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The gauntlet of Washington, Edwin, Walter, 1913
The Spirit of '76, Siegmann, George, 1917
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Sons of liberty, Curtiz, Michael, 1939
Johnny Tremain, Stevenson, Robert, 1957
The fighting reverend Caldwell, , 1911
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The pursuit of happiness, ,
The scarlet coat, ,
The devil's disciple, Hamilton, Guy, 1959
1776, Griffith, D. W., 1909
Washington under the British flag, ,
Gone with the wind, Fleming, Victor, 1939
Unconquered, ,
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THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION IN FILMS

D. W. Griffith

By
JACK SPEARS

FOR some unknown reason, motion pictures about the American Revolution and its legendary figures are few and far between.

The most important is D.W. Griffith's flawed production of *America*, a '24 silent whose merits have been obscured by inevitable comparisons with his earlier masterpieces. Among later films, John Ford's *Drums Along the Mohawk* and Frank Lloyd's *The Howards of Virginia* are at best entertainments, while Peter H. Hunt's *1776* is all the more unreal for putting Benjamin Franklin and John Adams to singing and clowning in a wholly unstatesmanlike fashion. The most quietly moving is an orientation film, *Williamsburg-The Story of a Patriot*, made privately for showing to visitors to historic Williamsburg.

More than 200 years have passed since the drums beat at Lexington and Bunker Hill in 1775, and to most contemporary Americans it is an archaic period in the nation's history. 20th century movie audiences seldom relate to heroes in knee-breeches, tricorns and powdered wigs, or find much in common with virginal heroines in hoopskirts. Revolutionary

War epics, like many costume pictures, have generally failed at the box-office. Samuel Goldwyn is one of several Hollywood executives credited with the sagacious observation, "Beware of films where they write with feathered pens."

With rare exceptions (notably in John Huston's *Independence*, a 28-minute short made for tourists to Philadelphia's Independence Mall), portrayals of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and other American patriots consistently have a one-dimensional textbook quality. Even a Bicentennial Year has failed to stimulate more flesh and blood portraits on the screen, although there are moments of great warmth in some of the better commemorative series on educational tv, particularly *The Adams Chronicles*.

By contrast, hundreds of films over the past 75 years have explored every facet of the American Civil War in clinical detail. Notwithstanding such infrequent box-office blockbusters as *The Birth of a Nation* and *Gone With the Wind*, they too have been generally unpopular. Dozens of motion pictures have traced the life of Abraham

Lincoln, but there is yet to be a significant theatrical film to follow the trials and tribulations of George Washington.

Although his fame is largely based upon a monumental motion picture about the Civil War and Reconstruction, *The Birth of a Nation* ('15), D.W. Griffith had a profound interest in the beginnings of the United States. In '08, after the failure of his only produced work as a playwright, *The Fool and the Girl*, Griffith set about writing a play with a Revolutionary War background entitled *War*. For weeks he haunted the NY Public Library, reading everything he could find on the subject. *War* was never produced, and possibly never completed, but in '09 Griffith drew on his research for *1776, or the Hessian Renegades*, one of 141 short films he directed for Biograph that year.

Filmed on location at Cuddebackville in the Orange Mountains of New York, *1776, or the Hessian Renegades* was a routine adventure story about a band of American patriots who capture a troop of Hessian mercenaries. Owen Moore was a Colonial messenger cornered and killed in his father's farmhouse by enemy soldiers. His sister (Mary Pickford), tricks a sentry to enable the father (James Kirkwood) to go for help. The climactic skirmish was exciting and well-done, but *1776, or the Hessian Renegades* was not one of Griffith's more inspired films. An ancient stone house, constructed in Revolutionary times and still standing, was used for an authentic setting after Griffith turned on his charm to gain permission from a crusty owner.

Others in the cast were Kate Bruce, Billy Quirk, Linda Arvidson, Mack Sennett and Lottie Pickford.

In '24, seeking a vehicle to match the scope of *The Birth of a Nation*, Griffith undertook a costly motion picture about the War of Independence at the urging of the Daughters of the American Revolution. *America* is a ponderous film of great pictorial beauty, impressive battle scenes, and a wealth of historical incident and personalities. Unlike his Civil War epic, its more intimate story is peopled with shallow and colorless characters, and none of the great strength of the Cameron family of *The Birth of a Nation* is to be found in the protagonists of *America*. It was the last Griffith film of any real importance.

Despite some flaws, *America* remains the definitive motion picture about the Revolutionary War. Like *The Birth of a Nation*, it is divided into two major, almost self-contained parts. The first half portrays the legendary struggle of the ragged colonists against the British Redcoats in panoramic reconstructions of Lexington, Bunker Hill and Valley Forge. The second section dwells upon the atrocities of the bloody Indian war of Mohawk Valley. The two are tied together by the threads of a troubled romance between a young patriot (Neil Hamilton) and the daughter of a Tory judge (Carol Dempster).

All the familiar landmarks of the American Revolution are to be found in *America* — the Boston Tea Party, Paul Revere's midnight ride, Patrick Henry's inflammatory speeches to the Virginia House of Burgesses, the con-

frontation at Lexington, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and Cornwallis' final surrender at Yorktown.

The dramatis personae of *America* includes George Washington (Arthur Dewey), Thomas Jefferson (Frank Walsh, a Griffith assistant director), John Hancock (John Dunton), Samuel Adams (played by the early Vitagraph comedian Lee Beggs), King George III (Arthur Donaldson), Patrick Henry (Frank McGlynn, Jr., whose father frequently impersonated Abraham Lincoln in films), the Marquis de Lafayette (H. Paul Doucet), Edmund Burke (Will S. Rising, a pioneer Edison director), and William Pitt (Charles Bennett).

Griffith's battle scenes are breathtaking, done with infinite attention to military detail. (Through his friendship with Secretary of War John W. Weeks, Griffith obtained the participation of the 16th Infantry, 18th Infantry and 3rd Cavalry of the United States Army). Griffith spent countless hours poring over old records, books, maps and drawings, and the famous battles were militarily duplicated in *America* exactly as they actually occurred. The several types of uniforms (Continental, Royal Highlanders, Light Infantry, British Redcoat Regulars) were minutely authentic, and hundreds of Colonial muskets were manufactured for use in these scenes.

The Battle of Lexington was shot at Griffith's Mamaroneck (New York) studio, as were most of the interiors (including the reproduction of the British House of Commons). Other scenes were made at Williamsburg —



Marion Davies in JANICE MEREDITH

not then restored by the Rockefeller Foundation — and the famous Westover and Shirley plantations on the James River in Virginia south of Washington. The Old North Church in Boston was utilized for the beginning of Paul Revere's ride, as were many parts of the old Boston Post Road. Paul Revere's ride, beautifully photographed and edited, is one of the best things in *America* and took two weeks to film. (Harry O'Neill, who played Revere, was reportedly drunk throughout most of the shooting.)

The Mohawk Valley sequences in *America* vividly depict a lesser-known aspect of the Revolution, characterized by vicious fighting and bloody Indian atrocities. Most historians feel that Griffith overemphasized the significance of these wilderness raids, although the destruction of fertile

farms and critical food supplies was a telling blow to the rebels. The plot was patterned around the nefarious Captain Walter Butler, the King's emissary sent to rouse the Indians against the colonists, but actually a British turncoat planning to seize power for himself. Griffith was undoubtedly impressed by the lingering propaganda which earned Butler a reputation as the most hated man in the State of NY. The character was considerably overdrawn — as are many Griffith arch-villains (Silas Lynch in *The Birth of a Nation*, Von Strohm in *Hearts of the World*, Battling Burrows in *Broken Blossoms*) — but an athletic Lionel Barrymore played him with flair. Louis Wolheim was his brutal henchman, Captain Hare, who daubed himself with Indian warpaint before leading a sickening massacre. Regrettably, Griffith gives little footage to Joseph Brant (Riley Hatch), the loathsome war chief of the Iroquois Nation who was a personal friend of King George III and James Boswell.

D.W. Griffith displayed artistry in the action highlights of *America*, but his film floundered in long stretches of a dull romance between Neil Hamilton and Carol Dempster. Although it was in this role that he first gained public attention, Hamilton is much too passive for the spirited patriot Nathan Holden. He shares an unrealistic gentleness that is characteristic of many Griffith heroes, particularly those impersonated by Robert Harron and Richard Barthelmess. Miss Dempster, with whom Griffith was in love, is given to simpering; her acting in *America* is labored and uneven.

Some of the basic subject matter of *America* was used two years earlier in *Cardigan* ('22), an independent film financed by the millionaire lawyer-playboy Messmore Kendall (founder of the Capitol Theatre in New York). Based on a popular novel by Robert W. Chambers, it was about Michael Cardigan, a callow Colonial youth (William Collier, Jr.) who is captured by the British when he tries to persuade the Cayuga Indians not to go on the warpath. After a narrow escape from being burned at the stake, he returns to Massachusetts, falls under the spell of John Hancock (William Willis), and joins the Minute Men. The battles of Lexington, Concord and Johnstown are presented in desultory fashion, and there is the to-be-expected midnight ride of Paul Revere (Austin Hume). The heroine (Betty Carpenter), who goes by the unlikely name of "Silver Heels," is a ward of the hated Tory governor. She becomes the object of the lascivious attentions of the fearsome Captain Walter Butler (William Pike), but is saved by the hero in a daring rescue. The film ends with Cardigan going off to fight in Mohawk Valley and Silver Heels promising to wait until he returns. Collier gave his role some comedy touches in the Charles Ray idiom, but *Cardigan* was an inauspicious picture that went virtually unnoticed. John W. Noble directed.

America had been in release only a few months when another expensive epic of the Revolutionary War burst upon the nation's screens in late December '24. *Janice Meredith*, designed to showcase the limited

dramatic talents of Marion Davies, mistress of millionaire publisher William Randolph Hearst, covered familiar historical ground. Paul Revere again rides, but instead of the middle-aged Harry O'Neill the dedicated patriot was played by a clean-cut young cowboy named Ken Maynard, soon to become one of Hollywood's most popular Western stars. *Janice Meredith* also featured the Boston Tea Party, Patrick Henry (Robert Thorne) calling for Liberty or Death, the British Redcoats in mortal combat with the ragtag colonists at Lexington and Trenton, and the final surrender of Lord Cornwallis (Tyrone Power, Sr.) after a fierce bombardment at Yorktown.

What was new was a long (15 minutes) exposition of Washington crossing the Delaware River, something noticeably omitted from *America*. As the story goes, William Randolph Hearst, realizing the Griffith film would come into release first, asked Griffith not to include the famous incident. There were hints of a trade-off. In exchange for Griffith relinquishing the Crossing of the Delaware for use as the highpoint of *Janice Meredith*, Hearst newspapers would be generous in praise of *America*. The Valley Forge sequences, beautifully photographed by Ira H. Morgan and George Barnes, were the best part of an otherwise overblown film whose major asset was the piquant charm of Miss Davies.

Janice Meredith was reportedly put together on relatively short notice after Hearst came across Paul Leicester Ford's popular story (first pub-



Lionel Barrymore in AMERICA

lished in 1899) and thought it an ideal vehicle for Miss Davies. He was unconcerned that Griffith was already at work on *America* and could not be dissuaded by associates from embarking upon a film with great similarities in story and setting. Nothing was stinted on *Janice Meredith*. Cost estimates ranged from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000, a top budget for a motion picture at the time.

The plot was complex and frequently repetitive. *Janice Meredith* was a coquettish Tory lass, daughter of a wealthy New Jersey landowner, who falls in love with her father's bondservant, Charles Fownes (Harrison Ford). She is sent away to forget him, but their paths repeatedly cross after the Revolution breaks out and the hero becomes an aide to General George Washington. Miss Davies spent much time helping Ford es-

cape from a firing squad after he was captured as a spy. The lovers were reunited after the war and married at Mount Vernon with Washington as best man. *Janice Meredith* was frequently interrupted by historical pageantry, and fully half the cast impersonated historical figures — Benjamin Franklin (Lee Beggs, who was Samuel Adams in *America*), Thomas Jefferson (Lionel Adams), Lafayette (Nicolai Koesberg), Marie Antoinette (played by Princess Marie de Bourbon of France), Martha Washington (Mrs. Maclyn Arbuckle), Louis XVI (Edwin Argus), and Lord Howe (George Nash) among others.

Contemporary reviews of *Janice Meredith* were generally favorable, although some critics felt Miss Davies was in over her head in the dramatic portions. Harrison Ford, who was Miss Davies' leading man in *Little Old New York* ('23) was singled out as being too passive, if not effeminate. The selection of E. Mason Hopper as director was a poor choice for a film of such magnitude. A former lightning cartoonist on the Chatauqua circuit, he had directed slapstick comedies for Essanay before Samuel Goldwyn entrusted him with a series of light dramas (many with the rising young Richard Dix) in the early '20s. *Janice Meredith* did nothing for his career. Hopper subsequently made several undistinguished program pictures for Cecil B. DeMille's short-lived independent unit at Pathe. He surfaced briefly at MGM where he directed early talkies in the '30s (including Norma Shearer's *Their Own Desire*), and was soon pasting together

wretched Poverty Row quickies with fading silent stars.

Today, *Janice Meredith* has achieved a small measure of fame as the first feature film appearance of W.C. Fields. (In '15 he made two one-reelers, *Pool Sharks* and *His Lordship's Dilemma*, for Gaumont). Decked out in a mustache, he made a brief cameo appearance as a drunken British soldier, clowning around with Marion Davies in a comedy bit that reviewers singled out for praise.

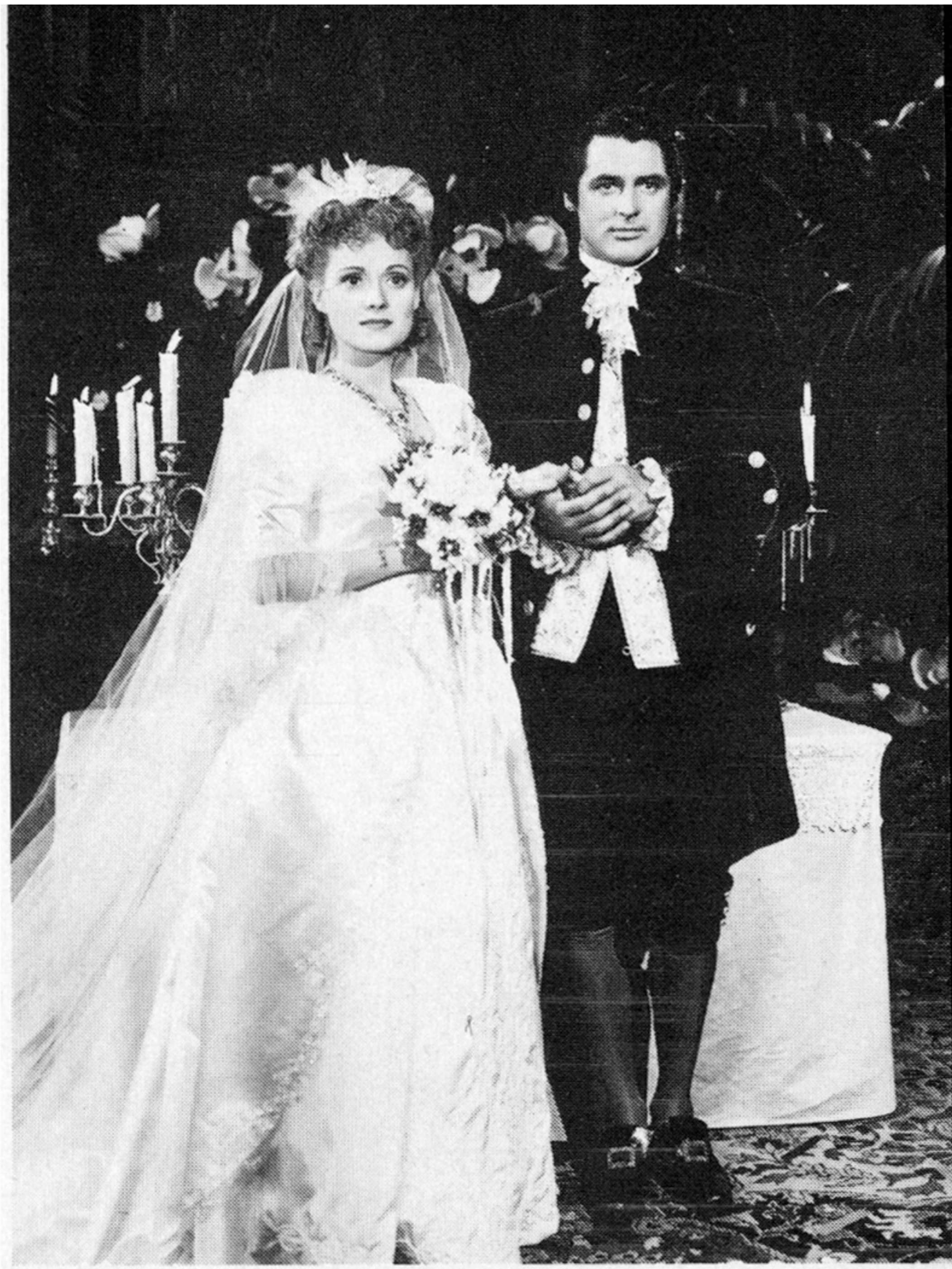
Revolutionary War melodramas were fairly common in the early silent picture era — more than sixty titles were recorded between '07-'12. The Edison Company, in particular, produced many one and two-reelers with such settings, often telescoping the entire Revolution into eight or ten scenes. Some of the Edison releases were *The Declaration of Independence*, *The Battle of Bunker Hill*, *The Minute Man*, *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere* and *The Death of Nathan Hale*. Kalem, Vitagraph, Lubin, Thanhouser, Republic and Champion were among other pioneer companies making this type of picture. (On a few occasions the costumes were used again in broad slapstick comedies with a Colonial background, as in *How Washington Crossed the Delaware*).

The plots were usually variations of those used over and over, with minor changes, for the popular and more numerous Civil War dramas of that period. Many centered around star-crossed lovers on opposite sides of the conflict, with one or both engaged in some form of dangerous espionage. Solax's *A Revolutionary Romance* ('11)

was about an American girl who fell in love with a British spy. She recovers the military plans of the Continental Army that he had stolen before helping him to escape his captors. In Lubin's *When the Flag Falls* ('09), the heroine infiltrates a British army camp and saves her lover, a captured Colonial messenger, by arranging a fake execution before a firing squad.

Selig's *The Spirit of '76* ('08) was about a girl who hides her sweetheart when Redcoats occupy her plantation. Through a ruse with a gullible sentry, she rides to warn General Washington of an impending enemy attack. In Kalem's *The Prison Ship* ('12), Anna Q. Nilsson betrayed the Colonies by helping her fiance, a British naval officer, escape from a prison ship. Eclair's *Hands Across the Sea* ('11), which featured a chronological parade of major events and battles of the Revolution, emphasized the emotional stress of a patriotic American girl in love with an English officer. She remains faithful to the United States, and they marry after the war.

In Edison's *How Mrs. Murray Saved the Army* ('11), Mabel Trunnelle played a spirited American wife who pretends to welcome the British command into her home. While they gorge on her enormous meals, she steals their maps and papers and dispatches them to the Continental troops under General Putnam (Charles Ogle). Stuart Holmes made a rather nasty Hessian villain. Edison's *The Boston Tea Party* ('08) showed how two New England sweethearts outwitted a Tory spy intent upon tracking down the participants in the famous incident in



Martha Scott & Cary Grant
in THE HOWARDS OF VIRGINIA

Boston Harbor. There was not always a happy ending. Republic's *The Pride of Lexington* ('11) was about an embittered Hessian soldier rejected by a patriotic young woman. He betrays her and the man she loves, a Lexington veteran, and both die in a savage Indian attack in the Mohawk Valley uprising.

Edison's *The Minute Man* ('11) was another variation of a popular plot used in many Civil War films. A lost child wanders onto the battlefield at Concord and is rescued by a British officer. Later, the child's grateful mother saves the officer from death by appealing for mercy to the Minute Men who have captured him. The familiar theme of the father and son on opposite sides was employed in

Lubin's *A True Patriot* ('09). The weak son of an American patriot betrays the Continental Army by luring them into a British trap. The father kills the boy, but learns too late that his son had repented and performed heroic acts on the battlefield in retribution. Revenge motivated Champion's *The Fighting Reverend Caldwell* ('11), in which a peaceful minister joins the rebels after his wife is brutally murdered by Redcoats on a pillaging expedition.

George Washington, America's legendary hero, has been a fleeting character in only a few films, usually portrayed in a stereotyped fashion devoid of warmth or reality. In '09, Vitagraph built two short films around his life. The first, *Washington Under the British Flag*, described his pre-Revolutionary career as a surveyor, his experiences in the French & Indian War, and his romance and eventual marriage with Martha Custis. This was followed by a sequel, *Washington Under the American Flag*, which picked up the story and carried Washington through the rebellious Continental Congress and the bitter fighting of the War of Independence, ending with his retirement as a gentleman-farmer at Mount Vernon. Joseph Kilgour, a Broadway actor, played the title role.

Two years later, in '11, Edwin S. Porter (of *The Great Train Robbery* fame) inaugurated his new Rex Pictures Company with *A Heroine of '76*, in which George Washington was saved from assassination by a patriotic tavern maid (Lois Weber). She overhears three men conspire to murder

the general as he stops for the night at a country inn. The girl exchanges rooms with Washington and is mistaken for him in the dark. *A Heroine of '76* had a shocking ending when the young woman, brutally stabbed and near death, staggers downstairs to accuse her own father as one of her assailants. She dies unforgiving in his arms. Phillips Smalley, Miss Weber's husband in private life and a frequent co-star, made an imposing Washington. The picture was praised for its production values on an economical budget.

Republic's *Before Yorktown* ('11) had the popular cliché of two lovers on opposing sides in the Revolutionary War. A British soldier betrays his trust when he discovers his American sweetheart is a spy by letting her escape with important military secrets. Later, after he is captured by the rebels, the heroine not only persuades George Washington to let her lover go free but to serve as best man at the wedding! This same threadbare plot was used in dozens of early Civil War melodramas with Abraham Lincoln granting a last-minute pardon to the condemned hero.

In '13, Edison brought out *The Gauntlet of Washington*, with the popular Marc McDermott in the title role. It was a mawkish picture about an impoverished old man found starving. He tells his benefactors how he saved Washington's life at Yorktown, and displays a glove which the general had given him in gratitude. Universal's *Washington At Valley Forge* ('14) was an elaborate remake of Porter's *A Heroine of '76*. A lengthy prologue

pictured the patriotic resistance of Samuel Adams and John Hancock, the midnight ride of Paul Revere, and the gallant stand of the Minute Men against the Redcoats at Lexington and Concord. Grace Cunard was the girl at the inn who exchanged rooms with General Washington (Francis Ford) and met death in his place. There were some minor changes in the plot. The heroine was in love with a Continental soldier, in reality a British spy assigned to kill Washington, and he unknowingly stabs her in the dark.

George Washington was a major character in yet another drama of the Revolution, Universal's *The Spy* ('14), whose plot borrowed shamelessly from Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. An American agent exchanges places in prison with a condemned British officer, brother of a woman he much admires, and goes meekly to the gallows. After his death, Washington reveals the true identity of the noble martyr. Edison's *Molly the Drummer Boy* ('14), directed by George A. Lessey, starred the versatile Charles Ogle as Washington. (Among other roles, Ogle played the monster in a '10 version of *Frankenstein*). The slight story concerns a patriotic young girl (Viola Dana) who wanted to be a part of the rebellion. Washington commissions her as a drummer boy.

Noah Beery, Sr., a curious choice, played Washington in Robert Goldstein's *The Spirit of '76*, an ambitious independent film first released in '17. Because of his image as a swarthy villain in dozens of silents and early talkies (*The Mark of Zorro*, *Beau Geste*), it is difficult to conceive of



Martha Scott, Sir Cedric Hardwicke & Cary Grant in *THE HOWARDS OF VIRGINIA*

Beery in the role, but critics praised his work in the brief Valley Forge sequences. *The Spirit of '76* was a lurid account of a striking half-breed Indian woman (Adda Gleason) who conspired to gain control of the Colonies when the Revolution broke out. A long, overblown picture that drew a generally favorable critical response, *The Spirit of '76* was directed by George Siegmann, an actor and assistant to D.W. Griffith best known for his portrayal of Silas Lynch in *The Birth of a Nation*. The usual historical pageants of the Revolutionary War were included — the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Paul Revere's ride, and Patrick Henry inciting the Virginia House of Burgesses to rebellion. The Mohawk Valley atrocities were also shown, with George Chesebro as the despicable Captain Walter Butler. Others in a large cast were Jane Novak, Howard Gaye (who was Robert E. Lee in *The Birth of a*

Nation and Christ in *Intolerance*), and Jack Cosgrove (as King George III). (See Anthony Slide's "*The Spirit of '76* and the Strange Case of Robert Goldstein," 'FIR', January '76.)

Arthur Dewey, a little-known character actor in stock companies, was selected by D.W. Griffith to play George Washington in *America*, reportedly because of his resemblance to the first President. While physically suited to the role, he was cold and aloof as Washington, conveying an air of superiority, although he has one good scene as he prays before leading his troops into combat.

Joseph Kilgour, who was Washington in *Janice Meredith*, achieved a considerable reputation as a Broadway leading man to Henrietta Crosman, Mrs. Hamilton Fiske and other noted actresses. In '09, Kilgour was signed by Vitagraph to play Washington in its historical sketches about the American Revolution. He repeated the role in several early pictures and was a popular character actor in films until his death in '33. A reappraisal of his performance as Washington in *Janice Meredith* may be possible if the film is among some 90 vintage prints recently donated to the American Film Institute by the Marion Davies Estate.

Edward Hearn was seen as a younger Washington in MGM's *Winners of the Wilderness* ('27), a drama of the French & Indian War with Tim McCoy and Joan Crawford. Another glimpse of the Washington of this era, portrayed by Richard Gaines, came in Cecil B. DeMille's *Unconquered* ('47), a historical mishmash of Indian fight-

ing on the pre-Revolutionary War frontier.

Perhaps the best impersonation of George Washington on the screen was given by Alan Mowbray in Warner Brothers' *Alexander Hamilton* ('31). This impressive picture, starring George Arliss as the scandal-ridden first Secretary of the Treasury, opens with Washington's moving farewell to his troops at the war's end. Mowbray's splendid voice and great presence made it a memorable scene. However, some critics thought the part was poorly written and made Washington too haughty and ambitious. (Mowbray played Washington for laughs in the flash-back sequences of *Where Do We Go From Here?*, a '45 fantasy with Fred MacMurray as a bumbling Continental soldier.)

Alexander Hamilton, although post-dating the Revolution, was sprinkled with historical personages — Thomas Jefferson (ineptly played as a pompous windbag by Montagu Love), John Jay (Charles Middleton), General Philip Schuyler (Lionel Belmore), James Monroe (Morgan Wallace), Count Talleyrand (John T. Murray), and Martha Washington (Gwendolin Logan). It was primarily about Hamilton's infatuation with a beautiful adventuress and his downfall when her husband blackmailed him. June Collyer, although lovely, was miscast as the tempting Mrs. Reynolds, a role done superbly on Broadway by Jeanne Eagels.

In an earlier film about the Hamilton-Reynolds affair, *The Beautiful Mrs. Reynolds* ('18), the role of Washington was taken by George



*Edna May Oliver, Claudette Colbert & Henry Fonda
in DRUMS ALONG THE MOHAWK*

MacQuarrie. (Carlyle Blackwell was Hamilton, and June Elvidge the cause of his disgrace). A year earlier, MacQuarrie had played Washington in another World release, *Betsy Ross*, a biography of the Quaker woman who fashioned the nation's first flag. Alice Brady had the title role, and John Bowers was the handsome aide to Washington who became her second husband. (Vitagraph's *Old Glory*, produced in '10, had a brief scene in which Betsy Ross made the flag at the request of General Washington).

The familiar story of Nathan Hale,

the 21-year old American spy who mounted the British gallows with the regret that he had but one life to give for his country, was the subject of Edison's *The Death of Nathan Hale* ('11), Kinemacolor's *Nathan Hale* ('13), and World's more elaborate *The Heart of a Hero* ('16). *Sons of Liberty* ('39), directed by Michael Curtiz, showed how the capture and execution of Hale inspired Haym Solomon, an American Jew, to raise money for Washington's army. Claude Rains gave a tasteful performance as Solomon in this costly Technicolor two-

reeler, one of a series of fine short subjects on American history produced by Warner Brothers.

The exploits of Francis Marion, the South Carolina guerrilla chief, were explored in Kalem's *Francis Marion, The Swamp Fox* ('14). The opening scenes, set ten years before the Revolution, pictured Marion (Guy Coombs) rescuing a young woman (Marguerite Courtot), later his wife, from a band of rampaging Cherokee Indians. The story jumped forward to Cornwallis' landing at Charleston. Marion, a Continental Congressman, organizes his famous band, but is rebuffed by General Horatio Gates, who tells him that America wants soldiers, not backwoods ragamuffins. Marion and his men independently harass the British and lure them into traps in the swamps, earning him the name of "The Swamp Fox." The climax of this three-reeler is historical fiction, and there is no attempt to show Marion's important contributions to the war's close. The picture was made at the Kalem studio in Jacksonville, Florida, profiting from many beautiful scenes shot on location in the nearby Everglades.

An earlier film on the same subject, Champion's *General Marion, The Swamp Fox* ('11), was more historically accurate, describing Marion's part in the strategic battles of Fort Warren and Eutaw Springs in 1781. Nearly fifty years later, Walt Disney revived the Revolutionary War hero in *The Swamp Fox*, a series of tv films produced for the '59-'60 season of "Disneyland." Leslie Nielsen was ideal as Marion. Some of the titles of

the individual segments were "The Birth of the Swamp Fox," "Brother Against Brother," "Tory Vengeance," "Day of Reckoning," "Redcoat Strategy," and "A Case of Treason."

Anna Q. Nilsson had the title role in Kalem's *Molly Pitcher* ('11), the story of Mary Ludwig Hays, the legendary heroine of the Battle of Monmouth. The wife of a barber who followed her husband when he enlisted in the 7th Pennsylvania Artillery Regiment, Mrs. Hays earned the sobriquet of "Molly Pitcher" by carrying water from a spring to the parched Colonial troops on the battlefield. When her husband was wounded, she manned his cannon and continued firing at the enemy. The picture had a fictitious sub-plot in which Molly rescued her husband (Guy Coombs) after he was captured by Hessian soldiers. The beautiful Miss Nilsson, in her first important screen assignment, bore no resemblance to the real Molly Pitcher, a large uncouth woman who chewed tobacco and was facially disfigured by a persistent case of itching eczema. Sidney Olcott directed. Earlier in the same year, Champion brought out a shorter version of *Molly Pitcher*, a much poorer film criticized for its distortion of Revolutionary War history.

Thanhouser's *The Declaration of Independence* ('11) had John Hancock as its hero, recreating the signing of the famous document. The action highlight was the Battle of Lexington. Pilgrim's *The Spirit of Lafayette* ('19) designed as WWI propaganda, was not released until several months after the fighting had ended. The first part introduced the Marquis de Lafayette

in a Colonial setting, concentrating on the dashing young nobleman's escape from Cornwallis in Virginia, and climaxing with the decisive role of his French troops at Yorktown. The story then jumped forward to the 20th Century and showed how a group of American doughboys repaid the debt to Lafayette by brave deeds in the '18 Allies offensive. There was even a timely prophecy of lasting peace through an international League of Nations. *The Spirit of Lafayette* was one of several films shown to Woodrow Wilson on the "S.S. George Washington" in early '19 when the President made a second trip to France to work on the peace treaty. (He reportedly found greater enjoyment in five Harold Lloyd comedies and Fannie Ward's *Common Clay*). The public had tired of war pictures, and *The Spirit of Lafayette* got few bookings. James Vincent directed.

A more detailed account of Lafayette's contributions to the American cause was seen in *Lafayette* ('62), a ponderous film made in France with a bilingual cast. George Washington (sternly played by Howard St. John) sends a young aide (Edmund Purdom) to Paris to seek the assistance of King Louis XVI (Albert Remy). After considerable behind-the-throne chicanery, the Marquis de Lafayette (Michel Le Royer) raises a small force which fights with valor at Saratoga. Lafayette returns to France, negotiates a treaty between the two countries, and returns with ships and men. The picture was overlong and episodic, although the spectacular battle scenes were well-directed by Jean Dreville.



Hal Stalmaster & Walter Sande
in JOHNNY TREMAIN

Most of the historical characters came on too strongly, particularly Orson Welles as an obnoxious Benjamin Franklin. *Lafayette* was dubbed into English for exhibition in the United States, but the film met an indifferent reception.

Champion's *Clark's Capture of Kaskaskia* ('11) was about George Rogers Clark, a bold young Virginian who set out with 200 irregulars and wiped out British frontier posts in Indiana and Illinois.

Paul Revere, a frequent character in Revolutionary War films, usually had little to do other than make his famous midnight ride. Few of these pictures bothered to show that the Boston silversmith was captured after he reached Lexington. (His companion on the ride, William Dawes, is missing in most of these films). Edison's *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*, a '14 two-reeler, was based on the Longfellow poem known to every schoolboy of that era. Charles J. Brabin directed, with Richard Tucker and Augustus Phillips in the cast.

Three years later, Edison cut it to one reel and reissued it as propaganda in WWI. The shortened version was known simply as *Paul Revere's Ride*. Other major pictures featuring the Revere exploit included *Washington at Valley Forge*, *The Spirit of '76*, *Cardigan*, *America* and *Janice Meredith*.

In '23, Yale University Press announced plans for an ambitious series of thirty educational films to be known as "The Chronicles of America." Designed to trace the history of the United States, the project foundered the following year because of high production costs and an undeveloped commercial market in the nation's schools. After an inauspicious start with *Columbus* ('23), a dull five-reel feature starring Fred Eric as Christopher Columbus and Dolores Cassinelli as Queen Isabella, the series was scaled down to two reels each. Those dealing with the American Revolution were *The Declaration of Independence*, *The Eve of Revolution* and *Yorktown*, all released in '24. Although minutely accurate with distinguished Yale historians as technical advisers, these slow-paced films suffered from too many expository titles and were little more than a succession of familiar tableaux. "The Chronicles of America" was eventually sold for stock shots, and portions were seen in many educational and classroom pictures produced over the next twenty years. (A similar fate befell Griffith's *America*, which finally earned back its high cost with income from this source).

The advent of talking pictures

brought no change in the infrequency of motion pictures laid against the background of the rebellion. Paramount's *The Pursuit of Happiness* ('34), directed by Alexander Hall, was a light-hearted comedy in which Francis Lederer was a reluctant young Hessian drafted to fight Washington's army. He deserts and hides in the home of a zany Colonial couple (Charles Ruggles and Mary Boland). The rest of the picture is devoted to Lederer's efforts to win their beautiful daughter (Joan Bennett) away from a rich but elderly Tory (Walter Kingsford) to whom she is pledged.

John Ford's *Drums Along the Mohawk* ('39) reprised the effects of the rebellion on the settlers in Mohawk Valley. Claudette Colbert, in an abrupt change of pace from her sophisticated comedy heroines, was somewhat miscast as an Albany society belle who married Henry Fonda and went to live in the wilderness. Ford built up a suspenseful feeling of impending doom on the uneasy frontier. When the Tories incite the Indians to a massacre, Fonda goes for help and returns at the critical moment with the Continental Army tootling "Yankee Doodle Dandy." It was good fun, and while far from vintage Ford, was done with his customary flair for such entertainments. *Drums Along the Mohawk* was marred by the persistent use of Indian stereotypes (although Chief John Big Tree was a delight as the taciturn Blue Black). Easily the best thing in the film was Edna May Oliver, whose performance as the warlike Widow McKlennan brought her an Academy

Award nomination. Some of Ford's exciting battle scenes were used later in Kurt Neumann's *Mohawk* ('56), a low-budget drama remembered for Rita Gam's portrayal of a sexy Indian maiden in tailored buckskins.

Frank Lloyd's elaborate production of *The Howards of Virginia* ('40) follows a stubborn American patriot from the seeds of rebellion through Valley Forge to the eve of Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown. Cary Grant plays a rough backwoodsman who marries the daughter (Martha Scott) of an aristocratic Tory family and takes her to live on the frontier. He prospers and is elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses, where he falls under the spell of Thomas Jefferson (Richard Carlson) and Patrick Henry (Richard Gaines). When the Revolution breaks, he goes to fight with Washington, while his wife, thinking him a traitor, returns to her people. They are eventually reconciled through the heroism of their son as a Colonial dispatch rider.

Utilizing authentic locations at Williamsburg, *The Howards of Virginia* has moments of impressive power, but the root causes of revolt are only sketchily traced in the political bickerings of its protagonists. Lloyd's film is done with sincerity — the distinguished director of *Cavalcade* and *Mutiny On the Bounty* had long wanted to make a motion picture about the American Revolution — but it is marred by a slow beginning, occasional talkiness, and an unexpected lack of action. The anticipated climactic battle scenes fail to materialize, and the struggle is covered in a few minutes of



Wm. Daniels, Howard Da Silva
& Ren Holgate in 1776

glossy but fast-moving montage expertly put together by Slavko Vorkapich. The film ends with trite speeches, obvious propaganda to prepare the USA for its entrance into WWII.

The great flaw of *The Howards of Virginia* is the miscasting of Cary Grant in the leading role. He appears self-conscious, as he frequently does in dramatic parts, and with his characteristic mannerisms adds an overdrawn touch of comedy to many scenes. Martha Scott, by contrast, is superb as the bewildered but ultimately understanding wife, while Sir Cedric Hardwicke is fine as the unforgiving Tory brother. Richard Carlson fails as Thomas Jefferson, his portrayal devoid of the will and dignity traditionally associated with the great statesman. George Houston, an opera singer who later had a brief career as a screen cowboy, played George Washington.

Fifteen years elapsed before Hollywood again turned to the Revolutionary War. MGM's *The Scarlet Coat* ('55), directed by John Sturges, took

considerable license with history as it explored the Benedict Arnold conspiracy to surrender West Point to the British. It used the familiar cliché of two friends on opposite sides in love with the same girl. Michael Wilding was the tragic Major John Andre, the English officer with whom Arnold was working, and Cornel Wilde played a secret agent for the Colonies. *The Scarlet Coat* had no battles and was short on action, and Andre took an interminable time to mount the gallows. Anne Francis was shallow as a petulant Tory daughter who transferred her affections from Wilding to Wilde. Robert Douglas had little to do as a surly Benedict Arnold. The great asset of *The Scarlet Coat* was its beautiful photography by George J. Folsey.

(Vitagraph's *Benedict Arnold*, released in '09, showed how Arnold, who was partly responsible for Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga, became embittered when he was denied promotion by the Continental Congress. This early film traced his quarrel with Washington, the attempt to betray West Point, and Arnold's escape to France and death in a shabby Paris garret).

Walt Disney's live-action *Johnny Tremain* ('57) brought some of the root causes of the Revolution into focus through the eyes of a young silversmith's apprentice down on his luck. After an unpleasant brush with a greedy Tory who accuses him of theft, the hero makes the acquaintance of such patriots as Samuel Adams and Paul Revere. He is imbued with a fervor for Colonial independence,

joins an organization of radicals, and participates in the Boston Tea Party of 1773. Two years later, Tremain is at Lexington at the historic confrontation between the Minutemen and General Gage's Redcoats. The picture ends with the guerrilla fighting at Concord.

Originally planned as a two-part film for the weekly "Disneyland" tv series, *Johnny Tremain* was transformed into a theatrical feature when costs mounted sharply. It suffers from its limitations as an attraction for children, and from the familiar clichés of the Disney concepts of history. No one is surprised when the young patriots, many refugees from the Mouseketeers, break into a rousing song at a torchlight demonstration on Boston Commons. Despite these shortcomings and the distractions of an episodic plot, *Johnny Tremain* is good entertainment a cut above most Disney melodramas. Much of the film's believability is due to the experienced direction of Robert Stevenson, whose British origins may account for a more sympathetic portrait of the English villains. Walter Sande, a surprising choice for Paul Revere, was excellent. Other historical characters seen in *Johnny Tremain* were Samuel Adams (Rusty Lane), Major John Pitcairn (Geoffrey Toone), and General Gage (Ralph Clanton). Hal Stalmaster, who played the title role, soon faded into obscurity. Luana Patten, who appeared as a child in many Disney films, had her first grown-up part as the girl Johnny loved.

John Paul Jones, the great naval hero of the American Revolution, was first featured on the screen in Edison's

The Stars and Stripes ('10), which recreated the historic three-hour battle between the "Bon Homme Richard," commanded by Jones, and the British warship "Serapis." In Vitagraph's *My Lady's Slipper* ('16), Earle Williams played one of Jones' lieutenants who was captured by the British but escaped and made his way to Paris. There he is saved from death by John Paul Jones and Benjamin Franklin when apprehended sneaking into the palace at Versailles to see his sweetheart (Anita Stewart), a lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette (Julia Swayne Gordon). It was good entertainment if fictional history.

John Paul Jones ('59) was a misguided attempt at a definitive screen biography of the American patriot. Filmed abroad by independent producer Samuel Bronston (with financing from Laurence Rockefeller, Pierre du Pont and other millionaires), it was a dull, episodic train of the highlights of Jones' life. Robert Stack was disastrous in the title role. The sea battles were poorly directed and unexciting. A Valley Forge sequence is mercifully brief, while other sections are talkative and overdrawn. Jones' final years in the service of Catherine the Great of Russia (played in a 60-second cameo by Bette Davis) are anti-climactic. The film is partially redeemed by the beautiful photography of its lush European locales.

In counterpoint to Stack's inept work in *John Paul Jones*, Charles Coburn is delightful as Benjamin Franklin. Other historical characters include Patrick Henry (Macdonald Carey), George Washington (John



Howard DaSilva (Benjamin Franklin), Ken Howard (Thos. Jefferson) & Wm. Daniels (John Adams) sing "The Egg," predicting the hatching of a great nation in 1776

Crawford), King Louis XVI (Jean Pierre Aumont), and Marie Antoinette (Susana Canales). The poor script by John Farrow (who also directed) and Jesse Lasky Jr. was preachy, seemingly intent upon proving the Revolution was won in spite of the political bickerings of its leaders.

George Bernard Shaw's satirical look at the Revolutionary War, *The Devil's Disciple*, written before the turn of the century, was a disaster of epic proportions in a '59 film version. Shot in England for income tax advantages, it was a joint effort of the independent production companies of Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas. Lancaster played Reverend Anderson, a peaceful pastor provoked by British tyranny into taking up arms, while Douglas was Dick Dudgeon, an outspoken scalawag whom Lancaster saved from the gallows. The bite of Shaw's witty dialogue was lost in a script watered down with melodrama, and Guy Hamilton's direction was understandably uneven (he had been



*W. Daniels, Blythe Danner
& H. Da Silva in 1776*

brought in to replace Charles Crichton after the picture had been in work for two weeks.

In a relatively minor role as General "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne, Laurence Olivier seemed aware the film was beyond saving. His performance wavered between mannered histrionics and indifference. Only in the climactic trial of Dick Dudgeon did he display any vitality. A fine cast was wasted in *The Devil's Disciple* — the always delightful Harry Andrews, Basil Sydney, Mervyn Johns, Janette Scott, George Rose and Eva Le Gallienne (in a bit as Mrs. Dudgeon, Dick's mother). A crowning piece of inanity was the use of puppets arrayed against a map of New England to illustrate Burgoyne's military progress.

The founding fathers of the United States — Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams — were by turns cute, pious and downright silly

in *1776* ('72), a picturization of the smash Broadway musical produced by the veteran Jack L. Warner for Columbia release. The patriots of the Continental Congress lapsed into 20th Century slang, laughed at risqué stories, sang love songs, and sank to bathroom humor. In more serious moments they debated slavery, had misgivings about war even for freedom, and indulged in campy soul-searching.

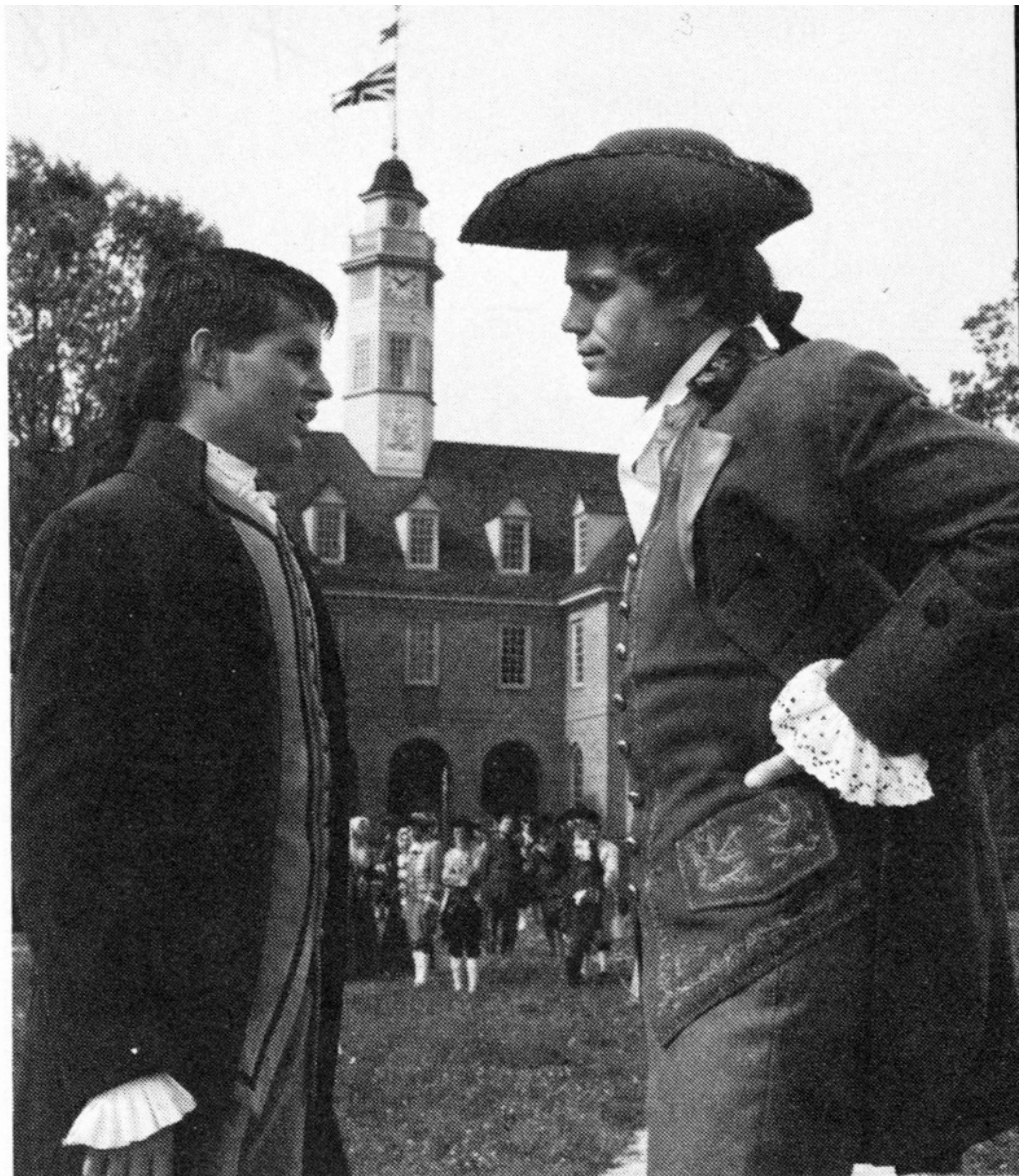
Thomas Jefferson (Ken Howard) could not find inspiration to write the Declaration of Independence until his wife (Blythe Danner) was imported to Philadelphia to assuage his sexual pangs — and sing a double-entendre song about his "fiddle." John Adams (William Daniels) was prim and prissy, a sarcastic know-it-all, while Benjamin Franklin (Howard Da Silva) was a dozing old codger.

1776 was a Broadway show transferred to the screen without cinematic style. Director Peter H. Hunt, who won a Tony for his stage direction, did not know what to do with the camera, at times doing too much. The performers had a typical Broadway theatricalism, and sang (or recited) their numbers in that familiar vocal fashion that characterizes most stage musicals. It is difficult to make any real evaluation of *1776*. Physically, it is graced with lush sets and beautiful photography, masking some of the indifferent direction. Sherman Edwards' music and lyrics are serviceable, though there is no memorable tune. Most viewers loved or hated the picture, and the critical response followed the same pattern.

Williamsburg-The Story of a Patriot is a 37-minute orientation film produced in '56 for visitors to historic Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. Photographed in the area restored by the Rockefeller Foundation, it is enormously impressive in every respect — writing, direction, acting and technical values — and provides a dramatic insight into the patriotic heritage of Williamsburg and its role in the founding of a new nation.

The plot of *Williamsburg-The Story of a Patriot* encompasses the turbulent years between the imposition of the Stamp Act and the outbreak of the American Revolution. It follows a fictional Virginia planter, John Fry, who becomes a member of the House of Burgesses. Through contact with Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and other patriots, he gradually loses his ties with the pro-British faction and casts his lot with the rebels. Among the historical events shown are the dissolution of the House of Burgesses by Governor Botetourt, the famous rump sessions of the legislature at Raleigh Tavern, the effective boycott of English goods until the oppressive Townshend import taxes were repealed, the removal of the colonists' gunpowder from the Williamsburg magazine by British marines, and the crucial vote of the Burgesses to send representatives to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia with instructions to propose American independence.

Though the authentic settings of Williamsburg add realism to the film, it is brought alive by the performances of an excellent cast largely unknown



*In WILLIAMSBURG-THE STORY OF A PATRIOT
John Fry (Jack Lord) consults
with his son (Richard Striker)*

to the average audience. The producers deliberately avoided using name actors, but Jack Lord, the principal lead, subsequently became famous as the star of the long-running tv police series, *Hawaii Five-O*, and the late John McGiver is recognizable in a bit role. Charles G. Martin is effective as George Washington, and Frederic Warriner gives depth to his Thomas Jefferson. Some of the other historical personages seen are Patrick Henry (Robert Carroll), Richard Henry Lee (Orin M. Bullock, Jr.), John Randolph (Michael Laurence), Peyton Randolph (Ralph Sumpter), Lord Botetourt (Clarence Derwent), George Wythe (Francis Compton), William Byrd (House Jameson), and Francis Lightfoot Lee (Ferdinand Hoffman). Richard Striker and the unappreciated Leora Dana are fine as John Fry's son and wife.

Williamsburg-The Story of a Patriot

was filmed in the Spring of '56, necessitating some portions of the restored area be shut down for three weeks. Production facilities were furnished by Paramount, with George Seaton (*The Country Girl, Airport*) directing. The script is by playwright Emmet Lavery, the music by Bernard Herrmann and the gorgeous photography by Haskell B. Boggs.

Seaton spent several days at Williamsburg, talking with visitors, to determine what an orientation film should encompass. He was appalled to find many tourists knew little about Williamsburg or the patriots. The basic material for the picture was put together in a NY hotel room by Seaton, Producer William H. Wright, and Thad Tate, a Virginia historian and teacher at the College of William and Mary. In writing the final script, Lavery frequently used quotations from the writings and diaries of Washington, Jefferson and other revolutionary figures to fashion authentic dialogue. Production costs were in excess of \$500,000.

Williamsburg area residents were employed as extras. When enough could not be found, Seaton went to a nearby mental institution (Eastern State Hospital of Virginia) and proposed using selected patients. Psychiatrists thought this would be excellent therapy, so some thirty inmates appeared in the film. Seaton said these patients performed beautifully and without incident. He later learned that the experience helped relieve personal pressures, and several inmates were released from the hospital months earlier than originally anti-



*In WILLIAMSBURG-THE STORY OF A PATRIOT
Patrick Henry (Robert Carroll)
speaks out against Townshend Duties*

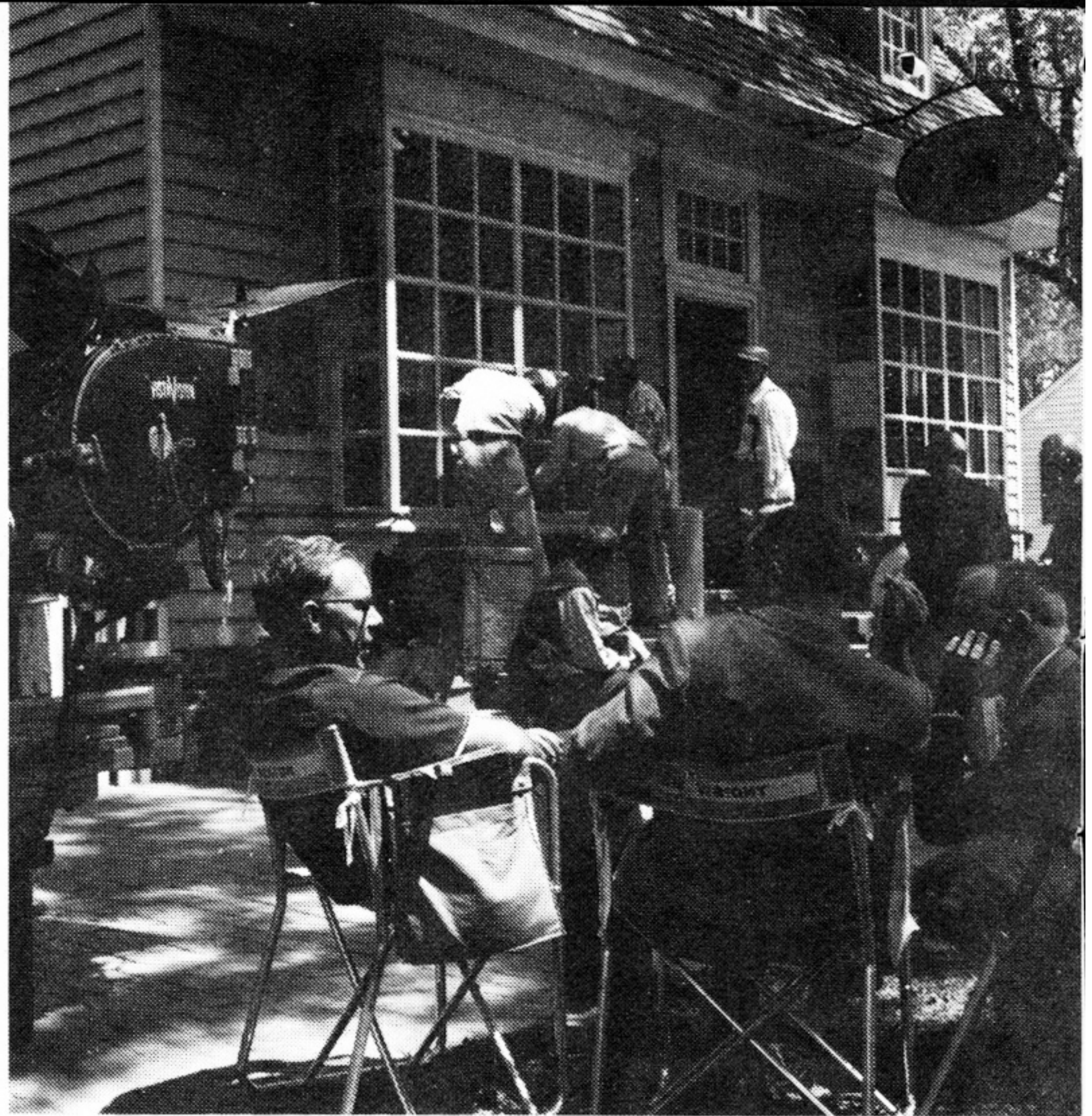
cipated. In appreciation for the participation of its patients and staff, the premiere of *Williamsburg-The Story of a Patriot* was held at the Eastern State Hospital in early '57. More than 17,000,000 persons have seen *Williamsburg - The Story of a Patriot* in Williamsburg alone, and millions more in educational screenings before schools and organizations across the USA. Two specially-designed theaters in the Information Center are used, utilising 70 mm projection equipment with six-channel Todd-AO sound. Each print averages 1,250 runs at the two auditoriums, and ten prints are exhausted in the course of 9,000 showings each year. The print is cleaned by hand after each screening. Special earphones are provided for the hard-of-hearing, and the audio track has been translated into six languages for foreign visitors.

John Huston's *Independence*,

produced by 20th Century-Fox for the National Parks Service, is an orientation film for visitors to Philadelphia's Independence Mall. Made in June '75 at a cost of \$400,000, it uses several legendary American patriots — Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Franklin — in vignettes illustrating the historical significance of the buildings in the restored Mall. It is shown several times daily in a new theater opposite Independence Hall.

Although it lacks the mounting dramatic intensity of the Williamsburg film, *Independence* is superbly done. It presents some of the most realistic portrayals — all by prominent actors — of the nation's founders yet seen on the screen. Patrick O'Neal delineates George Washington as a sensitive human being, eliminating the familiar clichés of the popular stereotype. Eli Wallach as Benjamin Franklin eschews much of the coyness and capering usually associated with the role. Ken Howard, who was Jefferson in 1776, plays him with more maturity in *Independence*. Pat Hingle is fine as John Adams, as is William Anderson in a lesser role as a young Benjamin Rush.

Independence reflects the sensitive hand of John Huston and becomes a meaningful film without being preachy. A major asset is the stunning photography by Owen Roizman (*The French Connection*, *Three Days of the*



Director Geo. Seaton & producer Wm. H. Wright discuss scene for WILLIAMSBURG-THE STORY OF A PATRIOT

Condor). The picture is expected to be shown continuously in Philadelphia for at least 25 years.

Washington-The Man, a 14-minute orientation film has been seen by more than 330,000 visitors to the Washington Monument in the District of Columbia. Lorne Greene portrays Washington. It was made by Eastman Kodak Company as a bicentennial project with the National Parks Service, and was photographed on authentic locations. The picture shows Washington's influence in the Revolutionary War period and how it has continued to be felt in the nation's history. Richard Young directed.

WORTH BUYING

The National Board of Review's famous "How to Judge a Movie" has been handsomely printed in a four-page pamphlet. Price 25c postpaid.