

Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc.

and

Museo Nazionale del Cinema

Present

Thanhouser Company's 1911 Production of

David Copperfield



In Celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of Charles Dickens

A Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc. Release
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Phone +1-503-226-7960 • e-mail: postmaster@thanhouser.org
www.thanhouser.org

Press Kit: *David Copperfield* (1911)

Credits

Produced by..... Edwin Thanhouser

Directed by George O. Nichols

Starring Flora Foster (David Copperfield as a young boy)
Ed Genung (David Copperfield as a young man)
Marie Eline (Little Em'ly as a young girl)
Florence LaBadie (Em'ly as a young woman)
Mignon Anderson (Dora)
Marguerite Snow (Agnes)
James Cruze (Steerforth)
William Russell (Ham)

New and Original Music by Dr. Philip Carli (Rochester, New York)

Commentary by Professor Joss Marsh (Indiana University/Kent-MOMI)

1911 USA Release Thanhouser Company (New Rochelle, New York)

1911 European Distribution Western Import Company, Ltd. (London, England)

1959 Preservation..... Museo Nazionale del Cinema (Torino, Italy)

2012 Restoration..... Museo Nazionale del Cinema (Torino, Italy)

2012 DVD Release Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc.
(Portland, Oregon)

Black and White, 1.33 : 1 aspect ratio, 40 minutes, Italian intertitles with optional English subtitles.
Silent with musical accompaniment and commentary track, photographed in and around New Rochelle, NY, including scenes along the New York Long Island sound.

DVD Bonus Features

- English sub-titles by David Robinson, director Pordenone Silent Film Festival
- Commentary by Dickens & film scholar Professor Joss Marsh
- Charles Dickens biography
- Preservation report from L'Immagine Ritrovata
- Image gallery from Dickens themed Thanhouser films
- Thanhouser's 1912 two-reel production of *Nicholas Nickleby* (TRT 31 minutes)

David Copperfield

David Copperfield is a complex novel, crowded with material, hard to summarize with any justice. To have presented it in full would have required hours of screen time. Nevertheless, the three reels Thanhouser devoted to *David Copperfield* provide much more than a simple series of “Dickensian” vignettes or tableaux. The first part focuses on the soon-orphaned and delicate boy David, his childhood happiness with his nurse Peggotty and her fisherfolk relatives, his brutalization by his stepfather, Mr. Murdstone, and his hard journey to find his aunt. The second dynamically entwines the story of his young manhood with the tragic tale of Little Em’ly, Peggotty’s niece, seduced by David’s friend, Steerforth. The third finds David himself in love—twice. All the while, around him swirl a crowd of the extraordinarily individualistic and memorable characters who people the Dickens world, making it, as Vladimir Nabokov once said, a kind of “magic democracy.”



Charles Dickens (1812 -1870)

David Copperfield, published 1849-50, is one of the greatest works by the man now considered the greatest novelist of the Victorian period, **Charles Dickens** (7 February 1812 – 9 June 1870). During his lifetime, Dickens's works enjoyed unprecedented fame, and remain popular to this day, though it was not until the later twentieth century that his genius was fully recognized by critics and scholars. They are alive with some of the most iconic images, moments, and characters of English literature. *David Copperfield* draws extensively, sometimes word for word, on the highly-charged fragment of autobiography Dickens wrote in 1848, but showed to only one person in his lifetime—not his wife, or (later) his lover, but the close friend who became his first biographer: the novel’s original readers sensed, as they devoured it, month by month, that in doing so they were drawing unprecedentedly close to Dickens, the man, but had no way of knowing the degree to which *David*

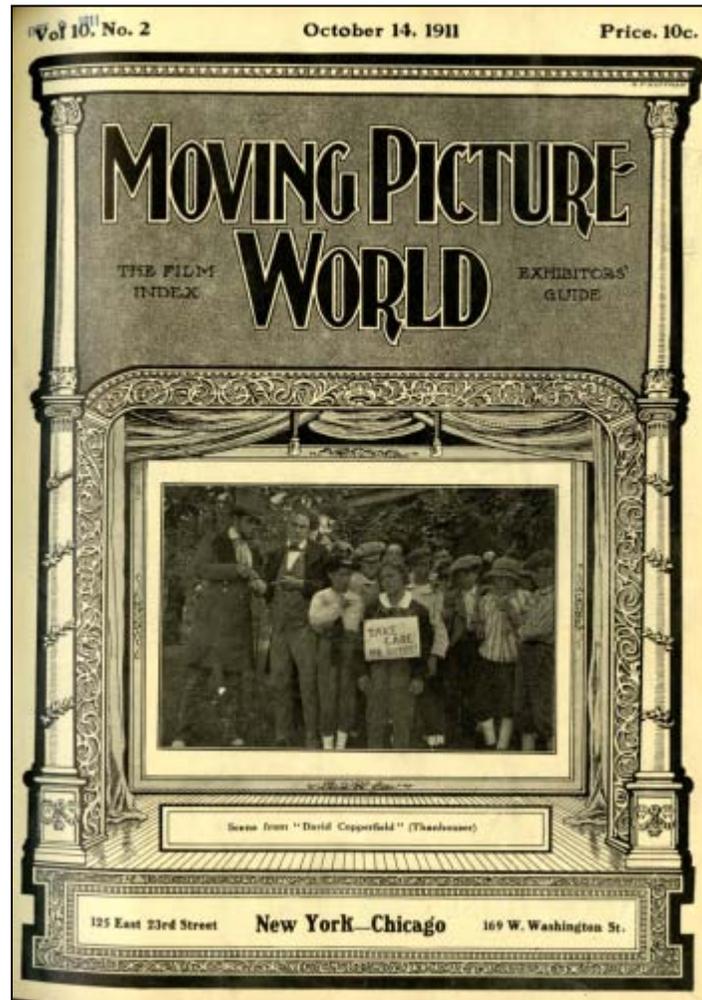


James Cruze (as Steerforth) and
Florence Labadie (as Em’ly)

Copperfield revealed him until John Forster published that biography, two years after Dickens’s death. The penury and humiliation of Dickens's own childhood, especially after his father’s imprisonment for debt condemned him to lonely factory drudgery: all are here, with an extra dose of cruelty, in the shape of Murdstone. “Like many fond parents,” Dickens admitted, “I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child, and his name is David Copperfield.”

A biography of Charles Dickens is available on the DVD.

Background



The most ambitious Thanhouser Company effort to date came with its three-reel version of Charles Dickens's immortal *David Copperfield*, the story of an English lad's tribulation-filled journey to adulthood. As Thanhouser's Sales Company distribution channel could not accommodate the release of all three reels on the same day, Thanhouser shaped each reel as a story which could stand alone, giving each its own title: *The Early Life of David Copperfield*, *Little Em'ly and David Copperfield*, and *The Loves of David Copperfield*. Release dates were set for consecutive Tuesdays, beginning on October 17, 1911. Directed by George O. Nichols, the cast included Flora Foster (David Copperfield as a young boy), Ed Genung (David Copperfield as a young man), Marie Eline (Little Em'ly as a young girl), Florence LaBadie (Em'ly as a young woman), Mignon Anderson (Dora), Marguerite Snow (Agnes), James Cruze (Steerforth), and William Russell (Ham).

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Flora Foster, who took the title role in *The Early Life of David Copperfield*, at one time was known as "The Biograph Kid." She was an actress for Thanhouser during the 1911-1913 years, although she was rarely mentioned in publicity. Her talents in the motion picture field were never to mature, for in 1914, at the age of 16, she died of heart failure.

The Morning Telegraph found the three reels little more than a series of tableau-like scenes in a wax museum, tied together with subtitles. Their reviewer was in a distinct minority, however. More typical was the detailed review covering all three reels published on September 30, 1911 in *The Moving Picture World*:

In the filming of Dickens these reels are a revelation. The best ideals and fondest expectations of both the friends of the moving picture and the readers of Dickens have been realized. This may sound like a reckless compliment, but after one sees character after character in the famous story step from the printed page into life and motion, after one has felt the presence of the Dickens spirit and atmosphere radiating from the screen into the deepest recesses of the heart, after one has had that happy hour of laughter and tears which the great novelist knows so well to be so, the function of criticism is wholly suspended and there remains nothing for the critic but to record, always imperfectly in such a case, the superabundant merits of the production.

Other film makers, among the best in the field, have attempted to give us Dickens in pictures and, though there are good points in *The Cricket on the Hearth*, *Oliver Twist*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Our Mutual Friend*, and *A Christmas Carol*, they do not even approach the present films in the power of cinematographic characterization, the sustained excellence, the attention to detail, the sympathetic and complete understanding of the soul of Dickens.

If Dickens ever wrote out of the fullness of his heart, it was when he told of the misfortunes and struggles of the child and boy David, when he describes the hopes, fears and ambitions of his youth and the friendships and loves of his early manhood. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why the story has such a strong hold on the readers of Dickens and why its characters are so well known and so much admired. These very facts, however, constituted a grave danger for the Dickens student, who intended to render the charm and beauty of the work visible to every eye, including the eye that had never conned a page of the story. It was of the first importance to reduce and condense. And thus this reducing and condensing was done with painstaking care and with an eye to the preserving of the essential features of the story. Adaptation was apt to become a mutilation and a matter of special offense to the readers of Dickens.

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It was here the art of the makers of the film achieved a most convincing success. Every one of the characters so dear to our recollection stands out strikingly and picturesquely; the villainous curmudgeon Murdstone, the lovable Peggoty, the handsome seducer Steerforth, the sterling Aunt Betsey, the unhappy Wickfield, the unspeakable Uriah Heep, the unctuous and unique Micawber. The women of the story deserve special mention: Dora, the "doll-wife," was an embodiment of the Dickens character, and Dickens himself could not have chosen more fortunately and exactly; the same holds true of Em'ly and Agnes. Even the minor characters such as poor Dick, Mrs. Gummidge, Ham Peggoty, David's mother, Creakle, the servant in Steerforth's employ, and all the others are sketched with consummate skill, a sure indication, by the way, of the artistic excellence that pervades the entire production from the first inch of film to the last. Even the little dog Jip that threatened poor David's marital happiness is there, and it is a real Jip too.

Of course, the Dickens readers will be out in full force to see this picture and they will urge others to come, and the Dickens shelves in the libraries will be depleted. But what about the great majority that have never seen the Dickens book and know nothing whatever about David Copperfield? Is the story of the films told in such a way that they too will understand, appreciate and enjoy? Is there enough of the subtle charm of Dickens on the screen to steal into their hearts and make them disciples? The answer is emphatically "yes." The man, woman or child that has not read a lot of Dickens will feel the Dickens spirit and the Dickens atmosphere, and as a first enjoyment of the story is often the keenest, they lose nothing by becoming acquainted with the great story teller through the medium of the picture. There are stories within stories in *David Copperfield*, but the best ones are all in the film and they are all dramatic and finely staged.

The scene showing the wreck of the vessel on which Steerforth was a passenger, the desperate efforts of Ham Peggoty to find the path through the stormy waves and save a life, the drowning of both Ham and Steerforth, and their floating bodies in the surf challenge the best display of realism in a photoplay. In the portrayal of the emotional scenes, in which the peculiar Dickens mixture of human pathos makes such exacting demands on the stage director and the actors, these films are beyond all praise. I must content myself with mentioning only two - one the Em'ly-Steerforth episode, the other the unmasking of Uriah Heep in lawyer Wickfield's office.

The Thanhouser Company has set a new standard in the filming of Dickens, and I very readily believe their assurance that this was with them but a labor of love and that, imbued with a true Dickens' enthusiasm, they have spent six months in producing these reels. Time is of the essence of success.

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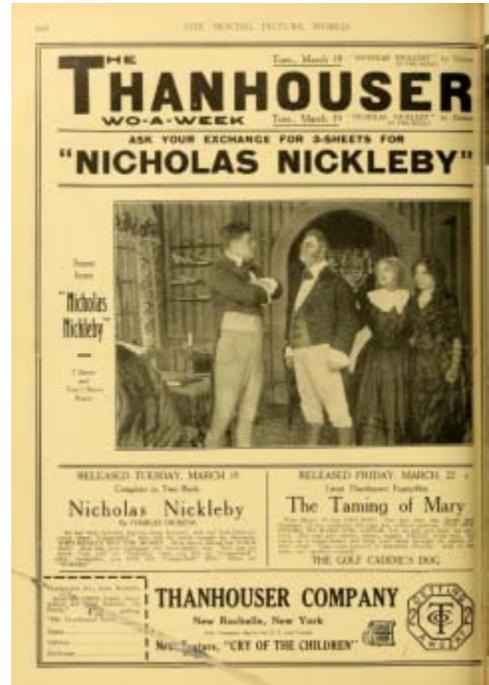
While it would undoubtedly have had many advantages to release the three films at once, the film makers had made the best of an otherwise unfortunate situation by skillfully using the autobiographical character as a basis of division - The Childhood, The Boyhood, and The Manhood of David Copperfield. That was a happy idea, although the full effect of this excellent production cannot be secured except by showing the three reels in one night. A lecture would go well with it if it were featured as "An Evening with Dickens."

The original Thanhouser Company three-episode David Copperfield film was distributed on three separate consecutive weeks in the USA by the Sales Company and in Europe by Western Imports, Ltd. in London:

- *The Early Life of David Copperfield*
(October 17, 1911)
- *Little Em'ly and David Copperfield*
(October 24, 1911)
- *The Loves of David Copperfield*
(October 31, 1911)

The Thanhouser Company produced and released three other films based on Dickens novels:

1. *The Old Curiosity Shop* (January 20, 1911)
2. *Nicholas Nickleby* (March 19, 1912)
3. *Little Dorrit* (January 29, 1913)



The surviving Thanhouser Dickens films on this DVD are from the Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Torino, Italy, and includes all three of the original *David Copperfield* episodes, together with *Nicholas Nickleby*, held by the British Film Institute in London, England.



NATIONAL CINEMA MUSEUM

The thrill of cinema comes alive at the Mole Antonelliana

The only one in Italy and one of the most important in the world, the NATIONAL CINEMA MUSEUM is housed within the Mole Antonelliana in Turin, the city's symbol. Inaugurated in July 2000, by 2011 it saw a good 610,000 visitors, becoming one of the most visited museums in Turin and Piedmont and garnering much consensus internationally; a noteworthy success for a very particular museum, which proposes to charm its visitors by enticing them into the enchanting world of the Seventh Art.

What makes the National Cinema Museum truly unique is the extremely rich heritage of its collections and the peculiarity of its displays, developing spiral wise vertically, and articulated over several showcasing levels illustrating the history of cinema by alternating spectacular and evocative posters, objects, film clips and scenography, with an overall surface of around 3,200 square metres. In planning the museum layout François Confino did not only have to take in account the characteristics of the building hosting it, but, following Antonelli's crescendo, he also superimposed various interpretation levels, combining the necessity for a rigorous scientific structure with the requirement for a spectacular presentation, which aims at reproducing and playing with the mechanisms of fascination at the core of cinematographic depiction.

The actual visit starts from the floor dedicated to Cinema Archaeology: here it is possible to admire a precious collection of objects and devices which antedate the great magic of cinema and are at its foundations. One continues with the Cinema Machine, an enthralling circuit illustrating the main stages of production and making of a film, with stage-set items, sketches, costumes, screenplays,

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photographs and video-screenings. On the upper floor, in the Posters Gallery, the history of cinema is told through its finest posters, all belonging to the Museum collections. The Helicoidal Ramp, surely one of the most fascinating parts of the museum, is the location for temporary exhibitions. At the top of the helicoidal ramp, in the section *They rode together*. 50 years of cinema and television, six 'alcoves' stage the cinema-television relationship, depicted through its domestic aspects. One finally reaches the Hall of the Temple, the heart of the Mole, where visitors can take a seat on special chaises lounges to watch the screening of 35mm films on two large screens and admire the images animating the interior of the cupola. All around, thirteen chapels dedicated to the cult of cinema recount great themes in the history of the Seventh Art, by alternating scenography, images, objects, photographs and posters from the Museum's rich collections.

The Museum preserves an impressive heritage, in many cases unique worldwide, of rare and precious material: its collections number 900,000 photographs documenting the history of cinema, from the silent age to the following talking production, and the history of photography, from its beginnings to the first decades of the 20th century; about 530,000 posters and sundry publicity material retracing the history of the Seventh Art; 23,500 devices and artistic artifacts, which include a collection of testimonials from the archaeology of cinema, among the most important ones internationally, costumes and items from the set; 1,600 gadgets and movie memorabilia. Furthermore, the Museum Film Archives number 26,000 silent and talking films (including 4,000 film trailers), belonging to diverse cinematographies, and can boast of an exclusive collection of films from the Italian silent period. The Library-Mediatheque – in its renewed and multipurpose venue in via Matilde Serao 8/A – represents one of the most prestigious centres for documentation on cinema and photography at a European level for the extent and the variety of its assets (36,400 volumes and over 132,000 magazine issues), while the Archive, with its 8,000 files, preserves collections from the greatest production companies in Italian silent cinema. The Library is now complemented by a Videotheque endowed with 27,500 titles and a Phonoteque with 2,300 cinema audio recordings. In addition, for several years now the National Cinema Museum has further stepped-up its commitment in the recovery and restoration of films once considered irreparably lost.

The National Cinema Museum is host to several festivals, and has signed agreements with the Turin Film Festival, the Turin GLBT Film Festival "From Sodom to Hollywood" and the environmental CinemAmbiente Festival. These agreements entail that each festival is responsible for its own artistic directorship, while it is up to the Museum to define the financial resources destined to the organization of the festivals and to manage their budget for each edition.

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Thanks to the plurality of the scientific and popular activities accomplished, the National Cinema Museum has become one of the most important hubs for cultural initiatives at a national and international level, carrying out avant-garde research on the conservation of materials and on the history of cinema, a vast restoration programme, publishing initiatives, film showcases, meetings with cinema authors and protagonists, educational programmes.

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Thanhouser Company

Film Preservation, Inc.



Trademark

Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization based in Portland, Oregon, dedicated to the research, acquisition, preservation, and publication of educational materials related to the early silent motion picture era, with a specific focus on the Thanhouser film enterprise. From its founding in 1909 through 1917, Thanhouser Company, and its successor, Mutual's Thanhouser Film Corporation, produced and released over 1,000 silent films, with worldwide distribution.

To date, over 220 Thanhouser film prints have been identified, located, and catalogued at archives and private collections around the world, with new discoveries every year. Once relegated to the backwaters of academic study due to the lack of available titles for study, Thanhouser's place in film history has changed dramatically in the past decade, thanks to the availability of 56 titles on DVD plus online viewing at www.thanhouser.org. The company also publishes on CD-ROM the most extensive research effort on any American silent motion picture studio: *Thanhouser Films: An Encyclopedia and History* by Q. David Bowers.

Edwin W. ("Ned") Thanhouser is the grandson of silent film pioneers Gertrude and Edwin Thanhouser and is president of Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc. He has been active in film preservation since 1986, and in 1988 with his family established the Thanhouser Film Preservation Trust at the Library of Congress for the acquisition and preservation of nitrate-based Thanhouser films. He is a member of the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA), Domitor (The International Association for Early Cinema), the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS), and has served on the National Film Preservation Board. He has presented papers

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on the history of the Thanhouser film enterprise at academic conferences and makes guest lecture appearances at Thanhouser film screenings across the nation and internationally.

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David Copperfield: The 1911 Film

The Museo Nazionale del Cinema conserves four Italian prints of *David Copperfield* (George O. Nichols; Thanhouser Film Corporation, 1911).

The 817-meter-long, black and white, nitrate positive print of the Italian period version joined the Museo Nazionale del Cinema's Film Library collections in 1955. In 1959, the Museum carried out an initial conservation of the nitrate material on a safety support, at the same time making a master dupe negative, from which a 35mm positive and a 16mm positive were later printed.

The nitrate print presents characteristics of completeness and accuracy in the editing order of the episodes. With the one exception of the card which says "FINE" (End) all the intertitles are original and bear the production trademark.

In view of the good quality of the nitrate, the decision was made to carry out new conservative action in 2012, which is described in detail in the report prepared by the laboratory L'Immagine Ritrovata of Bologna. This report is available as a BONUS feature on the DVD.

This nitrate print was then used to prepare another dupe negative, from which a new projection print (35mm, positive, polyester, 817 meters, b/w, approx. 40' at 18 ft/s, Italian intertitles) was printed and put at the Museum's disposal for the DVD edition of *David Copperfield*, curated by Thanhouser Company Film Preservation in 2012 on the occasion of the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Charles Dickens.

Preservation Report for *David Copperfield*

by L'Immagine Ritrovata (Bologna, Italy)

DAVID COPPERFIELD (1911)

- Production Company: Thanhouser Company (New Rochelle, NY – USA)
- Director: George O. Nichols
- Film: Original Positive Nitrate, Three Reels (817 meters, 2,680 feet)
- Aspect Ratio: 1.33 : 1, Black and White
- Preservation Date: February 2012

Summary

Materials were in good condition. The three reels have the same characteristics. We insert the protection leaders 6 meters long to allow passage in the optical alternating printer machine (TAI). The film base is 1911 PATHÉ FRÈRES, it is in good conditions, but slightly warped and helicoidal. Some bits are very ruined and wavy. Some frames have light halos and are darker. 1911 splices are one perforation large with missing image area. Some later splices are in better conditions and we decided to leave them as they are. The intertitles are on PATHÉ film base with the THANHOUSER production logo. The intertitle FINE is on KODAK film and is not original.



The complete preservation report from L'Immagine Ritrovata is available on the DVD.

Profile: Joss Marsh (Commentary)

Associate Professor, Indiana University (1998-2013) and Curator, Kent Museum of the Moving Image (2012-).

Ph.D., University of California at Santa Barbara, 1989; M.Phil., English Literature 1789-1880, University of Oxford, 1982.

Joss Marsh is an archival scholar whose work is driven by two broad interests—in the intersections of "high" and "popular" culture (especially film and pre-cinema), and the history of the imagination. Her 1998 book *Word Crimes: Blasphemy, Culture, and Literature in 19th-Century England* (Chicago UP) was unusual in being described (in the British press) both as "monumental" and as "a page-turner". Her forthcoming (Ashgate, 2014) *Starring Charles Dickens* began life as a book about Dickens adaptation, but has turned into a book about Dickens, cinema, and all the popular culture that intervened between, including the Victorian theatrical star system, celebrity photography, Victorian virtual tourism, and the relationship between performativity and anti-Semitism in Britain. She has lectured and published most recently on Dickens impersonators, the late-Victorian multi-media phenomenon George R. Sims, "Victorian film," Victorian spectacle and visibility, Chaplin, and the Imperial reprocessing of Sydney Carton. With her partner, David Francis, her main commitment now is to Kent-MOMI, the new museum they are building in Deal, near Dover, UK, and to the magic lantern, the "machine of wonder" that, for 250 years before the coming of cinema, brought projected (and sometimes moving) images and visual story-telling to screens and audiences across the world. Since 2006, Marsh and Francis have lectured on and performed with magic lanterns at such international venues as the Museum of Modern (MOMA), New York, the Vienna Filmmuseum, the Greek National Film Archive, the George Eastman House Museum of Film and Photography, the Cinemateca Portuguesa, and the Academy of Motion Pictures. Their most recent lantern lecture-performance, "Dickensian Light and Magic," was the showpiece of the 2012 DOMITOR conference in Brighton, UK. Professor Marsh has been a member of the international research group The Dickens Project, since 1987, and is a past executive director of its famous yearly public conference, the Dickens Universe. She occasionally subjects herself to theatrical discipline, and is probably the only woman academic ever to have played Scrooge in male drag in a professional theatre.

