

History of film (3): Fairbanks and Pickford topped the list of stars in the golden age of silent movies

by Terry Dupuis

The star system had begun to develop as early as the first features of D.W. Griffith. Griffith had established his own stock company of actors and actresses which he employed in film after film.

These performers included Henry B. Walthall, Lillian Gish, Dorothy Gish and Donald Crisp. Through their repeated screen appearances in Griffith films, these players and many others became known to the public.

By 1920, the star system was flourishing. Members of the public went to see a movie largely on the basis of who the stars of the film were.

A number of actors and actresses had built up large followings, and the appearance of each new film with one of these players was accompanied by the jingle of money at the box office. Therefore it was not surprising that the studio contract system developed hand in hand with the growth of the star system.

Performers would sign a contract with a studio for a certain number of years and/or a certain number of pictures. The performer was usually well-paid under his contract, but it meant that he could not appear in the productions of any other studio.

However, as the years went on, the practice became quite common for a

major studio to loan out one of its contract players to another major studio, at a very advantageous profit to the actor's home studio, though usually not the actor.

Another practice which developed was an exchange whereby two studios would make a straight trade - Studio A would lend out its contract player X to Studio B in exchange for Studio B's contract player Y. These were practices which led to a number of studio abuses in the 1930's.

Fairbanks-Pickford
One of the most popular of all silent screen stars was Douglas Fairbanks (1883-1939) who thrilled the audiences of his day with his incredible swash-buckling and athletic feats and heroics. Such Fairbanks films as *The Mark of Zorro* (1921), *The Three Musketeers* (1922), *Robin Hood* (1922), *The Thief of Baghdad* (1924) and *The Black Pirate* (1926) have become classics of the silent screen, and are still enjoyable even today, half a century after they were made.

If Douglas Fairbanks' screen image was that of the lusty adventurer, Mary Pickford's (1893-) was that of the sweet innocent young heroine.

Born in Toronto as Gladys Smith, Pickford earned herself the title of "America's Sweetheart" via her appealing and gentle performances in

such films as *Polyanna* (1919); *Tess of the Storm Country* (1922) and *Little Annie Rooney* (1925).

She married Fairbanks and for many years they were touted as the ideal American couple; in their many trips to foreign countries they were often treated like visiting royalty. In 1919 they became co-founders, along with Charlie Chaplin and D.W. Griffith, of the United Artists Film Corporation.

Valentino the lover
Fairbanks was the great silent screen adventurer; Pickford was the great silent screen sweetheart. And Rudolph Valentino (1895-1926) was undoubtedly the great lover of the silents.

A young Italian who emigrated to America while still in his teens, he made his first film appearance in 1914. But it was not until seven years and twenty films later that he became a super-star and created a sensation with movie audiences.

It was his role in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* in 1921 which led to his becoming the great romantic idol of the 1920's, a position which was reinforced through his roles in *The Sheik* (1921); *Blood and Sand* (1922); *The Eagle* (1925) and *Son of the Sheik* (1925).

Valentino's sudden death in 1926 caused several suicides and his funeral was a national event.

Lon Chaney (1883-1930) was the fourth outstanding screen personality of the silent era, he specialized in macabre roles which usually required elaborate make-up which he applied himself. He became known as "the man of a thousand faces," due to the face that he never looked the same in any two films.

His macabre performances and startling make-ups thrilled silent screen audiences in such movies as *The Miracle Man* (1919); *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923); *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) and *London After Midnight* (1927).

The above four early film stars were each phenomenally successful in their own day; they have all since become legends and moreover, they all belong

uniquely to the silent cinema.

Coming of Sound
Valentino died shortly before the arrival of sound movies; Chaney died soon after the revolution of sound, having lived long enough to make only one talkie, *The Unholy Three* (1930); Fairbanks and Pickford made a few early talkies, but they were not very successful and the couple had retired from the screen by the middle 1930's.

Movies up to the late 20's may have had no sound, but there was certainly variety for audiences to choose from. There were the Griffith and DeMille epics; the Douglas Fairbanks adventures; Valentino romances; the Pickford tales; and the Lon Chaney melodramas. In addition to all these, there was one genre of film-making which many historians consider to have reached its finest and most perfected level during the silent era - screen comedy.

Comedy existed from the beginning years of the cinema, and the early years of Mack Sennett's famous Keystone Studio certainly form an important chapter in silent screen comedy. But it was in the late teens and most of the twenties that screen comedy was perfected to such an extent that the period has become known as "The Golden Age of Comedy."

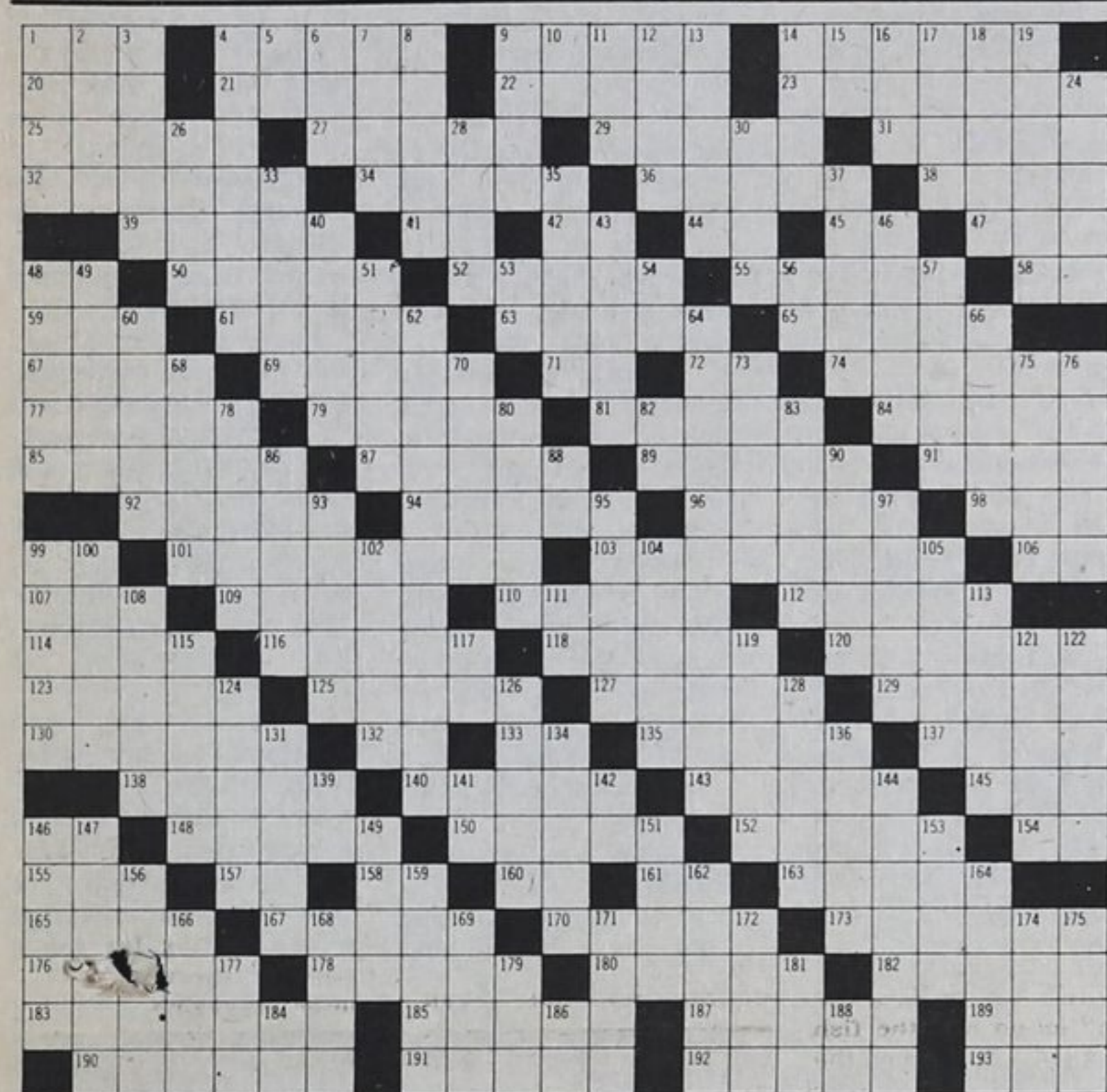
The Little Tramp
It was during this period that Charlie Chaplin (1889-) perfected his little tramp characterization in such classics as *The Kid*, *The Gold Rush* and *The Circus*.

(1895-1966) turned out his great comic masterpieces such as *Sherlock Junior*, *The Navigator* and *The General*.

In addition to these two greatest of the silent comedians, there was also Harold Lloyd, Harry Langdon, Fatty Arbuckle, Larry Semon, Ben Turpin, Charlie Chase, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. Like the other screen personalities we have already discussed, very few of these silent comedians were to survive the coming of sound.

(Next installment: Sound Revolutionizes the Film Industry.)

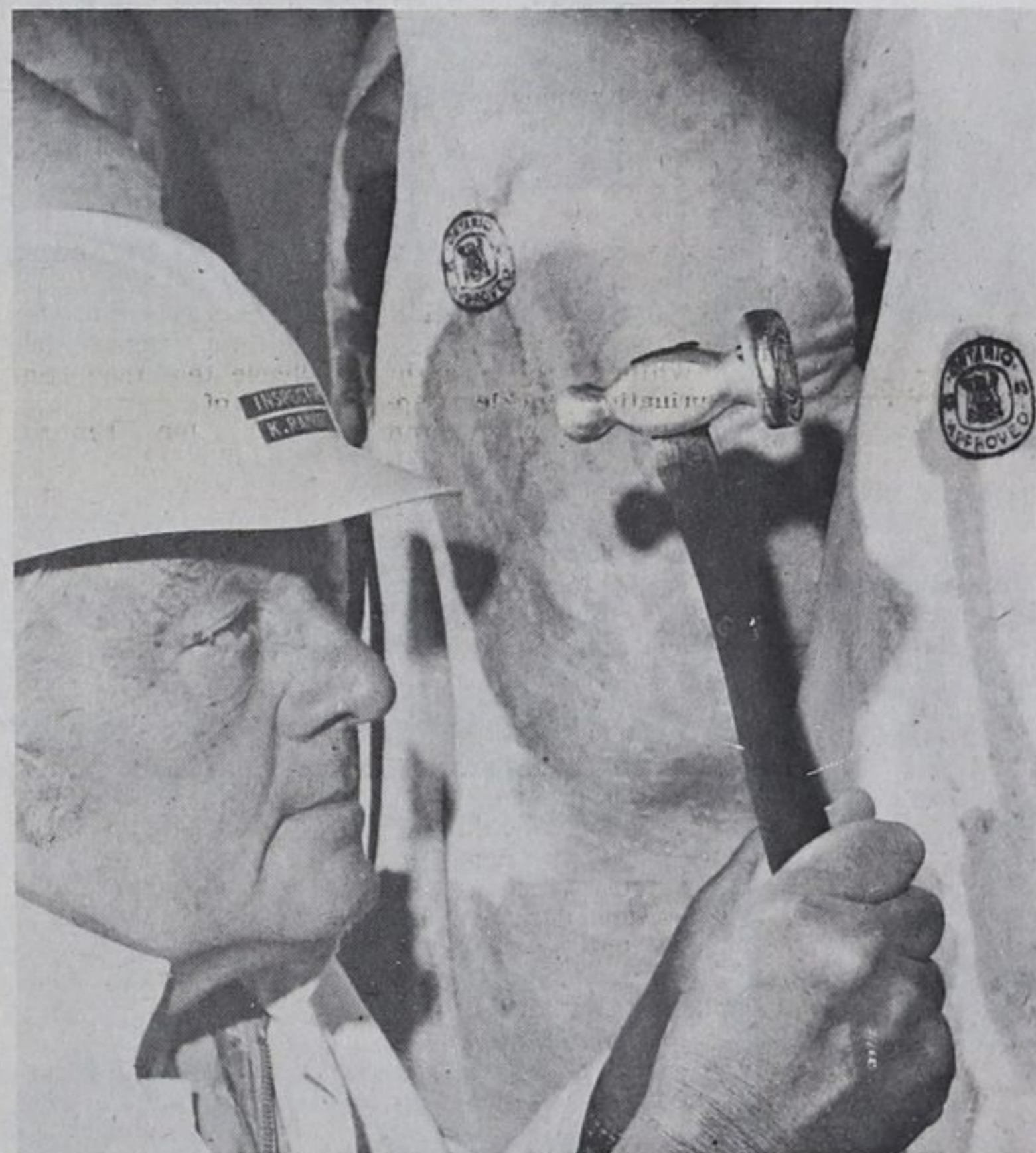
crossword



- | | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| ACROSS | 87 Thin line | 158 Elevator direction | 18 Musical sounds | 102 Say |
| 1 Cudgel | 89 Baltic island | 160 Japanese drama | 19 Much adorned | 104 Biblical kings |
| 4 Main artery | 91 Utah flower | 161 Chaldean city | 24 Aromatic resin dagger | 105 Irish |
| 9 White bear | 92 Biblical passage | 163 Layers | 26 Sootsayer | 108 Fathered |
| 14 Musical | 94 Greek "four" | 165 Look sullen | 28 Account entry | 111 Jewish month |
| 20 Miscalculate | 96 Of oil | 167 Citrus fruit | 30 Western state | 113 Matriculate |
| 21 Apparition | 98 English river | 170 Of a swelling | 33 Small candle | 115 Stair post |
| 22 Open mouthed | 99 Buddhist monk | 173 Office period | 35 Independent one: slang | 117 Forward |
| 23 Steady | 101 Access | 176 Esoteric holiday | 37 Fashion girl | 119 Overwhelms: slang |
| 25 Sublet | 103 January | 178 Abraham's wife | 40 Liquid measure | 121 Paired |
| 27 Spring | 106 Man's name | 180 Physician | 43 Amorous looks | 122 Legislate |
| Howler | 107 Reverse curve | 182 Danger | 46 Spanish title | 124 Recorded |
| 29 Industrial leader | 109 Board game | 183 New enlistee | 48 Engine | 126 Early German |
| 31 British nursemaid | 110 Track components | 185 Want greatly | 49 Nigerian tree | 128 Build |
| 32 Wail | 112 Serpent | 187 Sun-dried brick | 51 Sand hills | 131 Swiss warble |
| 34 Birth | 114 Useless | 189 Maiden: slang | 53 Metric measure | 134 Vine fruit |
| 36 Fact | 116 Board game | 190 Legislative body | 54 Disgust | 136 Characteristic |
| 38 Posterior | 118 Sheep sounds | 191 Chinese tea | 55 Cutting tool | 139 As far as |
| 39 Treadle | 120 Vindicate | 192 Man's name | 57 Facial cavity | 141 Verb form |
| 41 Helm position | 123 Heron | 193 Guido's note | 60 New | 142 Thus |
| 42 Hawaiian bird | 125 Bridle straps | DOWN | 62 Entry | 144 Horizontal |
| 44 French article | 127 Gleamed | 1 Fire alarm | 64 Famous park | 145 Sumatran oast |
| 45 Bone: Latin | 129 Consumed | 2 Region | 66 Coincide | 147 Måle bees |
| 47 Steamer abbr. | 130 Allowable variation | 3 Vagabond | 68 Ambling horse | 149 Roman king |
| 48 Justice goddess | 132 Right-hand page | 4 Programs | 70 Merchandise | 151 Undraped |
| 50 Speedy | 133 Verb form | 5 Exclamation | 71 Pale | 152 Unruffled |
| 52 Shabby | 135 Breathe noisily | 6 Decay | 75 Wood-worker's knife | 153 Sea eagle |
| 55 Pluto domain | 137 Thread: comb. form | 7 Chinese measure | 76 Telemeter | 156 Weight |
| 58 Exclamation | 138 Freight station | 8 Reclaim: abbr. | 78 Challenges | 157 Measure |
| 59 Disconnected | 140 Verbs: slang | 9 Family member | 80 Saltpeper | 159 Veranda |
| 61 Chaser: 2 wds. | 143 Pitchers | 10 Biblical king | 82 Assamese tribe | 162 Electronic detector |
| 63 Pass on | 145 Recreation: abbr. | 11 Escape: slang | 83 Large knives | 164 Billow |
| 65 Ohio city | 146 Football tally: abbr. | 12 Footless animal | 86 Slow train | 166 Gull-like bird |
| 67 Waterproof canvas | 148 Encouraged: | 13 Princely | 88 Franc: abbr. | 168 Italian family |
| 69 Renovate | 150 Lawmaker | 14 Girl's name | 90 Girl's name | 169 Not one |
| 71 Regarding | 152 Climb | 15 Printing measure | 93 Sorrow | 171 Foretoken |
| 72 Printing measure | 154 Army officer: abbr. | 16 Martini ingredient | 95 Indigo plants | 172 Italian resort |
| 74 Lake trout | 155 Nigerian people | 17 Distant | 97 Covet | 174 Persian coin |
| 77 Mountain nymph | 157 "... profundis" | | 99 Slant order (abbr.) | 175 Girl's name |
| 79 French writer | | | 100 Western Indian | 177 Bantu native |
| 81 Bargain events | | | | 179 Possesses |
| 84 Bucolic | | | | 181 Gear tooth |
| 85 Scamp | | | | 184 Neuter pronoun |
| | | | | 186 Verbal order (abbr.) |
| | | | | 188 Take place |

Answer on page 5

PMCL Canada Tour 22 DAY NEWFOUNDLAND Departs Aug. 2 & 30 This interesting tour is highlighted with a visit to the French island of St. Pierre. TWO SHARING \$585.00 BY MOTORCOACH & FERRY	WASHINGTON/WILLIAMSBURG Departs Aug. 9, Oct. 18 \$185.00 per person BY MOTORCOACH	5 DAY MOONSTONE Departs July 22, Aug. 18, 25 A relaxing motorcoach holiday to Cochrane then it's aboard as the Polar Bear Express takes us to James Bay. Two Sharing.
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(Photograph by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food)

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Blood and Sand

"Blood and Sand" has been filmed twice - as a silent in 1922 with Rudolph Valentino, and in 1941 in technicolor with Tyrone Power. The above scene is from the latter version.



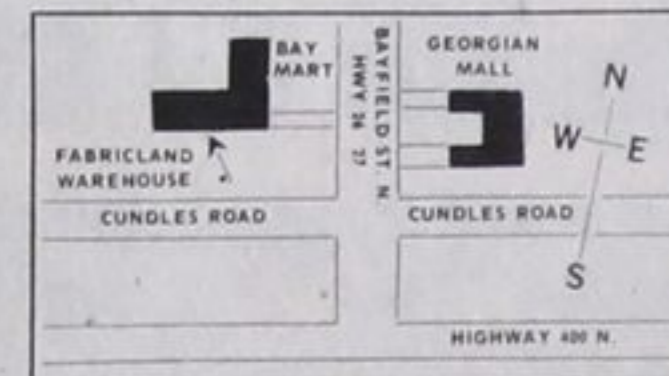
The Mark of Zorro

Tyrone Power starred in the 1940 remake of "The Mark of Zorro", a swashbuckler which had starred Douglas Fairbanks in the silent 1921 version.

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