

## The Latest Thanhouser Releases

By Anthony Slide  
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It has been more than eighty years since there was a new Thanhouser release, but, thanks to Ned Thanhouser, three further volumes of “Thanhouser Classics” are now available on video. Through Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc., Ned Thanhouser has been assuring not only that the productions of his grandfather’s company are restored but also made available to a wide audience thanks to videotape.

Each of the “Thanhouser Classics” volumes is beautifully packaged, with reproductions of original posters on the covers and detailed program notes. They are also presented with organ accompaniment by Ray Brubacher, full film frame, and at the correct silent speed. The first of the new series, Volume IV, contains the 1910 and 1917 releases of *The Vicar of Wakefield*. The earlier version is most succinct and well abbreviated. The prints of both versions are somewhat dark, and the 1917 film is unsteady, but the Thanhouser logo positively sparkles in every scene of the earlier film.

Volume V is subtitled “Thanhouser Kids and Dogs” and contains *The Little Girl Next Door* (1912), *The Evidence of the Film* (1913), *The Tiniest of Stars* (1913), *Just a Shabby Doll* (1913), *Uncle’s Namesake* (1913), *Shep’s Race with Death* (1914), and *Their One Love* (1915). The recently discovered *The Evidence of the Film* is fascinating for its footage of the combined Thanhouser cutting room and laboratory. *Their One Love* is remarkable for its night photography of Civil War battle scenes, although this sophisticated footage is perhaps used only in order to prevent the audiences from realizing that just a handful of men were involved in the action.

The final volume, number VI, is subtitled “The Thanhouser Stars Emerge,” and includes *She* (1911), *Marble Heart* (1913), *Madam Blanche*, *Beauty Doctor* (1915), and a truncated version of *Fires of Youth* (1917). It is unfortunate that the print of *She* is so dark, because it must have been a sumptuous production.

Thanhouser was a lively independent producer, more noted for its players than its directorial techniques. The child stars dominate the ranks of its leading performers, and the company always had an efficient way of putting its kids into cute situations – thanks, perhaps, to story department head Lloyd Lonergan. The twins Madeline and Marion Fairbanks are great; the plot demands of *Uncle’s Namesakes* have them disguised as twelve-year-old boys to great effect, while in *Their One Love*, they age effortlessly from children to elderly spinsters. Some of the kids are precocious and some need a little help – a good slapping might have persuaded Marie Eline to cry a little more realistically in *The Evidence of the Film*.

Among the adults, William Russell over-acts in *The Little Girl Next Door*. Harry Benham surprises with his light comedy and cross dressing in *Madam Blanche*, *Beauty Doctor*. James Cruze was never an attractive leading man, and in *She* and *Marble Heart*, it is revealed that he does not even have a decent pair of legs. Frederick Warde enjoys his close-ups a little too much in *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *Fires of Youth*, while female star of the latter, Jeanne Eagels fails again to prove on screen just how great an actress she was in the theatre, although she does have a cute little turned up nose. The best performer is, without question, the star of *Shep’s Race with Death*. This dog is far more polished and natural an actor than William Duncan [sic] and James Cruze combined.

I look forward to further volumes in the series, and urge anyone interested in silent film to purchase the latest of the “Thanhouser Classics.” For more information, contact Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc. at 8770 NW Kearney Street, Portland, OR 97229 or on the world wide web (who would ever have dreamed that one day Thanhouser would be on the world wide web!) at <http://www.thanhouser.org>.