

# The Thanhouser Collection



## DVD Collector's Set Volumes 7, 8 & 9

**Volume 7: Thanhouser Presents Shakespeare (1910 to 1917)**

**Volume 8: Thanhouser Presents the Classics (1912 to 1915)**

**Volume 9: Lloyd Lonergan's Legacy (1910 to 1917)**

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**T**he eight-year history of Thanhouser motion pictures occupies one of the most important periods in film history. It was the era when the moving picture image moved out of the little peep-show box and nickelodeons, into real movie houses. Mass market and modern national/international distribution systems were established. The studio system and star system were created. The genres and film narrative techniques we know today emerged. At the beginning of the era cinema production was a very small industry and at the end of the period the first permanent Wall Street-backed Hollywood studios were burgeoning.

During a New York City vaudeville performers' strike in 1905 big-screen cinema first proved its mass-medium viability and movie theaters mushroomed for the next 25 years, insatiable for product to show their eager audiences

In 1910 a typical one-reel (about 15 minutes or less, dictated by Patents pressures) picture could be shot in a 20-foot-by-20-foot room on a budget of a couple of hundred dollars, and was typically a succession of static-camera tableaux of self-explanatory subjects. Strangely, dialogue-loaded plays and novels were good sources for silent film because the material was already familiar to viewers.

In 1917 a typical feature-length movie ran five reels or more, using numerous locations and sets, with elaborate camerawork/editing/lighting/story and star players, and could cost upwards of ten thousand dollars. Striking technical advances in cameras, lenses, lighting, makeup and film were evident throughout the period.

Unlike all other early movie studio heads, Edwin Thanhouser came from a theater career, acting, directing and managing theater companies for over 20 years. The film business was in its first big growth spurt when Thanhouser decided to establish a studio in 1909 in the center of American film, the New York City area. Intending to live in the suburb of New Rochelle, the favored residential town for Broadway professionals, Thanhouser also found there a facility in which to set up his studio.

Edwin Thanhouser established his studio as an independent, choosing to work outside Motion Picture Patents Company, also known as The Trust or The Edison Trust, which attempted to maintain a monopoly on equipment, film and distribution and charged high royalty and licensing fees. The approximately two dozen independents, dominated by Thanhouser, often were innovative in content and style. Edwin Thanhouser was a vocal proponent of what he called "natural length" films, running as many reels as necessary.

Thanhouser avoided assembly-line sameness by its attention to story and visual quality, and a unique relationship with its surrounding community of New Rochelle. The town provided access to a variety of facilities and locations. In addition, nearby New York City, farm, rural and wilderness locations were available. In return, the studio opened part of its campus on Long Island Sound as a public park and provided local employment and entertainment. The studio even became a local tourist attraction.

Thanhouser drew from many top New York legitimate actors; some who worked for the studio were James Cruze (a top Hollywood director in the 1920s), Florence LaBadie, Marguerite Snow, Muriel Ostriche, Mignon Anderson, and Jeanne Eagels.

Founder Edwin Thanhouser sold his interest in the studio to Mutual Film Corporation in 1912, and Charles J. Hite, an energetic and bright Chicago film distributor, was hired to manage the reorganized company, called Thanhouser Film Corp., one of several Mutual production companies. Thanhouser took his family on a grand tour of Europe, only to be caught up in the turmoil of the outbreak of the First World War. When he returned, he had intentions of setting up a new film studio. However, Hite died in an accident in 1914, leaving the studio in a several-months-long slump without leadership and with declining quality of product. Mutual, which continued to own the Thanhouser studio, lured Edwin Thanhouser back to manage it beginning in early 1915. The last two years saw production of primarily feature-length films of increasing importance and greater quality. With wartime economic turmoil in 1917, every movie studio in the United States was operating at a loss, and (though financially stable) Mutual's Thanhouser was one of several that chose to cease operations.

The studio's board chose to discontinue production in the black rather than move to Los Angeles at great expense. Thanhouser did not become part of Hollywood history and its negatives and prints were not considered commercial enough to preserve. Very little written or oral history of the studio survived through the decades. A few film historians, notably Anthony Slide, Q. David Bowers, and grandson Edwin (Ned) Thanhouser "rediscovered" Thanhouser beginning in the 1980s, and their research has renewed interest in the once-forgotten studio and its movies.

Thanhouser pictures enjoyed great demand by audiences and exhibitors, and were seen worldwide. Some of the prints in this collection were discovered in foreign archives. Over 1,000 titles were produced during the 1909-1917 span of the Thanhouser studio, distributed by various companies.

It is difficult or impossible to precisely identify all of Thanhouser's contributions to film; fewer than 200 surviving Thanhouser prints are known to exist today. The studio's legacy certainly includes significant resistance to the Patents trust; a major role in the improvement of the quality of American film; grooming of much talent on both sides of the camera; increasing the importance of scenario development; and demonstrating the importance of sound business practices in the volatile film industry.

— Victor Graf, Portland, Oregon (April 2007)

## VOLUME 7: THANHOUSER PRESENTS SHAKESPEARE

*The Winter's Tale* (One reel of approximately 1,000 feet, May 27, 1910)

Print source: Library of Congress, 12 minutes 35 seconds.

Scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan and Gertrude Thanhouser, based on the play by William Shakespeare.

Cast: Anna Rosemond (Queen of Sicilia), Martin Faust (King of Sicilia), Frank H. Crane (King of Bohemia), Amelia Barleon (Princess of Sicilia), Alfred Hanlon (Prince of Bohemia).

The first of six Shakespeare adaptations from Thanhouser, *The Winter's Tale* was just the 13th or 14th title from the studio in its first nine weeks of releases. A handful of dramatic scenes from the play are presented in simple cinematic style with particular artistry in costumes and sets. This is the first Shakespearean adaptation by any American independent producer.

Nitrate deterioration in this print is typical of the chemical problem that has destroyed thousands of pre-1950 film negatives and prints.

*Cymbeline* (Two reels, March 28, 1913)

Print source: George Eastman House, 22 minutes 15 seconds.

Directed by Lucius J. Henderson. Adapted from the play by William Shakespeare. Photographed by Arthur A. Cadwell.

Cast: Florence LaBadie (Imogen), James Cruze (Leonatus), William Garwood (Iachimo), William Russell (King Cymbeline), Jean Darnell (the Queen).

Southern California locations vividly suggest both elemental pre-Roman Britain and classical Rome. An energetic cinematic pacing and intimacy show rapidly improving narrative technique and realism well beyond the limitations of the stage. Especially cinematic are the bedchamber scene in the first reel, with its intimate cinematography and acting and special lighting effect, and the battle scene of the second reel, considered very effective in its day.

*King Lear* (Approximately 2½ reels, abridged from the original five reels, December 17, 1916)

Print source: George Eastman House, 35 minutes 56 seconds. A Pathé Gold Rooster Play, released through the Pathé Exchange.

Directed by Ernest Warde. Scenario by Philip Lonergan, adapted from the play by William Shakespeare. Photographed by William Zollinger and John M. Bauman.

Cast: Frederick Warde (King Lear), Lorraine Huling (Cordelia), Wayne Arey (Duke of Albany), J.H. Gilmour (Earl of Kent), Hector Dion (Edmund), Ernest Warde (the King's fool), Edwin Stanley (Edgar), Boyd Marshall (King of France), Ina Hammer (Goneril), Edith Diestel (Regan), Charles Brooks (Duke of Cornwall), Robert Whittier (Oswald).

Frederick Warde, one of the best known stage actors of his generation, had played King Lear many times since 1896, and had starred as Richard III in the first known feature-length American film in 1912. In 1916-17 Warde was one of only three exclusive Thanhouser stars in these early days of the new "star system" of high salaries and relentless promotion. As seen in the inter-titles, the players are boldly identified, but Thanhouser stubbornly refused to build the full star treatment publicity machine to the extent that competing studios did.

Among the striking advancements of the mid-1910s, as seen here, are much more rapid and fluid editing, an increase in the use of dialogue titles, freer use of close-ups and insert shots, new skills in shallow-focus cinematography, and ever-increasing complexity of narrative. This surviving print, cut down for a later re-release, is half its original length.

Warde gives an admirably subtle performance for the intimate camera, in contrast to the broad stage acting style that prevailed in film acting as well.

Ernest Warde, the director and actor (as the court jester), was star Frederick's son, and a solid and experienced theatrical director in his own right.

## VOLUME 8: THANHOUSER PRESENTS THE CLASSICS

***Nicholas Nickleby*** (Two reels of approx. 2,000 feet, March 19, 1912)

Print source: British Film Institute, 31 minutes 18 seconds.

Directed by George O. Nichols. Scenario (uncredited) based on the novel by Charles Dickens.

Cast: Harry Benham (Nicholas Nickleby), Mignon Anderson (Madeline Bray), Frances Gibson (Kate Nickleby), Inda Palmer (Nicholas' mother), Justus D. Barnes (Nicholas' Uncle Ralph), N.S. Woods (Smike), David H. Thompson (Squeers), Marie Eline (Wackford), Mrs. Grace Eline (Fannie Squeers), Etienne Girardot (Gryde), Harry A. Marks (Vincent Crummles).

With *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *David Copperfield*, both released in 1911, and *Nicholas Nickleby*, Thanhouser established itself as producer of the best Dickens adaptations in American film. Under one-man story department Lloyd Lonergan, with regular scenarist contributions by Gertrude Thanhouser, the studio developed a knack for mining even long, complicated novels for their salient events and characters and transforming them to a cinematically interesting 15 or 30 minutes.

Because of Edison's Patents Trust pressure, distributors demanded one-reel-length pictures. *Nicholas Nickleby* was only the third single-release 2-reel title by Thanhouser. Thanhouser's and others' resistance to monopoly limitations made feature-length films (an hour or more) the norm within a few years.

There is an unusually varied flow of different sets and locations. Advanced techniques include the subtle tilt and pan of the camera in the Greta Bridge scene, the mid-action cuts to different camera positions in the "brimstone and treacle" scene, and the smooth editing of several shots, some brief, to construct scenes.

*Nicholas Nickleby* was one of the first productions from Thanhouser's new Florida operation in Jacksonville, the first time an independent production company had done extensive location work for several pictures in Florida. Thanhouser would build studio facilities in Jacksonville in 1916. Some scenes for *Nicholas Nickleby* were done in the main studio in New Rochelle.

***King Rene's Daughter*** (Three reels of approx. 3,000 feet, July 1, 1913)

Print source: Blackhawk Films/David Shepard, 41 minutes 53 seconds.

Directed by W. Eugene Moore, Jr. Scenario (uncredited) based on the poetic drama "Iolanthe" by Henrik Heri.

Cast: Maude Fealy (Iolanthe), Harry Benham (Tristan), Mignon Anderson, David H. Thompson (Ebu Jahia), William Russell (Pierre).

A very romantic fiction is set in renaissance France with florid, rich costuming. The story was originally a one-act verse play in Danish, "Iolanthe," which also enjoyed great popularity in a fine English translation for the stage.

Maude Fealy made her Thanhouser debut in the title role, and became a much-admired member of the Thanhouser stock company. Previously she had been a beauty contest winner and had a solid career on the legitimate stage.

Compared to just a year earlier, cinematic progress is seen in the increased narrative complexity and length, more confident use of inter-titles, and more flexible camerawork sometimes following actors' movement.

***Tannhäuser*** (Three reels of approximately 3,000 feet, July 15, 1913)

Print source: British Film Institute, 40 minutes 09 seconds. (**Note:** Like many films from this era, the original print was tinted with various colors for different scenes. Thanks to the Library of Congress, the tint log from the original nitrate print was made available from which this copy was edited to imitate the rich colors audiences enjoyed in 1913.)

Directed by Lucius J. Henderson. Scenario (uncredited) based on the opera by Richard Wagner.

Cast: James Cruze (Tannhäuser), Marguerite Snow (Elisabeth), Florence LaBadie (Venus), William Russell (Wolfram), Burton Law.

Though different in spelling and pronunciation, Thanhouser's adaptation of "Tannhäuser" was probably inevitable. The opera, with original libretto and music by Wagner, based on traditional legends, was the first Wagner opera seen in the United States and enjoyed great popularity throughout the opera world. A subsequent non-musical English verse stage version was very popular in England and the U.S.

The story, set in medieval Germany (Thuringia), tells of chivalry, mythology and magic (with skillful in-camera tricks), love's redemption, and tragedy.

The scantily-clad wood nymphs and the passion between Tannhäuser and Venus, tame relative to the demands of the story, are early examples of censor-testing cinematic expression. Although those freedoms were noted in the press, there is no record of any attempted censorship of *Tannhäuser*.

At the beginning of 1913, Thanhouser, now a Mutual Film Corporation company, leased facilities in Los Angeles and equipped them for full-service studio production with the intent of making movies for a new Mutual brand, Royal. The Royal brand did not happen, and Thanhouser ended up using the Los Angeles facility for films in its own schedule. *Tannhäuser* was produced in Los Angeles, as the treeless mountain landscape reveals.

***The Vagabonds*** (One reel of 1,000 feet, August 29, 1915)

Print source: The Library of Congress, 12 minutes 58 seconds.

Scenario (uncredited) based on the poem "The Vagabonds" by J.T. Trowbridge (the poem was sometimes known by the title "Roger and I").

Cast: Morris Foster (Tim), Grace DeCarlton (Amelia), Arthur Bauer (Grossbeck Upham), Carey L. Hastings (Tim's mother).

*The Vagabonds* source is a different kind of classic—a poem by an influential and prolific writer of inspirational and cautionary stories for children, particularly boys. *The Vagabonds* is a series of flashbacks where a penniless, friendless tramp relates the story of his downfall due to drink. The author J.T. Trowbridge (1827-1916) had also been a well-known pre-Civil War abolitionist. His poem "The Vagabonds" was first published in 1863.

This relatively fine print shows the rapid improvements in camera lenses in the mid-1910s, and independent studios like Thanhouser finally had access to the best cameras and equipment with the breaking of the Patents Trust in 1915.

The variety of camera setups and fluidity of editing is quite modern compared to just a year or two earlier.

Thanhouser Film Corporation was almost in disarray following the 1914 death of its brilliant manager Charles J. Hite and the subsequent departure of many employees. In addition, big studio competitors were realizing big profits from lengthier films and celebrity-star promotion that Mutual's Thanhouser was not keeping pace with.

The turnaround began when Edwin Thanhouser returned as general manager in early 1915 and the company was soon reorganized. He also was made an executive and a director of Mutual.

## **VOLUME 9: LLOYD LONERGAN'S LEGACY**

Especially in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a newspaper writer's greatest talent was in storytelling. With newspaperman Lloyd and his brother Philip joining the new film company's writing staff it became almost a family company—Lloyd was married to the sister of Mrs. (Gertrude) Thanhouser. Lloyd drew on nearly 20 years experience writing for important newspapers in Chicago and New York City, and wrote most of the scenarios in the first years of the studio as well as heading its story department. Between 1910 and 1914 he completed some 800 scripts for Thanhouser. He continued working for the new manager Charles J. Hite when Mutual acquired the studio, but left after Hite's sudden accidental death. He re-joined the studio when Edwin Thanhouser returned to manage it in 1915.

Loneragan's and Thanhouser's commitment to scenario-composed movies is an important reason for the studio's reputation for quality. It also helped define the filmmaking process in those formative years of American film. The standard had been, and continued to be for some other studios, that the director had the story in his or her head, filmed it with minimal planning, and attempted to put it together in the editing room. A traditionalist like Charles Chaplin was still making movies without written scenarios as late as the 1930s. Today, the detailed screenplay is vital, and often even includes shot-by-shot drawings of the intended scenes.

***Daddy's Double*** (One reel of 960 feet, April 5, 1910)  
Print source: British Film Institute, 15 minutes 42 seconds.  
Scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan. Photographed by Blair Smith.  
Cast: Frank H. Crane (Daddy), Fred Santley (Daddy's double), Isabelle Daintry.

This deft comedy about a foiled elopement and assumed identity shows the importance of a carefully worked out scenario for narrative flow. The rule at many other comedy-producing studios was that gags drove the film and story line was incidental. With the talent of Lloyd Lonergan, it was the other way around at Thanhouser from the very beginning. *Daddy's Double* was the fourth release by the new studio.

Some minor camera tilting in the ladder scene, minor panning as necessary, and minor cross-cutting hint at the stylistic revolutions to come in the next few years.

***When the Studio Burned*** (One reel of 1,000 feet, February 4, 1913)  
Print source: Library of Congress, 14 minutes 14 seconds.  
Directed by Lawrence Marston. Scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan.  
Cast: Marguerite Snow (as herself), Helen Badgley (herself), Marie Eline (herself), James Cruze (himself), Justus D. Barnes (director), Mrs. Gerald Badgley (member of traveling crew).

The film studio's worst enemy was fire, thanks to mostly wooden structures and highly flammable negatives, prints and film stock. Fire actually struck the Thanhouser studio on January 13, 1913 and burned the main facility to the ground. Most of the negatives and prints were saved. The fire was reported in newspapers nationwide.

Although there were a few shots of smoldering ruins, the cameras arrived too late to film any of the actual fire. Although several Thanhouser players portray themselves in *When the Studio Burned*, the story is all fiction from the imagination of Lloyd Lonergan, simply meant to capitalize on the notoriety. The views of the city of New Rochelle are perfectly authentic.

As luck would have it, Thanhouser had just opened a studio in Los Angeles, and had just set up production in Chicago, so it was able to continue its schedule of releases without interruption as the replacement facilities were constructed.

***An Elusive Diamond*** (One reel of 1,002 feet, January 23, 1914)  
Print source: British Film Institute, 15 minutes 27 seconds.  
Scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan.  
Cast: David H. Thompson (the butler), Carey L. Hastings (Mrs. Burr), Mignon Anderson (Bettina), William Noel (hoodlum).

Screenwriter Lonergan's amazing versatility served equally well in several genres—here a one-reel adventure with crooks, ruses, kidnapping, escape, and a twist, all wrapped in a coherent narrative. There is successful pictorial telling of the setup and attempted theft, and a little cross-cutting as the police come to the rescue (rescue of the rock, as the resourceful heroine obviously needs no rescuing).

Thanhouser's popular Mignon Anderson's climactic stunt work shows that the stock players were remarkably versatile.

“An” *Elusive Diamond* was the official title despite the “The” of this surviving print.

***The Marvelous Marathoner*** (One reel of 1,023 feet, August 16, 1915)

Print source: Library of Congress, 13 minutes 12 seconds.

Scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan for the Falstaff brand.

Cast: Boyd Marshall (Walter Bodewick), Ruth Elder (Vivian Webster), Justus D. Barnes (Ewing Webster), D. Hegeman (Colotta Cummings). A Falstaff film.

Thanhouser’s “Falstaff Comedies” was a schedule of one-reel comedies released each Friday beginning in April 1915, later changed to each Tuesday. Looking for a niche, Thanhouser’s short plot-driven comedies stood out from other studios’ trend toward longer offerings and broad gag-oriented comedy. The Falstaff comedies were what could be called situation comedies calling on the outstanding screenwriting skill of Lloyd Lonergan and the acting charm of the Thanhouser stock company. *Marathoner* enjoys energetic and vivacious comedy pacing combining physical comedy (without slapstick) with situation comedy.

Skillful cinematography, many interesting locations, and creative lighting for interiors add to the fine visual quality. Some serious nitrate deterioration has compromised a brief part of this surviving print.

***The Woman in White*** (Five reels of 4,627 feet, July 1, 1917)

Print source: Library of Congress, 1 hour 8 minutes.

Directed by Ernest C. Warde. Scenario by Lloyd F. Lonergan, based on the novel by Wilkie Collins.

Photographed by William M. Zollinger.

Cast: Florence LaBadie (double role as Laura Fairlie and Ann Catherick), Richard R. Neill (Sir Pervival Glyde), Gertrude Dallas (Marian Holcombe), Arthur Bauer (Count Fosco), Wayne Arey (Walter Hartridge), J.H. Gilmour, Claude Cooper. A Pathé Gold Rooster Play released through the Pathé Exchange. Re-released by Chandler Pictures as *The Unfortunate Marriage* ca. 1920.

In its last two years of production Thanhouser concentrated on multi-reel features of high quality. Lloyd Lonergan’s scenarios were the foundation for the attention to quality, whether with original stories or with adaptations like *The Woman in White*.

Stylistic and technical elements are very near the sophisticated level of the first golden age of cinema, the 1920s. Especially noteworthy are the special lighting effects, a technical tour de force as well as dramatically effective.

Release through Pathé gave Thanhouser pictures especially strong international exposure during the studio’s last years, but somewhat hampered by the war in Europe.

*The Woman in White* was adapted from a very well known contemporary novel and was a particularly fine vehicle for the beautiful Florence LaBadie, one of the last of the old stock company still with Thanhouser in 1917. She was called “the most important personality at the Thanhouser studio” by Thanhouser historian David Q. Bowers. Two months after the release of *The Woman in White* she was in an automobile accident and she died in October from her injuries, just a week later than the release of the studio’s final new production.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

New and original organ music for the 12 films in this collection was composed and performed by musician Raymond A. Brubacher. Born in Washington, DC he 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 performed 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.

Special thanks goes out to Michele Kribs, Madeline Kribs, Gary Lacher, Victor Graf, Jim Labosier, Doug Miller, Dan Pred, Paul Spehr, Mike Mashon and Pat Loughney; your support made this project possible.

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	George Eastman House
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Washington, DC	

#### **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 World Wide Web at <http://www.thanhouser.org>.