

Thanhouser Classics Video Collectors Set

Volume IV: *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1910 & 1917)

Volume V: *Thanhouser Kids and Dogs* (1911 - 1915)

Volume VI: *The Thanhouser Stars Emerge* (1911 - 1917)

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Thanhouser studio was a key participant in the rise of the film industry during the important 1909-1917 span of the studio's operation. As a production company, Thanhouser has remained relatively unknown because: 1) It did not evolve into a major Hollywood studio; 2) Few of its 1,000-plus productions survive; and 3) Until recently, little effort has been made to document Thanhouser and its films.

The present collection of video releases of some surviving Thanhouser titles will offer a glimpse into the development of the business and art of cinema.

Thanhouser was unique in its leadership. Founder and manager Edwin Thanhouser (1865-1956) was the only studio head with a strong background in legitimate theater—the medium that was probably the biggest influence on early film. Thanhouser productions became famous for story development and visual quality. However, as an independent studio opposing the attempted monopoly by the Patents Trust, Thanhouser was denied access to the best technical equipment and was pressured into conforming to the demands of the Patents-oriented distributors, particularly regarding length, content and release schedules.

Carving out a distinctive place in the international film community, Thanhouser provided a memorable contribution.

THANHOUSER CHRONOLOGY

- 1909** Legitimate actor-director-manager Edwin Thanhouser moves with his family from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to establish a new film production studio in New Rochelle, New York, just northeast of Manhattan on Long Island Sound. It is strategically located to draw on New York City talent, have access to a variety of filming locations, and be part of the center of US film industry. Thanhouser renovates a former roller skating rink as its first studio-laboratory-offices. Approximately 9,000 movie theaters in US, most small nickelodeons opened in the last three years. Movie performers appear without billing, much less star status. Almost all films 15 minutes or less.
- 1910** First Thanhouser film released. Thanhouser unique among US film producers in developing scenarios, overseen by Lloyd Longergan. "The Thanhouser Kid" (Marie Eline) popular; Harry Benham becomes one of the most popular Thanhouser actors. Edwin Thanhouser predicts that soon "one motion picture will provide a whole evening's entertainment." Thanhouser expands to two one-reel releases per week, representing 25% of 22 independents' releases through the Motion Picture Distributing & Sales Co.; later switches to Associated Independent Film Mfrs. distribution. Thanhouser assembles a stock company of New York-based actors. Edison studio assigns a detective to spy on Thanhouser activities. Thanhouser's "Pocahontas" includes one of the earliest uses of the dissolve.
- 1911** Thanhouser films hailed as the finest quality of all US independent producers. Thanhouser's "Romeo and Juliet," released in two installments, is the first US independent two-reel film. Three-reel (in three installments) "David Copperfield." Single release of two-reel "She." Thanhouser maintains two production companies. Actress Marguerite Snow begins her extremely popular career at Thanhouser, as do actress Mignon Anderson, James Cruze (Thanhouser's most famous actor), actress Florence LaBadie (Thanhouser's all-time best-known player), and "The Kidlet" (Helen Badgley). Thanhouser's "The Pillars of Society" and "A Doll's House" are the first and second screen dramatizations of Ibsen plays. "The Railroad Builder" climaxes with the largest fire yet filmed. Movies begin listing cast names. Over 12,000 nickelodeons and full-time movie theaters in US; first movie palaces appear. Some studios try filming in western US.

- 1912** Thanouser establishes winter production in Florida. Edwin Thanouser sells his interest in the company to Charles J. Hite and the Mutual Film Corp., studio reorganizes as Thanouser Film Corp. Landmark social-reform “Cry of the Children” released. Two-reel releases are common. Debut of the “Thanouser Twins” (Madeline and Marion Fairbanks). Thanouser releases one-and-a-half-reel “Miss Robinson Crusoe,” example of Edwin Thanouser’s “natural length” advocacy of appropriate running times. Edwin Thanouser and family depart for Europe. Big-budget three-reel “Star of Bethlehem.” Florence LaBadie is third most popular actress in nationwide poll.
- 1913** Thanouser sets up a branch production company in California. Thanouser’s New Rochelle studio burns, production continues in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York City while the studio is rebuilt. California operation is unsuccessful, closes. Actress Muriel Ostriche joins Thanouser. Thanouser players rank high in national popularity polls. Thanouser releases three films per week plus one four-reel film per month under Thanouser and other Mutual labels.
- 1914** “Feature” production and distribution becomes dominant. Thanouser joins the serial craze with “The Million Dollar Mystery,” which becomes one of the studio’s biggest successes and is the most popular serial yet made; balloon and hydroplane scenes include some of earliest aerial stunt work in narrative film. Studio’s back lot, “Thanouser Park,” opens, is open to the public when not being used. Five-reel “Terrors of the Deep,” semi-documentary nature film. Location filming in the Rocky Mountains. Studio head Charles Hite dies in accident. Edwin Thanouser cuts short his European tour. Second expensive serial, “Zudora,” fails. Writer and temporary studio head Lloyd Lonergan leaves, as does actress Muriel Ostriche. Popular dog star Shep dies.
- 1915** Edwin Thanouser returns as general manager and president, along with chief writer Lloyd Lonergan. Patents Trust dissolves. Four and five-reel releases are common, though Thanouser steps up its production of one-reel light comedies. Corporation, still owned by Mutual, reorganizes to raise money for expansion. “Their One Love” is first use of night-for-night cinematography. James Cruze leaves Thanouser, ten years later is highest-paid director in Hollywood. Thanouser avoids the high-salary star system and expensive promotion found at other studios. 17,000 movie theaters in US.
- 1916** Facilities completed in Jacksonville, Florida, for winter production. Thanouser releases seven-reel “Silas Marner” starring Frederick Warde. Thanouser is forced to abandon production of comedies in the face of greater success of other Mutual comedy producers; will produce five to seven-reel dramas. Staff cutbacks. Mutual reorganizes, drops Thanouser. Edwin Thanouser contracts with Pathé for US distribution, but will produce less than before at two features per month to maintain its famous level of quality. Pathé provides improved international distribution. Jacksonville studio closes.
- 1917** Beginning of two-year industry slump due to war in Europe. Los Angeles now the center of the film industry. Florence LaBadie, the last remaining player of the old Thanouser stock company, dies after an auto accident. Three stars under exclusive contract, including Frederick Warde and Jeanne Eagels; can’t compete with expensive stars and publicity machines of other studios. Screenwriter Lloyd Lonergan retires. Edwin Thanouser announces intent to retire when contract expires in early 1918. Thanouser studio ceases production with a positive bank balance.
- 1918** Thanouser Film Corp. ceases all operations. By 1919 almost all pre-1915 production companies will have closed. Thanouser liquidates in 1919.

— Victor Graf, Portland, Oregon (March, 2000)

VOLUME IV: THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD (1910 & 1917)

The Vicar of Wakefield (One reel of approximately 1,000 feet, released December 17, 1910)

Print source: Nederlands Filmmuseum, 13 minutes 20 seconds

Adapted from the novel by Oliver Goldsmith. Cast: Martin J. Faust (the Vicar of Wakefield), Frank H. Crane, Anna Rosemond, William Garwood, Marie Eline, Bertha Blanchard, Lucille Younge, William Russell.

Edwin Thanhouser, and Lloyd F. Lonergan who wrote or supervised screenplays for hundreds of Thanhouser films, often turned to classic plays and novels for quality source material. *The Vicar of Wakefield* was an enormously popular English novel for 150 years, offering a complex but accessible mix of Georgian English characters, situations, mores and manners. All this had to be simplified and distilled down to one reel of story, which was done better by Thanhouser than any other studio could have done.

In 1910 virtually all movies were developed in the director's mind, improvised during filming, and made into a narrative by the film editor. Theater veteran Edwin Thanhouser and journalist Lonergan were possibly the first movie professionals to begin each new production with a complete screenplay (which they called a "continuity"). Within a year after its first release, the studio had a reputation for the best-developed stories in the business.

Also contributing was Gertrude (Mrs. Edwin) Thanhouser who helped on the scenarios and film editing.

The studio logo appears prominently throughout the film. That was one way to protect ownership in those days before film could be copyrighted.

The Vicar of Wakefield (seven or eight reels, released February 25, 1917)

Print source: EmGee, 1 hour, 29 minutes, 30 seconds. Directed by Ernest C. Warde. Scenario by Emmett Mix, based on the novel by Oliver Goldsmith. Photographed by William M. Zollinger. Cast: Frederick Warde (the Vicar of Wakefield), Boyd Marshall (George Primrose), Kathryn Adams (Olivia Primrose), Gladys Leslie (Sophia Primrose), Thomas A. Curran (Geoffrey; Mr. Burchell), Robert Vaughn (Squire Thornhill; Squire Wilmot), Carey L. Hastings (Mrs. Primrose), William Parke, Jr. (Moses Primrose), Tula Belle (Dick Primrose), Barbara Howard (Bill Primrose), Grace DeCarlton (Arabella Wilmot), Arthur Bauer (Mr. Wilmot), Morgan Jones (Jenkinson), Joseph H. Phillips, Nellie Parker Spaulding, Oscar W. Forster.

After affiliating with Pathé in late 1916, Thanhouser produced only feature-length dramas. In 1917 the studio had a roster of only four stars, none of them a commercial match for the personality-stars created by the publicity machines of other studios. Frederick Warde, like his Thanhouser colleague Jeanne Eagels, was one of the most talented and famous stage actors in New York City, and was the perfect choice for the popular title character of the 1766 English novel. The production vindicated the new feature-length movie format by restoring several characters, plot complications, and atmosphere that had been truncated in Thanhouser's 1910 version of less than one-sixth the length.

Warde, forgotten today, was best known for his classic stage work, but starred in several films including the title role in *Richard III* in 1913, the first American feature film (not a Thanhouser production). The director is the star's son.

The elaborate production required several months to produce, working around Warde's busy Chautauqua lecture schedule, and includes incidents vividly remembered by the novel's readers, such as the green spectacles, the debtor's prison, the sham marriage, and the burning of the vicarage.

VOLUME V: Thanhouser Kids & Dogs (1912-1915)

The Little Girl Next Door (One reel, approx. 1,000 feet, released November 1, 1912)

Directed by Lucius Henderson. Scenario by Philip Lonergan.

Print source: Essex Films, 14 minutes, 20 seconds.

Cast: William Garwood (the husband), Marguerite Snow (the wife), Marion and Madeline Fairbanks (Helen Randall and Ruth Foster), William Russell (the other father).

The “Thanhouser Twins,” Marion and Madeline Fairbanks, are featured in this tragic drama with a moral lesson. Although limited by the constraints of one-reel storytelling, the scenario (the first by Philip Lonergan, the brother of story department head Lloyd Lonergan) is a well-rounded and engaging one. The naturalistic acting is quite sophisticated for the time.

The Evidence of the Film (One reel, approx. 1,000 feet, released January 10, 1913)

Directed by Edwin Thanhouser and Lawrence Marston.

Print source: Library of Congress, 14 minutes, 30 seconds.

Recently discovered and rescued, *The Evidence of the Film* is a particularly clever and unusual early example of a fictional dramatic movie with filmmaking as a subject. The portrayal of a movie crew that just happens to be at work on a street corner is accurate. The director is seen consulting a shooting script, something a Thanhouser director would do but probably not another studio’s director. The film laboratory and editing scenes are of enormous interest as historical document as well as ingeniously integrated in the crime tale.

The Tiniest of Stars (One reel, approx. 1,000 feet, released January 14, 1913)

Print source: Library of Congress, 15 minutes, 45 seconds.

Cast: James Cruze, Marie Eline (the little boy), Helen Badgley (the little girl)

An air of authenticity infuses this family drama of a brother and sister who take to the variety stage. The popular stage was a source of everyday entertainment for most Americans of the time, and had been Edwin Thanhouser’s career before 1910. Audiences were beginning to recognize and demand more of the little actresses Marie Eline (who plays the little boy) and Helen Badgley, which led to the studio promoting them, and demand for their movies helped create the star system which survives today stronger than ever. Deft mixture of comedy and sentimentality.

Just a Shabby Doll (One reel, approx. 1,000 feet, released March 11, 1913) a.k.a. ***Little Nell***

Print source: British Film Institute, 14 minutes, 40 seconds.

Cast: Mignon Anderson (the wife), Harry Benham (the husband), Lila Chester (the governess), Helen Badgley (little daughter who listens to her father's tale), Marie Eline (little girl of long ago), David H. Thompson (drayman).

A relatively complex original romantic story is squeezed onto only one reel, but this was the last year that such a constraint was taken for granted. Of special interest here are the 1913 New York City backgrounds. In 1913 the inter-titles became more frequent and, for the first time, primarily represented dialogue. This narrative is unusual in its fluid use of flashback (complete with anachronisms!).

Uncle’s Namesakes (One reel, approx. 1,000 feet, released December 12, 1913)

Print source: British Film Institute, 15 minutes.

Cast: David H. Thompson (Jack, a needy young husband), Lila Chester (May, his wife), Sidney Bracy (Uncle John Henry Carson), Madeline and Marion Fairbanks (the uncle's namesakes), Justus D. Barnes.

This story of an American family’s innocent deception to earn money from a rich English relative is about as broad as Thanhouser comedy ever got. The Thanhouser studio avoided slapstick despite the vigorous success the genre was enjoying at other studios. Young movie actresses of the time often portrayed boys, but here the Thanhouser Twins get to make fun of the practice.

Shep’s Race with Death (One reel, approx. 790 feet, released November 1, 1914)

Directed by John Harvey.

Print source: Museum of Modern Art, 12 minutes, 15 seconds.

Cast: Mrs. Whitcove (Mrs. Mateland), J.S. Murray (Mr. Stearns), Marie Rainford (Mrs. Stearns), Marion and Madeline Fairbanks (the twins), Shep (the Thanhouser Collie, as himself)

The simple story of a heroic dog that saves the day appealed to audiences (especially with a well-trained animal as attractive and energetic as Shep), and became a movie staple for generations.

Their One Love (One reel, approx. 1,020 feet, released May 2, 1915)

Directed by John Harvey. Scenario by Gertrude Thanouser. Photographed by Carl Louis Gregory.

Print source: British Film Institute, 15 minutes, 20 seconds.

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

One of the many Civil War movies made during the 50th anniversary of the conflict. This was one of Thanouser's last one-reel dramas and was released just after Griffith's Civil War epic *Birth of a Nation*. Griffith's monumental picture had included three long-shots of nighttime pyrotechnics that included superimposures to complete the effect. *Their One Love* has an elaborate and spectacular eleven-shots night battle sequence with pyrotechnics and electric lighting effects, plus far more elaborate staging, editing, action, and pictorial drama than Griffith's example. Thus, film historians consider *Their One Love* to be the first fiction film to fully realize the technique of night cinematography. The night sequence was filmed three weeks after *Birth* opened in New York.

VOLUME VI: The Thanouser Stars Emerge (1911-1917)

She (Two reels of approx.2,000 feet, released December 26, 1911)

Directed by George O. Nichols. Scenario adapted from H. Rider Haggard's novel of the same name

Print source: Em Gee, 24 minutes, 40 seconds.

Cast: Marguerite Snow ("She"); James Cruze (Leo Vincey and also Kallikrates, his ancient ancestor; in the tomb scene, in Part II, by double exposure photography), Viola Alberti (the Pharaoh's daughter), William C. Cooper, Horace Holly, Irma Taylor, Harry Benham, Alphonse Ethier, Marie Eline (Leo Vincey as a youth).

The sensational popular story was one of three Haggard novels filmed by Thanouser. It has many of the elements found in the not-yet-invented adventure/fantasy serial genre. Thanouser's expertise in location work, costume fantasy, and elaborate storytelling pay off in in *She*, the studio's first single-release two-reel production. The double role of the hero is played by James Cruze, Thanouser's best-known actor, who was something of an adventurer himself. In the 1920s he became the highest-paid director in Hollywood. Margurite Snow was also one of the core of Thanouser's stock company who enjoyed popularity as stars began to be identified and promoted.

Marble Heart (Two reels of approx.2,000 feet, released May 13, 1913)

Scenario adapted from the play by Charles Selby.

Print source: Museum of Modern Art, 26 minutes, 50 seconds.

Cast: Marguerite Snow (Marco, the woman with the marble heart), James Cruze (Raphael, the jilted sculptor), Florence LaBadie (Marie, the girl who found refuge in the sculptor's home), William Russell (the editor friend), Burton Law.

This story, already a well-known English play of 1854 adapted from an earlier French play, casts the three most popular Thanouser adult stars in a story of unrequited love, with a dream sequence that parallels the main story. Pale makeup is especially noticeable in some scenes, the answer to orthochromatic film's blotchy-dark rendering of skin tones. Within a couple of years the technique of film makeup, filtering and lighting would be greatly improved.

Mme. Blanche, Beauty Doctor (One reel of approx.1,000 feet, released July 9, 1915)

Directed by Arthur Ellery. Scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan. A Falstaff comedy.

Print source: British Film Institute, 13 minutes, 35 seconds

Cast: Harry Benham (Bob, the college boy; Madame Blanche), Riley Chamberlin (Simon Southwick, his guardian, a rheumatic old man), Mrs. S. Stevens (Mrs. Southwick), Mignon Anderson (Betty, the stenographer), Ray Johnston (clerk), Edward N. Hoyt (clerk), Morgan Jones, Ethel Jewett.

A good example of the clever light comedy Thanouser produced for Pathé's Falstaff label, while other studios cranked out broad slapstick comedies. Harry Benham and Mignon Anderson were versatile and popular Thanouser stars, here showing considerable skill in light comedy, a genre that invites plenty of satirical social observation such as the burgeoning beauty-salon industry here. Cinema technique shows much more intricate editing and freer use of closeups than just a year or two earlier.

Fires of Youth (Two reels of approx. 2,000 feet, originally released in five-reel Pathé Gold Rooster Play version by the Pathé Exchange on June 17, 1917; shortened re-release by Imperial Film Company Ltd.) Directed by Emile Chautard. Assistant director: James Ewens. Scenario by Agnes Christine Johnston. Photographed by Jacques Bizeul.

Print source: Em Gee, 31 minutes, 12 seconds.

Cast: Frederick Warde (Iron-Hearted Pemberton), Jeanne Eagels (Billy's sister), Helen Badgley (Billy), Ernest Howard (Billy's father), Robert Vaughn (Jim), James Ewens, Carey L. Hastings, Grace Stevens.

The productions from Thanouser's mature period, 1915-1917, clearly show the advancements that set the stage for the first cinematic golden age, the 1920s. In this surviving shortened version of *Fires of Youth* are evident such advances as detailed character development by veteran actor Warde (and in a smaller role, at least in the shortened version, by Eagels), mature editing technique, special lighting effects, intelligent story development, realistic use of locations, fluid dialogue inter-titles, complex staging, and access to better cameras with the defeat of the Patents Trust.

Acclaimed French stage and film director Emile Chautard was brought from Éclair studio in France to direct.

EmGee Film Library recently purchased this only known surviving print from the collection of the Silent Movie Theatre in California. The shortened version is imprinted with "Imperial Film Company Ltd.," an English production and distribution company founded in 1913 by Paul Kimberley who was also managing director of Thanouser Films Ltd. in London in 1913-1914.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

New and original organ music for the 13 films in this collection is composed and performed by musician Raymond A. Brubacher. Born in Washington, DC, Brubacher has been the staff organist at the AFI Theatre in the Kennedy Center since it opened in 1973. He is also the silent film accompanist for the National Gallery of Art, the Mary Pickford Theatre (Library of Congress), the Weinberg Center for the Arts, the Harris Theatre (George Mason University), the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop and Slayton House.

Mr. Brubacher performs on a Wurlitzer Style H with two manuals and 12 ranks (two additional non-Wurlitzer strings were added to the 10 rank H specification) plus a Deagan Vibraharp. Originally installed in Loew's Colonial Theatre, Reading, Pennsylvania, it has resided in its current Silver Spring, Maryland home for thirty years.

This video collector's set was made possible with the cooperation of film archives around the world. All the videos in this set are new transfers made from prints supplied by the archives. Transfers were made at "silent speed" (18 frames per second) for authentic presentation. Sincere appreciation and thanks are extended to the following archives which supplied films used in this collection:

British Film Institute National Film and Television Archive London, England	The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film New York, New York
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Nederlands Filmmuseum Amsterdam, Netherlands	EmGee Film Library Reseda, California
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The Library of Congress Motion Picture, Broadcast and Recorded Sound Division Washington, DC	Griggs Moviedrome Nutley, New Jersey
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Thousands of feet of Thanhouser nitrate film still await preservation. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this video set will go towards film preservation and improved access. If you would like additional information, please contact Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc., 8770 NW Kearney Street, Portland, OR 97229, fax (503) 226-7961, send e-mail to feedback@thanhouser.org or visit us on the World Wide Web at <http://www.thanhouser.org>.