

Treasures from the Desmet Collection at the EYE Filmmuseum

Presented by
Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc.

The Desmet Collection at EYE

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The owner of a chain of cinemas across the Netherlands, Jean Desmet (1875 – 1956) was among the first to establish an international film distribution company. Although he stopped distributing in 1916, Desmet kept all his films and promotional material, as well as his company's correspondence and account books. The collection was donated by his heirs in 1957 to the Dutch Filmmuseum and consists of 923 motion picture films, 1,032 film posters, 1,454 still images, approximately 2,500 publicity items, and more than 120,000 company documents.

Ray Edmondson, archival consultant and author, wrote, "The Desmet collection is a remarkable survival from the silent era. It is not just the films themselves, many of them unique: it is the fact that their context – the business records and the publicity materials – also survives that makes the collection an unparalleled resource for scholarship and a vital part of the Netherlands, and the world's cultural heritage."

Of the 930 films in the Desmet Collection, 234 are American productions with five from the Thanhouser studio based in New Rochelle, New York. It is probable that Desmet bought and rented more Thanhouser films than survive in the collection as evidenced by the fact that the assortment of items includes several Thanhouser film posters, such as *The Barrier of Flames* and *The Star of Bethlehem*, plus a collection of related stills and publicity materials. However, in 1957 when the Desmet Collection was donated to EYE shortly after Jean Desmet's passing, *The Barrier of Flames* and *The Star of Bethlehem* were sadly not among the remaining films.

It is likely that Desmet had limited access to Thanhouser films. Among the company papers of the Jean Desmet International Film Rental and Sales Company, the only references to Thanhouser are found among the film lists of the Brussels based sales agent Maurice Gigan, who offered a selection of independently produced (American) films to Desmet every week. This also explains why the Thanhouser films within the collection were often referred to by their French titles. From January to April 1913, Gigan's lists regularly contained Thanhouser films; but after that date it appears that he stopped his collaboration with Thanhouser. Although it is possible that Gigan was not the only

distributor of Thanhouser films to the Netherlands, it seems clear that he was the only source used by Desmet to buy and rent out Thanhouser films.

The Thanhouser Studio

The Thanhouser Company, and its successor Mutual's Thanhouser Film Corporation, was a trail-blazing studio based in New Rochelle, New York, which from 1910 to 1917 released over 1,000 films that were seen by audiences around the globe. Its founders, Edwin and Gertrude Thanhouser and their brother-in-law Lloyd F. Lonergan, entered the nascent motion picture industry as an independent producer to compete with Thomas Edison and the companies aligned with his Motion Pictures Patents Corporation (MPPC). Thanhouser films were immediately acclaimed for their story content, photography, and artistic quality thanks to Edwin and Gertrude's years on the stage and experience as successful Midwest theatre managers.

About the EYE DVDs

The 10 Thanhouser films in this collection showcase the vast range of productions from this pioneering American studio. This two-DVD collector's set presents these films with new high-resolution digital transfers, including several in color showing the beautiful tinting from the original nitrate. The DVDs also feature new and original music composed and performed exclusively for these films. Bonus features include: A Thanhouser Poster Gallery from the Desmet Collection at EYE, a video tour of the EYE archive with silent film curator Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi, and a commentary by Professor Judith Buchanan of the University of York on Thanhouser's 1911 production of *Cinderella*. Kudos to Ray Brubacher, Andrew Crow and Ben Model for their new and original music composed and performed exclusively for the films in this collection. Ben Model, the featured artist on DVD #2, has served as resident silent film accompanist for The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City for the past 25 years (see www.silentfilmmusic.com).

DVD #1: Treasures from the Desmet Collection

The Vicar of Wakefield (1910) TRT 13:17 Producer Edwin Thanhouser and scenarist Lloyd F. Lonergan often turned to classic plays and novels for quality source material. *The Vicar of Wakefield* was an enormously popular English novel for 150 years, offering a complex but accessible mix of Georgian English characters, situations, mores and manners. It had to be simplified and distilled down to one reel of story, which was done better by Thanhouser than any other studio could have done. Music by Ray Brubacher.

The Coffin Ship (1911) TRT 13:31 A love story filmed on Long Island Sound, near the Thanhouser studio, featuring William Garwood. Because of 1911 production conventions, this sprawling adventure is truncated to one-reel length. Good location work, a strength of

Thanhouser pictures, creates a visually strong seagoing story of a stowaway and a shipwreck. Music by Andrew Crow.

Her Nephews from Labrador (1913) TRT 12:33 Can't-believe-your-eyes authenticity is found here in a lighthearted story, a vehicle for two New Rochelle residents, Billy Noel and Ed Brady, locally famous for the antics they portray without stunt doubles and without camera tricks—ice skating in their bathing suits and swimming in an icy pond in New Rochelle's Hudson Park. Music by Ben Model. Preserved by Museum of Modern Art.

Just a Shabby Doll (1913, color) TRT 13:23 A relatively complex original romantic story is squeezed onto only one reel, in the last year that such length restraints were placed on film production. Of special interest here are the 1913 New York City backgrounds, and the more frequent use of inter-titles primarily representing dialogue. Starring Harry Benham and Helen Badgley. Music by Ray Brubacher.

The Spoiled Darling's Doll (1913) TRT 14:20 Both the Darling (Marie Eline) and the Doll (Helen Badgley) are played by exceptionally clever and talented child actors. In this delightful, odd little moral story, a naughty, spoiled child has a dream wherein her doll comes to life and mimics her pampered ways. Music by Ben Model.

BONUS: *EYE Filmmuseum Archive Tour* (2014) TRT 7:34 Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi, Silent Film Curator, takes us on a fascinating tour of the EYE film archive for a new insight into what is done to preserve early silent nitrate films. Music: *Aan De Amsterdamse Grachten* by Werner Oh.

DVD #2: Thanhouser Films at EYE Filmmuseum

Note: All music on DVD #2 is by Ben Model.

Silas Marner (1911, color) TRT 10:40 Adapted from George Eliot's novel, it depicts the disillusion of Marner who believes that gold is everything. Through the loss of his hoard and the love of a girl whom he brings up as his daughter, he comes to understand that love, not gold, is what truly matters in life.

An Elevator Romance (1911, color) TRT 12:18 A portrayal of the thrilling adventures, sharp trials, and real perils encountered in an office building aflame. Featuring William Garwood as the wealthy, hustling young Westerner.

Cinderella (1911, color) TRT 14:33 Directed by George O. Nichols and starring Florence LaBadie, this elaborately produced version of the well known Charles Perrault fairy tale is interrupted by just a few summary intertitles.

BONUS: Optional critical commentary by Professor Judith Buchanan.

Clarence Cheats at Croquet (1915) TRT 12:29 Released under Thanhouser's "Falstaff" comedy brand, two rival lovers face off at croquet. One wins out because of his honesty, or rather, Clarence gets it wrong because he cheats at croquet. Preserved with support from the National Film Preservation Foundation.

A Modern Monte Cristo (1917, color) TRT 56:25 This Thanhouser feature was derived from the 1844 novel by French author Alexandre Dumas, who is known for his action-filled and colorful historical dramas. This adaptation tells of a man, living in the present day, who returns home incognito and wealthy after having been a sailor for years and living on a desert island surrounded by water filled with pearl-oysters. He revenges himself on his enemy, who had unjustly accused him of a crime he did not commit. With Vincent Serrano and Helen Badgley.

BONUS: *James Cruze and Marguerite Snow Wedding, plus Daughter Julie* (1913-1915, color) TRT 4:38 Newsreel footage of the marriage of famous Thanhouser actors James Cruze and Marguerite Snow plus home movies of the birth of daughter Julie. She appeared as an infant in Thanhouser productions in 1914 and 1915 including *The Million Dollar Mystery* and *Zudora* serials. Cruze and Snow left Thanhouser in 1915, and he went on to be one of the highest paid Hollywood directors, including *The Covered Wagon* and *Beggar on Horseback*.

Acknowledgements

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