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D.W.GRIFFITH and the American Revolution

Film Series 66 # 7

Music arranged and played by STUART ODERMAN

11/30/90

1776 or The Hessian Renegades (American Biograph, 1909) Directed by D.W. Griffith; photographed by G.W. Bitzer; 12 mins.

With Mary Pickford, Frank Powell, Owen Moore, Arthur Johnson, Kate Bruce, Bobby Harron, Mack Sennett.

Although "1776" is scarcely as important a blueprint to "America" as "The Battle" was to "The Birth of a Nation", it nevertheless has a basically similar pattern, winding up with a miniscule call to arms by a Paul Revere parallel, and a routing of the Hessians by a band of American patriots. And - a typically Griffithian addition to such climaxes - the saving of a young maiden's honor assumes almost as much importance as saving the vital despatches that Washington needs so urgently. Even for 1909, the year he gave us "The Lonely Villa" and "A Corner in Wheat", this is lesser Griffith, but for a man who had been directing for only a year, it is still a smoothly told little story, really lacking only a better sense of cross-cutting and the occasional closeup to heighten a dramatic point or to make more use of Mary Pickford's pert attractiveness. The interior sets, though cramped, are good historical reconstructions, though the New Jersey exteriors, including some landscaping and cement walks, offer a few not too disturbing anachronisms. If the interior dramatics sometimes seem a bit unlikely -- for example, the card playing Hessians not noticing the father of the house skulking on the floor behind them -- it's because these are night scenes that would originally have been tinted blue, and the lessened visibility would have restored credibility. At this time, the Old West and the Civil War interested Griffith far more, and it was Edison that was to turn out, and in considerable numbers, stories of the American revolution.

