

The Thanhouser Collection



DVD Collector's Set Volumes 10, 11 & 12

Volume 10: More Early Thanhouser (1910 to 1912)
Volume 11: The Genius of Charles J. Hite (1913 to 1914)
Volume 12: Edwin and Gertrude Return (1915 to 1916)

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Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of
Thanhouser Company on October 25, 1909.

VOLUME 10: More Early Thanhouser (1910 TO 1912)

Thanhouser's very first release, *The Actor's Children*, was actually the new producer's fourth or fifth production. Its first project in late 1909 was over-ambitious, with (as scenarist Lloyd F. Lonergan admitted) enough material for 15 stories. The first productions were also plagued by technical problems as the studio facilities came online as an independent studio, without access to the latest and best equipment controlled by the one-year-old Motion Picture Patents Company, an attempted monopoly under Edison. Two or three other early productions were shelved for a yet-to-be-determined regular release schedule.

Thanhouser made 19 prints of *The Actor's Children*, and sent them out on approval to 19 dealers nationwide (without actual orders or requests), bypassing the existing distributors. Ten of the prints were returned, with compliments about the film, but the dealers required advance notice, advance screening, and established distribution channels. (A distributorship, handling only independent studios with Thanhouser the largest by far, was soon created.) The trade publications, already well established by 1910, were also complimentary of the picture's attractive story and production quality.

The Actor's Children

(One reel of approximately 1,000 feet, March 15, 1910)

Print source: Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences Archive, 13 minutes 27 seconds.

Directed by Barry O'Neil. Scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan. Photographed by Blair Smith.

Cast: Frank H. Crane (father), Orilla Smith (girl), Yale Boss (boy),

Nicolas Jordan (comedian).

Photographic supervision by Joseph Bianchi, inventor of the Bianchi camera, two of which were rented by Thanhouser.

Remarkably for a movie studio's first release, *The Actor's Children* is well up to the state of the art for early 1910. Intertitles announce, in a few words, what will happen in the upcoming scene (a convention that lasted through 1912). Each scene is an unedited fixed-camera shot suggesting a front-row-center viewpoint. (Later in the film a single scene/sequence is a combination of two separate shots in separate sets, an important step toward ever increasing complexity of scene-building.) Sets are 12-foot cubes with one exterior location filming.

The Actor's Children is the story of the insecure lives of theater people and was supremely appropriate for the Thanhouser studio, whose principals Edwin and Gertrude Thanhouser had a wealth of theatrical experience in acting, production and entrepreneurship.

This print of *The Actor's Children* has survived against all odds, so the nitrate deterioration and other poor condition in places is unfortunate but bearable.

Young Lord Stanley

(One reel of approximately 1,000 feet, October 25, 1910)

Print source: Library of Congress, 13 minutes 35 seconds.

Scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan.

What appears to be the title of this print, "His Only Son," may be a later alternate title or may be the first inter-title card.

Cast: Justice Barnes (Father of girl)

Some of Lloyd F. Lonergan's recurring storytelling themes are the basis for this simple, engaging and unlikely story—indomitable young romance, inheritance, classism, and wealth. Thanhouser makes especially rich use of one of its strengths, a variety of location exteriors. Even its interior sets, though still small, are more realistic than a few months earlier.

The Pasha's Daughter

(One reel of approximately 1,000 feet, January 3, 1911)

Print source: Museum of Modern Art, 13 minutes 39 seconds.

Cast: William Garwood.

The elements of an adventure-romance are dressed in an exotic setting. (Ottoman Turkey was hot in the news as the empire was on the verge of collapse and the European powers were preparing to carve up the Near East and Middle East into colonies.) An American visitor somewhere in the Ottoman Empire, is mistakenly arrested, escapes, is aided by the local Pasha's daughter, they fall in love, and they find each other later in America. The vivid exoticism is emphasized (1911 viewers must have wondered, is that a depiction of a real harem?), and the brisk, dashing pace of the story again shows Thanhouser's deft touch.

His Great Uncle's Spirit

(One reel of approximately 1,000 feet, March 8, 1912)

Print source: George Eastman House, 14 minutes 9 seconds.

Cast: George Ober (miser)

Rapid advancement in film technique is seen in *His Great Uncle's Spirit*. Especially in the opening theater sequence, and in the climactic "transformation" sequence, several different shots are edited together to create a fluid, dynamic scene. Cinematography shows the first spark of flexibility with a couple of tilting movements. There is a new energy in direction with strong fore-to-back staging. There are also some insert close-ups and some relatively unusual medium close-ups of action.

Despite all the stylistic skill, the story is the entertainment, about a vaudeville magician down on his luck, who takes a secretarial job and uses magic tricks to transform his mean skinflint boss into a generous man.

Ben Model's expert organ accompaniment indicates how effective the music can be in, among other things, foiling the most extremely emotive silent movie acting,

The Portrait of Lady Anne

(One reel of approximately 1,000 feet, July 23, 1912)

Print source: Library of Congress, 14 minutes 53 seconds.

Cast: Florence LaBadie (Lady Anne), Justice Barnes (Lady Anne's father in 1770), William Russell (rejected 1770 suitor), Carl LeViness (accepted suitor in 1770), Harry Benham (her suitor in 1912).

A fantasy of romance and jealousy across 200 years. Sets are, in 1912, becoming more realistic, sometimes even layered (with glimpses into other rooms in the background). Though still not willing to identify (much

less promote) their popular players, the theater-savvy Thanhousers were willing to hire the most elaborate and picturesque costumes in New York City.

The Voice of Conscience

(One reel of approximately 1,000 feet, September 3, 1912)

Print source: George Eastman House, 14 minutes 22 seconds.

Cast: Edmond J. Hayes (dying father), Jean Darnell (orphan), Florence LaBadie (visiting girl), Harry Benham (suitor), Justice Barnes (doctor).

The shackles of studio filming are largely broken in *The Voice of Conscience*, filmed in a variety of New Rochelle locations. The freedom is also evident in the cinematography which uses subtle panning and tilting in several shots, plus one trick shot and one unusual composition.

In a Garden

(One reel of approximately 1,000 feet, October 25, 1912)

Print source: British Film Institute, 15 minutes 4 seconds.

Cast: Riley Chamberlin (gardener and narrator), Marie Eline (Miss May [Marie in film inter-title], as a child), Leland Benham (Jack, her childhood sweetheart), Marguerite Snow (May grown up), James Cruze (Jack grown up), Harry Benham (who precipitates a quarrel between May and Jack), Helen Badgley (child visitor to garden), Carl LeViness (butler).

Alternate title: *The Romance of a Gardener*.

The ups and downs and ups of a romance over 30 years, told as a series of flashbacks by the gardener who witnessed them. The final garden scene, which is back-lit by the sun, appears to use fill lights or reflectors (which would have been a startling innovation) or may be lucky natural fill by scattered or thin clouds. Either way, the Thanhouser cinematographers always showed remarkable skill in dealing with the widely variable lighting conditions in their extensive exterior location work.

VOLUME 11: THE GENIUS OF CHARLES J. HITE (1913-1914)

Thanhouser's sale in April 1912, and the transition to new management in mid-October 1912, went very smoothly, contrary to the turmoil in the industry and despite the change and challenge within the studio. Edwin and Gertrude Thanhouser's 2½-year-old company was purchased outright in early 1912 by Charles J. Hite, an extremely successful and popular Chicago businessman with experience in film distribution. He took over as president several months before Edwin and Gertrude "retired" to depart for an extended European tour.

The reorganized company became a subsidiary (one of several) of Mutual Film Corporation, a major exchange (distributor). Hite, a charismatic, energetic, decisive, open, imaginative manager, continued the Thanhouser trend toward more frequent, longer, more expensive productions and introduced star promotion. He even oversaw the efficient rebuilding of the studio facilities following a devastating fire in January 1913.

Her Nephews from Labrador

(One reel split reel with short subject: *Los Angeles the Beautiful* at the end, January 26, 1913)

Print source: Museum of Modern Art, 12 minutes 38 seconds.

Cast: Billy Noel (a nephew), Ed Brady (a nephew).

Alternate (British release) title: *The Nephews from Labrador*.

Can't-believe-your-eyes authenticity of film is found in *Her Nephews from Labrador*, a lighthearted story as a vehicle for two New Rochelle residents, Billy Noel and Ed Brady. They were locally famous for the antics they portray here without stunt doubles and without any deception—ice skating in their bathing suits and swimming in an icy pond in New Rochelle's Hudson Park.

His Uncle's Wives

(One reel split with *The Seven Ages of the Alligator*, 686 feet, February 2, 1913)

Print source: Library of Congress, 9 minutes 6 seconds.

Directed by Lawrence Marston.

Cast: Jean Darnell, Harry Benham.

This simple situation comedy enjoys opulent sets of the home of an already-married New York City painter who inherits a harem, then finds a way to dispose of them. Though silly, the premise could fill a 2-hour movie today, plus sequels. Though the scenarist is unrecorded, it is likely Lloyd F. Lonergan who loved the device of inheritance to drive the plot.

Seven Ages of an Alligator

(One reel split with *His Uncle's Wives*, 315 feet, February 2, 1913)

Print source: Library of Congress, 4 minutes 20 seconds.

In early 1913 as Thanhouser staff and crews were setting up a facility in Los Angeles, cameraman Carl Louis Gregory was taking documentary footage, from which four "split reel" short subjects were created: *A Million Birds*, filmed at California pigeon and ostrich farms; *Los Angeles the Beautiful* (two different version with the same title), showing scenic attractions; and *Seven Ages of an Alligator*, filmed at an alligator farm. Released together, *His Uncle's Wives* and *Seven Ages of an Alligator* filled up one 1,000-foot "split reel."

The Farmer's Daughters

(One reel of 1,006 feet, September 28, 1913)

Print source: British Film Institute, 15 minutes 36 seconds.

Scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan.

Cast: Muriel Ostriche (May, the farmer's daughter), Jean Darnell (Grace, the farmer's other daughter), Billy Noel (hired hand), Nolan Grane (hired hand), Justice Barnes (father).

The one-reel light comedy was a specialty of Thanhouser, as were well-selected locations and a clever scenario. The theme of gender democracy is not unusual in Lloyd F. Lonergan's stories. Here, the two daughters are set up against their will as sexual lures, but they turn the tables and get the best of the men.

In de Tropische Zee (In the Tropical Seas)

(One reel of approximately 1,000 feet, date of release unknown)

Print source: Nederlands Filmmuseum, 12 minutes 52 seconds.

Photographed by Carl Louis Gregory.

Co-production of Submarine Film Company and Thanhouser, using the Williamson Submarine Tube, with the participation of J. Ernest Williamson and George M. Williamson.

Williamson and George M. Williamson.

Edited for Netherlands release, from 20,000 feet of film taken by Thanhouser's cinematographer Carl Louis Gregory in Nassau Harbor, Nassau, Bahamas, April-June 1914. Includes use of the "Photosphere," a Williamson invention consisting of an underwater tube with a large window on one end for viewing and photographing.

In April through June of 1914 a joint project by Thanhouser and the Williamson Submarine Company produced some 20,000 feet of underwater footage in the Bahamas. Carl Louis Gregory, an important cinematographer in film history, was the Thanhouser cameraman, using the newly-perfected Williamson Submarine, aka Photosphere, a nine-foot-long underwater tube with a viewing window at one end where the camera operator could work perfectly dry while capturing actual underwater views in their natural settings. George M. Williamson and his brother J. Ernest Williamson, sons of the tube's inventor Capt. C. Williamson, participated both in front and behind the camera.

The first Thanhouser release from this footage was the five-reel *The Terrors of the Deep*—after three or four special screenings in July 1914 it was finally released in September. More material was assembled into *Thirty Leagues Under the Sea* (also released in September).

The shark footage of *In de Tropische Zee* is either the final reel of *Thirty Leagues Under the Sea* or additional footage not used in the two Thanhouser releases, here assembled in a special Dutch or European release by a Dutch distributor or exhibitor. This title is not mentioned in the Thanhouser records or in the U.S. trade press.

Universal's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1916) used the Williamson Submarine.

Joseph in the Land of Egypt

(Four reels of approximately 4,000 feet, February 1, 1914)

Print source: Museum of Modern Art, 51 minutes 43 seconds.

Directed by W. Eugene Moore. Assistant Director, Leo Wirth. Photographed by A.H. Moses Jr. Scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan, based on the play *Joseph and His Brethren* by Joseph Napoleon Parker. Music score by Tams Music Library.

Cast: James Cruze (Joseph), Marguerite Snow (Potiphar's wife), John Lehnberg, Justus D. Barnes, Arthur Bauer, Lila Hayward Chester, George A. Grimmer, Riley Chamberlin, David H. Thompson, Thanhouser Zoo animals.

The second of "Thanhouser Big Productions," a monthly schedule, *Joseph in the Land of Egypt* was a true "feature" film, a new class of film which came to dominate the market by the end of 1914. A feature was an hour or more, heavily advertised, with elaborate production values, often with higher ticket prices, longer runs per theater, strongly promoted star cast, and was always a drama.

Thanhouser followed up on the enormous success one year earlier of *The Star of Bethlehem* with a familiar Biblical story, large and highly decorated (and highly populated) sets, elaborate costumes, and (something new) star promotion.

Only a few "Thanhouser Big Productions" in early 1914 included specially-commissioned scores from Tams Music Library. It had been common for accompanists to improvise or use standard selections from theater and classical music, or "cue sheets" of compilations tailored specifically to the film. Beginning in 1915, the biggest features included original scores commissioned by the production studio. The performed score for *Joseph in the Land of Egypt* is a combination of the written original music and the musician's improvisation based on its themes. This original music is a transition to the fully-composed scores introduced in Europe and the U.S. a year later. Whether it is another Thanhouser innovation is a subject for research. As in all the other titles in this Thanhouser collection, organist Ben Model exhibits the demanding and skillful art of improvisation.

The Center of the Web

(Two reels of 1,870 feet, December 1, 1914)

Print source: British Film Institute, 26 minutes 38 seconds.

Directed by John Harvey. Scenario by Philip Lonergan.

Cast: Claire Droell (Ida Dean, the counterfeiter's secret accomplice), Frank Wood (John Linton, the Secret Service agent), Sam Niblack (George Morley, the counterfeiter), George Niblack, Marguerite Loveridge (the old clerk's daughter), Nolan Gane, 13 police dogs.

A counterfeiting gang is foiled by police, and the action-chase takes up almost all of the second reel. The real stars of the chase are the agile and determined police dogs. This is a rather conservative example of late-1914 film style with only a couple of interesting camera set-ups and compositions, few dialogue titles (almost all title cards merely announce the action of the next scene), and no identification of the actors. It succeeds on a strong story line to exploit the three sure-fire elements of crime, chase, and animals. A rare and technically difficult process inset is used to enhance the drama and to do what silent movies do best—replace words with pictures.

VOLUME 12: EDWIN AND GERTRUDE RETURN (1915-1916)

On Friday August 21, 1914, Charles Hite at age 38, at the zenith of his career returning from a dinner meeting, skidded off the road and overturned in his new roadster; he died the next day from his injuries. Without his creative genius, the leaderless company floundered under the management by a committee of investors who knew little about running a studio in the film business. By a twist of fate, Edwin and Gertrude Thanhouser returned to the United States from their European “retirement” two days following Hite’s death – their tour was cut short due to the outbreak of the World War. In February 1915, Mutual, in an effort to salvage the Thanhouser brand, lured Edwin and Gertrude to resume their leadership positions running the company they founded six years prior.

Zudora, Episode #2: The Mystery of the Sleeping House

(Two reels of approximately 2,000 feet, November 30, 1914)

Print source: Thanhouser Collection/Essex Film Club, 29 minutes 21 seconds.

Directed by Frederick Sullivan. Scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan, based on a story by Dr. Daniel Carson Goodman. Photographed by Carl Louis Gregory.

Cast: James Cruze (Hassam Ali; later, Jim Baird, a reporter), Marguerite Snow (Zudora, Hassam Ali’s neice), Harry Benham (John Storm), Helen Badgley, Sidney Bracy (Tom Hunt, a detective).

Aka: *Zudora in the Twenty Million Dollar Mystery*, aka *The Twenty Million Dollar Mystery*. Episode 2 aka *The Sleeping House Mystery*, Working title: *The Frozen Laugh*, Alternate working title: *The Mystery of the Frozen Laugh*.

The earlier 22-episode *The Million Dollar Mystery*, released from June through November 1914 (with a 23rd sequel episode in February 1915) was one of the most successful projects in Thanhouser’s history, said to be more popular and more profitable than Pathé’s more famous *The Perils of Pauline*, also from 1914. In mid-release of *The Million Dollar Mystery*, Thanhouser was already beginning work on another serial, *Zudora*. A full 20 two-reel episodes were released between November 1914 and April 1915. This serial was far less successful and many exhibitors canceled their orders in mid-series, despite the general popularity of its stars Marguerite Snow and James Cruze.

A mysterious and exotic secret society conducts elaborate ceremonies in American suburbia with the kidnapped heroine Zudora who they want to marry off to their leader as a substitute for the real princess who was taken by a rival tribe back in India. The sets range from cheap and cheesy (the outside-of-the-window backdrops, painted stone walls), to elaborately and skillfully decorated.

Climactic inter-cutting between three or four simultaneous action scenes is a new technique, and the use of inter-titles shows the transition from old-style (identifying the action in the next scene) to the new style (dialogue).

Because each episode was meant to be a self-contained story, the last-second rescue here eliminates a potential cliff-hanger ending.

Old Jane of the Gaiety

(One reel of approximately 1,000 feet, July 18, 1915)

Print source: Library of Congress, 15 minutes 49 seconds.

Cast: Ethyle Cooke (“Old Jane,” theater wardrobe woman), Grace DeCarlton (Mary, a chorus girl), Jay Yorke (Jack, her sweetheart), Winifred Lane (Daisy), Morgan Niblack (Gilbertson), Janet Henry (Fay), Justice Barnes (choreographer), George Barnes.

By July 1915 the studio was again benefitting from the management of Edwin Thanhouser. A good example is *Old Jane of the Gaiety*, a well-written and well-directed backstage drama with visual panache. The wardrobe lady, Old Jane, counsels the new chorus girl, who is being wooed by a stage-door Johnny while her boyfriend tries to “save” her from theater life. The crisply-paced narrative, complete with flashbacks, has strong pictorial interest emphasizing front/back staging and creative camera placement.

In the Hands of the Enemy

(Two reels of approximately 2,000 feet, November 16, 1915)

Print source: Library of Congress, 27 minutes 19 seconds.

Cast: Morris Foster (Albert, the young officer), Inda Palmer (Constance, his mother).

Just 15 months after the outbreak of war in Europe, it was still very early for an American film to be produced on the subject for release in isolationist U.S.A. Edwin Thanhouser had been in Europe at the outbreak and must have seen the dramatic potential, which he produced here as both an intimate and large scale story, taking no sides, set in fictional countries.

The gripping story has very little melodramatic hokum. A countess and her son volunteer to disguise themselves and take a secret message across enemy territory. It begins as the personal mission of two people, but expands into relatively complicated cavalry and artillery battles (not the less picturesque trench warfare that was actually happening).

The fluid editing and vastly more dramatic cinematography (especially the use of close shots for expressiveness and intimacy) are part of the extremely rapid advances in the artistry and technique of the film medium compared to just a year earlier.

Silas Marner

(Originally seven reels, February 19, 1916, this version three reels, release date unknown).

Print source: Thanhouser Collection, 43 minutes 26 seconds.

Directed by Ernest Warde. Assistant Director, Frank L. Geregthy. Photographed by William Zollinger.

Scenario by Philip Lonergan, based on the novel by George Eliot.

Cast: Frederick Warde (Silas Marner), Louise Emerald Bates (his sweetheart), Morgan Jones (his supposed friend), Frank S. McNish (Squire Cass), Thomas A Curran (Godrey, the older son of the squire), Baroness DeWitz "Valda Valkyrien" (Molly, the barmaid in the neighboring village of Shoreham), Hector Dion (Dunstan, the squire's younger son), Kathryn Adams (Silas Marner's foster daughter grown to womanhood), Edwin Stanley (her betrothed), Arthur L. Rankin (Lammeter), Frank L. Geregthy, Ethel Jewett (Nancy, the youngest daughter), Elise Jordan (Priscilla, the oldest daughter).

From the very beginning, Thanhouser had a knack for pictorializing classic plays and novels, especially quaint period stories. The title character, a kindly weaver, is wrongly accused of murder and theft and becomes an embittered miser. Meanwhile, the real villain is blackmailed. The lives of various characters intertwine eventfully with the life of Silas Marner, and events over the decades restore his humanity. A rich variety of locations (including genuine snow—take that, Hollywood!), one of Thanhouser's specialties, is at its best here. Silas' fire-lit cabin interior has dramatically effective special lighting not possible a couple of years earlier. The story suffers from severe truncation in this version (reduced to less than half its original length for a post-Thanhouser re-release), but benefits from Frederick Warde's detailed acting.

— Victor Graf, Portland, Oregon, August 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

New and original organ music for the 18 films in this collection was composed and performed by musician Ben Model. For the past 25 years he has served as resident silent film accompanist for The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. He has played for silents in many other venues around the U.S. and has recorded numerous scores for silent film DVDs. Visit www.silentfilmmusic.com for more details.

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This DVD 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	George Eastman House Motion Picture Department Rochester, New York
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The Library of Congress Motion Picture, Broadcast and Recorded Sound Division Washington, DC	The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film New York, New York
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Nederlands Filmmuseum Amsterdam, The Netherlands	The Essex Film Club 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 or visit us on the web at www.thanhouser.org.