nearby city. A young painter of considerable prominence occupied the adjoining studio and within a short time they fell in love with each other. Because of her clouded name, she refuses to marry him and wrote her sister begging her to confess all. One day, as a surprise, a picture painted by the young artist for the child's mother was on exhibition at the studio. She called with her husband to view it. Suddenly the door opened and a little girl appeared in pursuit of her kitten. Reaching a window ledge she lost her balance and fell. The mother, in her anguish, ran to the yard, picked up the injured child and, returning to the studio, confessed all. All was quickly forgiven by the husband, when the wife explained the child's parentage. The father, too, forgave and later the strong hearted elder sister married the young artist and all returned to live at the wealthy father's estate....

"Mignon Anderson, who shares honors with Florence LaBadie in *The Price of Her Silence*, a four part Mutual Masterpicture screened at the Thanouser studios, is Mrs. Morris Foster in private life. Her husband is one of the popular young leads of the Thanouser studios. They frequently play together in pictures.... Florence LaBadie, who is starring with Mignon Anderson in *The Price of Her Silence*, a four-part Mutual Masterpicture screened at the Thanouser studios in New Rochelle, is an exceptionally popular young woman. She undoubtedly boasts of a larger following than any other player in picture work. This is best attested by the great number of letters she receives daily from admiring fans in all sections of the two hemispheres. A large number of the communications are from young girls and young women, who are desirous of entering motion picture work. And, to be honest, a number of letters are forwarded her by would-be screen stars of the opposite sex. Of recent months, the demands on Miss LaBadie have become so large that she has had written and printed a circular letter, reciting her own experiences, the best methods for winning success and so on. One of these letters is forwarded to each of the writers with Miss LaBadie's best wishes for their success....

"One of the most vividly realistic shipwrecks ever screened is shown in one of the scenes of *The Price of Her Silence*, a four part Mutual Masterpicture, screened at the Thanouser studios.

"Florence LaBadie, co-star with Mignon Anderson in *The Price of Her Silence*, a four part Mutual Masterpicture, is one of the most conscientious young screen players in the

profession. Before stepping before the camera, Miss LaBadie goes through what she terms a 'final' rehearsal, to be certain that she will be able to register the expression as she wishes it to be done."

SYNOPSIS, *Reel Life*, September 18, 1915:

"'We do not care what all the fathers in the world will do when we are safely married, do we dear?'

"In spite of her bravado, the attractive little girl trembled just a trifle as she looked up into the eyes of her handsome lover. In her hand she held a wireless message from her father, which told her tersely that if she married 'that fellow' she would be disinherited. To be disinherited meant to be cut out entirely from the millions which she should someday share with her older sister, and 'that man' was only her father's discharged chauffeur! The girl was on her way to a cloistered school in France, where her father purposed to keep her silly young head so filled with her books that she would forget her plebeian lover. But the wily little girl had secretly informed the chauffeur that she was sailing, and the boat was well out at sea before the father learned that he had been outwitted. The following night the echo of 'fire' resounded through the ship. The passengers ran to the life boats, but the blazing liner went down into the blackness of the sea with most of the passengers still on board. In the captain's small uncollapsible boat, the millionaire's daughter and the ex-chauffeur were among the pitiful handful who escaped.

"One by one the members of the party succumbed, until there was left only the captain and the hardy young couple. Before the captain, too, gave up his life to the deep, the girl remembered that there was a provision of law which authorizes the commander of a vessel to perform marriages at sea. So the weakened man joined the hands of the two young people and pronounced them married. The little boat drifted to a desert island, where the happy young lovers spent their honeymoon. One day, the husband was attacked and killed by a giant ophimorphous. Some weeks later the widow was discovered by the crew of a sailing vessel, which had put into the island for water. She was taken home. Frightened, the unhappy girl was afraid to tell her father the truth. She swore that she had been entirely alone on the island.

"Back again in the safety of her home, the little sister found herself turning to her elder sister for aid and comfort - just as it had been when she was a little child and had passed through fancied grievances. So she told her sister the true story of her marriage, and swore her to secrecy. In order to keep the truth from their father, the elder sister told him that the younger girl's nervous condition was so serious that she must have rest, and advised a holiday in a little fishing village. In the little town the younger girl's child was born. A woman in the village was prevailed upon to undertake the care of the baby for a fixed sum. Then the two girls returned to the city.

"Five years later, the younger sister was to be married. The wedding day had arrived. The bride was all arrayed in her wedding gown, and she and her sister awaited the strains of the bridal march, when a farmer deposited a little girl at the door with the remarks (which the bride's father overheard) that 'Old Martha was dead.' Suspicious, the father took the child to the bride's chamber to demand an explanation. At the threshold, the child burst

into joy at seeing the elder sister. 'The nice lady who brings me presents,' she cried. The father believed that the elder daughter was guilty. She was about to disclaim any responsibility, when she caught sight of the younger sister's face. 'Please let him think so until after the marriage, then I will tell the truth,' the younger sister hurriedly whispered.

"The elder sister took her niece to a nearby city, where she put her talent for sculpture into practical use. Soon a rising young painter fell in love with her. She returned his affection but would not marry him because of the taint on her honor. As a gift to his wife, the younger sister's husband planned to have her portrait painted by the young artist. At the first sitting, the woman's own little girl rushed in in hot pursuit of a runaway kitten. The mother recognized her and fell back with a stifled cry - and when their backs were turned, the child climbed to the window ledge for the kitten, lost her balance and fell. 'It is God's judgment,' she cried. 'My child! My child!' Then the mother told for the first time the true story. In a moment, the painter came back bringing a perfectly whole and safe, but very frightened child. The elder sister was called to the studio. She knew that at last the shadow had been lifted from her heart."

REVIEW, *Variety*, October 15, 1915:

"*The Price of Her Silence*, a four-part Mutual Masterpicture (Thanouser) features Florence LaBadie and Mignon Anderson, with the latter lady having the fatter role of the two. The picture was produced in the New Rochelle studios and the ocean scenes were evidently made on Long Island Sound. The four-reeler is a pleasing enough feature without any great thrills, although there was an opportunity for a big scene in the burning of a yacht at sea. The one genuine punch is in the fall of a child from a fourth story window.

"The story tells of a love affair the younger daughter of the family had with the chauffeur. To break up the match the father sends the girl to Europe on the uncle's yacht. The man is also aboard as a sailor. The yacht burns and the girl, her lover and the captain escape in a small boat. They drift for days and all three are about dead when the captain marries them. He dies and the two are thrown on a desert island. Later the husband is drowned by an octopus, the girl rescued by a sailing vessel and returned to her home. She keeps her marriage and widowhood a secret until there is danger of exposure and then confesses to her older sister, who has been her inseparable companion since babyhood. The two go away; a child is born and left in the care of another woman. Five years elapse; the younger sister is about to be married again. On the night of the wedding the child is brought to the door and left with a note addressed to one of the sisters. The father takes the child to the room where the two girls are. When it recognizes the older sister he immediately believes her to be the mother of the little one and turns her out. The younger sister says she will confess immediately after the ceremony, but loses her nerve. In the meantime the older girl takes a studio, falls in love with a fellow tenant, but refuses to marry him because of the child. She writes to the sister, asking to be released from her promise of secrecy, but the latter begs for more time. The husband of the younger sister arranged for her to have a portrait painted and selects the artist that lives across the hall from the sister. At the first sitting, the child playing in this sister's room chases a kitten into the room, where its mother is posing, and falls from the window. The mother with a

shriek rushes to the window and when the child is brought back she admits that it is hers. The confession is followed by absolution on the part of the husband and the girl's father and the sister consents to marry the artists, the father giving them his blessing. The picture will hold the interest of women especially. - Fred"