

Thanhouser Classics DVD – Volume 1

Only in the Way (1911)
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1912)
The Cry of the Children (1912)
Petticoat Camp (1912)
The Evidence of the Film (1913)
A Dog's Love (1914)
Their One Love (1915)

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This DVD collection contains films produced by Edwin Thanhouser and the film studio he opened in New Rochelle, New York in the first decade of the twentieth century. He was the first American studio head to come from a theatrical background. In 1909 he entered the "picture" business in the midst of a Starbucks-like explosion of thousands of small storefront theaters called Nickelodeons, with film "manufacturers" springing up like dot-coms. Moving through the nascent world of motion pictures, he touched everyone who influenced the new craft of movie making: Thomas A. Edison, D.W. Griffith, Carl Laemmle, and more.

In the course of a few exhilarating years he watched this novelty grow into a shared national experience that redefined American culture. When he entered the industry, "moving pictures" were exhibited one-reel at a time and sold for pennies a foot. By the time he left in 1918, cinema had developed its own language, the studios had moved to California, Wall Street controlled the money, and "movie stars" had become royalty.

The films in this collection trace the evolution of the Thanhouser Studio against a background of the industry, playing out in New York, Europe and California.

The collection begins with the simple story of traditional family matters in *Only in the Way* and closes with a remembrance of the Civil War, *Their One Love*, released within weeks of Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*. In between are five films that represent a microcosm of the early film industry as it refined its use of cinematography, editing techniques and narrative development that resulted in what we know today as Hollywood.

Only in the Way (One reel , released January 31, 1911)
Print source: Library of Congress, 12 minutes, 14 seconds.
Cast: Marie Eline (Marie).

Through most of 1910, the first year of Thanhouser releases, the studio created vehicles around one of its earliest stars, child actress Marie Eline. She was one of the few movie players to receive screen credit in those early days.

The dramatic theme of *Only in the Way* centers on a universal topic, family disharmony. In this film, the parents' treatment of the grandmother affects the little girl who identifies with her grandmother. Thanhouser scenarists seemed to have had a special sensitivity for the feelings of children which is reflected in this film. The sentimental approach was expected in 1911.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (One reel, January 16, 1912)
Print source: Blackhawk Films, 11 minutes, 31 seconds.
Based on the Thomas Russell Sullivan stage adaptation (with romantic story added) for Richard Mansfield, of the novel by Robert Louis Stevenson. Directed by Lucius Henderson.
Cast: James Cruze (Jekyll/Hyde), Harry Benham (Hyde in several scenes), Florence LaBadie (his sweetheart), Marie Eline (little girl knocked down by Hyde).

This famous tale, made even more sensational by Richard Mansfield's stage performance, was filmed in at least nine silent versions. Thanhouser's was the second U. S. film version, after Selig in 1908, but was the first based on the stage adaptation.

The Thanhouser version downplays the horror element in favor of the thematic conflict between the good and evil sides of one personality. Perhaps unique among all Jekyll/Hyde adaptations is using two actors to portray the two aspects of the same character. The credits list James Cruze in both parts, but Harry

Benham played the crazed Hyde in several scenes, simplifying production. Transformation trickery was done with careful cuts and quick in-camera dissolves with no changes in lighting.

The Cry of the Children (Two reels, released April 30, 1912)

Directed by George O. Nichols. Photographed by Carl L. Gregory.

Print source: George Eastman House, 28 minutes, 47 seconds.

Cast: Marie Eline (Alice, little girl), Ethel Wright (working mother), James Cruze (working father), Lila H. Chester (factory owner's wife).

The Cry of the Children is the most famous and best documented of all Thanhouser films. In its day it was recognized as one of the most important expressions of the pre-World War One reform movement, in particular child labor. Perhaps because the uncompromising content drew all the attention, the film was not then recognized as the artistic masterpiece it is.

The title and basic outline of the scenario were taken from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's popular poem which was quoted in the intertitles. The antique sentimental quality of the poem contrasts sharply with the gritty realism of the visual images. Likewise, the story contrasts scenes of the mill owner's home life with that of the poor working family. An unsuccessful strike, poverty, death, and hardship threaten to tear the poor family apart.

Although some elements of the story are melodramatic, clichés are to be expected from that era. However, the cinematic skill and social importance certainly contributed to a new social-realism style. The film marked the emerging political power of film, and the potential for making contributions to society.

Petticoat Camp (One reel, released November 3, 1912)

Print source: Library of Congress, 14 minutes, 50 seconds.

Cast: Florence LaBadie, William Garwood, the Jordan Sisters (divers).

This comedy capitalizes on the booming pastime of a newly mobile American middle class — fishing and camping. Not only is the woodsy lakeside photogenic, but it also provides a charming locale for a light-handed battle-of-the-sexes comedy.

With a fresh and energetic attitude, the story portrays several married couples vacationing on an island. The boys play and the girls work. The girls rebel and move to an island of their own. The boys scheme to show how necessary they are as protectors, but the plan backfires and a truce is reached.

The Evidence of the Film (One reel, released January 10, 1913)

Directed by Edwin Thanhouser and Lawrence Marston.

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

Recently discovered and preserved, *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.

A Dog's Love (One reel, released October 4, 1914)

Directed by John Harvey. Scenario by Nolan Gane.

Print source: Museum of Modern Art, 11 minutes, 12 seconds.

Cast: Shep (The Thanhouser Collie, as himself), Helen Badgley (Baby Helen), Arthur Bauer (Helen's father), Ethyle Cooke Benham (Helen's mother), Fan Bourke (a visitor).

The fantasy centers on a dog and a child, a universally appealing movie subject. The loyal dog's attachment to his little girl playmate is treated with pictorial beauty and simple, honest sentiment. Reviewers of the time praised the double-exposure passages for their dramatic effectiveness.

Baby Helen, also known as The Thanhouser Kidlet, was a precocious child actress who was very comfortable and expressive in front of the camera. Also a regular, Shep, The Thanhouser Collie, was a well-trained member of the studio's repertory company.

Their One Love (One reel, released May 2, 1915)

Directed by John Harvey. Scenario by Gertrude Thanhouser. 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.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Thousands of feet of Thanouser 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 Thanouser Company Film Preservation, Inc., 8770 NW Kearney Street, Portland, OR 97229, fax (503) 226-7961, send e-mail to feedback@thanouser.org or visit us on the World Wide Web at <http://www.thanouser.org>.